

Making the connection

Civil society and social media

By Suw Charman-Anderson




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About the Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland

The Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society was established to explore how civil society could be strengthened in the UK and Ireland. The Inquiry Commission was chaired by Geoff Mulgan and was also informed by an International Advisory Group.

The objectives of the Inquiry were to:

- explore the possible threats to and opportunities for civil society, looking out to 2025;
- identify how policy and practice can be enhanced to help strengthen civil society;
- enhance the ability of civil society associations to shape the future.

The Inquiry Commission's work began with an extensive futures exercise to explore possible futures for civil society. Drawing on the findings of the futures work, which are documented in two reports, *The Shape of Civil Society to Come* and *Scenarios for Civil Society*, the Inquiry Commission agreed to explore the current and possible future roles of civil society associations in relation to the following themes:

- **Growing a more civil economy**
- **A rapid and just transition to a low carbon economy**
- **Democratising media ownership and content**
- **Growing participatory and deliberative democracy**

This paper was commissioned to inform the Inquiry's work on the roles of civil society associations in growing a more civil economy.

The final report of the Inquiry Commission, *Making good society*, was published in March 2010.

For further information about the Inquiry and to download related reports go to www.futuresforcivilsociety.org

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Contents

Executive summary	2
What is social technology?	5
What are the main types of social technology?	5
What is civil society?	6
Key characteristics of social media	7
Part one: Introduction	8
Background to the report	8
Building civil society 2.0	9
A changed world	9
Challenges and risks posed by social technologies	10
Part two: Social media in civil society	13
The state of play: How are civil society associations using social technologies?	14
Why are civil society associations using social media and how successful are they?	20
A failure of leadership?	22
Myths of age and technology	23
Case study 1: Joseph Rowntree Foundation	23
Case study 2: YouthNet	25
Part three: Alternative scenarios for the future	28
What might the year 2025 hold for social technology and civil society associations?	28
How might the social web develop over the next 15 years?	29
Key drivers of change	29
Future scenarios	35
Questions raised by the future scenarios	38
Part four: Recommendations	40
Recommendations for governments and policy-makers	42
Recommendations for funding organisations	42
Recommendations for civil society associations	43
Looking forwards	44
Appendix 1: Methodologies and limitations	45
Appendix 2: Survey analysis	48
Appendix 3: Website assessments	55
Appendix 4: Resources & links	59
Glossary	60
Endnotes and references	62
About the Carnegie UK Trust	65
About the author	65

For an explanation of terminology used in this paper see the Glossary on page 60.

Executive summary



Social technologies – websites, services and applications that allow users to engage in social behaviours online or on a mobile phone – are transforming many aspects of modern society. From the media to government, from education to business, people are congregating online and using social tools to filter news, collaborate and organise. Information and requests for action can propagate quickly through online networks as people forward on interesting or important messages to their peers.

At the same time, trust in government, business, the media and traditional information sources is low and often declining, a trend that also affects civil society associations. The media landscape is fragmenting. People are spending less time with traditional media formats, instead choosing to focus their attention on activities such as gaming, social networking and online video.

Civil society associations will find it harder to operate effectively in this challenging new environment. Many will have to undergo a profound shift in organisational culture in order to benefit fully from social technologies: keeping quiet in a world where everyone else is talking is the first step towards irrelevance.

Given that civil society associations are often, at their heart, community organisations that bring people together over a shared topic, problem or concern, they should be naturally drawn to social technologies. Indeed, quantitative research in the UK and US shows that the use of social media is more widespread amongst civil society associations than might be expected, with over 70% of UK organisations using one or more social tools. But a closer qualitative look shows that social media is not always being used effectively, with organisations often using it to broadcast their message rather than engage with their online community.

The most popular social tools used by British civil society associations include social networking and RSS feeds. Most organisations using social networks are running them on third party sites, with Facebook dominating. This is possibly because:

- Social networking sites already have huge numbers of users.

- They allow organisations to set levels of privacy and to experiment in a more private arena than in, say, a blog.
- Social networking tools are easy to use and free to access.

Despite the improvements in blogging software over the last five years, and the availability of free open source software, blogs are not as popular as might have been predicted. That may be because they are perceived to have higher overheads in terms of the amount of time and effort it takes both to get the software installed and create original content to post on them.

The micro-blogging or micro-conversation tool Twitter has had a lot of coverage in the media and is used by nearly two thirds of UK associations, although only one third of websites assessed as part of this research provided a link to, or feed from, Twitter. Embedded video from sites such as YouTube is the most popular way to use media.

An assessment of nearly 30 civil society association websites, covering a range of organisation sizes and types, exposes some of the problems with the way that these organisations are using social technology. Many websites suffer from confusing and cluttered visual design, poor navigation and low usability. They often lack clear calls to action such as 'write to your MP', 'join our campaign' or 'become a member', although many of them do include some sort of 'donate' button or link. There is also very little opportunity for visitors to interact either with the organisation itself or each other. The majority of websites used a formal, corporate tone to their communications, rather than the personal, informal tone prevalent in social media.

The most popular reasons for maintaining a web presence are to provide information to the general public, promote events and communicate with the organisation's constituency. Only half of organisations use the web for fundraising and two fifths use it for recruiting more volunteers. Survey respondents said that using social media allows them to reach more people, often of a different demographic to their usual members or supporters. Many also mention raising awareness of their activities, creating the opportunity for conversation, and providing networking opportunities.

There is a common perception that civil society associations lack people who understand technology in general and social media in particular, but the results of the survey undertaken to inform this paper do not support this. The majority of survey respondents said that they find it 'very easy' or 'easy' to use social tools, and that they understand social tools 'very well' or 'moderately well'. Although the survey sample was self-selecting, thus more likely to be completed by people who have these skills, it does indicate that there is more knowledge among civil society associations than might be expected.

Attitudes towards organisations' overall capabilities, however, are at odds with the understanding reported by individuals. Respondents rated their organisations' understanding much less favourably, with only half saying that their organisations understand social tools 'very well' or 'moderately well'.

Despite the encouraging results regarding respondents' opinions of their own ability, there is room for improvement. More case studies, training and a better understanding of 'which tools are useful for what', would help respondents expand their use of social technologies.

There is also some evidence that resistance to new technology by management and trustees is also causing problems. A number of 'internal threats' have been identified by researchers, including 'complacency, apathy, indecision, fear of change and losing control'. The importance of an internal culture which is open to new ways of doing things, and willing to take risks and experiment, must not be underestimated.

Looking forward to 2025, it is challenging to envisage how current trends and future developments will shape the social web and society. Interviews and workshops with technical entrepreneurs, social media experts and civil society practitioners revealed a number of driving forces that were used to create three scenarios for the future that provoke the question: 'What if...?'.

Rise of the digital pensioner: what happens when an ageing population meets increasingly powerful and usable technology?

The 'we can' world: fed up with a corrupt ruling elite, and inspired by the opportunities provided by social tools, people self-organise to right civic wrongs.

The battle for attention: faced with increasingly diverse and entertaining ways to spend our time, those who would claim our attention find themselves in fierce competition.

Although individual tools, services and platforms may wax and wane, the underlying concept of enabling social interaction between individuals via the web is one which speaks to fundamental human needs. The urge to communicate, to connect with others, to express ourselves and to learn will never change, and the tools which enable those activities will have a staying power far beyond our expectations.

It is important that civil society's capabilities be developed over the next 15 years so that it is able to keep up with developments in technology, but there are also some present day prejudices which need urgent attention, particularly with regard to age and technological capabilities.

Two common assumptions are that young people have a natural affinity for technology and both understand and use it in ways that older people cannot; and anyone over the age of 60 is not only technically incompetent but also uninterested in the internet, using it only under protest. But evidence shows that age is not a reliable predictor of interest, capability, confidence or engagement with technology in general, or social media in particular.

Overall, technical skills need development, but any digital media literacy programmes must be approached with care and forethought. Social media is experiential in nature: it is difficult to fully understand social tools until one has participated and experienced them for oneself. Unlike basic computing skills, such as word processing or spreadsheet manipulation, the core understanding required to make good use of social technologies is cultural, not procedural.

This report makes a number of recommendations to governments, funding organisations and civil society associations regarding skills and training. Core recommendations are that funds should be set aside for training and skills development, and that organisations across the board — including governments and funders — should use social media in order to understand its function in civil society projects.

More general recommendations are also made. Key amongst them is the recommendation that an independent research body, a 'British Internet Institute', be created to study the use of the internet and social media in the UK. Very little academic research in this field is carried out in the UK, so civil society, business and government are forced to make decisions without adequate evidence to support them.

It is also essential that funding bodies become more receptive to experiments and risk-taking; that they encourage organisations to include a social technology component in their project plan; and that sharing experiences — of both success and failure — should become the norm.

Civil society associations should look at how they can embed the web at the heart of their activities, encouraging everyone in their organisation to become familiar with social technologies. This is not only about ensuring that resources are made available, but also about changing internal culture to be more exploratory and open. They should also engage with non-civil society social media communities, both to learn from them and share their experience.

Every part of society is being touched by social technology. These new tools provide a valuable opportunity for civil society organisations to become more efficient, more capable and more adaptable. Organisations can use them to form stronger relationships with their supporters, their audience and their volunteers. But associations which do not embrace technology may find themselves cast to the margins as people come to regard the convenience and connection afforded by the web as an essential part of the way they live their lives.

What is social technology?

Social technology is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of websites, services and applications that allow users to engage in social behaviours online or on a mobile phone. The terms social tools, social software, social web and social media are synonyms.

Web 2.0 is another common term. It gained prominence after being used as the title of a conference by technology publisher O'Reilly Media. Although there are competing definitions of Web 2.0, it is generally used to refer to the web as a platform for software development, as opposed to computer desktops.

What are the main types of social technology?

Social network: websites that allow people to create profiles, connect to other users, and participate in a community. Examples include Facebook or MySpace in the personal arena and LinkedIn or Xing in the professional arena.

Blog: a lightweight system that allows users to publish information to the web, usually time-stamped and in reverse chronological order. Most blogs have comments on each blog post which allows conversation. Examples of blogging software include Wordpress or Movable Type.

Social bookmarking: a way to collect and share links to interesting webpages. These bookmarks can be tagged with descriptive keywords to make them easier to find later. Examples include Delicious.

Wiki: a wiki is a webpage which can be edited by users. Examples include MediaWiki (the software which powers Wikipedia) or SocialText.

Content sharing: websites that allow users to share media, such as photos or video, and to socialise around that media. Examples include YouTube (video) or Flickr (photos).

Micro-blogging: perhaps more accurately described as 'micro-conversation', these tools allow people to exchange short messages. Examples include Twitter and Identi.ca.

New forms of social technologies are regularly developed and the lines between different types of tool can become very blurred. For example, content sharing and social networking can merge, like Last.fm, a social network focused on listening to music where people can share statistics about their listening habits.

For an explanation of other related terminology used in this paper, see the Glossary on page 60.

What is civil society?

Civil society as associational life: civil society is the ‘space’ of organised activity voluntarily undertaken, and not undertaken by either the government or for-private-profit business. This includes formal organisations such as voluntary and community organisations (often referred to as the third sector), faith-based organisations, trade unions, mutuals and co-operatives. It also includes informal groups, from the very local to global social movements.

It is important to note that all civil society associations are not necessarily ‘good’ in and of themselves. As noted by Tom Carothers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: ‘Civil society is the good, the bad and the downright bizarre.’ At their best, civil society associations can fundamentally enhance the lives of the poorest in society, strengthen democracy and hold the powerful to account. At their worst, they can preach intolerance and violence.

Civil society as a ‘good’ society: the term civil society is often used as shorthand for the type of society we want to live in; these visions are both numerous and diverse. Civil society associations can, and do, play a critical role in creating a good society. However, they will not achieve this alone. Creating a good society is dependent on the actions of and interrelationships between the market, states and civil society associations.

Civil society as the arenas for public deliberation: we will not all necessarily agree what a ‘good’ society is or agree on the means of getting there. Civil society is therefore also understood as the arenas for public deliberation where people and organisations discuss common interests, develop solutions to society’s most pressing problems and ideally reconcile differences peacefully. These arenas are a key adjunct to a democratic society. They may be actual – a community centre, for example – or virtual, such as a blog.

In short, civil society is a goal to aim for (a ‘good’ society), a means to achieve it (associational life) and a means for engaging with one another about what a good society looks like and how we get there (the arenas for public deliberation).

“ Civil society is the good, the bad and the downright bizarre.”

Key characteristics of social media

Social media ...

- improves the transparency, governance and accountability of organisations which increases trust in those organisations;
- improves the relationship between an association and individual supporters as well as between supporters;
- allows information – good or bad – to propagate rapidly, thus enabling quick and effective mobilisation online or offline;
- provides organisations and individuals with a venue to participate in and enhances public debate;
- enables organisations to tackle large problems by breaking them down into small tasks achievable by individuals;
- is extensible and adaptable with the potential for data and content to be re-used by third parties to generate unexpected insights;
- provides a platform for dissent by allowing people to express discontent or highlight abuses of power;
- lowers the barrier to entry, for both public and civil society associations, as it offers simple ways to participate which have scope to develop into deeper engagement;
- helps organisations engage with segments of the population that are difficult to reach via traditional methods;
- can bring about financial benefits by helping organise direct and indirect fundraising;
- strengthens offline communities, and offline events strengthen online relationships;
- helps create highly responsive, less hierarchically governed and sometimes *ad hoc* civil society associations.

“ The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower. Attitudes are the real figures of speech. ”

(Friedman, 1990)

Part 1: Introduction



Background to the report

This paper was commissioned to inform the work of the Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland, and specifically the work on media ownership, content and social media. While many civil society associations have taken advantage of the opportunities afforded by social media, many others have yet to adopt such tools. This report examines the current state of play, asks how civil society associations can enhance their application of social media, and looks at how social technologies and society may change in the years between now and 2025.

This guide has been developed for staff, trustees and active volunteers of civil society organisations to help them stay ahead of the curve in relation to how they apply social media, particularly when it comes to conveying messages to key stakeholders, changing hearts and minds of constituencies and enabling participation. Whilst much of the research comes from ‘professional’ organisations, the information published here is relevant to all nature of civil society associations.

Building civil society 2.0

- **The media landscape has fractured and traditional media is losing its dominant position.**
- **Trust in figures of authority and traditional institutions is falling.**
- **People are congregating on social media sites in large numbers.**
- **By using social technologies, civil society associations can extend their reach, increase member/supporter engagement and provide opportunities for direct involvement.**

A changed world

Any civil society association formed more than a few years ago now finds itself existing in a world which bears little resemblance to the one in which it was conceived. Technology has developed in unforeseen ways; the media is locked in a fight for survival; the entertainment industry has fragmented; and individuals are empowered to speak their minds and organise action in unprecedented ways.

Few civil society associations will have been created with this world in mind, yet they must come to understand it and adapt accordingly or they may find themselves sidelined.

In their report, *Public Media 2.0: Dynamic, Engaged Publics*, Jessica Clark and Patricia Aufderheide (2009) describe the landscape we now inhabit:

‘Commercial media still dominate the scene, but the people formerly known as the audience are spending less time with older media formats. Many [people] now inhabit a multimedia-saturated environment that spans highly interactive mobile and gaming devices, social networks, chat – and only sometimes television or newspapers. People are dumping land lines for [mobile] phones and watching movies and TV shows on their computers. While broadcast still reaches more people, the Internet (whether accessed through phones, laptops, or multimedia entertainment devices) has become a mass medium.’

At the same time, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer Survey 2009, trust in governments, business, the media and traditional information sources is low and often declining. Trust in the media has suffered the most but business analysts, press releases and company chief executive officers (CEOs) are also badly affected. Whilst the report says that civil society associations, specifically non-government organisations (NGOs), are trusted slightly more than other types of organisation, they are still losing the public’s trust. In order to combat mistrust Edelman recommends that:

‘Organisations must be forthright and honest in their actions and communications. [When problems occur] stakeholders need to see senior executives take a visible lead in acknowledging errors, correcting mistakes, and working with employees to avoid similar problems going forward.’

Social technology offers an opportunity for civil society associations to address some of the problems thrown up by these changes. Using social media, such as blogs and Twitter, allows organisations to show a more human face to the world and provides an opportunity not just to acknowledge errors and correct mistakes, but also to discuss how they came about and what can be done to prevent them in future.

Organisations can also use social tools to involve their members and supporters in future planning and to learn how they would like to interact with the organisation.

Example 1

Aware that its fellows wanted to be more engaged with its activities, the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), set up the OpenRSA project to involve staff, fellows and the general public in discussions about the future of the society. OpenRSA started on Facebook and now includes a Ning network as well as blogs and Twitter to create a forum for discussion.

<http://openrsa.wikispaces.com/about>

<http://openrsa.ning.com>

Key characteristic: *Social media improves the transparency, governance and accountability of organisations which increases trust in those organisations.*

Using social tools can extend the reach of an organisation's web presence and the strength of its network, and allow it to form direct relationships with its stakeholders. Establishing one-to-one relationships increases engagement which, in turn, increases the likelihood that the individual will become a more active and valuable participant in the community.

Martin *et al.* (2008) quote *The Decision to Join* by ASAE and The Center for Association Leadership (Dalton and Dignam, 2007), saying that:

'The extent to which a member is engaged in their membership association is tightly correlated to their likelihood to renew their membership and to talk to friends and colleagues about their association. [And] the number one way members first learn about their membership association is from another member.'

They go on to say that even a 'small improvement in member engagement should reliably produce an increase in membership retention rates,' which will in turn improve

revenue. Because 'research shows that engaged members are more likely to talk to prospective members about their association', it also follows that increased engagement will not only improve income from those members but also increase income from new members.

Social media can improve engagement by providing members with a way to get directly involved in their chosen association and the community that coalesces around it. Rather than being a passive individual isolated from their fellow supporters, members can be part of an active online community that has come together to discuss and solve shared problems.

Example 2

The Open Rights Group, a small digital rights NGO formed in 2005, uses a selection of social media tools, including wikis, blogs, Twitter, Flickr and Delicious, to engage its supporters and engender a sense of community. By drawing on the expertise of its supporters via collaborative tools such as 'Consult', the Open Rights Group has responded to many more consultations than would otherwise be possible. Seeing the results of their work then encourages supporters to continue their involvement.

www.openrightsgroup.org

Key characteristic: *Social media improves the relationship between an association and individual supporters as well as between supporters.*

Challenges and risks posed by social technologies

Social media is not without its challenges; not just for those who use it but also for those who do not.

For organisations that decide to adopt social tools the challenge is to do so successfully and, as with any other technology, success in social media is dependent on the way in which it is used. Social media often seems like it should be easy to implement because the tools themselves are relatively easy

to use, but social media is elective; unlike most software, people have a choice in whether or not they use it. This means that implementation is not just a matter of installing the software, but also requires a detailed adoption plan¹ to help convince its potential users that it is worth their time and energy.

In 2008, Gartner analyst Adam Sarner projected that half of the social media projects run by Fortune 1,000 companies will fail (McCarthy, 2008). Deloitte consultant Ed Moran studied 100 online social networks created by businesses around their brand. The majority of these social networks failed to attract significant numbers of visitors, with over 75% of communities having fewer than 1,000 members (Catone, 2008).

Few of these unsuccessful cases will be documented because few companies wish to discuss failure publicly, so lessons about what makes a project succeed or fail are slow in being learnt (Charman-Anderson, 2008). Indeed, there is a significant success bias in the case studies which have been published, with practitioners, vendors, consultants and companies tending to shy away from discussing negative experiences.

One area where mistakes may have been made is in understanding which tool is right for the job and, indeed, which job is right for social media. Not all projects are suitable for social media: for example, short-lived projects that have had no time to build up a community might not realise any benefits from using social tools, as it takes time and effort to attract users.

Picking the right tool is essential. Twitter, for example, is not suitable for in-depth, nuanced discussions about delicate subjects; Facebook is not an open site, so not useful for publishing lots of material for discussion; and blogs are not the best tools for collaborating on documents. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each tool and the context in which they work best is important in deciding which tools are useful for a specific project.

Resourcing can also be a problem, particularly for smaller civil society associations. It takes time and effort to build up an audience and to nurture a community, and ongoing work to keep that community vibrant and healthy. Whilst communities often reach a tipping point after which they become self-sustaining, it can take

years to reach, particularly for niche issues. This means that staffed organisations need to make a long-term commitment to the project, ensuring employees have the time and resources required.

In staffed organisations social media projects are often bolted on to staff members' existing workload without consideration of the amount of time it can take to research and write a blog post, check Twitter or Facebook, etc. This can lead to the blogger or Twitterer feeling undue pressure and, when time is short, social media is often the first thing to be dropped. Thought should be given to the whole life span of a social media project before work commences, and social activities must be worked into employees' work schedules in a way that guarantees the time and freedom to engage fully.

Social technology changes constantly, so engaging with it has to be an ongoing process of discovery and learning. It is not a one-off project, but a permanent change to the way the organisation communicates, collaborates and thinks.

Possibly the biggest challenge for civil society associations adopting these tools is cultural. Social spaces online each have their own culture and unwritten code of conduct. Often, behaviours that are acceptable in a PR or marketing context are not acceptable in a social media context, so care must be taken to understand the culture before engaging with the tools.

Those associations that choose not to adopt social tools need to be aware that there is a risk in not engaging. People will talk about organisations whether those organisations take part in the conversation or not. Often those conversations are positive, but not always. Bad news can spread easily through online networks, as can misinformation and rumour. Social media allows information — good or bad — to rapidly propagate, thus enabling quick and effective mobilisation online or off.

In a business context, negative conversations like these can have a significant impact on an organisation's brand and profits.

Example 3

In 2004, a biking forum published a story about how bike locks made by Kryptonite could be opened with nothing more than a Bic pen. Videos showing the locks being opened were posted on the internet, the story spread through blogs and ended up in the mainstream media. Kryptonite were the subject of vociferous criticism for failing to react fast enough to the criticism, and by the time they explained what had been going on behind the scenes, the damage to their reputation had been done. The estimated cost to the company was \$10m. The company eventually began a company blog in 2007. It has been argued that Kryptonite should have engaged more rapidly with online forums and blogs and that their losses — both financial and in terms of trust in the brand — could have been lessened by a more frank and open conversation about their plans to remedy the situation (Rubel 2004).

Key characteristic: *Social media allows information — good or bad — to rapidly propagate, thus enabling quick and effective mobilisation online or off.*

Conversely, organisations that have a presence online, such as a blog, have their own space where they can reply to and correct misapprehensions.

Example 4

In August 2009 Greenpeace took issue with the way that BBC HARDtalk journalist Stephen Sackur, in an interview with their executive director Gerd Leipold, misinterpreted a story that Greenpeace had run on its website about the retreat of Arctic sea ice. Greenpeace refuted Sackur's interpretation on their blog and asked their supporters to use Twitter, Facebook, or their own blogs to help spread the word about the clarification.

Key characteristic: *Social media provides organisations and individuals with a venue to participate in and enhance public debate.*

Civil society associations who choose to reject social technologies risk more than bad press getting the better of them. Outsell (www.outsellinc.com/store/products/734), as quoted by Michael Collins (2009), warns that despite associations being 'the poster child of communities,' bringing together as they do people with common interests, 'their seeming inability to move their offline communities online into vibrant digital communities is stark. Associations [stand to lose] their very reason for being if they cannot move their professionals into digital environments'.

For some civil society associations adopting social technologies requires a profound shift in organisational culture. Such a shift is a small price to pay compared to the risks of failing to engage with social technology. Publisher Tim O'Reilly (2002) once observed that: 'Obscurity is a far greater threat to authors and creative artists than piracy.' For many civil society associations, obscurity is a far greater threat than letting go of control.

Part 2:

Social media in civil society



Social technology is still a new phenomenon. The first wiki was developed by Ward Cunningham and made public in 1995 (Wikipedia, 2009). The first recognisable social network was SixDegrees.com which launched in 1997 (boyd and Ellison, 2007). And blogs began to become stylistically separate from websites in the late 1990s with the release of blogging services Manilla and Blogger in 1999 (Riley, 2005).

Social media in all its forms is still in the process of moving into the mainstream and continues to develop rapidly. New tools, applications and services are continually springing up, as some old tools die away.

Example 5

Mapumental is a map-based mash-up of public transport timetable data and information on 'scenic-ness' which helps people plan where they want to live. The scenic-ness is decided by members of the public rating photos of locations as scenic or not.

<http://mapumental.channel4.com>
(currently in private testing)

<http://scenic.mysociety.org>

Key characteristic: Social media enables organisations to tackle large problems by breaking them down into small tasks achievable by individuals.

With less than 15 years of social media history behind us it is essential to understand the present — as changeable as it is — before trying to understand the directions in which the future could take us.

This section examines the state of social media in civil society today and provides a picture of how social media is being adopted by civil society associations in the UK (and, because most of the existing research was done in America, the US). The findings combine existing research with a survey of civil society associations and a separate assessment of a selection of associations' websites. A full analysis of the survey results can be read in Appendix 2: Survey analysis, p. 48.

Two very different case studies also throw light on some of the challenges faced by organisations using social media, and some of the benefits it can bring. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has experimented with social media and initially found it unsuitable for its specific audience, but is now investigating new ways to use it. YouthNet puts social media right at its heart and it forms an integral part of the organisation's outreach activities.

This section also looks at the way that conservative and risk-averse governance cultures can prevent organisations from using new technologies. Two common myths are examined: that young people are naturally *au fait* with the internet and social technology, and that older people are not.

The state of play: How are civil society associations using social technologies?

Surveys show that the majority of civil society associations in the UK are already using at least one type of social technology.

Third party social networks, such as Facebook, are the most popular interactive social tools, possibly because they are cheap, easy to use and come with a huge user base. RSS is popular as a distribution mechanism.

The quality of civil society associations' websites, and the way in which they use social tools, needs improvement in order to be effective and meet the needs of their audiences.

Most of the existing research into the use of social technology by civil society organisations has been carried out in America. Undoubtedly many of the conclusions drawn by those studies are also relevant in the UK despite the different geographical context.

In a survey of 76 of America's 200 largest charities, Barnes and Mattson (2009) found that 'charitable organisations are still outpacing the business world and academia in their use of social media' with 89% of the charities surveyed using some form of social media. These take-up rates are higher than might be expected, perhaps because the survey focused on only the biggest, and therefore probably the most wealthy and well-resourced, charities in the US.

In the survey of UK associations undertaken for the purpose of this report, 101 organisations responded that they did have a web presence and 70.3% used some form of social media; and in the assessment of UK websites, 62.1% of the 29 sites examined had some sort of syndication or social functionality with 37.9% providing only static, non-interactive content.

What forms of social technology are popular amongst civil society associations?

Social networking, video blogging and RSS are all popular.

Both the survey and the website assessment showed that British civil society organisations favour RSS for use on their own sites. Exactly half the survey respondents and 51.7% of the websites assessed used RSS.

This may be because RSS, whilst an essential part of the social technology ecosystem, can also be used as a broadcast medium and so seems like a safe option for organisations not keen on other more interactive tools. The website assessments showed that one third of organisations using RSS did not have a blog but were instead using RSS to distribute press releases, events information and news, rather than blog posts or podcast episodes.

Example 6

MySociety develops websites and services that support democracy in the UK and often provides its data via an RSS feed or an API. One of MySociety's services, TheyWorkForYou, publishes data about MPs' activity in Parliament and produces an RSS feed which some MPs have used on their own websites to keep their visitors up-to-date.

www.mysociety.org

www.mysociety.org/projects/theyworkforyou

Key characteristic: *Social media is extensible and adaptable with the potential for data and content to be re-used by third parties to generate unexpected insights.*

Social networks, and particularly third party social networks hosted by private companies, were also popular. Martin *et al.* (2008) discovered from a survey of 280 US organisations that they were most likely to use third party social networks as a way to dip their toes into social media, with 31% of associations doing so. Barnes and Mattson (2009) identified video blogging and social networking as the most popular tools, with both being used by 79% of American organisations studied. The UK survey showed that 68.3% of respondents use social networks.

Amongst these third party social networks, Facebook dominates. NTEN, Common Knowledge and ThePort collaborated on a survey of 980 US organisations, asking only about the use of social networks (NTEN *et al.*, 2009). They found that Facebook was the most popular third party social network, more so than YouTube or Twitter, although professional associations were more likely to use LinkedIn. Community sizes were quite small with an average of 5,391 members on Facebook and 1,905 on MySpace. The Facebook figure was, however, skewed by three very large communities of over half a million members. When they were discounted, average community size fell to 1,369 members.

Martin *et al.* (2008) corroborate the popularity of Facebook, finding that 17% of associations use it, and that the majority maintain an open network, with only 17% of organisations restricting access to members (compared to 69% of LinkedIn Groups users).

The UK website assessment showed only 20.7% of organisations clearly linked to external social networks — all of them using Facebook — and 51.7% did not link to or mention third party social tools of any type.

Why should these third party social networks be more popular than other tools? Martin *et al.* (2008) suggest three reasons:

- Social networking sites already have huge numbers of users.
- They allow organisations to set levels of privacy and to experiment in a more private arena than, say, a blog.
- Social networking tools are easy to use and free to access.

In-house social networks, where the organisations use community tools such as Ning or Webjam, or create a bespoke social network, were less popular than the large third party sites such as Facebook or MySpace. NTEN (2009) found that a third of respondents had one or more in-house social networks and three-quarters of the respondents' networks had 2,500 or fewer members.

Martin *et al.* (2008) found that only 9% of civil society organisations in the US had in-house social networks. The UK survey found that 20.7% use them. Both NTEN (2009) and Martin *et al.* (2008) identified Ning as the leading vendor of community tools although the market is very fragmented.

The use of blogs

Despite improvements in the quality of blogging software over the last five years and the availability of free open source software, blogs are not as popular as might be imagined.

Martin *et al.* (2008) found that 24% of respondents publish one or more blogs. They often have multiple authors, with rank and file members being the most likely authors rather than board members. Most (71%) blogs listed 'increase member engagement' as one of their top three reasons for blogging. Comments were allowed by 92% of blogs.

Barnes and Mattson (2009) found that 79% used video blogging (although they do not define the term) and 57% are blogging — a higher take-up rate than in business or academia in the US. Approximately 90% of charities said that they felt their blogs were successful.

Example 7

Random Acts of Reality is a blog written by Tom Reynolds, an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) with the London Ambulance Service (LAS). Tom not only describes his experiences as an EMT, he also highlights failures by LAS management, the government and the NHS, and the comments on some of his blog posts provide a place for people to discuss the problems he encounters.

<http://randomreality.blogware.com>

Key characteristic: *Social media provides a platform for dissent by allowing people to express discontent or highlight abuses of power.*

The UK website assessment found that 31% of organisations provided a blog but over half of them were hard to find from the main website: either the link was hard to spot or absent completely. Some blogs did not link back to the main site and were thus completely isolated from the organisation's main web presence.

In the social media survey, blogs were the next most popular tool after RSS and were used by 43.9% of respondents.

Although blogs are very flexible and adaptable, it may be that they are used less often than third party social networking tools because they are perceived to have higher overheads — in terms of the amount of time and effort it takes both to get the software installed and to create original content to post on them.

Other social technologies

The micro-blogging or micro-conversation tool Twitter has had a lot of coverage in the media, both in the US and the UK, yet did not feature in any of the American reports. In the UK social media survey, 58.5% of respondents said that they used Twitter, Identi.ca or other similar tools; the website assessment showed 31% of sites provided a link to, or content from, Twitter.

Photo sharing sites such as Flickr were used by 51.2% of UK survey respondents, although very few websites assessed used the Flickr badge — a display of thumbnail images that can easily be added to a blog or website — with only 6.9% showing any use of Flickr at all.

Social bookmarking tools like Delicious were used by 35.4% of our survey respondents and 10.3% of websites assessed.

Wikis were very unpopular. Martin *et al.* (2008) found that only 14% of organisations used them; Barnes and Mattson (2009) found that 16% of charities use them. The UK survey found that 20.7% of organisations used a wiki but none of the websites assessed did. This may be because wikis are seen as collaboration tools mainly for internal use, rather than as tools for creating community or communicating with an external audience.

The use of audio and video

Barnes and Mattson (2009) found that 79% of charities surveyed are video blogging and 36% are podcasting.

The UK survey found that video was more popular than audio with video sharing sites such as YouTube the most popular way to use media (50%). Downloadable audio (not podcasts) was the next most popular (35%) followed by podcasts, downloadable video and streaming video, each used by about one fifth of respondents. Audio streams were the least popular way to deliver media (11%).

Of the UK websites assessed, 51.7% provided some sort of multimedia for their visitors, the majority of which was video. Most (37.9%) used video sharing sites, with YouTube the most popular (31%), Vimeo accounting for 10.3% and one site using MySpace for video sharing, one streaming video, and another using a specialised sector-focused television website. Three sites provided audio which was a mix of audio downloads, podcast and streamed audio.

Audio and video are both excellent media for storytelling, and more or better use of these media could be made by civil society organisations. That they are not may be due to the perception that audio and video are prohibitively expensive, but advances in technology and a lowering of expectations regarding the quality of video and audio on the web brings these media into reach.

CD-ROMs, interactive television, virtual worlds and mobile

Most of the research by other parties has not addressed the use of CD-ROMs, interactive television, virtual worlds or mobile. The survey to inform this research showed a surprisingly high use of CD-ROMs with 37% of UK civil society organisations providing them for free or for sale. Interactive TV, on the other hand, was used by only two organisations. Virtual worlds were also used by very few organisations, with only eight using Second Life and four using Habbo Hotel.

There was also very low take-up of mobile technology, with 10% of organisations offering a website optimised for use on mobile devices and 3.7% offering mobile applications.

Although few (10% or less) organisations said they were intending to use CD-ROMs, interactive television or virtual worlds in the future, many more showed interest in mobile services with 42.5% intending to optimise their website for mobile and 30% intending to offer mobile applications.

Example 8

No2ID is a small organisation which campaigns against the excessive use of databases by government, particularly the national ID card scheme. It uses social technologies such as blogs, RSS and YouTube for campaigning, lobbying and community building. No2ID's supporters are encouraged to be creative and have made animations and videos that illustrate the organisation's position and that can be used to spread their message.

www.no2id.net

Key characteristic: Social media lowers the barrier to entry, for both public and civil society associations, as it offers simple ways to participate which have scope to develop into deeper engagement.

Understanding social tools

The vast majority of survey respondents (78%) said that they found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to use social tools and 82.7% said that they understood social tools 'very well' or 'moderately well' (comprising 49.4% 'very well' and 33.3% 'moderately well'). But respondents rated their organisations' understanding less favourably, with only 50.6% saying that their organisations understood social tools 'very well' or 'moderately well' (comprising 12.3% 'very well' and 38.3% 'moderately well').

That nearly half of respondents rated their own understanding very highly, whilst only one eighth said the same of their organisations, could be interpreted to mean that there is a better understanding of social technologies within civil society associations than is often assumed. This may be because the people who understand social media are not very visible and do not have the status required to both effect change and discuss it publicly. This problem has also been identified in the media and undoubtedly exists in other industries and sectors; media consultant Alan Mutter (2007) once quoted an anonymous newspaper online editor saying 'the people with the most online experience have the least political capital'. Civil society associations do have social media expertise within their ranks, but are not making the most of it, perhaps due to cultural prejudices against technology (see: 'A failure of leadership?', p. 22).

There may also be a disconnection between people's understanding of social media in their own personal life and the role that it can play in a professional context, although additional research would be required to confirm or refute this. Users do not always transfer knowledge successfully across contexts, so knowing how to use a service like Facebook for personal socialising does not necessarily mean that the same person understands the best way to use a blog or wiki for business purposes. It is both possible and desirable to help existing personal users expand their understanding of social tools to encompass a professional context, and organisations should encourage members and supporters

who have a natural interest in, and aptitude for, social media to learn more about how to use the tools in the context of their organisation.

Resources for those wishing to learn more about social technologies are listed in Appendix 4: Resources and links, p. 59.

Design and usability

The website assessment that took place to inform this report examined issues that a survey cannot, particularly design and usability. See Appendix 1: Methodologies and limitations, p. 45, for full details of how qualitative judgements were made.

Many of the websites assessed suffered from poor visual design, for example page layout and colour palette, with 72.4% scoring average or below, including 44.8% scoring poor or very poor. Many of the sites were confused and cluttered, with too many visual elements placed too close together and not enough use of white space.

Sites often lacked clear calls to action, such as 'Write to your MP', 'Join our campaign ...' or 'Become a member', although many of them did include some sort of 'Donate' button or link. For many organisations that rely on volunteers, there was little clarity on what type of tasks were available for volunteers to do and often no chance for them to sign up to a specific task on the website. There was also very little opportunity for visitors to interact either with the organisation itself or the related community of interest.

The navigation and usability of most sites was also of a poor standard. Many sites had multiple navigation menus, sometimes eight on one page, which made it very difficult to find information and keep track of which pages had been visited. Standard navigation tools such as wayfinding navigation (text-based menus at the bottom of each page) were used by only two sites, and breadcrumb navigation (showing the user their path through the site at the top of the page) was also rarely used.

On larger sites, the information architecture (how the content is organised) tended to be overly complex and confusing, reflecting the association's internal organisational structure, rather than the needs of the visitor. This problem wasn't necessarily linked to the size or wealth of the organisation, but to the amount of information that they had collected on their website.

Few sites showed any evidence of user-centred design (which concentrates on understanding the site through the eyes of the user, and what they wish to achieve during their visit). A better understanding of usability principles would help organisations create a better user experience and, potentially, increase visitor engagement with the organisation and its cause.

Voice

Using the correct tone of voice to communicate with readers is essential in the realm of social media. A formal PR or marketing voice used on a blog, for example, will alienate readers who are used to associating blogs with personal, informal voices. In this context, voice does not necessarily refer to the role of the person speaking, but instead refers to their style of writing or speaking. A trustee, for example, can write with a corporate tone that is flat and impersonal – or they can speak from the heart and share their opinions with their readers as equals.

The website assessment found that the majority of civil society organisations used a formal, corporate tone to their communications, with 62.1% of sites having no individual, informal voices in evidence. All the websites that did not use social media in any form fell into this group, including sites that only used traditional forums rather than blogs or Twitter.

Generally speaking, the more social tools a site used, the more individual voices were heard. Only one organisation's website comprised mainly of individuals using their own voice and that was an *ad hoc* community group with no obvious official governance structure. However, the correlation between use of social tools and voice did not always hold true. There were several sites that, despite using several social tools, still maintained a very polished, broadcast-style voice rather than the more intimate voice usually associated with social media.

This may be a reflection of the fact that, as reported by both NTEN (2009) and Martin *et al.* (2008), marketing and communications departments are most likely to be responsible for social media projects. This co-option of social technologies by departments that tend to be focused on maintaining a polished image and keeping communications on message is unsurprising, but the effectiveness of social media is reduced when it is used in such a controlled manner. The key feature of social media is that it facilitates conversations and builds relationships; relationships are not built between a person and a brand, but between people. Removing the personal and conversational aspect also removes the key reason for using social media in the first place.

Example 9

Savvy Chavvy is a social network created by On Road Media for young Gypsies and Travellers who often feel alienated from other social online spaces. Savvy Chavvy allows 'young Gypsies [...] to communicate freely amongst each other in a safe place away from the discrimination and prejudice that many of them face daily.' (Williams, 2008)

www.onroadmedia.org.uk

Key characteristic: *Social media helps to engage with segments of the population that are difficult to reach via traditional methods.*

Why are civil society associations using social media and how successful are they?

Reasons for using social media

NTEN (2009) found that the majority of third party social networks were used for marketing purposes 'to promote the nonprofit's brand, programs, events or services' with a third using them to deliver services.

Very little fundraising was done using social networks and those that did try fundraising online raised very little: nearly one third of Facebook communities raised US\$500 or less and only 1.2% raised more than US\$10,000. Of the in-house networks, one quarter were used for fundraising and, of those, one third (about 8% of the total) raised more than US\$10,000.

Example 10

Twestival was a series of events, organised via Twitter over the course of just a few weeks, for Twitter users to meet up and socialise. Twestival events were held in over 200 venues worldwide in February 2009, raising over \$250,000 for charity: water.

<http://twestival.com>

Key characteristic: Social media can bring about financial benefits by helping organise direct and indirect fundraising.

Survey respondents were asked about their top reasons for maintaining a web presence. The three most popular reasons were to provide information to the general public (89%), followed by event promotion (84%), and communicating to the organisation's constituency (81.7%). Only 52.4% of organisations said they used the web for fundraising, and 41.5% said they used it for recruiting more volunteers.

When asked an open-ended question about how social media helps them reach their goals, many respondents replied that it allowed them to reach more people, often people of a different demographic to their usual members/supporters. Many also mentioned raising awareness of their activities, creating the opportunity for conversation and providing networking opportunities.

However, in the website assessment, actions that visitors could take on the web were often limited, with 17.2% of websites providing users with no way to interact at all. In contrast to the number of survey respondents who said they used the web to raise money (52.4%), 83.3% of websites assessed provided some way for visitors to donate, whether through a one-off donation, subscriptions, paid membership or other mechanism.

Comments from survey respondents asked: 'How does social media help you reach your goals?'

'Allows geographically-spread officials and volunteers [to] communicate and co-ordinate and feel part of the organisation.'

'Essential for the interaction that maintains and builds relationships.'

'The area is complex as the online constituents are not necessarily our whole body — many of whom do not use the internet widely. We hope that through using [social] tools not on our own website we can encourage dialogue and debate.'

'Both Facebook and YouTube enable us to reach a different demographic.'

'It creates a regular channel of communication with key stakeholders.'

'It allows expression and conversation and creativity across groups who might not encounter one another in print or in their ordinary social life.'

'As a small organisation, social media helps us to punch above our weight, and allows us to differentiate ourselves from other local non-profits.'

'We have a very engaged audience once a year, but social media tools have enabled us to develop this more year-round, further building loyalty, and helped our audience promote the event for us.'

Users could volunteer in some way on 70.8% of websites, usually through getting in touch with an organiser, rather than being able to take an action immediately online. The next most popular action was to allow people to sign up for events (37.9%).

Recognising and measuring success

The three activities deemed most successful were also the most popular reasons for having a website: to provide information to the general public, event promotion, and communicating to the organisation's constituency. When asked an open-ended question about how they know that social media is helping their organisation to achieve their goals, the majority of our survey respondents said that they relied on website traffic statistics. Because website statistics analysis can show web managers where visitors to their website came from, they can see whether people are clicking on links to their website in different social tools, such as Twitter or Facebook.

Many respondents said that they used the amount of activity on social tools as a metric of success, for example the number of followers on Twitter, number of fans on a Facebook page, or number of photos uploaded to Flickr. Also popular was gauging success through direct feedback from users and word-of-mouth from the community. Some respondents, however, either do not yet know how to monitor success or are not doing so.

Example 11

Harringay Online is a very local, online social network. The double award-winning web initiative connects residents of the neighbourhood of Harringay in the Borough of Haringey, north London, encouraging them to share information, find out about local events, join local groups and discuss local issues.

www.harringayonline.com

Key characteristic: *Social media strengthens offline communities, and offline events strengthen online relationships.*

Whilst numeric measurements, such as the number of visitors to a blog or the number of friends acquired on a social network, can give an idea of a project's success, they do not paint the whole picture. Chris Lake (2009) of Econsultancy suggests that organisations should 'stand back and take a widescreen approach to measurement' rather than focusing too much on campaign-specific metrics.

Much discussion around measuring success online, for example the MeasurementCamp event, (<http://measurementcamp.wikidot.com>) focuses on a business context; however, it can provide civil society associations with valuable insights. But it must be acknowledged that measuring the success of social media projects can be difficult and more research into metrics particular to civil society associations is required.

For further insight into measuring success, see the YouthNet case study on page 25.

What would help organisations use more social media?

NTEN (2009) found that respondents wanted more time, more staff and additional training to help them to improve their use of social networks. As a lack of budget and lack of expertise were given as key reasons for not creating social networks, it would also follow that more money and understanding would help.

When survey respondents were asked what would help their organisation expand their use of social media, 74.1% said that they need to know 'which tools are useful for what', 50.6% would like more case studies and 44.4% would like training in how the tools work. Only 38.3% said they need more information about the different tools available.

Other responses indicated that organisations needed more time and resources as well as pointers to the 'best free training resources on the net'. Respondents also expressed a need for more willingness from management to adopt new ways of working within their organisations, and 'strategies for overcoming nervousness at senior levels'.

See also: 'A failure of leadership?', p. 22.

More detailed analyses of the social media survey results and the website assessments are located in the appendices.

A failure of leadership?

Conservative attitudes amongst management and trustees are stifling the use of social technologies by civil society associations.

Management is too often focused on the past and do not have a sound understanding of current needs, particularly regarding technology and the internet.

Cultural change, including a more accepting attitude towards risk-taking and experimentation, will enable civil society associations to benefit more fully from technology and social media.

There are a number of reasons why civil society associations might shy away from using social media, including a lack of technical understanding or a paucity of time and budget. These are all legitimate concerns but there is evidence that resistance to new technology by upper management is also causing problems.

Interviews with civil society associations and responses to the social media survey undertaken for the purposes of this report both showed that, for many organisations, conservative attitudes amongst management and trustees stifles the use of social technologies. A web developer for one large organisation, when discussing possible uses of social media, responded: 'The trustees would never go for that.'

Collins (2009) identifies a number of 'internal threats' to the adoption of social media:

'Complacency, apathy, indecision, fear of change and losing control.'

'Myopia re return on investment.'

'Inadequate consultation with community members.'

Survey respondents also believe that there needs to be a greater depth of knowledge and understanding amongst management. One said that, 'lack of knowledge in the upper levels of the organisation tends to hold us back'.

'[Our staff] are focused on service provision. Many don't understand, or have time to learn about the net,' said another, whilst a third admitted that there is 'not much understanding that social media is not the same as mass publicity that the 'comms' team can just do by themselves.'

Example 12

Guerilla Gardeners is an *ad hoc* group of gardeners who cultivate neglected public land. They organise digs and communicate via a blog, forums, Twitter and YouTube. The movement, which started in London, is now a worldwide phenomenon.

www.guerrillagardening.org

Key characteristic: *Social media helps create highly responsive, less hierarchically governed and sometimes ad hoc civil society associations.*

Although persuading managers and trustees to recognise the value of social media might be hard, some people are still able to use social tools despite the barriers:

'I have struggled to get buy-in from management, but have had success with what I have been able to do,' said one survey respondent, whilst another said, 'We are just beginning to expand on usage, and I am doing my best to educate my management team.'

Caulier-Grice *et al.* (2008) discuss how civil society associations 'can sometimes become frozen around past needs rather than current ones.' Although they were not directly discussing civil society associations' attitudes towards technology, their words are just as applicable in this context.

One survey respondent illustrated this tendency to remain stuck in the past, saying 'current policies seem to have been made years ago'.

The manager of one mid-sized association's website said: 'The culture of [our organisation] leads its communications efforts in many ways and it's not based on evidence, or knowledge of the marketplace or the audience. It's: 'This is the way we've always done things'. When push comes to shove we tend to revert back to instinct, revert back to assumptions.'

Those who oversee civil society associations must ensure that they create a culture that is open to new ideas, new technologies and experimentation. Failure to do so will hobble staff in their efforts to communicate, collaborate and engage their community, holding the association as a whole back. Organisations unable to use the internet to its fullest capability risk being sidelined by those who understand how to use social technologies to spread their message, and to unite and organise their supporters.

Myths of age and technology

A person's interest in and access to technology varies greatly across the generations, as does their capabilities.

Age is a poor predictor of a person's ability to understand and use technology. Fewer young people and more older people have confidence with technology than is often assumed.

Civil society associations need to be wary of making age-based assumptions about their staff/volunteers' technical capabilities, and must also be careful not to project these same assumptions on to their audience.

There are two common assumptions about the relationship between age and technical competency that rear their heads whenever the internet is discussed. The first assumption is that young people have a natural affinity for technology, understanding and using it in ways that older people cannot. The second is that anyone over the age of 60 is not only technically incompetent but also uninterested in the internet, using it only under protest.

Case study 1: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

www.jrf.org.uk

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) is an independent research charity which seeks to 'understand the root causes of social problems, to identify ways of overcoming them, and to show how social needs can be met in practice'. It focuses primarily on poverty, housing and empowerment, for example social care or disabled rights.

JRF's website is a rich resource for anyone interested in social change. The organisation uses the site to share information with its audience, hoping to reach senior leaders under significant time pressure. They feel that these people are unlikely to want, or have the time, to engage with social tools.

Nathon Raine, who is responsible for the web team at JRF, says:

'[users] don't necessarily want to come to our site and hang around in a social media sense. I don't think they want to come for engagement. They just want to come in, get the research and get out as quickly as possible.'

The site was recently migrated to an open source content management system called Drupal. Open source fits well with the organisation's ethics and ethos according to Nathon – and it is free.

Drupal supports a number of social media activities, such as blogging, yet the only social tool used on the JRF website is RSS feeds for publications, press releases and events. This may imply an organisation that is unaware of social technology, but that's not the case. Nathon understands how the internet is developing and the limitations of a static website. However, using social media tools is seen as something for a younger demographic and, considering JRF's position of engaging with influencers, often seen as senior people, at odds with their target audience.

Nathon feels that the web team has not yet seen compelling evidence that social tools will help JRF achieve their organisational goals. Instead, he believes they need to focus on areas such as user experience, which they feel will provide the best return on investment in a short space of time.

'If we were trying to reach the general public,' Nathon concludes, 'then I think things would be very, very different. But we go after this slightly rarefied audience, and social media doesn't seem right for us in many ways.'

Both of these assumptions are flawed, yet have worked their way firmly into the public consciousness. Because they seem like 'common sense', these concepts are spread by policy makers, the media and technology companies alike. But if civil society associations take them at face value they risk forming strategies and policies that are as flawed as the assumptions they are based on.

The 'digital native'

Marc Prensky, technologist and educationalist, coined the term 'digital native' in 2001 to refer to today's students of the developed world, born after 1980, which he sees as radically different from both their predecessors and their teachers/professors. He characterises them as 'native speakers of technology, fluent in the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet' (Prensky, 2006) and compares them with their elders, the 'digital immigrants', who may use technology but who 'still have one foot in the past'.

Prensky's is not a lone voice, nor is his the first to characterise young people as being computer naturals — that idea has been around since the 1970s but has become particularly prevalent over the last ten years. It is predicated on the idea that there is a clear divide between generations and that these new characteristics, ascribed to the young, are so new that not only are their elders incapable of developing those skills, they can't even comprehend them.

As well as having a natural affinity for technology, 'digital natives' (also known as the 'net generation', or 'millennials') are also supposed to be 'optimistic team-oriented achievers' and 'active experiential learners, proficient in multi-tasking' (Bennett *et al.* 2008). Yet a review of the evidence shows the truth to be much more complex than the words of Prensky and his peers would lead one to believe. In reality, competency with technology varies along with access and interest. Selwyn (2009) says:

'There is mounting evidence that many young people's actual uses of digital technologies remain rather more limited in scope than the digital native rhetoric would suggest. Surveys of adolescents' technology use, for example, show a predominance of game playing, text messaging and retrieval of online content (as evidenced in the popularity of viewing content on YouTube, Bebo and MySpace)'.

Bennett *et al.* (2008) discuss studies of American students that found the most common activities were word processing, emailing and accessing the internet for pleasure. Only a minority of students actively created their own content or used emerging technologies such as blogs, social networking and podcasts. A significant proportion of them had lower levels of technical competency than would be expected of 'digital natives'.

Research by Golding (2000, cited in Selwyn 2009) shows that access to technology is strongly influenced by a number of factors including socio-economic status, social class, gender and geography, as well as school and home background and family dynamics. Studies from Europe and North America show that rural youth, females and those whose parents have low levels of education are more likely to suffer from digital exclusion.

Furthermore, digital exclusion is not always involuntary. danah boyd's (2007a) study of teenagers on MySpace discovered 'two types of non-participants: disenfranchised teens and conscientious objectors.' The former group have no internet access, have been banned by their parents, or can only access the internet through public terminals where sites like MySpace are banned. Conscientious objectors include 'politically minded teens who wish to protest against Murdoch's News Corporation (the corporate owner of MySpace)', as well as obedient teens who respect their parents' bans, and teens who feel socially alienated from their online peers or who just think they are too cool for MySpace.

The concept of the digital native is, then, an artificial construction rather than a description of reality. Selwyn (2009) says:

'Whilst often compelling and persuasive, the overall tenor and tone of these discursive constructions of young people and technology tend towards exaggeration and inconsistency. The digital native discourse as articulated currently cannot be said to provide an especially accurate or objective account of young people and technology.'

This is a conclusion with which Bennett *et al.* (2008) agree: 'These assertions are put forward with limited empirical evidence ... or supported by anecdotes and appeals to common-sense beliefs.'

Harvard's John Palfrey, co-author of the book *Born Digital*, explains why the term 'digital native' should not be used to describe a particular generation:

'Not all of the people who have the character traits of Digital Natives are young. [Some people] over a certain age ... live digital lives in as many ways, if not more, than many Digital Natives. Many of us have been here as the whole digital age has come about, and many of our colleagues have participated in making it happen in lots and lots of crucial ways.'

The 'silver surfer'

Similar mythology has grown up around internet users of retirement age. The common perception of the over-50s, and in particular the over-60s, is that they are technically incapable and uninterested in the internet. This diminishes the role that the internet plays in the lives of older people and the influence they have on the internet itself.

Corrick (2009) cites Nielsen Online and Hitwise UK, who both foresee an increase of approximately 20% in the use of the internet by the 55+ age group. Usage of the internet by both the 55-64 and 65+ age groups has increased each year from 2006 to 2008, with 64% of 55-64 year-olds and 54% of the 65+ group, accessing the internet every day or almost every day. The level of use by the younger age group is now almost the same as the 45-54 year-old cohort, which stands at 65%, only 8% behind the 25-44 age group (National Statistics Online, 2008).

Case study 2: YouthNet

www.youthnet.org

YouthNet is a charity that provides online services and information to young people in the 16-25 demographic. Originally conceived as a book, YouthNet moved its service directory to the web in 1997, two years after it was founded.

YouthNet currently runs two websites: TheSite.org and do-it.org.uk. The organisation focuses on understanding which social technologies their target audience use and then adopts those tools.

YouthNet uses social media tools to both connect with its community, and to communicate and collaborate internally and with its charity partners. There is a very open culture where employees are encouraged to use whichever tool they feel will work for them. They mix social tools with traditional working methods rather than trying to replace them. Their use of social media is part of a broader strategy which embraces offline as well as online activities.

Externally, YouthNet maintains a presence in a variety of third party tools, such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Twitter, Flickr, Ning, YouTube and Delicious. It also runs a number of blogs, written by both YouthNet staff and volunteers, and provides RSS feeds of content.

Natasha Judd, YouthNet's Marketing Manager, says:

'[Social media] allows us to have individual conversations with individual users in the spaces which are relevant to them. It's about sharing what we are and what we're doing, and having the trust that everyone is a fantastic representative for YouthNet.'

Understanding and keeping up-to-date with social technology is the responsibility of everyone at YouthNet and everyone has the opportunity to engage with the tools if they wish.

Social media tools can also give valuable information about an organisation's user-base, for example the demographic of a Facebook group.

The vast choice of social media tools, platforms and services can be daunting but it is not necessary to have an active presence on every one. When deciding which tools to use, take the lead from your community, Natasha advises, and do not feel that you have to be everywhere:

'It's not about the tools; it's about communicating with people, engaging them and inspiring them to trust your services and get involved in your organisation.'

A 2008 Ofcom report found that '[Older people] with an internet connection spent 30 minutes longer [90 minutes in total] online per day than the UK average'.

An AXA survey (2007) found that 'using the internet is the preferred hobby of pensioners', over DIY/gardening and travel. Furthermore, 88% of pensioners who use the internet 'chat regularly with friends and family', and are 'embracing the web to enhance their social lives and keep in touch with family'.

So older people are engaging with the internet, and increasingly so, but are they using social tools?

The average ages of social sites is surprising: YouTube (34.4), Facebook (34.6) (Nielsen Online, cited in Corrick 2009), Friends Reunited (43.8) and Saga Zone (62) (CIM Presentation, cited in Corrick 2009). Indeed, almost as many in the 55+ age group use Facebook globally as in the 25-34 age group. Not only are these sites not just the preserve of the teens and 20-somethings, as is often assumed, but pensioners will actively engage with sites such as Saga Zone that are relevant to their interests.

Corrick (2009) concluded from this and other data that:

'Baby boomers and 'silver surfers' are not averse to digital technology. Their motivations for going online are the similar as other generations: socialising, communication, learning, sharing, shopping, bargain hunting, organising. Like all other age groups, usage of all digital media is rapidly increasing. [And it] is no longer a matter of what kind of sites/ services this demographic is not using, rather which ones are they use more than others.'

Another part of the mythology surrounding silver surfers is that they lack confidence with technology. Whilst this is undoubtedly true of some, a recent Ofcom (2009) study found that lack of interest was a more important problem than lack of confidence.

For example, interest in the creative elements of the internet, such as uploading photos or commenting on blogs, was low for the 60+ group. Ofcom discovered that 42% of the 60+ group have either uploaded or are interested in uploading photos to the internet and only 18% either have commented or are interested in commenting, on someone else's blog.

Ofcom's figures are problematic because they do not give a clear picture of how popular activities are within younger age ranges. Questions about the use of advanced mobile phone functions, where the 60+ cohort was split into 60-69 and 70+ age groups, show that the 70+ group is consistently less interested and less confident with technology than those aged 60-69. Their responses will therefore pull down the figures for the 60-69 age group (more so than they do the 16+ age group). There was also no data for the 50-59 age group which can also form a section of the 'silver surfer' demographic group.

The fact that interest, rather than confidence, was a key reason for the lack of engagement by older people is to be expected given that the main demographic targeted by most websites are the 18-35 year-olds who are perceived to have the greatest engagement with the web and the greatest disposable income.

Implications for civil society associations

These findings show that age is not a reliable predictor of interest, capability, confidence or engagement with technology in general or social media in particular. Whether civil society associations are looking for technically competent staff or volunteers to work on their web presence and use of social media tools, or whether they are assessing the potential reach within their target audience that such tools may have, they must do so with an open mind.

When considering hiring staff or recruiting volunteers, organisations must firstly remember that not all young people are automatically competent with technology. Although many teens and young adults use social tools in their personal lives, they may not have the necessary perspective to transfer those skills to a different context, such as a professional or volunteering context. Conversely the over-30s may have a deeper understanding of technology and a broader capability to apply that knowledge in a novel context.

However, it must be emphasised that with social media it is mindset, not skill set, that is important. The right people will be curious about technology, eager to experiment, will understand how interpersonal relationships develop, will be good communicators and will have a solid understanding of their community's culture. Such skills can be found in people of any age.

Equally, when formulating web strategies, it is important not to assume older people are

absent from the web. Whilst there is room for improvement in the number of over-50s online, an increase in relevant content may increase both interest and confidence as users find more compelling reasons to explore and learn about the web.

This is good news for civil society organisations, especially those focusing on older people, as the indicators are that there are many opportunities for them to reach out and engage with the over-50s digitally. Given the UK's ageing population, engagement with the 50+ age group should be a key consideration for all civil society associations.

Finally, it must be emphasised that the terms 'digital native' and 'silver surfer' should not be used as demographic descriptors. Instead, it is preferable to talk in terms of level and type of digital engagement and to recognise that these vary within all age groups.

Part 3:

Alternative scenarios for the future



What might the year 2025 hold for social technology and civil society associations?

This is a difficult question to answer. Looking back to 1994 gives an idea of just how much technology can change in 15 years: then, connections to the internet were made via slow dial-up modems, email was just starting to find its way into business, and email addresses were issued only to those who needed them. The web was just four years old and most websites were hand-coded, page by page, in HTML. It would have taken an unusually prescient person to predict blogs, YouTube or Twitter.

This section seeks to examine the drivers that would underpin changes that may happen over the next 15 years, and to derive three different scenarios that describe possible futures.

These scenarios are not predictions about the nature of social media in 2025. Instead, they aim to provoke the question: 'What if...?', and to help organisations imagine how they would cope if any of these scenarios came to pass.² The questions raised by these scenarios are then looked at and the implications for civil society associations are examined.

How might the social web develop over the next 15 years?

Civil society associations must consider how developments in technology will affect relationships with their members/supporters and should prepare for a world in which technology is ubiquitous and mainstream.

Key themes include: an ageing population that is becoming increasingly tech-savvy; how social media enables civic action; the increased demands on people's attention from a highly fractured media and entertainment industry.

Social media provides an opportunity for civil society associations to become more flexible and adaptable; those which do not adapt to changing technologies risk becoming irrelevant.

Key drivers of change

The drivers of change listed below have been developed through interviews and workshops with technologists, social media experts and civil society organisations. They are not exhaustive but rather provide a scaffold around which individuals and organisations can derive their own drivers of change and build their own scenarios. These scenarios can then help them understand how they may need to adapt in the present, so that they are better placed to flourish in the future.

The drivers of change have been divided into three types: predetermined, uncertain and wildcard. This provides a framework within which to think but, just as useful, would have been the PESTLE framework, which examines drivers in six subject areas: politics, economy, science, technology, legal and environment.

The material on the following pages is written as if looking back from 2025 ...

Predetermined

Predetermined drivers of change are trends that are either already at play or imminent and where countervailing forces are weak or non-existent.

Increase in number of interpersonal connections

Social media has increased the number of people that any individual can keep in touch with. As people reconnect with old friends, and make more new friends, they find themselves in the midst of larger networks than ever before. The majority of these relationships are weak, made up of business contacts, acquaintances, and people that are only vaguely known to the individual. A person's core circle of friends remains small but those key relationships last much longer and are less vulnerable to his or her increasingly peripatetic lifestyle. People can now stay in touch with anyone, anywhere in the world.

Ubiquity of technology and connectivity

Technology is cheaper, more powerful and easier to use than ever before. The green movement, combined with concerns about society's electricity consumption, has forced manufacturers to make devices that are power-efficient and easily serviced or recycled. Computers and telephones have merged to create a class of mobile device which is lightweight, pocketable and permanently connected to the web. Users really can get online anywhere, 24/7, and everyone has one.

Social software moves into the mainstream

Like email before it, social software has become ubiquitous. Blogs, wikis and social networks are commonly used and understood. Data portability — for example, users being able to move their contacts seamlessly from service to service — has lowered the barriers to entry. Social media has become embedded in people's personal and business lives. Organisations without a social media presence find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their savvier competitors, as consumers base purchasing decisions not just on recommendations from friends, but also on judgements of how personable they find companies' representatives in online social environments.

Everything is recorded

Everything can be, and is, recorded as a matter of course. The government's surveillance powers have been curtailed by activists' campaigns but the UK is still the most surveilled country in the world. Capturing of any type of activity or interaction is trivially cheap and easy, so people routinely record communications for their own personal archive. Businesses retain as much data as the law allows and mine it for key trends that might put them a step ahead. Archive and search functions are core issues for everyone, from mums organising their family's media archive, to charities sorting through their supporter activity database.

Self-organisation

Social tools help citizen groups self-organise, and a culture of *ad hoc* activism is born. Groups coalesce around the issue of the moment; agree on, organise and take action; and then dissipate. It only takes a few activists to work as organisers, evangelists, moderators, mentors and provocateurs, and to act as a focal point for the wider community. Sophisticated e-democracy tools let people lobby every level of government, from local to European. Activism is not restricted to the political or civic arena; businesses also find themselves in the firing line for socially unacceptable behaviours such as poor customer service or a failure to embrace green thinking.

Green issues become mainstream

Issues around climate change have been accepted by the majority of the population. Consumers expect businesses, governments and individuals to behave in an environmentally responsible manner, and punish any organisations that do not. Technology is no longer seen as a threat to the environment but its potential saviour. The intersection of social media and environmentalism has resulted in the positive application of peer pressure, to the point where individual action, rather than government action, is the norm.

Demographic inversion

The population has aged, with many more people over 60 than in previous decades. Advances in medicine mean that common diseases of old age are treatable or even curable, and both life expectancy and health in old age have improved. A shrinking workforce can no longer adequately fund the health, welfare and pension systems which creep towards breaking point. Retirees are unable to survive on the meagre state pension and, after the global recession, even private pensions aren't paying out enough. Many over-60s want to work but ageism makes it hard for them to retain or find jobs.

Decrease in trust of authority figures and institutions

The global economic crisis, various political scandals and accelerating mistrust of the media have resulted in the collapse of faith in authority figures and institutions of all types. People no longer look to self-proclaimed experts and venerable institutions when seeking information, instead relying on their network of peers to recommend and advise. Recommendations websites combine complex algorithms with human judgement to increase reliability. Consolidation of the media market has led to an information vacuum which is filled by distributed expertise sites. Wikipedia, for example, has become a well-respected and reliable resource.

Cuts in public services spending and access

Demographic inversion and an extended recession have significantly damaged government coffers. Taxes on individuals and small to medium-sized businesses cannot be raised further without the risk of civil unrest, whilst the rich — individuals and institutions — continue to avoid otherwise punishing tax rates. Instead, swingeing cuts affect access to services, particularly in less popular areas such as prison reform or support for drug addicts. Vulnerable adults and children are let down by the system, resulting in more reliance on charitable organisations.

The digital divide becomes a matter of choice

Mobile phones have evolved into mobile computers capable of providing full access to the web through browsers and applications developed to run on mobile devices. Laptops are cheaper than ever before. Cost is no longer a barrier to entry. Yet still not everyone embraces the web and social media. A percentage of the population — 'refuseniks' — show no interest in being a part of the web. This is not age-related, nor is it an economic or class issue. Instead, it is related to a lack of confidence with technology, disinterest, or even fashion. For some, it is just not cool to be online.

Uncertain

Uncertain drivers of change are either trends that appear to be reliable at this point, but which could easily be turned around by an unknown force at some point in the future, or ones where the trend could take two very different directions.

Split between inward-looking individualism and outward-looking collectivism

Social tools split into two types: inward-facing 'walled gardens', which encourage people to interact only with pre-approved friends, and outward-facing tools, which encourage people to be public in their interactions. The illusion of privacy created by walled gardens causes problems, because actions the user believes are private are actually on view to a much larger group. People on introspective sites engage less with the wider internet and avoid having their assumptions and prejudices challenged. More outward-looking people are attracted to sites which allow them to interact with strangers and stumble upon novel ideas, and are much more likely to engage with the community.

Experimentation and failure become more acceptable

Barriers to entry for participants wanting to experiment with the web have lowered. Third party tools enable organisations to create a sophisticated web presence without specialist knowledge. The low cost of entry and the spread of the web's 'fail fast, fail often' culture means that organisations become more relaxed about experimentation and more willing to take risks or venture into unknown territory. Huge budgets no longer hang in the balance so technological projects are free to evolve, adapting to emergent behaviour rather than attempting to dictate behavioural change.

Wide availability of information leads to either overload or smart/group filters

The amount of information available has sky-rocketed, and many people feel overwhelmed with sources when trying to find something out. Instead of looking for ways to assess the reliability of information, some people reject the web as an information source and refer to their peers for advice and answers. This leads to the easy spread of misinformation, some of which has serious consequences. Others have come to rely on smart filters that marry algorithms with readers' behavioural data, to help winnow the wheat from the chaff. Loyalty to specific information outlets is a rare anachronism with people being varied and fickle in their personal news-gathering habits.

Consolidation of the media; rise of community-sourced news

The failure of the media to find an adequate replacement for falling ad revenues has resulted in many newspapers, magazines, radio stations and commercial television channels failing. The BBC's licence fee is no more and the organisation has had to radically reinvent itself as a commercial venture, a transformation with which it has struggled. The news outlets which are left have focused on commentary over journalism, and sensationalism over reportage. Disillusioned with an increasingly shrill and desperate media, the public — which now includes plenty of out-of-work journalists — uses social media to create community news ventures that directly compete with the old media companies.

Over-regulation of the internet stifles growth

What started as an attempt to clamp down on music piracy in the 2000s turned into a global effort to rein in the internet and control what people do online. Over-regulation, including international databases of everyone's web surfing habits and a policy of instant disconnection for transgressors, has led to a reduction in innovation and development. Meantime, elite technologists create work-arounds for the automatic control systems imposed by government in an ongoing arms race.

Multiculturalism leads to either tolerance or increased conflict

The web has not just improved access to information: it has also created the opportunity for cross-pollination between different cultures. Some are open-minded towards different world views, finding the cultural exchange to be educational and interesting. For others, the perceived threat to their lifestyles and beliefs becomes intolerable, emphasising how alien they find these distant cultures. Mostly, that alienation comes to nothing. However, occasionally it feeds the flames of intolerance which erupt not just online, but offline, in the form of increased racially and religiously motivated attacks on both a personal and international scale.

Flexible portfolio careers becomes more common

The concept of a 'job for life' died at the end of the last century and has been replaced with portfolio careers. Recruiters no longer look for long, stable periods of employment with a single organisation but, instead, seek to hire people who have had a variety of jobs and experiences. Many more people are employed in two or more part-time jobs, despite the tax penalties that come from doing so. Companies have learnt to trust remote workers, which allows them to hire the best people regardless of where they are. The best people are in demand and can move easily from company to company in a more peripatetic lifestyle.

Businesses engage in more 'co-opetition'

Economic conditions have taken a long time to recover after the global economic crisis that began in 2007, and businesses have learnt to be flexible and adaptive. They have been forced to enter into alliances with organisations that they previously considered competitors, in order to achieve their business goals. This 'co-opetition' happens where organisations' strengths complement each other, thus fundamentally changing the way that they think about competition.

Wildcards

Whilst wildcard events have a low probability, they would have a large impact, and cause significant disruption, if they came to pass.

Massive population change, either increase or decrease

Either advances in medicine and technology increase life expectancy leading to a much larger population as fewer people die or a serious global pandemic wipes out a significant proportion of the population. Both scenarios could result in social unrest as societies based on slow population growth come under unprecedented pressure and collapse.

Fragmentation of large political entities, increased localism

Political blocs such as the UN, the G20, or Europe grow too large and lose cohesion. Knock-on effects include the fragmentation of nations such as Italy in to city-states, and increased demands for regional power in the UK. The concept of central government is undermined as people vote to have power returned to local officials.

Resources shock as peak oil, water and food is passed

Changes in climate cause food shocks as droughts, storms and floods devastate much of the world's growing regions. Altered rainfall patterns cause widespread water shortages and conflict. Oil output begins to decrease causing prices to soar which, again, causes conflict. Aggression is not just between nations but also manifested in social and civil unrest.

Huge increase in war, insurgencies and civil unrest

Multiple causes of conflict mean that the majority of the world is embroiled in some sort of war, insurgency or civil unrest. Western nations, put on the defensive as terrorism increases, pull troops home not just for defensive purposes but because war abroad is no longer politically tenable. This leads many struggling countries to collapse completely.

Change in value system from GDP to happiness or well-being index

The global recession turns into a global depression and the concept of money is re-evaluated. Disillusioned by an incompetent financial sector, people start to look for other measures of success.

Advances in biotech, nanotech and genetic engineering usher in the Post-Human Age

Advances in prosthetics pave the way for us to connect humans and computers at a neurological level, increasing our intelligence, memory and physical endurance well past human limits.

Future scenarios

By combining some of the drivers of change above, the following scenarios posit possible futures. Three scenarios imagined are:

Rise of the digital pensioner: what happens when an ageing population meets increasingly powerful and usable technology?

The 'we can' world: fed up with a corrupt ruling elite and inspired by the opportunities provided by social tools, people self-organise to right civic wrongs.

The battle for attention: faced with increasingly diverse and entertaining ways to spend our time, those who would claim our attention find themselves in fierce competition.

These possible future scenarios, if they were to come to pass, would have many implications for civil society associations. After the scenarios, some questions are posed that might illuminate possible areas of concern and courses of action. There are, of course, many more and it is left to the reader to consider the questions that make most sense in the context of their own organisation.

Scenario 1: Rise of the digital pensioner

The 60+ age group in 2025 is considerably more *au fait* with technology than its predecessors, although to cast the rise of the digital pensioner as a new trend would be to underestimate previous generations. Since the web first began, curiosity and a willingness to experiment have been more important than age. Improvements in usability and accessibility have made it easier for people to engage with the web, and an increase in sites aimed at the over-60s has provided them with a great impetus to get online.

Demographic changes have increased the number of over 60s in society. There was some hope that immigration could help to flatten out the demographic hump, bolstering the workforce and increasing tax income for the government, but the xenophobic sentiments of the 2000s have instead translated into tougher immigration policies. Whipped up by the tabloids and far-right political parties, over 60% of the British population in 2009 wanted immigration stopped (Wells, 2009) and politicians granted them their wish.

Pensions have been under pressure since the pension scandals of the 1980s and 1990s. Private pensions are mistrusted and undersubscribed, but the state pension is at such a low level that people who rely on it live below the poverty line. Many of those coming up to retirement age are ill-

equipped financially, and multigenerational households become more common as sons and daughters take in their parents who can no longer afford to run their own home.

Advances in both medicine and medical technology — an unexpected benefit of the Iraq war was the improvement of prosthetics — mean that age-related illness and disease is controlled, treated and cured with a much higher success rate. Whilst previously feared diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's have not been eradicated, they are easily treated.

The damaged pensions infrastructure, combined with workforce pressures and better health, have forced the UK government to raise the retirement age. Those who have the means to retire early still can. However, many choose to continue working into their 70s either because they have vitality and energy to spare, or because their personal economics require it. Demands from other sections of society, including parents and disabled workers, have increased the acceptability of teleworking and part-time jobs, creating opportunities for older professional workers to continue their careers well into their 70s at a level of activity sustainable for them. Those who work in manual jobs find it hard to continue, losing out to younger, fitter candidates.

As business and personal use of social technology increases, so many more over-60s are exposed to it in their everyday lives. Photos of grandchildren are routinely

circulated to grandparents via photo sharing sites; videos of school performances are taken on camera phones and privately shared through social networking sites; elderly people who might otherwise have felt isolated are using social tools to keep in touch with friends and relatives. This gives them an advantage over their predecessors as the social stimulation helps, alongside radically improved medicine, to keep them healthy.

As health in old age improves, and as an understanding of technology and the social web permeate the digital pensioners' culture, so pensioners begin to take their experience of the web into their own hands. Dating sites just for the over-sixties are well established but now there are focused social networks, blogging sites and activist groups.

Pensioners band together with charities and unions to campaign for better treatment, including increased pensions, better healthcare and improvements to social care. Together, they become a force to be reckoned with, pushing government to rethink the way it treats the over-60s.

Web accessibility becomes a hot topic, particularly around the issue of ensuring that websites function in screen readers or with larger text. The over-60s engage fully with web standards groups and have become the driving force behind campaigns to make businesses take accessibility seriously. But it doesn't stop there: 3D printers, and access to manufacturers in Asia, allow pensioners to design and build their own hardware, creating text input devices that take into account loss of dexterity, or video cameras that can be more easily operated by the elderly.

The over-60s are no longer a minority online. The web is their future as much as it is their grandchildren's and they embrace it with open arms.

Scenario 2: The 'we can' world

The idea of a 'ruling elite' has never felt more like an anachronism than it does in 2025. A series of political exposés has taken public confidence in the British political system to an all-time low. Sticking-plaster fixes by Parliament fail to fool the electorate and political engagement has collapsed. Low turnout at elections has led to far-right and fringe parties winning seats

in the House of Commons, further damaging the general public's trust in government.

Local government fares equally poorly. Budgets were mortally wounded by the recession of the late 2000s which led to swingeing cuts in crucial local services accompanied by unpopular rises in council tax. Further scandals, this time at a local level, led to hard questions being asked about how councils are funded and run, but satisfactory answers are few and far between.

As faith in the political system collapses, so does the media collapse. A failure to monetise the web during a period of falling advertising and subscription revenue deals a mortal blow to the press, with the majority of regional titles either closing or merging with neighbours. National titles fair just as badly, with the broadsheets — which have never sold as well as the tabloids — suffering the most closures. Advertising expenditure on television and radio also crash, taking down many stations. The BBC loses its licence fee completely and struggles with its transformation into a commercial business.

Worried about local terrorism as much as global terrorism, the UK government tightens terror laws. Whilst the worst excesses of surveillance are curtailed by the European Court of Human Rights, the government pushes for more surveillance and control. In stark contrast, individuals feel empowered as they never have before, using social technology to rally around causes and take positive action. Social networking tools extend people's social reach well beyond what was previously possible by hooking together many networks into one. With just a few hundred immediate contacts, one person can end up with a network of several million. This allows ideas to spread through society like wildfire, although not all of them do.

Activism is not limited to political agendas, although there is a lot of that going on. Rather, people are focused on the civic and personal needs of their own and of the people around them. Small local groups form to deal with local issues, such as lobbying the council to fix potholes, or to raise money to pay for local amenities such as refurbishing a children's playground. The internet also has 'localities,' and people who share a common interest in issues such as copyright reform or the provision of support for teenagers, gather virtually to effect change.

This grassroots activism is common and stops being the preserve of a vocal minority. It is easy to take action through e-democracy services that help people interact with their elected representatives or social tools that make activism fun. Culturally, being an activist is more acceptable, too. Gone are the days of rampant individualism that characterised the 1980s and 1990s; instead, people are returning to a more considered, collaborative way of being, and collective action is a big part of that cultural shift.

The idea of becoming a life-long supporter of a single cause fades as people shift their focus according to shifting priorities. *Ad hoc* groups raise money online, using services like PayPal, without creating large organisational structures but also without necessarily accounting for their expenditure. A high profile charity con results in an attempt to regulate, but there is little that can be achieved through legislation to combat such scams. Instead, a new class of civil society organisation is created which is easier, quicker and cheaper to set up, govern and dissolve, and which provides previously informal groups, and their supporters, with some legal protection.

The ease with which individuals can embrace voluntary work changes the nature of their relationship with existing civil society organisations. They can create symbiotic groups, which act to support existing associations, or groups which compete directly with them. This ability to self-organise is embraced by some traditional organisations who find creative ways to work with the talent available on the internet, frequently collaborating with groups that they never meet in person. Other civil society organisations reject this opportunity and find themselves becoming increasingly irrelevant. When an organisation does not embrace the web, the supporters of its cause fill the gap however they can, with or without their sanction or support.

The shift from passive to active support transforms civil society and online social tools are the glue that holds that activism together.

Scenario 3: The battle for attention

Social technology has made it easier than ever for people to keep in touch with friends, relatives, acquaintances and business contacts. Social networks and micro-conversation tools (such as Twitter) have encouraged people to maintain many relationships that would, in previous decades, have fallen by the wayside. These 'weak' relationships — perhaps with school friends that one no longer sees, or colleagues from a job one left years ago — last for years. Relationships wax and wane but rarely end.

The number of strong relationships that people maintain, however, has remained relatively small with most people relying on just a few close friends, but the spread of one person's influence is no longer limited to just their immediate circle of friends; instead, it ripples through their network of networks. People spend considerable time maintaining these networks and relationships; the feeling of being connected is important and enjoyable.

As the number of weak relationships people maintain blossoms, so do the opportunities for people to spend time socially online. The opportunities to interact online are seemingly endless, from the 'massively multiplayer online role-playing games' (MMPORGs) that gained huge popularity and mainstream acceptance during the 2000s, to blogging and all the applications and games provided by social networking platforms.

People spend more time making their own media. Video cameras are cheap, the skills required to shoot and edit short films are becoming common, and the social rewards for creating a YouTube hit are massive. More people are writing, too: not just blogs, but white papers, reports and novels. Crafting and tinkering with electronics has seen a popular resurgence as people long to make physical objects and to own beautiful hand-made pieces.

With all this competition it is harder than ever for traditional media to capture the attention of the masses. The average amount of time spent watching television has steadily declined and on-demand television services have proven to be too little, too late. As audience numbers fall, so advertising revenue falls with it, sending the broadcasting industry into a downwards spiral.

Some larger charities create their own broadcast television channels covering news and current affairs, but struggle to gain traction with audiences who are already disillusioned with the restrictions of a set television schedule. Smarter charities create applications for on-demand platforms such as Boxee which allow audiences to watch what they want, when they want. Marrying on-demand with the easy engagement afforded by social media helps to increase interest and take-up, turning previously a passive experience into something more inspiring and interactive.

Also in decline are music and film industries, whose lobbying of government for harsher intellectual property laws has done nothing to protect their decaying business models. The industry's habit of punishing fans for 'intellectual property infringement' has alienated the public, and fans have rallied round independent musicians and film makers, people are also continuing to make content themselves.

Attention has become a scarce resource. People have a limited number of leisure hours each day but the ways in which they can spend that time seems limitless. Industries and sectors that depend upon attention are fighting for their share. Advertising is not as effective as it once was and the shock tactics used by some civil society organisations to get their message across has had the opposite effect, alienating potential supporters.

The organisations that do well, whether business or civil society associations, are the ones which take the time to work with the changes, instead of fighting to return to the olden days. The careful building of relationships and a sense of community has replaced shiny PR campaigns. The concept of being 'on message'

is outmoded, as people not only appreciate honesty and transparency, they actually reward organisations who have shown themselves able to admit to, and correct, mistakes.

But despite the opportunities that social tools provide to connect with people, getting attention in this age of information continues to be challenging.

Questions raised by the future scenarios

How do civil society associations communicate effectively with their constituency in a world where attention is scarce and the media inaccessible?

The consolidation of the media market and increasing competition for attention will make it difficult for civil society associations to continue with their existing marketing and communications strategies. Print, television and radio advertising are likely to become less effective, and may even become uneconomic. Civil society associations will not be immune to consumers' green preferences, with direct mail campaigns attracting the ire of recipients. Supporters will want to be able to access more information and services via the internet.

What does it mean for civil society associations to nurture relationships with their members and supporters at an individual level?

As one-to-many communications styles becomes less effective, civil society associations will have to adapt their communications strategies and become more personal. Blog culture has set the scene and its watch-words remain: transparency, honesty, openness, authenticity. Brands do not have the power they once did, and conversation trumps PR 'messaging'. The concept of letting staff talk openly about their work on Twitter or blogs will at first be an anathema, but it will eventually become a business necessity.

How do civil society associations get up-to-date, and stay up-to-date, with technological advances which affect not only the way in which they communicate but also the way that they work?

Whilst it used to be the role of the IT department to assess and recommend new technology, most are now tasked with keeping the technical infrastructure 'safe' at any cost. Often the costs are flexibility, adaptability and agility. Organisations that rely on IT to identify new technology will lag behind those who empower employees to look at, experiment with and recommend social tools. This is particularly important at small organisations that have fewer resources. Digital literacy training will need to be widespread, as will an adaptable and curious mind.

How do civil society associations respond to a decrease in trust of authority figures and institutions?

A sea change in how people define and react to authority would fundamentally affect the position of civil society associations. If authority figures, such as MPs and business leaders, continue to abuse their position, and the gap between rich and poor continues to widen, so scepticism regarding authority will grow. This loss of respect for authority will affect the third sector with civil society associations expected to open themselves up to scrutiny in order to prove themselves trustworthy. Organisations will have to think carefully about how they can earn trust in a less trustful world; and leadership within civil society is key to this.

How do civil society associations create a culture of experimentation, and how do they learn to cope positively with failure?

The cost of experimenting with social media and other technologies is low, and set to go lower, with many open source tools available for free. The concept of a 'website launch' is outdated and outmoded, with new websites and services tending to invite a limited number of people to use the site in a private test before opening to the public. This allows sites to be improved in conjunction with users who no longer expect to be presented with finished, perfect software. This cultural change, from a controlling and risk-averse culture to an innovative and risk-accepting culture, is one that has shown itself to be key in technology and will become just as important in the third sector.

How can civil society associations use technology to fully empower their staff, volunteers, members and supporters to act, rather than passively receive information?

The web is not just a medium for communicating information but is also a platform for action. The 2008 US presidential election campaign by Barack Obama clearly illustrated how the web can be used to rally support, and raise funds, both online and offline. Civil society organisations which use the web just to broadcast will be much less successful than those who provide ways for supporters and volunteers to engage with the organisation and each other. Many of these paths to engagement may be very simple, but empowering people to take positive action via the internet will become a key part of civil society associations' work over the next 15 years.

Part 4:

Recommendations



This report makes a number of recommendations for government and policy-makers, funding organisations and civil society associations themselves. These include recommendations regarding the adoption and integration of social media by government, grant-giving bodies and third sector organisations, and in education; research into the use of the internet and social technologies in the UK; funding and resource allocation; knowledge sharing; and open source software. Most of these recommendations are straightforward, but it is worth paying special attention to the issue of training and the spread of digital skills.

If the third sector — and, indeed, the public and private sectors — is to flourish in this digital age, we must ensure everyone has the requisite skills to understand and take advantage of new communications technologies, both mobile and social. Lord Carter says in the 'Digital Britain' report (2009) that 'we believe digital life skills are essential for all citizens' and suggests a 'National Plan for Digital Participation' to replace the currently fragmented approach to media and digital literacy. A more coherent approach to improving digital literacy is to be welcomed, especially if it takes an informed and nuanced approach towards the internet and social technologies.

Unlike basic computing skills, such as word processing or spreadsheet manipulation, the core understanding required to make good use of social technologies is cultural, not procedural. Social tools are generally very simple to use, but using them to engage with the public in a meaningful way requires more than just an understanding of how to publish an update or upload a picture; rather, it requires gaining an insight into the motivations, behavioural norms and expectations that make up each tool's sub-culture.

Newcomers need to learn and understand the 'language' of the community, for example, the abbreviated language of @, DM and RT³ found on Twitter. Becoming a part of the community is the most effective way of learning that.

Both tools and languages are evolving quickly and will continue to do so for some time. Any education programme must teach the fundamental concepts that underlie social media, as well as encouraging key traits such as curiosity, empathy and communications skills, so that participants acquire the ability to adapt to the technology as it changes. However, if social media is sidelined or treated as equivalent to non-interactive digital behaviours, such as sending and receiving email, there is a significant risk of creating a false sense of understanding.

Any social technology skills programmes need to be organised in partnership with existing social media communities, such as the Tuttle Club (<http://tuttleclub.wordpress.com>) and experienced practitioners. This work also needs to be done out in the open, in public view, so that anyone with relevant knowledge and interest can assist.

A well-considered social media literacy programme could have wider benefits than just improving digital inclusion. By encompassing social media and its culture as part of a wider digital media literacy programme, the government and civil society associations could also empower individuals to take part in activities online, such as participating in web-based local community projects that would improve their offline social inclusion.

Recommendations for governments and policy makers

- Experienced social media practitioners should be an integral part of any digital media literacy or digital inclusion programme, and should be included in consultations and steering groups.
- All governmental and allied groups working on digital media literacy and digital inclusion projects should adopt social media for internal collaboration, and external consultation and conversation, so that all those involved have first-hand experience of the tools and their culture(s).
- Governments should consider the impact social technology could have on tackling issues such as employment or social inclusion/exclusion and, accordingly, widen digital literacy initiatives both within their own departments and the constituencies they serve.
- Centres of excellence in social media, whether community-organised, in business or academia, should be identified, recognised and supported.
- Research into the use of the internet by the British population is currently fragmented and sporadic. Whilst both Ofcom and the Office for National Statistics produce general research, there is a lack of work focused on areas such as social media or use of email. This report strongly recommends that a new body, a British Internet Institute, be formed to carry out original quantitative and qualitative research, and meta-analyses of research produced by other organisations. Such a body should be independent of the government and should focus not just on issues of the moment but carry out longitudinal studies that will give clear indications of trends and variations. This would provide data to the third sector, business and governments.
- Social media should be embedded into the education system at all levels. It should be used to: support students; empower educators to share information and collaborate; and help strengthen the relationship between educators and students' families. The ICT curriculum should be updated to include social technology and should develop relevant aptitudes

such as curiosity, collaboration skills and communications skills. Embedding social technology in education may also help drive more general adoption of ICT.

- Social media should become an integral part of governments, from local to national levels. Using social technology will not just be beneficial from a practical point of view, but will also help spread the skills required to understand the medium amongst those who make policy. It could also help humanise the government in the eyes of the public and help regain their trust.

Recommendations for funding organisations

- Funds should be set aside for cross-sector social media training, coaching and mentoring, and the creation of free/open source training materials, case studies and other resources. Such projects should be led from within the social technologies community.
- Funding organisations should also adopt social media internally for collaboration, and externally for communication, as a matter of course so that they become better equipped to understand social media projects.
- Additional help should be given to smaller organisations to ensure that they are not excluded from participation.
- Recognition and assistance should be given to informal, *ad hoc* civil society groups and the individuals who wish to start them.
- Grant giving organisations should consider how the projects they fund could be improved by the use of the web and should encourage organisations to include social technology in their project plans. They should also be willing to provide additional budget to ensure that social media is worked into the fabric of the project, not bolted on as an afterthought.
- Adherence to web standards, particularly regarding accessibility, should be encouraged for all projects with a web component.
- Grants should be given for focused research into the use of social media and the web by civil society associations, to create a portfolio of case studies and best practices, including return on investment, metrics and resourcing needs.

- Funders should invest in projects that will help build technical capabilities across civil society associations; for example, schemes that bring together developers and organisations to work on open source projects which could then be used or adapted by any other organisation.
- It is essential that funders be supportive of experiments and risk-taking. There is no one clear route to social media success and some projects will not work out as well as hoped. These must not be seen as damning but as part of a wider learning experience.
- The sharing of experience should be built into project plans, covering both success stories and lessons learned from projects that didn't work out so well. Full and frank discussion of how social media fits into the civil society agenda is an important way to develop both our understanding and future applications.

Recommendations for civil society associations

- Associations should earmark funds to pay for ongoing social media awareness training for as many staff as possible, especially trustees/management and those staff 'at the coal face'.
- Additional training should be focused on those with the right aptitudes; for example, curiosity, the ability to communicate clearly, and the desire to connect with people. These people can then become social media champions within each organisation.
- Volunteers, supporters and members should also be offered assistance in understanding new social technologies and opportunities to participate in their organisation's social media projects.
- Organisations should ensure that individuals have the resources, especially time, to engage with social technologies.
- An individual or team within the organisation should be charged with learning about and experimenting with social technologies on an ongoing basis, and to share their discoveries throughout the organisation.
- Social tools should be used internally for collaboration and communication. Blogs, wikis and social bookmarking tools are particularly useful in an internal context. A small number of tools should be chosen which fit into existing work schedules. It is important to understand resource limitations and not try to do too much.
- Associations must be aware of each tool's Terms of Service, where they exist, and ensure that their ramifications are understood. Some tools, for example, have clauses about content ownership and licensing or fair use policies which may affect use.
- Open source software should be embraced. Many social media tools have been built by a community of developers and released for free under an open source licence, the terms of which must be understood. It can be valuable to spend time getting to know the developer community, so that help can be requested if the tool needs to do something it currently doesn't.
- All content – text, video, audio or photos – should be released under a Creative Commons licence⁴ so that others can reuse and redistribute it for, thus increasing reach.
- Associations should work with external consultants and mentors who can advise on strategy and implementation. Whilst the tools might be easy to use, using them well can be harder.
- It is important to share success stories, lessons, problems and knowledge both internally across the organisation but also externally with other organisations.
- Associations should engage with non-civil society social media communities and attend events focused on social media (many of which are free).
- Individuals should be free to let their personalities come through. Social media is not a form of corporate communication but a one-to-one conversation so it is essential to let people be themselves.
- Do not just focus on younger members of staff. Having a talent for social media is all about one's mindset, not age or technological history. Older members of staff can take to social tools just as well as their younger counterparts.

- It is essential to ensure there is space for dissent and that dissenting views are evaluated honestly and fairly, and acted upon when necessary.
- Online and offline strategies should be integrated. Whilst internet penetration is improving there are still segments of the UK population who either do not have access to the internet or choose not to use it. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report 'Poverty in the media' (Robinson *et al.*, 2009) provides valuable insight into the digital divide.
- If associations create their own social tools, which collect or store personal information, obligations under the Data Protection Act (www.ico.gov.uk) must be fully understood and met.
- Associations should at all times respect the privacy of both their users and their staff.

Looking forward

The internet has changed the world immeasurably over the last 15 years, and its reach continues to grow. AMD has compiled statistics which show that, globally, 1.5 billion people are now online (2009). Forrester analyst Josh Bernoff (2008) reports that 'social technology participation has grown rapidly' and 'social activity is way up among 35-44 year-olds, especially when it comes to joining social networks and reading and reacting to content.'

Despite these statistical trends, accusations that social technologies are a fad continue. For example, a 'poll of communicators conducted by Ragan Communications and PollStream found that 54% of 702 respondents claim Twitter is a fad and will plateau' (Miller, 2009).

To label social tools as a fad is to wrongly focus on a specific service or tool rather than on the behaviour that it enables. Although individual tools, services and platforms may wax and wane, the underlying concept of enabling social interaction between individuals via the web is one which speaks to fundamental human needs. The urge to communicate, to connect with others, to express ourselves and to learn will never change. The tools which enable those activities will have

a staying power far beyond our expectations.

Every part of society is going to be touched by social technology and these changes will provide a valuable opportunity for civil society associations to become more efficient, more capable and more adaptable. Social tools provide a way for organisations to form stronger relationships with their supporters, their audience and their volunteers, and to streamline their own working processes. As social media becomes more widespread, so too will the expectation of being able to interact socially with all manner of organisations, and people will begin to favour those who meet that expectation.

Civil society associations can protect themselves from becoming marginalised by providing ways for supporters to participate socially online in the ways that they, the supporters, want. Even small investments of time, for example in Twitter, can reap dividends both predicted and unexpected. The low financial cost of most social technologies means they are within reach of even the tiniest organisation. Social media will inevitably enable and encourage existing organisations to do things differently, such as fundraising, service provision and campaigning, but it will also lead to the flourishing of new civil society organisations.

The web in 2025 will not be just 'more of the same', but is likely to be unrecognisable compared to what we have today. Exactly how it will change is unknowable but we can prepare for the unknown by focusing on the traits that make people and organisations adaptable, forward thinking and innovative.

Appendix 1: Methodologies and limitations

Social media survey

The social media survey was carried out using the online service Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). Questions were constructed by the author in conjunction with Carnegie UK Trust and covered:

- information about the organisation;
- the organisation's use of social tools on the web and plans for future development;
- the organisation's use of social tools internally and plans for future development;
- the organisation's and the individual's understanding of social media.

The survey requested that respondents be based in the UK and able to answer authoritatively regarding their organisation's internet use. A total of 108 organisations began the survey with 79 (73.1%) completing it. The majority (89.1%) of respondents who indicated their location said that they were based in the UK. Respondents were self-selecting.

The survey was open to any third sector organisation, regardless of their use of the internet, and included questions for organisations that did not have a web presence. The majority of respondents did have a website; only four organisations completed the section for organisations without a website.

The survey was promoted through a variety of channels, the majority of them electronic, including emails to potential respondents and posts on blogs, forums and Twitter. This is likely to have excluded organisations which are not present on the internet (their contact details will not have been readily available to the author) or organisations which do not use or regularly check email.

The author contacted approximately 270 third sector organisations directly, via email or their web contact form, to invite them to participate. Notices about the survey were sent out to mailing lists, including The Union Post.

Although organisations with local groups could have completed the survey multiple times to represent each group individually, this did not happen. Any organisations with local offices were represented in the survey results as a single entity which may give an inaccurate picture of the use of social media by local offices.

These limitations suggest that the survey is likely to have over-reported the use of social technology.

Website assessment methodologies

The website assessments, carried out by the author, examined what social technologies were used by organisations, how well they were used, and their usability and look-and-feel. The assessment included both quantitative and qualitative components.

A non-random sample of 56 civil society associations was selected to give a cross-section of organisation types, sizes and competencies.

The list was compiled by the author in conjunction with Carnegie UK Trust to ensure that it was as representative as possible. Some organisations which were known to be using social media were added to the list to provide balance.

Types of civil society association:

- Voluntary community organisation
- Co-operative
- Credit union
- Faith-based group
- Foundation
- Movement
- Network
- Social business
- Trade union
- Umbrella organisation
- Community group

Of the initial list, 32 organisations' websites were assessed, including at least one from each category. Of the websites assessed three were either non-functional or 'under construction', reducing the number of websites with completed assessments to 29. Some websites had member-only areas which were not accessible for assessment.

The assessment sought to answer both quantitative and qualitative questions:

- Does the site use any social functionality or provide syndication feeds?
- What third party tools were mentioned, linked too or included on the site?
- What media, e.g. audio or video, was used on the site?
- Does the site mention or link to any virtual worlds?
- Does the website say that it has been optimised for mobile use, or provide information on mobile applications?
- What tone of voice does the site use?
- What can visitors do on the site?
- Rate the look and feel of the site, e.g. design and layout.
- Rate the navigation and usability, e.g. is it easy to get around?
- Rate the ease of finding the blog, if the site has one, and the use of standard blog 'furniture', e.g. calendar, categories, archives.
- Rate the ease of finding RSS, if the site has it.
- Rate the ease of finding audio/video.
- How many links in from other websites does the main URL have in Icerocket?
- Does the site link out? To how many other sites?

Qualitative answers were based on a 1-5 scale.

'Look and feel' ratings were based on the overall attractiveness of the site, including: consistency of design from page to page; use of white space; consistency of navigation placement, font, colour palette and layout.

'Navigation and usability' ratings were based on the ease of getting about the site, including: whether links or buttons were labelled accurately and took the visitor to the expected page; how easy it was to get back to previously visited pages (without using the browser 'back' button); information architecture as portrayed by the navigation bar; how easy it was to find a specific type of information; and use of breadcrumbs and wayfinding navigation.

'Ease of finding RSS' ratings were based on whether there was a link to the RSS feed, and how prominent it was, or whether the presence of RSS was indicated only by the Firefox browser displaying the RSS icon in the address bar, and not by any link on the site.

'Ease of finding audio/video' ratings were based on whether it was easy or difficult to find audio or video on the site, including: whether there were links in the navigation to audio/video material; whether it was embedded or linked-to in a blog or podcast; and whether that was itself linked to.

These assessments should not be treated as representative but should be viewed instead as an opportunity to gain anecdotal insight into the quality of third sector websites.

Futures methodology

Research for the futures section of the report was carried out by talking to a variety of technologists and third sector practitioners. Interviews of varying lengths were conducted with James Cox, entrepreneur;⁵ J. P. Rangaswami, Managing Director of Service Design at British Telecom;⁶ Chris Messina, entrepreneur and open web advocate;⁷ and Ross Mayfield, Chairman, President and Co-founder of Socialtext.⁸ These interviews were published on the web for public comment.⁹

Additional workshops were held at Google headquarters and at O'Reilly Media's Social Web FooCamp unconference. A final workshop was held in London and attended by technologists, social media experts and civil society practitioners.¹⁰

At this workshop, attendees were initially split into three groups to consider different types of change.

Predetermined driving forces

- What forces appear to be predetermined?
- What changes in the broader environment appear unavoidable?
- What assumptions are these changes based upon?

Uncertain driving forces

- What might happen over the next 15 years that would affect social technology?
- How uncertain are they?
- Which are becoming more certain?
- If you could have any question answered about what will happen by 2025, what would it be?

Wildcard events

- What type of unexpected developments could totally change the game?
- What could undermine existing assumptions?

Groups then reported back to the room and key issues were discussed in more depth.

Once the workshops and interviews were complete themes were identified across all change types and examined for underlying trends.¹¹ These were then developed into Key Drivers of Change which, in turn, informed three scenarios for the future development of social media and its impact on civil society organisations.

Literature review

A literature search, focused on the use of social media by civil society organisations, discovered that existing studies have been carried out predominantly in America. Whilst this does provide a useful insight, readers must be aware that the situation in the UK could be very different to that in the US.

Research into general internet use does exist in the UK, such as that carried out by Ofcom or the Office for National Statistics, but this rarely mentions social media and does not focus on civil society. It provides only general context rather than clear and specific insight into the use of social media by civil society associations.

Much of the research into social media usage in the UK is market research, rather than academic work, and so assessing the rigour with which it has been carried out is difficult.

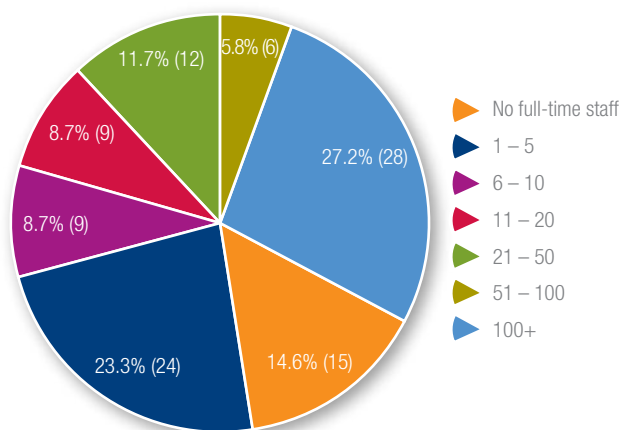
Overall, it is clear that there is a significant need for more work in the UK in this area, and that our understanding of the current state of play is thus limited.

Appendix 2: Survey analysis

About the organisations

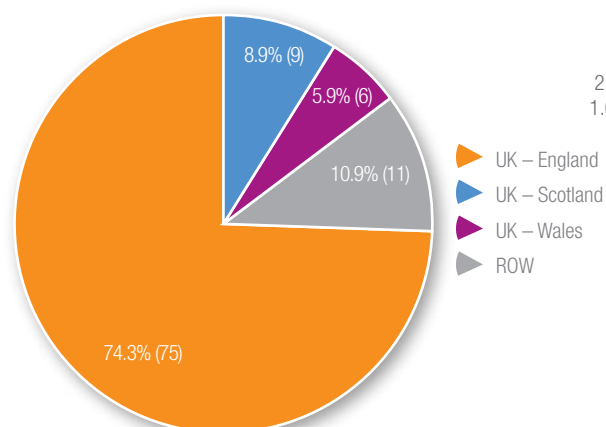
Most of the organisations that responded to the survey were either relatively large – 27.2% of organisations had 100+ full-time staff (or equivalent) – or relatively small, with 23.3% having between one and five full time staff (or equivalent) and 14.6% having no full-time staff at all (see Chart 1).

Chart 1: Size of organisation
(number of full-time staff or equivalent)



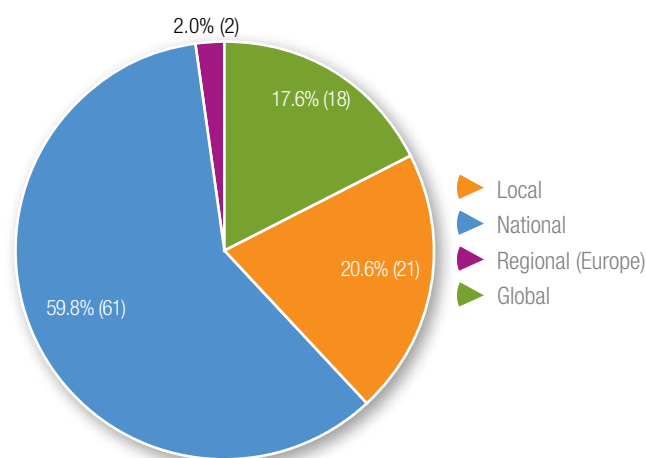
The majority of respondents were headquartered in the UK (74.3%), with 5.9% in Wales, 8.9% in Scotland and none in Northern Ireland. The remaining respondents were outside of the United Kingdom (see Chart 2).

Chart 2: Location of your organisation's head office



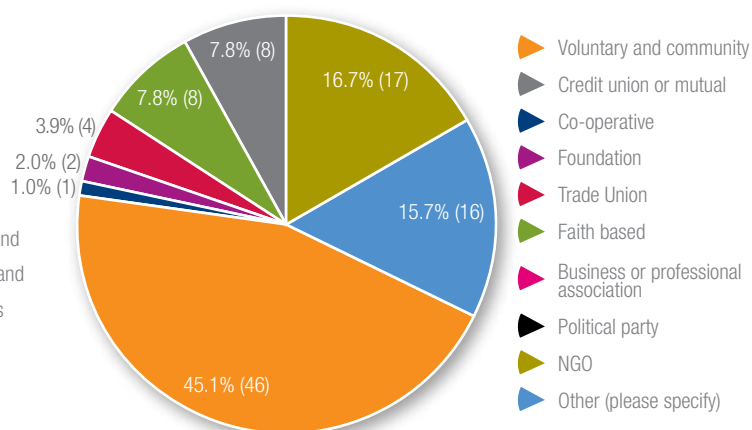
Over half (59.8%) of organisations had a national remit, with 20.6% focusing on local issues, 17.6% on global issues and only 2% focusing on European-level issues (see Chart 3).

Chart 3: Your organisation's geographic remit



The majority of respondents represented voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) (45.1%) or NGOs (16.7%). Analysis of the 'other' category shows at least another eight VCOs and a think tank. No organisations identified as a credit union/mutual or political party (see Chart 4).

Chart 4: What kind of organisation do you work for?



The most common primary objectives for organisations were service delivery (47.0%), influencing public policy or lobbying (47.0%), campaigning and advocacy (45.0%) and publishing information (40.0%). (Respondents could choose multiple objectives). Responses in the 'other' category included religious activity, research, publishing and provision of funding (see Chart 5, below).

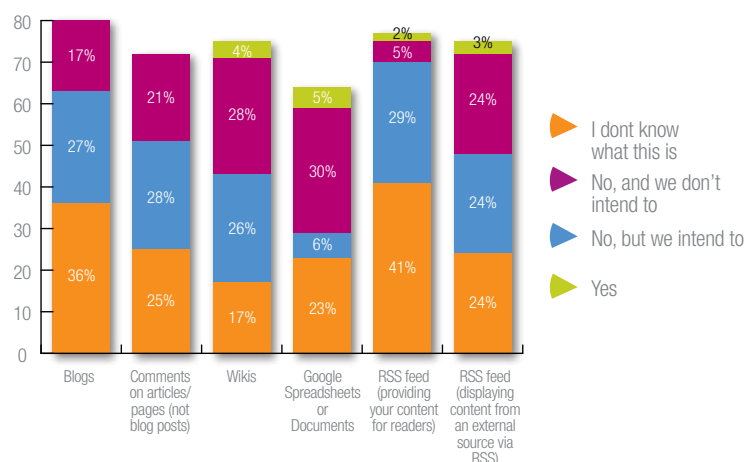
General website information

Of the organisations that responded to the question, 97.1% said that they had a website, and 2.9% said that they did not.

Many organisations with websites used a content management system (CMS) (44.6%), 18.1% were updated manually, and 28.9% combined a CMS with manually updated pages. Of those who answered 'other' (7.2%), three specified that the site was being redesigned, one said that most of the content is user-generated, one uses a wiki and one said that the site was 'rarely updated and useless'.

Most websites were managed either by team members uploading content for themselves or their team (38.6%), or by a web team or designated individual (36.1%). Only in 12% of cases could anyone within the organisation upload content. Some responses to the 'other' category (12%) indicated that some organisations have editorial processes through which some or any staff member can write content, but only designated individuals can make it live on the site.

Graph 1: Does your organisation use any of these social tools on your own website (or hosted elsewhere)?



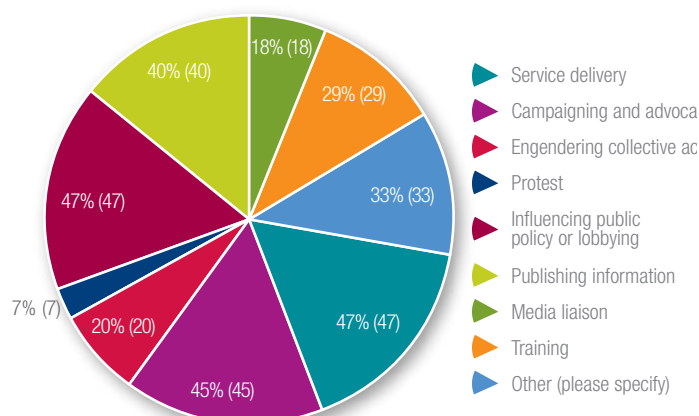
Use of on-site social tools

The most popular social technology was RSS, with 50% of organisations providing a feed of their own content for readers. Blogs were the next most popular (43.9%), followed by comments on articles (not blog posts) (30.1%). Displaying content from an external source, such as news headlines or Delicious bookmarks, by using an incoming RSS feed, was done by 29.3%, with 28% using Google Spreadsheets or Documents and, finally, 20.7% using wikis. (Respondents could select multiple options.)

About a third of respondents are intending to implement RSS feeds, comments, blogs, wikis and incoming RSS feeds, with only 7% intending to implement Google Spreadsheets or Documents.

Levels of awareness were very high, with only a small percentage of people not knowing what wikis, Google Spreadsheets or Documents, or RSS are and everyone knowing what blogs are (see Graph 1, above).

Chart 5: What are the primary objectives of your organisation (tick all that apply)



Use of third party social tools

Use and knowledge of third party social tools was generally higher than with on-site social tools. The most popular type of third party tools were social networks such as Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn (68.3%), followed by video sharing sites such as YouTube (62.2%), micro-conversation tools such as Twitter or Identi.ca (58.5%), and photo sharing sites such as Flickr (51.2%). Social bookmarking sites such as Delicious, and community tools such as Ning and Webjam, were less popular, at 35.4% and 20.7% respectively.

About one fifth of respondents said that they intend to use third party tools, with a fairly even spread across all tool types. A higher proportion said that they had no intention of using third party social tools with just under a third saying they had no intention to use tools such as Delicious, Ning or Flickr, and about 15% saying they would not use tools like Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube.

Overall, familiarity with these tools was high, with only one respondent not having heard of Twitter, four not having heard of Delicious, but nearly 20% had not heard of community tools such as Ning or Webjam.

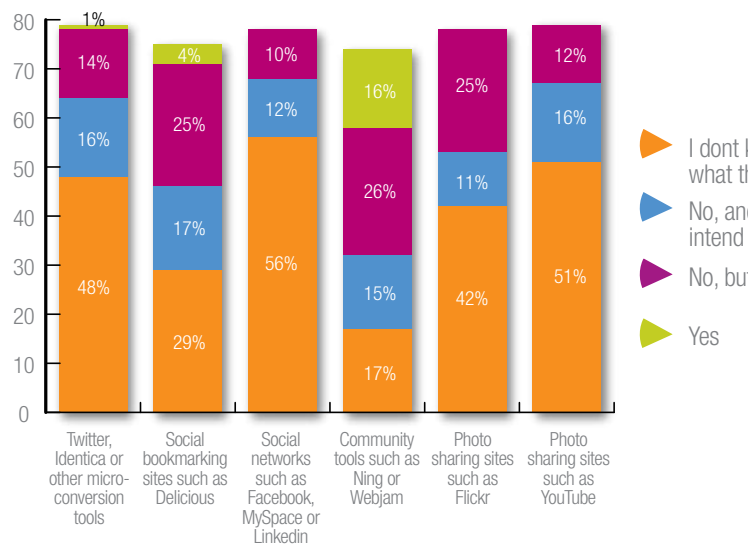
Two respondents specified that they used Slideshare, a tool for sharing presentations, and another is developing their own community tools. Other third party tools such as LiveBlogs, Netvibes, CommentOnThis, Second Life, Dipity, uStream, CoverItLive, Tumblr and Friendfeed were also mentioned (see Graph 2, above right).

Use of audio and video

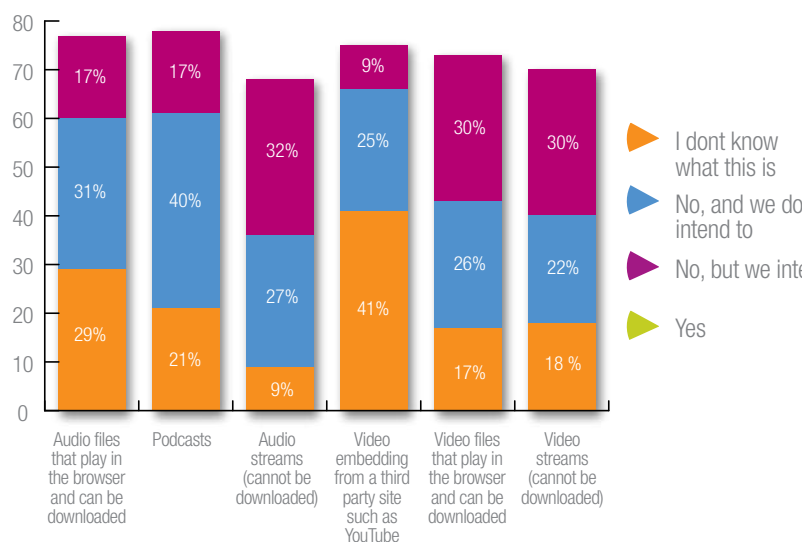
Video in all its forms was more popular than audio, with embedded video from sites such as YouTube the most popular way to use media (50%). Downloadable audio (not podcasts) was the next most popular (35%), followed by podcasts, downloadable video and streaming video, which were each used by about one fifth of respondents. Audio streams were the least popular way to deliver media (11%).

Nearly half of respondents intend to start a podcast with 37.8% wanting to use downloadable audio. Around one third of respondents are intending to use the other media types.

Graph 2: Does your organisation use any of these third party social tools?



Graph 3: Is there media other than text on your website?



Around 37% of respondents have no intention to use media streams or video downloads, with one fifth not intending to use audio downloads or podcasts. Only 11% do not intend to use video hosting services such as YouTube (see Graph 3, above).

Use of virtual worlds

Very few organisations are using virtual worlds with only 5% maintaining a presence in Second Life and 1.3% in Habbo Hotel, and not many intending to (10% and 5.1% respectively).

The vast majority of respondents (72.5% for Second Life and 70.9% for Habbo Hotel) have no plans to use virtual worlds and many did not know what they are (12.5% and 22.8% respectively).

Forums/bulletin boards, CD-ROMs and interactive television.

Nearly two fifths of respondents said that they provided forums or bulletin boards for users, and/or provided multimedia CD-ROMs for free or for purchase. Only two organisations make use of interactive television.

A few respondents intend to provide such services, with 18.5% intending to offer forums, 6.2% intending to offer multimedia CD-ROMs, and 3.7% intending to offer interactive TV. The majority of respondents did not offer or intend to offer these services.

Use of mobile

Again, there was very low take up of mobile services, with 10% offering a website optimised for mobile use and 3.7% offering mobile applications. Although in contrast to virtual worlds, a greater proportion is intending to provide these services, with 42.5% intending to optimise their website, and 30% intending to offer mobile applications.

Although around one third of organisations have no plans to optimise, and half have no plans to offer mobile applications; only a few respondents were not familiar with the concepts.

Adequacy of the tools

The majority (84.2%) of respondents felt that existing tools catered for their needs, with 15.8% feeling that they lacked the tools to do what they wanted online.

Of those who responded, two are developing their own community platform, and another is developing an integrated diary tool for mobile and web.

Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a part of 45% of respondents' web strategy, with 27.5% viewing it as a 'side-effect' of using social tools. Another 27.5% do not think about SEO.

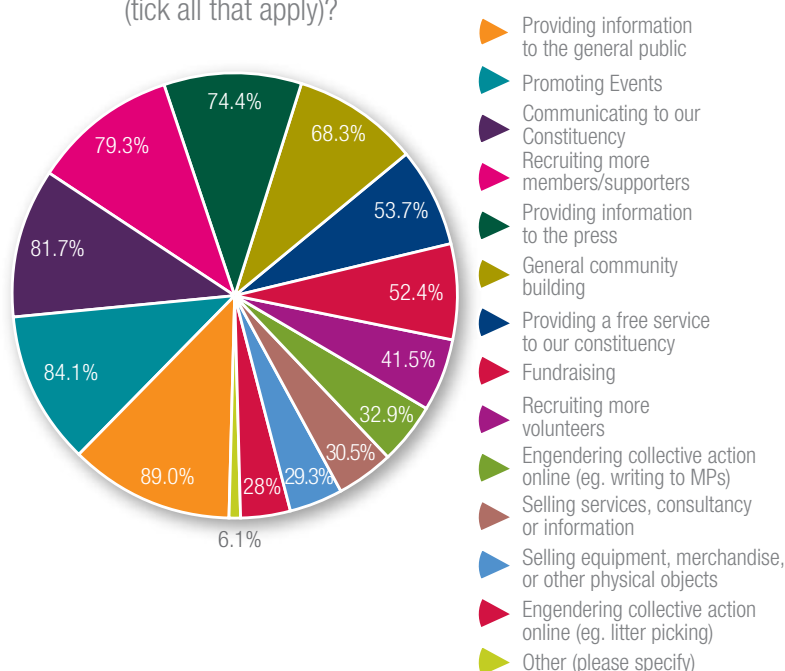
Reasons for maintaining a web presence

The three most popular reasons for having a website were to provide information to the general public (89%), followed by event promotion (84%) and communicating to the organisation's constituency (81.7%).

The three least popular reasons were engendering collective action offline (28%); selling equipment, merchandise or other physical objects (29.3%); and selling services, consultancy or information (30.5%). Surprisingly, only 52.4% of organisations said they used the web for fundraising, and only 41.5% said they used it for recruiting more volunteers (see Chart 6). (Respondents could select multiple options).

Chart 6: What does your organisation aim to achieve with its web presence

(tick all that apply)?

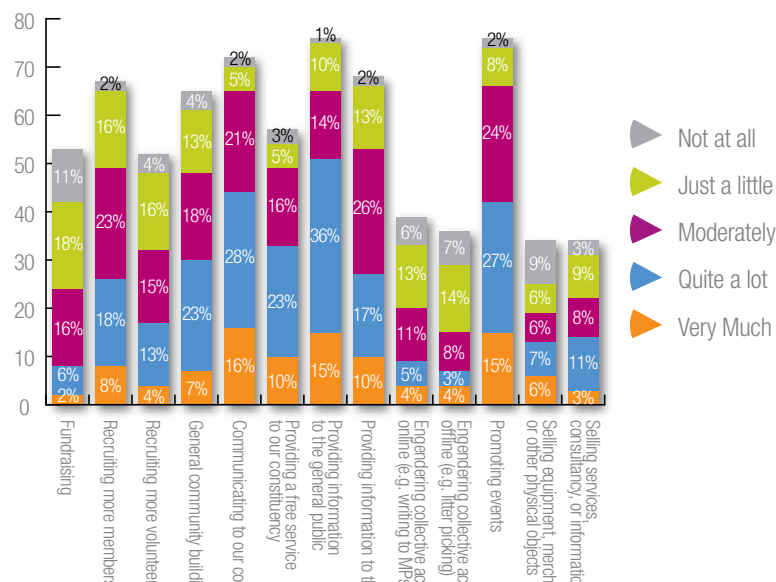


Success of web presence in meeting goals

The three activities deemed most successful (by combining the 'very much' and 'quite a lot' responses) were also the most popular reasons for having a website: to provide information to the general public, event promotion, and communicating to the organisation's constituency.

The least successful activities (by combining the 'just a little' and 'not at all' responses) were fundraising, engendering collective action offline, and recruiting more volunteers. But when measured by looking at the actions that get the fewest positive responses in the successful category, they were fundraising, engendering collective action offline, and engendering collective action online (see Graph 4, above right).

Graph 4: How successful would you rate your organisation's web presence at achieving your goals?

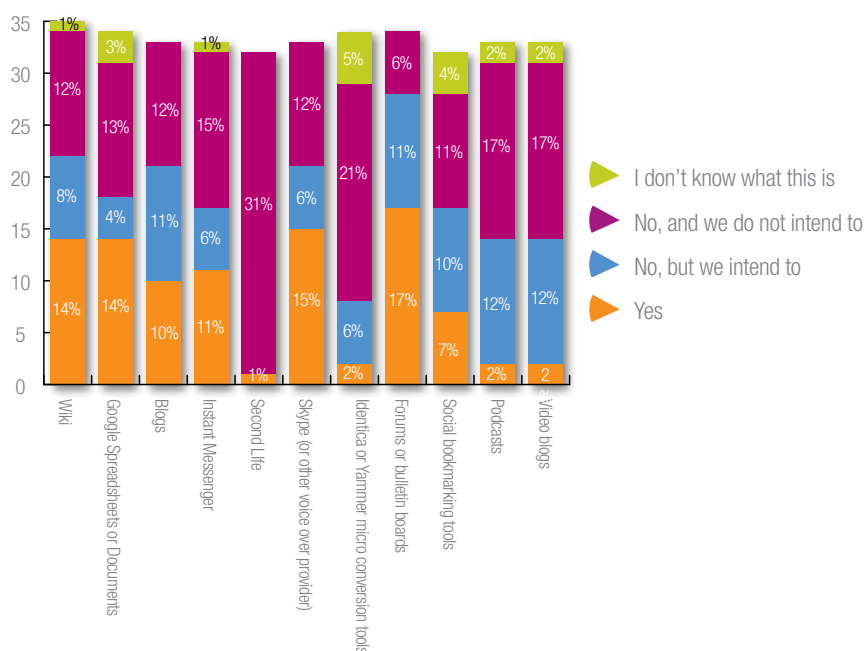


Organisations without websites

Of the three respondents who continued the questionnaire after indicating that they did not have a website, all were small VCOs: two of them have no full-time staff and one had between six and ten staff. The reasons given for not having one were that they do not have time to devote to it (66%) and that they haven't got round to it yet (100%).

Two respondents plan to have a website within the next six months, and one plans to have one at some point in the future. Their web strategy will include blogs, RSS feeds, Twitter or other micro-conversation tools, social networks such as Facebook or MySpace, video sharing sites such as YouTube, downloadable audio, podcasts and audio streams.

Graph 5: Does your organisation use any of these social tools internally (tick all that apply)?



One respondent said, 'Only one or two other people on the committee are even on email! We definitely need a website, but I don't know how I'd even start to explain social media to everybody else!'

About organisations' intranets

Just under half (45.5%) of organisations have an intranet, i.e. an internal website that only staff and those with permission can see. The primary reasons for having an intranet is to share information (89.2%), publish information to staff (83.8%), and store documents (83.8%). Only 54.1% used the intranet to collaborate. Other reasons given were to organise social events, manage room bookings, have discussions and provide 'yellow pages' functionality.

Most (48.6%) intranets are administered by a web team or designated individuals, with 40.5% open to anyone to upload content. In 5.4% of cases, no one had responsibility to add content, or the intranet was abandoned or forgotten.

The most popular technology used internally is the forum (48.6%), followed by the internet telephony application Skype (42.9%). The first social tool to rank is the wiki at 40%, with Google Spreadsheets and Documents at 40%, and blogs at 28.6%.

The least popular tools were Second Life (2.9%), micro-conversation tools such as Identi.ca or Yammer (5.7%), podcasts, (5.7%) and video blogs (5.7%).

Fewer organisations intended to implement these tools than did not intend to. Knowledge of these tools was relatively high, but still a small proportion of respondents did not have knowledge of seven out of the eleven tool types mentioned (see Graph 5, left).

Organisations without intranets

Of the 45 organisations that did not have an intranet the majority (62.2%) said that they had no plans to create one. Of those who said that they were 13.3% said that they were going to create one within the next six months, 4.4% within the next six to 12 months and 20% at some point in the future.

Of those organisations that are not going to create an intranet, the vast majority said that an intranet was not needed, two respondents said that either their information was all made public or that an intranet didn't fit their transparent ethos. Others said that their organisation was too small and that they could communicate effectively enough using other tools.

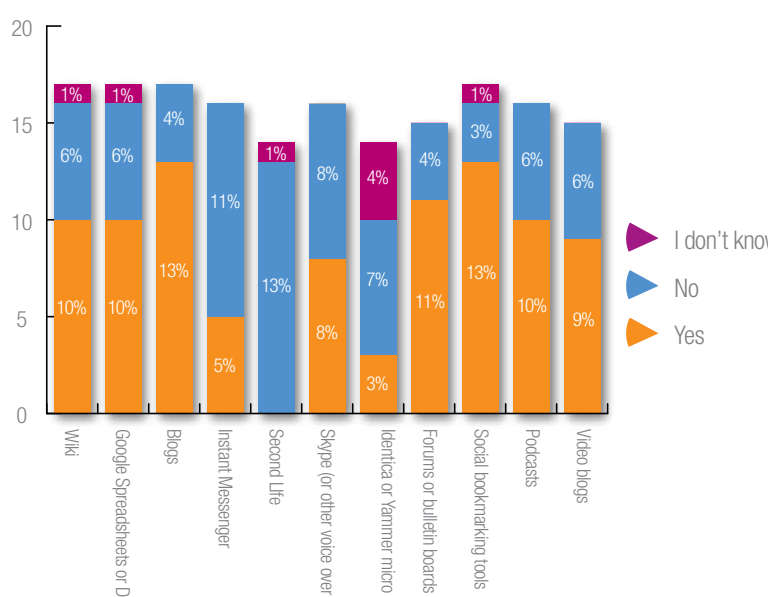
Plans for using social tools internally

Of those organisations that plan to create an intranet, the most popular tools were blogs (72.2%) and social bookmarking tools (72.2%), followed by forums (61.1%) and then wikis, Google Spreadsheets and Documents, and podcasts, all at 55.5%.

Least popular were Second Life (0%), micro-conversation tools such as Identi.ca or Yammer (16.6%), and instant messenger (27.7%).

Again, most organisations knew of most of the tools (see Graph 6, below).

Graph 6: If yes, do you plan to use any of the following social tools (tick all that apply)?



Understanding of social tools

The vast majority of respondents (78%) said that they personally found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to use social tools, with 14.6% saying it was 'reasonably easy', and 3.6% saying it was 'difficult'. Just 3.7% said they had never used any social tools.

When asked about their understanding of social tools, 82.7% said that they understood social tools 'very well' or 'moderately well', 16% saying that they could 'work it out', and 1.2% saying that they do not understand it. None said they are confused by it.

But respondents rated their organisations' understanding less favourably, with only 50.6% saying that their organisations understood social tools 'very well' or 'moderately well', 37% saying that organisations can 'work it out', and 12.3% saying that they do not understand it or are confused by it.

When looking at only the highest levels of understanding, 57.3% of respondents said they find it 'very easy' to use social tools, 49.4% said they understood social tools 'very well'; but only 12.3% said their organisations understand social tools 'very well'.

Expanding the use of social media

When asked what would help their organisation expand their use of social media, most respondents (74.1%) said that they need to know 'which tools are useful for what', would like more case studies (50.6%), and would like training in how the tools work (44.4%). Only 38.3% said they would need more information about the different tools available.

Of those who answered 'other', many of them said that they needed more time and resources, as well as pointers to the 'best free training resources on the net'. Respondents also expressed a need for more willingness to adopt new ways of working in their organisations and 'strategies for overcoming nervousness at senior levels'.

Over half of respondents (56.3%) said that they had social media role models to follow.

How does social media help organisations to achieve their goals?

When asked an open-ended question about how social media helps them reach their goals, many respondents replied that it allowed them to reach more people, often people of a different demographic to their usual members/supporters. Many also mentioned raising awareness of their activities, creating the opportunity for conversation, and providing networking opportunities.

Other comments included:

'Allows geographically spread officials and volunteers [to] communicate and co-ordinate and feel part of the organisation.'

'Essential for the interaction that maintains and builds relationships.'

'The area is complex as the online constituents are not necessarily our whole body — many of whom do not use the internet widely. We hope that through using [social] tools not on our own website we can encourage dialogue and debate.'

'Both Facebook and YouTube enable us to reach a different demographic.'

'It creates a regular channel of communication with key stakeholders.'

'It allows expression and conversation and creativity across groups who might not encounter one another in print or in their ordinary social life.'

'As a small organisation, social media helps us to 'punch above our weight and allows us to differentiate ourselves from other local non-profits.'

'We have a very engaged audience once a year, but social media tools have enabled us to develop this more year-round further building loyalty and helped our audience promote the event for us.'

How do you measure success?

When asked an open-ended question about how they know that social media is helping their organisation to achieve their goals, the majority of respondent said that they used website traffic statistics to see how successful their social media use was. Because website statistics analysis can show web managers where visitors to their website came from ('referrals') they can see whether people are clicking on links to their website in different social tools such as Twitter or Facebook.

Many respondents said that they used the amount of activity by their audience on social tools as a metric of success, e.g. number of followers on Twitter, number of fans on Facebook page, number of photos uploaded to Flickr. Also popular was gauging by direct feedback from users, and word-of-mouth from the community.

Some respondents, however, either do not yet know how to monitor success, or are not doing so.

Appendix 3: Website assessments

Overall impressions

Many of the websites assessed suffered from poor visual design, i.e. the way that the site looks, its page layout and colour palette, with 72.4% scoring average or worse, including 44.8% scoring poor or very poor. Many of the sites were confused and cluttered, lacking clear calls to action and with little opportunity to interact either with the organisation itself or the related community of interest. Only 27.6% scored good or very good for visual design.

The navigation and usability of most sites was also of a poor standard with 86.2% scoring average or worse and just 13.8% reaching a good standard. The main problem was that many of the sites had multiple navigation menus, sometimes as many as eight navigation areas on one page, which made it very difficult to find information and keep track of which pages had been visited. Standard navigation tools such as 'wayfinding navigation', i.e. clear text-based menus at the bottom of the page, were used by only two sites and 'breadcrumb navigation', i.e. showing users their path through the site at the top of the page, was also rarely used.

Two sites had particularly poor navigation, with one site actually turning out to be a mishmash of microsites some of which had the same design and navigation items and some of which had totally different designs and no clear link back to the starting point. The other site had menu items that changed, with no visible logic, depending on which page the visitor was on.

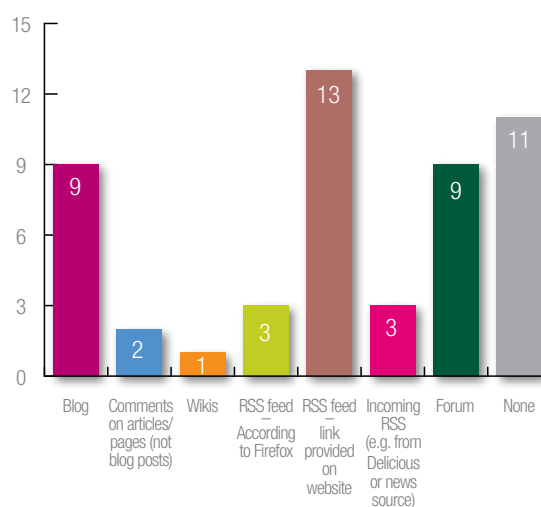
On larger sites, the information architecture tended to be overly complex and confusing, reflecting the association's internal organisational structure rather than the needs of the visitor. Few sites showed any evidence of user-focused design (which concentrates on understanding the site through the eyes of the user, and what they wish to achieve during their visit to the site). The majority of sites would benefit from even basic usability testing, and by utilising specialised feedback-gathering services such as UserVoice or Get Satisfaction to allow users to share and discuss ideas for improvements to the site.

Many of the sites that used social media did so in an almost perfunctory manner, failing to adapt to the prevalent culture of social media and thus missing opportunities to fully engage with their community.

1. Social functionality and syndication

Does the site provide any social functionality, such as blogs, or syndication tools, such as RSS, that visitors can use without having to go to a third party site or application? (See Graph 7).

Graph 7: Does the website contain/ provide any social functionality?



Overall, 62.1% of sites provided some sort of social or syndication functionality, however limited, but 37.9% provided only static non-interactive content.

The most popular tool was RSS, which was used by 51.7% of sites assessed, although two of the sites did not provide an explicit link to their RSS feed on their website. Instead, its presence was indicated by the Firefox browser, which provides the RSS logo in the location bar on every site that has a discoverable RSS feed.

One third of the websites that provided an RSS feed did not have a blog. Instead, they produced feeds of press releases, news articles or events listings. Conversely, one blog had no RSS feed.

The majority of the RSS feeds (34.5%) were easy to find, being linked prominently either in the navigation or on a dedicated page. Only four of the feed links were difficult to find or completely absent (indicated only by the Firefox browser's automatic discovery functionality).

Only 10.3% used RSS to display information on their own sites from external sources, e.g. Twitter.

After RSS, the next most popular technologies were forums and blogs, both of which were used by 31.0% websites. Many of the forums required registration but were otherwise open to the general public, and some were accessible only to the organisation's members.

Of the nine organisations that provided blogs, five had blogs that were hard to find from the main site, either with no prominent link or no link at all in the main navigation menus. Some blogs did not link back to the main site and were thus completely isolated from the organisations' main web presence. Four were rated as very easy to find from the organisations' main page.

Six of the nine blogs made very poor use of standard blog functionality, such as categories, calendars, archives or links to recent comments. The use of such functionality is important as it provides the visitor with key visual cues that what they are looking at is a blog, which then allows them to properly adjust their expectations, e.g. regarding the provenance and tone of the content they are about to read. Only the blogs were judged as good and none as very good.

Very few used widgets such as Flickr badges, or feeds from Twitter or Delicious, and a small minority provided 'Share This' buttons, which allow the visitor to share the page on services such as Delicious, Reddit, Digg or Facebook.

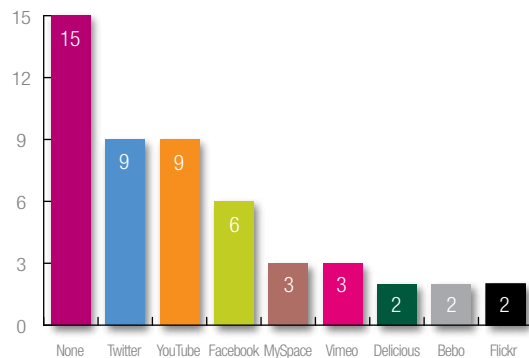
Only two (6.9%) websites allowed people to comment on content outside of the context of a blog, although for one of those sites, comments were not displayed on the site but were essentially a content feedback mechanism.

None of the websites surveyed provided a wiki of any sort, although one site did allow visitors to view and download computer code from CVStrac, a popular version control system used by computer programmers.

2. Use of third party tools

Does the site have a link to or a feed from (e.g. a badge or RSS feed) any third party tools displayed on their website? (See Graph 8).

Graph 8: Does the organisation have a link to or feed from (e.g. badge, RSS feed) third party tools on their website?



Of the websites surveyed, 51.7% did not link to, mention, or include content from any third party social tools. Of the 48.3% that did, the majority (37.9%) used video sharing sites, with YouTube being the most popular (31.0%), Vimeo accounting for 10.3%, and 3.4% of sites using MySpace for video sharing. No other video sharing sites, such as Viddler, were used.

The micro-conversation tool Twitter was also popular, used by nearly a third of sites. No other micro-conversation tools, such as Identi.ca, Jaiku or Friendfeed, were used.

Only one fifth of sites used social networks, with Facebook used by all, 10.3% also using MySpace and 6.9% using Bebo. No other social networks or community building tools, such as LinkedIn, Ning or Webjam, were used.

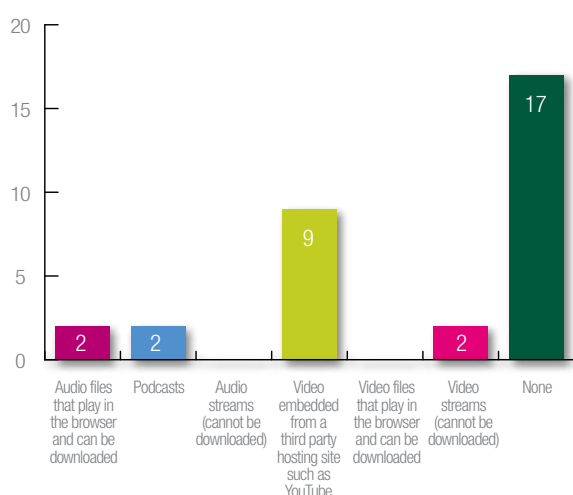
Social bookmarking was used by 10.3% of sites with 2.6% using Delicious and 3.4% using Google Reader Shared Items.

Photo sharing sites were used by 6.9% who exclusively favoured Flickr. Presentation sharing service Slideshare was used by 3.4%.

3. Use of audio and video

Does the site provide any audio or video materials for visitors? (See Graph 9).

Graph 9: Is there media on the website?



Nearly half the sites assessed did not provide any audio or video material at all, despite the fact that for some of them it would be an obvious opportunity given that their work lends itself to storytelling, e.g. working with people who have specific experiences to share.

Of the sites that did provide multimedia for their visitors, 37.9% provided video and 10.3% provided audio. About a third used video hosting services, with 34.5% of those sites embedding that video on their own site. One site provided streaming video via a Flash interface which was not downloadable or embeddable.

One site that had a YouTube channel did not embed any of those videos on its site, and another organisation supplied videos to a specialised, sector-focused 'television' website, but did not provide any of those videos on its own site.

10.3% of sites used audio, only one of which also offered video. Of those sites, 6.9% offered audio downloads, 6.9% offered podcasts and one offered both. The site which offered only an audio download mislabelled its download as 'podcast', but did not provide the audio file enclosed within an RSS feed, thus denying the listener the opportunity to subscribe to the podcast in their RSS aggregator or via iTunes. This audio cannot, therefore, be accurately described as a podcast.

In terms of the ease of finding multimedia offerings, 37.9% sites scored average or worse, and 13.8% scored good or very good. Most sites embedded videos on the pages where they were relevant, but few offered ways to aggregate all video/audio content in one place, so it was often hard to know at first glance whether or not the site provided multimedia at all. Those sites that provided site maps did not list which pages did include audio or video, and which did not.

4. Use of virtual worlds

Do any of the websites mention or link to any virtual worlds?

None of the websites surveyed made any mention of virtual worlds such as Second Life or Habbo Hotel. It was not possible to search all virtual worlds for the presence of these organisations, but it is reasonable to assume from the lack of links to or discussion of virtual worlds that they are not being used.

5. Use of the mobile web

Do any of the websites mention if they are optimised for mobile, provide a graphics-lite version, or provide applications for mobiles?

It was not possible to properly test all websites on a variety of mobile phones, so it was not possible to definitively say how well-prepared the sites were for use on mobiles. None of the sites mentioned either a version of the site optimised for mobile, or a graphics-lite version that would be usable when accessed via a mobile browser. It may be that some sites work reasonably well on mobiles, as a co-incidental result of the content management system used to create the website.

None of the sites made mention of, nor linked to, any mobile applications, whether for iPhone, Nokia, Blackberry, Android, Palm or other devices. Whilst it is not possible to search all app stores for applications from or related to these organisations, the lack of links to or discussion of mobile applications seems to indicate that they are not being developed.

6. Voice

How are these organisations speaking to their visitors, whether on their own site, their blog, or in third party tools?

The majority of organisations used a formal, corporate tone to their communications, with 62.1% of sites having no individual, informal voices in evidence. All the websites that did not use social media in any form fell into this group, including sites that only used traditional forums rather than blogs or Twitter.

Generally speaking, the more social tools a site used, the more individual voices were heard. Only one site was mostly done by individuals in their own voice and that was an *ad hoc* community group with no obvious official governance structure.

However, the correlation between use of social tools and voice did not always hold true. There were several sites that, despite using several social tools, still maintained a very polished, broadcast-style voice rather than the more intimate voice usually associated with social media.

7. What can visitors do on the site?

What sort of actions can visitors take?

Of the sites assessed, 17.2% were passive sites that provided information but did not allow users to act or interact in any way with the organisation or each other.

The most common action, enabled by 83.3% of sites was to be able to give money in some way, whether as a one-off donation, subscription, through paid membership or other mechanism. Yet only one site provided a specific way to help recruit others to join, in this case by allowing visitors to buy a gift membership.

Visitors could volunteer on 70.8% of sites either by getting in touch with an organiser, or by directly volunteering for a specific task via the website. Only 13.8% of sites allowed this latter option which seems like a missed opportunity.

Visitors could sign up for events on 37.9% of sites, either via the web or by email, and an equal number provided ways for visitors to fundraise. Some of the events were fundraising events but not all the fundraising was via events.

Nearly a third of sites had shops where visitors could buy equipment, merchandise, gifts and other physical objects, or information, publications, services or consultancy.

Very few (13.8%) sites had any facility for visitors to ask a question of the organisation directly, and most of those that did were not real-time, i.e. after asking a question the visitor would have to wait some time for a response rather than be able to chat with a representative.

8. Incoming and outgoing links

Does the site link to other sites?

Is it linked to by blogs?

The blog search engine Icerocket was used to determine how many blogs linked to the site in question, thus providing a rough measure of the popularity of the site. Links are a valuable currency in the online world as they are one of the measures of importance that Google uses when determining a website's position in search results.

It appears that there is a rough correlation between non-use social media and the number of links an organisation gets. Sites which do not use social media, or which only use forums, tended to have fewer links than those that used a variety of social tools. Of the 48.3% of sites that had no social media (but may have had forums), 27.6% had no incoming links, 13.8% had up to 15 incoming links, and 6.9% had over 160 incoming links.

The number of incoming links varied widely amongst 51.7% of sites that used one or more social tools (not including forums): only 3.4% had no incoming links, 10.3% had up to 15 incoming links, 17.2% had between 16 and 100 incoming links, and 20.7% had more than 100 incoming links. There were no clear correlations between tool used or tone of voice and number of incoming links.

It was very difficult to count the number of outgoing links on a site, and only 17.2% of sites actually collected outgoing links on a single page or in a list on their blog. It was therefore not possible to draw any firm conclusions about trends in outwards linking and their relationship to the use of social media.

Appendix 4: Resources and links

This is just a small selection of the resources available online and should provide a starting point for those interested in pursuing their interest in social technologies.

Third sector specific resources

Third Sector Forums

www.thirdsectorforums.co.uk

Charity Webmaster Forum on

Yahoo <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/charitywebforum>

NCVO ICT Hub www.icthub.org.uk

UK Fundraising forums

www.fundraising.co.uk/forum

UnLtdWorld www.unltdworld.com

We Are Media Social Media Starter Kit

www.wearemedia.org

Beth's Mega Huge List of Nonprofit

Blogs <http://bethkanter.wikispaces.com/listofnonprofitblogs>

Beth Kanter's blog (How

Nonprofits can use Social Media)

<http://beth.typepad.com>

Social By Social (guide to using social

technology) www.socialbysocial.com

E-democracy and civic participation resources

TheyWorkForYou (usable version of

Hansard) <http://theyworkforyou.com>

WhatDoTheyKnow? (FOI requests)

www.whatdotheyknow.com

WriteToThem (contact your elected

representatives) www.mysociety.org/projects/writetothem

HearFromYourMP (petitioning MPs to

interact with constituents)

www.hearfromyourmp.com

GroupsNearYou (local online

communities directory) www.groupsnearyou.com

Blogging tools

Movable Type www.movabletype.org

Typepad www.typepad.com

Wordpress <http://wordpress.org> (download)

<http://wordpress.com> (hosted)

Social bookmarking and link sharing

Delicious <http://delicious.com>

Digg <http://digg.com>

Reddit www.reddit.com

Social networks (personal)

Bebo www.bebo.com

Facebook www.facebook.com

MySpace www.myspace.com

Saga Zone www.sagazone.co.uk

Social networks (professional)

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com

Xing www.xing.com

Micro-conversation/ Micro-blogging

Twitter www.twitter.com

Identi.ca <http://identi.ca>

Laconica <http://laconica.com>

Yammer <https://www.yammer.com>

FriendFeed <http://friendfeed.com>

Tumblr www.tumblr.com

Content sharing

Flickr (photos) www.flickr.com

Last.fm (music playlists) www.last.fm

Vimeo (video) www.vimeo.com

Viddler (video) www.viddler.com

YouTube (video) www.youtube.com

Slideshare (presentation slides)

www.slideshare.net

uStream (live video streaming)

www.ustream.tv

Qik (mobile video) www.qik.com

12seconds (micro-video)

<http://12seconds.tv>

Seismic (video conversation)

<http://seismic.com>

Virtual worlds

Second Life <http://secondlife.com>

Habbo Hotel www.habbo.com

Community building

Webjam www.webjam.com

Ning www.ning.com

Wikis

SocialText www.socialtext.com

MediaWiki www.mediawiki.org

Events

Upcoming <http://upcoming.yahoo.com>

Eventbrite www.eventbrite.com

RSS readers (news aggregators)

Netvibes www.netvibes.com

Google Reader www.google.com/reader

Newsgator/Net News Wire

www.newsgator.com

Miscellaneous

Creative Commons (alternative copyright licences) <http://creativecommons.org>

PayPal (online payments)

www.paypal.co.uk

Dipity (mash-ups) www.dipity.com

Yahoo Pipes (mash-ups)

<http://pipes.yahoo.com/pipes>

Drupal (content management)

<http://drupal.org>

CoverItLive (real-time blogging)

www.coveritlive.com

Pledgebank (community action site)

www.pledgebank.com

Glossary

3D printers: a rapid prototyping technology where three dimensional objects are created by bonding layers of material.

Accessibility: the ease with which a web service can be viewed by as many people as possible, especially those with disabilities.

API: Application Programming Interface, a way for one web service to access and use the data in another.

Blog: a lightweight content management system that allows users to publish information to the web, usually time-stamped and in reverse chronological order. Blogs usually display a standard set of features, including comments, archives by date and categories.

Breadcrumb navigation: a plain text navigation aide which shows the user their path through the site at the top or bottom of the page.

CAPTCHA: Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Human Apart, a challenge-response test that supposedly only humans can pass. It is often used to prevent spammers from using software to automatically post comments on a blog or register on a social site.

Chat: a real-time communications tool where users can gather to converse, one-to-one or in groups.

Content management system: software for the creation and organisation of content, usually published to a website.

Data portability: the ability for users to control and move their personal data from service to service.

Drivers of change: forces that shepherd things in a given direction.

E-democracy: web tools which enable citizens to take part in the process of democracy.

Embedded video: video that is hosted by a video sharing site but displayed and played on a second site.

Emergent behaviour: behaviour displayed by web tool users that was not envisioned by the tool designers.

Extranet: a secure private network accessible only to authorised individuals and companies.

Feed: see RSS.

Forum: a web service where people can leave time- and date-stamped comments and thus have discussions. Also known as 'bulletin boards' or 'message boards'.

Information architecture: the way that information is organised, particularly on a website.

Intranet: a secure private network accessible only to authorised individuals, usually from one organisation.

ICT: information and communication technologies.

Mash-up: the combination of multiple sources of information in such a way as to create new insights into that information.

Meta-analysis: the use of statistical techniques to review and combine the results of several different studies.

MMPORG: Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game.

Micro-blogging/micro-conversation: a form of messaging service where messages are limited in length.

Mobile applications: software for use on mobile devices and phones.

Multimedia: the combination of multiple forms of media, e.g. audio and video.

Open source software: software that has been created by a group of, usually, volunteers where the source code is available to anyone to use or adapt.

Podcast: the embedding of an audio file into an RSS feed (often by embedding it into a blog post). The technology is used to automate and simplify the download of a wide range of audio content using software such as Apple's iTunes.

Refuseniks: people who refuse to use a technology.

RSS: Really Simple Syndication. Technology for automatically distributing content such as blog posts, news or events information. The user adds relevant RSS feeds to an RSS reader (also called a news aggregator) or to personalised home-page services such as NetVibes or iGoogle, and any updates to the original blog are reflected in the user's RSS reader or homepage without the user having to check the original blog's website.

Screen reader: software for reading aloud the contents of the user's computer screen.

'Share this' buttons: buttons added to websites which allow the user to immediately post a link to the page to one of a number of popular link-sharing sites.

Social bookmarking: a service which allows people to save and share links to interesting webpages.

Social media: see social technology.

Social networking: a website or application that allows people to create profiles, connect to other users, share content or enjoy conversation.

Social technology: any website, service or application that allow users to engage in social behaviours online or on a mobile phone.

Social tool: see social technology.

Spam: unsolicited, unwanted or junk email, comments and messages.

Streaming video/audio: video or audio that plays in the browser but which cannot be downloaded.

Syndication: See RSS.

URL: Uniform Resource Locator. The address of a web page.

Usability: the ease with which people can use a website or application.

Virtual world: a computer-simulated environment, usually 3D, which is populated by user-controlled characters.

Walled garden: a website that requires the user to register and log-in before the content becomes visible.

Wayfinding navigation: simple text navigation, usually at the bottom of a web page, which acts as basic site 'map', helping people to find their way round quickly and easily.

Web standards: the formal standards and specifications that define and describe the web.

Wiki: a website that is easily edited from within the browser, without the need to download or upload files.

Endnotes and references

Endnotes

- ¹ For example, the social media adoption strategy proposed by the author here: <http://strange.corante.com/2006/03/05/an-adoption-strategy-for-social-software-in-enterprise>
- ² More information about futures thinking is available from Carnegie UK Trust at: http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil_society/about_futures_thinking
- ³ The @ symbol, when prefixed to a friend's name, indicates a public response targeted at that person; DM means 'direct message' and is a private response to a friend; RT means 'reTweet', which is when a user repeats someone else's Tweet to their own followers to spread it further through the network.
- ⁴ A set of licences based on copyright which, when and granted by the content creator, preemptively give the user a set of rights, e.g. to reuse or redistribute the content. For more information see <http://creativecommons.org>.
- ⁵ www.viddler.com/explore/SuwC/videos/27
- ⁶ www.viddler.com/explore/SuwC/videos/28
- ⁷ www.viddler.com/explore/SuwC/videos/29
- ⁸ www.viddler.com/explore/SuwC/videos/30
- ⁹ <http://strange.corante.com/2009/05/05/what-does-the-future-hold-for-social-technology>
- ¹⁰ <http://strange.corante.com/2009/05/15/a-glimpse-of-the-future>
- ¹¹ <http://strange.corante.com/2009/06/03/the-future-of-social-technology-mindmap>

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About the Carnegie UK Trust

The Carnegie UK Trust was established in 1913. Through its programmes, the Trust seeks to address some of the changing needs of the people in the UK and Ireland, in particular those of the less powerful in society. The Trust supports independent commissions of inquiry into areas of public concern, together with funding action and research programmes. There are currently two active programmes: the Democracy and Civil Society Programme and the Rural Programme.

The Democracy and Civil Society Programme has two elements to its work. The main focus of the programme is the Trust's Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland. The second focus of the programme is the Democracy Initiative, which aims to strengthen democracy and increase the ability of citizens and civil society organisations to collectively influence public decision-making.

The Rural Programme helps rural communities across the UK and Ireland to respond to and influence social, environmental and economic change. The programme works to ensure that rural priorities are fully recognised by decision-makers. This is done through: securing the practical demonstration of asset-based rural development; testing Carnegie UK Trust's Petal Model of Sustainable Rural Communities; and hosting a Community of Practice for rural activists and professionals.

About the author

Suw is one of the UK's social media pioneers with eight years' experience under her belt, six of them as a freelance consultant. She has advised many household brands on social media projects, helping clients improve collaboration and communication internally and building customer relationships externally. She has a comprehensive understanding of strategy, implementation and social functionality design (building social interaction into the heart of a website or application).

She speaks regularly on social media at events and writes about social media and technology for *The Guardian*, *CIO Magazine*, *.Net Magazine* and blogs daily for *Computer Weekly*.

Suw is the driving force behind Ada Lovelace Day (findingada.com), an international day of blogging that celebrates the achievements of women in technology, science and engineering. A committed digital rights advocate, Suw founded the UK's Open Rights Group (openrightsgroup.org) in July 2005, a grassroots activist organisation which lobbies against issues such as copyright term extension, evoting and the 'three strikes' disconnection proposal.

Her personal blog can be found at ChocolateandVodka.com and her blog about social media, Strange Attractor, is located at www.charman-anderson.com. She can also be found on Twitter as @suw.



Over 70% of UK civil society organisations use social media — websites, services and applications that allow users to engage in social behaviours online or on a mobile phone — but research shows it is not always being used effectively. Poor web design, a lack of stakeholder engagement and common misconceptions about user groups are some issues. Resistance to new technology by management and trustees is also causing problems.

This report combines extensive research and analysis of current trends with a vision for the future – looking out to 2025 – that envisages how developments in social technologies will shape the social web and society. Drawing on this, it makes a number of recommendations to governments, funding organisations and civil society associations about how social media should be used, supported and developed in order for it to achieve its powerful potential as a vehicle for civil society organisations to become more efficient, more capable and more adaptable.

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