Social media horizon scanning

1. **Background**

   1.1. The landscape of social media channels is in constant change, which poses a risk to our communications ability:

      1.1.1. Changing usage patterns of different channels means our existing promotional plans and habits are at risk of reducing in effectiveness year on year

      1.1.2. The channels for which we have the biggest audience (Facebook and Twitter) are those that are decreasingly effective for reaching our Undergraduate members – whereas those for which we have presences but smaller reaches (Snapchat, Instagram, WeChat, LinkedIn) are those that are growing in relevance.

2. **Channel usage at Imperial College Union**

   2.1. **Facebook** is the channel with the single biggest reach; ~14k people have liked or followed our main 'Imperial College Union – ICU'. We also have pages for the Beit Bars (~7.5k) and Reynolds (~1k), and we create groups for incoming Undergraduate and Postgraduate cohorts each year.

      2.1.1. Facebook usage is broadly dropping amongst users under 25, with Facebook's user base moving more towards 'older' groups and other channels (Snapchat, Instagram) growing in market share for younger people. While a very high percentage of non-Asian students will have Facebook accounts, they are decreasingly likely to use them for socialising purposes, either using them infrequently or only to connect with older family members.

      2.1.2. As our Facebook account is the oldest social media account we have, the figure of 14k followers is likely to include a significant percentage of graduated students who may not engage with the content.

      2.1.3. Facebook Messenger retains a level of popularity, with it being an increasingly common way for students to ask direct, private questions of Imperial College Union – generally customer service queries.

      2.1.4. Our Facebook content is multi-purpose – news, updates, links to key projects, 'light' content such as commentary on the weather or national holidays, etc.

   2.2. **Twitter** is our second-biggest channel, with ~8k followers for our main account. We also have accounts for each Officer Trustee (such as @icu_president) but follower counts are low (~0.5k at most) and the OTs see little value in using them regularly.

2.2.1. Twitter engagement is barely growing amongst younger people, with most engagement being for news-gathering purposes rather than directly socialising.

2.2.2. Good practice on Twitter is to *engage* in two-way conversations rather than *broadcast* in one-way conversations, but we have detected very little demand for this from our members.

2.2.3. Our Twitter content is much like our Facebook content – multi-purpose in nature.

2.3. [Instagram](#) (~1.5k) is an extremely popular platform amongst young people; as a channel it has a particular focus on aesthetics and design rather than informative content. Our usage follows that ethos, with most content being design focus or 'artistic' images of spaces, buildings and activities across campus.

2.3.1. Content for Instagram is usually initiated by the Marketing team as other teams are not always familiar with its role and potential.

2.4. **Snapchat** (followers unknown) has widespread penetration into the demographic of our members. Organisations can engage through Snapchat by creating 'filters' (images to be overlaid on photos or videos taken by users, such as an 'I Voted!' badge) or through stories, where student officers or staff can post short videos or images with captions about their activities throughout the day.

2.4.1. Our Snapchat content is usually restricted to big events such as the Elections or Summer Ball. We have not developed the habit of creating content more frequently even though it would be technologically simple to do so, as editorial control is unclear and potentially complex.

2.5. [**LinkedIn**](#) (~0.6k) is a little-used channel that requires either reactivated or deleted. The engagement potential for current students is low, although there could be benefit in exploring the following:

2.5.1. Encouraging alumni (and final-year students) to follow us on LinkedIn where we post links and articles to aid employability and development – this is broadly the College's approach

2.5.2. Developing a stronger profile to attract more applicants for our vacancies and to build a professional reputation for Imperial College Union, which could benefit future partnerships.

3. **Discussion points**

3.1. How can we ensure that teams across the organisation are informed about changing social media habits and supported to react accordingly?

3.2. Do we need to change or create any editorial guidelines to support the distributed creation of quality social media content?

3.3. How can we support the creation of content more effectively across the organisation?