Use of Social Media by Pilots

NOTE
This paper supersedes 18POS25, of the same name.

BACKGROUND
The omnipresence of social media in modern society has blurred the separation between our working and personal lives. As innocent as posting a status update or a short comment may seem, what people do and say on social media can result in serious consequences.

IFALPA is extremely concerned with the potential safety and security risks taken by pilots who may be unknowingly putting their own flying career – and that of their colleagues – in jeopardy. Although this is not a new problem, the speed and extent to which the information is spread is unprecedented.

THREATS
Equipment
There have been several recorded incidents where personal devices have impacted flight safety. In one such incident, many passengers were injured after a pilot's camera pushed the side-stick as he moved his seat forward, causing a rapid descent of the aircraft. In a second incident, the thrust levers were jammed by a device being used for filming and could not be moved. In a third; a mobile phone used by a pilot for personal reasons during the flight was dropped between the seat and the pedestal, broke, and began to generate fumes in the cockpit.

Distraction
Accessing social media pages and contributing to them can easily divert attention, presenting a significant source of distraction from flight deck duties. This is well recognized, and action has already been taken by some Authorities, such as the [FAA Rule](#) that prohibits flight crews from using a personal wireless communications device or laptop computer for personal use whilst on duty station on the flight deck when the aircraft is being operated.

Misuse of personal data
Unlike recordings made by onboard equipment installed for accident investigation purposes, recordings from private devices such as mobile phones, cameras, or tablets, and content uploaded on social media have no protection whatsoever, even on so-called "private" pages. This content can always generate undesirable attention and be subject to misinterpretation and misuse. Consequently, images taken by (or of) pilots have a strong

potential of being used as evidence in disciplinary procedures against them or their colleagues on the flight deck.

Pilots should remember that it takes only one upload for any content to become permanent and therefore retrievable for later use. In a recent case, a pilot was suspended by his airline without notice, or opportunity for defense, due to a comment he made on a theoretically "protected" social page that was taken out of context by a web news portal.

Consequences of image recorders on the flight deck

For many years, some aviation industry stakeholders have been seeking an international Standard requiring the installation of cameras on the flight deck, constantly recording the pilots throughout the flight. These attempts are being resisted by IFALPA and all Pilot Associations worldwide for reasons provided in a [dedicated IFALPA Position](#).[1] Private recordings present similar concerns.

Security implications

The security consequences of uploading videos and photos of oneself in uniform and/or in the cockpit may be extremely serious. Such footage can easily provide ill-intentioned persons with safety and security data on aircraft operation and personal information that may be used in a harmful way.

POSITION

The use of social media, including content creation during flight operations, presents numerous safety and security concerns. IFALPA strongly recommends that pilots carefully consider and exercise the utmost caution before engaging in such activities. This includes refraining from sharing content online that may compromise their safety, security, or the privacy of themselves and others.

Pilots should be fully aware of their respective airline's social media policy, if one exists. They should bear in mind that anything they contribute online may remain accessible indefinitely, and the potential consequences of their actions on both their flying career and personal life should not be underestimated.

By adhering to these guidelines, pilots can demonstrate professionalism, respect for passenger safety, and safeguard their own professional reputation. Responsible social media usage contributes to the overall safety and public trust in the aviation industry.

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[1] https://www.ifalpa.org/media/3693/21pos11-airborne-image-recorders.pdf