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# Social Media Resources Guide

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**This activity identifies a number of digital platforms, or sites, which may be of interest for extending social research by Local Government practitioner-researchers. By developing a greater understanding of what's available you can start to think about how different platforms produce different kinds or 'sets' of data:**

## Digital Platforms for Practitioner-Researchers

Anne E. Howard (2012: 7-8) has identified the currently available social media platforms that may be of interest in local government. Here is an extract from her survey:

**LinkedIn** – the largest professional network site on the Internet with common interest groups and forums

**Facebook** – a popular social networking site which can facilitate individual and group communications, and includes corporate pages. On average, users are likely to be over the age of 40

**Yammer** – a private social network for 'in-house' communications across departments, organisations and selected locations

**Twitter** – a forum-based public microblog which allows users to post real-time 'tweets' up to 140 characters in length and has now grown to include other forms of media like articles, images and videos. Encourages 'followers' and emphasises what's current

**YouTube** – encourages the production and distribution of original video-based content from the public as well as advertisers

**Pinterest** – a theme-based photo sharing site which allows users to create and share picture collections through a 'pinboard' method

**Flickr** – a photo sharing site through which pictures can be individually or collectively shared and managed.

These sites offer the opportunity to gauge community sentiment about a particular phenomenon or event, or indeed, to generate dedicated social media pages to gather community views. Using a social media page attached to an event or initiative provides an excellent further means for capturing community views beyond those data collection techniques introduced in Module 3.

## Diverse Resources

Other resources include blogs and Rich Site Summary (RSS) 'feeds' which collate various themes and distribute them on a selected regular basis, a large selection of cloud-based applications for file sharing, perhaps one of the most common being Dropbox but others include iCloud, Box.net, Windows Live SkyDrive, and file transfer mobile applications (apps) which enable the easy sending of picture, document and other files from a mobile device to a social media site. All of the sites mentioned above are both desktop and mobile platforms (Howard 2012).

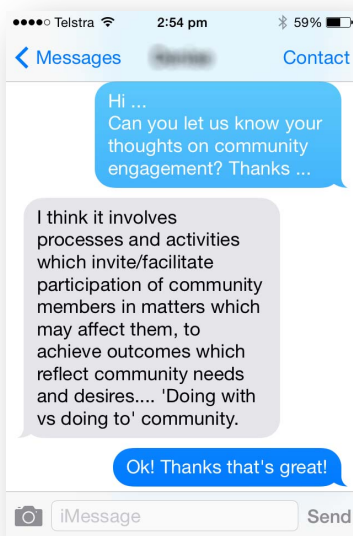
## Accessing Digital Platforms

Most social media platforms are subscription based, which means an account must be opened. In research terms, this process also guarantees a degree of transparency, as it is unlikely that you would perform research for any other reason. Some debate also exists about how 'random users' feel about their social media posts becoming part of a research project in which they are identified, so your research planning stage should allow you to consider these important ethical questions within the context of your organisation's research implementation policies.

## A Case Example:

### Anticipating Research for an Engagement Event with SMS

There may be times when, in planning an engagement event, you want to pre-expose your intended audience to an experience and feedback process. You may wish to trial this method if your organisation has a mobile telephone number dedicated to interactions with its stakeholders or members



For this example I invited a colleague to provide a comment about 'community engagement' through the SMS, or Short Message Service. Through a simple process, I then took a screen picture of my smartphone, which was stored in the phone's 'Photos' application. I accessed the picture through that application and sent it to my email account to download into this Module. Many phones and tablet computers have features that allow the user to send individual text messages to another mobile phone number or device, and that process may also be useful.

### Pre-exposing data collection techniques to communities

In an actual engagement setting or event, a group of participants could be selected and pre-exposed to a given research project. The detail of how to send text messages to a predetermined mobile phone

number could be given, and as the event progressed, participants could send their views or a snapshot of their experiences to that number as text messages. They could include pictures and audio, if they chose to, given the features of most mobile telephones. These inclusions help to encourage a sense of experience from individuals, which is unique, and therefore valuable to local government, given skills and time.

## Monitoring experiences in real-time

Social media applications such as Twitter and Facebook enable data to be gathered as the event is happening. Establishing a facebook page for an event, or Twitter tag to enable participants at an event to log their own posts about the event is a powerful way to gather views from community. While these views will still be partial and reflect the participants' perspective as mediated by the practice of posting on social media, an insight that adds to views gathered from interview, survey, observation and statistical counts of the event can be generated.

The added benefit of this kind of technique is that views can be collated in a short space of time and as the experience occurs. It could be suitable for getting a sense of how well an event is progressing or which aspects need attention.

## Co-producing Research with Communities

Pre-exposing community participants, or an audience, to your research has the advantage of encouraging a collaborative approach to obtaining new data about the event or issue. It affords community members the opportunity to work with you in determining what some of the approaches to understanding an event might be, from a community perspective.

Social media could also be used to disseminate your understandings about a particular event, perhaps as the event is happening, and to encourage responses from community as to whether your insights are shared by community. Establishing a social media page to accompany an event, and then encouraging community members to view it as the event is occurring is a powerful way of gathering 'live' insight into the progress of an event.