Social Media Data Management in a Governmental Setting

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 this dissertation entitled *Social Media Data Management in a Governmental Setting* 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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Signature:

Date:
Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation was to look at how two different Council’s managed social media and its immediate data. Social media’s vast growth in recent years has seen many organisations use social media to their advantage.

To understand this topic further, research was undertaken to see how local governments are using social media and seeing if they social media effectively. This existing research was compared and analysed against the authors primary research so conclusions were drawn.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out in both Council’s to extract information based on the subject area. The aims and objectives were analysed in comparison to the findings from the two interviews and were then related back to any existing literature. This led to the author being able to make recommendations to Bridgend Council based on any findings within the study.

The findings concluded many Council’s had grasped the basic uses of social media, and are now ready to use social media in a more advanced method. It also suggested Cardiff Council had incorporated uses of social media better than Bridgend Council, as they utilised more advanced data collection techniques, had a broader range of platforms and had implemented a successful social media strategy they adhere to.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Deborah Lamont for all her guidance and support throughout this project.

I would also like to thank the participants from Bridgend Council and Cardiff Council, as if it wasn’t for their input this project would not have been possible.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter One - Introduction

Brief overview of what I intend to do

Aims and objectives – What is my main aim? 3/4 of these

Reasons for chosen topic

The purpose of this research project is to gain a broader understanding of how two different Councils use their social media platforms, and to look at how they manage the data each platform produces. Social media was chosen as the main subject area due to its existing popularity and vastly growing nature. It has now been widely used across many platforms within the private sector, such as a promotion, customer relationship building and as an avenue of increasing web traffic. The public sector was slower to embrace social media like the way businesses did, but they are currently integrating different accounts on the multiple platforms are available.

A further reason for this research study is to find out ways in which two local governments can utilise and manage social media and its data, and possibly emulate the way the private sector did. Recommendations will be made after gathering primary and secondary data on the subject area and will then be used during the analysis of the findings in this dissertation.

1.1 Overview of the Project

Before commencing, an ethics form must be approved by an ethics committee. After approval, this project will begin with a brief introduction of social media, including how it began and where it is now.

The author will then review any existing literature on social media strategies, the current practice of social media in UK Councils and the data collection techniques are used. This will involve looking at how organisations have used social media and how it has benefited them. This will require undergoing an investigation of secondary data and examining a wide range of sources to broaden the scope. The literature review will provide the evidence of any previous work has that been carried out, and this will support any of the findings the author has gathered.
The author will state how they intend to conduct any research in the methodology section. It conveys what methods will be used throughout the dissertation and makes decisions based on what the author feels is the most appropriate method of data collection.

After conducting primary research, the findings will be collated, analysed and discussed in the subsequent chapter. This will then become the main section of the project as it is where all the data is compared and analysed. After thematically analysing those findings and combining it with the review of the existing literature, this can lead to suggesting recommendations. By doing this, Councils can improve their current social media presence.

As a copy will be offered to both Councils, if it proves to be a success, either Council can use this dissertation to improve their social media presence, and improve their methods of practicing social media.

1.2 Social Media Websites – A Brief Overview

Social media is defined as any “website or computer program allows people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone” (Cambridge University, 2017). Many studies say the first social media website started in 1997 and was named ‘Six Degrees of Separation’ (Hale, 2015). The first social media ‘surge’ is said to have happened with the arrival of Myspace in 2003. This was regarded as the first “original social media profile website” (Hale, 2015).

In February 2004, Mark Zuckerberg founded ‘TheFacebook.com’ (Brugger, 2015) which has grown into the most popular social media website, now called Facebook. It was designed as a method of communicating with Harvard University students, and eventually expanded adding more American schools. This progressive addition saw the social media website grow rapidly in its first year. Within its first two months Facebook had 70,000 users, however, by December the figure had grown beyond one million (Brugger, 2015).

Twitter did not exist then, as it was founded in 2006 because a co-founder, Jack Dorsey, thought up a social website based around communication similar to SMS platforms (MacArthur, 2016). Twitter has continued to grow since launch, and at the start of 2010, Twitter had 30 million monthly users. This figure now stands at 319 million monthly users (Statista, 2017). Figure 1 is a timeline conveys how social media began.
The growth of social media is clear to see and is not showing any signs of declining. It is evident why so many organisations have decided to use social media to aid their business objectives. This is a further reason for undertaking this research study. It will be interesting to see how local Councils can adapt their strategies to undertake new methods within the social media world.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this research study is to look at how two local Councils manage social media and its surrounding data. Four objectives have been set which need to be met to ensure the overall aim is accomplished:

1) To gain a thorough understanding of the current usage of each Council’s social media profiles.
2) To undertake primary research looking at the differing uses of each Council’s social media accounts, and to look at whether they use different platforms in different ways.
3) To critically analyse the existing literature involved within the local governments use of social media.
4) To make recommendations could improve the social media profile of either Council based on the findings within this dissertation.

1.4 Research Methods

Within this study, the author will be undertaking primary and secondary research to combine existing material with primary data. Existing literature will be critically analysed and will fall within chapter two - literature review. The author will undertake two sets of semi-structured
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interviews - one with each Council, Bridgend and Cardiff. This will allow qualitative information to be gathered.

The next section involves reviewing and critically analysing any existing literature of social media in a governmental setting. This will involve looking at how social media is currently used, the different data collection and analysis techniques available. The author will also explore where the future of social media in this environment may be heading, and how social media accounts are managed by Councils.
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Chapter Two – Literature Review

This chapter discusses the existing literature surrounding the topic. Hart (1998) defines a literature review as “the selection of available documents on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed”.

The author will need to investigate how social media is currently used in Councils and what data analysis techniques are currently in use. More research will be conducted to see how Councils have adapted to social media’s ever-growing nature. The author will need to find out how Facebook and Twitter are currently used by both Council’s so any information collected can be compared. This will be done before any primary research is gathered to allow recommendations to be made.

Talk about what a literature review is and how/why they are used

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 government arenas.

2.1 Introduction

Social networks are can be used to gather data which can be utilised to implement strategies to aid different business objectives. After looking at many different sources such as books, articles, websites and journals, I have collected many different pieces of information that is relevant to my chosen topic of finding out how social media data is used managed in a governmental setting. Social media is an ever-growing trend, and studies published by BDO

2.2.2 The Presence, and Use, of Social Media within Local Government

In the past few years, Aside from Instagram. To begin with, I have opted to look at the strategies in place within the government’s social media presence. I will only be looking at Cardiff Council.
and Bridgend County Borough Councils presence on some of the most popular social media websites: Twitter and Facebook. Instagram is another popular social media website that I would’ve liked to have included within this report, but neither council uses this form of social media yet, so it is not possible to use any information regarding either council’s activity on Instagram in this report. Twitter and Facebook appear to be two of the two most popular social media website platforms in that have been used over the past few years, with Facebook has been reported as having 1.79 billion active monthly users as of September 2016 (Statista, 2017). Twitter is ranked as the second most popular social network that has been used by internet users over the age of 16, within the last 3 months. I found this information using Mintel, who used information provided by 2001 people and found out how often they used each social media website over a three-month period (Mintel, 2016).

Emma Rogers, from Staffordshire Council, explains how social media can be used in Councils to achieve better communication with residents. She stated how they are working towards using social media to improve their approach, making sure it is more engaging and consistent. They are looking at the different ways in which social media can be exploited so money can be saved and spent in better areas. This is one of the major benefits of social media and this demonstrates how social media is being used in a governmental setting, and shows what Councils could gain in return.

APSE conducted a survey in 2015 regarding the local governments uses of social media. They said the “survey was designed to identify the purpose for which social media is used within local authorities, to gain further understanding of its impact and to illicit examples of how it is being deployed UK-wide to enhance and deliver public service provision” (APSE, 2015). They stated the feedback from the survey was “multi-faceted” as it amounted to eight separate uses of social media throughout the participating governments.

The most common use was the day-to-day communication, amounting to 77%. This is due to the instant nature of social media and shows their audience require information quickly. North East Derbyshire District Council say they have used social media for their leisure centres so a rapport can be built. They use social media to communicate short-term changes due to how fast information can be sent out and seen by the local public.
Could write more about the popularity of Twitter/Facebook—Charts/Graphs of demographics and figures in-depth uses of social media, and how different sets of data can be utilised to their advantage. One way in which councils have started to use social media more and more is by communicating various crisis’ or problems around the boroughs to their followers. E.G. Cardiff Council have used their twitter profile to alert followers of a traffic incident. See Figure 21 below.

Many UK councils seem to have embraced the various uses of social media and are now looking seeking more in-depth uses of social media, and how different sets of data can be utilised to their advantage. One way in which councils have started to use social media more and more is by communicating various crisis’ or problems around the boroughs to their followers. E.G. Cardiff Council have used their twitter profile to alert followers of a traffic incident. See Figure 21 below:
At present, this is potentially the fastest method of delivering a message to their followers. Important messages are relayed on both platforms so the residents of each Council are made aware of it.

Another Council, who remained anonymous in the APSE Survey (2015), stated some of their best engagement rates were achieved on tweets associated with crisis’. They used both platforms for winter-related incidents such as school or road closures due to weather problems. They said Facebook was a ‘hub’ during time as it was a tool used to educate their followers. They used Twitter for posting an “editable list of school closures” (ASPE, 2015) and they claimed it was one of their most successful tweets. The fact this list was editable allowed the Council to continuously add to the list, making everyone aware of which schools were closed during time.

Emma Rogers also states they used social media in a time of crisis’, no matter what size, to keep the residents up-to-date with details could cause problems. Staffordshire Council applied this strategy when using a social media campaign to lower the number of potholes within the borough. This strategy has shown it can cause a rise in web traffic too, stating a 200% increase – a third of which came as a direct result of the social media activity. This type of strategy has already been implemented by Bridgend Council, as shown below in Figure 3:
This strategy will be used nationally as it is an effective way of communicating important information to residents.

From the ASPE survey in 2015, they created a table displaying the most popular uses of social media within the governments (see Figure 4, below). The two most popular uses of social media were regarding responses to followers of their social media accounts. These, unsurprisingly, are some of the most popular uses of social media since the responses can be made instantly. The North-West Leicestershire District Council agree with this statement saying Twitter is used a lot for responding to customer queries (APSE, 2015).

![Figure 4 - Most Popular Uses of Social Media in the APSE Survey 2015](image-url)
Of the remaining most popular uses, many were in relation to promotion or awareness. For example, the promotion of healthy lifestyles, advertising job opportunities and enhancing opinions and awareness of the organisation.

The least popular use was communicating with colleagues. This may be very low as there are alternative ways of communicating within a working environment, so social media is not a popular use.

A BDO report from 2014 claims "social media is transforming the way councils communicate" (Gov.uk, 2014). Many of the councils around the country seem to use social media as a form of marketing, with a lot of councils seeing drops in the amount of telephone customers, equating to 40%. They also stated that social media frees up time for other tasks, and claimed 63% of councils in the UK are producing less paper, e.g. leaflets.

Emma Rogers, who works for Staffordshire Council, explains how it can be used in local councils to achieve better communication with citizens in their catchments. She has said how they are working towards using social media to improve their approach so that it is more engaging and consistent. They are looking at the different ways in which social media can be utilised to save money. This can be one of the huge benefits of social media and this source demonstrates one way in which social media is being used within a governmental setting and what all UK councils could gain in return. She also states they used social media in a time of crisis, no matter what size, to keep the residents up to date with details that could cause problems. Staffordshire Council applied this strategy when using a social media campaign to lower the number of potholes within the borough. This strategy has shown that it can cause a raise in web traffic too, stating a 200% increase - 33.5% of which came as a direct result of the social media activity. This type of strategy has already been implemented by the Bridgend Council, as shown below in Figure 2.
This strategy will be used nationally as it is a simple, yet effective, way of communicating what could be important information to local people.

Another campaign that Staffordshire County Council are attempting to undertake is by using their social media profiles as a “contact channel” alongside their current contact channel, customer service calls. Emma Rogers also believes that social media is “only going to grow so it’s worth the investment now” (Rodgers, No Date). I think this was the almost a consensus for council throughout Britain around 3-5 years ago, as this was back when councils were initially exploring the idea of utilising different social media platforms within their management schemes.

In the 2015 APSE survey, they asked the Councils about the budgetary concerns of social media. The chart had three bars, displaying if social media had increased costs, generated new income or created savings. It shows a high percentage of the Councils in the survey had used social media to create savings – totalling 61%.

The APSE stated the two ways in which savings were identified were to “reduce spend on costlier forms of advertising and a reduction in spend on less cost-effective customer contact channels” (APSE, 2015). This method will be used in countless local authorities throughout as there are savings to be made because of social media. This can also increase the digital interaction which draws more users to the Council’s social media profile and their websites.

The 29% that saw social media increase costs stated they had used social media to promote various activities. This would see costs rise whether they used social media or not, so it is fair to say it is an acceptable reason for those Councils to have seen a rise.
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2.3 Social Media: Data and Analysis Techniques

Nesta’s Local Datavores are research programmers that have considered various techniques in which councils can utilise the data that they have gathered on social media effectively. They describe how managing social media data correctly can be used to “help councils to achieve their strategic objectives” (Nesta, 2016). Social media data can be analysed to successfully predict events. Bluefin Solutions (2015) claims that by using predictive analysis, it can “prevent misery and save money”, simply by from intervening in the early stages of a problem. This also mentions how predictive analysis has been used by councils at times of a crisis. For example, they said that councils within the “northern powerhouse” (core cities in north England, e.g. Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle) are using analytics that can spot these types of patterns. They have used these patterns to figure out whether local people are troubled financially, for example, which can be due to several circumstances, such as their benefits being cut off (Gunn, 2015). These councils are then stepping in to try and prevent any repercussions that may occur due to individual struggling financially. However, one of the biggest consequences of using this data is that it is often regarded as an intrusion on someone’s privacy. However, if this data is being used to benefit people who are in a time of need, it could be argued that it is more of an advantage to them, and not a security implication.
LocalGov, likewise, back up the need for predictive analysis as they state that council Councils will need to start using this analysis to successfully predict outcomes, and say that it is “essential they can forecast” (Felton, 2016). This is so that they can be more aware of the costs they incur or could possibly incur soon. They talk about how certain work within the council Council can be very labour intensive and can be prone to many different inaccuracies. Using data from these analytics could be a step forward by due to minimising errors and easing the workload of staff within the local governments. LocalGov (2016) say how this can change a council Council’s approach to analytics and data in general. Overall, I believe that if a government can start to successfully predict a high percentage of outcomes from different problems early on, then residents will soon begin to reap the benefits of the council being one step ahead.

Another technique council Councils can use social media data for is by using data warehousing. This can to store all the data and then be used to help guide their decision-making process due to the retention of the data. Nesta’s Local Datavores say that council Councils are now combining data-sets within the local area to analyse deeper into their social media profiles (Nesta, 2016). Data warehousing has been used in Barnet council Council alongside a model that has been developed so that they can understand future services and identify the future demand for service within Barnet’s community. Nesta (2016) states this has been used to look at creating a “single view” of customers that can enable efficient support programmes to be used in future. This could be combining any retained data — a data warehouse — with predictive analysis to help create the “single view of customers” that they would like to have.

Geo-spatial analytics is another big use of social media data and this has been used to “optimise waste collection routes and reduce inefficiency and duplication in transactional services. Studies have found that it can be cost beneficial and have found that it can make up to a £4
return for every £1 spent on the use of geo-spatial data” (Nesta, 2016). Geospatial analysis can be said to provide “a unique lens through which to examine events, patterns, and processes” (Smith, Goodchild & Longley, 2007).

A separate use of social media data is by linking different data-sets to find patterns which is known to make problem solving easier. This can expose the data and combine datasets from different sources, which will then be used to establish connections within the social media data. (Nesta, 2016). For example, E.G. information connections from a government database that provides statistics or information, and the social media data could be linked together with the social media data to give the council a broader range of material which can then be acted upon to their advantage. In social media linked data, in terms of social media, is mainly used to combine data from multiple social media sites and expose patterns using the combined data all the information that has been gathered.

One of the best ways, and potentially the most popular way, to use social media data is by mining through different users’ tweets or status’ etc., and turning it into a behavioural pattern. This pattern is then observed to see if it has any worth to the organisation, company, or in this case, if it could be of use to the local government. An example of a company using data mining to predict outcomes to their advantage was the American company, Target. They looked at customers’ buying habits and used the data and combined ran different tests to see if patterns emerged. The results were then and then they could use those patterns to offer those customers different promotions. This demonstrates how different techniques could be utilised to explore so that they can try and target different demographics in order to their advantage try and benefit them. (Matillion, No Date).

The UN have used social media data to try and detect trends for spikes in major social issues such as unemployment. The UN have described this as an “invaluable” way of using social media data but also states how it can also cause a few problems, including privacy of data (Zentut, 2017). I think this could be used by a council as it has proven to be of a good use to companies and different organisations. Governments have been known to use data mining techniques to find fraudulent activity and to detect various and consider different criminal
activities. This shows how this technique can be used to keep residents in a safer environment in terms of technology/internet safety. (Gov.uk, 2016).


Councils are exploring the different uses of social media to analyse and research different pieces of information. They can even use different analytical features of social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook—to see how many impressions a tweet or a status gets, which can then be used to see what topics are the most popular or raise the most concerns. Many businesses use their social media analytical tools to keep track of their profiles on each website. These analytics can aid businesses, individuals or local government organisations as they show different types of datasets that allow them to scrutinise them in different ways (Fox, 2013). For example, you can track how many times a user has visited your website, which can then show how popular a topic is or how well a topic has taken to your social audience. This data could then be used as a way of prioritising which subjects are seen as the most popular. With this information, Councils could and they could have more time allocate more time or resources to the more popular concerns due to the importance of them.

2.4 Social Media Polices – Cardiff & Bridgend

After looking at both sets of policies it is clear to see Cardiff Council’s policy is far bigger than Bridgend Council’s. This may be due to Bridgend’s catchment area being far smaller than Cardiff’s.

Cardiff Council clearly outline their policy clearly in ten different sections. This way it makes it more presentable and much easier to understand. This policy covers a broader area of social media than Bridgend’s version.

Bridgend Council’s policy was last updated 30th May 2014, whereas Cardiff Council’s has not been updated since its date of issue, 31st March 2015. Both policies are over two years old now, which is quite surprising considering the importance of social media and how regularly it is used.
2.5 Future of Social Media in Councils

The APSE survey (2015) say “Councils are trying to diversify their use of social media channels”. In more recent years, Councils had just wanted to make sure they had a presence on social media, but now they are looking deeper into social media as they use multiple profiles. Also, there is a team in place – whether it’s a communications team, or a designated social media team – that handle the accounts. A few years ago, Councils would not have had the ability, so since it is readily available to them now, they can utilise this further.

Renfrewshire Council are “investigating new channels” and are also “planning on how to increase our reach on existing ones” (APSE, 2015). This shows how ready Councils are to improve their presence and build upon what has already been achieved.

2.5 Conclusion

The secondary data that has been collected has shown various patterns and themes that will be compared to the primary data. After undertaking this review of existing literature, it has enabled the author to plan what topics to discuss in the primary research.

The first part of this chapter explained how social media is currently used within local governments and why it is used. It is fair to say there are a range of reasons as to why social media is used within the Councils, but the main reasons are to promote or advertise and for general communication with followers.

The next section investigated the differing techniques of collecting and analysing the data. Now, it seems as if Councils are slowly incorporating deeper uses of analysing social media data. It is then up to each Council to interpret the statistics of the data and use it to their advantage.

Following on from that, the author has looked at how social media may be used in the future and what the plans are to increase their presence and improve the quality of their social media content.
All the findings within the literature review will be amalgamated to see how the information compares with the primary data. It will be analysed further against the other results from the interviews the author carried out.
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Bhattacharyya (2006) defines research as “documented prose work” which means the “organised analysis of the subject based on borrowed materials”. This chapter justifies the reasoning behind the methods that were conducted and explains the processes that were undertaken within the primary research of the project. The author will discuss the benefits and limitations of the research, and analyse the findings after all the data has been collected and reviewed.

The aim of the methodology is to look at the different ways of approaching this research study. From this the author will derive the best way of tackling this subject area. There will be two participants within the primary research section of this study - one member each from Bridgend and Cardiff Council’s. Due to time constraints, only one member of each Council will be interviewed.

3.2 Literature Review

With social media’s popularity being so fresh in today’s organisations, there are not many academic books available that are relevant to this research study. Due to this, most of the literature review will be focused on electronic sources, with governmental sources being the primary target. The author will be looking at several types of electronic sources and will then discuss the literature that has been collected.

3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

“Semi-structured interviews are designed to have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but such prepared questions are designed to be sufficiently open the that subsequent questions of the interviewer cannot be planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way” (Wengraf, 2001).
Semi-structured interviews were the focal point of the primary research as they allow for planning to organise the interviews. The main aim of the interviews was to find out more information about each of the Council’s uses of social media and what techniques they use to get the best out of their current platforms. Another aim was to gain information based on what social media data management techniques are currently in place, so recommendations can be made for the two Councils.

The questions asked were designed to gather qualitative data that will then be used to compare with the different sets of data collected from both Councils. Open-ended questions were used so a broader range of information was fed back from the participants. This meant there was more material to work with during the project.

The first interview was conducted face-to-face with an e-communications and web officer who worked at Bridgend Council for over three years. The second interview was conducted with a person in a similar role at Cardiff Council, via e-mail. Five questions were prepared prior to the interview which were designed to tackle various topics of the subject area.

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview Questions

The first step of the semi-structured interview was to find out what different platforms are currently in use and why they use those platforms. This was to find out the scope of the project and see what social media networks the Council use.

Using the information from the first question, the benefits and drawbacks of the platforms could be identified. This question was included in the interview as it can be used as a way of seeing how the advantages and disadvantages within both Councils compare. It will be interesting to see how the problems compare, and what they are doing to avoid these issues.

One of the main areas of this project was to find out about the different strategies used so comparative analysis between the two sets of information can be carried out. This allowed the author to find out the different data collection techniques either Council uses. This was important to find out because these strategies are the foundations in which the social platforms are built upon. If the local government is not using an efficient strategy on social media, the public within the catchment area may be unaware of important information.
This information will be used to compare the social media data collection techniques and consider the ways they are managed and used throughout. The author will demonstrate how the Councils intend to utilise the data produced by the platforms.

To finalise the interviews, the author found out what the participant thought of a future direction on the Council’s use of social media. This was to gauge if one Council was ahead of the other – for example, if one Council was considering using a new platform and the other Council was already using it, more research could be undertaken to find out why. It was also asked to see if there are any changes on the horizon, and seeing whether the other Council had yet established a need for similar changes.

3.3.1 Advantages/Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are an efficient method of primary research. They allow the author to stay in control of the interviews, but still allow follow-up questions are based on the participants’ responses. This is beneficial as it allows freedom within the interview, for example, if anything was said was linked to a different aspect of the research, a further question could be asked.

Data from interviews can be used to compare with other sets of interviews and is a very reliable source of information. This is because the information is directly gathered from the Council. Gomm (2004) states interviews are “fact-producing interactions” as they allow very specific ways of collecting the data.

Interviews can cause delays within the study due to the communication aspect. To arrange the meetings, the author used emailing as the only form of communicating with the members of the selected Councils, so there was often a delay between responses which held up progress. With the face-to-face interview, once a time and date was arranged, all the data was collected within 30 minutes – much faster than the e-mailed interview.

It can be quite difficult arranging a time and a date to meet up with the participant because the author must adhere to a university timetable, and the participant has set working hours. This can cause problems with the progression of the study.

Semi-structured interviews are excellent for encouraging two-way communication. The author has free reign on what follow-up questions can be asked as it is only semi-structured, but still has set questions to rely on (Keller, S and Conradian, K, 2012).
The data gathered from the interviews can be suspect to the participant just answering the questions based on what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Newton, 2010). The only way of overcoming this barrier is to research what has been discussed and to check if what they mentioned has been put into practice. This has been done within the literature review of the study.

Another huge benefit of semi-structured interviews is they can collect emotion, when conducted face-to-face. They have been described as “particularly useful for getting the story behind the participant’s experiences”. This is because the interviewer can “pursue in-depth information around the topic” (Houston and McNamara, 1995). This will be more beneficial to the study as opposed to other forms of primary research such as questionnaires.

### 3.4 Rationale

#### 3.4.1 Questionnaires

There are several different methods of carrying out primary research, but this research study solely depended on the use of interviews. They have been preferred to questionnaires simply because the data required the knowledge of people who have experience working alongside social media in a governmental setting.

One of the biggest problems in questionnaires is that it is unclear how much effort the participant has put into completing the questionnaire (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2004). This can obscure results as the participant is selecting any answer at random just to complete the questionnaire in the shortest time.

In comparison to face-to-face interviews, it is a lot easier to figure out the effort has been put in by the participant. The subjectivity of questionnaires is also difficult to analyse. For example, what is ‘above average’ to one participant may be ‘poor’ to another (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2004).

#### 3.4.2 Focus Groups

Another option that could have been utilised were focus groups. As opposed to approaching just one member involved with the social media within the Councils, multiple members could have been targeted so more information could be transmitted as there are more voices. However, within the government, the social media departments are normally just a few members. Due to this, the knowledge of the potential participants would be very similar so this
idea was deterred. Focus groups can lead to conformity – a Groupthink study carried out by Irving Janis showed certain members of groups may conform to the group, which leads to information being diffused due to the limited vision (Janis, 1982). The semi-structured interview questions could have been put to a focus group, but due to the problems previously stated, they were put to individuals instead.

3.5 Qualitative vs Quantitative Research

Qualitative research can be described as “research using methods such as participant observation or case studies which result in a narrative, descriptive account of setting or practice” (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011). This type of information can be derived from data such as words and pictures. The information derived from the interviews will be qualitative research since the information is not quantifiable. This is the most important data of this project as it will be based on the analysis of the primary research has been carried out prior to the findings section.

Aliaga and Gunderson (2000) describe quantitative research as “explaining a phenomenon by collecting quantitative (numerical) data are analysed using mathematically based methods such as statistics”. This type of research will be used when introducing statistics into this study. For example, before undertaking this study, the author will need to consider the popularity of the different types of social networks are available and then decide on which platforms will be considered in this project.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Before this study commenced, the project required ethical considerations to be undertaken. The form of ethics to signify reliability and validity will need to be sent off to the Ethics Committee and approved before research can be carried out.

The focal point of primary research in this study will be via semi-structured interviews. The approval of ethics ensures the methods of the study comply with the correct ethical regulations. The author will give the participant a consent sheet to inform them what the study is about and this will allow any participant of this study to withdraw completely at any time. This research does not contain and will not touch upon any sensitive information, and all participants will be over 18.
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4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses all the information gained from the primary research. All the data collected from the semi-structured interviews will be analysed and compared, then the author will provide justification of the results. The primary research will be conferred with previous literature so links can be found and discussed.

4.2 Bridgend Council

The semi-structured interview was conducted face-to-face with a member of Bridgend Council’s e-communications team. It was not possible for the interview to be recorded so notes were taken throughout the interview and then expanded upon later.

4.2.1 Platforms in Use

Which social media platforms are currently in use and why?

“For Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, currently.”

For this dissertation, the use of YouTube will be discounted as the author is focussing on simply Twitter and Facebook profiles. This is because YouTube is very different, in terms of the content is posted, so it is difficult to count one Council’s presence on YouTube in comparison to Facebook or Twitter, for example.

Facebook and Twitter are two of the largest social media platforms available and are already widely used within an organisational environment so it is not surprising to find out Bridgend Council use these two platforms.

“We treat these as information channels to the public so different platforms give us different messages. Each platform gives off different information so by having more than one platform active, it can relay more information.”

The interviewee said they use the platforms as a way of channelling information to their users, so they are kept up-to-date with what is happening within the community. By having a presence on more than one platform, it gives Bridgend Council a wider audience and therefore a bigger reach.
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(Follow-up Question) Why aren’t you using Instagram?

“We have explored the uses of Instagram but due to it being media-related, we think it wouldn’t be an effective use of our time”.

As Instagram is one of the most popular platforms used at present, it was interesting to hear reasons as to why it is not used.

4.2.2 Strengths & Limitations

What are the current strengths and limitations of the social media platforms currently used?

“The main benefits of the sites are the speed of responses. If we didn’t use social media to deliver information, we’d struggle to get important information out in the required time. Social media has such a large reach – within a couple of hours it could’ve spread throughout the entire community”.

The benefits of social media will be similar throughout most organisations, but it was interesting to see if this remained. The main reason outlined by the Council was the response time. Social media has an instantaneous nature about it so they felt it was very beneficial to make sure any posts that involved short-term details went on social media. This has been outlined below in Figure 6.

Figure 6 - Social Media Short Term
The above tweet was sent out on a Tuesday to remind followers about an event on a Thursday. Social media’s speed is clearly very appealing to Bridgend Council and this is just one way in which they utilise the speed of it.

“Social media encourages two-way conversation so we can find out exactly what the public are looking for and what they think of our content”

A further advantage was that it encourages two-way conversations, so content has been put on social media so the Councils can receive feedback and then discuss it with followers. This can be valuable to both the Council and their followers.

“We use our sites, mainly Facebook as a free way of advertising things around the county too”.

The participant then spoke about how it can be used to promote, advertise or generally raise awareness of topics within the community. Although money can be spent on social media to advertise to a bigger audience, Facebook and Twitter are free to use. This means the Council can tweet or post a status to advertise. For example, Bridgend Council have used Twitter to advertise an apprenticeship vacancy in Bridgend. If they were to use a third-party website to advertise this it can prove to be costly.

“Feedback can sometimes be an issue with social media. Negative comments can spread faster than the posts sometimes”.

Although social media has proven to be very useful to Bridgend Council, it does have some problems associated with it, too. The main problem outlined was how detrimental feedback can be. If their post has received a negative comment, it is often that this is what the rest of the social media users will see as well. This negative feedback can spread faster than the post itself and will remain in the users’ minds.

“There can be a problem with the posts not gaining enough interactions, too”.

Posts not reaching the correct audiences or reaching the targeted amount of interactions is a problem within the Council, too. This can be for multiple reasons – the timing of the post, how the post looks, where it was posted etc. If the tweet does not get seen by the correct audience, it is almost seen as a wasted tweet.

“Another problem is managing the various platforms can be resource intensive – they take up a large portion of the day”.

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A final limitation of social media mentioned was about how much effort they use up within the Council. Since they are managing several platforms, it takes up more than one person’s time to make sure all the relevant content is posted in the correct places to meet the projected interactions.

4.2.3 Use of Social Media

How are the current social media platforms used?

“We don’t have a set strategy or tactical arrangement for our platforms. We do use different content on different platforms because some content seems to suit, or work better, on different platforms.”

This was quite interesting as many organisations have a strategy that is adhered to so consistency is kept. There are not many workers in the communication team of Bridgend Council, so should the team grow, then a designated strategy may evolve.

“The Facebook algorithm can be a bit of a pain on times as Facebook only shows what they think the user is interested in - and often the Councils aren’t in the higher ranks of the algorithm. We could set out a strategic plan and the algorithm can, basically, mess it up.”

The Facebook algorithm is a sophisticated ranking system that considers various factors such as liked posts, relationship status, what the user clicks on and even considers the device is in use (McGee, 2013). This was built upon EdgeRank from 2011, which had only three ranking factors, but this new algorithm has been said to have up to 100,000 different factors (Walters, 2016). In short, Facebook arranges the posts on your news feed based on your previous actions on Facebook.

The interviewee was arguing the fact that since Bridgend Council would not be very popular within many people’s social media, they would find themselves at the lower end of the rankings. This would directly impact the amount of engagements they would receive on posts, thus making the post significantly more ineffective.

“We have a set target of interactions we aim for every month. Those targets will slowly increase, dependent on the previous months’ impressions.”

The e-communications team of Bridgend Council have been set an interaction target that their posts are set to achieve. This will show how effective their posts are and can prove which posts
are more popular on what platform. For example, if a regular post about a job opening gains a substantial amount of more impressions on Facebook than Twitter, they should utilise Facebook audience as much as possible.

“We make sure our key messages get relayed throughout all platforms so more people can see the content”.

All the key messages are sent out on both platforms as the audience is wider and there is more chance of the post reaching its targeted audience. This is shown in Figure 7 below.

![Figure 7 - Bridgend Council Relaying Key Messages](image)

The deadline of this post was within a day so the importance of it was very high. They were posted within a few hours of each other and use the same media. The only difference is the detail of the post. Facebook caters for more than 140 characters per post, unlike Twitter, so Bridgend Council used this to their advantage. On the Facebook post, they gave followers a direct link to the government website that allows them to sign up, and they posted more detailed content. The tweet contained the most important pieces of information allowed them to stay within the character limit.

This has been repeated on all important posts, showing a high level of consistency within social media. The Council have kept with the same themes on both platforms by using the same media, but using Facebook’s larger character limit to their advantage by including more relevant detail.
4.2.4 Collection, Analysis & Usage

How is the data from the social media platforms collected, analysed and used?

“As I said previously, we have a target of impressions for each month we try to meet. We use the analytical software on each platform to see how well we’re doing and if our content is being seen by our audiences. For example, Twitter [Twitter Analytics] tells us how many people have seen the tweet, clicked on it, viewed our profile via tweet etc. This information is just collected on the analytics section on Twitter and we just look at the weekly or monthly statistics of the platform.”

It appears Bridgend Council have utilised the basic form of analysing their social media data, which is by using the analytics from both websites. These are called Twitter Analytics and Facebook Insights. They simply collect all the information and details of the content that has been sent out by an account, and then break it down and store it all on one page, which gives the Council easy access to the insights/analytics of their posts.

“We tried using third-party websites like TweetDeck or HootSuite but it’s difficult to manage our kind of accounts. Sometimes accounts manage the sentimental value of content but it’s quite awkward sometimes because they don’t detect sarcasm and various other things so the figures can be deceptive.”

Bridgend Council have stated the use of third-party websites is not very beneficial to them, hence why they solely use the analytics generated by platform. Maybe, in the future, they will improve their social media presence and utilise this strategy of collecting the data.

4.2.5 Future Direction

And finally, what are your thoughts on a future direction for social media use?

“We’ll probably try to add to the number of platforms we have currently”.

This was what was expected – more platforms equal a wider, more varied audience. It was surprising to hear only Twitter and Facebook (YouTube is used, too, but discounted for this project) are used by the Council as they have been using social media channels for a few years.

“We’re looking at Snapchat, because of its current popularity. This would be a tough platform to use properly because of the way it’s used so content could be hard to display.”
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Snapchat has either an option of sending media to a person, or posting it as a story – which can be viewed by all ‘friends’ on Snapchat. It is easy to see why they have not used this media yet, and why they may never use it. The biggest reason why the interviewer thought it may be used was down to how popular it currently is.

“LinkedIn is another one, too, but it’s more of a professional platform so we could be restricted on platform.”

Most people would have assumed LinkedIn would be used throughout the local governments, but it is not. They argued it is more of a professional platform, in which many organisations use to stay in touch with other organisations, as opposed to updating the community with their posts, as they do on Facebook and Twitter.

4.3 Cardiff Council

It was not possible to meet up with the member of Cardiff Council so the semi-structured interview had to be carried out via e-mail. It was unfortunate not to be able to have a face-to-face interview as the process would have been more efficient and would have led to having results sooner in the process.

4.3.1 Platforms in Use

Which social media platforms are currently in use and why?

“The City of Cardiff Council currently has platforms on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.”

Due to the nature of Bridgend Council only having a presence on Twitter and Facebook, Instagram will have to be discounted for this dissertation. As previously stated, YouTube will not be considered, too. It comes as no shock a Council such as Cardiff have a large social media presence, due to the large catchment area they cover.

When asked why they use these platforms, the participant said:

“These are powerful media tools which help promote Council campaigns, Council services and the work the Council carries out on behalf of the city’s residents. Using social media channels complements and enhances more traditional communication channels like newspapers, press releases, radio and TV interviews and website publications. It opens new ways of directly engaging with residents, stakeholders and partner organisations.”
They have instantly stated the current power of social media, and have shown exactly how they use these two sites. They have specified they have used social media alongside their current methods so a wider, more digital audience can be added to their existing audience. This is a good use of social media as it adds to what they have already built upon, but can also improve their presence in the local community.

4.3.2 Strengths & Limitations

What are the current strengths and limitations of the social media platforms currently used?

“The benefits include the ability to reach a wider audience quickly and directly with an undiluted or changed message. It’s an excellent way of sending out information to residents and allows us an opportunity to speak directly to those residents”.

The instantaneous nature of social media seems to be a huge benefit to Cardiff Council. They are clearly using social media as a way of engaging with the community. It seems as if they have found the best way of conveying short-term messages, which is social media. Direct conversations can pinpoint the exact feelings of users within their catchment area, and thus allows Cardiff Council to figure out what they want.

“It can also act as a vehicle to promote the work the Council carries out on behalf of its residents, raising awareness of services or service changes”.

One of social media’s biggest features is that it can act as a free promotion tool for the Council. It can raise awareness of issues within Cardiff, and this will make residents more alert to potential changes or make them more mindful to various opportunities.

“Our social media accounts are also a useful tool for providing ‘real time’ essential public information, for example, in the event of emergency situations in the city like large scale fires, floods, traffic incidents etc. when people are looking for a ‘trusted voice’ delivering news they can use in a timely manner”.

This response shows Cardiff Council are prone to using social media in crisis situations as the speed and efficiency of social media makes it beneficial to all involved. They say their residents are looking for the ‘trusted voice’ to confirm any news in relation to the emergencies. This will put people at rest as it is a recognised source of information.
“All social media tools carry the potential to damage the Council’s reputation. A poorly written post can reflect badly on the Council.”

One of the biggest problems that Cardiff Council face with social media is how detrimental it can be if users respond negatively to their content. This information is then seen by everyone who can see the Council’s post, and this problem can spread within the county, bringing an additional problem to the Council.

“Any errors can be magnified under the glare of social media. It can share posts instantaneously and to a worldwide audience, posts which can’t be withdrawn once they are out there and shared”.

Although posts can be removed from Facebook/Twitter, it is unknown as to exactly who has seen this, so any mistakes can be spotted and potentially used against the Council. Even when posts have been deleted, it can be found elsewhere online.

“Once you engage on social media it’s a 24/7 business. But most Councils are not set up to work 24/7 in this area. It’s entirely feasible something which could have been dealt with quickly during normal working hours could turn into something which is damaging to your reputation overnight”.

Cardiff Council are saying how the timing of responses can damage their social media reputation. It is not possible for them to be able to engage for 24 hours a day so if something occurs out-of-hours, they do not have the facility to respond. This means the message will be left on social media until the following morning, where the problem may have had time to manifest and be seen by the public. At any ‘in-office’ time, the problem could have been dealt with easily and it would not have caused the Council any issues.

It is not possible for the Council to be active at all hours for several reasons, for example, staffing problems or monetary issues. This means overnight problems could always be detrimental to their reputation.

4.3.3 Use of Social Media

How are the current social media platforms used?

“The Council has a social media policy to provide a clear framework to work within to ensure effective, safe and legal use of social media. The policy complements the
Overall Communications Strategy and needs to be considered alongside the authority’s Corporate Brand Guidelines, ICT Security policy, Internet & Email policy and the Codes of Conduct.

After searching through Cardiff Council’s website, it has become clear their social media policy is available for everyone to see. This policy was issued as of 31st March 2015 and then published on the 23rd April 2015.

It instantly states the “policy has been developed to protect Cardiff Council’s reputation and brand by providing Council employees with a clear framework to work within to ensure effective, safe and legal use of social media. It aims to help get the most out of this powerful media tool to effectively promote the work and the vision of the Council” (Gov.uk, 2015). The interviewer has stated this policy is to be abided by, by all involved with the social media platforms within the Council.

Within the policy of 2015, they outline ten sections which can be found below in Figure 8.

Within the ten sections, they discuss how social media should be used within their organisations and outline the best practices and worst practices of social media. This is clear for all the staff to see, so can be followed easily by workers of the Council.

4.3.4 Collection, Analysis & Usage

How is the data from the social media platforms collected, analysed and used?
“The City Council uses a web-based social media management tool to provide a platform for engaging with other social media users as well as the ability to monitor and analyse the effectiveness of our social media output”.

Cardiff Council use a basic form of monitoring their social media data. It appears they use the default analytical software already on Facebook and Twitter (Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics).

The interviewer wanted to find a more in depth view of the process of monitoring the analytics so followed up question by asking:

Regarding the data collection techniques, are you looking at the engagements/interaction figures of the content, or are you looking deeper into the analytics? I.e. Semantic data

“We analyse our social media activity, looking at reach, engagement (link clicks, followers, shares/retweets, likes, reactions, impressions), sentiment, gender, location, top posts (by clicks and reach separately)”.

This response indicates what Cardiff Council are looking at when they are analysing their social media platforms. They are looking at both ends of the analytical spectrum – ranging from the amount of engagement their posts achieve, to the sentimental value of the posts. This proves they have an expansive knowledge of their followers, based on their analytics.

“We evaluate social media campaigns, considering how many posts we issue, the optimum number of posts and also best time to engage with followers”.

Cardiff Council monitor the media aspects of their content as well as simply the basic content. They have a detailed list of what they analyse when it comes to the media of their social media platforms.

“We evaluate social media campaigns, considering how many posts we issue, the optimum number of posts and also best time to engage with followers”.

This fits in with their social media policy and will be more beneficial to them if they can pinpoint the best times to tweet or post a status for certain topics. This will maximise their social media potential and can help them build towards having a greater presence on social media.
4.3.5 Future Direction

And finally, what are your thoughts on a future direction for social media use?

“In the future, we are planning to develop our use of Instagram (including Instagram stories) and Snapchat.”

Twitter and Facebook have been around longer than the likes of Instagram and Snapchat so they have already grasped the uses of those two platforms. Instagram stories are a recent edition of the platform so it is acceptable for them to only now start to develop their uses of Instagram. Snapchat is also a more recent form of social networking, but it will be difficult for the Council to successfully incorporate such a unique platform into their social media presence.
Chapter Five - Discussion

In this section, the author aims to build upon the previous two sections, comparing them for any similarities or differences. To do this, each question of the semi-structured interviews will be examined to reveal potential themes and patterns.

Following on from that, the author will then compare these findings with section two - the literature review. This will allow the data to be further assessed in relation to any existing literature has already been drawn upon.

5.1 Bridgend vs Cardiff

Throughout the discussion of the two semi-structured interviews, there are many similarities and several differences between the two Council’s responses. Under this heading, the author will be comparing the views of the Council’s and analysing the results.

5.1.1 Social Media Platforms

Both Cardiff and Bridgend Council’s rely on Facebook and Twitter as their main channels of information via social media. This is simply because these are two of the largest platforms available. It was interesting to see both Council’s also use YouTube as an alternative to share media. Cardiff Council also use Instagram, demonstrating Cardiff Council have a larger presence on social media, as they have the workforce and the time to manage a further platform.

When speaking to Cardiff Council they said they were looking at incorporating more advanced uses of Instagram, such as using Instagram stories. However, Bridgend Council’s future direction within social media, is to incorporate Instagram soon. This shows Bridgend are ready to take on another platform, but are currently weighing up the positives and negatives to ensure it is suitable for their uses.

When prompted about any further platform additions, they both responded by saying they are looking at incorporating Snapchat into their plans. Bridgend Council stated due to Snapchats nature they would probably find it too difficult to make its use effective. Snapchat only allows users to send media to ‘friends’ of the account, or put the media as a ‘story’ in which it can be viewed for 24 hours. It can also be used to advertise or promote something on the website which can be viewed over a short period – this could be the best use of the platform for Councils. It is unsurprising Councils would find it a difficult media source to make use of.
5.1.2 Benefits and Limitations

The main benefits of social media both Council’s agreed on was its instant nature. They both explain how they can send out information at short notice and still have it reach the targeted audience in time. They are both in agreement the reach of social media has huge benefits, too. The speed and reach social media has, combined, will ensure information can be seen throughout the community with ease, if the content is posted correctly. Despite the huge benefits of social media, Bridgend Council mention how resource intensive social media can be. Cardiff Council did not talk of this, maybe, as they have a bigger team responsible for managing the accounts so therefore do not find this as a problem. This limitation of social media can be a reason why Bridgend Council are not able to have an Instagram presence, too.

In terms of the benefits and drawbacks of social media, the two Council’s seemed to agree with all the reasons either stated – such as how they utilised social media to encourage two-way conversations with residents. This allows them to communicate on a personal level with those involved and get feedback or give extra information to the residents within the community. This is highly beneficial to the residents as they can engage with either Council to gain a better understanding of a topic. This works both ways, allowing the Council to incorporate any ideas from their residents as it is those who will benefit from any changes.

However, negative feedback is a huge problem within social media. This can instantly spread, and once posted, it is not possible to know who has seen the information. Both Council’s responses both stated how negative feedback can be detrimental to their reputations. Cardiff Council brought up the issue of not being active for all hours of the day, and how negative feedback can manifest in the time the accounts are not managed. As Bridgend Council are not available 24/7, they are faced with this problem, too.

Both Council’s stated they use social media as a method of promotion, advertisement and general raising of awareness within the community. Since social media is free, it allows any money saved to be spent in other areas of the community.

5.1.3 Strategies

One of the biggest contrasting responses was in relation to the strategies of the two Council’s. Bridgend Council say they do not have a set strategy but do ensure the use of social media is consistent throughout all platforms. Both Councils have a social media policy in place, which
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Both Council’s talk about how social media is used heavily in crisis situations. These situations require a definitive voice and regular up-to-date information, so the Council’s social media platforms are perfect for this. This can put residents at ease as they know the information is coming from a reputable source. Social media is perfect for the use of short notice communication, so in situations such as these, it works well for the two Council’s.

When asked about how the social media sites where used, Bridgend Council mentioned how they have targets in relation to the amount of interactions they get. This target is monthly, so they look at their analytics for the month and compare them to the target they have been set. If they have met or surpassed their target for the month, next month’s target rises. Cardiff Council did not say anything about having monthly targets, but it would be surprising to find they do not have any in place. All businesses want to build upon what they have previously achieved, and this is no different in Council’s – they will always look to widen their reach per month.

Within their social media presence, any key messages are clearly relayed through both platforms so there is a bigger audience to receive this information. This fully ensures the information is seen by the correct audience.

5.1.4 Data Collection and Analysis

When speaking to both Council’s about the insights and analytics of their social media data, it was apparent Cardiff Council look deeper into this side of social media than Bridgend Council. This was to be expected given Cardiff Council is larger than Bridgend.

Cardiff Council say they are interested at more in-depth views of their social media data, they look at the locations and the semantic values of the posts and they also carry out analytics based on their video content, too. When asked about the detail of data they look to extract from their content, Bridgend Council stated they only looked at the engagement and interaction rate. They
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To utilise the analysis of their social media data in a more basic form, by using Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics. These are the two analytical types of software can download the data from the platforms directly – they involve no third-party websites. The interviewee from Bridgend Council stated by looking at information such as the semantic value of the tweets, it can sometimes cause more problems, and they found it quite awkward.

From Cardiff Council’s interview, the author found they use a third-party social media data management tool to monitor, analyse and assess their effectiveness. They have a larger catchment area, so more data techniques are required. Cardiff Council also decipher a lot more information than Bridgend Council do, due to them having the ability to look at the more in-depth uses of social media data – i.e. semantic data, locations of posts etc.

5.2 Existing Literature

At the start of this research study, the author undertook research looking at the existing literature surrounding the study’s topic. This section collates all the primary and secondary research so the two sets of data can be compared and analysed.

5.2.1 Benefits and Limitations

After researching the existing literature prior to the semi-structured interviews, it was clear most UK Council’s found very similar benefits of social media. As the APSE survey in 2015 stated, social media’s advantages are “multi-faceted”. The most popular benefits of social media from the existing literature mirrored both Council’s responses. They all agreed about its ability to send out information instantly and its wide reach, mixed with the fact residents can become involved within the discussion, by commenting or replying to the content. This proves it is great at creating two-way conversations with the community and finding out exactly what they want. Emma Rodgers explained how the Staffordshire Council use social media as a way of engaging with their residents and this has been clearly demonstrated by both Cardiff and Bridgend Council. A Council within the survey say they use social media to build a rapport with their residents. Bridgend Council agreed with this in their interviews when they were asked about how they use the platforms. They stated its used to directly communicate and engage in two-way conversations with their followers.

Surprisingly, neither Council spoke about how social media can be used to save money. For example, Emma Rodgers stated they were exploring ways in which Councils can use social
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media as opposed to other techniques. The APSE carried out a survey showing 61% of the Council’s involved in the survey showed it had made savings. 21% of Council’s also showed social media had generated more income for those Councils. It was interesting to see neither Bridgend or Cardiff Council talked about social media creating savings or generating income. This survey showed off social media can cause monetary benefits to local governments if used correctly. Also, many UK Council’s had shown drops in telephone calls and paper usage, but are using social media more, so maybe they will start to see the savings in the future – especially if social media continues to grow at its current rate.

A huge benefit displayed by both Council’s was social media can be used to promote or raise awareness of various things throughout the community. In the APSE survey, it showed promotion was a very popular use of social media, as it was ranked in the higher end of the “multi-faceted” responses of the survey. This is also in agreement with a BDO report from 2014 who state social media has been used as a marketing tool. This links in with how it is used within both Council’s as they use it to raise awareness, advertise or promote.

The main limitation outlined by both Council’s was how detrimental negative feedback can be to the Council’s reputation. When looking at the limitations of social media, the consensus of the Council’s involved agreed with this statement.

5.2.2 Strategies

It was clear all Council’s use social media heavily use Facebook and Twitter as their main channels. This is much like Bridgend and Cardiff Council, mainly Bridgend Council, as the only other social media channel is YouTube. Cardiff Council, like many other Council’s, use Instagram as a further information channel as is another very popular platform. No Council has incorporated the use of Snapchat yet, including Bridgend or Cardiff Council. This was mentioned by both sets of Council’s regarding their plans, so this will be something UK Council’s will start to integrate soon. This was displayed in the existing literature by Renfrewshire Council saying they are investing ‘new channels’. This demonstrated they were in the process of researching different platforms, before potentially using them.

In terms of any strategies used, all councils the researcher spoke about in section two had published a social media policy, outlining the best practices of social media. When comparing the policies, most Council’s had a similar policy to of Cardiff Council’s. This was a
downloadable copy, normally a pdf version, had clear headings throughout, making it more presentable and had a lengthy policy covered a very broad range of information. However, Bridgend Council’s policy was very brief and did not outline a strategy. This was a very contrasting issue within the existing literature as all Council’s outline strategic plans in their policy. The lack of strategic planning within Bridgend Council’s social media policy is a reason why they were worried about their posts not being seen by the correct audience.

A lot of Council’s, Bridgend and Cardiff included, use social media as a pivotal tool in times of crisis. One of the biggest uses of social media at a time of crisis was during a time of bad weather. This was because of social media being able to reach a wide audience very quickly. Its instant nature is very important at these times as the Councils are a trusted source so residents are looking to be updated regularly by the Councils. Both Council’s heavily use social media within crisis’. For example, Bridgend Council posted a link to their website showing a list of school closures during a period of snowy weather. This is like a strategy was used by a Council (remained anonymous) in the ASPE survey in 2015. Also, Nesta Local Datavores (2016) emphasise how a social media correctly utilised to “help Councils to achieve their strategic objectives”.

The APSE survey of 2015, stated the most popular uses of social media were in relation to communication daily with followers, promoting or raising awareness of things within the community and advertising. The trend followed suit after speaking to both Cardiff and Bridgend Council’s. They stated they mainly used their social media platforms for these uses.

Emma Rogers stated how social media can increase web traffic, too. Cardiff and Bridgend Council’s utilise social media to attract followers to their website as they often post links to their website gives off more information. This shows how these two Councils have a similar usage of social media.

When asked about a future direction, both Council’s looked towards improving their presence on social media via additional channels. Not all Councils are using Instagram or Snapchat at present, adding more platforms to increase and vary their audience. All Council’s will be considering adding more platforms for these reasons. A wider audience can lead to the Council’s content gaining more interactions and engagements, which can give them more of an indication of what residents need or want within the community.
5.2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Cardiff Council are ahead of Bridgend Council in relation to the data collection/analysis of their social data, and this was similar throughout the existing research. A high majority of Council’s look at the same form of analysis as Bridgend Council do – simply tracking the interaction/engagement rate. However, a few Council’s utilise more advanced techniques of data collection – for example, the ‘Northern Powerhouse’ Councils are trialling the uses of predictive analysis. Cardiff Council embrace some advanced techniques as they consider the locations of posts by their residents which can help target a specific area in need. This technique is carried out by many businesses, but not used so much within a governmental setting.

Geospatial awareness is an effective way of locating patterns within the community and can separate areas to form those patterns. The existing literature showed the use of geospatial awareness can generate an income, with Nesta Local Datavores (2016) saying they saw a £4 return for every £1 spent.

One of the most widely used techniques of data analysis is data mining. This has been used when they are looking at Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics, as they have had the data extracted from the platforms and then sorted for them. There is no evidence from the interviews suggests either Council use this technique besides the use of the Insights/Analytics software currently on the platforms. The UN mentioned how they used this technique to try and detect spikes and it has been used to allow patterns to emerge. This has happened in criminal activity and has aided organisations find trends to stop these activities. This proves how valuable this can be to any organisation.

Another type of data collection was not used within the two Council’s interviewed was the data retention technique of data warehousing. This technique does not appear to be used by other UK Council’s, but it is widely used in businesses so soon UK Council’s will start to integrate this technique. By having a data warehouse, it can allow different data sets to be stored in one place and then they can be used to link different sets of data together so patterns are exposed. This means data from Facebook can be linked to data from Twitter and then analysed to see what platforms are more effective. This data can also be linked to data outside of social media, for example, governmental statistics can be brought in to help form more patterns.
5.3 Recommendations

Prior to this study, the author outlined an overall aim along with several objectives needed to be completed to accomplish the overall aim. The final aim of this project was to make recommendations for Bridgend Council after comparing all the findings.

5.3.1 Additional Platforms

One of the best ways to improve their presence on social media would be to begin using Instagram. This is one of the largest social media platforms available at present, and would capture a wider, varied audience. Cardiff Council are fully integrated with their uses of Instagram already, and has proved it can be an asset to any organisation.

Another way Bridgend Council could extend their audience is by integrating Snapchat. If they were to do this, they would become one of the first Council’s to be on board with this platform. This can be return similar benefits to the other platforms in use as it is free, can be used to promote/advertise and it allows for information to spread quickly.

By adding these two platforms, it would add to their workload so maybe they could be used sparingly at the beginning, but could be expanded upon when the audience is built up.

5.3.2 Improved Analytical Techniques

It was clear to see Bridgend Council were behind other Council’s in terms of the analytics of their current social media platforms. Many Councils have embraced the use of more advanced techniques of analysing their social media data. One of the best methods of this was be looking at the locations of the posts. This can possibly determine the areas need help the most, and outline which locations of the community need the Council to step in first. Should Bridgend Council decide to explore this avenue of analysis, they could then add further techniques when they are fully integrated with this technique.

5.3.3 Improved Social Media Policy with Strategic Plan

Their social media policy was not very comprehensive when compared to other Council’s, so it maybe be beneficial to improve this. Within this new social media policy, Bridgend Council could outline a more definitive social media strategy. This can help correctly target the specified audience, as it was mentioned in the primary research sometimes the content can miss their intended audience.
When updating their policy, they should cover more topics, as Cardiff Council have done in theirs. This will give the policy more clarity for users. Their policy clearly outlines what they think the ‘proper’ use of social media is, and explain how it should be used within their organisation.

After browsing other Councils’ policies, it was clear Bridgend Council were an anomaly. All the other Council’s policies were set out in a downloadable, PDF format which makes it easier to read and a lot more presentable.
Chapter Six – Conclusions

This final section summarises the most important points of the dissertation. It will revisit the initial aims and objectives of the research study, and look to see how two local Councils manage social media and its surrounding data. They will also look at whether the overall aim was met, and whether the objectives were reached. The author will need to demonstrate the initial objectives were achieved and will describe what went well and what did not go well.

6.1 Understanding of Current Use

The author outlined they needed to consider how the Council’s already used social media, so the author knew what they had to build upon. This was completed by undertaking a complete evaluation of both Council’s Facebook and Twitter profiles prior to the study.

Within the literature review, the author outlined how both platforms were used by both Council’s. This meant the author could then move on to the next section and begin to critically analyse any current literature around the subject. It was clear to the author both Council’s heavily relied on the uses of Facebook and Twitter within social media. This was due to the highly popular nature of both these accounts. They used the accounts as a form of communicating with their residents and as an information channel to display important information.

6.2 Primary Research

This objective drew upon the need for primary research to be carried out. The author stated they would be exploring the differing uses of both Council’s accounts and to see if the accounts were used differently.

To achieve this objective, primary research needed to be carried out. This objective was successfully met as the author met with a member of Bridgend Council for a face-to-face interview, and held an interview via e-mail with a member of Cardiff Council. These interviews were semi-structured, and the author intended to build upon the analysis of the existing literature so both sets of data could be analysed.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of five short questions, using open-ended questions to extract qualitative data. This objective was completed successfully as it drew important
information from the Council’s. These interviews were then compared to try and find any patterns of any contrasting views of their social media management.

6.3 Analysis of Existing Data

Objective three mentioned how the author needed to critically analyse the existing literature based around the topic. This will be accomplished by exploring a range of sources, such as governmental documents, books and statistics to ensure the author has a clear understanding of the current use of social media.

This objective was met during the literature review chapter. This chapter evaluated existing information critically and allowed the author to link it to their own research in the discussions chapter.

6.4 Recommendations

The final objective spoke about how the author will make recommendations to Bridgend Council, based on the findings of this study. After all the information was collected and analysed, the author looked at any key points Bridgend Council had yet to make use of. The author recommended them to incorporate further uses of different social media platforms, update their social media policy with a clear strategy involved, and to integrate more advanced techniques of social media data analysis.
Chapter Five

References


Participant Consent Forms

Cardiff Metropolitan University
Ethics Committee

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Participant name: ____________________________

Title of Project: Social Media Data Management in a Governmental Setting

Name of Researcher: Joseph Ralph

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 interview /consultation being recorded [ ]

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications [ ]
6. I would like my organisation's name to be anonymised in all publications

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date ________________

Name of person taking consent __________________________ Date ________________

Signature of person taking consent __________________________
Ethics Form

When undertaking a research or enterprise project, Cardiff Met staff and students are obliged to complete this form in order for the ethics implications of 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 for 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>Joseph Ralph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor (if student project):</td>
<td>Dr Deborah Lamont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School / Unit:</td>
<td>Cardiff Metropolitan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student number (if applicable):</td>
<td>ST20039715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme enrolled on (if applicable):</td>
<td>BSc Business Information Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Social Media Data Management in a Governmental Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected start date of data collection:</td>
<td>17/12/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate duration of data collection:</td>
<td>4 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Body (if applicable):</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other researcher(s) working on the project:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will the study involve NHS patients or staff?</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will the study involve human samples and/or human cell lines?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your project fall entirely within one of the following categories:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper based, involving only documents in the public domain</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory based, not involving human participants or human samples</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In this project, I aim to compare the different uses of social media data in bigger councils such as Cardiff Council and look at how a smaller council such as Bridgend Council can incorporate those into their strategies. I will look at gathering primary data from Bridgend Council. This will mainly be by using semi-structured interviews I can arrange. I will have an approved consent form from both councils will allow me to collect any data. I will look at collecting secondary data on the different ways in which the bigger council can use the social media data and the techniques differ, and then compare my findings and make recommendations on what the smaller council can learn from the use of their social media data and techniques.

DECLARATION:

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

I confirm I will abide by the Cardiff Met requirements regarding confidentiality and anonymity when conducting this project.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS: I confirm I will not disclose any information about this project without the prior approval of my supervisor.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature of the applicant: Joseph Ralph</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOR STUDENT PROJECTS ONLY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of supervisor: Dr Deborah Lamont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of supervisor: Debbie Lamont</td>
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<tr>
<th>Research Ethics Committee use only</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project not approved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project rejected</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Project reference number: Click here to enter text.

Name: Click here to enter text. Date: Click here to enter a date.
PART TWO

A RESEARCH DESIGN

A1 Will you be using an approved protocol in your project? No

A2 If yes, please state the name and code of the approved protocol to be used

N/A

A3 Describe the research design to be used in your project

Semi-Structured Interviews:

- I will be interviewing Bridgend Council to gain an insight into its uses of social media data and why. This will be used to compare the same use of the data in a larger council, Cardiff Council.
- I will be looking to collect qualitative information so the questions I will be using will mainly be open ended.
- The interviews conducted will be no longer than 30 minutes.

Participants:

- A purposive sample will be selected according to suitability to the study.
- Everyone who is involved in my research throughout this project will have signed and accepted a consent form beforehand.
- All participants will be aged 18 or over.
- The participant will always retain the right to withdraw any data throughout the research.

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.
Social Media Data Management in a Governmental Setting

Analysis:
- I will be gathering quantitative secondary data to provide tables, charts or graphs.
- The qualitative data used in the semi-structured interviews will be interpreted by myself and will only be used in aid of this project.

Consent:
- This is required before any research or interview is conducted, and will need to be completed before taking part in this process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A4 Will the project involve deceptive or covert research?</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A5 If yes, give a rationale for the use of deceptive or covert research</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>A6 Will the project have security sensitive implications?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 If yes, please explain what they are and the measures are proposed to address them</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</table>

B PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

B1 What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project do you have?
- During Welsh Baccalaureate in sixth form I created and handed out questionnaires to gather primary data for the module. We used the data in the questionnaires to draw quantitative analysis and create charts, graphs and tables from the data in question.
- I undertook a module in my second year of university called “E-Business”. In this module, I had to carry out a semi-structured interview with my chosen business to collect information for the project. This was then used to draw conclusions from and make recommendations based on the data I gathered.
What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project does your supervisor have?

13 years' experience and a PhD

C POTENTIAL RISKS

C1 What potential risks do you foresee?

- During the interviews, the interviewee may decide the information is confidential and may not want to answer the question.
- Another potential risk could be the interviewee is caused offence by a question which may lead to anger or aggressive behaviour.

C2 How will you deal with the potential risks?

- I will ask the interviewee to sign a consent form before the study so they are aware of the questions I will be asking, and aware of the topics I will be enquiring about.
- The interviewee will remain the right to withdraw any information gathered. I will also remind the interviewee I will have sole access to any data or information collected.

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.
LETTER TO AN ORGANISATION

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am an undergraduate student at Cardiff Metropolitan University. The title of my research is ‘Social Media Data Management in a Governmental Setting’. I am writing to you because your organisation fits the research profile, and employs a sufficient number of employees to provide a large enough number of potential participants. Before any primary data is collected, this project will have been approved by Cardiff Metropolitan University and all data collection will be in accordance with the University’s ethics code of practice.

My purpose in writing is to ask if you would permit me to interview some of your employees. Their participation would be entirely voluntary, neither they nor the company would be identified in the research, and it would only take 15 to 20 minutes per person.

I shall be very happy to make the results of my research available to you as a participant in the research when it is complete. If you would like to participate in this project and or are interested in discussing it further please contact me.

Thank you in anticipation for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Joseph Ralph

st20039715@outlook.cardiffmet.ac.uk
Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Social Media Data Management in a Governmental Setting

Project summary

The purpose of this research project is to explore the ways in which different-sized council organisations use social media data management techniques. Your participation will enable the collection of data which will form part of a study being undertaken at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate because you fit the profile of the population being studied; your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Project risks

The research involves participation in an informal interview, which will be recorded for later analysis. We are not seeking to collect any sensitive data on you. We do not think there are any significant risks associated with this study. However, if you do feel 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. We have taken careful steps to make sure you cannot be directly identified from the information given by you. Your personal details (e.g. signature on the consent form) will be kept in a secure location by the research team. When we have finished the study, and analysed all the information, the documentation used to gather the raw data will be destroyed except your signed consent form which will be held securely for 5 years. The recordings of the focus groups/interview will also be held in a secure and confidential environment during the study and destroyed after 5 years.

YOU WILL BE OFFERED A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET TO KEEP
If you require any further information about this project then please contact:

Joseph Ralph, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cardiff Metropolitan University email: st20039715@outlook.cardiffmet.ac.uk
### Semi Structured Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of Semi-Structured Interview</th>
<th>Discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a) Ask respondent’s approval to use a recording system</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1b) Ask respondent to acknowledge and sign the Consent form</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Ask Background Questions - Confirm:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Respondents position</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Years working for the organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Which social media platforms are currently used and why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) What are the strengths and limitations of the social media platforms currently used?</td>
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<td>5) How are the current social media platforms used?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) How is the data from the social media platforms collected, analysed and used?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7) What are your thoughts on a future direction for social media use?</td>
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</table>
Social Media Data Management in a Governmental Setting

ST20039715

Interview Transcription – Bridgend Council

1) Which social media platforms are currently in use and why?

“Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, currently. We treat these as information channels to the public so different platforms give us different messages. Each platform gives off different information so by having more than one platform active, it can relay more information”.

a. Why aren’t Bridgend Council using Instagram? (Follow-up Question)

“We have explored the uses of Instagram but due to it being media [as in pictures or videos] related, we think that it wouldn’t be an effective use of our time”.

2) What are the current strengths and limitations of the social media platforms currently used?

Strengths

“The main benefits of the sites are the speed of responses. If we didn’t use social media to deliver information, we’d struggle to get important information out in the required time. Social media encourages two-way conversation so we can find out exactly what the public are looking for or what they think of our content. Social media has such a large reach – within a couple of hours it could’ve spread throughout the entire community. We use our sites, mainly Facebook as a free way of advertising things around the county too”.

Limitations

“Feedback can sometimes be an issue with social media. Negative comments can spread faster than the posts sometimes. There can be a problem with the posts not gaining enough interactions, too. Another problem is that managing the various platforms can be resource intensive – they take up a large portion of the day”.

3) How are the current social media platforms used?

“We don’t have a set strategy or tactical arrangement for our platforms. We do use different content on different platforms because some content seems to suit, or work better, on different platforms. The Facebook algorithm can be a bit of a pain on times as Facebook only shows what they think the user is interested in - and often the councils aren’t in the higher ranks of the algorithm. We could set out a strategic plan and the algorithm can, basically, mess it up.
We have a set target of interactions that we aim for every month. Those targets will slowly increase, dependent on the previous months’ impressions. We make sure our key messages get relayed throughout all platforms so that more people can see the content”.

4) How is the data from the social media platforms collected, analysed and used?

“As I said previously, we have a target of impressions for each month that we try to meet. We use the analytical software on each platform to see how well we’re doing and if our content is being seen by our audiences. For example, on Twitter [Twitter Analytics] tells us how many people have seen the tweet, clicked on it, viewed our profile via that tweet etc. This information is just collected on the analytics section on Twitter and we just look at the weekly or monthly statistics of the platform. We tried using third-party websites like TweetDeck or HootSuite but it’s difficult to manage our kind of accounts. Sometimes accounts manage the sentimental value of content but it’s quite awkward sometimes because they don’t detect sarcasm and various other things so the figures can be deceptive”.

5) And finally, what are your thoughts on a future direction for social media use?

“We’ll probably try to add to the number of platforms we have currently. We’re looking at Snapchat, because of its current popularity. This would be a tough platform to use properly because of the way it’s used so content could be hard to display. LinkedIn is another one, too, but it’s more of a professional platform we could be restricted on that platform”.

Interview Transcription – Cardiff Council

1) Which social media platforms are currently in use and why?

“The City of Cardiff Council currently has platforms on Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram. These are powerful media tools which help promote Council campaigns, council services and the work the Council carries out on behalf of the city’s residents. Using social media channels complements and enhances more traditional communication channels like newspapers, press releases, radio and TV interviews and website publications. It opens new ways of directly engaging with residents, stakeholders and partner organisations”.

2) What are the current strengths and limitations of the social media platforms currently used?

Strengths
“The benefits include the ability to reach a wider audience quickly and directly with an undiluted or changed message. It’s an excellent way of sending out information to residents and allows us an opportunity to speak directly to those residents. It can also act as a vehicle to promote the work the council carries out on behalf of its residents, raising awareness of services or service changes. Our social media accounts are also a useful tool for providing ‘real time’ essential public information, for example, in the event of emergency situations in the city like large scale fires, floods, traffic incidents etc when people are looking for a ‘trusted voice’ delivering news they can use in a timely manner”.

Limitations

“All social media tools carry the potential to damage the Council’s reputation. A poorly written post can reflect badly on the Council. Any errors can be magnified under the glare of social media. It can share posts instantaneously and to a worldwide audience, posts which can’t be withdrawn once they are out there and shared. Once you engage on social media it’s a 24/7 business. But most Councils are not set up to work 24/7 in this area. It’s entirely feasible that something which could have been dealt with quickly during normal working hours could turn into something which is damaging to your reputation overnight”.

3) How are the current social media platforms used?

“The Council has a social media policy to provide a clear framework to work within to ensure effective, safe and legal use of social media. The policy complements the overall Communications Strategy and needs to be considered alongside the authority’s Corporate Brand Guidelines, ICT Security policy, Internet & Email policy and the Codes of Conduct”.

4) How is the data from the social media platforms collected, analysed and used?

“The City Council uses a web-based social media management tool to provide a platform for engaging with other social media users as well as the ability to monitor and analyse the effectiveness of our social media output”.

38