Future Social Media: enhancing cohesion through advanced digital technology

Open Call and workshop report
and roadmap for social media innovation

Vital Media project, May 2018

Overview

In April 2018, Digital Catapult, in collaboration with Technology Ireland Innovation Forum, Trinity College and ADAPT Centre Dublin, designed and delivered an Open Call and workshop on the theme of 'future social media' as part of our deliverables within Work Package 2 of the Vital Media project. During the project duration, Digital Catapult has delivered two networking events within the UK and Europe to facilitate collaboration between technologists and creative content makers, and to create a roadmap for digital media content and media innovation. A snapshot report from the first event that we held, in April 2017, can be found at https://nem-initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/new-realities-report-presentation-april17.pdf.

1. Strategic focus of our activities

- **Why we chose the theme:** We developed the *Future Social Media: enhancing cohesion through advanced digital technology* theme in order to explore what and how social media will look in the future, how we are going to get there, and what has to be done to enable it. It's well known that during the last one-two decades, social media applications have introduced significant changes to the way people and businesses communicate, and moreover, to the way entire online communities are established and organised through common interests.

  Its capabilities are tremendous to obtain information about the acceptance of a new product or service, identification of needs, or even the determination of ways to influence particular social acts and events. Opportunities as much as challenges are abundant – be it in relation to data protection, consumer trust, new areas of social media brought on by the convergence of technologies, disruption to business and cooperation models, and citizen/user education.

  As advanced digital technologies become more prominent in enhancing users' social experiences, technology providers and creative content makers need to work together effectively in order to deliver relevant, accessible, cutting edge and user-focused innovations, products and services. For the purpose of this Open Call and workshop we describe advanced digital technologies as:

  - Immersive (augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), mixed reality, haptics)
  - Intelligent (artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML))
  - Data-driven (blockchain/distributed ledger, cybersecurity)
  - Future networks (5G, low-power wide-area network (LPWAN), IoT)

Furthermore, as the Vital Media project is aligned with the NEM (New European Media) Initiative - one of the largest research and innovation communities focused on media and content in Europe – we aimed to align the theme of the Open Call and workshop with current priorities of NEM as well as with the European Commission (EC). The *Towards the Future Social Media* White Paper was published by NEM in December 2017 aiming to identify the next steps towards the future social media, including required research and innovation activities to achieve defined goals, as well as related standardisation, regulatory, and policy actions – underpinned with a European approach. We took key themes from this White Paper to help shape the Open Call and workshop.

- **Why we worked with the partners:** Digital Catapult met with Technology Ireland Innovation Forum at Cap Digital's Future en Seine festival in Paris in June 2017, and again at the NEM Summit in Madrid in November 2017, where early discussions took place about the aspiration to collaborate. The Forum's network manager, Dave Feenan, subsequently connected Digital Catapult with Trinity College Research & Innovation's industry liaison manager, Audrey Crosbie and the ADAPT Centre's head of design and innovation, Declan McKibben, and associate director commercialisation, Liam Cronin, in which they all saw the opportunities in working with us.

  Trinity College and ADAPT Centre were particularly keen to collaborate with us via the Vital Media project and NEM Initiative, as they saw this as an opportunity to raise their profile across the European media, technology and innovation landscape. As well as to be able to tap into future opportunities with Vital Media project partners and NEM members - such as developing future EU-funded project bids and also to be able to exploit knowledge transfer across different European territories.

  Digital Catapult also saw the potential in collaborating with the three Irish organisations, as their objectives and approach to technology innovation and working with start up and scale up organisations align with ours. Furthermore, it was clear from an early stage that all of the organisations are very well connected with business, industry, research and investment community, which was essential for us to deliver a successful Open Call and workshop. Trinity College plays a significant role in producing entrepreneurs and is the only European university within the Top 50 (in 2017), making this the third year in a row that it has been ranked first in Europe by the private equity and venture-focused research firm PitchBook.[1]

  > *"Trinity sits at number 48 in the global rankings for producing venture-backed entrepreneurs from its undergraduate programmes, according to PitchBook's recently published Universities Report"*

- **Why we chose Ireland**: With guidance from the EC, we ran our second event in a European country that does not have significant representation across both the NEM Initiative as well as wider EC-funded projects. We chose Ireland as opposed to a country in Eastern Europe, due to a number of factors:

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[1] https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/trinity-remains-european-leader-in-producing-entrepreneurs/8143

- The Republic of Ireland derived €263m from the "digital media" market in 2018,[2] while the digital technology and ICT industry in Ireland holds "9 of the world's top 10 ICT companies located in market" with Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Google all having significant operations[3]
- We were also drawn to Ireland given some of the unique challenges and opportunities that media companies face there. For example, as Brexit could potentially have negative impacts on media companies, such as in Louth and Donegal,[4] we wanted to ensure that links remained well established
- Furthermore, social media can help in seizing the main opportunity for consumer-centric businesses (such as those in media) to find themselves with more engaged and loyal audiences per capita.[5]

- **Objective of the activities**: The Open Call was designed to identify and showcase some of the most innovative future social media solutions across Europe. The objective was also to demonstrate cohesion between technology providers, creative content makers, their users/adopters and research through social media, and the role (including opportunities and barriers) that different advanced digital technologies can have on the interplay of these.

  We invited applications from startups, scale ups, and collaborative partnerships from across Europe to showcase and pitch their innovative future social media solutions in front of peers, investors, accelerators and incubators at the workshop on 17 April in Dublin. As well as showcasing and pitching, the three successful finalists (out of six applications received in total) have had / will have the opportunity to:

  - Participate at a 1:1 mentoring session with relevant specialists / experts (for example, lawyers, business development experts, social media and advanced digital technology experts)

  - Have all their expenses paid to attend the workshop in Dublin

  - Increase exposure of their product, service and organisation

  - Gain access to investors / accelerators / incubators, which will potentially lead to investment or business development

  - Pitch their innovation to peers, leading to potential collaborations and adopters

  - Leverage advice and expertise to help their business overcome a challenge / accelerate innovation

  - Promote their story via a case study that will be published online including on the NEM Initiative Digital Catapult, Technology Ireland Innovation Forum and Trinity College websites, and disseminated to a wide European (and wider) audience.*

[2] "Digital Media - Ireland | Statista Market Forecast". 2018. *Statista*.
https://www.statista.com/outlook/200/140/digital-media/ireland?currency=gbp#
[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exporting-to-ireland/exporting-to-ireland
[4] https://www.tssg.org/2018/02/rise-of-the-regions-which-areas-of-ireland-are-winning-in-tech/
[5] https://www.pwc.ie/media-centre/press-release/2017/irish-entertainment-and-media-industry-set-to-grow.htm

The objective of the workshop was to bring start ups, SMEs, academics, researchers, cluster representatives and representatives from citizen- and media literacy-focused organisations from across Europe together. The workshop was designed to be interactive and a learning and networking opportunity for participants as well as an intelligence-gathering opportunity for us (the facilitators).

Participants had the opportunity to gain insights and advice from leading social media, advanced digital technology and business development experts, and contribute to a panel and provocation session about innovation opportunities and barriers for future social media for technology providers, creative content makers and research.

2. Active participation in the activities

- **Participant numbers and territories**: A total six businesses applied to the Open Call from across the UK and Ireland with three being selected as finalists – two from Ireland and one from the UK. A total of 48 people registered to attend the workshop with 37 that attended on the day. The vast majority – if not all – of the workshop participants came from Ireland, and came from a mix of start ups, academia and clusters/networks.

- **Contributing individuals and organisations**: Details of the three Open Call finalists are as follows:
  - Tony Burke and Keith Curley : **Gladcloud**. Gladcloud has developed an Integrated Enterprise SaaS platform that connects Brands and On-Demand Services with their affiliated merchant partners, addressing the key parallel challenges and opportunities of improving customer engagement and increasing revenue at each merchant partner location. Gladcloud's platform provides these Brands and On-Demand Services with:
    - Aggregation & AI-based analysis of Social & Review data at scale for both affiliated and potential merchant partners (e.g. Restaurants & Bars),
    - An integrated, easy-to use-dashboard within On-Premise portals for these local merchant partners to better manage customer engagement on social and review sites and,
    - Simple to use social video advertising tools to increase revenue at each location by publishing unique, customised and locally relevant video ads at scale across multiple platforms"
  - Luke Rynne Cullen, Conor Clery and Eoin O'Reilly : **Applaud Events**. Applaud Events is an online booking platform for performers. We are aspiring to develop into a Tripadvisor/Airbnb style website, with the networking qualities of LinkedIn. We are implementing an escrow service for performers to get paid once both parties verify the booking. Our MVP includes integrated spotify, soundcloud, bandcamp, youtube and so much more to allow performers to showcase their best content on their profiles, like an online portfolio. We are also aiming to provide a crowdfunding feature that allows performers to set goals like kickstarter/gofundme, this will assist in the websites promotion as the performers will advertise it themselves.
  - Nikita Zdanov and Ilya Kuznetsov : **Fussy**. Fussy's innovation will use AI to recommend relevant, local Instagram micro-influencers to promote and review restaurants to their highly engaged and local following. Accumulated data will also

be used to help improve restaurant operations and increase revenue for restaurants.

Details of the social media, advanced digital technology and business development experts (including investor, accelerator and incubator representatives) who presented / spoke on the day are as follows.

- o **(Keynote) Mark Little**, Co-Founder, NevaLabs. Mark was Founder of world's first social news agency, Storyful, and led Twitter's media team in Europe. He's also a former TV news anchor and foreign correspondent. Mark is currently building solutions for those who want a more productive and empowering news experience.
- o **Prof. Vinny Wade,** Director, ADAPT Centre
- o **Dr. Jennifer Jones**, Media for Communities - Research, Education, Advocacy and Lecturer in Service Design, Scotland's Service Design Academy
- o **Kevin Marks**, Decentralised Web Fellow consulting on standards, data and strategy, Digital Catapult
- o **Prof. Dave Lewis**, Deputy Director for Industry Spokes, Trinity College Dublin / ADAPT Centre
- o **Alison Crawford**, Investment Associate, University Bridge Fund
- o **Neil Gordon**, Start-up support Manager, Trinity College
- o **Thomas Melia**, Senior Commercialisation Specialist, Enterprise Ireland
- o **Julian Seymour**, Syndicates Manager, Halo Business Angel Network

3. Top takeaways from the workshop for innovators working in the social media space – by keynote, Mark Little

- Five principles and areas where innovators can find solutions
  1. Design (with human beings in mind, otherwise your business/innovation is open to manipulation - don't fall in love with the product but the problem it solves)
  2. Decentralisation (while considering the identity of the individual - a need to think about natural language processing (NLP) in a radically new way)
  3. Engagement (for example, engaged journalism, where the audience/users are part of the storytelling process and communities are at the centre of the journalism)
  4. Revenue (innovators of course need to think about how they make money, and think about sustainable business models across all aspects of the innovation, but should avoid thinking about the social web as philanthropic)
  5. Capital (think about how businesses are financed – venture capitalists (VCs) think about growth but this should not be the core of your ideas – you should look wider at unlocking potential).

> **Kathryn Louise Geels**
> @girlondon
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> Key points from our #futuresocialmedia panel: @marklittlenews: stop using the term fake news & disruption; @jennifermjones: media literacy needs to be core; @kevinmarks: how do we create a web that is connected w/ standards?; Prof. Dave Lewis: GDPR is a gift that we shld explore

4. Key themes and learning gained at the workshop about enhancing cohesion between the different social media players (technology providers, content creators, users/adopters, researchers). Incorporating opportunities and challenges around data protection, consumer trust, new areas of social media brought on by the convergence of technologies, disruption to business and cooperation models, and citizen/ user education.

- What will / could cohesion look like?
  - Social media started as a revolutionary idea, then became the antithesis, i.e. between users/adopters, and now we have to look at how to create a synthesis
  - Preserving the web as a set of independent sites that communicate with each other, i.e. via standards
  - For future social media, the benefits must outweigh the negatives. Where cohesion *is* created, benefits include:
    - A means for content creators to seek other opinions from specialists (via crowdsourcing)
    - Access to a mass audience without going through gatekeepers
    - Ability to be transported to the place, in real time
    - Democratic potential
  - We need to determine "what is information that is healthy?"
  - How can we replicate innovative things happening in wellness and health technology, for example, to the broader social media ecosystem?

- We need to go beyond fetishizing 'disruption'. For example, instead of calling for the likes of Facebook to be boycotted altogether (particularly on the back of the Cambridge Analytica situation), we need to mature alongside advances in digital technology and make incremental gains in our exploitation of them

> "*Disruption should not be about moving fast and breaking things, but making incremental gains*". Kevin Marks

- **What needs to be done to enable this?**
  - **Policy and makers and regulators** need to see the information disorder across social media as the next big public health problem
  - Government and tech platforms should not necessarily be the entities spearheading regulation
  - Regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are useful, especially as it is citizen/user-centric, but not necessarily designed for innovation or the nuances of advanced digital technologies such as AI and ML. Furthermore, where an issue is presented at an individual level, such as an individual activating their right for data portability and taking their data elsewhere, this is still a fairly powerless undertaking. Whereas if 100,000 people ask for portability of their data, or collectively request more transparency, this is a big bargaining chip. Therefore, how can regulations and frameworks be designed and implemented that take into account both the citizen and the innovation opportunity? And how can they be 'speak to' and reach the common person so that maximum impact can be gained through their implementation?
  - Both policy makers and platform providers need to consider how we address closed social networks
  - **Platform providers** reward for bad behaviour and don't currently create incentives for people who create value through using their services. Therefore, there is opportunity for the likes of Twitter and Facebook to reward for value creation – be it via journalism, community building, providing positive experiences for other users
  - They should be delivering a service that benefits everyone, including other innovators. Such as building APIs for other innovators to benefit from and provide different services through, allowing interoperating data, and sharing data
  - **Users and adopters** shouldn't see platform providers as monoliths, but rather we should be more open to a third-party ecosystem emerging alongside them
  - Media and digital literacy is essential and as traditional education establishments are not equipped with this endeavour, policy makers, platform providers, and other stakeholders need to work together to enable effective, relevant and timely knowledge and awareness for users
  - **Researchers** need to continue to explore 'humanistic overload' as so many people are continuously playing catch-up with the pace and dynamics of social media – even those who have grown up online

- **What are the opportunities for innovators?**
  - Social media empowers people, so innovators need to ensure that their product or service is enabling empowerment in a positive and constructive way

- For areas such as news media/journalism, which social media completely changed the means of production for, technology innovators particularly should look at what advanced digital technologies will take such aspects to the next level in the future
- Innovators need to ensure that ethics and values are embedded into their technology

5. The role that advanced digital technologies can play in enhancing cohesion and in creating wider opportunities and challenges

- To enable content creators (e.g. journalists) to do their job more efficiently – for example, so they don't need to spend vast amounts of time wading through information and determining what is legitimate
- In regards to antithesis, big social platforms are essentially a contradiction. As on one hand they enable and encourage democratisation, but on the other hand they exploit this through being the gatekeepers of users' data and monetising it through pushed content, and third parties and advertisers of their choice – not the choice of the users
- We need to consider the interplay between advanced digital technologies and marginalised communities and ensure that humans still act as a broker rather than relying on technology itself
- AI is a very specific challenge as the technologists and content creators do not understand the outputs of the AI. There is a lot of opportunity with AI to build transparency, however:
  - We need to be able to explain to common people how things like deep learning works in order to match businesses enthusiasm about it
  - There is perhaps incentive for business to use AI to hide the fact that we (consumers) are not making conscious choices
  - There is difficulty in narrating and renarrating through our own lens about what AI is, how it works and why it's 'good' or 'bad'
- Advanced digital technologies do bring the benefit of helping people understand others better – be it in regards to identity, perceptions, biases and interests, and also helps people to collaborate
- We shouldn't force technological advancements onto people, however. User experience is fundamental and each person doesn't necessarily want or need the same experience or functionality. For example, users should be able to turn off AI-driven recommended content

- We also shouldn't allow only digital technology to prescribe aspects such as filter bubbles and identities, as context is lacking. For example, humans often have a public identity that is different from their personal or offline identity.

6. Did the activities meet their objective?

These joint activities facilitated multiple new engagements between Trinity College and Digital Catapult, the three short listed companies, the Irish investment community and the start up ecosystem. Furthermore, on the back of helping to design and deliver these activities, Trinity Research & Innovation aims to connect its researchers to industry and the end user community for future activities, to ensure that relevant research results are transferred for commercial and societal gain.

Through the Open Call, Digital Catapult met its objective of showcasing a variety of European social media innovations and businesses, and also demonstrating cohesion between different player across social media, and the role of advanced digital technology (particularly apparent in Gladcloud's and Fussy's innovations).

Through the workshop, Digital Catapult met its objective of bringing together participants from a variety of backgrounds / organisations, providing learning and networking opportunities for them, and gathering intelligence for Digital Catapult and the co-facilitators.

Upon collecting feedback from the Open Call finalists about their experience of being part of the Open Call and workshop, overall the objectives were met in relation to:

- Benefiting the finalists' business / innovation
- Increasing their knowledge about the role that advanced digital technologies can play in enhancing cohesion between the different players across social media, *and/or* the role they can play on some of the key social media challenges

> *"The main takeaway for us was creating a deeper engagement with the Adapt Centre, Trinity College and a VC, with whom we are in discussions with regarding development of IP and funding respectively".* Keith Curley, Gladcloud

> *"The one to one sessions provided a fresh set of eyes to examine the user experience of our website, and to point towards avenues of publicity, funding and further mentorship.*
>
> *"The workshop showcased the ability for fast growing platforms to fill niches in the market, to adapt what current businesses do, and how to best spread awareness of our platform by working towards the user's needs rather than what is simply seen as profitable".* Luke Rynne Cullen, Applaud Events

Aspects that could have been improved upon (based on Open Call finalists' feedback and Digital Catapult evaluation) include:

- Capturing interest from more European territories / businesses to apply to the Open Call
- Incorporating a prize (financial or other) for an Open Call grand winner

- Having more time (i.e. making the workshop all-day instead of finishing mid-afternoon) to do 'deeper dives' into some of the key opportunities and challenges, and having all of the expert contributors present individually about their areas. E.g. an investor explaining the criteria needed for a start up to receive investment or a GDPR specialist explaining how best start ups can adapt their business for the new Regulation.

7. Next steps

Digital Catapult is eager to build on its working relationship with Trinity College, ADAPT Centre and Technology Ireland Innovation Forum and look at future collaborative opportunities, including other CR&D projects and also involvement in a London-based event. *Digital Catapult will also follow the progress of the Open Call finalists and will publish a case study on them if, for example, they secure investment / scale in turnover / grow in employees on the back of participating in the Future Social Media activities.

Trinity College will further develop relationships and networks from post-workshop meetings that the Open Call finalists are scheduling with the business development experts, and will actively seek to create opportunities for collaboration and business development. It also aims to provide additional support to the finalists and provide access to expertise and infrastructure within the University.

In addition, Digital Catapult has shared information with the Irish co-facilitators about the NEM Initiative and has encouraged them to become members and consider becoming NEM ambassadors.