



The
ISSUES
Project

Social Media & Knowledge Exchange

ISSUES Survey of Use and Application
April 2011



www.urbansustainabilityexchange.org.uk

ISSUES – Implementation Strategies for Sustainable Urban Environment Systems



Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
What is social media?.....	3
Existing ISSUES utilisation of social media	4
2. Survey creation.....	4
3. Survey results	6
4. Recommendations	7
References	9

1. Introduction

Research would suggest that there are a growing number of internet end-users interacting with social media and that this group is not limited to a particular demographic (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Increasingly organisations are using social media to influence stakeholders and potential customers in both the commercial (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Bónson & Flores-Munoz, 2011) and non-profit (Waters et al., 2009; Curtis et al., 2010) sectors. Therefore, it is feasible that there is potential for social media to have an impact within the context of knowledge exchange and the dissemination of academic outputs, i.e. the core deliverables of the Implementation Strategies for Sustainable Urban Environment Systems (ISSUES) project. It is this possibility that was explored and reported here.

What is social media?

Social media can be considered as being comprised of two closely associated concepts, namely Web 2.0 and User Generated Content. Although online definitions abound (Google, 2011) and despite being commonly associated solely with technical implementations, Web 2.0 can be thought of as a cumulative change in the way that both software developers and end-users utilise the internet for greater collaborative interactions. To fulfil the criteria of User Generated Content, web-based material must be publically accessible, demonstrate creativity and be generated outside professional conventions (OECD, 2007). Drawing these two ideas together Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) succinctly express social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”.

In practice, social media offerings fall into one or more of a number of categories including blogs (a contraction on the term web logs), microblogs, social networks, wikis, social bookmarking and audio/visual sharing. It is not the intention of this report to define and draw a distinction between each of these groups nor will it deal with the specifics of software applications falling therein. However, for the interested reader, a general explanatory resource on social media, such as Wikipedia (2011), is recommended.

Existing ISSUES utilisation of social media

The ISSUES project is currently registered with the following social media applications.

Facebook	Blog	LinkedIn
Twitter	Vidiowiki	YouTube
	TSB_connect	

In a wider context, two uses of social media on the Sustainable Urban Environments (SUE) Programme, of which ISSUES is a constituent project, were also identified: SUE Research Dialogues which is ostensibly a blog but is in reality simply a website run on a WordPress blog platform (SUE Research Dialogues, 2011), and therefore cannot be considered an instance of social media; and EnergyCLUES (EnergyCLUES, 2011), a SUE Phase 3 project blog run on the BlogSpot platform.

2. Survey creation

A survey was produced and issued in order to understand specifically whether it is worthwhile pursuing an enhanced social media strategy (i.e. going beyond its current ISSUES implementation) in order to facilitate the further promulgation of ISSUES project outputs and, more broadly, the applicability of social media in a general academic context. Initially this involved a literature review of both academic and non-academic/online sources of information to establish both the theoretical and practical basis for social media.

Thereafter, a number of social media applications were investigated based on the awareness of these applications by the author and through UK-specific website rankings provided by Alexa (2011), an internet traffic monitoring organisation. These applications, which were categorised and sub-categorised based on the groupings provided within the Wikipedia page pertaining to social media (2011), are as displayed overleaf.

Awareness of Social Media Applications

Category	Type	Application	Alexa UK rating
Communication	Blog	Wordpress	19
		Blogger	12
		Posterous	354
		Tumblr	54
		Livejournal	168
	Microblogging	Twitter	11
		Tumblr	54
		Posterous	354
	Social networking	Facebook	2
		MySpace	61
LinkedIn		14	
Information aggregator	Netvibes	877	
Collaboration	Social bookmarking	Delicious	243
		Reddit	111
		StumbleUpon	121
		Digg	113
		Diigo	1779
Multimedia	Video sharing	YouTube	4
		Vimeo	130
	Presentation sharing	Scribed	342
		Slideshare	370

Survey participants were established from a list of ISSUES end-user contacts provided by Annabel Cooper, ISSUES Communications Officer. A short survey was formulated and issued via the online survey application [Survey Monkey](#) in order to garner information about the following from the survey participants.

- Existing use of social media applications in a professional and/or personal context.
- Perceived barriers to the uptake of social media applications.
- Awareness of existing ISSUES usage of social media applications.
- Preferred channels of communication (social and other media) for ISSUES project output.

3. Survey results

A total of 520 surveys invitations were sent via email and 45 returns were received within the survey active duration period of a week, corresponding to an approximate return rate of 9%. In general, the findings of the survey can be summarised as follows.

- Some, but not all, respondents frequently use a variety of social media applications in both a professional and/or personal context, the most popular categories of which (in descending order) are social networks, video sharing, and wikis and blogs.
- Respondents cited (in descending order) time restrictions, workplace constraints and a myriad of platforms as the main barriers to greater utilisation of social media. However, a significant number of respondents indicated that in their opinion social media was inappropriate or a waste of time within a professional context.
- Respondents were aware of ISSUES social media outputs including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Respondents indicated that their preferred social media channels for the consumption of ISSUES project outputs included blogs, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. However, many respondents, in line with the perceived poor value and lack of applicability of social media within a professional or academic context, stated a preference for traditional means of electronic communication including emails and website content.

4. Recommendations

Based on the author's personal experience, views expressed in the literature and online resources and specifically the findings of the survey, the following recommendations relating to the use of social media can be made.

- There is value in pursuing a social media strategy as an integral part of the general dissemination policy for knowledge exchange projects such as ISSUES, and more broadly for individual SUE projects, despite some scepticism and negativity expressed in the survey results. Social media is a relatively nascent abstraction but its use and application will almost certainly increase over time. Axiomatically, social media are channels for communication (the key word here is 'media') not a substitute for genuine academic analysis and discourse.
- It is essential that any social media effort occurs under the auspices of a well-developed social media strategy. This would involve *inter alia* clearly identifying and documenting what is to be achieved, whom should be targeted, implementation and maintenance responsibilities, methods, metrics, etc. A good starting point for formulating such an approach is a blog entry by Beth Kanter (Kanter, 2009) but other suitable online resources are available, e.g. the website of Mindjumpers (Mindjumpers, 2011), a creative agency specialising in social media. Other guidance regarding social media strategy and usage has also been identified (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010a, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010b). However, it cannot be understated that sufficient time and dedicated resource should be invested to establish and maintain any social media offerings although this should not be undertaken, obviously, to the detriment of core academic outputs.
- Having studied the survey results, it was determined that an appropriate response would be to reduce the number of social media channels used by the ISSUES project and consolidate around a defined set of popular offerings identified by the survey respondents. More specifically, it was proposed that the existing project blog should continue to be the hub of any ISSUES social media strategy, supplemented as and when required by YouTube videos (which should also be embedded in blog entries) with updates to the blog being announced through a combination of Twitter, LinkedIn and an RSS feed (the latter being a functional part of the existing blog platform). Furthermore, Twitter and LinkedIn should also be used to drive related content (e.g. from other SUE projects), develop professional relationships and contribute to discussions and the dissemination of information pertinent to the ISSUES project, thus developing an online presence and reputation for professional excellence in the sustainability research sector.

The key finding in relation to the application of social media in a more general academic context was that any social media strategy should be appropriate and 'right-sized' to suit the requirements of the intended audience. The survey results served to highlight the difficulty, due to the multifarious nature of academic research, of making specific recommendations in a broader context in the same manner as was achieved for the ISSUES project without first determining the preferences and proclivities of the research consumers, for example, through a survey. However, it is sufficient to state here even without adequate knowledge of the intent of other instances of academic research that the social media strategy and usage guidance referred to previously will prove invaluable for the successful utilisation of a social media against such a wider backdrop.

Regardless, it is proposed in all cases that the whole social media effort should be supplemented, with minimum additional overhead, by non-interactive means of communications, such as periodic emails and newsletters. These disseminations should help to counteract the identified barriers to the uptake of social media applications and moreover should mention social media outputs so as to encourage those not convinced by the social media concept.

References

Alexa Internet Inc. (2011) Alexa [Online]

Available at: <http://www.alexa.com/> [Accessed 14 February 2011]

Bónson, E. & Flores-Munoz, F. (2011) Social media and corporate dialog: the response of the global financial institutions, *Online Information Review*, 35, 1.

Curtis, L., Edwards, C. Fraser, K., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K., Sweetser, K. (2010) Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations, *Public Relations Review*, 36, pp90-92.

EnergyCLUES (2011) EnergyCLUES [Online]

Available at: <http://energyclues.blogspot.com/>

[Accessed 14 February 2011]

Google (2011) Google search 'define: Web 2.0' [Online]

Available at: [http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&client=firefox-](http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=cAY&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&defl=en&q=define:Web+2.0&sa=X&ei=Sr1STfCWLoeXhQeU58DKCA&ved=0CCEQkAE)

[a&hs=cAY&rls=org.mozilla:en-](http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=cAY&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&defl=en&q=define:Web+2.0&sa=X&ei=Sr1STfCWLoeXhQeU58DKCA&ved=0CCEQkAE)

[GB:official&defl=en&q=define:Web+2.0&sa=X&ei=Sr1STfCWLoeXhQeU58DKCA&ved=0CCEQkAE](http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=cAY&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&defl=en&q=define:Web+2.0&sa=X&ei=Sr1STfCWLoeXhQeU58DKCA&ved=0CCEQkAE)

[Accessed 14 February 2011]

Kanter, B. (2009) Creating Your Organization's Social Media Strategy Map [Online]

(updated 23rd January 2009)

Available at: http://beth.typepad.com/beths_blog/2009/01/creating-your-organizations-social-media-strategy-map.html

[Accessed 14 February 2011]

Kaplan, A. & Haenlein, M (2010a) Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53, 1, pp59-68.

Kaplan, A. & Haenlein, M. (2010b) The early bird catches the news: Nine things you should know about micro-blogging, *Business Horizons*, 54, 2, pp105-113.

Mangold, W. & Faulds, D. (2009) Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix, *Business Horizons*, 52, pp357-365.

Mindjumpers (2011) Search Results for 'social media strategy' [Online]

Available at: <http://www.mindjumpers.com/blog/?s=social+media+strategy>

[Accessed 14 February 2011]

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007) *Participative web and user-created content: Web 2.0, wikis, and social networking*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

SUE Research Dialogues (2011) SUE Research Dialogues [Online]

Available at: <http://suedialogues.wordpress.com/>

[Accessed 14 February 2011]

Waters, R., Burnett, E., Lamm, A. & Lucas, J. (2009) Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organisations are using Facebook, *Public Relations Review*, 35, pp102-106.

Wikipedia (2011) Social Media [Online] (Updated 12th February 2011)

Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

[Accessed 14 February 2011]