

# Use of Social Media by Pilots

## NOTE

*This paper is an update to, and supersedes 23POS24, 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 have 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 any person from using a personal wireless communications device or laptop computer for personal use while 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 - whether by pilots themselves, or featuring pilots, or the flight deck environment - **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 defence, due to a comment he made on a theoretically "protected" social page that was taken out of context by a web news portal. In another case, an airline grounded both pilots following the upload of a video in the flight deck taken by a passenger.

Some Operators have taken steps to prevent such behaviour, for example, by making an announcement at the beginning of each flight, such as: *"Passengers are reminded that they are not allowed to take pictures or videos of the crew or other passengers without their permission"* or enforcing policy which, *"prohibits the filming, photographing, or recording images, by any electronic means, of other guests and/or cabin crew or flight crew without the express consent of the person(s) being filmed, photographed or recorded."*

## 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 Pilot Associations worldwide for reasons provided in a [dedicated IFALPA Position](#).<sup>1</sup> Private recordings present similar concerns.

## Security implications

The security consequences of videos and photos of pilots in uniform and/or in the cockpit uploaded online 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.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ifalpa.org/media/3693/21pos11-airborne-image-recorders.pdf>

## POSITION

The use of social media, including content creation such as upload of videos and photos during flight operations, presents numerous safety and security concerns. Pilots should not underestimate the negative effects of such activities and exercise the utmost caution, for example by 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 airline's social media policy (if applicable). They should bear in mind that anything uploaded online may remain accessible indefinitely, with potentially serious consequences on both their flying career and personal life.

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.