Search social media for opinions, anecdotes and storytelling

Students may be able to find local news stories being covered or local issues being talked about. Comments sections and replies to posts may reveal a wealth of public opinion which the general public may not otherwise have the means to express. Collecting quotes from these sources as well as gauging where contextually the bulk of opinion lies are useful exercises.

Recording the number of followers

Council, local enterprise, and regeneration schemes may all have their own social media accounts. The number of followers these have can be an indication of popularity, public interest in schemes and indeed a measure of community strength. Local volunteer groups that attract a high number of social media followers may show that people care about their area and are behind grass roots change.

Map geo-tagged photos and events

Many photos used on social media will have a geo-tag: a location marker that says where the picture was taken. When exploring a location it can be useful to map the images one finds on social media - which areas are well represented pictorially and which are ignored or under represented? This type of analysis can tell a lot about the way local people wish to think about their own area and how they wish others to view it too. Events being advertised on social media such as community group meetings, garden open days, fundraising events or family fun days can also be mapped. This gives students an idea of where the 'hub' of a place is and how active the local community might be in using it.

Hashtag analysis

The characteristics of a place may be discernible from the hashtags used to describe it. These can be recorded and presented as a word cloud or similar, with further analysis looking at which hashtags are most commonly used with which other. The number of times a particular hashtag is used in a 48 hour period can be an indication of how much consensus there is around a geographical concept or how popular an idea is.

Questionnaire requests

Social media can be a great way of getting your questionnaire out to a large number of people. As people share your post a snowball sample is possible with an ever growing number of responses. Attaching it to threads you find online about your chosen research topic can mean that people with a genuine interest in your field of study may then present themselves to you for stakeholder interviews.

Warning!

Social media is not used by everyone. Rates of engagement vary most widely by age so analysis of social media posts should be done in a way that is mindful that it is not likely to capture the views of everyone. Likewise the algorithms used by social media platforms can create echo chambers where the views of the users are likely to be projected back to them. It is also noteworthy that some social media platforms align with and attract people who lean more towards some political standpoints than others.