

Telling Your Story Visually on Social Media

Credit: Climate Action Campaign



When you're crafting a message on social media, creating a narrative is important to its success.

Tara McMahon is the digital creative director at Climate Action Campaign, where she focuses on telling the story of climate change and finding innovative ways to convey the detailed science of climate change.

"Given the nature of platforms like Facebook and Twitter," said McMahon, "images and graphics offer an important opportunity to engage the reader in your story."

We asked McMahon to offer the YALI Network her tips for incorporating compelling visuals into online campaigns.

1. Create a mini-campaign "brand" for a set of visuals.

Using consistent fonts, colors and design elements helps drive the overarching message visually.

2. Pick the best approach for telling your story.

Info graphics are helpful for distilling finds in reports, photos are best for highlighting real-life impacts, and quotes and graphics are good for elevating direct stories.

3. Use your resources!

The Internet is full of free and low-cost resources: templates for infographics, free fonts, color palette generators, Creative Commons photos and more.

4. Think of visuals as a companion to your messaging.

For example, visuals can help tell a story about real-world local impacts of a global problem like climate change. It's important to start with a strong message you're looking to convey. Then visuals help give more context so you can craft a story that will really resonate with the viewer.

5. Be creative!

Trying new things is the best way to determine what works with your audience. Test out using two different types of visuals that convey the same story and see which one engages people the most.

Women's Situation Rooms: Women Protecting Women's Voting Rights

Liberians celebrate the inauguration of 
President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.
Liberia's 2011 election was the first to use a
Women's Situation Room. (©AP Images)

While Nigerians went to the polls in March 2015 for what would prove to be [historic elections](#), 40 young people in Abuja, mostly women, answered phones around the clock, fielding calls about outbreaks of violence and voter suppression.

Meanwhile, 300 female [election monitors](#) observed polls in 10 targeted Nigerian states, reporting irregularities back to Abuja. There, a team of eight eminent women from Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal worked with political parties and religious groups to address threats of violence against women voters and women candidates as they happened.

Welcome to the Women's Situation Room. Nigeria's election was the most recent African election to benefit from a four-year-old idea that's been spreading throughout the continent. Originated during the 2011 presidential and legislative elections in Liberia to promote women's leadership development, the Women's Situation Room model has been replicated in Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mali and Guinea-Bissau.

Participants in Nigeria's Women's 
Situation Room during the March 2015
elections. (Courtesy U.S. Embassy Nigeria)

Studies show that women and children are the most likely to be affected by election violence, including efforts to prevent women from exercising their right to vote. Women's Situation Rooms employ women and youth to ensure access to the polls.

Among the desks in Nigeria's Women's Situation Room was one staffed with police representatives and another with representatives from Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission, allowing immediate response to outbreaks of violence and incidents of voter exclusion.

"If a situation happens in the field and we want answers from the police — like violence erupted in a certain state while [women] were taking part in the election — we respond by finding the particular arm of government, INEC or police, to tackle the situation. If they're in the room, it's of course easier and faster," Turrie Akerele Ismael, Nigeria's solicitor-general and one of the situation room's eminent women, reported to U.N. Women.

"Women and youth play an active role in sustaining peace before, during and after the elections,"

said Sylvie Ndongmo of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, which coordinated the Women’s Situation Room for the Nigerian election. When civic groups work with governmental agencies to reduce threats to voters and candidates, said Ndongmo, “the threat of electoral violence becomes an opportunity for promoting sustainable peace and democracy.”

[#Africa4Her Generates Support for Women and Girls: Olivier Nathacia, South Africa](#)



We asked some of the many YALI Network members who in March made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge to invest in women and girls in their community how they have fulfilled that pledge. Here is Olivier Nathacia’s story.

I have pledged to invest my time, knowledge and the other resources accessible to me to improve and empower the lives of women and girls within my community.

As a young woman residing in South Africa, I noticed that there is a gap regarding support of women’s development and growth. Women are still sidelined, especially those residing in less privileged areas.

I also experienced the challenges that most young women and girls come across, especially in the corporate and business arenas. I realized that women are still severely hampered by discrimination, lack of resources and economic opportunities, limited access to decision-making and gender-based violence.

I volunteered because I want to be that ripple of change that will close the gap and become part of a generation that makes a difference — a generation that changes obscure obstacles within society about women and girls through entrepreneurship, public innovation and leadership.

Olivier Nathacia wants to close 
the opportunity gap for women
and girls

I have learned that service is important. More especially when you work with the community, you need to know how to serve people, communicate with them, have time for them, show them that you care. Most of all I learned what it means to be disciplined and be a people’s person.

Through volunteering, I learned that leadership is not for the faint-hearted. I have learned what it means to connect and how to build a network that will transform this nation.

Most importantly, I learned that women and girls are strong leaders by nature — they thrive in every situation or circumstance. They vouch for justice, yet they need support in order to achieve whatever they want to accomplish in life. They need a platform to share their knowledge, to network and build each other up.

This experience through #Africa4Her has made me a creative leader and inspired me to continue with the journey I have embarked on.

I can now connect and communicate better. Being amongst women and girls all the time has changed my perception of how women deal and do things from different circumstances of their lives.

Service is important when you work with the community.

On August 28, 2015, we will once again host an event that focuses on young women and girls. The event will be about the importance of exercising and healthy living.

Although it is still hard for me to get all the support I need from government in order to make things happen within my community, I encourage myself to keep going because my passion is assisting young women and girls in every way possible.

More than 1,000 YALI Network members made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge. They represent 47 countries, and 54 percent of them are men. If you made an #Africa4Her pledge and would like to share your story, please email us at YALINetwork@state.gov and use the subject line “#Africa4Her.”

#YALICHAT: Wanjira Mathai Connects with the YALI Network on Climate Change

From November 17 to 19, YALI Network Online Course instructor and director of wPOWER hub Wanjira Mathai held a YALICHAT to answer questions from YALI Network members. One of the common themes addressed throughout the chat was how individual citizens can make an impact for good in their communities.

“Raising public awareness about the climate crisis and giving local communities practical actions they can take to mitigate and adapt is crucial — water harvesting, food security, tree planting are but a few,” Mathai says. “Young people should be encouraged to plant trees in school, at home, at church. We want to create a culture of planting trees so that we do it because we know it is important for us. A national tree planting week would be a great idea; ideally, when schools are closed (say around Easter). Public tree planting is great in that it will build solidarity nationwide.”

Tree planting is an everyday affair: When you are happy, plant a tree!”

One of the main concerns for YALI Network members was the role the government plays in addressing the problem at hand: While citizens of each country can do their part, governments should promote clean energy solutions and encourage industries to do the same.

“What many governments want to believe is that economic growth and clean energy are incompatible,” Mathai says. “They are compatible. In fact, some of the world’s economic leaders are prioritizing clean energy because they know it will be good for people, planet and profit — the triple bottom line.”

Governments are beginning to implement solutions to improve air quality. New Delhi, for example, is creating an organized mass transit system to encourage people to use public transit more frequently.

“I was impressed when I visited New Delhi recently and heard that the government just got tough on emissions,” Mathai says. “Some of the interventions they introduced included public awareness campaigns around health impacts of air pollution and pollution checks to ensure that only road-worthy vehicles are on their roads.”

Network members were particularly interested in deforestation. According to Mathai, at a practical level, destroying forests has short-term benefits but serious long-term consequences.

“We have to begin to see all these impacts from a systems perspective. When we destroy our forests and landscapes, we destroy their ability to support life and replenish rivers and underground aquifers. We are told by the U.N. that we need a forest cover minimum of 10 percent for sustainable development. Most of our countries have decimated our forests with little or no reforestation taking place. The function these forests used to play is stopped, and so the services it provided cease. So floods and famines (which become droughts) have become more frequent.”

In addition to discussing the role the government plays, another concern addressed in the chat centered around the issue of clean water. According to Voice of America’s Straight Talk Africa, 350 million to 600 million people in Africa are projected to be exposed to water stress due to climate change.

“For most of our countries, restoring the degraded landscapes and riverine forests with indigenous vegetation is an important investment,” Mathai says. “In the meantime, we must work on ways of harvesting water when it rains. We must find ways to harvest the water from our roofs, particularly in agricultural areas where it can be used during the dry season, and also learn techniques for in situ water harvesting. There is a lot we can learn from countries like Israel and projects like we have seen in Ethiopia (watch “Ethiopia Rising”) where terraces, check dams, gabions and many other water harvesting techniques have been employed in addition to tree planting and farmer-managed natural regeneration of trees.”

We protect what we care about. In order for action to be taken, something has to be at stake. Here is some advice straight from Mathai to the YALI Network on how to speak to your community about climate change:

“The best way to explain climate change to others is to engage them in activities that demonstrate what it means and also take them to beautiful places that they might experience environmental beauty. You know the saying: “We protect what we love.”

[#Africa4Her Generates Support for Women and Girls: Mercedes Leburu, South Africa](#)

Poet Mercedes Leburu has pledged to  help women become more confident. A portion of her poem titled Africa4Her is below:

So what ...

If they look at me with their piercing eyes

Scrutinizing my face, body, and thighs

So what ...

If they emit prolonged chuckles when they see me

Endlessly commenting on who I ought to be

I don't break down and fall apart,

Instead I chose to set myself apart

For I know, Earthly eyes can never tell the contents of my heart

So I gear up, ignore it and restart.

We asked some of the many YALI Network members who in March made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge to invest in women and girls in their community how they have fulfilled that pledge. Here is Mercedes Leburu's story.

I pledged to empower young women in South Africa to become confident and lead a liberated lifestyle through writing poetry that will boost their self-esteem; to challenge young girls to showcase their unique abilities, thus moving from being a MIS-FIT in society to being their BEST-FIT; and to groom youth to invest in what they believe in — their ideals, principles and standards that not only benefit them but can impact others.

Young people generally want acceptance, to be part of a tribe or movement, as they are insecure and find comfort in being a part of something bigger. Insecurity is a challenge faced by many young women. We tend to care what other people think, and strive to please others, which robs the continent of individuality.

This gap in my community and generation of young, confident, empowered and liberated women urgently needs to be filled. Our need for acceptance and human validation as young women has diminished our creative thought and thus we tend to be so busy trying to fit in that we have lost our uniqueness.

The growing need to groom youth to invest in what they believe in — ideals, principles, and standards that not only benefit them but impact others around them through their natural God-given talents — was imperative.

I was fortunate enough to grow up having a mentor. I wanted to reach out to those around me and aid them to showcase their unique abilities, thus moving from being a MIS-FIT in society to being their BEST-FIT.

Service is one of the core features of being a strong leader. Serving one another is critical to building a sustainable Africa, because “no man is an island.” We need to be hungry to serve as youth, as we are the future leaders.

Service is not like an extra credit on a test; it is the whole test, and either you pass it or you fail it.

The experience [with Africa4Her] as a whole has shaped my character and has taught me to forge on despite the odds, which is a leadership trait that I can use in the future.

I have learnt to be patient and that little by little I can reach the end goal.

The best thing that one can do in this world is discover who they are and be the best of that person consistently — to express yourself through poetry.

When you focus on improving other people’s lives it also improves your life and ultimately contributes to a sustainable Africa, even if it is in a small way.

When God places something in your heart, pursue it relentlessly, be authentic, and be your best fit! At the end of the day, it boils down to how many people you can really influence, how many of those people will influence others, and how many people’s lives will change through changing thinking and perception.

I always have an action plan for the things I want to achieve. I act by putting my vision into action. And I delegate responsibility to recently established team members, because attempting to do everything on my own was a recipe for disaster.

More than 1,000 YALI Network members made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge in March 2015. They represent 47 countries, and 54 percent of them are men. If you made an #Africa4Her pledge, share it with the YALI Network on Facebook and Twitter.

5 tips for building a successful advocacy campaign



Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

Are you trying to get the word out — either for a candidate or a cause you feel passionate about? [Social media](#) is great, but when online supporters turn into offline volunteers, your advocacy campaign reaches a new level.

Aisha Satterwhite of Blue State Digital, a leading digital-strategy agency, said, “Every group thinks its problems are different, but they’re often the same.” She said often a group uses conflicting messages for the same campaign, or a message that is so vague it won’t mean anything to people.

These five tips will help you match your message to your intended audience and motivate them to get off the sidelines for your cause.

Know how your audience communicates

Do the people you’re trying to reach respond to email? SMS texts? Will radio, print and other traditional media be most effective? For many advocacy campaigns, time spent knocking on doors produces better results than a hundred emails.

Macala Wright, a digital marketing strategist, suggests nonprofits with limited budgets take advantage of free resources to learn about online audiences. For instance, Google Analytics can tell you what country visitors to your website are from, where on your site they’re going and what devices (mobile, desktop, tablet) they’re using. “That’s information any organization can use to make informed decisions on how they’re messaging,” Wright said.

Figure out your messaging strategy

A good advocacy campaign has a core message, Wright said, and how you present that message determines how far it spreads. “There are three good ways to make your message appealing: humor, inspiration and enlightened education,” Wright said. “People share things that make them happy or make them want to learn more.”

Spur your audience to act

Know what it is you want your audience to do, and make sure the audience knows it too. Perhaps it is as simple as sharing your post on Facebook. Sign a petition? Attend a meeting? Vote for a candidate? If you’re asking for donations, Satterwhite advises that you “think what it would take for you to actually take money out of your pocket and give it to someone. How would you want them to approach you?”

Move people toward engagement



How engaged is your audience? This chart shows how influence can be increased by gradually increasing engagement. (Source: Blue State Digital, State Dept.)

Convincing someone to “like” your organization’s page on Facebook is easy; convincing him or her to host an event at home to raise funds for your organization is hard. These are examples of the bottom and top rungs of what media strategists call the ladder of engagement. By gradually asking more of your audience as it engages with you — to opt in for email updates, to make a small donation, to attend a live event, to knock on doors for your cause — you can convert an online bystander into an enthusiastic worker for your cause.

Test your messages

Both Satterwhite and Wright stress the importance of trying different approaches and learning from the results. For a social media posting, Wright advises trying the same message starting off with a question (“Have you thought about where your food comes from?”) and then again with a compelling fact (“Processed foods make up 70 percent of your community’s diet.”)

“Whatever has better traction in terms of share, engagement and reach,” said Wright, is the approach to use. But she said you must always try new things, because digital behaviors move very rapidly.”

YALI Live: How to Fail Forward

Learning from your past mistakes is a key part of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs Dante Disparte, CEO of Risk Cooperative, and Saran Kaba Jones, CEO of Face Africa share their knowledge during this video event. Watch below!

Biographies of Speakers:

Dante Disparte is the founder and CEO of Risk Cooperative, a strategy, risk and capital management firm. Mr. Disparte is a specialist in strategy and risk reduction through the design and delivery of comprehensive risk solutions of worldwide scope. He is credited with designing the world’s first card-based life insurance program for the United Nations. Previous work in sub-Saharan Africa with Landover, also provides Mr. Disparte with comprehension of the challenges working within the African business community.

Saran Kaba Jones, the Founder and CEO of Face Africa, a community development organization working to build and strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and services in remote communities across sub-Saharan Africa. Born in Liberia, Saran’s organization has raised over \$500,000 for water, sanitation and hygiene projects from organizations like JP Morgan Chase, Coca

Cola, Chevron, and more. The organization website is <http://faceafrica.org/>.
