Issues in Adapting Evaluation to Tap The Power of Social Media

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What Are Social Media?

Wikipedia:
Web- and mobile-based technologies which are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among organizations, communities, and individuals.
Types of Social Media

- Collaborative projects ➔ Wikipedia
- Blogs ➔ Twitter
- Content communities ➔ YouTube
- Social networks ➔ Facebook

Open access based on opting in
Why Evaluators Should Care About Social Media

WWW.IPDET.ORG
It’s About How People Get Evaluative Information for Decision-Making

Think TRIP ADVISOR

• Real-time
• Unbiased [Relatively]
• Users
It’s about How data collection for monitoring & evaluation gets done in what might be called in some countries the New Era of the Citizen Evaluator
REAL-TIME DATA COLLECTION
REAL-TIME DATA COLLECTION IN REMOTE LOCATIONS

Photo courtesy of UNDP in Kazakhstan
COMING SOON? Evaluator as Steward of Citizen Deliberation

• Constructing deliberative forums throughout evaluation processes in practical contexts
• Evaluators to consider their role in being stewards of citizen deliberation
• Beyond participatory evaluation
• Cheryl Macneil *The American Journal of Evaluation* Volume 23, Issue 1, Spring 2002, Pages 45–54
Biggest Challenge

Developed World
Identifying who you are reaching online
• Demographics of those participating
• Identifying passive participants
• Determining sample bias

Developing World
Who has Internet access and who does not?
Most Work on Using Social Media for Evaluation Led BY NGOs

- Knight Foundation’s Community Information Challenge
  - 80 projects to create more informed and engaged communities
  - Started using social media and website analysis to evaluate impact
- FSG presentation at AEA 2011: interactive dialogue on issues
- Estimate 97% of nonprofits are using social media
Exploring Social Media for Front-End Evaluation – Bliss Jensen and Lynda Kelly

- Case study using social media to revise content for a major museum exhibition
- Interactive forum for contributing and reacting to ideas
- Looked at time invested and outcomes compared with traditional front-end study
- Went from blog to Facebook group
Issues

• Doesn’t substitute for other forms of evaluation
• Takes time; don’t underestimate to market, instruct, build and maintain activity
• Issues of intellectual property: who owns ideas?
• Raise expectations that delivery does not match?
Issues

• Importance of knowing bias in who responds (beyond age)
• Passive participation still participation
• All about enabling interaction but can be uncontrollable
• Bottom line: It will happen-- guide or not/informally or formally!
Implications for IPDET & Others

- Use Facebook more actively for evaluation especially for what is happening over time
- Link to other sites like LinkedIn IDEAS
- Send Tweets with evaluation nuggets
- Ask for input e.g. new evaluation workshops
- Think about a weekly blog in addition to listserv
- Supplemental, not replacement
Keep selectivity and bias of respondents in mind but informal evaluation will happen with you or without you!