SM Okay, great, so you’ve read and signed the participant consent form so I have a bunch of questions for you. The first ones are rather introductory.

IR Okay.

SM The first one is what is your role within the [University 1]?

IR My role is Head of Digital Communications; which means that we look after the University’s primary website and the social media channels and the ((0:00:24.1?)) range of audiences to the university, including prospective students and staff, the Research Department and things like that. Digital Communications works closely with our Marketing Department and Research and Innovation Groups and Corporate Affairs and we support the activities of colleagues in Marketing, Press and PR and Internal Communications.

SM Okay, so you have anticipated also the next question, which was about the role of the Digital Communications team. What kind of things is it involving in a bit more detail if I may ask in terms of digital communications?

IR So different organisations structure things in different ways and I know that my role is, has different scope in other universities even. But at [University 1] what it means is we look after [University 1].ac.uk and the main 600 to 700 web pages that link. We provide general information for prospective students, prospective staff and that is students both undergraduate and post-graduate and that website gives information about research activities and also that website is the front door for staff and students often to our websites. We also help support colleagues looking after the main web presence for staff, which is the staff website and we work quite closely with the university’s technical experts to develop and provide on-going direction and strategy for our web presence at the university. Aside from that we also set up, run and maintain our presence on the big social media platforms, Facebook, we run the university’s presence on that. The university’s biggest Twitter accounts run through Communications with the support of Digital and also Pinterest, Instagram and Linked In as well and Google Plus to some extent and ((0:02:24.2?)) more generalised. But we also do interview work with staff and development and training areas we do within the university to help others make use of social media. So one thing we are very aware of within the university environment is the corporate use of some of these platforms but equally we need to help staff and students make good use of them to raise their profile; to raise the profile of their research or their teaching activity in a more specialised, in a more specialist use of all of those channels, which is above and beyond. The university has got an awful lot of social media activity as a whole, which you might ask me about in a moment.

SM Yeah, yeah. Then I also wanted to ask how did you come to be involved in this line of work?

IR Historically, my background, I worked in press and communications for ten to twelve years and part of that I worked in IT. So when I came into the university I worked in Press and PR at first and I managed other parts of communications but I also quite quickly became more and more involved in working with new digital projects or we worked on the website and things like that because that had a technical grounding which enabled me to do it. The role of Head of Digital Communications was created about two and a half years ago to bring together our digital activity in a more coherent way.

SM Okay and the next question is about social media insights for you – are you using any of these within the digital communications system?

IR Yes, social media tool we use is called Hootsuite primarily, which we use for our Twitter accounts, which we find very useful. It gives us some reporting and insights through there. The Facebook account, we find it’s not as useful for Facebook updates. We do find that Facebook have upgraded their insights significantly in the last couple of years but our use of them at present that kind of meets our needs. What we are looking at longer term with the number of digital projects, which particularly are about supporting student recruitment, is the smarter use of analytics across our social media channels and our website and how they work together and also how we use social media for managing enquiries. So one thing that we’ve done in the last two years, we’ve launched a Twitter feed specifically for prospective undergraduate students and it’s use is very different to the university’s very generally theme. It is increasingly a channel that in effect other organisations can say they’ve been using it for customer service. The university doesn’t treat students quite that way, as independent learners, but in effect that is what that channel has become for us as part of our customer service in that respect to students, which takes them beyond the ((0:05:18.4?)) communication activities to something that more areas of the university are interested in. So over the coming years, the coming year and a half, I am expecting that we are probably going to be moving to a more sophisticated analytics and more sophisticated tools for managing that social media channel and possibly a couple of others.

SM Okay, so it is a combination of using tools used for Twitter as well as doing some, almost your own analytics with the Facebook insights kind of, the insights that Facebook provides?

IR Yes, and we are also interested in what links to how the traffic, whether that, in some instances it drives traffic to our website for particular things and in some instances it is a channel running in it’s own right and there isn’t much movement between the two. So we also use Google analytics on the website and that, of course, has a section for the social element and it helps us understand the link between the different channels.

SM Okay and you’ve done, with Hootsuite does the company do, provide insights for you or does it provide an interface that you then use to kind of -?

IR Out of the box Hootsuite provides some basic reporting and it has different subscription models and at the moment we are on a fairly small licensing basis so we get some standard reports that we might use monthly. But it would do some, you can custom build reporting in there if you want to.

SM So you both make use of the reports they provide and also use the tool for other purposes?

IR In some instances we find custom reporting, particularly if we have run a campaign and we are interested in the impacts of that particular traffic.

SM Okay and can you tell me a little bit about how you arrived at that process? Like Hootsuite for Twitter, Facebook insights, Google insights and so on – did you, the question was then did you try other tools that you later excluded and if so why did you exclude them? I mean why these end products at the moment.

IR Analytics, Google Analytics was used on the website; that was probably the first thing that was put in place. That was put in place when we last rebuilt the university’s network site. It was chosen because to the university it’s free. It’s robustly used widely across the industry so it was a pragmatic tool to use for analytics and it works with lots of other tools and other reporting tools should you want it to do so. So it’s a good baseline for us to start with. In terms of Hootsuite we bought it, I mean there are probably two things. One, it is a fairly useful and flexible model. We did look at a number of other tools and you’ve asked me which ones but to be honest I can’t remember and periodically we go back and we check against other tools that are on the market and what other people are using to see if it is still the best choice. I think we trialled using Hootsuite with Facebook but we, particularly in terms of posting to Facebook it didn’t give us the level of control that we wanted and if you are not posting through Hootsuite you don’t get the analytics. So in that sense it wasn’t the right tool for that but as I say, in parallel what has happened is that Facebook, because they’ve become more commercial and more interested in advertising, they have realised that their customer’s are going to need more information about how their content is being used. So there has been a big, big change in how much information Facebook can provide us with indirectly and how it makes it available in an easier form for us to pull out of Facebook and display in reports.

SM Great and when did [University 1] start using social media analytics?

IR I think it is when the Digital Communications Team was formed – so it’s about three years ago we were put in and discussed putting analytics in in a systematic way.

SM Okay the next three questions we’ve already covered so I am not going to ask them. Now I have a series of questions about the social media insights themselves. So why did the [University 1] broadly speaking decide to start using social media insights?

IR Like many organisations, because, well particularly the Communications Team is very tightly resourced, in terms of saying we need to put a case for why we were doing certain activities we had to say what was the impact of doing them and what analytics gives us is the ability to say, well we’ve reached this many people, they’ve engaged with it, they’ve commented and shared this. But equally in terms of making sure that what we do with them remains meaningful and useful is using analytics to refine and change what we do and we’ve done that with our web analytics as well. So with accounts in terms of things like the prospective student one, which we started from scratch and to build a following is quite hard work and to build a large following. But equally when you’ve got it the temptation is to say, well we think we need to tell prospective students about all the higher education fairs we are going to. Analytics tell us they don’t engage with that content because actually the prospective students that are likely to follow us only follow us at a time when they’ve made the decision about [University 1] already. We are already in their short-list so higher education fair stories are meaningless. What they are interested in is what is going on in [City 9] as a city; what are the foundation choices? And we can see very quickly from analytics it is about the type of content they are engaging with and therefore they want to know more of. So in terms of why? One, is it activity that is useful for the university but two, when we do it, it is so important that we are maintaining something that is useful really and that bring benefit.

SM So in terms of aids these were, they not only help you improve what you are doing but optimising in terms of – one of the things you mentioned obviously is recruitment of prospective students and so on?

IR Yes.

SM Okay.

IR Is that enough on that one or -?

SM Yes, I think so. There is a small danger that I’ll ask you to repeat yourself but I just want to make sure that I capture everything. So be brief if you feel you have already extensively talked about something.

IR No problem.

SM So what kind of insights exactly are you undertaking? So let’s take Twitter with Hootsuite – what kinds of things are monitored? When? For how long?

IR Okay, so we do, at the moment we are trying monthly reports. We have a kind of dashboard that brings together analytics from several sources to represent what is going on in digital comms and we are looking at several ones. The content that is most engaged with being able to interest some of our followers; so quite simple metrics at the moment, really only two or three. What we do is then periodically, so probably four or five times a year, if we use Twitter or Facebook for a particular campaign or for a particular event then we might do further insights to see, did that drive the action that we were promoting? So classically in a year is registration for undergraduate open day. So we will look at the Twitter activity; we will look at the reach of it, we will look at the engagement that is shared, how much it is re-tweeted? We will look at the incoming enquiries that we’ve had. We may even do – another example is A level results. We looked at the qualitative comments that come back and there is a trend to see if we have issues here that we aren’t meeting the needs and being responsive. We are very flexible in how we use it. So our study as I say is a very simple monthly report but for particular events we will look further and feedback from the events that we’ve picked up on Twitter will be picked up and used in any evaluation of that. So for A level results, one, also the open days in terms of the sentiment that is picked up. But again that is not done with some very smart tools, in terms of ((0:13:54.6?)) or anything like that at the moment that is done from capturing the Tweets and then looking at a manual evaluation of what things were brought up in those comments about the event. And in one instance it did change what we do? So two or three years ago, probably in our early use of Twitter, we used it more through A level results day and as mentioned it is increasingly a channel for incoming communications and questions to us rather than just us to the students. And what we really did was we just weren’t quick enough in answering some of their questions but also giving them on-line induction materials. Three years ago the university was telling people, if you wait two weeks and we’ll post you out a guide. And actually having seen the traffic and making it part of our evaluation after A level results it was just very easy. Well no, we shouldn’t be waiting two weeks to post it. We should be producing some good web content to answer those questions on the day. Because if they’ve got the results fantastic but the next thing they want to know is – and we know what they want to know because we’ve got this fabulous trail now. These were the questions they asked so we really need to answer those. So – and I think that is really valuable. It is the immediacy of social media that gives you those things. The fact that it is so easily tracked means that it is also so easy for us to capture things that we need to learn from. Whereas if the same thing happens face-to-face at an event the chances of people writing it down are pretty slim. And one or two people might remember it but afterwards it could get lost and actually what this media body of evidence that says well 60 or 70 people within four hours asked us for this. Admittedly out of 6,000 or 7,000 who were going to start university that year but actually in social media terms that is quite a significant number of people have gone out – and again you need to check the volume. One comment is, well you know, not necessarily something you are going to respond to directly but if you’ve got a lot of them and there is a trend to it then you know you need to do something different or evaluate what you are doing.

SM That is really a good example and my next question was exactly this – if you could provide us with a few examples of concrete findings or insights that you made use of. I mean actually if you, ideally if you could provide some documentation of those, like a bit of web content or a report or anything and send it by e-mail that would be great. It would be seen on a strictly confidential basis, just by me and Helen Kennedy but it would help us – well we ask this at every interview because we want to get concrete and physical evidence from an organisation of how an organisation makes use of social media insights basically. So that would be really great.

IR Okay.

SM But can you think of any other examples like the one you just mentioned?

IR On the open days, I’ll have to check back and see if we have got something concrete but I know there have been things that have happened on the day that we’ve picked up and therefore we’ve responded to it. And one example that also comes to mind is this week, and whether I can show you documentation now I’m not sure but was the – the very sad case of one of our students who – died in the plane crash this week. And three or four years ago, when I was in Press and PR you would know because a newspaper ran it but this time we knew because our students tweeted it. ((Crying)) And that’s where things like the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Airlines can’t move as fast as social media can. Normally again where we would wait from a communications perspective for a formal statement and we had to bear in mind the needs and wishes of the family in this case as well. It was so widely reported and the press report that is on social media that we responded with a statement, perhaps earlier than we would have done historically, where we made a statement to say we understand there are reports – and you know, primarily because that story had broken so quickly because of social media and we, from a communications perspective, also then that is the moment that the university says, we are really sorry to hear about your loss. And we would not have done that historically but because things have changed – and that, I am upset about this because it is obviously very sad news and anyone I think in the team last week was reading that because it’s a member of the university community. But then what happened afterwards was interesting again so yesterday was [their] fellow students asking us via Facebook or social media, would we re-share [the student’s] Just Giving page? And we did, I mean, and we promoted it and again that’s us responding to it. It’s a very specialist example but it does show the diversity of the university’s engagement with social media. Yes, we’ve got these things that are very much about recruiting new students but equally it is a very direct way that our current students engage with us and the wider community do. So two very different examples – sorry – but you know, so and that’s probably more corporate affairs rather than a sort of commercial example. But again one where we had to be listening and we had to respond.

SM Okay, yeah, when you commission or undertake the insights what do you think you will use them for or do with them?

IR There is another piece of insight that we commissioned a while ago I need to touch on. Very specifically there to improve and refine what we do as I say, because we use it in lots of different ways the effect on students is one thing, reputation management is part of it. Communications with our current staff and students – also we have a Twitter account that serves current students and most of it is the churn of it is quantitative analysis and then we follow it and the most shared content. But we haven’t time to look for qualitative research as well so we did this with prospective students to understand the relative influence of our use of social media on their decision-making process and again, what came back in, and again that was to inform what we do. Are we doing the right thing now and making the best use of it? Is it appropriate use of it? Is the type of content we’re sharing and what came back from that was again perhaps what we’d suspected from our own insights and looking at how things were used. It is a layer for prospective students but it is not going to change their decision about which university they study at but it is another useful channel. The website is far more important because it is still the formal route of communication and there is the trust and expectation that goes with that, although, and I think people within the university know this, the most influential thing for undergraduates is the open day, which is when they visit [University 1]. So it helps give an understanding of where, what the role is of social media in all the activities we are doing. Other organisations might say well from a brand awareness perspective it is one of the number one things. But that isn’t the case for us – so is that a bit more.

SM Yes, sure. The next round of questions is about the actual use of social media insights. So again it might be repetitive but what have you used the insights for?

IR We have a regular monthly report and then we do probably four or five, maybe six ad hoc reports during the year on particular campaigns that we have run and that would apply to the main university and to the prospective student feed. We also have feeds for the Press office, which is very particular; it is niche, serving journalists. So it is almost just like another option. It is like a phone line to them. And the creative insights are also part of the monthly report. Instagram has very few insights on it although at the moment actually Instagram, engagement on Instagram for prospective students is higher there than it is with Facebook but as yet, probably until Facebook do more to try and monetise Instagram the analytics are quite poor so we don’t see much. So in terms of uses, so it helps us plan, it helps us with our content planning. It helps us decide how we are going to use those channels in terms of communication, wider communication and helps us to understand their role in our communications strategy as well and it helps us to advise others in the university about where they might make best use of things. So there is a huge, there is often a demand from colleges saying well we should have a Facebook group for this or for that department. And actually if we look at the insights we have at the moment engagement with Facebook is a high proportion of international current students but with respect to students ((0:24:10.4?)) and even current students when they are here, although they seem to be members of it and they will say on the surveys well yes, I use Facebook. The way in which they use it is quite different to the way in which probably staff use it or the way in which people four or five years older use it. And that is the other thing because these platforms move and mature and they shift and their user group shifts and yeah, we might have been seen to be cutting edge and we were definitely reaching current students with it say five years ago that is probably not the case now. I’m not at the point where I would abandon using Facebook but we are saying, well we perhaps wouldn’t invest the time and effort that we would have done a few years ago to it, or a year ago. And instead we would look more at using imagery to repost on Instagram probably because we get more engagement with those tweets.

SM And then who do the insights go to -?

IR So the insights are shared within the Communications Team for our on-going activities and also the Marketing Teams and Insight Team and we share them on request with other areas.

SM Depending on the subject matter and their -?

1. IR Yes. So we did some work, one at the moment we are using social media a lot to help with promoting on-line course or MOOCs as they have been called. So we share them with the Digital Learning Team and that is actually, that is a very specific area where we’ve used a lot of the insights and analytics to help them build very ((0:25:51.4?)) to the point that they have bought some advertising on Twitter to help them load it. And other platforms have been very useful and that is Linked In as well and again it is using the insights for demographics and things like that to understand when you deploy and post stories to these particular channels. So Linked-In reaches a lot of alumni online and Linked-In have an ambition to extend into schools, school children post-16, but at the moment we wouldn’t use it for the group particularly. We might use it for post-graduate recruitment, particularly in the context of the Business School. So again the MOOCs is an example, we set particular MOOCs depending on the content for them and which channels we use at the moment. So we have one on enterprise that is aimed at school leavers but also a wider appeal. So we did use Linked-In and Facebook and Twitter and it had a fantastic response across all particularly with the things we did on entrepreneurship, which is a topic that we do well on that platform. On the other hand we have had other subjects that we’ve got one launching this morning on The One, with the BBC, so we will use Twitter and for that one we are using Facebook. I don’t expect we would use Linked-In particularly for that story.

SM Okay and then I guess they get passed on depending on the relevance to the branch or -?

IR Yes, so for instance we share the insights with the Digital Learning Team who produce the MOOCs and the Marketing Team are part of that to understand what the take-up was and also to help understand what is the buy-in for registrations. I mean they’ve got a hard figure of how many people register for the online course and with this we can help understand where they are coming from. We also did it for the university advertised some post-graduate research fellowships, post-graduate PhD, further PhD opportunities and the social media was part of the promotion for those as well. So we looked at which ones of those channels really had traffic to it and we can start to do things about where those people are as well. So actually we can start to try and engage and how much of the engagement of that is actually from our existing student base. We didn’t do that in a really systematic way but there are indications where ((0:28:27.6?))

SM Okay can you tell me about any decisions that have been taken on the basis of the insights?

IR Yes, very much so – about communications and to do with that. So to give you some examples, sometimes the university has chosen to respond in terms of statements or in terms of offering things differently. In terms of changing the service and how it does something. So I think some of the examples I have given might help with that but if you want me to go back over them – so I mean again the provision of induction information for A levels is an obvious one but we need to – it’s slightly crazy decisions here, but yes, it has cemented the need to put induction information for undergraduates online. But also to do it on the day of A level results and not to wait.

SM So we are now kind of back onto the related question about actions taken on the basis of insights, which -

IR Yeah.

SM How useful would you say the insights have been?

IR I would say very useful because they give us – it is very difficult to do research on some of the things you can get immediately from digital insights. I am going to come back to the A levels example because if we asked students in a focus group after the event, after the day, when did you start looking at the university’s information about what to do when you started, you are asking people to remember something that may have happened several weeks ago. The chances of getting them on the day to tell you are pretty slim and I think if you said to any market researcher saying well we need to ((0:30:20.5?)) on the day, you don’t have the insights of whether that is incoming phone calls, incoming e-mail enquiries and in our case it was the social media stuff that we had really visible. And I think again people in that demographic are more likely to post something on Twitter than they are to e-mail the university because it is the sort of questions like, oh when am I going to hear? The problem is, they might ring us but generally they kind of expect that we are going to be in touch; that’s particularly their experience for the organisations like ((0:30:51.1?)) or you know, their phone company or anything they’ve bought. You immediately get an e-mail saying, thank you and just to confirm this is your order. And the fact that we are saying you can confirm your place at university once you have your A levels, they expect that we are going to provide them with an e-mails. So I think that social media is very useful in giving us rapid, almost real time, well yeah, real time insights that we would struggle to provide in other ways at the moment.

SM Yeah, okay. The next question is a bit open but do you think social media insights are beneficial and if so to whom? To the university, for actual students, for prospective students or for others -?

IR I think they are overall beneficial but that’s based on analytics and how we’ve chosen to use them. So we use them with the view that you refine and improve what we do. We don’t do it because, and I can imagine that there could very easily be privacy concerns about well is the university watching what I do on my Twitter account? And the answer is no, we’ve got an enormous student population, we’ve got a large staff population and we want to pick up genuine issues, we want to improve the communications we have with them and the services we offer them and the teaching. We do also, and universities are different in this sense, when we’ve looked at drawing up a code of practice for social media it does have a vicarious liability for the actions of it’s staff and students and how they use it because they are publishing. And so the only time we do give ((0:32:35.3?)) is sometimes if there is either a complaint about something that has been posted by an individual student or member of staff; if it is inappropriate or breaching copyright or things like that. So they are not part of our insights but they are issues that instant communications has to help with providing the infrastructure for it and help resolve the issue. But they are issues that I think other people highlight subjects like privacy that are a concern.

SM I have a bunch of questions towards the end regarding these issues; yeah. But the other question is what other mechanisms giving insights do you use alongside social media insights? So I imagine there is stuff like focus groups and surveys maybe?

IR So with most of our audience groups there is fairly significant on-going market research and insights. So with prospective students the Market Research and Insight Team run regular surveys, focus groups and then ad hoc pieces of research on particular subjects. There are plenty of feedback exercises on things like the open days so you know, the feedback does come through a multitude of channels and get put together to help in the evaluation of any one event or service and things like that. When the university launched its mobile app for students the feedback on social media went to their direct e-mails and phone calls to help us to sort of say, this is what happened. A level results, you know, there is a joint workshop between Admissions and IT in terms of the helpdesk stuff; with Communications to talk about what feedback you got directly but equally what feedback other people had from different groups. So we are fairly, we fairly reliably do bring it to the table with other sources of information to help fill in the colour of what has happened on the day.

SM There is another question that is about I am wondering what social media insights have advantages or are better or superior to other ways of ((0:34:49.0?))? Sort of the immediacy, the real time ((0:34:51.7?)) you have said is one?

IR The immediacy and the speed; the informality of it is useful. People tell you things through social media that they probably wouldn’t bother to ring you about or they wouldn’t bother to e-mail about. So you can pick up things that could be improved that nobody is going to write you a letter to say, this is wrong and that can be useful. But also with that then you need to, when you are looking at the comments, be aware that of course people do just sometimes need to rant or complain about something, which is where the human element around the social media is really important to understand what you are looking at and again that’s I think... one of my colleagues who looks at a lot of our ((0:35:37.2?)) but the problems around sentiment on some of the tools that we’ve got and not understanding irony, you know. So the immediacy as I say and the informality and a lot of the detail that you sometimes get and that can be an important way of making a link and it’s quite, they will tell you exactly where it is and also that it is personalised I guess in that sense that you can get back to the person who has asked the question. So again where if there is one person in a room you can again say ((0:36:11.2?)) I couldn’t hear things in the auditorium and they might say something like that and then walk away and you never understand why whereas with social media you might pick up – oh there is a recurrent theme and somebody else might have said something else about well – or here in Facebook there might be other reasons for why they were so interested in something. So the student who asked us about the Just Giving page for example, because of the way they’d asked, firstly we know they were a current student, they described themselves as that. Secondly we could see from information that person had chosen to keep as public on their social media presence, it was quite possible that they were in that deceased student’s friendship group and that really does help to respond in a far more sensitive way to that person. You don’t get that information even when they ring. You clearly always assume that you’ve got to tread very carefully but you don’t know and it just helps you be alert to things.

SM Yeah and conversely what ways are insights worse or inferior to other ways of gaining feedback?

IR I suppose all the classic data points come up in that they are unstructured; there is a lot of them. ((Laughs)) Filtering out what you need and sometimes in a lot of noise and the tendency for confusion. So those are some of the downsides and in terms of, I don’t see where the university is going to get the data on the scale that some corporations do so I simply don’t think it is something that we have any interest in doing. But there are some useful tools that clearly are, that I read about being used to help understand people’s choices and things like that and in a way I think well maybe that would be a more useful, more efficient way of understanding people’s behaviour and why they do things, particularly for the students in a research department they don’t do it quite like that. But you know those relationships don’t work in that kind of way. It is not like a consumer or pretty much like consumer trends for, I don’t know, salted caramel ice cream this summer. We are not in that kind of business. I think we have to evaluate other insight mechanisms to really get under the skin and talk to people about how they feel about what we do and what draws them to the choices they make about either where they study – and in terms of our research links, it is very, social media is growing as a powerful tool for individual researchers to raise their profiles about what they do; to share their insights and I hope that, yeah, they use those insights to inform and refine what they do and I know they are in particular areas and it probably gives them insights that they would probably have to ((0:39:17.1?)) go and buy so that is very useful.

SM The next batch of questions is about potential barriers to using online ((0:39:26.6?)) insights. Is there anything that you hoped to do with insights but didn’t?

IR Barriers for us in time and capacity to analyse them and to some extent the people who are very good at understanding tools and understanding digital media content aren't necessarily experts at analysing and understanding data. So they can see a trend but then in terms of how you might interpret that and then what you do with it is still where I think, and I think we’ve not worked it out yet, is how we share this expertise with the Market Research and Insights Team to make smarter use of what we ((0:40:06.7?)) So barriers, yes, time and expertise and I think then, as I say, other organisations for things like mining could be done and I genuinely think the university wants to respect the privacy of it’s students and wouldn’t go to some of the really in-depth monitoring that some of the organisations might choose to do once they, you know, somebody has engaged them via Facebook. Well you’ve just opened up a whole new layer of information. I can’t see the university ever saying, right well we are going to use that to really check your sentiments through your degree or through your PhD. At the moment I can’t see [University 1] doing that. It’s not how we work.

SM Okay. Other difficulties I was wondering about are colleagues’ attitudes. Now obviously the Digital Communications Team people are really on board with social media but is that the case throughout the university that they accept it or are some parts or other areas of the organisation -?

IR I think it is really mixed. I think there are areas where and there are two parts; one, from the insights we know that it has a role in raising awareness but we know it is not going to make somebody choose [University 1] over Manchester to study. What it might do is attract the student, fellow-researcher or PhD researcher and help them realise that [University 1] has got strengths in an area or somebody that they want to work with because they’ve followed them on Twitter and they’ve discovered them from somebody else and they’ve researched something. But unless you are already using it and helping people become aware of it is something that we – and taking time to engage with it is a bit different. And there are a large number of this community who really do feel that ((0:42:05.9?)) and therefore the analytics and insights, the analytics of social media that ((0:42:14.5?)) the question?

SM ((0:42:19.3?)) the social media insights, they have, yeah.

IR I think they are valued by people who are very active in social media; so particularly where they are finding that they are investing a certain amount of time and energy in running a group. With communication on this scale we know we’ve got about a hundred Twitter feeds running for schools services and departments and the use of insights for those is probably fairly limited. Facebook groups, a similar number exists again. And some of that, they don’t realise how much information they might get from them. So one thing that we’ve been working on with the staff development unit over the last two years they have recently put together social training programmes for the use of social media and in that we approach people to use insights. So I suppose it’s really, because I mean it is a very basic one to help them understand what they are doing and the impact of what they're doing. People see it as an activity that is free to do but it is not, it takes, to really manage it and run it takes a lot of time.

SM Yeah, yeah, ((0:43:53.4?)) organisational structures within the university that affects how, well creates difficulties in making use of the insights?

IR I don’t think at the moment they are making difficulties with the use of the insights. I think what it, what university structures tend to do if anything is they don’t encourage a joined up way of thinking about what social media channels we’re using. So if you’ve got a scattergun approach to what you are using, to then try and create a coherent picture of the insight on it is really, really hard. And again one thing that only slowly, mainly through training and development, people have freedom because we are not going to sit there and say, you may not have a Twitter account and you may. We can’t do that nor should we do that but in terms of supporting the staff using them is to say, be aware of the insights and use them and talk to us as well about what you are doing. And also when people do come to us to say, I am thinking about setting up an account, and that used to happen quite a lot but it happens maybe less so now and again it is a structural thing of – it’s where we have to think across structures actually because their audience, when you think about the university in its structural terms, they think well I want to know this stuff, I want to know what is going on. Or, I am a member of the alumni and I want to know what is going on and I don’t care which bit of the posting it is. Encouraging people to talk to each other and say, well these accounts already exist, let’s not recreate them. But equally then in terms of understanding your audience then you’ll have a coherent picture of what – or at least let’s link to understand the relationship between them and the traffic between the two because that’s not necessarily easy. And what insights also, I guess what insights do best is to tell us from our experience of setting up new accounts that it takes time to build up accounts and followings and you are better going to speak to existing followings with some content than you are trying to establish a new channel.

SM Has it ever been the case that it’s quite hard to make sense of a particular piece of social media insight?

IR Mm …

SM I am wondering if this is a barrier or a difficulty?

IR I don’t think our use of them is anywhere near as sophisticated as some commercial organisations so we’ve kept things intentionally simple and fairly sustainable so I am trying to think of an example. There must be one or two things where we’ve seen things happen and we’ve gone that’s odd. I think one of the things that we do come back to that is a bit strange is say Facebook’s age groupings and whilst we know the ages of the people who follow us the patterns of what they then engage with don’t really match. But we know there are slight problems, not problems but slight oddities with particular demographics of where people weren’t allowed to join Facebook until they were a certain age. Lots of people lied about their age and I think there have been some good articles written in the Economist, they published something and this is a few years ago – but equally that cohort of people who maybe lied about their age, they are probably still there in false stats and we look at the insights saying -. So that’s one of the ones and you know, how do you test that? Well you’d have to take it out of Facebook and find something to match the data against and I am not in that ballgame and I don’t think it brings enough value for us to do. If on the other hand you had a very high value goods that you sold in a very quick lead time and you wanted to know it I am sure somebody might well go and try and set their Facebook engagement against other demographic data to just see is that true?

SM Any – are there things that it is sometimes hard to put into action? ((0:48:07.9?))

IR ((Pause)) Well the issue, again the sensitive statement about the student who died; it wasn’t hard to put into action – ideally in social media terms you respond really quickly and I remember looking at the time the message was sent to us thinking, that was eight minutes ago, what have I done? And I think the university, the idea that there are things that people have to start thinking, that was sent to me eight minutes ago, I have minutes to respond or I have, I may only have an hour or maybe two with an issue, you have to be really quick. And we’ve had things where something’s gone wrong and I know, there was another example where we used ((0:48:59.9?)) current students. There were weather problems disrupting lectures – whether it’s hard, it’s just, you have to – when you go into it for that kind of use you have to bear in mind that it operates at an immediate – the immediacy of it is its value but obviously it also requires an immediacy of response and management. So when the weather was bad and lectures were being cancelled Twitter was used to help students find out what was running and what wasn’t in a way that e-mail was too slow for and in a way that perhaps the university wasn’t used to having to be so visible. And that is where the organisation needs to be fast to move and fast to make decisions and to give people confidence – whoever is on your Twitter feed that you’ve got confidence in them and you’ve prepared them and equipped them to respond to questions quickly and independently as much as they can. There are always things they need to be able to escalate up but generally – keep it moving.

SM Okay, a couple of the people in the user group are curious about the usefulness and usability of the social media insights?

IR I think people would like them to be probably more easily shared both by – easier to get through some key tools and they would probably like a clearer prioritisation of what they use them for. As I say, from the university’s – it uses social media and therefore it’s insights, we use social media for so many different reasons and sometimes people have started out not really thinking why they are using it but thinking they should. But insights also, we need to equip people to make decisions about what they need from them and what is useful and that is the challenge with lots of things in the university. It is about equipping the individuals to in effect run them themselves and do things independently as much as it – in a way, the running the university channels is the easy bit. Helping other people make sense of what they need to be doing and how they do it, that’s the rigorous stuff.

SM Yes but do you think that the branch, department or the role of other people in the university bears on their attitudes to the social media insight?

IR Is there another way of phrasing that? Hang on what is the – sorry?

SM Whether the kinds of branch or role or department people are working in within the university affects their attitudes towards social media insights?

IR Yes, yeah.

SM And in what ways? What do you think leads people to have more positive bearings on social media insights and the opposite? Sorry, are you doing okay with time or -

IR I’m going to have to – I’ve got another fifteen minutes but we can do it in ten probably. Yes, I mean if people have got – university is a very diverse population, Market Research and Insight has got lots of people who are interested in analytics and understanding behaviour so they will leap on any data we’ve got and will be really interested in it because they’ve got a professional interest and it helps them do what they do. And for other people who’ve got roles that are more interested in managing different services or managing different means of delivering things because they are interested in print then they are less interested. So yes, there are differences and it does depend on people’s roles I would say.

SM Now it’s the last part of the questions, which are things like privacy and so on. The first one is generally open; what do you think about the strengths and possibilities opened up by social media data mining and insights?

IR And this is where I got visibility of some of the things some of our academics have talked about as well as what we do. I think, very widely in terms of the possibilities for research and the possibilities for companies, the possibilities for the Health Service and the possibilities for Government and public planning are enormous. I think the opportunities for the university of mining the data, I think there are some but I think at the moment a method of operating that generally involves face-to-face interaction and communication with our research partners and methods of teaching actually a lot of insights and the values in our relationships remains face-to-face so possibly that data mining is less valuable to the university. But that – that’s today, who knows in two years time things may have moved on and we may say, well actually understanding the sentiment of prospective students two years before they apply might help us. But whether that kind of insight is readily affordable on the scale that the university might want to use it?

SM What do you think are the weaknesses and problems associated with social media data mining and insights?

IR There are lots of clauses aren’t there because you make lots of assumptions that well one person has one Facebook account and one Twitter account and they’ve filled in all the details absolutely truly but that isn’t what happens. So people might have, I have multiple Twitter accounts. I have a very personal one I use for very personal interests and I have one that I use for work and my patterns and the content of what I do with them are very different quite reasonably. Similarly there will be people who have very different Facebook presences – as much, there are probably people who submitted different data to Facebook to achieve particular things. So you’ve got to take this into account and also there is evidence in various researches that has been done about people’s postings and the ((0:54:53.7?)) research, which was the subject of lots of ethical debate afterwards about Facebook and mood. So to what extent are people being influenced by the subjects that are being posted on that channel. And then you get back to the thing where you’ve got an awful lot of noise there so to disentangle the things that are very clear strong messages and themes to come out, you think that they might be robust. And then that’s where the human element, the tools and the power, the computing power to do it is there, that is obvious and technology is moving on to do it but it is nothing without the brains to analyse it and make sense of it and test it.

SM Yeah, okay. I am going now to mention some of the issues that get raised in relation to social media insights monitoring and invite you to share your views on these if any. So the first one is representativeness – so some people say that what you find on social media is not always representative of a broad range of people’s views?

IR That’s probably true; particularly of some demographics. I think if you had any serious issues you probably would want to match them against other things or set it against other things.

SM Yes, maybe combine it with surveys or focus groups or -

IR Yeah, I mean obviously you get, if something big hits the news that is terribly unpopular but again sort of common sense or volume or something will say well yes, that probably is accurate. But within the social media you will get a range of views from extreme to mildly annoyed or something.

SM Okay, then in terms of privacy, you have already said that the university does not have the kind of approach where detailed personal information would want to be accessed for various reasons. Well some people say that social media users consider, for example Facebook page private, even though because of his or her settings it might be public. So any reflections on this?

IR I think it is very, very hard for people to navigate. I almost think that some channels might be simpler in some ways but some advice I was given a long time ago and I think it still holds – if you use social media for something it is really a postcard because if somebody really wanted to see it or if you post something and share, if somebody else wants to take a screenshot of it, it can go somewhere else. You’ve committed it. You’ve stuck it up there. Be sensible and again it is very tricky to give people writing advice for everyone in the university because a lot of it is kind of well don’t say anything you wouldn’t say in a room to somebody. People do it and privacy, it’s not robust but what was the nature of the question? Do you think it’s an issue?

SM Yeah, what is your opinion on the issue of privacy?

IR Yeah, I mean I think there might be. I would say my personal views are actually probably at the moment probably entangled with the guidance I’ve had to try and write for the university. But it is an issue; people need to be mindful and there is some good advice out there to help people make decisions.

SM And I have another one in terms of security – some people express a concern that even though data mining is gathered in a sound and secure way someone else might get hold of it because you can’t control where the data goes. Now of course -

IR For analytics?

SM Yes, for analytics.

IR Well that’s true ultimately, no you can’t. I think there is a difference between members of the general, the wider population thinking well, and to what extent they worry about it, to very extreme cases where the power that people that need or whatever, if they wanted to get hold of information in relation to private – they could do it. What’s the question really?

SM Just inviting you to share your views on the issue of security and social media insights.

IR Again I think the insights that it generates – I mean at the university what we are capturing isn’t particularly sensitive but I think if you are in one of the areas, if you were in an organisation that does capture sensitive data then it needs to be treated with the same care that they treat something like patient records or financial records. Because inadvertently people are doing things or using messaging functionality that is deeply personal and deeply sensitive without thinking sometimes about who can have that data. So it needs to be treated with great care.

SM And the next question is about transparency so some people say that social media data mining should be more visible; that users should be made more aware of it – for example with clear and explicit statements on platforms.

IR Yeah, it’s a really interesting one this. To what extent, even if you make people aware of it, because Facebook would say well we’ve done a lot to make people very aware of the privacy settings and I’ll be honest, even I, I mean I take it with a pinch of salt but I do remember when one of the later warnings flashed up and even I just, oh I’m too busy to read this now. I want to see what my friends are doing. It’s a question to what extent do you need like anything, that’s the main gist of communications, you need to make that real for people and what does it really mean for you as an individual? What – and Facebook is not going to do it, Linked-In isn’t going to do it – they are not going to tell you well the consequence of this going on but if you share any indiscrete messages about your partner or whatever, you know, well we may have shared those with an advertising company and that might be why you get an advert that sells you holistic weekends away where you can lie about where you are. And unless it’s very climatic for people, and I think that’s the thing is even when the data is harvested people don’t know what is going to be done with it or who is going to play around with it. But partly if you enter into this well you do it, to what extent people care is different I think and particularly when it is something that is abstract. It happens somewhere else and it might mean I get some badly targeted advertising or some brilliantly targeted advertising, it just happens, I’ll just accept it. And I think there are things in life where people do go well I’ll just accept it and they live with it.

SM But users should have the opportunity to consent to data mining?

IR I think it needs to be clearer but I think there needs, yes, I think they need to be given clearer options about which buttons will and won’t show their data and, you know, I’m reading about start up companies where they are setting up particular platforms so social platforms or even a mobile phone company where they are not going to sell your data so if only from a business sustainability perspective, yes and from an ethical perspective yes.

SM Do you think social media data mining is an ethical practice and does it raise any ethical concerns for the university?

IR I would say in the current form that they do it, because it is quite, generally quite limited, generally – it raises one or two things about privacy and care and sensitivity and occasionally about data protection for us. Frequently there are issues of copyright in terms of other people’s use of it that we pick up on. And you know we have to exercise the judgement that if the problem is between staff or student or something like that comes up, there are often privacy issues and there are private issues that might get played out in the public forum. That is not necessarily insights or mining per se in those cases. In terms of our uses of big data sets at the moment our use is fairly simplistic so at the moment I can’t see any major issues. If we were going to do something more sophisticated I think we would probably go through an ethical due process. But there aren’t ethical issues in the university’s use of it.

SM Okay, are there any social media data mining practices that you or the university consider off-limits? I guess there are because you said that the university is not the kind of organisation that is interested in -

IR Yes, we’re not going to – at the moment, and this is my, my informed view as the Head of the Digital Department but it is not something that I’ve tested with my senior colleagues but I would say that mining the data of our staff and students would be off-limits. If they did something that broke the law or broke the university rules and it was brought to our attention then we would take action because they’ve infringed – you know, that might be into abusive behaviour but we don’t systematically mine data looking for example for that. I mean the parallel would be would you stand outside the union bar looking for examples of abusive behaviour towards each other? No, I wouldn’t any more than we read every piece of graffiti in the toilets. You can’t but if somebody reports something that is serious then we will, we do.

SM Okay and this is the last question. Are there any regulations or guidelines that the [University 1] follows relating to social media data mining insights? We spoke about training -

IR Oh gosh, we’ve got, yes, we’ve got wider policies on data protection and privacy and social media insights are no different to any other sort of data in that we would expect to be informed of those rules and how they are enforced. It is a bit like the use of social media, I mean we have a code of practice in draft but in practice when we looked at it a lot of the issues and rules if you like are already there. I think in some instances, and I would defer to my colleagues for this or the lawyers office very much – sometimes bits of legislation may not specifically say social media insights and jurisdictions make it more complicated. So where the jurisdiction that the social media data is held and then if you add in the third party element. Because there are tools, not necessarily social media ones but digital tools where we say people shouldn’t use particular – or we aren’t happy about their data and security.

SM Is there anything else you would like to ask or comment on?

IR I don’t think so, it was a very interesting piece of research and I am looking forward to hearing about where it goes. Keep me posted.

SM I will do, thank you.