Communities
and Local Government

Online Social Networks
Research Report

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The findings in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have become a global phenomenon, with communities such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo reporting user figures in the hundreds of millions. People, having been invited into or chosen to join these communities, are able to publish multimedia content about themselves, their interests and concerns. They can establish links to existing friends or discover new friendships because the social networking sites help them to identify people who share common interests and pastimes (eg people in the same town or with the same hobbies, or who like similar films). Instead of being limited to a network amongst peers within the schoolyard or workplace, social networking sites are increasingly allowing relationships to be built up with people right across the globe and from all walks of life. Inside these networks, people are now actively collaborating, creating new content and finding a global voice for themselves.

Social Networking has its origins in fifteen years of online networking with, for example, Poptel/Geonet bulletin boards, independent conferencing groups, Communities On-Line in the UK, Global Cities Dialogue (French led) and hundreds, if not thousands, of local on-line groups. Web 2.0 technology has now become accessible to the mainstream and people from all over the world have embraced this new revolution in the generation and sharing of content. The small online communities were the pioneers in the establishment of social networking sites and are in part responsible for their extraordinary growth.

Chapter 2

The Rise of Online Social Networking

So exactly why have these sites become so popular? What has driven millions of previously novice users to participate in the most recent digital paradigm shift? We suggest that there are two factors at play here, both significant. Firstly, the networking factor itself; the ability to form different networks with people who share such things as location, political views, aspirations, hobbies and so on. Secondly, the supposition that internet users want to freely create and share their own content without having to undergo the sometimes mundane task of setting up and managing their own websites. User generated content is thus empowering millions of people to express their views, ideology and moods with the internet world and to learn about the views, ideas and moods of others. Users of online social networking sites are now liberated to do exactly as they wish including creating any relationships that they choose.

However, what do we believe to be the true value of these online relationships? How do they fit into a spectrum of human experiences and how do they relate to physical proximity-based relationships and real world communities? Are online communities actually an impoverished facsimile of what community is or can they provide real added value? Do online communities actually and paradoxically encourage isolation as people replace traditional friendships with online activity or might online communities simply provide an additional channel for people to communicate with one another? The question which this paper seeks to address is 'can social networks support digital equality by drawing people who are otherwise disengaged or excluded into capturing the benefits from the online world?' If so, what are the barriers to the use of social networks by those with little or no online experience? These questions are of crucial importance if social networking is to be considered a route to achieving greater digital equality.

Online social networks are increasingly drawing people into the online world; providing the motivation and purpose to engage in a medium which hitherto held little attraction. Applications such as Facebook[1] and Friends Reunited[2] appeal to very large audiences and appeal to the inherent inquisitiveness we have about other people and what they are doing with their lives. This desire to learn about and connect with others (whether we know them or not) can be harnessed to strengthen other offline activity. For example, a group of carers may come together in a workshop to talk about issues and concerns they have in common. They may have a desire and need to continue their conversations at any time. The use of an online social network then becomes a way of sustaining communication and continued sharing of experience and learning.

[1]   http://www.facebook.com

[2]   http://www.friendsreunited.com

Online social networks can provide a lifeline to those who are isolated and disengaged from family, friends and communities. Networks exist to support hundreds of subjects from a desire to stop smoking, to coming to terms with a death in the family, to cultivating mushrooms. Whatever the topic, there is generally user generated content on the internet which can inform, engage and connect like minds.

In the context of digital equality, it is therefore important to understand the various catalysts and hooks which attract people into taking advantage of online social networks. Social networks also open up the possibility of engaging with public services and organisations in a very different way, and have the potential to engage those who may currently find the public sector distant and impenetrable.

Chapter 3

The Role of Social Networking

The rise of SNSs has resulted in significant changes to the way in which many of us interact with others and how we distribute content across the internet. However, when we talk about social networks we are talking about social relations between people who have some type of relationship or affiliation. In this sense, social networking technologies merely provide the infrastructure to do this in different ways. Prior technologies including the multitude of applications on the internet (such as chat rooms and online games), mobile phones, landline based telephones all continue to facilitate social networking. However, it is the range of features and capabilities of social networking sites that have captured the public's imagination and have led to them being marked as different and new.

In a few years, SNSs have found a place in many people's daily lives, whether they are at home, in the office or on the move. This along with the development of Web 2.0 technology[3] has led to a situation where the individual has much more control over content creation and the ability to manipulate websites. The opportunity now exists not just to view information or just simply to buy some goods over the internet, but to fully participate with others through sharing or creating content, or collaborating with those who share common interests. As a result, we are seeing both the rise of totally new online networks of people with no links to the offline world and those that provide support and added value to existing social networks. The strength, value and longevity of these networks can vary enormously. A group of people who have reviewed a book on Amazon, or contributed to feedback on an Amazon re-seller are loosely associated; representing disparate views to the benefit of the wider community. A group of people using SNSs to design an open source car[4] have a significantly stronger relationship with much more interaction and common purpose.

The growth in user numbers for social networking sites has been phenomenal. Research[5], from Nielsen Online, indicates that Facebook, YouTube and Second Life are the fastest growing sites in terms of total UK minutes. Still, there are many, even amongst Internet users who have not yet used SNSs. A recent OFCOM report[6] stated that only 22 per cent of UK based internet users over 16 are members of one of the major social networks such as Facebook and Bebo.

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[3]   Web 2.0 describes the trend in the use of the World Wide Web for creative and two way interaction amongst users, leading to the development of SNSs, Wiki's, Blogs, and peer to peer. (Wikipedia, 2008)

[4]   http://www.theoscarproject.org/

[5]   http://www.netimperative.com/news/revealed-the-ten-members-of-web2019s-2018500

[6]   http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/socialnetworking/

The capabilities of social networking sites have increased significantly, most notably by allowing third parties to develop their own applications for use on these sites. In addition, the increasing ability to access these sites using mobile phones and TV offers the potential for even wider use. This provides an opportunity to address digital equality by enabling anytime/anywhere (ubiquitous) access using different and affordable devices. SNSs have not just become popular with the young and tech-aware of our society. Many other groups are now actively taking advantage on what's on offer. One of the fastest growing social networks this year has been SagaZone[7] for the over 50s. This type of growth supports the belief that SNSs can be used to support digital equality if appropriate and relevant uses are identified and can effectively be used as an 'icebreaker' for people to enter the digital world and to subsequently accrue the wider social and economic benefits of digital citizenship. There are many examples where people's first contact with online technology has been through joining a social network. These include:

- family/friends in contact with someone who is seriously ill
- local societies eg history group
- networking with other individuals in your profession (eg carers)
- keeping in touch with people who have moved away
- supporting a cause or joining a protest

Identifying and encouraging such 'icebreakers' would be a positive way of enabling further direct digital engagement and digital equality.

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[7] http://www2.saga.co.uk/

Chapter 4

Defining Social Networks

Some commentators suggest that SNSs can only be traced back to 1997 with the launch of sixdegrees.com[8]. However, we suggest that examples of online social networking in its broadest sense can actually be traced back ten years earlier to 1987 with the development of a range of mainly green and ecological networks. These led to the formation of the Association of Progressive Communications (APC)[9] in 1990.

A further example of early online social networking can be seen in 1987 when people in GreenNet in the UK began working with their colleagues at the Institute for Global Communications (IGC), formally known as PeaceNet/EcoNet, in the US. They shared electronic material in a way that can be considered online social networking (APC, 2008). As a result, this networking rapidly increased to include other organisations in countries such as Sweden, Canada and Brazil, to name a few, leading to the eventual formation of the APC.

Since then and particularly in the past two to three years, the number of SNSs has increased dramatically. Today, millions of people around the world are actively using social networking sites, integrating their use into their daily lives.

Boyd (2007) offers the following definition for today's Social Networking Sites:

They include "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users within whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within their system."

Similarly, a recent report by Hitwise and Experian (2007) states that:

"Social networking websites are online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. They typically provide a variety of ways for users to interact, through chat, messaging, email"

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[8] Sixdegrees.com was a social networking site which started in 1997 and ended in 2001. It was named after the six degrees of separation concept and allowed people to list friends, family and acquaintances.

[9] Please see http://www.apc.org

In the context of this report, we use the term Social Networking Site (SNS) to refer to the full range of products and services across platforms, which cover content creation, networking, sharing and collaboration and which support existing offline networks or the creation of new ones. As a result, we are including global platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, thematic networks such as NetMums, localised Community Forums and also Virtual Worlds such as Second Life.

Chapter 5

Categorising Social Networks

SNSs can be categorised in a number of ways. We have chosen to follow, with some extension, the categorisation developed by Digizen[10], an organisation which promotes safe activities on the web.

Profile-based social networks

Profile-based services are primarily organised around members' profile pages. Bebo (www.bebo.com), Facebook (www.facebook.com) and MySpace (www.myspace.com), are all good examples of this. Users develop their 'web space' in various ways and can often contribute to each other's spaces – typically leaving text, embedded content or links to external content. In addition, some offer their users the ability to embed video content from sites such as YouTube (www.youtube.com). These social networks tend to give the user the ability to choose where different content can be located on their social network pages. All services cited above are very different in their appearance and this undoubtedly influences which networks the different types of user sign up to.

Content-based social networks

With these services, the user's profile remains an important way of organising connections. However, they play a secondary role in the posting of content. Photo-sharing site Flickr (www.flickr.com) is an example of this type of service, one where groups and comments are based around pictures. Shelfari (www.shelfari.com) is one of the current crop of book-focused sites, with the members 'bookshelf' being a focal point of their profile and membership.

White-label social networks

These sites offer members the opportunity to create and join communities – this means that users can create their own 'mini-MySpace's', small scale, personalised social networking sites about whatever the creator wants them to be about. One interesting example is WetPaint (www.wetpaint.com), which uses social wikis as its format to enable social networking. Groups of people can become members of a specific social wiki enabling them to join in with generating content on their chosen subjects and to interact with those who share a similar interest.

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[10] Please see http://www.digizen.org/socialnetworking/what.aspx

Multi-User Virtual Environments

Gaming environments such as Runescape (www.runescape.com) and virtual world sites like Second Life (www.secondlife.com) allow users to interact with each other's avatars are a virtual representation of the user.

Mobile social networks

Many social networking sites are now offering mobile access to their services, allowing members to interact with their personal networks via their mobile phones. Two examples are Facebook (www.facebook.com) and Bebo (www.bebo.com). Increasingly, there are mobile-led and mobile-only based communities emerging, such as Wadja (www.wadja. com).

Micro-blogging/Presence updates

Many services let users post status updates i.e. short messages that can be updated to let people know what mood you are in or what you are doing. These types of networks enable users to be in constant touch with what their network is thinking, doing and talking about. Twitter (www.twitter.com) and Wayn (www.wayn.com) are examples.

Social Search

Sites like Wink (www.wink.com) and Spokeo (www.spokeo.com) generate results by searching across the public profiles of multiple social networking sites. This allows anyone to search by name, interest, location and other information published publicly on profiles, allowing the creation of web-based 'dossiers' on individuals.

Local Forums

Though often not included in social network definitions, place based fora such as Eastserve (www.eastserve.com), Onsnet (www.onsnetnuenen.nl), and Cybermoor (www.cybermoor.org) provide a localised form of social networking, linking online with offline activity.

Thematic Websites

The building of networks around areas of common interest is one way in which people can be brought together successfully. Sites like Netmums (www.netmums.com) also add in a local dimension by putting mums in touch with others in their area, where they can share advice, information, recommendations, information on schools and are able to network both at the local and national levels. In addition, there are also sites for those with a disability such as www.deafgateway.info which provides a place for deaf people to interact.

In Annex A, we have listed a number of exemplar social networks from the above list of different types, and sought to describe how they differ along with the types of people they attract as users, their uses and benefits.

Chapter 6

Digital Equality

In order to help look at how SNSs could contribute further to digital equality, we have developed a simple classification system using a 2 x 2 matrix, based on the reach of the network and its relationship to 'offline' networks. A third dimension related to the level of immersion could be added, but we do not believe this contributes significantly to digital equality considerations. The four quadrants are therefore:

Global/Existing: global platform which primarily adds value to existing offline social networks. eg Facebook.

Global/New: global platform that provides a 'meeting' place for creation of new networks/relationships. eg Second Life

Local/Existing: a local/thematic platform which primarily adds value to existing offline social networks. eg Community Forum

Local/New: local/thematic platform that provides a 'meeting' place for the creation of new networks/relationships. eg Netmums

Applying this approach we can plot exemplar SNSs. It is important to note that some social networking sites are not mutually exclusive and can fall into multiple categories.

When looking at the relationship between SNSs and digital equality, we need to think about a method which can highlight where exactly SNSs can be of most benefit; for instance providing an entry point to the 'Digital World' for those not engaged, or supporting delivery of public service transformation. We also need some form of classification of the digital users and non users, and we have adopted the classification in the Oxford Internet Institute report on the link between social and digital inclusion.[11]

Social Groups
- socially isolated
- economically disadvantaged
- young independents
- urban minorities
- rural England
- well off, up and coming

User Types
- basic engagement (accessing information)
- intermediate engagement (transacting)
- advanced networking (networking)
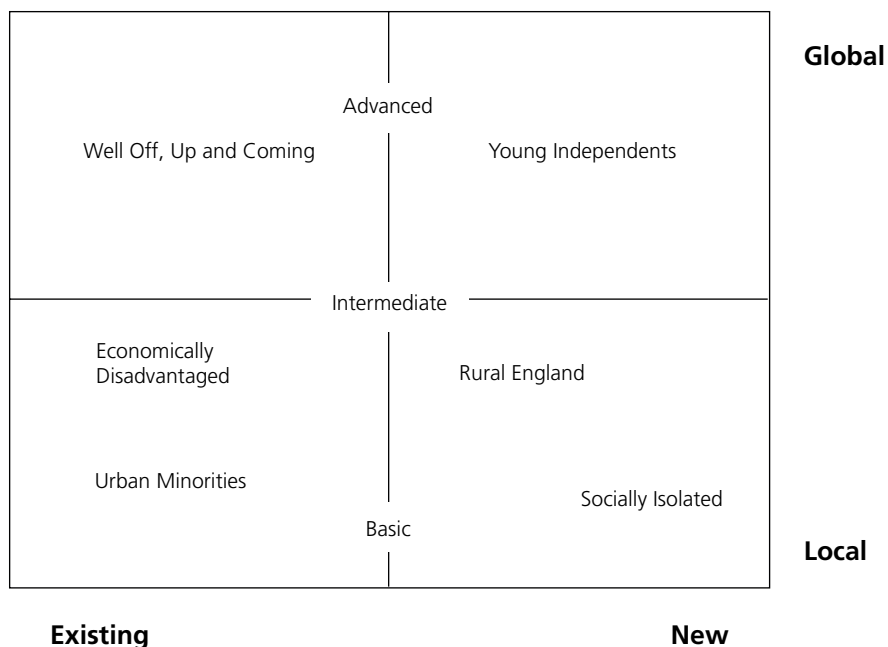
11   "Oxford internet survey 2007 report: The Internet in Britain", Dutton, W.H. & Helsper, E (2007).

The above approach suggests that the locally or thematic SNSs, including subgroups of global platforms, provide the best opportunity to engage both by supporting existing offline networks or grouping and creating new networks based on common interests. In the latter context there is anecdotal evidence that creating networks online can be the precursor to new offline networks and community building.

An essential part of the engagement process is the ability of users to publish content, for example the sharing of photos, music and writing, without necessarily participating in wider networking activities. Some users may not initially have the confidence or the interest in the wider aspects of social networking, therefore these types of users need to be supported to develop the skills needed to exploit the opportunities that SNSs provide.

Chapter 7

Opportunities for Social Networks

"Would it be possible to encourage more community and thematic social networks that reflected the issues that people and organisations face?"

The above analysis suggests that social networking sites have a significant role in the following scenarios and therefore could be used to directly benefit excluded groups and individuals.

- supporting and liberating vulnerable groups by providing them with a voice and by enabling access to people with similar issues or challenges; an example being people suffering from chronic or serious illnesses such coronary heart disease

- organising for political action, legislative improvement and legal rights/protection

- enabling minority groups to have a further means of organising and supporting each other, and presenting themselves and their views to a wider society

- linking to public and third sector services to provide a more collaborative approach by involving citizens in the process; an example would be carers

- supporting special interest groups; these could be existing groups such as one for local history or those arising out of a particular social problem such as bullying at the local school

"Would it be possible to facilitate a social network that could help the Criminal Justice System to solve crimes, rather than simply reporting them; would it be possible to create a social network that would work with the local council to ensure the streets are clean, rather than simply relying on a street cleaning service? "

The Power of Information review by Mayo and Steinberg (2007), supported by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, suggested that the Government formulate a strategy to explore the role of Government in helping to maximise benefits for citizens in this information based society. They go on to suggest that helping, not hindering organisations such as netmums should be on the agenda, instead of reinventing the wheel with similar government systems. Whilst this review has stimulated a level of experimentation in major departments such as DCSF (where under the Parent-Know-How programme there is support for seven social networking services offering different kinds of parenting advice), there is a lot more that could be done to encourage and engage people in the delivery of public services.

Social networks work on the basis of relationships between people and provide an opportunity for a new form of relationship between the public sector and citizens that can support service transformation. One example could be giving the user the ability to express their views to their local council's Local Plan whilst in the consultation phase, allowing the planners to shape the plan more effectively around the needs of their citizens. Whilst there has been much work done in the area of e-Government, many people who could benefit still do not make use of online government services.

Given the role that SNSs can play in engaging people, then there is a significant opportunity to be realised by using SNSs as a way of supporting public service delivery, perhaps leading to some form of collaborative service delivery consistent with the ideas proposed by Charles Leadbeater in "We Think" [12]. Would it be possible to facilitate a social network that could help the Criminal Justice System to solve crimes, rather than simply reporting them; would it be possible to create a social network that would work with the local council to ensure the streets are clean, rather than simply relying on a street cleaning services? Engaging people in such activities using the internet will both help with solutions and encourage current non users into the digital world, as there will be a perception of real value to their lives.

The rise of social networks, particularly those linked to offline groups, provides further opportunities for rebuilding co-operative and collaborative action in communities to address both local issues such as crime and contribute to wider challenges such as climate change. For example a recent YouGov survey reported that 29 per cent of 18-24 year-olds would start an online group or campaign and 37 per cent would go online to find others sharing their views.

Young people are using the widest variety of social action tools which suggests they are adopting the same 'bite-size' media snacking approach to campaigning as they do to news consumption and communicating with friends. Encouraging similar activity across a wider population such as the over 55's through social networks will significantly increase digital equality, particularly since the evidence suggests that once engaged older people typically spend the most time online.

Social networking and media also help with the localism agenda. It offers another communication channel for local communities to have their say on local issues. It would help ward members as ward champions reach other segments of their community – perhaps those they would not normally reach for example, Norfolk County Council has helped to establish a campaign to get councillors blogging (www.civicsurf.com).

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[12] http://www.charlesleadbeater.net/orange-buttons/we-think.aspx

Such approaches provide for a better quality of information about local views and allow debate between community groups on issues. With a more open and engaging way of consultation more people may be tempted to contribute as it doesn't require them to attend a meeting or even take up a great amount of time.

While the above represent a positive outcome of the use of social networks in civic life there is a fear, heightened by extreme news stories that young people in particular are being taken advantage of by people they meet through SNSs, and as a result are reluctant to engage. The counter to this is often a direct invitation from a friend to get involved for a particular reason (eg keeping in touch with a family member who is seriously ill, through an SNS which can be easier than the more direct one-to-one contact of email/phone)

Chapter 8

Barriers to Use

The main barriers to people engaging with social networks and potential solutions are listed below. We have drawn on the work of Ofcom[13].

Barrier	Response
1. Perception of the Value of Joining a Social Network	Requires positive promotion of value and local encouragement. Highlighting of effective use, sufficient content by public sector.
2. Fear of losing information/ identity, or meeting the 'wrong' type of person	Public information about the benefits and pitfalls. Possibly some form of codes of conduct that are self accredited.
3. Lack of Access to Technology in the appropriate place	Links to wider issues about home access, but needs to also ensure that there is wide as possible access in public/work places.
4. Lack of skills/confidence	Local community based initiatives to guide and support. 'Social Network' for non users.
5. Intellectual Rejection	Look for catalysts that can open the door.

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[13]   http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/socialnetworking/

Chapter 9

Relevant Government Policy/Activity

There is already a level of activity across Government around the use of SNSs, with the following being the main ones linking to digital equality.

Activity	Summary
Power of Information Report/Task Force (Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg) – Independent review	An independent review by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg looking at the development of citizen and government generated information in the UK. The review explores the role of government in helping to maximise the benefits for citizens in the creation and use of this new information. The Report discusses the opportunities that are emerging from the creation, consumption and re-use of information and argues how government can make use of this if it were to revise current policy and action. The report recommends a strategy in which government sets out three things: 1. Welcomes and engages with users and operators of user-generated sites in pursuit of common social and economic objects; 2. Supplies innovators that are re-using government-held information with the information they need, when they need it, in a way that maximises the long-term benefits for all citizens; and 3. Protects the public interest by preparing citizens for a world of plentiful (and sometimes unreliable) information, and helps excluded groups take advantage. Finally, it makes fifteen recommendations in line with the above strategy.

Activity	Summary
Safer Children in a Digital World – Tanya Byron Report	An independent review by Dr Tanya Byron looking at children and their use of digital world and how to empower them to manage risks and to stay safe. The review proposes that a national strategy be adopted for child internet safety involving better self regulation and better provision of information and education for children and families. For video games, Dr Byron suggests that we need to improve on the systems already in place to help parents restrict access to games which are not suitable for their ages. The two objectives of the review were: • to undertake a review of the evidence on risks to children's safety and well-being of exposure to potentially harmful or inappropriate material on the internet and in video games • to assess the effectiveness and adequacy of existing measures to help prevent children from being exposed to such material and help parents understand and manage the risks of access to inappropriate content, and to make recommendations for improvements of additional action
BERR Study on Virtual Worlds	This study is in progress and will report towards the end of 2008. The scope includes governance and regulation relating to Virtual Worlds.
Central Office of Information (COI)/ Cabinet Office Web 2.0/ Social Media Group	The COI have taken the lead on producing guidelines around the use of social media within the public sector.
Ofcom Report on Social Networks (April 2008)	This report surveyed the current use of social networks in the UK and provides some valuable statistics.

Chapter 10

Recommendations/Actions

Greater use of social networks to support digital equality will be dependent on a mix of promotion and barrier removal. We recommend the following actions.

Action	Responsible
1. Building on work already coming out COI/Cabinet Office on use of social media , a 'Social Networking' initiative that provides proactive support/guidance to users to help realise benefits and avoid pitfalls. This should include: • a 'Membership' for Social Networks that 'Comply' with 'Social Media Guidelines' or 'Code of Conduct' • a programme of public education, where possible using social networks themselves as well as normal media • develop a module for myguide which will introduce web novices to the benefits and (safe) effective use of Social Network sites	DCSF
2. In order for the public sector and citizens to get wider benefit from 'Social Networks', then: • Increase the access to and use of 'Social Networks' from within the Public Sector, to explore their value in specific ways for specific groups. • Provide a showcase for the use of 'Social Networks" in support of digital inclusion. Identify further opportunities for experimentation with 'Social Networks' in line with Power of Information taskforce activity in relation to specific groups	
3. Develop a neighbourhood based programme for the widespread use of 'Social Networks' in collaborative public service/community activity in support of service transformation.	
4. Provide support for community based 'Social Networks' as part of community engagement/empowerment and regeneration programmes to assist local capacity building and the creation of social capital.	
5. Develop e-Media curriculum and training courses rather than simply ICT.	

Chapter 11

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Annex A

Example Social Networking Sites

We have described below a number of example SNSs, descriptions are based on the following.

URL	Reference URL
Type	Profile-based, Content-Based, White Label, Multi-User Virtual Environment, Mobile, Micro-Blogging, Social Search Local Forum, Thematic Network
Reach	Local/National/Global/Thematic
No of Users	How many current users?
Link to Offline Networks	Supports or Creates offline social networks
About	Description
Demographics	Who Uses
Use/Purpose	Sharing, Collaborative, Creative
Security/Privacy	Approach
Cost	Who pays and how much?
Platforms	PC, Mobile, TV
User Applications	Add-on applications
Geography	Which Countries
User Content	Ability to create own content
Advertising	Is advertise part of the model
Customisable Templates	How customisable is it?
Moderation	Is content moderated?
Accessibility	How accessible is it?
Functionality	What is primary functionality
DE Examples	Examples of use in support of digital equality
Barriers to Use	What stops people using?
Service Transformation Uses	Examples of use in Service Transformation
Benefits	What is perceived as main benefit?

Example Social Networking Sites

Social Network: Facebook	
URL	www.facebook.com
Type	Profile-based
Reach	Global
Number of Users	More than 60 million active users
Links to Offline Networks	Supports both offline networks and creates new ones
About	Facebook is one of the most popular online social networks in the world. It provides a platform for users to connect with friends and others who work and study around them. Originally set up as a University utility, Facebook has grown exponentially, allowing users to share photos, videos, to share links, to meet new friends and to organise events, amongst others.
Demographics	All
Use/Purpose	Facebook is a social network to connect people to one another, their place of employment, their region, and schools. It links networks together.
Security/Privacy	Facebook has a privacy policy in place. This can be viewed at http://www.facebook.com/policy.php. All information is held on secure servers behind firewalls and they use Secure Socket Layer Technology (SSL) to encrypt sensitive information.
Cost	Free to use
Platforms	PC/Mobile
User Applications	Yes
Geography	Global
User Content	Yes
Advertising	Yes
Customisable Templates	Templates are customisable, for example layout of information boxes, and applications, however skins are not interchangeable.
Moderation	The site relies on user moderation.
Functionality	Network creation, photo and video sharing, notes, links, event management.
Digital Equality Example	Creation of Local Carers Network. Keeping in touch with family.

Social Network: Facebook *(continued)*	
Barriers to use	• lack of interest in technology • perceptions about security of personal data • perceptions about its value, or lack of it • belief that it is solely for young people
Service Transformation Uses	Democratic Group, Political Campaigning, Service Information, Links to Government Services.
Benefits	• ability to network with peers and work colleagues. • rekindling of old school and college friendships. • ability to share photos, videos, sites of interests, thoughts and current status. • ability to develop third party applications offers possibility of developing specific initiatives of relevance to excluded or at risk groups

Social Network: Netmums	
URL	www.netmums.com
Type	Thematic
Reach	National
Number of Users	345,000 registered users
Links to Offline Networks	Provides mothers and fathers with access to information on all kinds of local information resources.
About	A "family of local websites" set up by 'mums'. Each local site is maintained by a mother with support from a central team. Each local site provides content on places to go, things to do, education, childcare, and community, social and employment issues.
Demographics	All parents
Use/Purpose	Chat with other parents. Find childcare, places to go, to read recommendations from other mothers and to find information on schools.
Security/Privacy	Netmums privacy policy can be viewed at http://www.netmums.com/h/n/HOME/HOME/ALL/492//
Cost	Free
Platforms	PC
User Applications	None

Social Network: Netmums *(continued)*	
Geography	UK
User Content	Local based 'mothers' run and maintain information sites.
Advertising	No. The site is sponsored by BT, Early Learning Centre and Nick Jr.
Customisable Templates	No
Moderation	Moderation is left to the main content administrators.
Functionality	Forums, Newsletters.
Digital Equality Examples	Helping parents who have never used internet technologies to find out information which will be of benefit.
Barriers to use	• lack of interest in technology • lack of awareness
Service Transformation Uses	Netmums is one of seven services supported by DCSF Parent's Know How programme that provide parenting advice, others are: http://www.cafamily.org.uk/, http://www.onespace.org.uk/, http://www.gotateenager.org.uk/, http://www.thecoupleconnection.net/, http://www.dads-space.com/default.aspa, http://www.dadtalk.co.uk/ All of whom work closely with UK Online Centres to help with access and skills.
Benefits	• provision of important child care information for parents • local based networks, with central support • current and up-to-date advice

Social Network: MySpace	
URL	www.myspace.com
Type	Profile-based
Reach	Global
Number of Users	110 million monthly active users around the globe
Links to Offline Networks	Supports both offline networks and to create new ones
About	MySpace is described as an online network for friends to meet their friends. It is one of the most popular social networking sites and allows its users to network, to share photos, videos and to create journals, amongst other things.
Demographics	85 per cent of MySpace users are of voting age (18 or older) 1 in 4 Americans is on MySpace, in the UK it's as common to have a MySpace page as it is to own a dog[13]
Use/Purpose	Social Networking with friends, colleagues and peers.
Security/Privacy	MySpace privacy and security policy can be viewed at http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction= misc.privacy.
Cost	Free to use
Platforms	PC, Mobile
User Applications	Yes
Geography	Global
User Content	Site based on user generated content.
Advertising	Yes
Customisable Templates	MySpace allows templates to be customised and skins to be changed. It also enables users to create their own personalised skins.
Moderation	MySpace offers Report Abuse functionality.
Functionality	Network creation, photo and video sharing, notes, links, event management.
Digital Equality Examples	Creation of government, political groups to highlight particular issues or link to government services.

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[14] http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/2008/01/09/social-network-stats-facebook-myspace-reunion-jan-2008/

Social Network: MySpace *(continued)*	
Barriers to use	• lack of interest in the technology • perceptions about security of personal data • perceptions about its value, or lack of it • belief that it is solely for young people
Service Transformation Uses	Democratic Group, Political Campaigning, Service Information, Links to Government Services.
Benefits	• ability to network with peers and work colleagues • rekindling of old school and college friendships • ability to share photos, videos, sites of interests, thoughts and current status

Social Network: Flickr	
URL	www.flickr.com
Type	Content-based
Reach	Global
Number of Users	Unofficial estimates state that Flickr has 775,000 registered users and 19,5 million photos and a 30 per cent monthly growth rate. The month before Yahoo! acquired Flickr, Stewart Butterfield, Flickr's CEO, stated in an interview that Flickr had 270,000 users and 4 million photos. Flickr does not provide official numbers of subscribers or photos.
Links to Offline Networks	None
About	Flickr is an online photo and application sharing service.
Demographics	Non available
Use/Purpose	Users share and organise their photos and videos and can track where each picture was taken. The site also enables users to create for example, prints and photo books using their own images. Finally it enables users to keep in touch with other users known to them and to comment on each others images.
Security/Privacy	http://info.yahoo.com/privacy/us/yahoo/flickr/details.html
Cost	Free

Social Network: Flickr *(continued)*	
Platforms	PC, Mobile, Email
User Applications	None, but some third party print applications such as HP Prints and moo.com
Geography	Global
User Content	Flickr features user generated content.
Advertising	Commercial advertising appears on the site.
Customisable Templates	Content layout can be manipulated. However layout is fixed.
Moderation	Site contains 'Report Abuse' functionality.
Functionality	Network creation, photo sharing, blogs.
Digital Equality Examples	• keeping in touch with family/friends • sharing images of places visited
Barriers to use	Lack of understanding of how to use the website.Lack of interest in taking and sharing photos
Service Transformation Uses	Sharing photographic information about places/events
Benefits	• ability to easily upload and share photos and video content on the Internet, without the need to set up a personal website • ability to network

Social Network: Second Life	
URL	www.secondlife.com
Type	Multi-user virtual environment
Reach	Global
Number of Users	Total no of users (or residents) is over 14 million. Peak time usage 65,000 online. Full population and economy statistics available at http://secondlife.com/whatis/economy_stats.php f Linden
Links to Offline Networks	Supports both offline networks and to create new ones.
About	Second Life is an online virtual world accessible through the internet with software downloaded to the PC. It has become one of the best known virtual world environments and it enables users to socialise and to conduct business using the recognised in-world linden dollar currency.
Demographics	The average age is 33.

Social Network: Second Life *(continued)*	
Use/Purpose	Leisure, business and social.
Security/Privacy	Private areas secured by groups Separate grid for under 18.
Cost	A single Basic account is FREE. Premium accounts, required for buying land, are $9.95 per month.
Platforms	PC
User Applications	None
Geography	UK
User Content	The site relies on user-generated content.
Advertising	None
Customisable Templates	But customisable everything else, right? Yes for your own buildings.
Moderation	Moderation from Linden after reported event.
Functionality	List is non-exhaustive. New functionality is added all the time by its developers Linden Labs and by its users.
Digital Equality Examples	Non text based interface can provide easier engagement, eg someone with dyslexia.
Barriers to use	• high specification PC/Mac required. • knowledge and ability to install the client software. • understanding of terminology. • lack of understanding of the virtual world, how to create an identity, how to explore and how to interact and participate. • perception of value or lack of it • cost
Service Transformation Uses	Creation of Local Authority virtual islands in Second Life, for use with consultations, information and online services. Oldham MBC and Tameside MBC are amongst the first UK Local Authorities experimenting with the technology. In addition, the Department for Work and Pensions E-Delivery team have established a virtual version of their Innovation Centre in Second Life, in order to display innovative IT products and solutions. These examples demonstrate Second Life's capabilities for the public sector.
Benefits	• social interaction with other worldwide users. • e-Commerce applications

Social Network: SagaZone	
URL	http://www2.saga.co.uk/
Type	Profile-based
Reach	National
Number of Users	44,000 users as of July 2008 (14,000 during its trial period)
Links to Offline Networks	Linked to Saga Group
About	SagaZone from the Saga Group provides a social networking platform for the over 50's. Similar to MySpace and Bebo, it permits the creation of a users profile page in order to help the user create networks, to participate in forums, to share photos and to create blogs, amongst other things.
Demographics	Over 50's
Use/Purpose	See About
Security/Privacy	See Saga's privacy policy at http://www.saga.co.uk/general/privacy-policy.asp.
Cost	Free
Platforms	PC
User Applications	No
Geography	UK
User Content	This site relies on user generated content.
Advertising	None
Customisable Templates	None
Moderation	Moderation after reporting
Functionality	Forums, photos, messages, blogs, friends, forums
Digital Equality Examples	• creation of Local Interests Networks • socialising • interaction with service providers • access to private health products
Barriers to use	• lack of interest or knowledge of technology • perceptions about security of personal data • perceptions about its value, or lack of it • belief that it is solely for young people

Social Network: SagaZone *(continued)*	
Service Transformation Uses	• provision of targeted information for the over 50's age group, Democratic Group, Political Campaigning, Service Information, Links to Government Services
Benefits	• ability to network with peers and old colleagues • rekindling of old school and college friendships • ability to share photos, videos, sites of interests and thoughts

Social Network: MyManchester	
URL	www.mymanchester.net
Type	Local forums
Reach	Local
Number of Users	1 million unique visitors a year
Links to Offline Networks	Linked to local communities around Manchester.
About	Mymanchester contains information about local activities and events, as well as discussion forums and local job information. Mymanchester receives social media content from over 30 community reporters as part of the People's Voice Media programme run by Manchester Community Information Network. This content includes stories and local reports from local residents within Manchester. Mymanchester is part of a broader network of a further 10 community sites which reflect local communities and communities of interest groups including the deaf community and the BME community.
Demographics	Targets the population of Manchester but mainly works in the regeneration areas in Manchester and Salford.
Use/Purpose	Promote local activity across Manchester and encourages offline and online social networking.
Security/Privacy	N/A
Cost	No cost
Platforms	Open source PHP/MYSQL with plans to move to drupal
User Applications	None
Geography	Manchester, UK
User Content	Through the community reporters programmes user generated content appear on the site. This includes blogs, text and video.

Social Network: MyManchester *(continued)*	
Advertising	Some advertising appears on the site.
Customisable Templates	None
Moderation	Community content managers undertake moderation
Functionality	N/A
Digital Equality Examples	Local residents are given the skills to produce social media. This content includes, sign language jokes, stories about the local area, experiences of being an asylum seeker, barriers for deaf people to access 999 services.
Barriers to use	Access, lack of interest, lack of knowledge
Service Transformation Uses	Content from local agencies appear, the site undertakes online consultations, good access to local communities and the community reporters programme allows agencies to develop user generated social media content on the services they are providing as well as provide access to hard to reach group for consultation.
Benefits	This site and the other 11 sites in the network are useful to show the vibrancy of the community as well as a place for local community activity to be promoted. The site also allows groups and individuals a place to distribute there social media content.

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