



WHITE PAPER

The Value of Social Media in the UK Government

A Hootsuite White Paper

Hootsuite®



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Executive summary

The UK government is steadfast in its commitment to building a world-class digital infrastructure. Supported by a £1 billion investment in next-generation digital infrastructure, the [UK Digital Strategy 2017](#) policy paper outlines a “digital strategy for a digital economy” that will ensure the best digital connectivity for consumers and businesses alike.¹

However, providing a seamless, efficient, and integrated online platform to better serve its citizens is only one part of the digital jigsaw for the UK government. Stimulating economic growth through innovation, productivity and competitive advantage for UK businesses is another piece. Ensuring that all areas of the country and every citizen in the UK has access to adequate connectivity is yet another.

But underpinning all of this is the reality that digital connectivity is now a utility. Modern life in the digital age is becoming impossible without it.

And nowhere is this relentless march towards digitisation epitomised better than in social media. In less than ten years, social media has evolved from a tech trend to a daily communication tool for the general public.

In 2007, according to [research by Statista](#), just thirty percent of UK adults used social media every day.² Fast-forward nine years to 2017 and we see social media penetration in the UK at [64 percent of the population](#).³

Today's population has social media networks at their fingertips every minute of the day, and they expect immediate access to information and real-time responses. This means there is a disconnect between traditional approaches and the expectations of today's hyper-connected, always-on UK citizens.

As such, the UK government must continue to significantly expand its efforts, embracing a government-

57 percent of the UK population are active on social media on their mobile devices.

Source: *We Are Social, Digital in 2017: Global Overview.*

wide citizen engagement and service delivery strategy with social media and mobility at its core.

Never before has government had such a low-cost solution for engaging citizens. Political parties are leveraging social media to win the public support around the world. For example, during the 2015 general election, the Conservative Party [spent £1.2M of their campaigning budget](#) on Facebook advertising.⁴

Maximising the investment in social media requires a strategic approach to social engagement. Government agencies that are doing it well have mastered a way to adopt a human-centric approach when engaging with citizens on social. But there's a lot of work still to do —government is still perceived as being the most annoying industry on social media.⁵

Now more than ever, central and local government organisations that are looking to embrace the power of social media must adopt tools to ensure good outcomes. Social media management solutions can simplify social engagement and pay for themselves by providing operational efficiencies, streamlined service delivery, and improved citizen satisfaction with government interactions.

This white paper explores the value of social media as an agent to drive efficient, effective, and citizen-centric engagement within the UK government.

The social government: How it works

Interacting with British communities

Social media continues to attract a multigenerational audience hungry for real-time information and engagement. With 92 percent of the UK population now on the Internet and 64 percent now active on social media, the [opportunity for a social government is huge](#).⁶

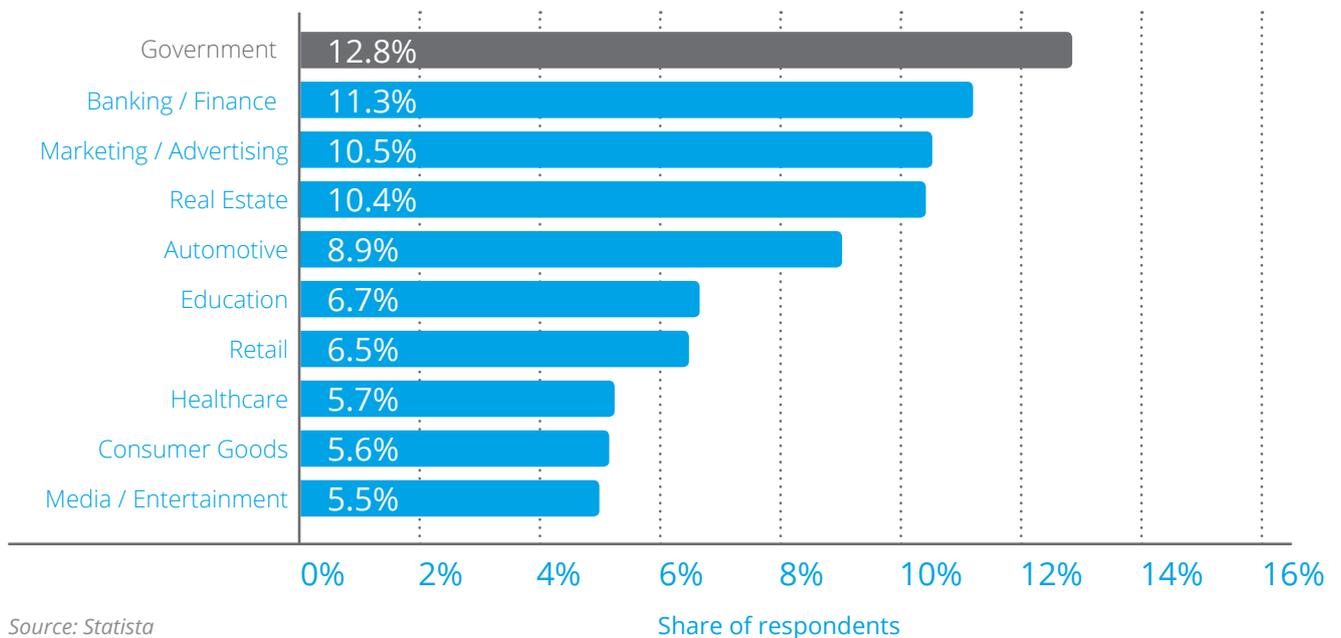
While government agencies are using social media to disseminate information, many are focusing their efforts on using it as a broadcasting tool, resulting in one-sided conversations that don't result in meaningful engagement with citizens. As a result, citizens have a less-than-satisfying experience, which does nothing to improve their view of—or relationship with—government entities.

Simplifying government operations

Compared with traditional means of communication like the telephone, mail, in-person contact, and email, social media provides government agencies a cost-effective way to interact with a larger audience.

Governments can use platforms like Twitter and Facebook to issue alerts and expedite the delivery of information—from traffic and weather notifications to missing-person outreach. The West Midlands Police, England's second largest police force, [use social media](#) to resolve cases using far less resources.⁷ For example, it took them 12 minutes to find a missing man after an appeal was posted on Facebook, and 24 hours to identify an accused assailant after a CCTV video was shared on Facebook and Twitter. These social successes have helped the police force earn trust and credibility with the community.

Most annoying industries on social media according to social media users worldwide as of July 2016



Digital transformation in the UK

One of the seven strands of the [UK Digital Strategy 2017](#) is “Maintaining the UK government as a world leader in serving its citizens online.” Fundamental to this strand is the [Government Transformation Strategy](#). Published in February 2017, this policy paper outlines how the government will use digital to transform the relationship between the citizen and state up to 2020 and beyond.⁸

The UK government’s clear goal is to serve its citizens and businesses with fast, efficient, and seamless online services and tools, as part of its “Government as a Platform” concept.

But this extends beyond a single cross-government platform service being used by 25 million GOV.UK Verify users by 2020. It means providing digital connectivity to every corner of the British Isles, completing the rollout of 4G and superfast broadband by 2020, and implementing a Universal Service Obligation to give all individuals, businesses, and public premises across the UK the right to request an affordable high-speed broadband connection.

The rate of digital transformation has a direct impact on citizens’ ability to adopt social media. Fundamentally, the easier and cheaper it is to access consistent quality broadband, the more people will use it. Furthermore, public sector entities should

consider the success of digitally-connected companies like Amazon and Google to understand citizen appetite for digital access.

All aspects of British society are impacted by digital transformation, from health care and education to transportation. Indeed, the government pledges within its Digital Strategy 2017 policy paper to make the UK’s transport infrastructure smarter, more accessible, and more convenient for passengers.

For example, one way it will do this is by tackling “not-spots” as part of a nationwide rollout of Wi-Fi on trains to cover up to “90% of passenger journeys on Department for Transport-franchised line” by the end of 2018.

Never before has the opportunity been so great for digital transformation to change the lives of British citizens for the better.

More than 2.8 billion people globally were using social media by the end of 2016, up 21 percent from 2015.⁹

Amplifying Social Reach

6,000

Tweets sent every second

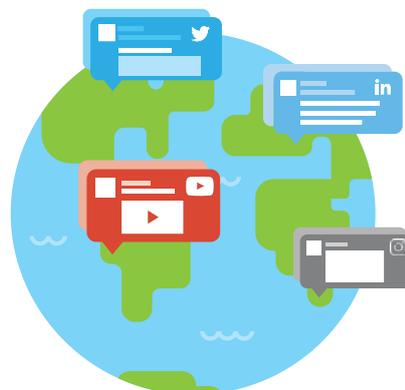
100 Million

Daily active users of Snapchat

1 Billion

Daily searches on LinkedIn

Source: Hootsuite¹⁴



80 Million

Photos shared on Instagram daily

1 in every 6 minutes

Amount of time spent daily on Facebook

4 Billion

Daily views on YouTube

The four pillars of a social government

1. Citizen engagement

Listening to citizens is the first step to learning what's happening within communities. Tweets and Facebook events, polls, lists, and livestreams can be used to gauge and monitor citizen engagement and community concerns.

The UK takes public safety seriously, using social tools to promote good citizen behaviour, advocate safety, and address sensitive subjects.

Digital interactions accounted for over 35% of contact centre interactions in 2015—and will soon overtake voice interactions.

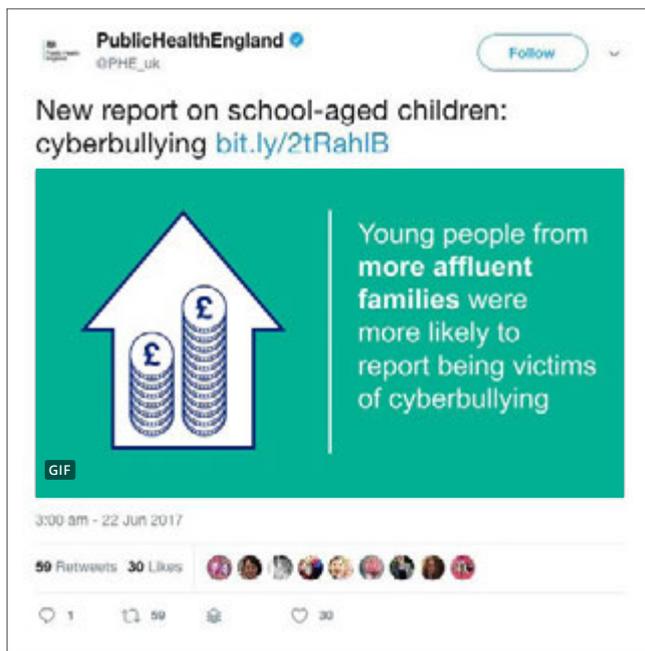
Dimension Data, [2015 global contact centre benchmarking report](#).

2. Government service delivery

Social media can play a role in helping to reduce the public-sector resources consumed in the delivery of citizen services. Services like tax payments, permit applications, and license renewals, for instance, can be delivered as do-it-yourself services.

The much-maligned NHS is benefiting from digital transformation, which is helping them enhance internal efficiencies and become more accessible to the general public. The UK government's vision of a [seven-day-a-week NHS](#) puts patients at the centre, with services accessible for everyone, from anywhere in the country, at any time of the day or night.¹⁰ Similarly, the burden on staff government call centres can be reduced with more effective workflows on social media that shorten wait times and help administrative staff work more efficiently.

Public Health England uses Twitter to educate the public about cyberbullying.



The Department for Transport's THINK! campaign has its own Twitter handle, @THINKgovuk, to advocate road safety, campaign updates, and more, including its [#PinkKitten campaign](#).



3. Critical response communications

Social media can help spread the word quickly about a disaster or public emergency. Twitter and Facebook updates can alert citizens to power outages, terror alerts, and weather disasters in real time for immediacy and accuracy. First responders can monitor community activity to identify areas where citizen support is needed.

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office's travel-specific Twitter handle, @FCOtravel, provides updates and news flashes to help British citizens stay safe and well-informed, sometimes covering two issues in one tweet.



The National Cyber Security Centre provides advice, tips, and knowledge resources to help keep organisations and individuals safe online.



4. Government operations

As well as enhancing citizen engagement and service delivery, social media can create efficiencies in other areas of government operations.

For example, social tools can be used to attract and retain highly skilled workers where traditional recruitment fails. Younger workers are comfortable engaging via social media. Unlike insular traditional recruitment, social media enables open, transparent, and real-time interactions that give citizens an unfiltered understanding of the opportunities and benefits that exist within government employment. This can help enhance the employer brand of government agencies and help them compete against the private sector for fresh talent.

The British Army shares more than ceremonial duties and regimental events—they provide insight into what it's like to train and serve with them.



Examples of social government

1. 2015 General Election

Problem: Drive traffic and registrations to the new Individual Electoral Registration service

When the UK government replaced the outdated and cumbersome household registration process with the new Individual Electoral Service, it wanted to drive traffic and spark registrations. The new service allowed users to register their details in under three minutes. By testing a series of Twitter cards, it was able to use a variety of tactics—including clear calls to action, visual content, and trackable links—that resulted in [conversion rates of 30 percent on one card alone](#) with zero advertising spend.¹¹

2. Greater Manchester Police

Problem: Mobile phone usage while driving

The Greater Manchester Police force wanted to convey an impactful message about the dangers of texting, tweeting, emailing, and otherwise using a mobile phone while driving. The [#WrongForTheRoad campaign used an animated GIF](#) alongside a tweet for maximum storytelling impact.

3. National Health Service (NHS)

Problem: Making NHS strategy changes accessible to a wide audience

The NHS is a complex organisation that had historically struggled to convey its strategy, and therefore failed to spark public engagement in a positive or meaningful way. Healthwatch Essex took a novel approach to simplify its message as it entered the next phase of consultation on the Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) for mid and south Essex. They used a [video interview of NHS bosses by a 10-year-old girl](#) (dubbed “Healthwatch Harriet”) on what STP means and what is involved. It’s a great example of using social media and video to explain things simply.

4. Department for Transport (DfT)

Problem: Make the roads safer for all

[THINK!](#) is the Department of Transport’s road safety website, which provides guidance, advice, and information for all road users. The overarching goal of THINK! is to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries that occur on UK roads.

To raise awareness of dangerous driving, THINK! has partnered with various organisations to communicate

road safety advice. Their distinctive [#PinkKitten campaign](#) creatively used video and social media to get viewers to consider the consequences of using a phone while driving.

What’s getting in the way of the social government?



Need for funding

Competition for UK government budget is fierce. The [current budget deficit](#) is estimated to be £18.2 billion, although this has been slowly

declining over the last seven years. Health care and education combined are expected to account for £231 billion (£144B and £87B respectively) in 2017.¹²

Efforts to consolidate services are prompting departments to evaluate enterprise technology that can benefit government users on a wider scale. Also trending, is the reallocation of funding from traditional media to social media for cost-effective, targeted messaging.



Resource shortages

As social adoption rises, so does the number of accounts and interactions that must be monitored,

filtered, routed, and responded to. Relying on a single department to manage this without enterprise-strength social media management software is unrealistic and can result in delayed response, missed opportunities for engagement, brand damage, and poor service delivery.



Skills gap

There’s a technology talent gap in the public sector that puts IT transformation and digital optimisation at risk.

The *UK Digital Strategy 2017* forecasts that within 20 years, [90% of all jobs will require an aspect of digital skills and literacy](#). Technology skills and leadership at the highest levels are essential to driving government adoption of social media.

Getting it right: Proving the value of social

Simplified social outreach

Social media engagement can be used to enhance agency outreach by delivering a unified communications strategy that's on-brand and consistent.

A single platform for social management can centralise social outreach and engagement at the Central and Local levels for efficiency and ease of procurement. It can also empower teams at the local and department levels to maintain their brand voices. Automation features that allow users to schedule social posts help keep engagement flowing, with less time invested in the process.

Consolidated social monitoring

Social listening helps agencies learn what's on the minds of constituents. Likes, dislikes, and concerns are posted in real time, giving governments insight into relevant discussions. Listening to these discussions sets up agencies to respond to messages, brand mentions, and comments across all social channels, helping them resolve problems and maintain their brand reputation.

Solid metrics to prove value

Measurement of success is key to proving the value of social and increasing budget for social initiatives.

To measure performance, agencies need to start by defining what success means to them. At Hootsuite we define social media ROI as "the sum of all social media actions that create value."¹³ Activities on social media that create value for governments might fall under categories such as brand perception, customer experience, and security and risk mitigation. With a well-established definition of success in place, agencies can use social media management software to measure and demonstrate progress towards program objectives.

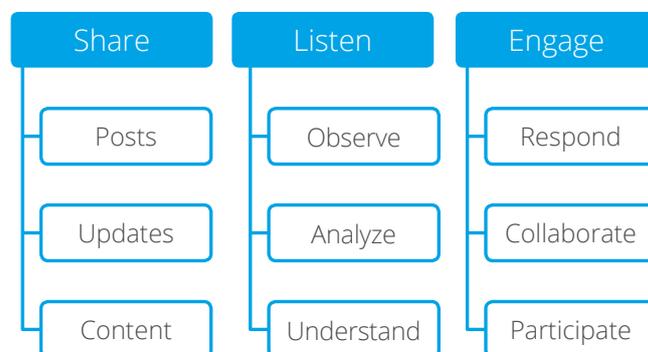
Security and process

Few things can be more damaging to perception of a brand than a negative social post that turns viral. A centralized social media management platform makes it easy to recognise and address potentially damaging social content. Staff access can be managed across departments with secure logins, publishing approval workflows, and flexible permission levels. This allows for consistency across departments, agencies, and locations, and ensures that posts are reviewed, approved, and compliant.

Bringing the value of social government to the surface

- **Advance public sector missions:** An effective social media campaign to communicate the goals and benefits of government initiatives can help get constituents advocating on your behalf. Social conversations on Twitter and Facebook, viral videos on YouTube, and image shares on sites like Pinterest and Instagram all help drive awareness of—and engagement with—government causes. A social media management platform can provide enterprise-strength social media capability in an affordable solution to advance these initiatives.
- **Streamline agency operations:** Social media management tools can speed up government responses to emergencies to safeguard constituents and communicate in a timely manner. Governments can post emergency alerts and instant updates across several social channels from a single dashboard while monitoring responses and inbound communications.
- **Reduce cost of citizen outreach:** A shared platform for social media campaigns can unify and speed up social interactions, reducing redundancies and making information more transparent and available for citizen and inter-agency consumption.

Engaging with citizens: A multilayered approach



Conclusion

Every government agency is at a different stage of the digital transformation journey. While social media is just one stage in this journey, it offers government agencies a relatively quick win in terms of enhancing the citizen experience.

Government social media use satisfies citizen demand for real-time information, makes citizen engagement easier, and streamlines government operations. Using social media, governments can control costs, increase transparency, earn greater public trust, and create positive public sentiment.

Effective social outreach requires that government users listen as much as they post, and that they respond quickly to comments and mentions. Investing in a citizen engagement platform (such as Hootsuite) to streamline and coordinate social media across departments and agencies is a critical step in ensuring successful social media adoption that delivers real value to government.

Endnotes

- 1 GOV.UK. [UK Digital Strategy 2017](#).
- 2 Statista. [Share of respondents that use social media every day in the United Kingdom \(UK\) from 2007 to 2015](#). 2015.
- 3 We Are Social. [Digital in 2017: Global Overview](#). 2017.
- 4 The Financial Times. [Facebook key to winning UK general election, political parties say](#). 2017.
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- 9 Hootsuite Blog. [125+ Essential Social Media Statistics Every Marketer Should Know](#). 2016.
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About Hootsuite for Government

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation

Agency Operations



Citizen Engagement



Critical Response



Citizen Service Delivery



Hootsuite is the most widely used platform for managing social media, loved by over 16 million people around the globe and trusted by more than 85 of the FTSE 100. Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organisations to execute business strategies for the social media era and scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and regions. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of social networks complemented by 250+ business applications and integrations, allowing organisations to extend social media into existing systems and programmes.

Along with our channel and agency partners, we help organisations build deeper relationships with customers, stay connected to the needs of the market, grow revenue, and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help organisations pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through product training, group training and tailored organisational training, as well as security and compliance services.

Request a custom demo today by visiting hootsuite.com/government