HOW LOCAL COUNCILS CAN USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO AID THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS AND COMPLETE BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Business Information Systems

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled *How local councils can use social media to aid decision making and complete business objectives* is entirely my own work, and it has never been submitted nor is it currently being submitted for any other degree.

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Date:
Abstract

Social media is an ever growing phenomenon in modern society that organisations utilize to obtain and divulge information from the public in order to achieve their goals. The purpose of this research study is ‘To find out how the decision making process and completion of goals can be assisted by the use of social media’, based on gaining and developing an understanding of how social media is used within the context of local government, specifically focused to the case study of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC). Semi-structured Interviews and online questionnaires were administered to find out from each individual’s perspective of the social media platforms which they consider to be most popular in today’s society, as well as understanding which social media platforms are currently being utilised within the day to day activities of NPTCBC. Issues with social media and decision making activities are identified, while documenting the alternative social media platforms that can be used efficiently by the case study organisation to complete objectives. Results are thematically analysed to allow for easier interpretation of findings. Recommendations are then provided to the case study organisation for future implementation.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather Alan Coles.
Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to show gratitude to my parents and my grandmother for their endless support and belief in me, and for providing me with a work ethic to always give 100% in everything I do.

Secondly, I wish to thank my partner Isabelle and her family for their encouragement throughout the process.

I would also like to thank Dr Hilary Berger of Cardiff Metropolitan University, whose constant support and guidance made the completion of this dissertation a lot less difficult.

Finally, I would like to thank Stephanie Griffiths, Natasha Williams, and Rhys George of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, whose compliance to assist me throughout the research study has made the process possible.
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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research study is based on gaining and developing an understanding of how social media is used within the context of local government. More specifically it is to understand the various social media platforms that are used within a local government setting, and to understand exactly how prominent they are during the various decision making processes. Ultimately, the purpose will be to identify the benefits that social media may bring, and to achieve an insight as to how social media assists in the completion of organisational objectives.

The topic was chosen based around the general popularity of social media at this time, and how it is used in most industries today, whether it be as a means of marketing, or day to day assistance.

The main aim of the research study is ‘To find out how the decision making process and completion of goals can be assisted by the use of social media.’

The four main objectives from the research study are:

1. To understand what social media Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council is currently using to gather information and make decisions.
2. To identify any issues with social media and decision making activities.
3. To look at what social media websites could be used efficiently by the case study council to make decisions and complete objectives.
4. To make recommendations of social media that would provide the best benefit to NPTCBC.

The research study is focused on one particular organisation, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. The decision to opt for a case study strategy was based on the ability to gain a thorough understanding of the activities of the chosen council, in order to compare and contrast with other authorities’ attitude and approach to social media, allowing conclusions to be drawn and recommendations to be made in the latter stages of the study.

Based on the need to understand the popularity and usage of social media, a literature review was conducted around the topic. The following chapter focuses firstly on the history of communication to give the reader an insight as to the earliest means of communication between people, including the use of the telegraph over long distances and the telephone’s advancements over time.

That is followed by social media and communications in the 20th century. This touches upon the use of social media alongside supercomputers, in order for information to be gathered about each user in order to build profiles on individuals. Social media and communication methods during the 1970’s and 80’s are also discussed.

Present day social media was then reviewed with a focus on Facebook and Twitter, including statistical figures related to daily, monthly, and annual user information, before briefly discussing Instagram as an emerging platform.
Social media use within local government is then critically reviewed with the aid of a case study provided by the BDO, and best practise examples provided by the Local Government Association. This helped to piece together which social media platforms are most popular at the moment within UK local authorities, and what alternative social media platforms have become introduced within some authorities. BDO examples of social media use within local government are supported in this section with facts and figures from surveys. The Local Government Association’s examples contain direct quotes from senior leaders of many authorities, detailing how and why they use social media, and the benefits that have arisen due to its use.

Chapter three details the methods taken in order for this research study to be completed. Within this chapter, the reader will be able to understand the philosophy chosen by the researcher and why that particular philosophy was decided on. The reader will also discover which approach was taken based on the philosophy assigned. The research strategy will then be discussed, with reasons given as to why this strategy will be implemented. A sample design follows, selected based upon the time and limitations of the study. Data collection methods are then finalised by the researcher, detailing how data will be gathered using these methods, and the limitations that face the researcher during the data collection phase.

In order to complete the objectives associated with this research study, both qualitative and quantitative research instruments were administered. Online questionnaire surveys were provided to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council via web-link in order to find out from each individual’s perspective of the social media platforms which they consider to be most popular in today’s society, as well as understanding which social media platforms are currently being utilised within the day to day activities of NPTCBC. Data gathered from the questionnaires also enabled results to be drawn with regards to the issues that those working for NPTCBC are facing with the current social media platforms in place, and to identify which alternative social media platforms they feel would provide an additional benefit to the organisation if introduced in the future.

The qualitative study involved the use of face-to-face, semi structured interviews. Information gathered from these interviews were used in conjunction with data from the quantitative study in order to provide supporting evidence for the results chapter.

Chapter four focuses on the results gathered from the qualitative and quantitative studies. The results from these studies are then thematically analysed with the use of graphs and charts to illustrate the findings in a way that the reader can find easier to understand. The results are then critically discussed, with the researcher identifying any new themes that have arisen and drawing conclusions to the discussion based on these findings.

Chapter five draws an end to the research study, with the researcher concluding the dissertation as a whole, and providing recommendations to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council drawn from the review of current literature, and results found from both the qualitative and quantitative research studies undertaken.
CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature Review

This chapter presents a critical review of the extant literature that is available within the domain of social media and communication, to aid the decision making process and ultimately to be used to achieve organisational objectives. I chose to review social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as they are all services that are free to use for businesses, and when used alongside one another, can collectively gather and share information from and between required audiences. I will further explore areas where social media has been used in a real life political context using a case study by the BDO regarding social media use in local government, and the Local Government Association case studies, with the eventuality of providing recommendations to the case study of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC). Due to the emerging state of social media’s adoption for business purposes there are not sufficient academic books and journal literature available to underpin this research study therefore this review has focused on relevant publications from electronic sources. For example, a number of case studies of social media usage in local e-government arenas.

Social media is an ever growing phenomenon in modern society that organisations utilize to obtain and divulge information from the public in order to achieve their goals. For example, Knight (2016) states that “The United Kingdom has a population of 64.1 million and 89% of this population is an active internet user. 38 million people actively use social media and a further 50% of total population actively use their mobiles to access their social media. Since January 2014, there has been a 4% growth in active internet users, 6% growth in social media users and 7% increase in mobile users accessing social media”.

In agreement Martin (2012), founder of social media company ‘Digital Royalty’, states that social media is “changing the way we communicate and the way we are perceived both positively and negatively”. Similarly Goleman (2013), said of social media “Social media expands our universe. We can connect with others or collect information easier and faster than ever”.

This only begins to touch on the subject of social media growth, and the way in which it places itself in the activities of organisations and networks. The following next sections of this chapter focuses on the early forms of communications and the gradual emergence of social media websites Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

2.1 The Origins of Social Media and Communications

Hendricks (2013) suggests that the origins of social media/networking and communication stem from social media giants like Facebook. Before the 1900’s, the use of written letters from one person to another became one of the earliest forms of communicating across vast distances.

Lambert (2016) further clarifies that the invention of the telegraph enabled messages to be delivered quicker over longer distances, and were seen as something of a revolution in conveying information.

Zigterman (2013) suggests that telephones have further progressed, incorporating answer machines with the ability to see a caller’s ID on the phone. Such developments have all made a difference to the way in which people in modern society can maintain networks, both for work or personal use, and gain valuable information for goals and decisions to be achieved.
2.2 Social Media and Communication in the 20th Century

In the 20th century, social media grew after the development of ‘super computers’, which would ultimately lead to the creation of what we know to be the internet (Hendricks, 2013; Matlis, 2005). According to Roston (2014) the use of social media alongside super computers have gathered pace in recent years, with IBM’s Watson supercomputer using information gathered from social media accounts to learn about the individuals in charge of the profiles. Roston continued by informing in 2014 that the Watson Supercomputer can learn about the user as an individual, in a human-like way, to gain an insight into what may be going on in that person’s life. It also allows the user to be found on other social media websites using the supercomputer. This piece of literature supports the rationale of this research study that focuses on the various social analytical techniques that the case study organisation [NPTCBC] uses to make decisions and complete organisational objectives.

The 1960’s saw different forms of internet development as well as early variations of email systems. It was not until the 1970’s that the improvement of network technology was evidenced. Shedden (2014) describes ‘CompuServe’ as playing a significant role in the early development of online communications in 1979. This is supported by Turchi (2014) who states that “CompuServe combines the power of your computer with the convenience of your telephone!” Shedden posits that CompuServe “became one of the largest systems for electronic bulletin board access”. Bonnett (2010) states that Ramm referred to UseNet, which emerged in 1979, as playing an integral role in the growth and popularity of the internet as it enabled its users to communicate via virtual newsletters. Bonnett also suggests that many of the social aspects that go hand in hand with online communication were originated and popularised on UseNet. By the 1980’s social media became more sophisticated and people started to invest in home computers.

The next introduction regarding social media and communication is the use of Internet Relay Chats (IRCs), which were first used in the late 80’s. According to Stenberg (2011) IRC was invented by Jarkko Oikarinen in 1988, when he wrote the first IRC client and server at the University of Oulu. Reed (1993) maintains that IRC gave birth to the modern chat movement, and describes IRC as the most widely used internet chat system.

Hendricks (2013) claims that social media began to soar in popularity from the invention of blogging, which stemmed from the first website that was recognized as the earliest social media tool, ‘Six Degrees’. According to the ‘Digital Trends’ ‘Six Degrees’ “sprang up in 1997 and was one of the very first to allow its users to create profiles, invite friends, organize groups, and surf other user profiles. Its founders worked the six degrees angle hard by encouraging members to bring more people into the fold” (Digital Trends Staff, 2014). However, Six Degrees was ultimately shut down by 2001.

The following section examines the current powerhouses of social media focusing on Facebook and Twitter, and looks at the services they provide, and how they can be used with the appropriate business intelligence technologies to ultimately aid the decision making process, and assist in the completion of business objectives for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.
2.3 Present Day Social Media

This section presents a brief overview of the main social media websites, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram that are used worldwide.

2.3.1 Facebook

Brixey (2016) informs us that “Facebook is probably the best known of the social networking sites. Created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his friends, originally as a way for students at Harvard University to get to know each other, it’s now believed to have over a billion active users. Some of its functionality – such as Facebook Connect, a way to sign up to other websites using your Facebook login details – appears across thousands of other websites.”

According to Dean (2014) “Facebook is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues”. Meanwhile Rayport (2011) addresses the importance of Facebook by suggesting that; “Facebook is not really a website anymore. Rather, it’s a vast, branded utility. It’s like another World Wide Web, but with a profit motive”.

An article published in ‘The Guardian’ by Reynolds (2014), entitled ‘Facebook: 10 reasons why councils should embrace it as a tool’ puts forward 10 reasons in favour of using Facebook in local government:

1. Facebook groups and pages allow residents to take action and feel empowered.
2. Councils are learning that they don’t need to keep building digital platforms, they can just take part in others.
3. Facebook makes councils speak like normal people.
4. Council’s don’t have to rely on media to get urgent information out.
5. Facebook helps councils build relationships and show support.
6. Local government communications people used to only hear from the public when they wrote angry letters to the papers.
7. Facebook is a local government consultation game changer.
8. You get to know how people really feel.
9. It provides a free communications channel and data.
10. Facebook has made councils more relevant.

Thornton (2009) notes some of the disadvantages of Facebook to some users at that time, where I have again precisely noted which of these disadvantages could be costly at a business level:

- **Difficult to navigate and update**
- **Requires investment of time to realise sustained benefit**

It is important to stress that these disadvantages will not affect all users, but may affect others more.

2.3.2 Facebook Demographics

Figure 1 below shows the number of UK Facebook users from 2012 projected through to 2018 illustrating an anticipated but sustained (Statista, 2014). This implies that the social media giant will continue to grow and supports the view that it is potentially a useful tool for businesses to communicate with the general public and local communities.
Moreover, Sedghi (2014) reported in ‘The Guardian’ newspaper that by 2013 Facebook had gained 170 million users in a single year - “According to Facebook, 757 million users log on to Facebook daily, as of 31 December 2013”. Figure 2 below clearly shows a sustained increase in the number of UK Facebook users by monthly volume.

Battisby (2016) states that “Facebook continues to take the lead with an influx of 1.5 billion monthly active users worldwide. The UK makes up 31 million of those users, with 60% of the population having a Facebook account. The most popular age group is 25-34 (26% of users) but Facebook is a great platform to speak to a mass market of ages and locations”. This is a significant statistic as it shows a continuation in growth from Sedghi’s table of monthly users provided from Facebook in 2013, growing from 1.23 million users per month in
2013, to 1.5 million in 2016, and also goes some way to backing up the prediction of worldwide Facebook users in the table provided by ‘Statista’ in 2014. Ellis (2015) stated that; “In March 2015, UK visitors to Facebook’s services spent 51bn minutes on them across desktop, laptop and mobile devices”. Rose (2015) writing for social media information website ‘Rose McGrory’, provides a significant summary on Facebook, and still classes Facebook as the main social media website for organisations in the world at the moment; “Facebook’s status as by far the #1 social media platform globally remains unchallenged, and B2C businesses ignore it at their peril”.

2.3.3 Twitter

McMahon (2015) defines Twitter with the following description “Twitter is a free social networking microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. Twitter members can broadcast tweets and follow other users' tweets by using multiple platforms and devices. Tweets and replies to tweets can be sent by cell phone text message, desktop client or by posting at the Twitter.com website”. Twitter’s support centre (support.twitter.com) states that “Twitter contains information you will find valuable. Messages from users you choose to follow will show up on your home page for you to read. It’s like being delivered a newspaper whose headlines you’ll always find interesting – you can discover news as its happening, learn more about topics that are important to you, and get the inside scoop in real time”. An article by Smith (2014), for newspaper ‘The Mirror’, entitled ‘5 local councils that get Twitter right – and 5 that fail spectacularly’, identified those authorities who are using Twitter effectively, and those who are not (see Table 1 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Example</th>
<th>Worst Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool City Council</td>
<td>Birmingham City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester City Council</td>
<td>Carmarthenshire County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouthshire County Council</td>
<td>Hounslow Borough Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle City Council</td>
<td>Orkney Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk County Council</td>
<td>Wirral Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.4 Twitter Demographics

Battisby (2016) reported that “Back in 2013, Twitter reported 15 million monthly active users in the UK. Since then, we haven’t seen any specific UK data released from the network. It was reported that in September 2015, Instagram overtook Twitter in terms of users”. The suggested figure of 15 million monthly UK users of Twitter seems to be backed up by Rose (2015), who said that “Once again, Twitter are suspiciously quiet on user numbers. The last official UK figure we had from them was at the end of 2013 – 15 million”. Rose also goes on to suggest that “It seems plausible that Twitter is the most likely victim of Instagram’s success; the way Twitter is typically used (relatively anonymous, networks developed by interest rather than ‘real world’ links, etc) is closer to Instagram than Instagram is to Facebook, and Instagram’s user interface and glossy filters is perhaps more seductive than Twitter – especially to a younger audience”.

The notion supplied by Rose above that Instagram is becoming more popular than Twitter is echoed by Battisby (2016), who said simply that “It was reported that in September 2015, Instagram overtook Twitter in terms of users”. Fig.3 below “shows a timeline with the amount
of monthly active Twitter users worldwide. As of the fourth quarter of 2015, the microblogging service averaged at 305 million monthly active users. At the beginning of the 2015, Twitter had surpassed 302 MAU per quarter” (Statista, 2014).

Figure 3 – Monthly Twitter Users Worldwide

Source: Statista (2014)

The above figure shows how the monthly Twitter users worldwide have grown from the first quarter of 2010, from 30 million, to a peak of 307 million in the third quarter of 2015, again giving an outline to NPTCBC that they would be accessing an ever growing audience of users of this platform. Whilst Ellis (2015) claims that “Among the 40% of online adults who claim to use Twitter, the majority of them (90%) have created an account”. Figure 4 below illustrates the reasoning behind why people are using Twitter.
Figure 4 – Which Categories Do Users Use Twitter For

Source: Statista (2014)

Figure 4 above shows that 72% of UK Twitter users use Twitter to follow their friends, while 45% of respondents reported using Twitter for news purposes. Ellis (2015) agrees that “Apart from retweeting, news is the topic that people are most likely to tweet about, with a third (33%) doing this”.

This suggests there is potential for NPTCBC to use social media to provide local news updates to the public. However, it is hard to determine which of the two sites are better. Thornton (2009) suggests that “the truth is that each has its advantages and disadvantages and will tend to appeal more to different types of people and for different reasons. Each can have great or little value to anyone; it really depends on what you are trying to accomplish in a given situation”. This suggests that NPTCBC could use both Facebook and Twitter to aid the decisions that they make, and complete their business objectives.

2.3.5 Instagram

Moreau (2015) defines Instagram as “a social networking app made for sharing photos and videos from a smartphone. Similar to Facebook or Twitter, everyone who creates an account has a profile and a news feed. When you post a photo or video on Instagram, it will be displayed on your profile”. This is expanded by Rouse (2012) who provides a link between Instagram, other online tools, and other social media websites, saying that “Instagram allows members users to upload, edit and share photos with other members through the Instagram website, email, and social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Foursquare and Flickr”.

9
2.4 Social Media use in Local Government

This section provides a review of social media usage within a local government setting derived from published newspaper articles and official case studies to outline where and how social media is being used in a local government area.

2.4.1 BDO Case Study – A Review of Social Media Usage in Local Government

Firstly, facts provided by the worldwide professional services network BDO International, who conducted a case study in December 2015 entitled ‘WHATSAPPENING IN #LOCALGOV’ is examined. The specific purpose of the case study was to provide a review of social media usage in local government. On completion of the study, BDO said that they found three key findings from the review:

- Councils are more committed than ever to using social media
- Councils need to learn from existing best practice
- Councils can still be bolder in embracing new social media channels

From the organisations that took part in the study, it was found that:

- 100% have a Twitter account
- 90% have a Facebook account
- 68% have a YouTube account, and
- 38% have a Instagram account

The BDO also asked the question “Has your organisation identified any financial benefits from using social media?” and 77% of respondents answered YES in 2014, while 71% answered yes in 2015, showing a slight decrease in the space of a year. One of the biggest increase in figures, is from the question “How much appetite is there within your organisation to develop/maintain a strong social media presence?” which saw just 7% of respondents answer ‘extremely high’ in 2014, whereas the number had increased to 30% in 2015. The study also implies that the impact that social media has on an organisation is directly linked to the approach taken by the organisations senior leadership “Over 74% of this year’s respondents suggested that the approach taken by senior leadership towards social media had a significant impact upon how their organisation uses it.”

Additionally, BDO informed that “Over 74% of councils believe there is a moderately or extremely high appetite within their organisations to maintain a strong social media presence, an increase of 7% from last year.” BDO are therefore suggesting that local authorities see social media as crucial in maintaining high levels of customer engagement and in utilising more cost-effective channels of communication. Furthermore, they posed the question “Is your organisation active on any of the following platforms?” which returned the following results (see Table 2 below).

Table 2 – Organisations social media activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platform</th>
<th>% in 2014</th>
<th>% in 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BDO suggest here that the only real social media platform that has seen a significant increase in usage within local government organisations, is Instagram. They also suggest that local authorities haven’t made drastic changes to what social media platforms they use in the space of a year. The BDO also quoted that “there is still some room for local authorities to diversify the way they disseminate information” and go on to provide a collection of best practice examples of social media being utilised by local councils, a selection of which, I will provide in a table below:

**Table 3 – Best practise examples of social media use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Council</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>How they did it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suffolk County Council</td>
<td>Improved engagement with customers using ‘Street life’</td>
<td>Joined Streetlife in June 2014 and linked their customer service agents directly on to this platform to answer questions and provide useful links to people. This approach has enabled local champions to be empowered to take positive action to get some changes they want to see in their local environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge Fire &amp; Rescue Service</td>
<td>Using Social Media to Manage a Recruitment Drive</td>
<td>Started a social media campaign to encourage more women to become firefighters. The first stage was advertising a ‘have a go’ day in a boosted post and paid-for advert on Facebook. They used case studies, an in-house produced video, more targeted boosted posts and messages. This has increased the previous more ‘traditional’ recruitment drive of 17 women (produced one full time firefighter) to attracting 38 women (producing six full time firefighters).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset County Council</td>
<td>Updating Citizens on the Latest Weather News in Harsh Conditions</td>
<td>Created an account on Twitter@ Somerset Gritter to inform customers about the weather and the need for safety precautions to be taken to ensure customers could plan their journeys in good time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isle of Wight Council</td>
<td>Increasing Customer Engagement Through Live Q&amp;A’s On Social Media</td>
<td>Held live Question and Answer sessions on Facebook on major matters such as budget consultations. This has allowed citizens to directly ask questions to senior officers or councillors on relevant topics which affect them, which has been extremely well received.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Torfaen County Borough Council   | Social Media Campaign – In The Depot         | Aim was to enhance the reputation of its public services during bad weather. It began its ‘In the Depot’ campaign to share informal but crucial messages were added its social media content. The outputs from the campaign gained recognition on a national scale. For example  
  • 97% of people being better informed about council activities during the snow  
  • 17,200 positive comments, praising Torfaen Council  
  • In the Depot video and its key messages received 32,938 ‘likes’ and 34,947 ‘shares’  
  • Facebook followers up by 65% to over 5000. |
2.4.2 BDO’s Local Government Social Media Leaders

The tables below list three examples of BDO’s data on the UK local authority members who are utilizing social media effectively. All data is correct as of December 2015.

Table 4 – George Ferguson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role/Council</th>
<th>Twitter Followers</th>
<th>Avg. Retweets Per Tweet</th>
<th>Facebook Page Likes</th>
<th>No. of Social Media Platforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Ferguson</td>
<td>Elected Mayor – Bristol City Council</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to BDO “George reaches over 170,000 users, and 92% of his tweets are retweeted suggesting people like what he has to say. His tweets show a good mix of personality and engagement. He has also proven his knack at agenda setting through initiatives such as the #Ask100RC (Resilient Cities), and the effective use of hashtags. He also has a YouTube channel.”

Table 5 – Mark Rogers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role/Council</th>
<th>Twitter Followers</th>
<th>Avg. Retweets Per Tweet</th>
<th>Facebook Page Likes</th>
<th>No. of Social Media Platforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark Rogers</td>
<td>Chief Exec. – Birmingham City Council</td>
<td>5,628</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The BDO’s description of Mark Rogers is “Mark promotes all things good about Birmingham, and also recognises engagement with his followers on social media is key - 70% of his tweets are retweets, and 87% of his tweets are retweeted by his 5000+ followers. On joining the Council and launching his blog, Mark was commended for its human touch and his willingness to engage with the City.”

Table 6 – Joe Anderson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role/Council</th>
<th>Twitter Followers</th>
<th>Avg. Retweets Per Tweet</th>
<th>Facebook Page Likes</th>
<th>No. of Social Media Platforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joe Anderson</td>
<td>Elected Mayor – Liverpool City Council</td>
<td>20,900</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BDO explains Joe Anderson’s effective social media usage “With 20,900 followers, and 140,000 Twitter users reached, Joe is effective at getting his message across to large numbers of people. 84% of his tweets – which combine humour and focus on key issues in Liverpool - are retweeted.”
2.4.3 Alternative Social Media Platforms

Continuing with the BDO case study, the BDO have implied that their 2015 report provides evidence that councils are starting to utilize other social media platforms as well as Facebook and Twitter. The following information from BDO offers three alternative social media platforms Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp, as well as again providing council’s that have taken up usage of these platforms.

2.4.3.1 Instagram

BDO stated that 38% of the councils that took part in their survey used Instagram in some way. BDO also support Instagram’s potential significance, sighting its availability to be used alongside the likes of Facebook and Twitter as important. They also suggest a link between Instagram and its appeal to younger users “It is a great tool for connecting with younger people, as 46% of Instagram users are under the age of 24.”

Evidence below from their official Instagram page shows how Westminster City Council uses its Instagram account to showcase events and important landmarks within the council’s area.

Figure 5 – Westminster City Council Instagram Page

2.4.3.2 Snapchat

From the BDO review, as of December 2015, not one of the councils that took part in their study were active on Snapchat. BDO have stated themselves that they believe Snapchat “is a great tool to make people aware of what is going on in the community.” Interestingly, an article published by The Shuttle (2014) which is the newspaper for Blackburn with Darwen Council news, documents how the Blackburn with Darwen Council became the first UK authority to use Snapchat as a means of increasing voter turnout in both the local and European elections in 2014. The article says that BWD Council would send out ‘snaps’ to those users who follow them, encouraging them to visit their local polling station, and would also receive messages regarding local events and offers.

2.4.3.3 WhatsApp

According to the BDO case study, 68% of their internal staff who took part in their survey revealed that they use WhatsApp on their smartphones, and also suggested that they would be more likely to use it than Twitter. The key fact from the review though, is that only 2% of the local authorities use WhatsApp actively, and the BDO suggest that this can be seen as a massive opportunity for councils to use WhatsApp as a means of connecting to those people within their respective areas. However, an article by the Shropshire Newsroom (2014) revealed that “Shropshire Council is currently trialling the use of mobile messaging app WhatsApp to communicate with local people, in a different way.”

The leader of Shropshire Council, Keith Barrow, took part in the trial and said “I’ve had a few messages now and I hope people are finding it useful. If you haven’t already, please get in touch. Representing people’s views is an important part of our role, and being aware of people’s thoughts and opinions allows us to work more effectively. You can WhatsApp me, the other councillors or our general enquiries service about issues like waste collection, adult services, libraries, education, and transport and roads, and we’ll do our best to get you an answer” (Shropshire Newsroom, 2014).

2.5 BDO Tips for Local Authorities

One section of the BDO’s case study that was particularly informative was their ‘7 Top Tips’ for local authority’s using social media. The 7 tips are as follows:

1. Integrate your Platforms – Publish content from different social media platforms in order to make people aware of that platforms existence.
2. All Work & No Play – Lighten things up with pictures or word posts more personally.
3. Have a Strategy – A good strategy would outline what the authority wants to achieve from social media use.
4. Make it Easy – Make sure all social media accounts are displayed in one, logical place.
5. Go Mobile – Making content compatible with mobile phones ensures people keep up-to-date with posts. (65% of internet usage through mobile phones, 95% of Twitter users own a smartphone, 99% of Instagram users own a smartphone).
6. Stay Focused – Commit to platforms where most of the authority’s users are on.
7. Engage with your Audience – Post questions and polls to keep people involved.
2.6 Local Government Association Examples

The Local Government Association have also provided an abundance of best practice examples of social media usage within local government and by their councillors, a few of which are documented below supported by statements from councillors and how they have used social media in their local authority.

2.6.1 Dave McKenna

Dave McKenna, who is Scrutiny Manager for the City and County of Swansea Council, spoke with regards to his use of Twitter, as well as his use of alternative platforms ‘Knowledge Hub’ and ‘Trello’, “As a council officer I find it useful to connect with people. I'm connected with a lot of people I just wouldn't have connected with otherwise who have been really helpful.” McKenna is backing Twitter as an important way to engage with people within his area whom he may not have been able to have connected with before. He continued by saying “At Swansea, we use Twitter for scrutiny. We'll post updates about meetings and reports and we've found it is especially useful for engaging with stakeholders. It's transparent and open it means you are having your conversations in public. It's shining a light in the black box of local government decision making – even if only a little bit.” Here McKenna is also giving a positive review of potentially using Twitter in conjunction with council meetings.

A local authority that has taken their council meetings online are Oldham Council. According to an article in the Guardian by McMahon (2012) who is the leader of Oldham Council, Oldham streamed a council meeting on their official website, so people could watch it from the comfort of their own home. The key introduction was the ‘Public Question Time’ section which gave the public the ability to submit questions directly to cabinet members through Twitter, Facebook and Email, with around 400 people logging on to watch the meeting and see their questions answered.

2.6.2 Cllr Mathew Hulbert

Mathew Hulbert, of both Barwell Parish Council & Bosworth Borough Council, encourages the use of both Facebook and Twitter, “I use Twitter and Facebook. I don't see how I could do my role without them. I've got one profile on each rather than create a 'cllr' profile and a private one. That's deliberate. My belief is that people should see the whole of me to see I'm a real person.” Hulbert also says how he separates workload between both platforms, and will use specific platforms for specific tasks, “I find that Facebook is more for residents and there is space to talk in more depth there about issues. Twitter for me has been fantastic. It allows me to meet other interesting people and has been the vehicle for several TV appearances.” Hulbert does however use social media alongside the traditional forms of engagement, “I still do the traditional things. I still deliver Focus leaflets and I wouldn't rely on social media as the only way to connect with residents. The primary way is still being out and about.”

In contrast, some council members are not fully supportive of the use of social media within their authorities. Two examples are set out below.

2.6.3 Cllr Tim Cheetham

Tim Cheetham, a councillor for Barnsley Council, felt that although he was using social media, it may not have necessarily improved or changed the way in which he goes about his work, “I
used to use Twitter a lot but after several years I took a close look at the statistics and I realised in my ward it didn’t make the blindest bit of difference to my getting re-elected. I wouldn’t argue against using it. My problem is that it isn’t more effective and the best way I find to reach people in my ward is still to go out and meet people.”

Wakeman (2009) also suggests that councils should not necessarily focus all their efforts into social media, and maybe narrow their social media usage to two specific areas:

1. Create Facebook pages for things people care about – Wakeman suggests that rather than creating a page for all council activities, create a page for local activities such as festivals, and other events.
2. Reaching out to existing users – Wakeman puts forward the idea that councils using Facebook should target those who are already in groups concerned with that specific council’s area.

Bustin (2013) writing for ‘The Guardian’, ‘A Guide to Facebook for Local Councils’, echoes the statement from the first point above when talking about Sandwell Council’s dealings with school closures over Facebook, due to the significant amounts of heavy snow that hit them. Bustin stated that “We shared updates on school closures (as well as gritting and disruption to bin collections) over the weekend and early in the mornings throughout the week. The number of people who "liked" our page went from a few thousand to over 10,000.” She goes on to suggest that the increased popularity in Sandwell’s Facebook page were down to two key reasons. The first being that the information was of usefulness and importance, and secondly, those concerned with Sandwell were already on Facebook to communicate with friends and family, and to look at photos of the snow, which backs up Wakeman’s second point of using Facebook to reach its existing users.

Slee (2011) writing for his official blog entitled ‘FACING UP: Twelve ways local government can use Facebook’ pinpoints Coventry City Council for their clever use of simply calling their Facebook page ‘Coventry’ rather than ‘Coventry City Council’ for the reason that “people would be happier signing up to the place where they live over the institution that governs it.” This has proven to be the case as the figure below shows how Coventry’s official Facebook page now has over 36,000 followers/likers.
2.7 Summary

To summarise, from the secondary data that I have found and reviewed, it would be reasonable to suggest that there is definitely an awareness for social media in local government, depending on which local authority is using it, and what their leaders’ specific attitude to social media usage is.

From conducting this review, it has enabled me to plan what specific questions need to be asked to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council when undertaking my search for primary data. I plan to do this by arranging interviews with specific members of NPTCBC, and will also look to distribute an online questionnaire to gain a further understanding of the topic. This will also aid me in my recommendations to the case study of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Research Methodology

This Research Methodology chapter describes both the organisation of the chapter, and the design of the research study to be carried out. Having reviewed the relevant literature surrounding the topic of this dissertation, it would be appropriate to define the methods used in order to carry out my research.

3.1 Literature Review

In the Literature Review chapter, secondary data has been reviewed using predominantly internet search engines to access case studies and blogs, and with the aid of the university library various information sources such as books and journals were accessed. Specifically, the use of case studies carried out by both the BDO and by the Local Government Association to ascertain which local authorities have effectively engaged in social media, and also to see which councils have not. It has helped determine which social media platforms are most prominent in local authorities. The case studies referred too will also be of significant aid in the recommendations and conclusion chapters, when putting forward an outcome to the research question.

The purpose of collecting data from both the BDO and the Local Government Association were based on the fact that it was imperative to gain an understanding of what other local authorities were utilising social media effectively, and in contrast to gain an insight on which councils were not using it in the best manner. From this data it gave an idea of where Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council fits in terms of the way they use social media platforms. Secondly, once it had found which authorities used social media effectively to make decisions and complete objectives, it was possible to analyse exactly which individual social media platforms they were using in order to do so, especially looking into how they are using them, and again make a comparison to NPTCBC, to see if it would be possible in the future for that organisation to integrate these platforms into their daily activities.

From conducting the secondary research so far, the questions that will firstly be looked at during primary data collection will focus around the individuals associated with NPTCBC, to gain an understanding of which social media platforms that they are aware of being used within their authority. It would also be necessary to understand which of those social media platforms they would use on a day to day basis. The reasons behind this would be that evidence from my secondary data collection shows that Facebook is still the most popular platform in general, so I would like to see if that is the same case within NPTCBC. Once it has been established which platforms each individual is aware of or even using, it would be appropriate to then find out how they are used and what benefits they provide to each individual in the authority. The next step I would make would be to look at the negative side of their social media usage, and gain an understanding of possible problems that those individuals may face with social media, if any. By combining the possible experience of problems alongside a question asking if there are other authorities that they are aware of that may be using social media differently, it would enable me to provide well thought out recommendations later on in the dissertation.
3.2 Research Philosophy

Based on the need to reflect on the feelings of participants for this research study, and understanding social process involves getting inside the world of those generating it (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991), an interpretive philosophy will be applied to the research, as the vehicle for such 'interpretive' investigations is often the in-depth case study, where research involves frequent visits to the field site over an extended period of time (Walsham, 1995).

Orlikowski and Boroudi (1991) make the claim that interpretivism is a valuable approach to studying IS in organisations, or more strongly that it is a better method than positivism for this purpose.

Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Johari (2009) states that qualitative data is the main concern for an interpretative study.

Walsham (2006) puts forward that carrying out fieldwork as the fundamental basis for interpretive study, with interview as the main way of accessing the interpretations of informants in the organisation. Eisenhardt (1989) states that case study by definition is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings.

Despite the potential use of online questionnaires that reflect a positivist philosophy in this study (Johari, 2009), if the questionnaire is designed carefully, open-ended questions will provide an insight into the participants’ interpretations (Moser & Kalton, 1985). Despite the underlying philosophy of the research being interpretivism, it will not be effected by the use of questionnaires as a methodology (Johari, 2009).

3.3 Research Approach

Based on an interpretive research philosophy, it is imperative to choose either an inductive or deductive research approach. Many evaluation projects use both inductive and deductive analysis (Thomas, 2006).

An inductive research approach involves the researcher collecting sufficient data relevant to their chosen topic, then looking for patterns in the data to develop a theory (Blackstone, 2012). Thomas (2006) defines the inductive approach as “a systematic procedure for analysing qualitative data in which the analysis is likely to be guided by specific evaluation objectives.” Thomas further states the aim of inductive research “refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher.

Researchers who adopt a deductive approach will use the same steps used in an inductive approach, except in reverse order, and centre on quantitative data (Blackstone, 2012). Thomas (2006) states that “Deductive analysis refers to data analyses that set out to test whether data are consistent with prior assumptions, theories, or hypotheses identified or constructed by an investigator.” Thomas’ thoughts on a deductive approach is “deductive analyses, such as those used in experimental and hypothesis testing research, key themes are often obscured, reframed, or left invisible because of the preconceptions in the data collection and data analysis procedures imposed by investigators.”
Despite their differences, inductive and deductive approaches can be complimentary (Blackstone, 2012). Based on an interpretive philosophy, it would be of significance to conduct qualitative interviews based on an inductive approach to make sense of the interviewees’ thoughts and feelings, and then theorize about them. Then administer quantitative surveys, favouring a deductive approach, by analysing the results alongside relevant literature (Blackstone, 2012).

3.4 Research Strategy

This particular domain would adopt a case study strategy in order to answer the given research question. As ascertained by Robson (2002), if the basis of the study is to develop an understanding of the research organisation, and the processes it entails, then a case study strategy would prove useful. The basis of this study would be to understand the position of social media in the decision making process and completion of objectives within Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, and to ascertain whether it is advantageous to the authority, leaving the case study strategy the most effective option.

Utilising Creswell’s (2013) research design it has been possible to establish the different research approaches available and thus determine which of these approaches would be the most relevant for the proposed research study. Of the three primary approaches to research (Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods approaches) a mixed method combining both qualitative and quantitative research will be adopted.

Creswell (2013) states that Qualitative research “is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”

Quantitative research “is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures.”

Mixed Methods research is “an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone.”

More specifically, the convergent parallel mixed methods design would best help to achieve an outcome from this research as it “involves the merging of quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. In this design, the investigator typically collects both forms of data at roughly the same time and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall results” (Creswell, 2013).

Table 7 below outlines the Research Strategy for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Type of Questions</th>
<th>Analysis Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>To gain a deeper understanding of NPTCBC’s attitude</td>
<td>2-3 members of the social media &amp; decision making</td>
<td>Mixture of structured and open questions</td>
<td>Thematic analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
towards social media usage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative online questionnaire</th>
<th>To gain an understanding of what social media platforms NPTCBC employees use in their daily activities, to understand which social media platforms they could introduce, and which platform they consider the most popular.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NPTCBC employees from different department authorities that have accounts on social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple choice and open ended questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptive analysis including charts and graphs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Sample Design

In regards to research methodology and sampling Kothari (2004) has been established that sample design is a plan for obtaining a sample from a set population, based on factors such as the type of universe, the sampling unit, the sampling frame, and the sample size, parameters of interest, budget constraints, and sampling procedure. The population of this sample based on the research study would be employees working for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council that are using social media during their daily activities, in order to aid the decision making process and ultimately achieve completion of organisational objectives.

Given the time issues associated with this study, a non-probability sample of the population will be chosen. A non-probability sample is used most often in conjunction with a case study strategy (Saunders et al, 2007). “Items for the sample are selected deliberately by the researcher; his choice concerning the items remains supreme. In other words, under non-probability sampling the organisers of the inquiry purposively choose the particular units of the universe for constituting a sample on the basis that the small mass that they so select out of a huge one will be typical or representative of the whole” (Kothari, 2004).

3.6 Data Collection

The basis for this research design is to get a face-to-face insight from leading members of the social media department of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC), to get an understanding of exactly what their strategy is with regards to their social media usage, and to see if there are any challenges they may be facing with their current social media in place. It would also be of significant benefit to gain an idea of what other local authorities they are aware of that are implementing a similar or more developed social media strategy.

It would be appropriate to pose the question of whether or not their social media plans are being possibly reviewed in any way. The ultimate aim of course, is to understand how social media is used by NPTCBC to make the appropriate decisions and complete business objectives.

Consequently a qualitative research method, containing semi-structured interviews, while allowing the respondents to have some flexibility beyond the questions written down, in order to gain primary research, for this research question. The researcher favoured semi-structured interviews over structured or unstructured interviews because by asking questions specifically
about the chosen domain, the researcher will expect to receive responses that will provide an answer to the research question, whereas unstructured questions may provide redundant data that is irrelevant, while in contrast, an interview that carries too much structure may result in missing out on valuable and insightful responses that the researcher may not have expected to have gained initially. The layout of semi-structured interviews could also allow the researcher to gauge further information from the respondents, where the researcher may feel that further information is required.

The members of NPTCBC that the researcher intends to interview will have worked mainly within the social media area but may advise interviews with other members of the council with regards to the decision making side of proceedings. This may possibly mean that certain question areas of the interview may be answered by other individuals in interviews arranged beyond the initial meeting. The interview questions can be found in the appendix of this dissertation.

In order to achieve a more rounded and complete answer to the research question, the researcher will also use quantitative methods, in the form of online questionnaires. The aim of the questionnaires focus mainly on which members of the council are using social media, what other platforms they are aware of, in which way they use these platforms, and if they are any other platforms that they believe could be used.

The online questionnaires will contain a mix of multiple choice, and open-ended questions, which will be converted into numerical values once collected and taken into the data analysis stage. The way in which respondents will access the questionnaire will be through a web link that the researcher intends to provide during the interview with the social media leader/s, who will then hopefully distribute to council members as soon as possible, to a sample size of around 50.

Both of the research methods chosen will be used in conjunction with one another, with the primary aim of using qualitative data as the main informative source, with the quantitative data providing supportive information (Creswell, 2013).

Cardiff Metropolitan University applies a rigour ethics process to all research studies. Consequently ethics approval was sought and granted by the Research Ethics Committee [2015D0385]

3.6.1 Limitations with Data Collections

The researcher has planned that the data collection process takes around 4 weeks, with a start date of approximately 18th January 2016. There are a number of potential risks associated with this stage of the research project. The arranging of interviews could be potentially difficult, as it could possibly cause inconvenience to members of the council, as the interviews will more than likely be conducted during their working hours. The researcher aims to deal with this risk by arranging interviews at a time and place that is most convenient for the interviewees. It is worthy to note that consent for the interviews, once arranged, will be provided by a signed consent form before the commencement of the interview.

Timing would be another issue associated with the data collection phase, with the key risk being that research deadlines are met consistently. The only way that this risk could be
combatted is by ensuring that every effort is made to complete the research phases in accordance with the anticipated research deadlines set.

The privacy of data is significant when conducting data collection. Firstly, the risk of maintaining secure storage of all data would have to be taken into account, ensuring that all data will be held on a secure password protected external hard drive, and paper copies will be kept in a locked cupboard. Access to the data will be restricted to the contributor and supervisor, and questionnaires will have no trace back to the contributor.

Secondly, data confidentiality is of significance at this stage. With that in mind, all data that will be collected will be kept confidential, particularly the names of contributors, who will remain anonymous, as pseudonyms will be used for quotes.

3.7 Data Analysis

The exact number of individuals working for NPTCBC has not been defined, however I have been made aware that the web link to the online questionnaire will be provided in Neath Port Talbot County Borough Councils staff magazine. The issue with this is that it is unlikely that every single individual will provide a response to the survey, so there will not be a set number of respondents. The data analysis technique I plan on using is a thematic approach, defined by Braun & Clarke (2006) as “A method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data.” This suggests that it would be a perfect tool when analysing my qualitative data as a vast amount of my data would best be analysed thematically. Quantitative data that I collect will be formatted in Microsoft Excel in the Results & Discussion section of the dissertation.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Results & Discussion

This chapter focuses on the empirical data gathered using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. As the recording of interviews was not consented to by the participants qualitative data were initially noted down on paper and then recorded in a word document in bullet point format. Data that were gathered from these interviews provided an insight into firstly, what and how social media is used within Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, and secondly, whether or not social media is present in the decision making and governance sector. Qualitative data that was gathered will be provided alongside quantitative data, and in reference to the literature review, to reinforce any points made.

Table 8 – Interview Respondents & Topics Covered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent No.</th>
<th>Fictional Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Topics Covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Principal Officer – Communications and Digital Services</td>
<td>Social Media Usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>Social Media Leader</td>
<td>Social Media Usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>Electoral &amp; Democratic Services Manager</td>
<td>Decision Making Process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings from quantitative research focused more with the individuals associated with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, garnering their opinions on social media platforms and their popularity, any issues faced during the usage of social in their authority, awareness of other local councils using social media differently, and what social media they would like to see introduced into the authority.

It is worth noting that during the interviews conducted Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 felt it necessary to add a question regarding the age of respondents from the quantitative research, in order for themselves to gain an understanding of which age groups were most interested in responding to this study based around social media usage within their organisation. Of the 20 contributors that responded, the results can be seen in Figure 7 below.
Evidence from Figure 7 above shows that of the 20 employees that responded, 7 of them were aged 45 to 54, the highest number of respondents per age category from the study.

4.1 Current Social Media Platforms

The first theme to arise in conjunction with the objectives of this research study and the literature review conducted was the understanding of what social media NPTCBC uses in order to gather information and make decisions. Respondents were asked which social media platforms that they were aware of being used within their authority, which platforms they used during their daily activities and which social media platform/s they considered to be most popular.
Figure 8 – Awareness of Social Media within NPTC CBC

**Figure 8.1 – Social Media Platform Considered Most Popular**

**Awareness of Social Media Platforms Within NPTC CBC**

- **Facebook**: 100%
- **Twitter**: 90%
- **Instagram**: 30%
- **Linkedin**: 15%
- **Flickr**: 10%
- **YouTube**: 5%

% of Respondents

WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM DO YOU CONSIDER MOST POPULAR?

- **Facebook**: 74%
- **Twitter**: 26%
The results suggest that both Facebook and Twitter are the dominating social media platforms currently being discussed and used within the case study organisation, with 100% of employees aware of NPTCBC’s usage of Facebook, while 90% of employees are aware of Twitter within NPTCBC. This can also be supported by the results of Figure 8.2 which show Facebook as the overriding social media platform being used by employees within NPTCBC, with 100% of those who responded using Facebook in the course of their daily activities.

In reference to the literature review, this is supported by Reynolds (2014) who gave 10 reasons explaining why Facebook should be embraced as a tool, based on its features of groups and events, as it provides a free communications channel between organisation and the public.

74% of respondents also considered Facebook to be the most popular social media platform at a general worldwide scale, as shown in Figure 8.1. Brixey (2016) supported this by labelling it as “probably the best known of the social networking sites.” Indeed, Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 also confirmed this during the qualitative research phase, when asked the question “What social media websites are the council using?” they responded “Facebook & Twitter.”

Figure 1 of the literature review also provides an insight to Facebook’s popularity as indicated by those at NPTCBC, as it shows a rise in the number of UK Facebook users from 2012 to 2014, from 27.2 million to 30.3 million, plus a predicted number of users from 2015 (31.2) to 2018 (33). Sedghi (2014) suggested that as of 2013, 757 million users had logged on to Facebook on a daily basis. Figure 2 of the literature review shows the rise in Facebook’s monthly users on a yearly basis, supporting the idea of utilising Facebook as a platform as the audience that NPTCBC are trying to attract are likely to be on Facebook.

Figure 8 shows that 90% of NPTCBC employees who responded to the question were aware of Twitter being used within the case study organisation, while in Figure 8.2, 57.14% of respondents said that they used Twitter during their daily activities.
In reference to the literature review, Table 2 shows that 100% of organisations that took part in the BDO case study used Twitter in both 2014 & 2015, whereas 90% of authorities used Facebook in 2014 & 2015. Table 2 also shows a rise in the use of Flickr and Instagram, suggesting that alternative social media platforms are being considered by other local authorities, and could be considered by NPTCBC.

The use of Twitter at local authority level was supported in an article by Smith (2014), who provided 5 local councils that used Twitter effectively, and 5 that did not. The effective use of Twitter by the 5 authorities provided can be used as the benchmark for the case study organisation to work towards.

The results of Figure 8.2 suggest the importance of maintaining a strong social media presence within the case study authority, supported by the case study that BDO conducted, in the literature review “Over 74% of councils believe there is a moderately or extremely high appetite within their organisations to maintain a strong social media presence, an increase of 7% from last year.”

In summary, the results above suggest that Facebook & Twitter still remain the two most popular social media platforms within both the case study organisation and other local authorities across the UK. It also supports the idea that individuals from other councils may have been introduced to Twitter at an earlier stage than those at NPTCBC. However, the alternative social media platforms shown within Figure 8 indicate that NPTCBC have thought about, or are already slowly starting to integrate additional social media platforms into their authority.

4.2 Social Media Activity & Issues

The next theme identified by the research objectives and literature review surrounds how exactly the case study organisation is using social media, and any issues that have arisen during its usage.
Figure 9 – What Activities is Social Media used for?

Figure 9.1 – How Social Media Provides a Benefit to NPTCBC
Figure 9.2 – Issues Faced While Using Social Media

Evidence from Figure 9 suggests that of those who are using social media within NPTCBC, 43% say that they use it to follow local events, supported by Figure 9.1 which suggests that following local events brings the benefits of continued contact with the public (47%), and the ability for these events to be monitored relatively easily (20%). The idea of keeping in touch with the local residents was emphasised by Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 who when asked on the topic of social media “Why are you using them?” they responded “We use it for a number of reasons, but mainly to stay in contact with local residents.” Table 3 of the literature review provides a supporting example of using social media as a means of maintaining public contact, as Isle of Wight Council held live Question and Answer sessions through Facebook, allowing citizens to ask questions to senior officers/councillors on the topics that affect them. Figure 6 provided by Slee (2011), showing Coventry’s official Facebook page, praised Coventry City Council for naming their page ‘Coventry’ rather than ‘Coventry City Council’, stating that “people would be happier signing up to the place where they live over the institution that governs it.” This also supports the idea of keeping in contact with local residents as the ‘Coventry’ Facebook page has gained over 36,000 followers from the area, and post regularly to the public regarding a range of topics. This also supports the Local Government Association example of Cllr Mathew Hulbert’s use of Facebook to keep in touch with local residents.

Figure 9.2 is based upon the issues that have occurred within NPTCBC with regards to their social media usage. Nearly 44% of respondents stated that they found no real issues with the current social media in place at NPTCBC, however nearly 19% found that both training/usage issues, and the receiving of spam/inappropriate messages were active within the case study authority. 12% of respondents also found that privacy issues were a concern within NPTCBC. From speaking to Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2, privacy issues seemed to be the main concern with the current social media platforms in NPTCBC from their perspective. When asked the question “What are the challenges with the current social media in place (if any)?” their response was “Privacy restrictions – We have to be careful as to what we are posting, especially concerning issues such as photographs of children.” The privacy issue of
photographs including children was also mentioned by one of the respondents to the quantitative survey who said “Permission to use photographs of children.” Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 also commented on the issues regarding training/usage of social media, when responding to the question “Are you finding them easy to use?” they responded “We find the help centre useful as a means of providing basic training.” This does suggest that it might be difficult for professional social media training to be introduced as it would involve getting all staff members in the same place at the same time, which would disrupt the course of their daily activities during working hours, which is understandable.

With regards to the decision making process within NPTCBC, it was ascertained during the qualitative research phase with Interviewee 3 that social media does not yet play a major part in the governance and decision making process. When asked the question “What steps do you go through currently to make informed decisions?” Interviewee 3 responded by saying “We currently rely on a paper based archived system – Issues are discussed through cabinet meetings, corporate directors group, corporate members group, cabinet members briefing etc.” This is evidence of how social media has not yet appeared during cabinet meetings within NPTCBC, however Interviewee 3 informed that “The consultation phase is where social media is most prominent.” This is in contrast to Oldham Council, who according to McMahon (2012), streamed a council meeting on their official website, allowing people to watch the meeting from home. The introduction of ‘Public Question Time’ allowed members of the public to submit questions directly to cabinet members through Facebook, Twitter, and Email. This also fits in with the idea of keeping in contact with residents, as it allows local residents to play a direct role in cabinet affairs. This idea was discussed during the interview, with interviewee 3 stating that “Webcasting would be a good idea.” This particular feature also backs up Wakeman’s (2009) idea of reaching out to existing users within the council’s area.

To summarise this theme, it would be safe to say that social media has provided a benefit to the majority of individuals at NPTCBC, particularly when it comes to monitoring and being a part of local events, which leads to a degree of continuing contact with the local residents. With the vast majority of respondents (43.75%) stating that they found no issues with current social media in place, it would seem that the basic help centre training used by NPTCBC is sufficient for the time being, until the possibility of alternative social media platforms being introduced is discussed. Following on from discussions and surveys, the main aim for NPTCBC seems to be ensuring that they maintain a strong relationship with their local residents. The issue of privacy would certainly be a concern in the future for NPTCBC, especially when considering the introduction of alternative social media platforms into the organisation, especially platforms that are based around photos and videos (Instagram & Snapchat). In reference to social media’s role in NPTCBC’s decision making and governance process, it can be assumed that this would be the area where social media is at its least prominent.

4.3 Alternative Social Media Platforms & Social Media within Other Authorities

The final theme to be considered surrounds the possible introduction of alternative social media platforms, and how other authorities are using social media differently.
Figure 10 – Awareness of Social Media use within Other Authorities

% of Respondents

- Monmouthshire: 11%
- Swansea: 6%
- No: 83%

Legend:
- Monmouthshire
- Swansea
- No
Do you know of any alternative Social Media Platforms that you feel the Council should be using?

Figure 10.1 shows how 83% of respondents to the question had not been made aware or took it upon themselves to gain an understanding of how other local councils are using social media effectively. However 11% of respondents stated that they had been made aware of Monmouthshire County Council’s effective use of social media. This is echoed by Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2, who when asked the question “Are you aware of other council’s in South Wales that use more social media than yourselves?” responded by stating simply “Monmouthshire Council and RCT (Rhondda Cynon Taf).” However it is worth noting that the interviewee’s mentioned Rhondda Cynon Taf based on the modernising of their governance rooms, such as public galleries, and not based on their social media. Evidence of Monmouthshire County Council’s effective use of Twitter in particular can be found in Table 1 of the literature review, which documents them in a list of 5 best practice examples of Twitter by Smith (2014). 6% of respondents to the question were aware of Swansea City & County Council’s alternative use of social media. One respondent in particular stated that “Swansea have different accounts for Welsh and English.” Swansea’s use of social media has also been touched upon in the literature review within the Local Government Association examples, especially when linked back to the previous themes mentioned, Dave McKenna informs of how he uses twitter to “connect with people.” The main factor is how Swansea Council uses Twitter for ‘scrutiny’, to post updates about meeting and reports, and McKenna notes how it also encourages conversation with the public. This evidence provides a positive recommendation of using Twitter alongside council meetings, as well as providing supporting evidence to the previous themes mentioned.

Figure 10.1 shows alternative social media platforms that individuals from NPTCBC feel that they could introduce into the case study organisation. 56% of respondents stated that apart from Facebook and Twitter, there were no other social media platforms that they feel could have been integrated into NPTCBC. This does suggest that this proportion of respondents may not have an advanced understanding or awareness of the alternative platforms currently available. One respondent however did state that “We are about to implement a digital by choice strategy
the use of social media will change across the council in quite a radical way as the strategy is implemented." The on-going implementation of the ‘Digital by Choice’ strategy mentioned by the respondent was confirmed by Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2. It is worth noting that this strategy only has a small section on social media, and is not solely a social media strategy, and mainly deals with other issues such as the prospect of all NPTCBC’s payment services being integrated to an online system. 44% of respondents to the question posed in Figure 10.1 felt that Instagram was an alternative platform that should be considered for inclusion within NPTCBC. This is supported by evidence provided by the case study conducted by BDO who stated that 38% of authorities that took part in their study had an Instagram account, a growth of 18% since 2014. The BDO also went on to suggest that “there is still some room for local authorities to diversify the way they disseminate information” again encouraging the use of alternative social media platforms as a means of gathering and providing information. BDO further supported the use of Instagram by sighting its compatibility alongside the popular platforms Facebook and Twitter. Further support for the introduction of Instagram within NPTCBC is provided in Figure 5 of the literature review, showing Westminster City Council using its Instagram account to support events and landmarks within their area.

11% of respondents to the question asked in Figure 10.1 said that they believe Snapchat could be introduced into NPTCBC. However, in reference to the literature review, of those authorities that took part in the BDO case study, not a single authority had integrated Snapchat as a social media platform, which is contradicted by an article provided by The Shuttle (2014) which documented how Blackburn with Darwen Council used Snapchat to try and increase voter turnout in both the local and European elections, involving the sending of ‘snaps’ as reminders to vote. This again provides evidence of local authorities maintaining a strong association with the public.

Other results from the question in Figure 10.1 show how 6% of respondents felt that YouTube could be utilised within NPTCBC. However, this contradicts findings from Figure 8, which states that 10% of respondents were aware of YouTube being used within NPTCBC. It poses the question of whether YouTube is being used by certain individuals for personal purposes rather than work purposes within the case study organisation.

Although not mentioned by any respondents during the quantitative study, WhatsApp is another emerging social media platform, which 2% of authorities in the BDO’s case study had introduced into their workplace. It was also revealed by the Shropshire Newsroom (2014) that Shropshire Council went through the process of trialling WhatsApp to try and communicate with local people, but in a different way.

The successful introduction and use of alternative social media platforms within UK authorities has been proven by the BDO case study and exemplars from the Local Government Association, providing an opportunity for alternative platforms to at least be considered or trialled by NPTCBC in the future. When asked the question “What would be the big challenge with introducing more social media into the council” Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 answered simply “Workload.” This answer suggests that additional staff may be needed in order for alternative social media platforms to be integrated within NPTCBC. However, as most social media platforms are free, the only real expense to NPTCBC would be the cost of bringing in additional staff to start-up the social media platforms.

In contrast, the BDO reported that 71% of respondents to their case study in 2015 felt that their organisation reaped financial benefits from the use of social media. This would be of benefit
to NPTCBC as when asked the question “Do you believe there is a way you could integrate social media into the decision making process” Interviewee 3 answered “Yes, if it could provide some financial benefit.” The proposed financial benefits found by the BDO would again support the idea of introducing more social media into NPTCBC. In answer to the same question asked, Interviewee 3 continued by saying “It would also be about convincing senior figures who are more traditional to introduce more social media.” The approach taken by senior leadership with regards to social media has a direct link to the impact of social media on local authorities, says the BDO, who stated that 74% of respondents to their case study felt that the approach taken by senior leadership towards social media had an impact on how authorities would use it. Supporting evidence of this in the literature review can be found under the BDO’S local government social media leaders, with George Ferguson (Table 4), the Mayor of Bristol City Council, having 35,000 Twitter followers at the time the case study was conducted, as well as having accounts for 4 separate social media platforms, and Joe Anderson (Table 6), the Mayor of Liverpool City Council, having 20,900 Twitter followers, and accounts on 3 different social media platforms.

In summary, it can be ascertained that each local authority within the UK has a different stance on social media, with each utilising a different number of platforms. Analysis suggests it would be advantageous for NPTCBC to trial alternative social media platforms such as Instagram to judge whether or not it would provide a benefit to them and appeal to a wider audience. The main factor identified from these results would be the impact that senior leadership has on social media implementation. From the data that I have gathered it seems that senior figures from NPTCBC have only really considered Facebook & Twitter as informative social media tools, and in order for progression with regards to social media, a new approach to all social media platforms would need to be considered.
CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Conclusion

This chapter reviews and summarises each phase of the research study conducted and illustrates how each of the research objectives have been achieved. Additionally it puts forward areas of further research and sets out the limitations of the research study.

5.1 Objective One – Understand what social media NPTCBC uses to gather information and make decisions.

The first objective of the research study involved gaining an understanding of the current social media in place at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, and how that social media was used effectively in order to make decisions and complete business objectives.

In order for this objective to be completed, a review of available literature was conducted alongside qualitative and quantitative methods of research, allowing results to be thematically analysed in the process. Based on the BDO’s findings that 100% of authorities that took part in their study used Twitter and 90% had a Facebook account, the results gathered from this research study show very similar findings. 100% of respondents to the quantitative survey stated that they were aware of Facebook being used within NPTCBC, while 90% of respondents stated that they were aware of Twitter being used in the organisation. 100% of respondents also stated that Facebook was used as part of their working daily activities. The one finding that may contradict the hypotheses would be that in contrast to the 90% who were aware of the NPTCBC Twitter account, only 57.14% actually stated that Twitter was used as part of their daily activities. This would draw the conclusion that despite an awareness of the platform, many of those who used Twitter during their daily activities may have chosen not to take part in the online surveys.

Despite small percentages of respondents being aware of alternative social media platforms within NPTCBC, the conclusion can be drawn that Facebook & Twitter are the two primary social media platforms currently being utilised by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, as confirmed also during the qualitative research phase therefore completing the first objective of the chosen research study.

5.2 Objective Two – Identify issues with social media and decision making activities

The second research objective involved identifying issues with both the current social media in place and decision making activities of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. It was found that during the surveys taken, 43% of respondents felt that social media was best used as a means of following local events. However, following on from the face-to-face interviews conducted, it would seem that providing a means of communication between the authority and its local residents was the main focal point for NPTCBC’s use of social media.

This would be supported by results from the surveys, with 47% of respondents finding continued contact with the public to be the best benefit of social media use to the organisation. Examples from both the BDO and Local Government Association also support this, with many senior leadership figures addressing that maintaining a dialogue between authority and the public as their main reason for consistent social media use.
With regards to the issues with social media faced by NPTCBC, it was ascertained that privacy issues were the main concern for the organisation, specifically concerning possible photographs of children being uploaded to social media. This concern was identified through findings from both the qualitative and quantitative studies conducted.

Training and usage issues were also discussed but it was acknowledged that the case study organisation were more than happy with the use of the help centre’s provided by each social media platform as a means of providing basic training to each employee.

In terms of the processes that NPTCBC go through in order to make decisions, it was found that social media played a relatively non-existent role during such processes. The consultation phase was said to be the area where social media would have been most prominent. This was derived from an understanding that many senior leadership figures within NPTCBC are very traditional in their ways and have not been introduced to the possibility of introducing social media into the decision making processes. The idea of social media being introduced was suggested to be dependent on the decision of whether or not senior leaders could forecast a financial benefit from its use. This therefore covers the issues with social media and the decision making process of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, completing the second research objective.

5.3 Objective Three – Look at what social media websites could be used efficiently by the case study council to make decisions and complete objectives.

The third objective of this study was to identify alternative social media platforms that could be used efficiently by NPTCBC in order for them to make decisions and complete objectives. In order to do this, it was of significance to gain an understanding of the alternative social media platforms available, and to have knowledge of the ways in which other UK authorities are using social media.

It was found during the literature review that the use of Instagram amongst local authorities had risen by 18%, from 20% in 2014, to 38% in 2015. Results from the quantitative study show how 44% of respondents felt that Instagram could potentially be used within Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

The use of Snapchat within NPTCBC was also touched upon, with 9% of respondents stating that it could be of benefit to NPTCBC. This result was in contrast to findings from the literature review, as the BDO found that none of the participating authorities in the case study had used Snapchat as a tool. However, other research articles found that Blackburn with Darwen Council had utilised Snapchat as a way of completing objectives.

WhatsApp was found to be another alternative social media platform used by just 2% of UK authorities, according to BDO. It is worth noting that not a single respondent from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council was aware of WhatsApp, neither did a single respondent note WhatsApp as a social media platform that could potentially be introduced in the future.

The review of current literature was significant in identifying other UK authorities who are using social media effectively. For example, it was found by Smith (2014) that Liverpool, Manchester, Monmouthshire, Newcastle, and Norfolk Council’s collectively were amongst the best practise examples of Twitter use within local councils. Additionally, Suffolk, Somerset, Isle of Wight, and Torfaen Council’s had all used either Facebook or Twitter as a means of
engaging with the public either as outlets of information, or as forms of advertisement. Whilst, Westminster City Council have used their Instagram account as a means of showcasing events and landmarks/scenery within their covered area, and Blackburn with Darwen Council became the first authority to introduce Snapchat as a way of potentially increasing voter turnout in elections during 2014.

Similarly, WhatsApp has been trialled by Shropshire Council, as a means of communicating with local people in a different way, Sandwell Council dealt with school closures through Facebook, by providing updates over the weekend and early in the weekday mornings, which resulted in their Facebook ‘likes’ reaching 10,000+, and Coventry City Council’s naming of their Facebook page ‘Coventry’ was praised due to its simplicity, and the fact that over 36,000 followed/liked the page based on its naming of the city rather than the council itself.

The above analysis of alternative social media platforms, as well as providing other UK authorities that use social media effectively demonstrate that the third objective of the research study has been completed.

It is of significance to conclude that the importance of the senior leadership’s attitude towards social media within local government is essential to how each individual authority benefits from its use.

5.4 Objective Four – Provide Recommendations

The fourth and final objective associated with this research study surrounds providing recommendations to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council based on their existing use of social media, and the possible introduction of alternative social media platforms.

5.4.1 Recommendations

Based on the literature that has been reviewed, and the results analysed from the qualitative and quantitative research phases of the study, the following recommendations can be made to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

1. Consider following the example of Coventry City Council in changing the name of the current Facebook page associated with the case study organisation entitled ‘Neath Port Talbot CBC’, to simply ‘Neath Port Talbot’ in order to see if number of ‘likes’ can be increased. This could be done through a short trial period as the changing of a Facebook account name does not result in the loss of anyone who has already liked the page.

2. Follow in the footsteps of both Isle of Wight and Oldham Council who both held similar question and answer sessions through Facebook, Twitter, and Email. This would fit in with NPTCBC’s main aim of providing a means of communication between the council and the local public. It would again be worth trialling as both Isle of Wight and Oldham’s campaigns have been very well received.

3. Increase public service campaigns, as used effectively by Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service, in order to encourage more of the public into departments such as the police or fire service with the help of advert campaigns through Facebook and other social media platforms.

4. Make social media a key issue with senior leadership – as shown in this dissertation, elected mayors and chief executives of separate councils are active on more than one social media platform, with some having 30,000+ followers on Twitter. This would set
an example to those working alongside senior leaders within NPTCBC to at least trial using more social media. If this recommendation is taken seriously, recommendation number two (2) would be made easier to introduce.

5. Using Westminster City Council as an example, consider trialling Instagram as an alternative social media platform. Based on the privacy issues previously discussed, photos of local landmarks such as Margam Country Park and Afan Forest Park could be posted to Instagram, without containing any photographs of children. This would avoid any of the issues discussed occurring.

6. With elections always being a part of any local authority, the use of Snapchat to send out ‘snaps’ to local users, encouraging them to visit their local polling stations, could increase turnout in local and European elections, especially amongst younger voters who may not have originally had a significant interest in voting.

7. In following Shropshire Council’s example, WhatsApp could also be trialled as means of communicating with the local public differently.

8. Based on a tip from BDO, publish content from different social media platforms in order to make people aware of that platforms existence.

9. If introduced, ensure that NPTCBC display all social media accounts in one place on official website.

10. Start first by committing to platforms where most of the council’s users are on.

11. Only make posts on social media containing information of usefulness and importance.

12. Create Facebook pages for things that people care about, such as local festivals and other events.

Whether these recommendations are considered and/or implemented in the future can only be analysed effectively if given time for implementation of social media to be allowed. Further research could be conducted in the future, specifically on the case study organisation, analysing how social media has changed since this research study was undertaken, and identifying whether the introduction of social media to the organisation has provided any sustained benefit.

5.5 Limitation of the Research Study

There were a small number of limitations associated with the research study conducted. Firstly, due to the fact the data collection started in January, there was only four months for the whole study to be completed before the research deadline. Secondly, the research study was limited to just one county council in Wales, which does not provide an accurate reflection of social media usage amongst all local authorities. Finally, this study only reflects a small number of social media platforms, and does not cover every single platform available.

5.6 Future Research

With regards to future research around the topic, the fact that the study only reflects a single county council in Wales could mean that further research could extend to investigating social media usage within county councils across Wales & England.
References


Abbreviations

NPTCBC – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Appendices

Appendix A – Approved Ethics Form

When undertaking a research or enterprise project, Cardiff Met staff and students are obliged to complete this form in order that the ethics implications of that project may be considered.

If the project requires ethics approval from an external agency (e.g., NHS), you will not need to seek additional ethics approval from Cardiff Met. You should however complete Part One of this form and attach a copy of your ethics letter(s) of approval in order that your School has a record of the project.

The document Ethics application guidance notes will help you complete this form. It is available from the Cardiff Met website. The School or Unit in which you are based may also have produced some guidance documents, please consult your supervisor or School Ethics Coordinator.

Once you have completed the form, sign the declaration and forward to the appropriate person(s) in your School or Unit.

PLEASE NOTE:
Participant recruitment or data collection MUST NOT commence until ethics approval has been obtained.

PART ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of applicant:</th>
<th>Jordan Evans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor (if student project):</td>
<td>Dr Hilary Berger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School / Unit:</td>
<td>CSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student number (if applicable):</td>
<td>St20044315</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme enrolled on (if applicable):</td>
<td>Bsc Hons Business Information Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>How Neath Port Talbot Council can use social media to aid informed decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected start date of data collection:</td>
<td>18th January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate duration of data collection:</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding Body (if applicable):</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other researcher(s) working on the project:</td>
<td>Neath Port Talbot Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will the study involve NHS patients or staff?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the study involve taking samples of human origin from participants?</td>
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Does your project fall entirely within one of the following categories:

<p>| Paper based, involving only documents in the public domain | No |</p>
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<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>Laboratory based, not involving human participants or human tissue samples</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice based not involving human participants (e.g., curatorial, practice audit)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compulsory projects in professional practice (e.g., Initial Teacher Education)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A project for which external approval has been obtained (e.g., NHS)</td>
<td>No</td>
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If you have answered YES to any of these questions, expand on your answer in the non-technical summary. No further information regarding your project is required.

If you have answered NO to all of these questions, you must complete Part 2 of this form.

In no more than 150 words, give a non-technical summary of the project:

In this project, I will be looking at how my local council could use social media to aid their decision making in the future. I will need to have an understanding of what NPT council is currently using to gather information and make decisions, and identify any issues with their current decision making activities. I will then go on to look at what social media websites NPT council could use in an efficient way to make decisions, and finally, make recommendations that I believe would best benefit the council in the future.

DECLARATION:
I confirm that this project conforms with the Cardiff Met Research Governance Framework

I confirm that I will abide by the Cardiff Met requirements regarding confidentiality and anonymity when conducting this project.

STUDENTS: I confirm that I will not disseminate any material produced as a result of this project without the prior approval of my supervisor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of the applicant:</th>
<th>Date: 06/12/2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan Evans</td>
<td></td>
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FOR STUDENT PROJECTS ONLY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of supervisor:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Hilary Berger</td>
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Signature of supervisor:

Research Ethics Committee use only

Decision reached:  
- Project approved [ ]
- Project approved in principle [ ]
- Decision deferred [ ]
- Project not approved [ ]
- Project rejected [ ]
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<th>PART TWO</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A RESEARCH DESIGN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A1 Will you be using an approved protocol in your project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 If yes, please state the name and code of the approved protocol to be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 Describe the research design to be used in your project</td>
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<td>A4 Will the project involve deceptive or covert research?</td>
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<td>A5 If yes, give a rationale for the use of deceptive or covert research</td>
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<tr>
<td>A6 Will the project have security sensitive implications?</td>
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<td>A7 If yes, please explain what they are and the measures that are proposed to address them</td>
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<th>B PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>B1 What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project do you have?</td>
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1 An Approved Protocol is one which has been approved by Cardiff Met to be used under supervision of designated members of staff; a list of approved protocols can be found on the Cardiff Met website here.
B2 **Student project only**
What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project does your supervisor have?

Dr Hilary Berger has over 12 years of student dissertation and research at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

**C POTENTIAL RISKS**

C1 What potential risks do you foresee?

1. Arranging interviews – causing inconvenience to interviewees during their working day.
2. Risks of not meeting the research deadlines.
3. Maintaining secure storage of all data.
4. Concerns over confidentiality of data

C2 How will you deal with the potential risks?

1. The interviews will not be conducted without a signed consent form. Consent for the interviews will be provided by oral and participant consent form which will be signed before the interview. Interviews times will be arranged at a time and place convenient for the interviewees. Interviews will not contain any questions that reveal the identity of the contributor and will insure contributor’s anonymity throughout. This will be stated in the participant consent form for the interviews. If participants feel uncomfortable during any part of the research gathering process withdrawal from the process can be immediate. Audio recordings of the interviews will be transcribed and the participant will be referred to as a pseudonym.

2. Every effort will be made to complete the research phases in accordance with the anticipated research deadlines.

3. All data will be held on a secure password protected external hard drive and paper copies will be kept in a locked cupboard. Access to the data will be restricted to the contributor and supervisor. Questionnaires will have no trace back to the contributor.

4. All data will be kept confidential, participants will remain anonymous, as pseudonyms will be used for quotes.

When submitting your application you **MUST** attach a copy of the following:
- All information sheets
- Consent/assent form(s)

An exemplar information sheet and participant consent form are available from the Research section of the Cardiff Met website.
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
FOR INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONAIRRE TYPE DATA COLLECTION

How Neath Port Talbot Council can use social media to aid informed decision making

Cardiff Metropolitan University Protocol Number: 2015D0385

Project summary
The purpose of this research project is to identify the current social media websites that your organisation use and to understand the protocols you go through to make decisions, and then provide you with recommendations as to how social media can become a big part of that. Your participation will enable the collection of data which will form part of a study being undertaken at Cardiff Metropolitan University. The aims and objectives of this project are to understand what Neath Port Talbot council is currently using to gather information and make decisions, to identify any issues with your current decision making activities, to look at what social media websites could be used efficiently by the council to make decisions, and to make recommendations of social media that would provide the best benefits.

Why have you been asked to participate?
You have been asked to participate because you possess the relevant information needed to meet aims and objectives of this study.

Project risks
The research involves the completion of an interview. We do not think that there are any significant risks associated with this study. However, if you do feel that any of the questions are inappropriate then you can stop at any time. Furthermore, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time – we will completely respect your decision.

How we protect your privacy
All the information you provide will be held in confidence, securely stored and password protected. When we have finished the study and analysed all the information, all the documentation used to gather the data will be destroyed.

YOU WILL BE OFFERED A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET TO KEEP

If you require any further information about this project then please contact me: Jordan Evans at st20044315@cardiffmet.ac.uk or contact my supervisor Dr Hilary Berger at HBerger@cardiffmet.ac.uk.
Appendix C – Participant Consent Form

Cardiff Metropolitan University
Ethics Committee

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Cardiff Metropolitan University Ethics Reference Number: 2015D0385
Participant name or Study ID Number: Jordan Evans
Title of Project: How Neath Port Talbot Council can use social media to aid informed decision making and complete business objectives
Name of Researcher: Jordan Evans

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

4. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes being used in the study.

_______________________________________   ___________________
Signature of Participant                  Date

_______________________________________  ___________________
Name of person taking consent         Date

____________________________________
Signature of person taking consent

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Hi Jordan

In response to your email request to help with your dissertation, we would be more than happy to help with this work - it will be interesting for us to understand this topic too and hopefully we can learn together. We will be placing a more strategic focus to our social media in the new year, so this could be perfect timing for us both.

The Council is closed over the Christmas period from 24th December to 4th January. If you would like to give me a call after this date, we could arrange for you to meet up with our Social Media lead officer to discuss this further.

Have a good Christmas.
Appendix E – Semi-Structured Interview Questions

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

1. **Background Questions**
   - Name of Organisation
   - Respondents Position
   - Years working for organisation

2. **Discuss Social Media**
   - What social media websites are the council using?
   - How/Why are they using them?
   - Are you finding them easy to use?
   - What are the challenges you face with the current social media in place? (IF ANY)
   - What other social media sites are they aware of but are not associated with?
   - What would be the big challenge with introducing more social media into the council?
   - Are you aware of other council’s in South Wales that use more social media than yourselves?
   - If so, how do they use it?

3. **Discuss Decision Making**
   - What steps do you go through currently to make informed decisions?
   - Has social media played a part in that decision making?
   IF NO
   - Do you believe there is a way you could integrate social media into the decision making process?
   IF YES
   - Could better use be made of social media in decision making?
   - Would it be possible on the same budgets you work on now? E.g. would more staff be needed?

4. **Discuss the possible intentions of the Council**
   - Have you asked any outside specialists about possibly introducing more social media to the council?
   - Is your use of Social Media being reviewed at all in the forthcoming year?
Appendix F – Questionnaire Questions

Questionnaire Questions

** Submission of completed questionnaire will be taken as consent**

1. What is your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65-74
   - 75 or older

2. Which social media websites are you aware of being used in your authority?

3. Do you use social media in the course of your daily acitivities? If so, which ones?
   - Facebook
   - Twitter
   - Instagram
   - Myspace
   - LinkedIn
   If any other please state:

4. Please state what activities they are used for.
5. Do you feel that they provide a benefit during these activities? How?

6. Have you experienced any problems or challenges with social media? If so, please explain

7. Are you aware of other county councils that are using social media differently?

8. Do you know of any other social media the council should be using?
9. Which social media website do you consider to be the most popular, and why?
Appendix G – Notes taken during Interview

Interview Notes

Interviewee 1 & 2:
- Facebook and Twitter main social media platforms
- Basic Help Centre Training provided
- Keeping in touch with residents main concern of organisation
- Privacy issues – photographs of children, training issues
- Monmouthshire Council best example of social media implementation
- Rhondda Cynon Taf very modern public gallery
- Digital by Choice strategy

Interviewee 3:
- Cabinet Meetings, Corp Directors Group, Corp Members Group, Cabinet Members briefing
- Major issues go to council
- Webcasting a good idea
- Financial Benefit should be forecasted
- Convincing senior figures to comply with social media implementation

Other quotes documented within dissertation are from memory and can be confirmed by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council if necessary.