

Youth Participation Principles & Social Media

YACVic's research piece, **'What makes you Tweet?'**, explores young people's use of social media and perspectives about how government agencies and community organisations should use social media to communicate with them. Through a survey of 55 young people, six focus groups and five case studies, the report highlights opportunities for social media to be used as an engagement tool in ways that are empowering, purposefully engaging and inclusive.

Below is a set of principles of youth participation, which have been adapted for use in a social media context. The questions under each principle are intended to guide organisations and governments to develop a social media youth engagement strategy that is in line with the principles of good youth participation. It is envisioned that the framework will also be helpful for organisations and governments already using social media to reflect upon existing policies and practices to ensure that their use is empowering, purposefully engaging, and inclusive for young people.

Purposeful Engagement

Young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes.

What is your motivation for engaging young people with social media?

- How does it match the aspirations of young people themselves or how is it different?

Considering and interrogating your motivations will help to avoid tokenistic engagement.

- Will this process give young people valued roles?
- Will it be addressing issues that young people deem as relevant to them?
- Will young people see that their engagement influences real outcomes?

Why do you want to engage young people through social media?

- Is social media the best tool for that purpose and what form of social media will best suit that purpose?

Social media is best used when we go beyond simply getting a message to young people, and instead engage in a meaningful exchange.

Empowerment

Young people having greater control over their lives through participation.

Will young people's engagement with you through social media potentially increase their agency and enhance their wellbeing?

Will young people engage in a meaningful dialogue with you through their participation?

- How will young people know that their perspectives are being heard and valued?
- Are young people contributing to the agenda?

Are you using the social media medium to its capacity—to improve your participatory practice and create an empowering dynamic with young people?

Are you creating a safe space for young people to use online, thereby fulfilling your duty of care?

Inclusiveness

Ensuring that all young people are able to participate.

Social media can be a useful tool to engage young people who face barriers to other opportunities to participate, such as physical access, social isolation or time to be available for face-to-face engagement.

However, the use of social media should not be seen as a substitute for all other forms of engagement—instead it should be one engagement tool to complement others. In some cases, face to face engagement is more suitable and barriers to physical access will still need to be addressed to ensure young people's participation.

Remember that not all young people use social media confidently or have ready easy access to social media.

Do the young people you should engage with have ready access to social media and might they need some support in using it confidently?

Why young people use social media

"...it is an easy and modern way to find out about current events and debates, get opinions, on different subjects."

"The reason why it keeps going is that people will get comments... and if people are being heard, then they're going to speak again."

Young people's use of social media to build a sense of community

"For people with disabilities it can be good because, not me personally, but some of us are very isolated and we don't venture outside our computers, not because we don't want to, but just because it is the way it is...it's a good thing to have a place, even if it's online, to feel included and the sense of importance, even if it's just through words on a keyboard, it's really valuable to some people."

Use of social media by young people and organisations to take action and create change

"[T]raditional forms of promotion have mainly been to services and local government and paid staff who may possibly send it out in a newsletter...or an email. Social media is a direct way of reaching out to young people... people just tell you what they think. It publicises what you're doing, the good and the bad, and everyone gets to have a say."

Young people's perspectives about how the use of social media by organisations or government agencies can be helpful

"Social media may be a place where people who cannot rely on people close to them for support find refuge. It may take seeing an ad for e.g. mental health service on one of these sites seeking to connect them in order to get help."

