

# #Influenced: How Educators Should Address Security Risks Driven by Social Media

June 26, 2022

Written by By [Lucy C. Straker](#), Political Violence, Terrorism and Deadly Weapons Protection Underwriter, Beazley Group

## *What Role Is Social Media Playing in Security Risks?*

Just nine days after the November 2021 Oxford, Michigan school shooting, an egregious “National School Shooting Day” post went viral on TikTok<sup>1</sup>, resulting in a number of school closures and time-consuming investigations. It was just the latest in a series of social media-driven security risks that educators find themselves grappling with in today’s environment.

Gun violence is a growing threat in the US, and social media has played a key role, influencing an increase in incidents across the country. While there are undoubtedly other factors also at play, including the stressors of the pandemic, political divide, and civil unrest impacting the population’s mental health, media has increasingly played the protagonist in exacerbating polarization and increasing tensions.

## *Social Media Being Used by Extremists to Spread Hate and Collect Support of Hate Messages*

In the case of a recent Buffalo, New York grocery store mass shooting, the perpetrator live-streamed the attack on Twitch<sup>2</sup>, showing the rampage from his/her point of view in horrible detail, as if it were a real-life computer game. Soon after, the video appeared across other social media platforms. On one such platform, it was viewed over three million times. That’s three million people who participated in the tragedy by watching and sharing the murder of ten people.

Research indicates that the extensive attention generated by both social media and the news media can cause shootings to become contagious<sup>3</sup>. Copy-cat behavior is a very real phenomenon, and the combination of today’s round-the-clock breaking news cycle and social media platforms – both mainstream and splinter – provide all too much detail about incidents of violence for others to mimic.

## *Prevention Is Key. Proper Screening and Reporting Measures Are More Important than Ever*

With social media complicating the risk landscape for educators, it is more important than ever to learn how to assess potential threats and to spot warning signs that may lead to violence. The following best practices are a great place to start:

Provided by your....

| Collaborators in Risk Management |



- **Put a regular monitoring plan in place.** It's not enough to simply conduct hashtag searches for your school's name. In addition to screening everyday platforms, you also want to be monitoring the dark web. Consider a third-party screening company for this function.
- **Be aware of concerning behaviors that serve as warning signs.** If an individual is already exhibiting concerning behaviors and has recently been impacted by a negative life change, the risk of violence is increased.
- **Eliminate uncertainty over what is acceptable online behavior.** Consider providing social media use guidelines and education on the difference between normal teenage angst and concerning behavior.
- **Emphasize the importance of reporting everything.** No threat or scare is too small to research. Provide an action/response pathway to ensure that students and families can report in confidence.
- **Take posts on face value and treat nothing as a joke.** If someone says they will carry out a shooting tomorrow, that must be taken literally.
- **Review your coverage solution.** Examine the insurance policies you hold to determine whether risk management and crisis response services are provided. Ideally, you want to work with insurers who can give you advice on prevention even when something seems minor.

### *Educators Must Take Social Media and Its Attendant Risks Seriously*

According to the Gun Violence Archive website, 2021 was the most violent year in US history, with 693 total gun violence incidents equating to 58 mass shootings per month. With several months still to go, 2022 is currently on track to be even more violent than last year. This aligns with what our underwriting team is seeing, with increased numbers of violent incidents being declared on new submissions for Deadly Weapons Protection (DWP) coverage. And it makes it more important than ever that schools take proactive action to monitor for and respond to the security risks presented by social media.

Students returning to school this semester won't remember a life without the internet, a mobile phone or social media. As such, they are influenced in a way that has not been experienced before – for good and bad reasons. Social media has compounded racial, political, cultural, and gender divides by making people less likely to seek common ground and more likely to radicalize the views of many.

This article is a portion of what was covered in the URMIA 2022 Annual Conference session by the same name. If you registered for the conference, you can access the recording of the session through the Webex Events/Socio app used by URMIA for the conference.

1. [School threats and social media hoaxes are forcing closures, time-consuming investigations](#) (Washington Post)
2. [The gunman broadcast the attack on a livestreaming site](#) (New York Times)
3. [Does Media Coverage Inspire Copy Cat Mass Shootings?](#) (National Center for Health Research)

*Provided by your....*

| *Collaborators in Risk Management* |

