



Mindframe
for media professionals

Consultation Report
Mindframe Media Advisory Group Views on Social Media
July 2013

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Background to the consultation

Social media is well recognised as one of the most popular activities for Australians online. As a communication platform, social media is continuously evolving, allowing users new and meaningful ways to create, engage, share and use content over the internet. Many journalists and media organisations have begun to utilise social media as a tool to engage with their audiences, and to increase the reach of their stories.

In 2012, *Mindframe* commissioned Dialogue Consulting to conduct a scoping study exploring the nature and type of social media used by media organisations and media professionals (report available on the *Mindframe* website [here](#)). The results of this research showed that there was a considerable presence of both media organisations and media professionals on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, the research demonstrated that media professionals owned some of the most influential social media accounts, as they had a significant number of followers and a high level of engagement with their audiences.

In June 2013, *Mindframe* hosted its inaugural *Mindframe* Media Advisory Group (MMAG) meeting, which brought together members of Australia's leading media organisations. The purpose of the meeting was to engage and collaborate with a diverse range of media sectors and get their input into *Mindframe* resource development.

Mindframe allocated 30 minutes of the MMAG meeting to run three consecutive focus group-like discussions on the use of social media by media professionals. To facilitate discussion, senior managers at the Hunter Institute of Mental Health asked the group a series of questions surrounding four primary topic areas to gain their views about:

1. How media currently interacts with their audiences through social media;
2. Current issues or challenges faced by the media when engaging with audiences through social media;
3. Any best practice standards available for the media;
4. The type of *Mindframe* resources or strategies that would be most useful to people in the media, and how *Mindframe* could best support the sector.

The current report is a brief thematic analysis of the key issues that were raised by media professionals during these discussions.

Summary of key themes

1. In what ways do the media currently interact with audiences through social media?

There was a general consensus among all respondents that the usage of social media within the media sector was both widespread and extensive. Many suggested that social media was not only used by media



professionals, but was almost imperative to the profession. It is now believed to be one of the most popular methods of communicating news and information stories.

In a big way, I mean it [social media] has become very much a part of our digital arm, in telling people what's happening, what's not happening, breaking news and so on

It's a tool that you have to use in journalism now, all the breaking news is on it

I love social media, I'm on Facebook, I'm on Twitter

While there was general agreement that social media was widely used by professionals within the industry, there was somewhat of a dichotomy in the respondents' opinions regarding whether the medium was beneficial, with some feeling that use of social media was both positive and negative.

I love social media but at the same time I hate it. It empowers people but it disempowers people at the same time. The vitriol on there, the shocking imagery, the put downs, the bullying, it can be anything, it can be a great tool, but it's a really, really tricky tool

Everything bad you can imagine is easily accessible by anyone. But so is everything good

Social media was utilised in a number of diverse ways by those within the media sector. One of the most common uses was as a research tool to gather information about a story, and for the recruitment of individuals for either case studies or stories.

It is so common, as soon as something happens reporters go on Facebook and Twitter looking for relatives

I don't really use Facebook unless I have to put a call out for case studies or stories really

I have contacted dozens of people through Facebook. And you approach them politely and correctly, and you tell them who you are and what you want to do, and if they say no you leave it. It's the same as if you approach someone on the street

Many suggested that social media was a particularly useful medium for finding younger people to participate in stories.

The methods of finding people to speak to was almost exclusively online, because they were young, they were 14

This method of contacting people was considered an evolution of more traditional methods of journalism, whereby journalists would seek individuals for stories by either telephone or door knocks.

We used to use the telephone all the time, I mean, before we had social media you would just ring, and go through people in the phonebook with the same surname. I mean, I've been asked to do that. Sit there with the white pages in front of you



Overall, many felt that the medium had enormous potential and had continued to push the evolution of modern journalism. In a sense, it had created a paradigm shift whereby news reports are no longer one-way methods of communicating a story, but are open to extensive and immediate audience engagement.

The major opportunity is the immediate interaction with our customers. Where once upon a time we printed the newspaper, and it was like 12 hours later before you got any sort of reaction, because you know, it's got to be printed, thrown over the fence the next day. Now it's like immediate, you put a story online and you get an immediate reaction. So your engagement with the customer base is much more immediate than it ever was before. And that's taking our stories to a different level, now our news cycle is 24 hours a day

2. What are some of the current challenges or issues faced by the media when engaging with audiences through social media

The recent rise in social media technology has revolutionised contemporary journalism. However, entering this new era with little guidance of potential consequences comes with great risks and opportunities. Media professionals were able to identify many challenges that this relatively new method of communication posed for modern journalism.

There are just so many issues under the online banner though for journalists. How to disseminate our own stories through social media. How to research and find people on social media. It just goes on and on

Amongst the most common challenges discussed was the issue of control. Many media professionals were concerned by the lack of ability to moderate or control comments once their tweets or stories went live. Many suggested that there was no real method to control the user-generated commentary once a story had been published online.

We don't have any control. None at all

I don't think that we can control the online conversation. So you can't. We won't be able to moderate every conversation

Once we put it up online or post it, it's out of our control. We have no control over retweets or other peoples' comments

Many felt that the only feasible method of control that journalists had over their news stories was controlling the content that they published.

We can only control our digital sites, obviously, what we put up

We can control the tone of what is on our Facebook page. We can delete comments. We can control what comments are put on the internet. Give feedback. We can control what we put out there in Twitter. But what we can't do in Twittersphere is control what might then be retweeted or the comments



All we can do is control our output as best as we can

We can easily control our content, but only to a point. Once it gets out into the social media sphere, the comments aren't moderated enough from there

An additional method of control that was raised by the group was to moderate comment feeds. However, a number of respondents highlighted the difficulties associated with this, such as the limited resources devoted to this need, with journalists often being required to moderate their stories personally.

We are getting new reporting software, where I think that the expectation is that we will open our own stories up for comment and we as individuals will become the moderators

We all moderate, and I can moderate our Facebook page from my phone, I can delete comments and so on

We can't control social media, we can just delete comments, and delete posts

Moderating comments on news feeds was particularly challenging, as media organisations typically don't employ anyone to moderate the feeds 24 hours a day, but at times were required to assign staff this duty following inappropriate comments on their social media channel.

I write for the Sunday paper only and we just don't have anyone on a Sunday to moderate comments. Most of my stories are open to comment and a lot of them are issues for a lot of people in that community... so you go to the Facebook pages and they're all commenting on there

We've actually just had a case recently where we had to have someone on duty to moderate at night because we have had a whole bunch of stuff that was completely inappropriate that went up on our Facebook site as comments

There was also the challenge on determining the most effective methods of moderating social media feeds, with some indicating that attempts to moderate had been met with contempt from consumers, who claimed that the organisation were restricting their right to freedom of speech.

When I was at [media organisation], we had the [media organisation] hash tag, and people write some really abusive stuff towards the host. One night there was something that was particularly bad, and I wrote the [media organisation] tweet, can you please keep your language clean. Oh my god. Hurling abuse. How dare you try and moderate what we want to say, this is freedom of speech

One method of moderation that respondents found particularly effective was allowing the audience to self-moderate.

When there is comments the other thing that I find, and it comes up a lot, is that it's up to the people reading those comments to say that they believe that that comment is wrong and then they have to submit that and then it's removed



People do go on and moderate other peoples comments, that is actually a really good thing, it is actually better than deleting, it's actually better for communities to say, hey, that actually isn't the way we talk about this

An alternative option that was identified was restricting comments on certain stories that may induce an inflammatory response. Although this method had been utilised recently by some organisations, respondents were unaware of guidelines or criteria for excluding commentary from stories, and some felt that this was an ineffective method of addressing the problem.

I think that it was a [media organisation] story that I read yesterday had at the bottom, this story is deliberately not open to comments

One of my key frustrations with how other media organisations use social media or just even online, particularly with comments and how comments are posted after a story and how they pick and choose which stories can and can't have comments and that actually leads to a lot of discussion online about why that is

While one could moderate the comment feeds placed on the stories on news sites, moderating was difficult if not impossible when the information was 'shared', or reposted on a consumer's personal social media account.

There's no moderation, especially when people are sharing it from their own personal accounts

Sometimes it is good to keep all of the comments on that site with the story, so you can see the context, because one of the other problems is... the sharing function with the story, so that you can post, repost or retweet it or whatever, takes it off that site and you don't see any of the other story over, it's just the story in the end that some people start commenting on

A further challenge that was identified during the discussions was the issue of anonymity. Many respondents expressed frustration around the fact that social media allowed users to create anonymous profiles, as this made it extremely difficult to verify who you were actually speaking to.

I think that the anonymity is the thing that really bugs me. You don't know whether you are necessarily talking to Joe Blow, and people will say things just because they are masquerading as somebody else. It would be so easy to con the media too. And it has been done

There is no name to half of them. It's just some sort of hash tag. And the hash tag is faceless. Nameless

Another issue with social media is you haven't got a clue who you are talking to

This issue of anonymity was further compounded by the fact that users would make comments online that they would not ordinarily make when using their real names or in a face-to-face situation. These comments had the potential to cause considerable damage to vulnerable audiences who may be exposed.



People are involved because of anonymity. They say things, and do things, that they would never do, under no name or no face. It's the ugly side of humanity

And the problem with those anonymous titles, is that people are incredibly brave when they are not putting their name next to stuff that they say

It is such an unusual forum because people are so, they would never speak to you like this in person, they hide behind this veneer

This raised discussions about one of the most prevalent challenges regarding social media – the issue of trolling. Many respondents spoke of their experiences with trolls, users who purposefully post inflammatory content with the hope of provoking a response, as being extremely difficult, particularly as the trolls were often considered idols by their peers.

The trolling as well is a movement, so they get an enjoyment, it is a sport for them, it's a lounge room sport

They become heroes amongst other young people, my son talks about this mate that knows one of the trolls. It's like he is this superhero guy, you know, above everyone

The issues with trolling caused many to question the legalities surrounding social media. Many felt that the legal ramifications for unlawful conduct were unclear and that there was little awareness of these in the general public. They also noted that individuals would commonly post information on social media that would be illegal to publish via traditional means.

There is no legal restraint around Facebook and Twitter at the moment

When the [professional football club] footballer died late last year, he received 50,000 likes on his Facebook memorial page. While the established media, radio, newspapers, TV and so on were being told, 'please don't release his name yet, because his brother is travelling and we need to contact him first before his name is released'; well that's fine, but there were already 50,000 likes on his RIP page, I mean, that is the power of social medium

People are writing things on Facebook which can be prejudicial to a case against somebody

We've done stories on these Facebook sites that have been set up group rating sites where you know, boys and sometimes men are rating the sexual prowess of a 13-year-old girl... You've got parents ringing you up pleading to do something and the law is that far behind that it doesn't know how to cope with it. No-one's taking Facebook on

Others noted that while there may be laws surrounding social media use in place, they were rarely enforced. Respondents indicated that it was either too difficult to charge individuals for a violation of these laws, or that any penalties given were insufficient as a deterrent.

Our legal advice was, don't bother



It's just in terms of the success rate, you know, my understanding is that the success rate is quite low. So that if you have issues, and you take them to that company, it's a big difference if that country is the United States, you might need to take that case overseas

Two young blokes who started up these 'Root Rate' sites because they were bored, were actually found, they got six months jail terms. Which I think sent a really strong message. They sent it to appeal, and the magistrate said, 'yep, that's too harsh. But, I don't want the community to think that I am letting these guys off by reducing the sentence, I am going to take that six month jail sentence and I am going to turn it into 60 hours of community work'. Just demolished the message that was sent to young people that this is not acceptable

Many respondents noted that this represented a problem for professional media organisations, as the information posted by members of the public was not constrained by the same laws and regulations. There was the belief that members of the general public were able to publish material on social media that contravenes the laws, ethics and guidelines which regulate professional journalistic practice.

We sit around and we talk about these guidelines for you know, the reporting of suicide and mental illness, and as broadcasters and newspapers and the like, we are all run by these great guidelines, but then there is the whole Twittersphere where people just write things anyway, and everyone knows that if you can't get it from the [media organisation], or wherever, just jump on Twitter and find out what is really happening

Well the trouble is a lot of the stuff that we can't publish for legal reasons is published anyway, and it is actually true

I mean, people know that they can actually get good information [from social media], that may actually be illegal to broadcast, but it is actually true, but they know that they can get it. So, it's really hard for us

Respondents also raised concern regarding employees' use of personal social media accounts. A number of members expressed the difficulty in regulating information posted on personal social media profiles, as it was difficult to impose rules on staff outside of office hours.

I can't say to somebody, 'you're on your day off, and you're on holidays, and you were tweeting on your personal account', I can't go, 'well hang on, you've talked about something that has come back to the paper'

I can say to the staff 'look, because you're out there and your name is out there, and your name is associated with the paper, be very careful of what you are saying, certainly in a professional sense if you are representing the paper this is the guideline that we expect you to follow, outside of those guidelines, just be thinking of what you are saying, but you can't always control it'

However, many felt that all journalists, particularly those with celebrity status, need to be aware that their names are affiliated with the organisation they represent. Therefore, the content of their personal social



media profiles needs to reflect the values and guidelines set by the organisation. They need to consider that posting information against their organisation's principles could be potentially damaging to the brand of the organisation.

And we do have self-interest because, you know, we will be brought before the courts and so on, but the other thing is we have to protect our brand. You know, what does our brand stand for. So we have to protect our brand

People on weekends wanting to make their own comment, those people are setting your brand, and therefore whatever they do on the weekend's effects your brand, no matter what time of day they do it

We put out guidelines and I think that they address that you can't be a journalist for nine to five and then six to eight the next morning you can be a hillbilly with what you are saying. You have got to hope that your staff understands that

Protection of the organisational brand was of vital importance, particularly as news organisations rely on the public's perception of them as a credible and reliable source of information. Many respondents felt that the public's understanding that professional media organisations consistently deliver stories that are reliable and accurate was one aspect that separates them from news on social media platforms, and that posting information that potentially jeopardises this perception could have dire consequences.

Our brand and our success is built around our faith and trust that the community has in what we do and how we do it, and if that is broken down, we don't have an avenue for us to get a story because no one is going to read it. If they don't trust in what we do and how we do it, or have faith in our content it's just not going to work

The issue that I see with social media as well is that there is just so much crap out there that people take as gospel. You know, it's just trash and people read it and think, well that's true

I think that in and amongst all the junk out there, the recognised media groups are kind of seen as a respected source of information

The group emphasized that it was important for all journalists to maintain the integrity of the organisations they represent by proving to be a reliable source of information. Many also stated the importance of educating the public to recognise ethical and reliable sources, and to be cautious when evaluating the accuracy of information from unsolicited sources on social media.

It's really important though, that there is some evidence out there that people do trust certain brands and certainly the [media organisation], and also commercial broadcasters are still seen as the place where you go for reliable or trustworthy news

We need to educate people about, thinking about that information relative to the stuff that you get from professional journalists, who actually invest time and energy in to covering the story, validating



sources and then putting that information out there. And I think that we need to educate our young about the difference between those two

3. Are there any best practice standards available for media? What are their key features?

With the substantial increase in the usage of social media by media professionals, and the opportunity for immediate engagement with consumers, it was interesting to note that many media organisations advised their employees not to engage with their audiences on social media.

Yeah we tend to just put stuff out there. We don't tend to engage that much

So I don't engage with many people, because it could be the opposition, it could be a five year old kid, who knows. So our policy is sort of don't engage

Many organisations indicated that they had comprehensive social media policies in place, but that they were continuously changing in an attempt to maintain pace with the changing nature of the evolving platform. One aspect of these policies that was particularly prominent was ensuring that both an employee's business and personal profiles contain a disclaimer stating that the information they posted reflected their own personal views and opinions, and was not representative of the organisation.

We've developed a social media policy that is constantly evolving... But one of our biggest sticking points is people really trying to make it clear that if you have a show page, you have a show on [media organisation], and you have a Facebook and a Twitter account, that you put on there, you have the disclaimer that you are not speaking on behalf of the station, you are talking for yourself

Others mentioned that their organisations were taking important steps to enable better management of their social media accounts, with one company recently appointing a director of social media to deal with this task specifically.

We have appointed a social media director, a director of social medium. She will be setting the benchmark and standards

4. What type of Mindframe resources or strategies would be most useful to people in the media? How can Mindframe support the sector to do this?

In terms of support that *Mindframe* could offer, a number of respondents felt that the current *Mindframe* media guidelines translated well to the social media sphere. A number of components from the current *Mindframe* resources provided useful guidance that could easily be adapted to inform responsible reporting of information on social media.

They kind of translate well to the social media sphere really... The same guidelines would apply. You know, have a range of services at your fingertips, and pointers on how to respond if someone tries to engage with a serious issue

There were, however, others who felt that the addition of some brief guidelines on how to effectively moderate social media comment feeds would be a beneficial resource that *Mindframe* could develop.

Moderator guidelines would be a good thing for Mindframe to put out... Just saying what are the various things, you know four or five things you should keep your eyes out for, some general pointers

A number of respondents also reflected on the inherent need to educate the public on how to appropriately discuss sensitive issues such as suicide and mental illness on social media. Members of the media expressed a desire for a resource outlining appropriate methods of communicating these issues on social media that could then be used by media professionals to facilitate education of staff and the general public.

One of the things that we have always been very good at as news organisations is education. So, whether it is government policy or whether it is budget detail, whether it is something else, we have been the facilitators of education for the public. And so, if we can get hold of a legitimate angle where we can then educate the people on the wrongs on doing, you know, tweeting this and tweeting that, that is an avenue by which we can hopefully change attitudes. And so having a guideline from Mindframe, to be able to say, these are the accepted ways that we should be trying to do this as a culture, within this topic area, this is the way we should be talking about it in social media. We as an organisation can then find an angle and use those guidelines to say to people, 'that's the wrong way of tweeting and Facebooking, this is the more accepted way'. And hopefully that sort of takes off

All we can do is control our output as best as we can. And where Mindframe can fit in to that is to give us guidelines around mental health and suicide and whatever else, and then we empower our people through education as best we can... So those people who are news producers putting stuff online, they're aware of the issues around these subjects, and we maintain our duty of care, and duty of responsibility as a news organisation

Actions arising

- *Mindframe to develop guiding principles that address safe and effective methods of moderating social media feeds, and integrate into relevant Mindframe resources and activities;*
- *Mindframe to enhance resources through use of innovation and technology;*
- *Mindframe to develop and implement an active dissemination strategy for new resources including updated training materials;*
- *Mindframe to support sectors to incorporate principles into existing policies and guidelines.*