

**UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION and
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

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UNECE Work Session on the Communication of Statistics

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- (i) Gathering user feedback from web sites

Digital engagement: two case studies from the UK

Submitted by Office for National Statistics, UK¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This paper presents two case studies from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the UK. Both case studies used a mixture of channels to digitally engage with audiences in order to meet project objectives. Both have accelerated the use of social media engagement by ONS.

2. ONS is committed to increasing public accessibility to outputs, both in terms of the clarity of written materials and the number of outlets through which statistics are published. Embracing the digital age has meant migrating outputs from printed publication to the ONS website, allowing ONS to issue a wider range of reports with greater flexibility. Digital engagement is one aspect of a wider, integrated communication strategy, geared to disseminating data to the broadest possible audience.

3. There are many possible digital channels that can be used for engaging with audiences in today's environment. These channels range from the traditional (static websites) through channels that have been around for a while (blogs, wikis) and newer social media channels (twitter, YouTube etc).

4. We believe that it is highly unlikely that any single channel will meet all project objectives and that a mixed approach is almost always necessary. Knowledge of the channels and options currently available is critical to engage effectively with audiences in the digital landscape.

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II. Case Study 1: the National Well-being Debate Background

5. “Statistics are the bedrock of democracy, in a country where we care about what is happening. We must measure what matters – the key elements of national well-being... we want to develop measures based on what people tell us matters most.” – UK National Statistician Jil Matheson.

6. On November 25, 2010, the National Statistician Jil Matheson announced plans to lead a debate on measuring the nation’s well-being. The National Well-being Programme was set up to provide a fuller picture of ‘how society is doing’ in the UK than is given by economic measures such as GDP. The National Statistician was invited to lead the debate by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, who has voiced his desire to make the ‘well-being agenda’ a cornerstone of future policies.

7. The issue of well-being and how it is measured is being increasingly recognised around the world, particularly stimulated by the Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi report commissioned by President Sarkozy. The European Commission’s ‘GDP and Beyond’ project and the OECD’s global project on measuring the progress of societies are also looking at these issues.

A. Communication

8. The first phase of the National Well-being programme was a debate, which ran from November 25 2010 to April 15 2011. The aim of the debate was to focus on what well-being meant to people and how national well-being might be defined.

9. In order to engage the public to discuss what matters to them and generate national debate on well-being, a number of communication channels were identified. We were particularly keen to widen the target audience to encompass the views of as much of the UK population as possible.

10. Included amongst these channels were an ONS Twitter account, YouTube, Audioboo and the ONS website. In addition, over 170 events were arranged at venues across the UK. ONS also used other organisations/ partners’ internets, intranets and publications to link to the debate site.

B. The National Well-being Debate Website

11. At the launch of the debate, we provided the ability for people to fill out a survey about well-being as well as allowing them to write, email and phone us with their thoughts. We had a good response to the survey but decided that we would like to open up the debate further by providing the facility for people to comment online in a less structured manner.

12. In order to provide this functionality, we worked with external providers to create a debate website designed to take people’s comments. This site was created in a few weeks, based on open-source Wordpress software. For the first time at the ONS, we were able to provide the site bilingually, in both English and Welsh language versions. We also had to rapidly draw up a raft of policies on a range of subjects including monitoring and moderation.

Mae'r Swyddfa Ystadegau Gwladol yn datblygu ffyrdd newydd o fesur lles y genedl.

Rydym am wybod beth sydd bwysicaf yn eich bywyd chi ac ym mywydau'r rheini o'ch cwpas yn eich barn chi.

Ai'r cyflog a enillwch neu'r amser a dreuliwch gyda'ch teulu sydd bwysicaf? A yw gwerth eich tŷ yn bwysig, neu a yw cyflwr yr amgylchedd yn bwysicach?

Defnyddiwch y wefan hon i adael i ni wybod am y pethau sy'n bwysig i chi.

Bydd y wefan hon yn derbyn eich sylwadau tan 15 Ebrill, a byddwn yn cyhoeddi crynodeb o'ch ymatebion wedyn. Bydd hyn yn ein helpu i symud ymlaen o ddfiffin lles y genedl i'r cam nesaf: ystyried sut y gallwn ni ei fesur.



Ymunwch â'r drafodaeth ►



C. The website

13. The core functionality of the website was to allow users to leave comments as easily as possible. Users were able to select a “Join the Debate” button that took them into the comments section.

14. Instead of the ten detailed questions in the survey, users were able to provide a free text response to two questions: “what matters in life?” and “what is well-being?” Neither question was mandatory.

15. Users could choose whether:

- to keep their response private or allow us to publish their contribution
- to save their response to return to later
- or not to provide contact details.

The debate

What matters in life?

What is well-being?

Review

What is well-being?

Is there more to national well-being than happiness? What else matters?

Thinking beyond the individual – at a national level – what affects the nation's well-being? Should we just measure happiness or life satisfaction – what the media have been calling a 'happiness index' – or is national well-being much more complex than the sum of our individual feelings?

Some of the things that have been suggested as affecting national well-being are:

- poverty levels
- life expectancy
- educational attainment
- crime rates
- depression rates
- feelings of trust in the community
- national sporting achievement

Further information

Here are some of your responses about what you believe affects national well-being:

- Respect for the dignity of the individual
- Your feeling of 'worth' to yourself, your family, and your community
- Having equal opportunities within the work place for career progression
- Fairness to all sectors of society
- Peace, freedom and security are what really matter

Join the debate: what matters to you?

Is there more to National Well-being than happiness? What else matters?

D. The comments

16. A short time after the initial site launch, we were able to deliver the planned additional functionality that allowed users to view comments left by others. We published all comments except those where the author had asked for the response to remain private. (We also did not publish the very small number of posts that did not meet the moderation policy for comments included on the site.)

Recent responses

4 hours ago

What things in life matter most to you?

That children in this country have the opportunity to fulfil their innate ability by being given the same opportunities to...

Is there more to National Well-being than happiness? What else matters?

Children's happiness is a complex concept, driven by expectations from their family, their school and their peers together with the...

[Read more](#)

16 hours ago

What things in life matter most to you?

family relationships opportunity to improve oneself - in career, education and skills protection from violence/danger (safe environment) fairness with respect...

Is there more to National Well-being than happiness? What else matters?

Equal treatment of people. For example the recent london riots - how have people been allowed to destroy property, intimidate...

[Read more](#)

1 day ago

What things in life matter most to you?

- Good health.
- The love and support of family and friends.
- Knowing one can contribute to society.

Popular topics

[health \(322\)](#)

[family \(267\)](#)

[finances \(253\)](#)

[personal relationships \(237\)](#)

[community \(185\)](#)

[education \(174\)](#)


[employment \(154\)](#)

[environment \(147\)](#)

[children \(155\)](#)

[security \(158\)](#)

Not all responses are published, as some contributors have asked that their submission remain private

 **Twitter**

Are museums important to you? Have your say - join the debate #ukwellbeing #WhyILoveMuseums
<http://ow.ly/4vgNz>

2011/04/07 15:30

Chief Statistician of the EU gives his views on #ukwellbeing What do you think? Join the debate
<http://ow.ly/4v3el>

2011/04/07 10:57

17. Comments would be published once ONS staff had read them and tagged them. Users of the site could then read published responses sorted by time or by topic. All published posts listed all tags that referred to them and users could choose to view other comments submitted that had been classified with the same tag.

18. We discussed whether users should be able to leave comments in response to other comments but concluded that this would become extremely complex. It would

also risk the creation of a system that would allow for large numbers of isolated comments that wouldn't be easily seen by other site users.

19. After tagging, the comments were archived regularly to CSV format ready for closer analysis by the well-being team.

3. A response posted 4 days ago...

Tags: fairness, family, health, personal relationships, respect, society

What things in life matter most to you?

Health, friends and family, fairness in society - meaning the ability for anyone to pursue a happy life and have basic needs met (including respect).

Is there more to National Well-being than happiness? What else matters?

Life can never be always 'happy' but the internal and external ability to pursue happiness or at least contentment is paramount

4. A response posted 4 days ago...

Tags: achievement, children, culture, environment, family, food, free time, green spaces, health, job satisfaction, respect, diversity, fairness, international obligations, pride

What things in life matter most to you?

My children being happy and healthy.

A walk in the mountains.

E. Social media

20. Asking people to comment and leave their opinions is a standard feature of many so-called web 2.0 or social media websites. We were keen to become part of a conversation about well-being in the UK that was not only restricted to the well-being debate website.

21. We commissioned a short video piece made up of people's reactions to the question "what does well-being mean to you?" We uploaded this to YouTube, and embedded it on the home page of the debate website (see screenshot on next page).

22. We also brought forward plans for the creation of a corporate ONS Twitter account, where we tweeted details about well-being events, blog postings, and links to other online well-being related materials. In several cases, people tweeted us responses to questions that we'd asked about well-being. These responses were recorded and treated as contributions to the debate.

At the Office for National Statistics, we're developing new measures of national well-being

Like the people in the video, we want to know what you think is most important in your life and in the lives of those around you.

Is it what you earn or is it the time you spend with your family? Does the value of your house count, or is the state of the environment more important?

Use this website to tell us what matters to you.

This website will be open for your comments until 15 April, after which we will publish a summary of your responses. This will help us as we move from defining what national well-being is to the next step: looking at how we might measure it.

Join the debate ▶



This is the official Measuring National Well-being debate website.
The website has been developed on behalf of the Office for National Statistics (ONS)



Get short, timely messages from ONS.

Twitter is a rich source of instantly updated information. It's easy to stay updated on an incredibly wide variety of topics. [Join today](#) and follow [@statisticsONS](#).

[Sign Up](#)

Get updates via SMS by texting [follow statisticsONS](#) to 86444 in the United Kingdom
[Codes for other countries](#)

Are museums important to you?
<http://ow.ly/4vgNz> Have your say - join the debate <http://goo.gl/FTj6z> [#ukwellbeing](#) [#WhyILoveMuseums](#)
about 1 hour ago via web

Chief Statistician of the EU gives his views on [#ukwellbeing](#)
<http://ow.ly/4v3ei> What do you think? Join the debate <http://goo.gl/FTj6z>
about 6 hours ago via web

Isolation and well-being - @igfoundation discuss <http://ow.ly/4umjg>
What do you think? Join the debate <http://goo.gl/FTj6z> [#ukwellbeing](#)
7:22 AM Apr 6th via web

How much more do people earn having a degree than without?
View our short video at <http://bit.ly/eTpm7> [#ONS](#)
3:36 AM Apr 6th via web

Index of Production falls by 1.2 per cent between January and February <http://bit.ly/eSmYEB> [#ONS](#)

Name ONS
Location UK
Web <http://www.ons.gov.uk>
Bio The official channel of the Office for National Statistics in the UK. Twitter Policy: <http://tinyurl.com/32bpow2>

65 following 969 followers 32 listed

Tweets 212

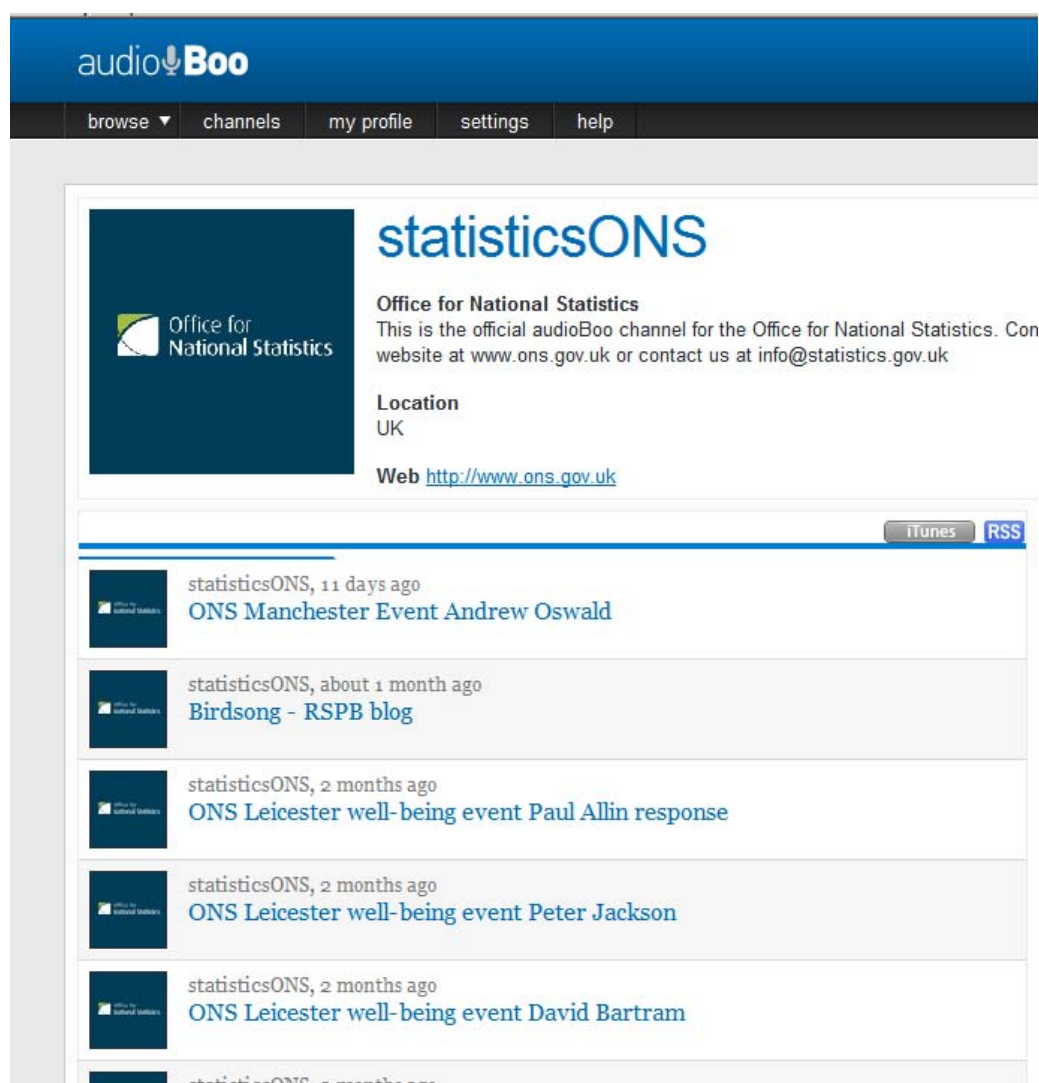
Favorites

Following

View all...

RSS feed of statisticsONS's tweets

23. We were able to request audio recordings from several of the events, and we created an Audioboo account to upload these recordings to.



24. Well-being debate team staff were involved in contributing to debates about well-being that took place on other websites, for example NetMums. Users of the debate site could also choose to bookmark the site in Delicious, Digg, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and StumbleUpon.

F. The news blog

25. After a user had submitted their comments to the debate site, they would be shown some text encouraging them to return to the site to view progress on the debate. Visitors to the site could also choose “News” from the menu to view the news blog at any point.

26. The news blog became an integral part of the debate site. It allowed us to quickly commission and publish topical content related to the debate. For example,

we were able to publish a piece considering whether sport affected our well-being just before the start of the Six Nations rugby tournament.

27. By the end of the debate, over 70 blog postings on a wide variety of subjects connected to well-being had been published on the blog. Each posting was also tweeted and users could leave comments on blog articles.

[Home](#) [News](#) [Events](#)

[← Older posts](#)


How can museums step up to the challenge and improve our well-being?

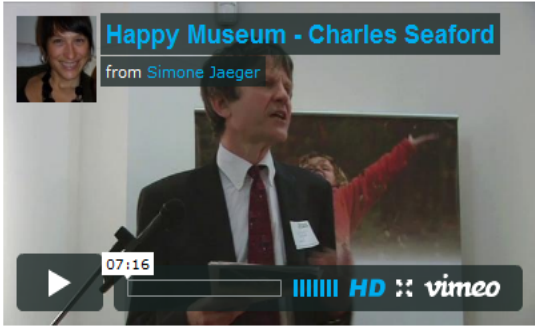
Posted on April 7, 2011 by sianf

Tony Butler, Museum of East Anglian Life, discusses the Happy Museum Project and how it is challenging UK museums to become sustainable, high well-being organisations.

Museums have a lot going for them in promoting well-being. They are popular, some 47 per cent of adults living in England made at least one museum visit in 2009. They benefit from high levels of trust and they are a sanctuary from commercial messages. This is no trivial matter, for not only is materialism strongly implicated in our present environmental difficulties, it is increasingly recognised by psychologists as a serious source of unhappiness.

The paper *The Happy Museum* (written by new economics foundation (nef) and leading museum thinkers) suggests that museums are in a great position to use their trust and popularity to increase well-being. In future rather than be just tellers, they should accept they don't have all the answers. From time to time they should eschew their objectivity and actively lead campaigns. Rather than view themselves as a neutral spaces, museums should realise the power of the museum as a place for encounters and its potential use as a rallying point or refuge for the community.





Happy Museum – Charles Seaford from Simone Jaeger on Vimeo.

G. Post-debate

28. We made the site available for two weeks after the debate closed, to allow people to return to read comments. After this, we archived the responses and redirected debate site visitors to www.ons.gov.uk/well-being, which will continue to update people on the progress of the National Well-being Programme.

29. National Statistician Jil Matheson will publish her report on this phase of the programme in the summer, along with how the new measures will be taken forward.

There were a lot of firsts for the ONS in this project. It was the first time that we had:

- used Wordpress open-source software
- delivered a fully functional bilingual website
- created a website from scratch and launched it in less than a month
- used social media to engage with users
- published user-generated content.

30. The flexibility that our debate website provided was vital in allowing us to relate the debate to events. We were pleased not just with the number of comments that we received, but also by the sometimes considerable depth of thought and care that had gone into their creation.

III. Case Study 2: the 2011 Census

A. Background to the Census in the UK

31. Since 1801, every ten years the nation has set aside one day for the census - a count of all people and households. The latest census was conducted in England and Wales by the Office for National Statistics and took place on Sunday 27 March 2011. For the first time ever the census questionnaire was available to complete online, with Twitter, Facebook and online gaming forming part of a comprehensive marketing and publicity campaign designed to reach an ever more diverse population.



B. Brief for the engagement exercise

32. Online engagement for the 2011 Census has occurred or is planned in three separate strands, each designed to motivate and engage an audience to serve a specific purpose:

- Consultation: an initial consultation on outputs from the census, held in 2008
- Publicity: supporting recruitment, raising awareness of the census, delivering key messages and informing and engaging the public during the live census operation in the first half of 2011

- Publication: broadcasting census data releases and promoting third party use and re-use of published data, planned in phases from summer 2012

C. Consultation

33. The consultation exercise sought to engage census data users and ascertain the basic requirements for products from the 2011 Census via an online survey. Expanded discussion and exchange between stakeholders was encouraged via a blog and supporting forum. A wiki platform was developed with the potential for collaborative development or peer review of content to support output products.



D. Publicity

34. To support the first true online census in England and Wales a comprehensive multi-platform marketing and communication campaign was planned and executed. All census information and support was provided online, and the central census website was the first point of contact for the public. The 2011 Census was the first UK census to allow people to complete their forms online.

35. With 46.7 million internet users in the UK, a digital strategy was vital to raise awareness of the census with segments of the population for which digital channels are becoming the preferred means of communication. A Flickr stream provided an online resource and account of live events and competitions. The census Facebook presence capitalized on the growing online interest in family history, sought to engage key groups such as students, and marketed to other younger audiences using an online viral game. A census YouTube channel provided rich media to support the PR campaign and deliver enhanced information and add interesting historical context to the census.

36. These initiatives were supported further by dedicated census twitter feeds targeting the media, the public, and the Welsh language audience. Twitter provided the means to deliver a more informal voice for the census to a wider audience, promote events, and drive traffic to other online media. Tweets have been used to update the public on progress throughout the live census operations, publicising key milestones around questionnaire delivery and enumeration, and promoting local and national media coverage.

37. The campaign also attempted to engage with the hard-to-reach youth market for 18 to 24-year-olds. The team commissioned a viral game, Census Man, developed by a viral games company, Koko. To date, the game has notched up more than 700,000 plays.

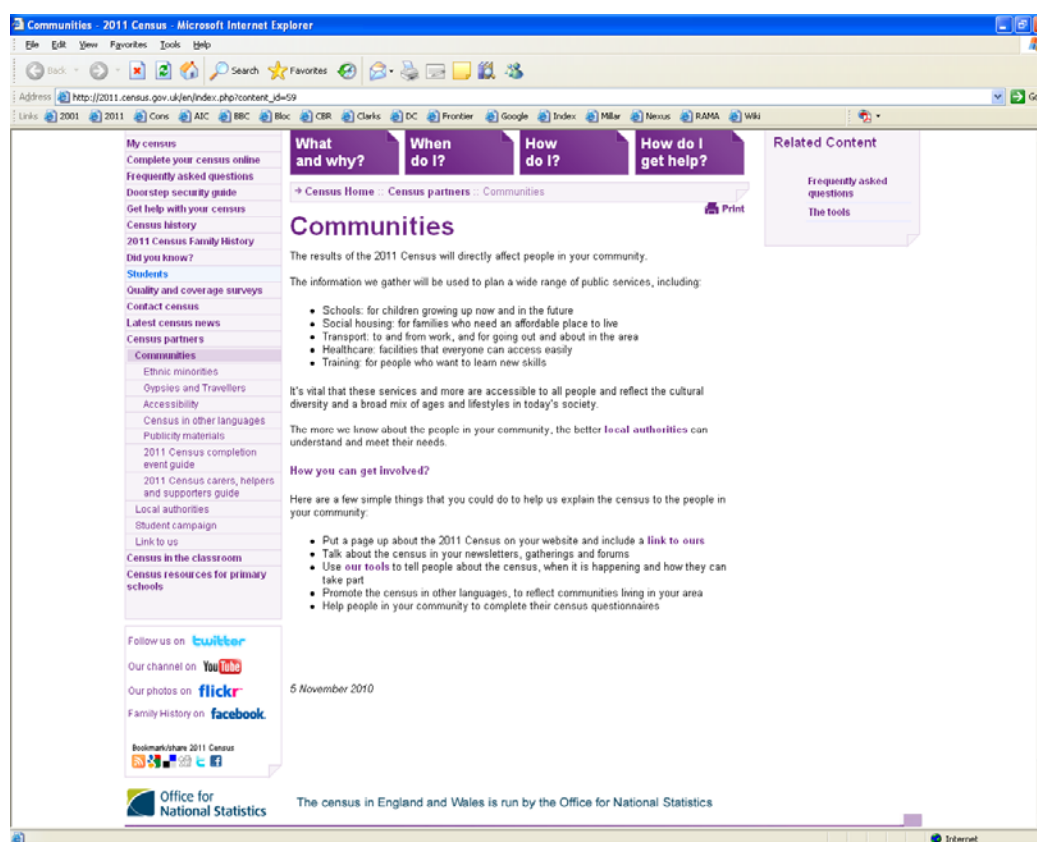
E. Publication

38. Although the release of first results from the census are little more than a year away, plans for the use of social media to promote the publication of findings are already being considered. Building upon the efforts expended to encourage the public to engage with the census and provide their information, it is sensible to use similar channels to deliver the back to them. A key part of the strategy for outputs from the census involves promoting the re-usability of data in open formats. The census is already working with the developer community to encourage development of applications which deliver data online in enhanced formats data re more accessible than ever before. In addition to promoting primary data releases, social media will be used to broadcast and promote 3rd party releases which make census data more accessible, aggregate census data with that from other sources, and use new visualizations to tell the story of the nation's population. Plans involve the use of RSS feeds for updates, social book-marking, and use of twitter to broadcast releases and foster a reciprocal pattern of re-tweeting of 3rd party releases.

F. Lessons learned/what we would do differently/what we would have liked to do but weren't able to

39. The multi-platform approach to initial user consultation was devised as a way of engaging both known users of census data and moving beyond typical stakeholders (for the most part academics and members of specific interest groups) to develop a broader community of practice. In the event, it attracted mainly those who had been involved with the census in the past.

40. Response to the online survey was very good, and analytics confirmed a high level of continued and returning traffic to the blog and wiki. Respondents to the survey were polled to determine their interest and pattern of use. While some visitors were keen to help develop a community of practice by engaging with the site or participating in discussions, the majority maintained only passive participation – returning only to view updates and additions rather than contributing. Overall, there was more emphasis on the non-participatory aspects of the site.



41. The census publicity campaign is still active while live operations are in effect. A considered review of activities will be conducted as the campaign draws to a close, but current evidence is very promising. Analytics and measures of success are expected to confirm anecdotal success at meeting the primary objectives of informing and engaging the public. The active use of twitter was successful at publicising events and broadcasting key dates. Support of census tweets via re-tweeting by local government and other stakeholders is an encouraging sign for future activities.

42. The success of the publicity campaign as an information channel to engage and promote active participation suggests a best approach to pursue in promoting the release and use of data in the coming years. The most cost effective use of social channels in the future should be as a broadcast platform to announce releases, to promote the best uses and 3rd party releases of data, and encourage such reciprocal promotion from stakeholders and partners.