Although social media has not reached the status of a scholarly source, an increasing number of foundations and organizations are releasing snippets of their latest studies and reports via Twitter or Facebook. Even social media savvy researchers have learned to promote their work using various social media sites. That said, we thought it would be a good idea this month to look more closely at how to properly cite this popular form of communication. The style experts at the APA Style Blog have written extensively on the subject. Below, we offer their instruction on, “How to Cite Social Media in APA Style (Twitter, Facebook, and Google+).”

By Chelsea Lee

Thanks to developments in technology and feedback from our users, the APA Style team has updated the formats for citing social media, including content from Twitter, Facebook, and Google+. These guidelines are the same as you’ll find in our APA Style Guide to Electronic References, Sixth Edition (available in PDF and Kindle formats).

Three Ways to Cite Social Media
There are three main ways to cite social media content in an APA Style paper:

• generally with a URL,
• as a personal communication, and
• with a typical APA Style in-text citation and reference list entry.

We'll look at each of these along with examples.

General Mentions With a URL
If you discuss any website or page in general in a paper (including but not limited to social media), it is sufficient to give the URL in the text the first time it is mentioned. No reference list entry is needed. Here is an example:

News agencies like CNN provide breaking news coverage to millions of people every day on their website (http://www.cnn.com) and Twitter account (http://twitter.com/CNN). In our first investigation, we analyzed the content of CNN’s Twitter feed during the year 2012.

Personal Communications
If you paraphrase or quote specific information from social media but your readership will be unable to access the content (e.g., because of friends-only privacy settings or because the exchange occurred in a private message), cite the content as a personal communication (see Publication Manual § 6.20). A personal communication citation should be used because there is no direct, reliable path for all readers to retrieve the source. Here is an example:

K.M. Ingraham (personal communication, October 5, 2013) stated that she found her career as an educational psychologist intellectually stimulating as well as emotionally fulfilling.

In-Text Citations and Reference List Entries
Finally, if you paraphrase or quote specific, retrievable information from social media, provide an in-text citation (with the author and date) and a reference list entry (with the author, date, title, and source URL). The guidelines below explain how to format each of these elements for any social media citation, and examples follow.

Author

• First, provide either an individual author’s real last name and initials in inverted format (Author, A. A.) or the full name of a group. This allows the reference to be associated with and alphabetized alongside any other works by that author.
Second, provide social media identity information. On Twitter, provide the author’s screen name in square brackets (if only the screen name is known, provide it without brackets). On Facebook and Google+, when the author is an individual, spell out his or her given name in square brackets.

The author reflects who posted the content, not necessarily who created it. Credit additional individuals in the narrative if necessary.

Date

- Provide the year, month, and day for items that have a specific date associated with them, such as status updates, tweets, photos, and videos; otherwise, provide only the year.
- If the date is unknown, use “n.d.” (for no date) instead.
- If the date is unknown but can be reasonably approximated, use “ca.” (for circa) followed by the approximated year, in square brackets.
- For multiple citations from the same author in the same year (regardless of the month or day), alphabetize the entries by title and add a lowercase letter after the year (e.g., 2013a, 2013b; n.d.-a, n.d.-b; or [ca. 2013a], [ca. 2013b]). Ignore nonletter characters such as the at sign (@) and pound sign (#) when alphabetizing.

Title

- Provide the name of the page or the content or caption of the post (up to the first 40 words) as the title.
- Do not italicize the titles of status updates, tweets, pages, or photographs; do italicize the titles of items that stand alone, such as videos and photo albums.
- If the item contains no words (e.g., a photograph without a caption), provide a description of the item in square brackets.
- Describe the content form (e.g., tweet, Facebook status update, photograph, timeline, video file) after the title in square brackets.

Source

- Provide a retrieval URL that leads as directly and reliably to the cited content as possible (click a post’s date stamp to access its archived URL).
- Provide a retrieval date if the content may change (e.g., whole feeds or pages). Do not provide a retrieval date if the post has a specific date associated with it already (e.g., status updates, tweets, photos, and videos).

Example Citations

Tweet, Individual Author

Gates, B. [BillGates], (2013, February 26). #Polio is 99% eradicated. Join me & @FCBarcelona as we work to finish the job and #EndPolio. VIDEO: http://bgat.es/X75Lvy [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/BillGates/status/306195345845665792

- In-text citation: (Gates, 2013).
Tweet, Group Author


- In-text citation: (Stanford Medicine, 2012).

Facebook Status Update, Group Author


Social Media Page


- In-text citation: (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.).