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Participation 2.0 and Planning: Web 2.0 technologies for planning and policy-making in New Zealand councils.

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by
Jessica Manhire

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Participation 2.0 and Planning: Web 2.0 for planning and policy-making in New Zealand councils

by

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Case studies of three councils were undertaken in New Zealand on the perspectives, opportunities, and barriers to the use of Web 2.0 technologies for participation in planning. All councils, involved in this study, saw the importance of Web 2.0 and wanted to increase its use. There was some Web 2.0 used by the councils, including social media, and mobile applications. Each of the three councils wanted to increase the use of visual forms of communication, such as photos and videos. Current use of Web 2.0 tended to be for wider government processes. However, interactive mapping, was utilised by two of the three councils largely for planning purposes. The councils believed the uptake of technologies depend on whether it was relevant and appropriate for the area the council serves. Interviewees of this study still believed there was a place for traditional methods of communication, even if some forms such as press releases have become irrelevant. It was generally believed that Web 2.0 could be more suitable for some people and provide alternative consultation methods. Perspectives on what the barriers were towards the utilisation of technologies differed between interviewees and included people not recognising the benefit the use of Web 2.0 can provide, and financial and technological barriers. The use of Web 2.0 for public participation was assessed against Sherry Arnstein’s A Ladder of Citizen Participation and Nabatchi and Mergel’s Types of Public Involvement in Decision Making. The councils used the technology to inform the public and there was also evidence of consultation being achieved using Web 2.0.

Keywords: Web 2.0, e-participation, planning, social media, e-planning, public participation, citizen engagement, e-government.
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## Glossary

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<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Social networking website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Information Systems (GIS)</td>
<td>GIS allows for the creation and visual presentation of geographic data, often in the form of maps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Positioning System (GPS)</td>
<td>“A worldwide navigation system which allows users to determine their location very precisely by means of receiving equipment that detects timed radio signals from a network of satellites in stable, predictable orbits” (Oxford University Press, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>Online mobile photo and video sharing application that allows people to also share photos and videos through other social networking platforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive tools</td>
<td>Platforms allowing two-way communication between the user and the owner of the technology. This includes social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content (Kaplan &amp; Haenlein, 2010, as quoted in Mossberger, Wu, &amp; Crawford 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Social networking website, which allows users to broadcast short posts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinars</td>
<td>A seminar conducted over the internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>A set of related web pages that are usually maintained by one person or organisation, on a specific topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web 1.0</td>
<td>The early days of the web characterised by top-down communication, with low levels of interactivity and relatively small numbers of information providers (Ellison &amp; Hardey, 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web 2.0</td>
<td>Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of the internet which is more interactive. It is characterised by the change from static web pages to User-Generated Content. Web 2.0 technology has allowed the development of social media.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

A new set of media, technologies, software, and cultural practices have emerged changing how citizens experience cities (Foth, Forlano, Satchell, & Donath 2011, p.xi). These technologies include Global Positioning System (GPS) navigation, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), smart phone applications and smart systems (de Waal, 2011 p.5). Their introduction has meant people can access more in-depth information about their environment and interact with it in different ways. An example of this different type of interaction is games with augmented reality. These require a Smartphone or other technology with GPS capabilities, an example being the popular 2016 game Pokémon Go. Beattie (2015) said that “technology has had an immeasurable impact on our lives, and will continue to do so at a seemingly increasing rate” (p.11). According to Orbe and Harris (2000), smartphones, tablets, laptops and other computers “are used with such regularity that they stand the risk of completely replacing traditional forms of interpersonal communication” (p.287), if it is not already doing so. Another advantage of modern technologies is that it allows users to easily also be the producers of information (Massa & Capagna, 2014). Technologies that promote user interaction and engagement have been labelled Web 2.0 technologies. This dissertation focuses on how Web 2.0 technologies can be used for public participation by facilitating a direct communication link between governments and citizens (Åström & Granberg, 2008; De Cindio & Peraboni, 2011). In particular, social media, such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, facilitates interaction between people and makes it possible to collaborate with a wide variety of people (Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011, p.327). These media will be explored in terms of their use for planning consultation.

Definitions of Web 2.0

Web 2.0 “refers to a collection of social media through which individuals are active participants in creating, organizing, editing, combining, sharing, commenting, and rating web content as well as forming a social network through interacting and linking to each other”(Chun, Shulman, Sandoval & Hovy, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that social media is only part of Web 2.0. They describe Web 2.0 as a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which content is no longer published by individuals. Instead, it is modified by all users in a “participatory and collaborative fashion” (p.61). Therefore, Web 2.0 is technology that is a platform for the

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1 Augmented reality “is a presentation environment where 3D virtual data is combined into a real environment in real time” (Azuma, 1997, p.366, as quoted in Dionisioa et al., 2015).
development of social media. Social media is a type of online platform, such as Facebook or Instagram, that fosters interactions among its users. Or as Bryer and Zavattaro (2011) define more broadly, “social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders” (p.327). The early days of the web, termed Web 1.0, was characterised by top-down communication, with low levels of interactivity and relatively small numbers of information providers (Ellison & Hardey, 2014). Examples of this might be static web pages for the purposes of disseminating information only. Any interaction was often limited to users submitting forms to request information, or retrieving information from an attached database. According to Mergel (2012) and Williamson and Parolin (2013), most of the interaction, at the time of their writing, was conducted non-interactively. However, the internet has fast become a way people can participate in things they normally would not have access to (Bizjak, 2012, p.118). Mandarano, Meenar and Steins (2010) describe Web 2.0 as building social capital (p.126). By this they mean that, digital communities are built which foster public participation. They argue that Web 2.0 facilitates “information sharing and collaboration on the web” (p.126). The authors said technologies such as distribution lists, photo directories, and advanced search engine capabilities as support online linkages between people (Mandarano et al., 2010, p.126). Web 2.0 has enabled different types of social interactions, and in doing so, has removed geographical boundaries to enable people from all over the world the ability to engage in a variety of activities including civic activism such as protest organisation and petition dissemination (Dahlberg, 2001). Combining traditional methods of communication, collaboration, and public participation with Web 2.0 technologies can help to strengthen planning processes and, it has been claimed, that this inclusion will eventually empower the role of citizens (Bugs, Gravell, Fonts, Huerta & Painho, 2010). Web 2.0 has also been regarded as a tool for enabling governments to engage citizens in planning and policy by reaching a wide audience (Williamson & Parolin, 2013; Williamson & Ruming, 2015).

Web 2.0 use for planning

Web 2.0 has become a tool that is used in planning (Bugs et al. 2010; Williamson & Parolin, 2013; Fredericks & Foth, 2013; Bizjak, 2012). Engaging citizens through Web 2.0 was termed by McMillan (2002) and Williamson & Parolin (2013) as ‘Mutual Discourse’. This is two-way communication in which both parties have control of communication and the opportunity to send and receive messages (Williamson & Parolin, 2013, p.549). As long as there has been an opportunity for people to have a say in planning matters, this has been done by written submissions. The traditional way of notifying a plan or consent application is via newspaper. However, web sites have become a more popular way to communicate to the public on planning application matters. A Review of the Publicity Requirements for Planning Applications in England revealed that newspaper advertisements were
“ineffective” and were not “value for money”. It was recommended that they be replaced with website advertisements (Cullingworth & Nadin, 2006, p.440). This dissertation will explore the use of Web 2.0 methods for planning.

Research Scope

This research will ask what the approach is to engage the views of the public in local government decision-making. Specifically, it will investigate what Mergel (2012) termed ‘Participation 2.0’ by investigating how Web 2.0 technologies are being used for public participation in local government planning processes. Mergel (2012) defined Participation 2.0 as when Web 2.0 tools are used to engage citizens with government (p.147). For instance, Love Lewisham is a project used by the Lewisham district in southeast London. The project allows residents to take photos of local issues, such as graffiti, and trash, and text it to the local authority along with the GPS location of the problem. A similar approach called ‘Snap, Send, Solve’ is being used by two of the local authorities interviewed for this dissertation. This dissertation will investigate use of these tools for planning and the benefits it can provide. A benefit could be that the public can participate in government anywhere at any time and, in this context, it provides higher accessibility to a wider public. The information can be updated, it enables free and “individual expression, without public exposure or social pressure” (Stern, Gudes & Svoray, 2009, p. 1068). Furthermore, this study will ask if local government is obtaining useful information from social media and if e-participation is enhancing participation in planning processes. The type of Web 2.0 technologies that are of particular interest to this study are interactive communication technologies such as social media (Facebook, Twitter).

The structure of this dissertation

The research aims to provide an understanding of how Web 2.0 is currently used to facilitate public participation in planning. This dissertation will begin by reviewing existing literature. It will explore theory on public interest, democracy and citizen participation. It will consider Web 2.0 for planning, complexities of consultation in general, and will briefly look at participation in New Zealand. Next, it will explore literature on virtual environments for participation, and the potential of technology as a form of engagement and interactivity.

The dissertation will then outline the research objectives. This research has six main objectives which were designed to answer the research questions. The research objectives and questions are:

1. What types of Web 2.0 technologies do local authorities make use of?
2. What changes in use of these technologies have councils noticed during the last few years, and has this type of technology become more commonplace?

3. How would councils like to use Web 2.0 technologies to improve the process of e-participation?

4. What are the barriers to utilising these tools e.g. financial, technological, security, connectivity etc., and what are the differences in the use of Web 2.0 technologies between local authorities?

5. What is preventing the uptake of Web 2.0 and ways to address these barriers will be discussed.

6. What level of participation does the technology offer?

Each of the objectives will be explored. The research was undertaken with staff from three local authorities located in Canterbury (two) and Southland (one). The data were collected using interviews undertaken both in person and also using calling technology (Skype), and some follow-up phone interviews.

The results chapter outlines key themes and interview quotes extracted from the transcribed interviews. Finally, the discussion aims to look wider in scope by asking what Web 2.0 means for planning. The discussion explores how councils are using technology for planning, what they consider to be barriers to engagement, whether Web 2.0 can address low turnout and the level of interactivity these tools offer.

The conclusion chapter summarises key findings from this study and also outlines a number of questions raised from the data collected. These questions form the basis of recommendations for further study.
Literature Review

Previous work such as Fredericks & Foth, (2013); Åström and Granberg, (2008); Ellison and Hardey (2014) have carried out similar studies in areas such as Queensland Australia, Sweden, and the UK. Research like those has not been undertaken in New Zealand. The relevance of this research may be the relatively small size of local body catchments and the geographical distances these catchments cover. Case studies of three councils of similar sizes were undertaken. To understand the requirements for this study, and the information found or missing in previous work, it is necessary to undertake a thorough review of literature in the areas of social media use for citizen engagement.

Public interest, and democracy

To be able to understand public participation, it is necessary to understand why the public has an interest in it. Public interest is a defining element of urban planning (Sandercock and Dovey, 2002). For instance, Friedmann (1987) outlined that “the state must maintain at least the appearance” of serving public interest. If not, then legitimacy is in doubt (p.27). Planners have been inclined to see the “managerial state as a guardian of public interest” (Friedmann, 1987, p. 7). Public participation in decision-making is a long-established principle of democratic government. It is founded on the principle that it is a basic human right for people to have a say in decisions that affect them and is seen to enhance the legitimacy of decisions (Cheyne, 2015). Modern democracies bring together three elements (Habermas, 2006). First “the private autonomy of citizens, each of whom pursues a life of his or her own; second, democratic citizenship, that is, the inclusion of free and equal citizens in the political community; and third, the independence of a public sphere that operates as an intermediary system between state and society” (p.412). Furthermore, citizen knowledge is perceived as a rich source of recent information that can be used to improve the quality of analysis and lead to different solutions (Bugs et al., 2010). According to Sandercock and Dovey (2002), “the public interest can never be pre-established, but is constructed in and through democratic public debate” (p.152). Public interest is determined by planners who analyse a problem and arrive at a rational solution (Sandercock & Dovey, 2002). Urban design visions can shape public interest by suggesting options and capturing the publics’ imagination. Architects with an urban sensibility yet without an interest in planning can become key agents in a process and in manipulating what is perceived to be the desired outcome (Sandercock & Dovey, 2002). Therefore, as Sandercock and Dovey (2002) outline, “public interest relies upon a broad exploration of alternatives and a rich urban imagination as a prerequisite to informed debate” (Sandercock & Dovey, 2002, p.153).
Åström and Granberg (2008) point out that there are two dominant theories about democracy, which are a matter of the location of power. ‘Elite democracy’ is a “bureaucratic or institutional view of government”. An outcome of elite theories in relation to planning is that direct citizen participation is discouraged. In other words, it is assumed planners know best and citizen participation would lead to inefficiencies in the decision-making process and would not add substance to the quality of decisions. ‘Participatory theory’ is a “pluralist or empowering view of government” (p.66). These criticise “decision-making for its concentration on instrumental rationality and systematic scientific knowledge and its view of bureaucrats as experts” (p.66). “Creating opportunities for direct e-participation in decision-making...is considered to contradict the value of professionalism in planning”. This is because it forces public servants to satisfy a few citizens rather than the general public interest” (p.67). Citizen participation is how the public interest is ascertained.

**Citizen Participation**

“The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you. Participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy – a revered idea that is vigorously applauded by virtually everyone” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

Citizen participation is the means to “induce significant social reform” enabling citizens “to share in the benefits of the affluent society” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). In other words, citizen engagement is a way power is shifted from the powerful to the less powerful citizens (Hand & Ching, 2011; Arnstein, 1969).

To illustrate and model this, Arnstein developed A Ladder of Citizen Participation. Essentially this tool, which has been used since its inception in 1969, provides a simplified categorisation of the extent of citizen power. It continues to be a useful way to group various levels of the distribution of power in society (Hand & Ching, 2011; Bizjak, 2012). In addition, this model has contributed to more critical thinking about participatory planning (Cheyne, 2015).

Blakeley (2010) interprets participation as a technology of government as it is shaped by top-down control and is focused on service-delivery. In this context, rather than empowering people who take part, it becomes a means of controlling citizens (Blakeley, 2010). For example, Blakeley (2010), describes councils as either ‘controlling’ or ‘facilitating’ in their commitment to citizen participation. In addition, citizens may view government as separate from their everyday life and public administrators “as an abstract representation of a group of disparate and distant voices” (Hand & Ching, 2011, p.364). It is worth noting that the Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation juxtaposes
powerless citizens with the powerful to highlight fundamental diversions between the two. However, neither group is homogenous. There are not always clear groups of the have-nots and the powerful; instead there are various competing interests (Arnstein, 1969). As such, each of the identified sections on the ladder have been further defined by grouping them with similar constructs and then labelling these groups. This is illustrated in Figure 1, below.

![Ladder of Citizen Participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969.P.216)](image)

**Figure 1: Ladder of Citizen Participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969.P.216)**

Rungs 1 and 2 of the ladder are the Nonparticipation groupings - Manipulation and Therapy. Arnstein describes these as ingenuine participation (Arnstein, 1969). This rung of the ladder is where the objective of engagement is to not enable citizens to participate but to “cure” or “educate” them through public relations, for example, to make it seem like citizens are involved. The next grouping is Tokenism. Steps three and four on the ladder, Informing and Consultation, is where citizens may “hear and be heard”. But under these conditions they lack the power to ensure “their views will be heeded by the powerful” (Arnstein, 1969, p.217). What this means is that, power holders have evidence they have gone through the necessary steps to involve citizens but there is no follow-through. Step five, Placation, which is the final step classified as Tokenism, is where citizens begin to have influence. It is where the have-nots can advise but the powerholders retain the right to decide. Step six, which moves into the Citizen Power grouping, is Partnership which is when citizens can share planning and decision-making responsibilities through structures such as joint policy boards, planning committees, and other mechanisms. The final two steps, Delegated Power and Citizen Control, are the stages where citizens obtain most decision-making or full managerial power. Web
2.1 has been explored for its use for public participation. It has been referred to as a way for citizens to be empowered (Mandarano et al., 2010; Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010). The potential of Web 2.0 is outlined in the next section.

**Web 2.0 for planning**

Participation is a challenge for any local authority as citizen participation can be viewed by the public as uninteresting. E-participation has been said to be a way to make public participation processes more interesting (Williamson, 2015). An example of the use of Web 2.0 technologies in a planning-making process is the Kamo Place Race project, referred to in the quote below (Williamson, 2015). This project involved drafting and consulting on a full district plan review for the suburb of Kamo, Whangarei, in only five days. The Whangarei Council has a variety of resources available online including maps on Facebook and links to the draft district plan chapter as it was being typed. While there are benefits of this type of fast approach, there are also several potential issues associated with it. For example, it would “only work if everybody was in the right place and participating when we needed them to” (Williamson, 2015, p.7). Williamson (2015) said that in a bid to manage the ‘risk’ to council, documents are typically put through a rigorous review process before being made publicly available.

“Most resource management processes are about as exciting as watching paint dry. And yet a large number of people will spend hours doing just that ... most likely by watching ‘The Block’, ‘Changing Rooms’ or ‘Dream Home’ on TV. So what makes watching paint dry so exciting that thousands of people tune in week upon week to watch house renovations? The formula for making it highly compelling is to compress the action over a very short timeframe, and build up the anticipation so that everyone wants to see the ‘big reveal’ before getting bored and tuning out” (Williamson, 2015 p.7).

In ways like the example above, planners are beginning to use digital technology for deeper public engagement (Mandarano et al., 2010). The most important contribution of these technologies is that the public can be involved in all phases of plan preparation through the Internet. This then becomes transparent and clearer to the public (Bizjak, 2012). E-participation in planning is “based on the idea of direct communication” between government and citizens (Åström & Granberg, 2008, p.72). By this, the authors mean that, through the interactive capacity of Web 2.0, citizens can engage more directly in the decision-making process reducing “potential conflict at later stages”. This is because this use of digital technology can create “a sense of ownership over a plan’s content” and “those involved feel responsible for the planning results” (Åström & Granberg, 2008, p.68). However, it demands a good technical platform and support, much preparation by the planners and quality expert publicity to include as many people as possible (Bizjak, 2012). Bizjak (2012) argues that the
advantages and benefits of e-participation outweigh the weaknesses. Next, complexities of consultation are outlined.

**Complexities of consultation**

Concerns have been expressed about the annual planning process and consultation. These concerns include councils experiencing difficulties managing public input and lack of it. For example, councillors were unsure how to interpret non-responses – is silence consent? (Cheyne, 2002).

Habermas (2006) outlines that literature “paints a rather sobering portrait of an average citizen as a largely uninformed and disinterested person” (Habermas, 2006, p.420). He refers to the work of other scholars such as Friedman (2003) who describes people as ignorant consumers of media messages and political information. He argues that political decisions of most people tend to be based on preconceived ideas they have about the world. Citizens make political decisions based on things such as “group identification” and “the nature of the time” (if things seem to be going well, vote for the incumbent”) (Friedman, 2003, p.247). Somin (1998) argues that “voter ignorance is widespread” (Somin, 1998, p.444). However, as Habermas (2006) points out, this view “has been changed by recent studies on the cognitive role of heuristics and information shortcuts” in how people form their opinions (p.420). Citizens consuming media can form reasonable attitudes towards public affairs, even unconsciously, by aggregating forgotten reactions to information (Habermas, 2006, p.420). People might not remember facts but use them to develop their attitudes judging issues through their emotions, rather than “deliberation and thought” (Carpini, 2004, p.414). In other words, people make shortcuts about an issue and this reasoning is driven by how they feel (Carpini, 2004). Therefore, people can be knowledgeable in their reasoning about their viewpoints without being able to recall many facts (Carpini, 2004; Habermas, 2006).

Consultation can be productive and rewarding but can also be time-consuming and wearying for all parties thus the participation may be weakened (Cheyne, 2002). This type of weakness has been termed ‘consultation fatigue’ (Blakeley, 2010). This is where, even when governments genuinely appear to do all they can to facilitate citizen participation, these efforts do not necessarily empower citizens to participate (Blakeley, 2010). The more citizen participation becomes public policy, the less likely it is to empower citizens. “The very fact of providing mechanisms and spaces of participation may become a burden for some people rather than an opportunity, especially when the burden is predominantly placed on communities which are already multiply disadvantaged” (Blakeley, 2010, p.139). One government official in Manchester, UK highlighted that disadvantaged communities are asked to do everything and are exposed to every government directive – “stop smoking, eat five a day and become involved in your community” (Blakeley, 2010, p.139). Overall, Blakeley found that those participating in local government projects recognise that they are involved in a power struggle
between the state, civil society and the market. This is because of the “complex patterns of decision making” due to the increase in power to non-state actors (Blakeley, 2010, p. 131). However, they continue to participate as a testament to their belief that their participation does make a difference, even if it is small (Blakeley, 2010).

Cheyne (2002) suggested that rather “than all groups and all citizens being consulted all of the time it may be preferable to have a more structured consultation or to make use of people panels where there are representative samples of relevant populations” (Cheyne, 2002, p.149). These types of arrangements are a positive step, according to Bonney (2004) as they “engage a wider circle of interested people” (p.46). It is argued, however, that there is an increasing pressure for accountability and responsiveness and the importance of consultation will intensify. More effective and efficient ways of gathering the views of the public are necessary and decisions need to be made in a timely way. In addition, there is a growing emphasis on less formal social participation. This is where, for instance, there is much closer relationship between community and voluntary organisations and government (Cheyne, 2002). Another potential issue in consultation is volunteer bias. This, is “a specific bias that can occur when the subjects who volunteer to participate in a research project are different in some ways from the general population” in that a participant may have a particular point to make or reason to participate that is outside the norm (Boughner, 2010, p.1610). In this instance, the data gathered is not representative of all people (Boughner, 2010). Next, this literature review will look at public participation in the New Zealand context.

**Public Participation in New Zealand**

In New Zealand, consultation must be carried out in accordance with the Local Government Act 2002. Part of the purpose of the Act is to promote the accountability of local authorities to their communities; and provides for local authorities to play a broad role in meeting the current and future needs of their communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services, and performance of regulatory functions (Local Government Act, 2002, S3).

As outlined in Section10 of the Local Government Act (LGA) 2002, the purpose of local government is:

(a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and

(b) to meet the current and future needs of communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services, and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and businesses.
In referring to the Local Government Act, Cheyne (2010) points out that this “clearly signals that local government comprises a system of representative local government whereby elected representatives form governing bodies, complemented by public-participation in the decision-making processes” (p.273). The challenge is for well-designed, cost-effective e-participatory processes so that local authorities in New Zealand make effective decisions that with a “high level of public confidence and legitimacy” (Cheyne, 2002, p.151). Robust public participation can “enhance the accountability of elected members to citizens, improve the quality of decisions, and assist with successful implementation of decisions” (Cheyne, 2002, p.276).

It has been argued that public participation has been declining in local government in New Zealand. Statistics show declining voter turnout over the last 25 years (Department of Internal Affairs, 2013). Cheyne (2015) attributes this to the changes to the Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991, and the Local Government Act (LGA) 2002. In New Zealand, the current statutory frameworks for participatory planning is delineated primarily by these two statutes. Cheyne (2015) argues: there “is a slow but inexorable weakening of local government through recentralisation, depolitisation (in which not just the public but also local politicians are increasingly removed from policy debates and decisions) and central government intervention in local government.

“Changes to participatory planning processes imposed by national governments have sought to reduce the scope for citizen influence in urban and environmental governance” (Cheyne, 2015, p.428).

Changes to the LGA 2002 and RMA 1991 sought to simplify and streamline resource management decision-making to foster economic growth and productivity. However, this meant reducing the scope for public participation, in order to speed up processes (Cheyne, 2015).

Collaborative governance has been examined as a response to traditional forms of public participation (Cheyne, 2015). Interactive governance arenas are increasingly seen as valuable contributions to effective governance (Sørensen, 2013). Interactive governance refers to a variety of partnership, co-management and networks in which public actors collaborate with individual users and citizens as well as with voluntary organisations and other interest groups (Sørensen, 2013). A shift from governance to government also heightens the awareness of the role of multiple stakeholders in decision-making (Blakeley, 2010; Cheyne, 2015). Despite these groups not having any formal authority or decision-making power, they have considerable influence on the outcome of government processes. However, according to Sørensen (2013), many researchers worry that these groups will reduce the level of democratic inclusion, deliberation and accountability. Sørensen (2013) claims that an ‘institutional void’ has formed in western societies due to the prominence given to interactive governance arenas. These are seen “as a positive contribution to democracy because they can supplement representative and participatory forms of democracy by enhancing the interaction
between public authorities and involved and affected stakeholders” (Sørensen, 2013, p.75).
Governance researchers point out, as outlined by Sørensen (2013) that “partnerships and networks may in many cases serve as arenas for coalition building and bargaining between different powerful elites from state, economy and civil society rather than as platforms for dialogue and collaboration between political elites and affected stakeholders” (p.74). This could be commissioners with expertise in planning making decisions, rather than elected councillors, to get things done effectively. For instance, The Environment Canterbury (Temporary Commissioners and Improved Water Management) Act, passed under urgency in 2010, where councillors were replaced by commissioners. Removing elected local government in decision-making has been argued to reduce citizen engagement by transferring power to non-elected officials (Cheyne, 2015).

Furthermore, decisions are often made in “opaque, negotiated governance processes” (Sørensen, 2013, p.74), where citizens must often fight to be recognised as stakeholders. This is easier for “powerful” citizens with more resources. The public might not be aware of planning decisions being made which reduces their ability to hold decision-makers to account. However, interactive governance might assist in improving the accountability of government processes. Intermediary arenas consisting of public and private actors can pool the knowledge and disseminate this knowledge to affected actors (Sørensen (2013). The success of these arrangements “will depend on the extent to which less powerful actors are engaged and the way power is redistributed in any future governance arrangements” (Cheyne, 2015, p.428). Virtual environments, such as public-participation geographic information systems (PPGIS), or games where people can see how planning projects might impact them and their community, have been suggested as a way to engage citizens.

**Virtual Environments for Participation**

Many types of media have been suggested as suitable ways to involve the public in planning. These include the use of digital technology as users are increasingly more confident in interactive and virtual environments. Included in these environments could be multimedia resources such as video, audio and pictures (Bugs et al., 2010).

The use of computer technologies including CAD (Computer Aided Design) and GIS (Geographical Information Systems), have been explored for their use in urban planning. Howard and Gaborit (2007) propose that virtual environment (VE) technology can facilitate and improve useful engagement by the public in planning processes, unlike the traditional consultation processes. This is because it has become possible to visualise large scale environments, such as cities, in real-time by performing environmental modifications and seeing how they play out. A model for Los Angeles, for example, has been used for urban planning projects such as car navigation, tourism and historic reconstruction (Howard & Gaborit, 2007). People can visit different proposals and vote for the one
they prefer and leave feedback. This enables planners to have a better understanding of the options and select the proposal that was the most favourable (Howard and Gaborit, 2007). In particular, literature has explored PPGIS as a tool for engaging citizens in decision-making. Several works have advocated for adaptable participatory systems and flexible participatory processes (Swobodzinski & Jankowski, 2014), including traditional forms combined with Web 2.0 tools (Bugs et al., 2010). Interactive games have been suggested as another way to attract more people to participate in and learn about urban planning processes. This is a way to motivate people to participate and learn about the environment and current planning projects that might impact individuals and their communities, using a digital environment that increasingly people are becoming comfortable with (Poplin, 2012). Furthermore, Bugs et al. (2010) argue that virtual environments have the potential to “empower the role of citizens” (p.180). Next, the potential of technology as a form of engagement will be explored.

**Technology as a form of engagement**

Technology, like that mentioned above, has the potential to improve interactions with citizens through participation in virtual communities (Mossberger et al., 2013; Dahlberg, 2001) and has had a transformational effect on the ways in which people interact with one another (Bertot, et al., 2012). People demand social networking and open communication to express their opinions on planning issues (Bugs et al., 2010). Furthermore, mechanisms through which citizens interact with others are evolving along with technology (Kittilson & Dalton, 2011). Digital technologies have reduced the costs of human interaction and have enabled people to participate from remote locations, when convenient (Mandarano et al., 2010) and to instantly connect “despite growing populations and broader geospatial ranges between people” (Hand & Ching, 2011, p.364). For this reason, there has been an ever-expanding use of information and communication technologies by governments to engage with citizens (Macintosh & Whyte, 2006). Efforts are underway to extend the participatory practices and cultures associated with Web 2.0 by helping people to engage with authorities (Iveson, 2011). There has been a rapid growth of online political projects and democracy experiments being carried out by government, corporate interests and citizen groups (Dahlberg, 2001). Available technology, including software and Internet connectivity, has meant that online interactions are now considered to be mainstream, with this type of communication having matured into providing a wide variety of communication methods (Ellison & Hardey, 2014; Fredericks & Foth 2013). Therefore, it is feasible to expect that online tools will aid experts and citizens to collaborate and foster local problem solving (Fredericks & Foth 2013). Social media can provide an opportunity for people, who would not otherwise, to stay in touch with local government initiatives as they are not always possible in the physical sphere. For instance, as outlined by Fredericks & Foth (2013), it gives citizens “who are ordinarily reluctant to contribute in traditional settings, the opportunity of participating in
their own environment in their own time, with face-to-face encounters being optional, rather than required” (p.255). Furthermore, it can be used to engage previously difficult to reach and new segments of society such as physically immobile or younger citizens (Fredericks & Foth, 2013). According to Mattoo, Goldber, Johnson & Riano (2015), information technology has enabled immigrants to integrate into society and engage with the government. This in turn has enabled governments to respond to their needs. An alternative study argued that digital technology “might instead further cement the marginalisation of already marginalised groups in society, and further empower those already powerful” (Goldfinch, Gauld & Herbison, 2009, p.346). Particularly, as not everyone has access to a computer or the Internet or has the confidence or technological knowledge to engage (Bizjak, 2012). Even if this does change as more people get access to the internet, there are those who continue to prefer traditional forms of participation such as letters and meetings (Goldfinch et al., 2009). However, Mossberger et al. (2013), looked at interactivity in major U.S. cities and, found that the cities appeared to be taking steps toward more e-participation (Mossberger et al., 2013). E-participation refers to the incorporation of participation into the democratic political process, at various phases, supported by information technology tools” (Bizjak, 2012, p.116). This includes taking steps towards an open government and more interactive platforms. Within the span of only two years, adoptions among the largest U.S. cities increased as much as six times for some social media (Mossberger et al., 2013). In some communities, there is the expectation that online participation opportunities will be provided (Fredericks & Foth, 2013).

**Interactivity**

Although engagement using online technology appears to be gaining popularity, embedding participatory practices into existing institutional organisations still needs work (Bugs et al., 2010). Much research has suggested that Web 2.0 tools are being used no differently than Web 1.0 tools (Fredericks & Foth, 2013; Williamson & Parolin, 2013; Hand & Ching, 2011). That is, while an organisation may have a web presence this is more likely to be one-way communication from bureaucracy to citizens, rather than be interactive (two-way communication). This has been referred to as monologue communication, of which local governments tend to be familiar with (Williamson & Parolin, 2013). Monologue communication is “one-way communication with the receiver, being the public, having no control over the format or type of information provided” (Williamson & Parolin, 2013, p.549). Digital information has been found to do no more than complement ‘top down’ sources such as local newspapers, broadcast media and paper-based newsletters (Ellison & Hardey, 2014).
There has been growth in research asking if technology has or has the potential to extend engagement (Iveson, 2011; Dahlberg, 2001). Dahlberg says there are three categories these experiments fall into. A ‘communitarian camp’ which stresses the possibility of the Internet for enhancing communal spirit and values; a ‘liberal individualist camp’ which sees the Internet as assisting the expression of individual interests and, finally, a ‘deliberative camp’ promoting the Internet as the means for an expansion of the public sphere of rational-critical citizen discourse. This third camp is focused on the power of discourse at holding decision-makers accountable.

Studies have pointed out that, although social media has the potential to provide a useful pathway for engagement, there is little evidence of social media being used to create interactive dialogue (Williamson & Parolin, 2013; Ellison & Hardey, 2014). For example, research has discovered that Facebook pages are not spaces where serious or sustained dialogue and debate take place. Instead, where it does occur, the conversation is about the quality of local services, rather than issues concerned with the nature and broader conduct of local government. For example, Ellison & Hardey (2014) recounted an instance where people making contact through Facebook with the council were referred to the website, rather than dealing with the issue directly through Facebook. These authors found that responses from the public on social media managed by local councils are “sporadic and muted” (p.32) in comparison to the independent local protest campaigns to save council services which have media presences separate to that of the councils (Ellison & Hardey, 2014). A danger of e-participation, is that people might only become involved to draw attention to themselves or for personal reasons such as “nimbyism” (not in my backyard syndrome), rather than for a common cause” (Bizjak, 2012, p.121). Some other issues could be council planners’ accidently publishing confidential information on the web or that not everyone has access to the Internet.

A key finding of previous research into the use of social media for public participation is that, despite social media enabling more people to take part in many different processes, there is a risk that the information produced will not be of use to local government (Afzalan & Muller, 2014). One instance, is that different users will tend to have very different ways of using media for participation (Afzalan & Muller, 2014). “Many participants simply seek out groups of like-minded others where member’s interests, values and prejudices are reinforced rather than challenged”. For example, forums such as SixDegrees.com and TalkCity.com consist of titillation, gossip and slander, superficial banter and other kinds of “lowest common-denominator exchange”, rather than meaningful debate (Dahlberg, 2001, p.618).

In their study, focused on the role of an online neighbourhood forum in the U.S., Afzalan and Muller (2014) found that individual interests were expressed. However, some of the information contributed on the site was inaccurate. The authors did not outline what these inaccuracies were.
The effectiveness of the discussion was lessened as some of the neighbourhood members and relevant department staff did not participate. This could be due to the use of other participatory methods such as public meetings. Therefore, the forum functioned to complement traditional processes. In this study, the opportunity of face-to-face interactions helped participants to evaluate the sincerity of the claims made on the forum. The forum itself helped participants to advertise meeting information, develop agendas and de-brief after face-to-face meetings were completed. However, in some cases, it was not easy to evaluate the real intention of the online claims. Reasons for this included people’s insensitivity to other people in online communication and the nature of non-facial conversation, among others (Afzalan, & Muller 2014). The authors suggest that planning “staff participation may have been hindered by the structure of the i-Neighbors site, which was not designed specifically with the need of planners in mind. Information on the forum was not easily retrievable because of issues with query functionality and data structure; for example, it was not easy to compile information about the location or characteristics of the new park” (Afzalan & Muller, 2014, p.81). Bizjak (2012) suggests that new tools offer opportunities and various technical platforms should be investigated and solutions found for cheaper accessibility, user-friendliness and easier maintenance and independence of platform providers. For example, web servers, software and Web 2.0 tools. The effectiveness of these technologies need to be explored for their effectiveness in fostering public participation.

Summary of literature

Web 2.0 technologies provide an opportunity to engage citizens with local government initiatives in different ways than traditional methods allow. However, there has been evidence of local governments not using Web 2.0 to its full potential. It remains to be explored in further detail how the use of these technologies can be used more effectively and if e-participation is increasing over time. Fredericks and Foth (2013) looked at the utilisation of Web 2.0 technologies for planning among local government areas of South East Queensland. This has not been looked at in a New Zealand context. The study also did not conclude why the local governments differed in their use of e-participation. However, suggested a “light corporate structure” as one reason why a council has the “greatest potential” to utilise social media for participation (p.253).

Åström and Granberg (2008) studied participatory attitudes among elites via ICTS. They found e-participation support was determined by computer competence and the availability of ICT infrastructure. Ellison and Hardey (2014) undertook a survey about the levels of social media activity in English local authorities. They found that social media was used to ‘push’ information about local
services to residents. This was also discovered by Williamson and Parolin (2013). More studies would help to understand barriers and effectiveness of Web 2.0 in general for public participation. There is limited research on local government staff members’ views towards e-participation in New Zealand, and how Web 2.0 tools and the public participation process matches up with Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation. In particular there is little research on Web 2.0 and planning. Most research looks at local government in general. This dissertation will expand on the previous research mentioned above by investigating the level of participation the technology offers and exploring how this technology can be better utilised.
Research objectives

Objectives
The purpose of this research is to investigate the extent to which local authorities have implemented and used social media for public participation in planning. In addition, it will explore the level of participation these technologies offer and identify gaps in current usage.

To address these objectives a research hypothesis has been formed:

Hypothesis: Web 2.0 technologies can provide benefits outside the realm offered by traditional forms of engagement.

To test this hypothesis an overarching research question and several sub-questions have been formed.

Research questions
The aim of this dissertation is to develop an overview of how Web 2.0 can enhance planning practices regarding public participation for local government organisations. The overarching question this research explores is:

What opportunities do Web 2.0 technologies bring for public participation in planning processes?
To answer this question this research will explore the following areas by answering the identified sub questions:

1. What types of Web 2.0 technologies do local authorities make use of?

   Technology is constantly changing. This question will determine where local authorities are at in their use of Web 2.0.

2. What changes in use of these technologies have councils noticed during the last few years, and has this type of technology become more commonplace?

   This will look at whether Web 2.0 is suitable for engaging the public by considering who uses it and what sectors of society it engages.
3. How would councils like to use Web 2.0 technologies to improve the process of e-participation?

Future opportunities for the use of technologies will be explored.

4. What are the barriers to utilising these tools e.g. financial, technological, security, connectivity etc., and what are the differences in the use of Web 2.0 technologies between local authorities?

Both the type and the level of use will be investigated.

5. What is preventing the uptake of Web 2.0 and whether there are ways to address these barriers will be discussed.

6. What level of participation does the technology offer? This will be assessed against a ladder of participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969).

Previous research has not been undertaken in New Zealand to determine how much local authorities make use of Web 2.0. Furthermore, Web 2.0 for public participation in planning has not been assessed against A Ladder of Citizen Participation.
Methods

Research methodology

A chosen research method should reflect the nature of the research and the assumptions made about the type of data required. In this case an interpretive approach was the most appropriate as the purpose of this research is to interpret the approaches different councils take toward the use of Web 2.0 technology. Most qualitative research comes from an interpretive paradigm as it allows for the inclusion of human interest in a study (McNabb, 2015). The interpretive paradigm means that researchers study phenomena in a natural setting by attempting to understand or make sense in terms of the meanings that participants have (McNabb, 2015).

Approach

To meet the objectives of this study a multi-case study using a qualitative approach to data collection was undertaken. The multi-case aspect of this study involved the collection of data from participants working in a range of roles in different councils. Participants were chosen due to their use or knowledge of social media for planning purposes or experience in planning.

Qualitative research is useful for collecting detailed information about opinions or behaviours from a particular population in specific contexts (Babbie, 2007). This approach enables gathering of the most up-to-date information, directly from the people who maintain the online engagement tools. Macintosh and Whyte (2006) provided a useful guide of what sort of questions to ask for e-Government research. The authors pointed out that evaluation “is firstly a practical concern of those responsible for undertaking particular e-participation initiatives, who want to assess its value in relation to the policy-making objectives” (Macintosh & Whyte, 2006, p.4). As e-Government is a complex and social phenomenon, a multi-method approach to research is important. Interview questions must include the political, technological and social perspectives. In addition, these studies benefit from a range of methods. This helps to maximise the validity of the information.

Data was mostly gathered by undertaking semi-structured interviews. In this case the interview was used as a form of discourse organised by the asking and answering of questions. To be successful an interview must be a joint creation of both the interviewer and the interviewee. The semi-structured nature of the interviews used in this study allowed for the development of the discourse to take place. A brief social media analysis was undertaken, which offered further information on the level of participation the technologies offered. Literature also offered a comparison and depth to the findings.
Data were analysed using thematic analysis. This analysis allowed for the identification of themes giving an in-depth understanding of the information received. This information was then assessed by using A Ladder of Citizen Participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969). This ladder classifies public participation from nonparticipation (as low as manipulation) to citizen power where citizens have full control of what happens in society. The results of this study were compared to previous studies about Web 2.0 and public participation.

**Interviews**

Interviews were undertaken with people employed by three councils. Ethics approval (HEC 2016-37) was obtained from the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee to undertake these interviews. The interviews were a combination of face-to-face, Skype, and phone interviews. This was dependent on the location, what is most convenient for the interviewee, and travel costs. The interviews focused on a series of open-ended questions designed to address the research objectives as stated in the previous section. Interviews were up to one hour in duration. Follow-up interviews, of about 15 minutes long, were undertaken with three of the six interviewees to fill in any research gaps. All interviews were, with the permission of the participant, recorded and transcribed verbatim. Key themes were established from the interviews.

The participants were selected to get a mix of communications staff, who were responsible for maintaining social media tools; and those with planning expertise. All participants have some sort of professional involvement in public participation. Six people in total were interviewed. This included two people with planning expertise (planning managers) and four people who worked in communications or technology (three communications staff and one webmaster).

**Council descriptions**

Three councils were chosen with similar populations. The populations were in the 40,000 to 60,000 range, according to Statistics New Zealand (2013). Two councils were district councils and one was a city council.

**Council 1**

Council 1 is a city council with a land area of 389km² (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). The city council’s population has remained relatively stable with a population of 54,200 in 1996 to 54,700 in 2016. It has a median age of 39.2 years old, compared to 38 years for New Zealand as a whole. In this city 70% of citizens aged 15 years and older have a formal educational qualification. This compares to 79.1% of people in all of New Zealand. The most common occupational group is classified by
Statistics New Zealand as professionals. In the district, 70.7% of households have access to the Internet, compared with 76.8% of households in New Zealand. In this city, 83.8% of households have access to a cellphone, compared with 83.7 percent of households for New Zealand as a whole (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

Council 2
Council 2, with a land area of approximately 2200km² (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011), has experienced significant population growth in the last 6 years. Its population increased from 47,600 people in 2010 to 57,800 people in 2016 (Statistics New Zealand, 2016). The district council has a median age of 42.9 years, compared to 38 years for New Zealand as a whole. According to Statistics New Zealand (2013) 12.4% of people aged 15 years and older held a bachelor’s degree or higher as their highest qualification, compared with 20% for New Zealand as a whole. The most common occupational group in the district, according to figures from Statistics New Zealand (2013), is managers. The district has a lot of people connected to the internet compared to New Zealand as a whole with 79.7% of households with Internet access, compared with 76.8% of households in New Zealand. In the district, 85.9% of households have access to a cellphone. This compares with 83.7% of households for New Zealand as a whole (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

Council 3
Council 3, with a land area of approximately 6300km² (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011), has also experienced significant growth. Its growth has increased from (Statistics New Zealand, 2013) from 41,000 in 2010 to 56,200 people in 2016. The median age is 38.7 years for people in the district. In the district, 82.2% of people aged 15 years and older have a formal qualification. The most common occupational group is also managers. Council 3 is more connected than the other two councils. In the district, 85.9% percent of households have access to the Internet and 88.2% of households have access to a cellphone (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).
Results

This section presents the research findings from the interviews held with employees of three councils. The people interviewed were in positions where they were required to have some interaction with the use of Web 2.0 technology. In keeping with the ethical requirements of such research, real names have been replaced with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

In each case the employee had some interaction with Web 2.0 technology. This interaction was either from a hands-on perspective or from the perspective of dealing with the output, or input, of the information created. In these interviews, each of the participants were asked to explain, for their organisation the role of Web 2.0 technology using a series of questions designed to meet the research objectives of this study. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a means of recognising, analysing and reporting identifiable and repeated patterns often found in interview data (Braun and Clark, 2006).

An attempt has been made in this section to focus the themes which relate to Web 2.0 and planning. However, some results offer useful insights to communications and public participation in general. The councils are referred to as Council 1, 2 and 3 so they could remain anonymous and freely express their views.

‘Several themes (or patterns) emerged from the interviews taken with council staff. These themes are outlined in Table 1. The tick (✓) indicates the council for which the theme was identified in a positive way, whereas an x indicates a negative connotation of the theme, and S means sometimes or mixed views.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/perception</th>
<th>Council 1</th>
<th>Council 2</th>
<th>Council 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web 2.0 relevance increasing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Growth of Web 2.0</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web 2.0 replacing traditional forms</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instantaneous/non-online methods time consuming</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web 2.0 an expected form of engagement</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to increase use of Web 2.0</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wants to grow engagement</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public relies on getting information online</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional forms still relevant</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevancy/Demographic appropriateness</td>
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<td>Social media hook to website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simplicity/convenience</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive tools</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visuals expected</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Financial and technological barriers</td>
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<td>Promotion required to grow use</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of social media needs to become habit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wanting meaningful engagement/feedback OR people do not engage appropriately</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>Low turnout</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web 2.0 for public to council communication</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Usefulness</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilised to promote council reputation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology insufficient for planning consultation</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal status of social media comments unclear</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>People’s mind-set needs to change</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of social media</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good social media content required</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young people use social media differently</td>
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<tr>
<td>No huge generational trend</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demographics of employers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Good social media content required</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporates and larger councils taking lead</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barrier: Law</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media has a wider audience than face-to-face methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web 2.0 can increase engagement</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Censoring hinders free speech</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has hidden offensive comments</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Behind eight ball”</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media to control news</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accessibility e.g. disabilities, language barriers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Face-to-face used less</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statutory timeframes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barrier: Planning is process orientated</td>
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<td>Social media for informing public</td>
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<td>Planning becoming more electronic</td>
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<td>Opportunities to use Web 2.0 for participation</td>
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Themes in detail

In the following sections, each of the identified themes will be described.

The importance of Web 2.0 increasing

The first theme identified from the interview transcripts is that all the councils saw the importance of Web 2.0 to be increasing. Council 1 said technology was always evolving and planning is becoming more electronic. Council 2 talked about the change from Web 1.0 forms of engagement to Web 2.0 forms. This council perceived engagement to be more instantaneous with the use of social media and had stopped using press releases to disseminate council news and information. Both Council’s 1 and 3 said people expected to be able to make submissions online.

“Electronic platforms are becoming more important and I think councils need to move with the times and make better use of that and reach out and make that available to a wider audience to perhaps in some areas get more participation” (Council 1, person 2).

“We live in a world of the mediums don’t we, what worked 10 years ago doesn’t work now – the flunky coms teams that everything had to go in a press release and it had to be signed off and that sort of rubbish, there’s no time for that you get the information straight away, it’s two degrees of separation...It’s very quickly becoming a specialist role, social media. Most corporates now have social media teams... in the past the online person would’ve been the boss now you’ll find it will be the social media person that is because their role is more interactive so they are dictating more how things weigh out.” (Council 2).

“I think now that there’s an expectation that everything is going to be online so you can make a submission online” (Council 3, person 2).

Wanting to increase use

All three councils wanted to increase the use of digital forms of engagement. Council 2 ceased preparing press releases because it did not see the value in them and Council 3 wanted to find better ways to engage to get meaningful feedback, and saw the opportunities technology could provide to do that.

“But looking at how Facebook works and how it grows and things like that I didn’t want to just grow numbers, I wanted to grow engagement as well.
So, a lot of the time we’ve started to focus on how we can better get engagement with our ratepayers...ideally we’d like to push our consultation side, and it’s one of the things I’ve found since I’ve been here, is people don’t really care that much. Unless it was something that people are really interested in people don’t bother submitting or engaging. We are trying to reduce the number of steps people take to engage with us” (Council 1, person 1).

“...in terms of any particular strategic planning projects that we undertake in the policy team we might go out and engage with the community and we actively seek participation and that, so it’s obviously notifying a range of stakeholders and advertising these things through our website and other forums, so we try to engage with people as much as we can. Obviously, it’s not as strong as we like so we are looking at other ways of doing that as well.... I think we need to be more in that digital space because technology has changed and its allowing us to opportunities there as well. I don’t think we have quite come to grips with it as much as we could. It’s something we are thinking about through our district plan review about how we engage with people and, you know, instead of just having maybe an evening where you arrange a community meeting or something and two people turn up maybe there’s other ways of doing that that would potentially get a greater turn-out and involvement from the general public so you get some meaningful engagement and meaningful feedback.” (Council 3, person 1).

Traditional forms of communication still important

Despite recognising the need to be proactive with the use of Web 2.0, all councils still found there to be a place for traditional forms of communication. When referring to face-to-face or over the phone communication methods, Council 1, person 1 believed Web 2.0 would not replace them. Council 2 said the communication channels used depends on community requirements.

“It is still going to be around but...I feel, it probably grows in areas that you wouldn’t necessarily have before” (Council 1, person 1).

“It’s a case of working out what’s going to service this community best in terms of our delivery and that means not taking for granted the fact that some people will always rely on the community newspapers for information so we can’t neglect that even though we are charging into the online and digital sphere as much as we can and certainly we will continue to do that” (Council 2).

Website still the main forum for engagement

All councils had a traditional website and also used social media. Two councils mentioned that their
website remained the main forum for them to provide information to their stakeholders. One council emphasised the use of social media as the hook to the main website but not as a consultation tool on its own. Council 3 was working on ways to make it easier to search for information about a property and any submissions received on plan rules in regards to the district plan review.

“They are not making websites redundant, they are more of a driver to a website... they are not there yet as a consultation tool on their own they are still more of a hook. Over time the pace that technology is developing they probably will be” (Council 2).

“We tend to use our website as the main forum for engaging with the public outside of normal communication – newspapers and that type of thing. But yeah, the website seems to be the large, the main portal, and we have our district plan online now which you can search for your own property information but for submissions, say for the district plan review, will be where we are looking for a submissions portal for the review which ties in with the EPlan software that we use, it’s all integrated so if you make a submission on a particular rule you can click on that rule in the proposed plan and you’d be able to see who the submission is in detail and if there were further submissions you’ll be able to see who that is and see whatever decisions have been made from it so it’s an all integrated system that we are currently working on with the company that does our EPlan” (Council 3, person 1).

Interactive tools

Simplicity and convenience was mentioned by all councils in regards to electronic communication. One council believed interactive tools were more convenient and instantaneous that ringing up the council or speaking to the council face-to-face. It was perceived that the public did not have to do anything to engage that way. For instance, Snap, Send, Solve is a smartphone application which uses GPS and photography as a way to inform the council of an issue.

“Interactive tools are another thing that we are just touching our toe in the water with. We had a recent proposed plan change around natural hazards, effectively about flooding and we needed to liaise with the community around how that would impact on them. We had an interactive tool whereby they could go on the website, type in their address and it would bring up their house and it would tell them where they fitted, whether they were high hazard, medium hazard or low hazard and they could find that information out without having to ring us it was there and they could follow-up with a call if they wanted to so, you know, interactive participant tools and again it’s all just removing the runt of the middle man because we are in an age where people expect, you know, we are in an age of convenience...” (Council 2).
“...we introduced an interactive app called ‘Snap, Send, Solve’, whereby if you see a pot hole you take a photo of it, use the app, it goes straight to the council the GPS of where the pot hole is so they can go straight to it. That’s proved out popular... it highlights the power of interactivity, people don’t have to do anything, they don’t have to even pick-up the phone and ring, take a photo, done” (Council 2).

The importance of visuals (photos and video)

Two councils are wanting to use Instagram, which is a social media photo sharing application, and one is getting into the video space to engage with residents. Visuals were perceived by Council 2 to be a powerful way to inform the public on what it was doing.

“A lot of the feedback we were getting through Facebook especially were for photos so it makes sense that we continue. In terms of consultation is something we really want is not really there. In terms of Instagram, every now and then we just put up some pretty pictures and...it just helps to spread the word a little bit” (Council 1, person 1).

“...another area that we are not in yet, but we are looking to get into very quickly, is video because people don’t read now, they watch. That’s the habit...Social media is a good hook to get the link and watch it so, you know, they are a very powerful visual way of explaining what we are doing educating etc.... one of the new roles will be in the video space. Not entirely video but that will be a big part of it. Its what people expect. Every story you see on Stuff will have a video playing. The reason for that is that a lot of people are watching rather than reading” (Council 2).

“We did a survey around communication preferences and on that we identified that there was kind of a gap with communication with young people by that I mean 15 to 30 year olds and part of the problem is that there is less reach for newspapers which has been one of the main ways we’ve communicated with people through so our council publication is put in the local newspapers so because of that we will do some research around what information they want from the council and how do they want to get it so my initial thought are we might look at things like maybe Instagram from that research” (Council 3, person 2).

Relevancy/ Demographic appropriateness

All the councils mentioned the importance of relevancy in the use of technology. For example, they said population is an important consideration whether to use technologies, and Council 1 did not want to “dive in too quickly” in using this type of media because of its relatively small population size.
Council 1 and 2 recognised promotion of social media pages as a step towards increasing engagement. Council 3, person 2 believed it depended on the geographical make-up of the area and that it might be less appropriate for rural areas to use social media as there is less demand. She said this is due to slower uptake of technology in these areas (connectivity), or social media not being as useful in those areas – perhaps because there is less need for conversation about events/places to go to in comparison to urban audiences. Council 2 said that some councils might not have the financial resources to utilise technologies. Growth of the social media pages was a challenge mentioned by two of the councils. Council 2 emphasised that it takes promotion and time for people to recognise the usefulness technologies such as those can provide. “Well I guess the key change is the more we promote and grow the page the more feedbacks/complaint/posts, messages that we are getting which I think is a good thing” (Council 1, person 1).

“...we can use those tools to get that information out straight away but you’ve got to have them using it first so it’s a case of slowly building up and them expecting that information to come from that source so getting them on the council Facebook is the first bit or getting them following the council Twitter and once you’ve got them they start getting that information and it becomes their habit that they’ll expect it... Council really has only scratched the surface of social media’s potential to date – the challenge now is to get a lot more out of it as an engagement tool” (Council 2).

Low turnout

Council 3 stressed that traditional consultation was not getting good turnout and quality feedback for policy and planning matters. Council 1 said turnout to face-to-face consultation was low for some planning matters.

“I think we had one evening where we had two people turn-up and we had about four staff and four councilors so there’s that sort of low engagement with the council on that night for whatever reason but that’s why I say, the way we’ve always done it is have evenings and days where we invite people to participate and hear what we have to say but is that the best forum to be actually getting that information across and getting people’s opinions because sometimes you just get a low turnout?” (Council 3, person 1).

“So from that the things that we are getting the most interaction, we are finding that in most cases less people are going to like drop-in sessions or public meetings and often we get a lot more comment on Facebook...I think that’s a trend that it’s easier for people to read something on Facebook and make a comment rather than attending a meeting and a lot of people feel they don’t do that anymore because if they want information it’s there” (Council 3, person 2).
Useful and informative

Despite low turnout, social media was a good way for councils to get the information they needed in regards to operational matters, rather than for consultation on planning matters. Council 2 said it is a useful tool to inform the public. Council 3 also saw informing the public as important.

“...it is really good to engage with people like with any business if people are unhappy or they’re upset or whatever or even if people say “oh there’s a pot hole down my road can you come and fix it” or the bus driver sped past and was like “what the heck is going on”, it’s actually still a good way to, I guess, get that sort of information and engage with them that way rather than them not saying anything at all because a lot of people probably wouldn’t take the time to bring it to the council and try and find the right person to then talk about it...the way we run it is that if we get any questions that are any semblance of difficulty, other than where do we pay our rates, I send them straight to the managers. One, I don’t want to say the wrong thing and two it needs to come from the proper source and give them the ability to reply” (Council 1, person 1).

“...oddly for the council the opportunity for us is around our operational stuff. If our roads going to be closed, if the pass is out of action. It might not seem like big stuff but it’s useful to the community...Any opportunity to promote because its habit, it’s 101, you keep hitting the message until people are sick of it then you hit them again because they don’t forget it then. And what we hope is when we’ve built our tools to the point where they are useful people will go on it and then they’ll say to their mate “I went onto Twitter the other day and I got a message that saved me 10 minutes to go down this road which was closed”. It’s making it useful and the variety of information so, you know, it goes beyond just closed roads and footpaths it could be events that are on or charity promotions and stuff like that, anything that’s community related and that’s the productivity that an organisation like ours needs. You know, not the big bad council” (Council 2).

“[Facebook] we tend to use that for events, we use it for consultation so if it’s a consultation opening or closing we remind people of that and how they can make a submission. We also use it for recent council decisions to announce things” (Council 3, person 2).

Engagement not always meaningful for formal consultation process

Furthermore, Council 3 said that decision-making is not influenced by comments on social media. However, it influences what information that the council releases to inform the public. The other two councils were not aware of instances where it has affected decision-making but said it makes the council aware of operational matters such as pot holes on roads. One of the reasons outlined for the limited use of online communication is that the technology is not yet suitable for the formal consultation process and the legal status of comments on these mediums was unclear. Council 1 said
some people post negative comments, without contributing with useful feedback. Council 1 said Web 2.0 is relevant for policy, but needs to consider how it can be used for planning consultation processes. Council 2 did not talk about meaningful engagement explicitly but talked about Web 2.0’s use for promotion as a tool for public information and educating what the council does. Council 3, however, did not talk about promotion but, instead, about people’s demand for information and the need for content. Council 3, person 1 wanted to get meaningful engagement. By meaningful he meant how the council takes on board the feedback that it’s received and builds on that in future consultations so it’s meaningful participation as opposed to just consulting.

“…what we are finding is people who want to say something are saying it in the wrong ways or the ways we don’t want them to…we’ll ask someone to go along and have your say and follow the online survey or something like that…but a lot of people will just kind of post negative comments in the comments section and not really, you know, go through and do it properly” (Council 1, person 1).

“I mean they’ve [managers] got a lot better things to do than, you know, reply to these angry sorts of messages but on the flip side it’s just like any sort of cast to the management system, you’ve got to take the good with the bad” (Council 1, person 1).

“…you have to accept the times that some people are going to have the views that they are not going to change so you give them the basic information you’re not actually targeting that person you’re targeting the other people that are reading it because you know you can’t change that person’s mind and that’s just human nature you know but we all have certain views and it doesn’t matter what we’re told we’ll stick to it so you can’t worry about it” (Council 2).

“…often people say that same thing, they make the same submissions and, you know, it’s not that we have ignored that at all, it’s just there’s always another thing that the council in general, not just planning, but the council in general is consulting on and, I think, it’s not just us as a council but it’s in that wider, greater…context that people are consulted on a range of different things and it’s trying to get that meaningful input from people. I don’t think you can ever consult too much but it’s just a matter of how you go about it and how you take on board the feedback that you’ve actually had and how do you use it so it’s meaningful participation as opposed to just consulting” (Council 3, person 1).

**Appropriateness for formal consultation process**

Council 1 said Web 2.0 is relevant for policy, but needs to consider how it can be used for planning consultation processes. Council 2 said social media is not developed enough for planning
consultation to be used on its own as it does not have the detail required – it is more of a hook to a website. Council 3, person 1 said Web 2.0 is suitable for the consultation process. Person 2 said it is unclear what legal status social media posts have.

“Tools in the space are rapidly expanding but at this stage it’s more of a hook...it doesn’t have the detail that is required it is easier to do on a website than it is on Facebook.” (Council 2).

“Well what we do currently is we monitor discussions about council issues and they get sent to a relevant council staff but I don’t know that the planners always include those discussions in reports. It’s a bit like unclear legally in terms of planning processes what status those kinds of discussions have, if they have any status” (Council 3, person 2).

Changing the mindset of people

It was perceived that people’s mindset about Web 2.0 needs to change. Council 1 and 2 said employees and the public are used to traditional forms of media. Council 1 believed making digital forms of consultation effective requires changing the mindset of people used to traditional forms. One interviewee from Council 1 said that getting good content on social media sites requires a better understanding of its importance by managers. However, the planning manager said they have a system in place to release information to the public but perceived the uptake to be dependent on people’s understanding of how it can be helpful, rather than people’s technological knowledge.

“Managers who don’t seem to be able to reply to Facebook do not realise that the post has grown exponentially while everyone is tagging their mates in it and commenting and often times it is perhaps the older generation who just think it’s just, you know, sort of a fun thing for kids or whatever and not realising that it, that actually it has the potential to really be blown out of proportion so we’ve had some of the things that have done that. Certain key issues because it has been the time lapse. I guess, as I said, the main thing is, for me, is more people or council embracing social media and oftentimes it’s wee things like talking to the rating department to say “hey look this ad that you put in the paper about road closures in this street let us know that that’s going in so we can put it up as well” and it’s one of those battles that they think “oh you don’t know it doesn’t need to go on Facebook”. And I just want to say “well actually if would be great, if it’s already gone out to the public then what’s the issue”, sort of thing. So, yeah, I mean that would be the biggest challenge I think for growing social media is having the good content on there and that’s one of the key battles is really good content” (Council 1, person 1).

Generational perceptions

Although the councils did not specify any age group that utilised Web 2.0 tools more, there were
some perceptions and assumptions made about how different generations used the technologies. Council 1 said there is no huge trend but that young people communicate differently, Council 2 said the employee demographic effects the uptake of Web 2.0 and Council 3, person 2 said it needs to target the 15-35-year-old demographic more. Council 3, person 1 said consultation using Web 2.0 can reach a wider audience, particularly younger people.

“I guess a lot of younger ones are quite happy to do a lot of Facebook whereas they’re a lot less likely to ring up and complain about something... there’s not so much that we have a certain age group that engages with us more than others. It’s more we found the younger ones to be ready to comment/ share things. I mean extreme age groups like 65+, but anything below that we are still getting a wide interaction from. So, no I wouldn’t say there’s a huge trend. Oftentimes it’s the best really passionate people as, of course, with councils there is a lot of key issues that people are really passionate about. In the moment, we are doing library consultation and um that people are upset that the kids section might be moved so some of the key kind of pushes behind the movement is say older librarians like 50s sort of thing and they’re just as savvy with Facebook and starting petitions and things.” (Council 1, person 1).

“I think probably because of the demographics of the employees we are probably not using them as effectively as we could but that’s more a learning process and, as I say, we’ve got a lot of people that have been there a long time and when you’re doing anything for a long time you get into your habits don’t you and you always do it that way so change is hard and it takes time and that’s, you know, the change has been so rapid in the last seven or eight years” (Council 2).

“...if you look at our demographics we’ve got quite a lot of people in kind of the 35-45 age group and then a lot of kids up to 15. So, we don’t have a lot of people in that kind of like 15-35 demographic which I think is a lot of people who use Twitter and Instagram and those kind of things” (Council 3, person 2).

Main barriers
Council 2 mentioned financial and technological barriers to utilising Web 2.0. The biggest barrier for Council 1, person 1 was managers recognising the usefulness of social media and Council 3, person 2 said planning processes was the biggest barrier. This is because communications staff cannot put a notice online or in a newspaper about a resource consent application if it is not publicly notified even if lots of people are interested in it. The legal framework under the RMA 1991 outlines whether a consent is to be publicly notified. There are circumstances under S95A (2) of the Act where a council, as the consenting authority, must publicly notify the application. These are if the council decides the
activity in question will have, or is likely to have adverse effects on the environment that are more than minor; or the applicant requests public notification of the application; or a rule or national environmental standard requires public notification of the application (RMA, 1991). A council may decide to publicly notify an application if it decides there are special circumstances or after a request for information and the applicant does not provide the information before the deadline concerned; or refuses to provide the information. Furthermore, Council 1 pointed out the need to work out how to use Web 2.0 more for planning.

“The only limitations anyone would have, and certainly our organisation would have, is the finance and you’ve also got to be smart so much as the technology is changing so rapidly you’ve got to be careful that you don’t buy into some technology that is already becoming obsolete…The corporates are taking the lead because they’ve got the money to get into that space and use it” (Council 2).

“We can’t just really decide that I want to put a notice about this consent application if it’s non-notified even if lots of people are interested in it because then you’re treating that applicant differently to what the law says” (Council 3, person 2).

The three communications professionals interviewed provided more relevant information for this study than the two planning managers did. This is likely because the latter group do not utilise technology for engagement as it was considered to be in the domain of the communications department. Two councils emphasised that the planning and policy department worked closely with the communications department. The communications advisor from Council 1 spoke about a lack of understanding by planning managers of the importance of social media, but the planning manager at Council 1 said his department worked closely with the communications team to draw-up press releases. The communication team then decided whether to put that information on social media. Two of the communications staff interviewed referred to sending some of the comments received on Facebook from ratepayers to the relevant managers to reply to.

Planning managers did offer a useful perspective on public participation and the use of various technology for planning. For instance, attempts are being made by one of the councils to streamline the resource consenting process by moving away from paper-based resource consent processing. Similarly, another council, despite believing Web 2.0 to be more useful for policy, plans to evaluate how Web 2.0 can be used for planning.

Council 3 supplied a graph created from data that shows the type, and frequency of use, of digital hardware that is used to access a council’s website.
Figure 2: Website visitors by hardware type

Figure 2 illustrates the number of monthly visits to Council 3’s website via non-desktop computers e.g. tablets and mobile, all desktop computers, all tablets, and all mobiles. Other councils might differ but it shows that there was almost no use of mobiles and tablets to access to the council’s website from 2009 to early 2012. Usage has increased from 2013 to 2016. However, the use of tablets has tapered off, while mobile use is increasing. With all non-desktop computers having 38 percent of the share in July 2016, up from zero percent in September 2009. While desktop use has decreased, it is still the highest used computer-type to access the council’s website. The data was gathered by the council using Google Analytics.

Summary of results

The relevancy of Web 2.0 was believed, by the interviewees, to be increasing and non-online methods could be time consuming, not as simple, and less convenient. Interactive tools such as Snap, Send Solve, and interactive maps were believed to be convenient for reducing the time it took for people to get information or give the council information; and visuals as a useful way to engage audiences. Traditional forms of communication were still considered to be relevant. The councils pointed out that the uptake of Web 2.0 depends on relevancy/democratic appropriateness. Corporates and larger councils were considered to be taking the lead with the uptake of new forms of technology. Overall, the councils wanted to increase the use of Web 2.0 and saw it as a way to further engagement with the public. Web 2.0 was perceived as another way for people to express their views to the councils and was also a ‘useful’ way for councils to get information to the public such as advertising the consultation process. Themes from the results will be discussed in detail in the next section.
Discussion

This section will explore how the three councils are utilising Web 2.0 and what the barriers to further uptake are. Next, it will consider the potential of Web 2.0 for addressing low turnout. Finally what level of participation is being achieved by Web 2.0 technologies will be assessed. This will be achieved by using Arnstein’s (1969) A Ladder of Citizen Participation and Nabatchi and Mergel’s (2012) Types of Public Involvement in Decision Making.

How the councils are utilising these technologies?

Interviewees were positive about the use of Web 2.0 for engagement between the public and the council, even if use of it was new and unexplored. The councils did not use a lot of Web 2.0 technologies as its use was still in its infancy and mostly limited to static content on the councils’ main websites and on social media. The interviews also confirmed traditional forms of communication, such as newspapers, still have relevance, even if there is progression towards more technologically-based engagements. All three councils included in this study still used traditional forms of communication, such as newspapers, newsletters, and public meetings, to inform stakeholders as well as placing notices on the Council website or postings on their Facebook page. These findings are in line with the literature which indicates there are people who prefer traditional forms of participation such as letters and meetings (Goldfinch et al., 2009). Orbe and Harris (2000) argue smartphones, tablets, laptops and other digital technology could replace traditional forms of communication. This statement made by Orbe and Harris (2000) is interesting given that it was made more than 15 years ago when digital technology, including cellphones were still in their infancy. More recent literature also indicates that steps are being taken towards more e-participation in local body matters (Mossberger et al., 2013). Again, this is in line with information provided by the councils interviewed for this study as there was the recent (in the last couple of years) uptake of interactive tools. For instance, Instagram, a photo sharing application, is used by Council 1 to promote council, and other events happening within the community. The council indicated that they would like to utilise applications such as Instagram more. Mobile applications such as Snap, Send, Solve is used by Council 2, and a lesser extent by Council 3. Snap, Send, Solve is an application that allows users to take a photo of a problem (such as graffiti) and send this directly to the Councils for action. Council 2 utilises natural hazards software so people can see their properties’ flooding risk such as low hazard to high hazards, and also see where fault lines are located. Council 3 also makes use of interactive mapping with its EPlan software\(^2\), where people can search to visualise

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\(^2\) The EPlan software does not allow people to give their feedback on the plan and engage with the council but it allows ratepayers to see information about rules. They are working on linking the rules to submissions information for the district plan review. This will allow people to see who made the submission and any decisions made from it.
relevant information, such as zoning, on a property. Therefore, it does appear opportunities for public participation are increasing in a range of different sized organisations. However, this depends on its appropriateness for the community and number of users. Interviewees mentioned demographic appropriateness being relevant for the use of technology. For instance, whether the population is sufficient for it to be widely utilised and whether the people in the area have access to technology. This consideration has been confirmed by literature. For instance, Gauld, Goldfinch, & Horsburgh (2010) said New Zealanders living in towns or rural areas had less than half the odds of being frequent internet-based ICT users than city residents. However, due to the recent roll out of fast-speed internet into rural areas this figure may have decreased in the last two or so years. Moon (2002) also found that larger governments are likely to be more proactive in the use of e-government initiatives than smaller organisations. These appear to be reasons for what Fredericks and Foth (2013) described as the “slow cultural change with the implementation of new tools and techniques for public participation” uptake of technologies by some authorities (p.253).

Barriers to uptake

Regardless of its potential, there are limitations to web-based public participation. These include limited access to the Internet, the potential lack of technological knowledge and the need for a user-friendly interface so people will want to use it (Stern et al., 2009). It is interesting to note that perceived barriers to uptake of Web 2.0 for participation raised by the interviewees differed between the local authorities. Some of barriers mentioned by the interviewees were: managers recognising the usefulness of social media, financial and technological, and planning processes. Therefore, no key trends could be identified in the small sample used in this study. However, this could be due to the perceptions by staff interviewed of what the key barriers are. Interviewee person 1 from Council 1 mentioned that people’s understanding of the usefulness and relevance of social media content was a barrier. For instance, managers may not realise that it could be useful to put information on Facebook to inform people of things such as road closures. Council 2 also mentioned this but did not specifically refer to it as a barrier, but instead as an institutional issue where technology is not utilised as well as it could be. Literature has outlined that e-participation support is primarily driven by technological competence and the ICT infrastructure available. In terms of technological competence and people’s technological expertise, Council 2 said the employee demographic effects the uptake of Web 2.0. However, Council 1, person 2 said it is less about the demographics such as the ages of the employees, but more about people’s perceptions of how
technology can be beneficial. In other words, it requires a change in mind-set of the opportunities technology can provide.

Previous studies report that e-participation is seen by planners as an “add-on to traditional planning processes and is not considered an alternative form of democratic deliberation and engagement” (Åström and Granberg, 2008, p.75). Other studies point out that Web 2.0 tools are being used no differently than Web 1.0 tools as they are used to disseminate information to the public rather than have two-way conversations (Fredericks & Foth, 2013; Williamson & Parolin, 2013; Hand & Ching, 2011). For instance, information is put on council’s website with little opportunity for feedback on that information. Therefore, e-participation requires challenging existing understandings of planning and the consultation process involved (Åström and Granberg (2008). In other words, and as mentioned previously, it may be necessary to consider the mind-set of those who able to affect change.

Council 2 said financing new Web 2.0 tools was a barrier to them increasing their use of these tools. They said corporates are taking the lead in the use of Web 2.0 because they have the money to do that. Councils, as governance bodies, in general, can have limited means of funding compared to corporates. This aligned with Moon’s (2002) findings that lack of technical, personnel, and financial capacities are likely to be major barriers for councils to increase their use of technology. Further, Bizjak (2012) argued, that non-governmental organisations generally have the people and the means to establish technical platforms, unlike governments (Bizjak, 2012).

There are many tools that can be utilised to increase two-way engagement that are not expensive and the three councils were already using, such as Facebook. The web based tool is free to use. However, the representatives from all three councils perceived that more could be done in that space. For instance, Council 3, person 1 suggested the use of webinars as a way of disseminating information. A webinar is a web-based seminar that council experts could use on planning topics of interest and access at times suitable to them. Those viewing the webinars would also have the ability to add comments, related to the topic, on the webinars to communicate to the council. This same interviewee also thought the use of tablets and laptops on site at consultations so people have access to all related information. Council 1, person 2 said it could use online submissions, and Council 2 was looking at utilising videos on Facebook, for promotional reasons, to capture people’s interest in what the council is doing.

“They are a very powerful visual way of explaining what we are doing, educating etc.” (Council 2).
In regards to this, Council 2 was in the process of reconfiguring its communication team by employing people with technological expertise. Furthermore, Council 1, person 2 said that the council must look at its consultation strategy and work out how to use Web 2.0 for planning.

The focus of Council 3, person 2 was on the content councils made available and the ability to be able to give the public the information it wanted. This is because, in the case of resource consents, a consent cannot be notified, for public submissions, if it has been determined by a planner, in regards to the Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991, that it is non-notified. However, only one person raised this as an issue.

Another reason why councils want to re-think their current consultation processes is that turnout for consultation has often been low. It is thought, having different ways for people to participate will increase participation by making it something people can do anywhere at any time.

Low turnout to face-to-face consultations was mentioned by the two interviewees from Council 3. Turnout was also mentioned by Council 1, person 2 and Council 2. Council 1, person 2 said there is low turnout to some consultations.

“I think we had one evening where we had two people turn-up and we had about four staff and four councillors so there’s that sort of low engagement with the council on that night for whatever reason but that’s why I say, the way we’ve always done it is have evenings and days where we invite people to participate and hear what we have to say but is that the best forum to be actually getting that information across and getting people’s opinions because sometimes you just get a low turnout” (Council 3, person 1).

The aim of Council 2 was to involve as many people as possible in consultation. Council 1, person 2 said some people cannot see how plan-making will impact them and they miss out on opportunities to give their input to plans and when they realise the impact it will have on them the submissions period has closed. This is not due to the length of the submissions period but to lack of interest in or awareness of planning matters, until people realise how it will impact them – at that point it is too late. Therefore, turnout is a key matter raised by the councils.

**Addressing low turnout**

Laurian (2004) studied why some people participate in planning processes and others do not. She found that attendance at public meetings was limited because people were not aware meetings were being held. There is potential for Web 2.0 to help address this. As it was outlined in the literature, Web 2.0 gives citizens “who are ordinarily reluctant to contribute in traditional settings, the opportunity of participating in their own environment in their own time, with face-to face encounters being optional, rather than required” (Fredericks & Foth, 2013, p.255). All councils said
social media is a more convenient way, for citizens to engage than traditional methods, such as attending meetings. For instance, Council 1, person 1 said, from his experience, younger people appear ready to comment on and share social media posts, but older people can also be technologically savvy. Council 1, person 2 said technology is more relevant for the younger demographic. Although these were only perceptions and they were not backed up with demographic data. However, Council 3 had undertaken a survey and found there was less engagement with younger people through traditional methods.

“...we did a survey around communication preferences and on that we identified that there was kind of a gap with communication with young people by that I mean 15 to 30 year olds and part of the problem is that there is less reach for newspapers which has been one of the main ways we’ve communicated with people through so our council publication is put in the local newspapers so because of that we will do some research around what information they want from the council and how do they want to get it so my initial thought are we might look at things like maybe Instagram from that research” (Council 3, person 2).

All the councils saw the opportunity of using technology to increase engagement. Previous studies have noted the heavy use of the Internet for political activities by younger people with decreasing participation levels within this group. Therefore, participation among this group could be increased with the use of the internet. For example, Stern et al. (2009) found that “younger people, residents, and local business owners in their 20s and 30s, mainly with only high-school education, are those who participate only through the web, with a lesser drive and ability to be active and effective” (p.1083). However, the more educated people in their 30s to 40s, are more likely to use “the web as an additional opportunity” for active and affective participation” (p.1083). More specifically, Gauld et al. (2010) found that older age, and less education were associated with lower ICT and e-government use. Council 1, person 2 saw Web 2.0 as an alternative form of communication that could engage more people. By this they meant that some people might prefer to participate this way. However, the interviewee seemed uncertain that higher participation would be achieved, as engagement in some topics was low in existing traditional participation opportunities. Online methods might offer an additional opportunity to engage, however there is no guarantee this would solve the problem if the topic was seen as irrelevant or “boring” to ratepayers. Nevertheless, this type of technology does afford people greater opportunity to participate. Reasons for this could be that people can participate at any place, at any time that suits them, without the social pressure of face-to-face methods.

Council 1 and 3 said there is low turnout to some face-to-face participation opportunities. To get useful feedback, planners are challenged to engage the public in meaningful ways (Evans-Cowley & Griffin, 2011). Council 3, person 1 said their aim is to make consultation meaningful. By this he meant not asking people the same questions repeatedly and by taking on board what they previously said.
Council 1, person 1 said that some of their efforts to engage via online methods were hampered by some people who do not put effort into responding to online surveys.

“...we’ll ask someone to go along and have your say and follow the online survey or something like that which were brought in recently in the policy and planning department. Those sorts of online surveys. But a lot of people will just kind of post negative comments in the comments section and not really, you know, go through and do it properly” (Council 1, person 1).

Council 3 said it is unclear what status social media comments have. For instance, is it considered a conversation or can they be used as official submissions? The Local Government Act 2002 does not state what form the submissions should be in. However, persons who wish to have their views on the decision or matter considered by the local authority should be provided with a reasonable opportunity to present those views to the local authority in a manner and format that is appropriate to the preferences and needs of those persons. This has not been explored by literature. However, Bizjak (2012) said that people may become involved “only to draw attention to themselves,” and their personal issues, such as nimbyism (not-in-my-backyard-syndrome). One reason for this is that “e-participation is accessible to a larger number of people” (p.121) who may not give participation suitable time and thought. As, Afzalan & Muller (2014) outlined, people can be insensitive in online communication as they can remain hidden behind a computer screen and may be less afraid to be rude or outspoken. Therefore, less thought may be given to the feedback when people participate this way. Following the 2016 New Zealand local elections, there was discussions about voting going online. However, issues regarding security were raised. The Department of Internal Affairs is not confident that councils could get systems in place that would be secure from hacking (Forbes, 2016). However, security was not an issue raised by any of the interviewees for this study. It is interesting to consider that the people interviewed for this study either did not comment on, or were not aware of, the security implications that using digital technology can bring.

The level of interactivity offered by the technologies used

This section considers how interactive the Web 2.0 technologies used by the councils are. In this case, interactive refers to two-way communication. Ellison & Hardey (2014) outlined, the conversation on Council Facebook pages is often about the quality of local services, rather than issues concerned with the nature and broader conduct of local government. This view was reinforced with the interview findings of this study and illustrated by an example Facebook posting in figure 3.
Each of the councils in this study spoke of making information placed on Facebook etc. ‘useful’ and that the technology can make disseminating this information to a wider group easier and more timely than traditional methods. Council 1 referred to technology being a useful way for people to get information on operational matters, such as road closures. As mentioned in the literature review, research has suggested that Web 2.0 tools are being used no differently than Web 1.0 tools, as a way of disseminating information (Fredericks & Foth, 2013; Williamson & Parolin, 2013; Hand & Ching, 2011). Ellison & Hardey (2014), in their study of social media usage by English local authorities, found that social media was used passively by pushing information about local authorities to the public. Therefore, communication is likely to be one-way. All three councils saw the importance of informing the public, but also recognised the importance of getting information from citizens. Therefore, seemingly appreciating the two-way benefits that Web 2.0 provides. Council 2 perceived Web 2.0 as a promotional tool for the council. It was seen as a way to promote what the council does. Council 2 also emphasised that it will take time for people to realise that they can get useful information from social media.

“By making it useful as I said before you have making it useful on a daily basis, the operational material. But that takes time for people to cotton on to the fact that it’s going to be useful to be on Twitter to be following the council account because it’s a big change for them, it’s not what they expect, it’s not what they are used to so that will take time and it will take promotion but the cool thing is that we are on the ground rather than, you know, there’s plenty of scope, we are only just starting to build the building in that area” (Council 2).

Council 1’s annual plan consultation involved a Consultation Caravan that went to different locations for community to have their say. The caravan was promoted, by way of posts, on the council’s Facebook page. It is interesting to note that, a number of responses to the posts expressed negative feelings about the caravan. A number of responses commented that the caravan was a waste of ratepayers’ money because council “will just do what they want to anyway”. Another person commented “when I see that van I just get angry” because money was wasted “on things that are not
core responsibilities”. However, despite these negative responses, Council 1, person 2 said the caravan has been a good way to engage with people, giving them the information they need as well as finding out the community’s views: “...it’s another way of reaching out to the public because it is at any event people are going to and it gives people, you know, people are there, and it gives them an opportunity.” Mandarano et al. (2010) outline that traditional methods of participation require commitment including people being present at public meetings and understanding and keeping up-to-date as the process unfolds. It is evident there are a mix of views towards face-to-face versus online opportunities. Online opportunities were perceived by interviewees as another way to engage and reach more people rather than completely replacing the traditional approach.

Section 82 of the Local Government Act 2002 outlines principles of how consultation is to be undertaken. These principles include that persons affected by or who have an interest in a decision should be provided with reasonable access to relevant information in a manner and format that is appropriate to the preferences and needs of those persons. These persons should be encouraged to present their views. They should be given clear information concerning the purpose of consultation and the scope of decisions to be taken. In addition, they should be provided with a reasonable opportunity to present those views in an appropriate format and manner for that person. Their views should be received by the authority with an open mind. Therefore, the format used is required to be appropriate for the person.

In each of the councils included in this study people have been afforded opportunities to have their say online. These opportunities include Facebook pages, where communications staff were actively filtering comments and passing them to managers. How these comments were dealt with was not mentioned. It appears the way that social media comments are considered by the councils in this study differs from what scholars, such as Williamson and Parolin (2013) have described as ‘one way’ or ‘monologue communication’. In this study it was evident that comments made by the public on council Facebook sites was treated respectively and acknowledged where appropriate.

The finding from the interviews along with assessment of the three council’s 2016 Facebook page posts have been evaluated against A Ladder of Participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969), with the view of determining the level of participation Web 2.0 technologies provide the three councils. The ladder has been provided and described on page 7 of this dissertation. A further categorisation, in the figure below, is provided by Mergel (2012). This simple categorisation, by Nabatchi and Mergel (2012), outlines there are multiple levels of involvement in decision-making, similar to A Ladder of Citizen Participation, from informing all the way to empowering, where final decision-making is placed in the hands of citizens.
Nabatchi and Mergel’s (2010) classifications are similar to Arnstein’s. Mergel (2012), however, focuses on the technological aspects of public participation. She considers the ability of different mediums for public participation and the level of engagement they provide. Both of these factors categorise the extent citizens can determine the end product, or decision. This provides a useful and more relevant categorisation for this study. Because Arnstein’s model focuses on the intentions of the powerholders it would work better to determine the level of public participation in certain events through all forums, rather than only Web 2.0 which is still in its infancy. The lowest rungs of Arnstein’s ladder are Manipulation and Therapy. The ladder categorises types of public involvement that is ‘masked’ as public participation. For instance, what is ‘masked’ as public participation is actually public relations aiming to educate or engineer people’s support. Nabatchi and Mergel (2010), do not have similar classifications to Manipulation and Therapy. These categorisations are difficult to assess for this study as they are about intent of powerholders and not about the level of participation offered by technology.
The first of Nabatchi and Mergel (2010), categorisation is ‘Inform’. This category is where
government shares information. This information is broadcast widely “to citizens who prefer to
receive their information through social media channels” (p.150). Arnstein argues that informing
“citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step towards
legitimate citizen participation” (p.219). According to Mergel (2012), local governments use websites
to inform citizens about events. “In some cases, governments use Twitter simply for updates and to
direct citizens back to websites for more information” (p.149). This was evident in the councils
studied who used social media as a ‘hook’ back to the website and to inform the public about various
things such as events, and publicising consultation processes.

“They are not making websites redundant, they are more of a driver to a
website... they are not there yet as a consultation tool on their own they are
still more of a hook. Over time the pace that technology is developing they
probably will be” (Council 2).

“And what we hope is when we’ve built our tools to the point where they
are useful people will go on it and then they’ll say to their mate “I went onto
Twitter the other day and I got a message that saved me 10 minutes to go
down this road which was closed”. It’s making it useful and the variety of
information so, you know, it goes beyond just closed roads and footpaths it
could be events that are on or charity promotions and stuff like that,
anything that’s community related and that’s the productivity that an
organisation like ours needs” (Council 2).

“[Facebook] we tend to use that for events, we use it for consultation so if
it’s a consultation opening or closing we remind people of that and how
they can make a submission. We also use it for recent council decisions to
announce things” (Council 3, person 2).

Another example of Web 2.0 technologies used to ‘Inform’ is Council 2’s interactive mapping tool
where people can find out about natural hazard classification for their property, or Council 3’s EPlan
which is used to view the council’s district plan online.

The next categorisation provided by Arnstein’s ladder is ‘Consultation’. Nabatchi and Mergel (2010)
identified this category as ‘Consult’ which “can include the receipt of and response to comments,
concerns, requests, and complaints” (p.150). According to Arnstein, this rung of the ladder provides
“no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account” (p.219). Arnstein said that
the most frequent methods used for consultation are attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings, and
public hearings. Therefore, with the use of online surveys by all three of the councils this level of the
ladder is achieved. Furthermore, applications such as Snap, Send Solve, which are used by Councils 2
and 3 are examples of consultation, as citizens’ complaints are obtained by the councils. Mergel
(2012) outlines a similar projects to Snap, Send, Solve (which was used by Council 2, and a lesser
extent by Council 3), as consultation. Love Lewisham mentioned by Mergel (2012), as well as Snap,
Send, Solve are applications where people can take and send photos of issues such as graffiti and trash to the local authority along with GPS co-ordinates of where the incident occurred. Furthermore, the Consultation level of the ladder, where citizens are involved, was achieved as the councils provided opportunities for feedback to planning matters, which were advertised on all the councils’ Facebook pages. On its Facebook page, Council 1 had a link to an online survey in regards to the library layout consultation, and links to submissions (which also included printable submission forms) on bylaws among and other council matters. Despite there being online surveys, submission forms were not writable PDFs, which would give people the opportunity to submit feedback online to plans and other consultations online. As mentioned previously, Council 1, person 1 said feedback to the online surveys is often negative and people do not put the effort into providing valuable feedback. Council 1 also advertised, on its Facebook page, face-to-face consultation opportunities on its annual plan. Likewise, Council 2 promoted submission opportunities on its Facebook page. Council 2 had a link from Facebook back to the Council website where people could fill out online submissions on things such as a Walking and Cycling Strategy, a recovery plan, the annual plan, and bylaws. Council 3 invited, through its Facebook page, participation in an online survey on community space needs and another one on what the council could do to support a vibrant arts scene. It also had links back to its website to an online submission form for its annual plan. Council 3, person 1 said the council receives good feedback on the submissions. However, Council 1, persons 1 and 2 found, in general with all forms of consultation, unless it was something that people are really interested in then they do not bother submitting or engaging. Council 3, person 2 has discovered people might talk about planning issues on social media but not make a formal submission. Council 1, person 2 and Council 3, person 2 both said people often miss the submission period as they are unaware of the opportunity to submit at the time. Council 3, person 2 also said people expect to be able to make online submissions. Council 2 and 3 said they receive useful feedback to online submissions forms. All councils said they take all comments into account. Comments are used by Council 2 to “improve the level of service” it offers to the community. Council 3 said feedback is useful for informing council what works and does not work such as rules and policies in the district plan. All of these examples show how these councils are all making the effort to afford citizens more ways to engage, both in the practical and political sense. The also show how the councils can learn about engagement by the methods people favour and how people choose to engage.

Not all planning related social media posts received comments from the public but some did, such as Figure 5.
Figure 5: Council replies to a comment on Facebook regarding the purchase of land for a park

However, when they did there was typically only a few comments at most. Comments on posts about planning consultation were sometimes responded to by the councils, but not always. Council 2 said there is not always a need to respond, as often people are just commenting on something the council put on their social media page, but whenever people ask questions then the council responds.

The next level Nabatchi and Mergel (2010) term ‘Include and Incorporate’, where “local governments use Participation 2.0 technologies, such as Wikis (interactive online content creation) “to engage the public in information processing and to give citizens more influence over decision making”.

Arnstein’s equivalent is ‘Placation’ where ‘citizens begin to have some degree of influence” but powerholders retain the right “to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice” (p.220). This could be evident in traditional forms of consultation, but was not evident in Web 2.0 alone. However, this level was to a small degree achieved by Council 3 who mentioned comments on Facebook pages lead communications staff to distribute information to explain matters. However, people were not able to be part of information processing, except for being able to post on the Facebook pages, in the form of Visitor Posts.

The next category is what Nabatchi and Mergel (2010) refer to as ‘collaborate‘ as the public are included in the decision-making to identify the preferred solution. This is where citizens “directly interact with the submitted solutions, see how others have voted, and are thereby part of the final decision making” (p.151). Arnstein’s ‘Partnership’ level is equivalent to this – where citizens and ‘powerholders’ “share planning and decision-making” (p.221) through structures such as joint policy boards, and planning committees. In regards to Web 2.0, Mergel (2012) gives an example of this. Westminster City Council uses Virtual Ward Panels, which will use technologies such as blogs and discussion forms, along with online surveys and voting tools. The goals of this is to engage citizens and give them input into the policing priorities and strategies for the area they live in. None of the councils mentioned the use of technology in this way. Therefore, this, and higher levels, of public participation were not achieved.
The next level of Arnstein’s ladder is ‘Delegated Power’ where negotiations between citizens and public officials can result in citizens achieving dominant decision-making over a plan. The highest level is what Arnstein classifies as citizen control. Nabatchi and Mergel (2010) classify this as ‘Empower’ where decision-making is in the hands of citizens. These levels, as per the information provided by the interviewees, were not achieved by the three councils. Nabatchi and Mergel’s (2010), highest categorisation ‘Empower’ provides ways that Web 2.0 can be used to achieve full participation. An example used by Mergel (2012) is the Virginia Idea Forum. People can submit their ideas via a website about improvements to state government. “Together, citizens discuss the ideas and collaborate to develop and enhance them. These ideas are then rated by users, and the ideas with the highest ratings receive an official response from a representative of the state” (p.152).

Overall, while councils want to increase the use of Web 2.0 technology for engagement, the highest levels of participation using Web 2.0 technologies has not been achieved.

Table 2: Councils’ achievement of levels of participation, as outlined by Arnstein (1969) and Nabatchi & Mergel (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arnstein (1969)</th>
<th>Nabatchi &amp; Mergel (2010)</th>
<th>This study (✓ = 1 council)</th>
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<td>Manipulation</td>
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<td>Therapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Consult</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placation</td>
<td>Include or Incorporate</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
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<td>Delegated power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizen Control</td>
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Conclusion

Public participation in all council issues, particularly for the purpose of planning, is something that has been an ongoing concern for local government. The purpose of allowing the public to consult is to ensure that all parties who may or may not be affected by particular planning decisions have had the opportunity to voice their issues and opinions.

The focus of this study is on Web 2.0 technologies, particularly social media and how these were used by the councils for the purpose of public consultation and participation. In the process of collecting data for this research it became clear that each of the councils involved, while using Web 2.1 technology to some degree, had differing experiences and rationale as to why or why not to expand on its use for planning. This section outlines the current use of Web 2.0 for participation, the barriers to the uptake of Web 2.0, the levels of engagement offered by the technology, some thoughts on Web 2.0 and planning, and suggests further research for Web 2.0.

Current use of Web 2.0 for participation

Despite differences, all councils involved in this study saw the importance of Web 2.0 and wanted to increase its use. There was some use of Web 2.0 including social media, and mobile applications. Each of the three councils were particularly interested in increasing visual forms of communication, such as photos and videos. These visual could be used to capture people’s attention in planning matters and increase awareness of participation opportunities – such as how an area could change as a result of a particular plan.

The hypothesis of this study was that Web 2.0 provides benefits outside of traditional forms of engagement. A benefit of Web 2.0, as raised by the interviewees was that it is more instantaneous. For instance, press releases can take time to be written and signed off, rather than a short post on social media which is much quicker. Council 2 referred to it as the “age of convenience”. This is confirmed by previous research. Mandarano et al. (2010) argued that “traditional methods of public engagement require extensive commitments from individual citizens to understand, track, and provide feedback throughout a planning process” (p.132). Information can be provided regularly on the planning process with the use of Web 2.0 (Mandarano et al., 2010). Other benefits of Web 2.0, mentioned by interviewees, include the ready access to specific information to do with a property and new “powerful visual” ways of explaining what a council is doing.
Uptake of Web 2.0

It was clear that overall the councils believed the uptake of technologies depend on whether it was relevant and appropriate for the area the council serves. Whether the technology is appropriate depends on several factors. For instance, the population of the local authority area and whether there is sufficient access to technology for it to be widely utilised. Therefore, while these tools can be beneficial, overuse of them can take the advantage of their use away. Perspectives on barriers towards the utilisation of technologies differed from people recognising the benefit of Web 2.0, to financial and technological barriers. It was believed that corporates were taking the lead in the uptake of Web 2.0 as Councils can have limited means of funding compared to corporates.

Turnout is, and long has been, an important issue for planners and something that Web 2.0 could address. It could provide more consultation opportunities for people that are easier and more comfortable for some people. There is the perception that it reaches younger people better, than a traditional method such as an advertisement in a newspaper. However, the councils generally believed face-to-face consultation will continue to be important because there are people that will continue to prefer those methods, and direct engagement with planners. Bugs et al. (2010) believes that combining traditional methods with Web 2.0 “strengthens participatory urban planning” (p.180). Bugs et al. (2010) did not outline whether Web 2.0 tools, such as PPGIS, could replace traditional forms of engagement. However, interviewees of this study still believed there was a place for it, even if some forms such as press releases have become irrelevant.

Levels of engagement

The level of engagement offered by these technologies was difficult to determine because they were used in conjunction with non-Web 2.0 methods. Nabatchi and Mergel’s (2010) work provided a more useful categorisation for this study than Arnstein (1969) that looks at the power citizens have in decision-making, rather than the technological use. However, Arnstein’s (1969) work still offered useful theory for this dissertation. The ‘Inform’ level of Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation was achieved as councils used a range of methods to inform the public. Consultation was also achieved as councils sought comments from the public. Higher rungs of the ladder and Nabatchi and Mergel’s categorisation was largely not achieved using Web 2.0 by the councils studied. However, councils were wanting to increase use of Web 2.0 for public participation and were aware technology is always developing. These findings differ slightly from Ellison and Hardey’s (2014) findings that English local authority currently define residents as primarily as consumers of council services. Councils, in this dissertation study, were positive towards and offered opportunities for public feedback to planning and other council matters. However, this dissertation was limited in scope as it involved interviews with representatives from three councils, which meant there was less ability to generalise
and find patterns. However, it likely offered richer data on specific councils than Ellison and Hardey’s study. Ellison and Hardey surveyed 352 councils. It is possible that with technology evolving, the use of Web 2.0 has increased since they undertook their study. Results could differ from their study due to the location it took place. Williamson and Parolin (2013) said that “responsive dialogue and mutual discourse communication modes remains lower” (p.560). This aligns with the findings in this dissertation as there was more evidence of informing the public. However, in this dissertation study, there was also evidence of consultation being achieved through the use of Web 2.0.

**Web 2.0 and planning**

Overall, councils were open to further use of Web 2.0 for planning. However, current use of Web 2.0 tended to be for wider government processes. This could be because the communications departments were responsible for the dispersal of information for all government processes. Interactive mapping, used by two of the three councils, is more relevant for planning than other council operations. Interactive mapping requires input/actions of the user to get feedback from the application. For instance, people could type in an address to get feedback on the specific property such as how they are affected by rules or natural hazards. It is surprising that the district councils seemed to utilise Web 2.0 technologies more than the city council. The district councils were close to one of the largest cities of New Zealand and had both experienced growth. Possible reasons for the slight difference could be that, the city council had a smaller land area and less people had access to the internet. This may point to the relevance of appropriateness of technology for the area the council served. As less people use technology than the other councils, there may be less demand for the use of internet-based applications. However, this council said it did not want to “dive in too quickly” because of its small population size. This indicates that there is a perception that people would not utilise technology as much as larger populations. It is possible that results from this study would differ from if the research was to be carried out in cities, with larger populations, such as Auckland or Christchurch, or in local authority areas with smaller populations.

**Further research**

Although this research answered some questions about the use of Web 2.0 for participation, due to the small number involved in this study, it has raised some more that could be addressed by future research.

For instance, further research could be undertaken to determine whether the uptake of Web 2.0 is indeed greater for growing councils. It could also look at New Zealand councils of different population sizes to see how they compare to the councils in this study.
Councils were not able to tell me what changes have taken place over time, due to duration of staff employment. Further research could address this.

There were some generational perceptions about technological use. This raises the question whether generational perceptions are holding up the progress of councils in social media.

This study has raised that it is unclear what status social media comments have, and if they can be used by planners as formal submissions. It could be explored if the public making these comments believe they are participating in the consultation process, or not.

Finally, while this study looked at the levels of participation, research could look at the impact peoples’ views have on plans and policy. More research would be useful to look at the differences in public participation from traditional methods versus Web 2.0, and whether more people are engaged by using both Web 2.0 and traditional methods.
Limitations

- This 40-point dissertation was completed over the course of one university year. It was undertaken along with two other courses each semester. Therefore, time was an inevitable constraint.

- Only three councils with a population of 50,000 to 60,000 (in regards to 2013 data) were interviewed. The study would have benefitted by interviewing more councils, particularly a range of sizes.

- The dissertation was based on interviewees perspectives of Web 2.0. Results were therefore limited by the interviewees knowledge.
Appendix A
Interview transcripts

A.1 Council 1, person 1

Can you explain your role at the (omitted) council, just for some context? The sorts of things that you do?

So, my title is communications adviser. So, in that I do press releases, (inaudible) print and of course the social media side. I take care of the council’s Facebook page and Twitter and we are going to bring in Instagram and maybe Snapchat further as well. A lot of the feedback we were getting through Facebook especially were for photos so it makes sense that we continue. In terms of consultation is something we really want is not really there. In terms of Instagram*, every now and then we just put up some pretty pictures and every...it just helps to spread the word a little bit. We are a little behind the eight ball in that in regards to other councils because we have got a small city size so we didn’t want to dive in too quickly. That’s a bit of my job. I work alongside the ...administrator and do a little web stuff from time to time to cover him as well.

What are you trying to achieve by using these technologies, is it just for informing the public, like what you just said?

Yeah, I think it will change a little bit as we bring in the other social medias. Facebook, at least in my role, I wanted to grow it. As I came in about two years ago and Facebook was really small and the previous employees hadn’t really put a whole lot of time and effort to set it up. But my role was to grow it, at least to start with. But looking at how Facebook works and how it grows and things like that I didn’t want to just grow numbers, I wanted to grow engagement as well. So, a lot of the time we’ve started to focus on how we can better get engagement with our ratepayers which has been a hard thing to be honest because, I mean what we are finding is people who want to say something are saying it in the wrong ways or the ways we don’t want them to.

What ways is that? Is that on Facebook where they do it in the wrong ways or what?

Yeah, it’s not necessarily that it’s bad. It’s just that, I mean, we’ll ask someone to go along and have your say and follow the online survey or something like that which were brought in recently in the policy and planning department. Those sorts of online surveys. But a lot of people will just kind of post negative comments in the comments section and not really, you know, go through and do it properly. That is just one of those examples but umm and in some terms it is really good to engage with people like with any business if people are unhappy or they’re upset or whatever umm or even if people say “oh there’s a pot hole down my road can you come and fix it” or the bus driver sped past and was like “what the heck is going on”, it’s actually still a good way to, I guess, get that sort of information and engage with them that way rather than them not saying anything at all because a lot of people are probably wouldn’t take the time to bring it to the council and try and find the right person to then talk about it.
So, in that context do you find that sort of communication is replacing the face-to-face communication?

I wouldn’t say replacing. It is still going to be around umm but it certainly, I feel, it probably grows in areas that you wouldn’t necessarily have before. That’s probably my take on it um I guess it’s a generational thing as well. I guess a lot of younger ones are quite happy to do a lot of Facebook whereas they’re a lot less likely to ring up and complain about something so I just think it’s different, it just changed the landscape slightly.

So, have you noticed a bit of a change in that way then especially with the younger people using Facebook. I mean, you’ve only been there two years but over those two years have you noticed any change?

Well I guess the key change is the more we promote and grow the page the more feedbacks/complaint/posts, messages that we are getting which I think is a good thing. I mean it’s hard to because a lot of the managers, you know, the way we run it is that if we get any questions that are any semblance of difficulty, other than where do we pay our rates, I send them straight to the managers. One, I don’t want to say the wrong thing and two it needs to come from the proper source and give them the ability to reply. But of course, the pressure is on them that... got to answer this email about why do you care more about... than you do about... You know those really sort of negative comments. I mean they’ve got a lot better things to do than, you know, reply to these angry sorts of messages but on the flip side it’s just like any sort of cast to the management system, you’ve got to take the good with the bad.

Is time quite a big issue in terms of really using online digital communication more? Like, if you had more time do you think you’d be able to grow it a lot more and make use of it?

Yeah I guess so. Time is not a big issue. My biggest issue is really how managers should be able to embrace it. Managers who don’t seem to be able to reply to Facebook not realise that the post has grown exponentially while everyone is tagging their mates in it and commenting and often times it is perhaps the older generation who just think it’s just, you know, sort of a fun thing for kids or whatever and not realising that it, that actually it has the potential to really be blown out of proportion so we’ve had some of the things that have done that. Certain key issues because it has been the time lapse. I guess, as I said, the main thing is, for me, is more people or council embracing social media and often times it’s wee things like talking to the rating department to say “hey look this ad that you put in the paper about road closures in this street let us know that that’s going in so we can put it up as well” and it’s one of those battles that they think “oh you don’t know it doesn’t need to go on Facebook”. And I just want to say “well actually if would be great, if it’s already gone out to the public then what’s the issue”, sort of thing. So, yeah, I mean that would be the biggest challenge I think for growing social media is having the good content on there and that’s one of the key battles is really good content.

Do you filter any of the comments, so do you go through and remove any of the comments that people put up?

We wrote a protocol and we took a lot of social media policies from the other councils and then kind of amalgamated and chose some of the best parts and worse parts and from that we kind of wrote up our own social media policy. Typically, we don’t. The beauty of Facebook is that it is a two-way communication stream, we don’t want to start limiting but Facebook has its own filter anyway so any profanities it takes out which is fine and um there’s only been a couple of times, probably once or twice, that we’ve ever hidden a comment. We don’t typically erase them, just hide them so that they
don’t come back and get more upset. Um and sometimes in terms of election year which we are now we will try to remove ourselves from tags or hide things from our timeline so it still follows our guidelines for the Local Government Act in terms of election protocols.

You said it’s more of the younger people using Facebook. Do you have any demographic data on that?

Um, there’s not so much that we have a certain age group that engages with us more than others. It’s more we found the younger ones to be ready to um comment/share things. I mean extreme age groups like 65+, but anything below that we are still getting a wide interaction from. So, no I wouldn’t say there’s a huge trend. Oftentimes it’s the best really passionate people as, of course, with councils there is a lot of key issues that people are really passionate about. In the moment, we are doing library consultation and um that people are upset that the kids section might be moved so some of the key kind of pushes behind the movement is say older librarians like 50s sort of thing and they’re just as savvy with Facebook and starting petitions and things.

Is there anything else that you’d like to add, anything else that you currently do in terms of public participation?

Ideally we’d like to push our consultation side, and it’s one of the things I’ve found since I’ve been here, is people don’t really care that much. Unless it was something that people are really interested in people don’t bother submitting or engaging. We are trying to reduce the number of steps people take to engage with us. A lot of stuff we do is online stuff.

Are there any instances where citizens’ contributions have affected decision-making or are there any examples where feedback was used for decision-making?

Feedback certainly has been used. People can speak to those submissions. As to whether it changed decision-making, I don’t know... We take all comments into account. It is not the only form of communication. We still do traditional forms. We are still in that phase where we are trying to bring them in as they are new to people. Such as online advertisements for meetings.... paper is becoming one of the traditional forms of communication. It requires* changing the mindset of people that have been used to the traditional forms of communication for a long time.
A.2 Council 1, person 2

What technology does the council make use of for planning?

Computer systems, GIS mapping systems, and we are moving towards all electronic processing...and a system called Trapeze to do measurements and mark up plans...They are the main systems we use within council.

Do you have any technology that you use to engage with the public?

We use the council’s website. I was just looking at the Web 2.0 technologies and we haven’t used that up till now.

Are you looking to use it at all?

Technology and how we do things is always evolving so we can still look at how we go forward and I think that when you’re talking about interaction with the public that’s something we’d look at doing on the policy side. On the consenting side, I’m not sure if there is a place to use that...we just have to work out what area of planning such technologies and social media would work best.

Are there any examples of ways that you encourage participation in planning matters?

Well I guess, I mean, we use our media vehicles - our Facebook, our web page things like that to get out notices of what we’re doing. To a certain extent, Council still uses print medium as well and those sort of things...electronic...so we are advertising it, whether we can use other things like council Facebook to let people know more about what is going on...maybe more to get that participation rate up. I should say that it is sometimes easier to actually hold meetings face-to-face...wider context...

Are you still getting a good turn-out at the face-to-face meetings?

When we did the district plan one we get a very good turnout, other areas we don’t get such a good turn-out. I’m not 100% sure whether electronic media would change or not. I think some people have certain areas they are interested in and it’s very hard to get feedback on other matters. One thing a wider area of council has done is gone out is that consultation is tied in with community events...that sort of came after we completed our consultation on the district plan...to have a clear presence.

So, are you engaging with people more that way?

I think people in other areas of council use this and it works very well...bylaws and other areas like that, that’s not my area...For surveys and things like that it is easier for people to go online and give feedback that way.

Are there any other weaknesses that you’ve discovered in the consultation process?

No, well I guess from now going forward we probably do need to look at how we can use electronic means more. I guess that’s what everybody uses now...we’ve got to have all areas covered as
supposed to the traditional ways of to advertise let people know we’re consulting on documents, in planning anyway...we need to go back and look at our strategy.

So, is there any technology that you think if it existed that it would help with consultation...or that council doesn’t have that would help?

Well I’m not completely sure of that, I think that all councils are using more electronic platforms. Some of our documents and things do need to be more interactive on our website as well. Planning is becoming more electronic...relying more on getting information off council’s website.

If you have something going up on the website, do you send it to the coms team to put on social media?

The way, well we generally draw up all our press releases in consultation with them, so they do that electronically. They go on our website, some of it goes on social media, I’m not 100% sure whether everything does.

So, would you say that is more the domain of coms to decide that?

We work with them to draw up any press releases and the relevant ones go on our website and on our Facebook page.

Is there anything else you want to add?

No but all I’ll say is that electronic platforms are becoming more important and I think councils need to move with the times and make better use of that and reach out and make that available to a wider audience to perhaps in some areas get more participation.

Follow-up interview

Do you use online submissions?
We haven’t got writable PDFs yet.

Are you receiving good feedback in general?
District plan review - A couple of areas not many people turned up, some areas we did.

What else could be done to increase engagement?
Online submissions probably the way to go. Are people interested to take the time to have a say? People can’t always see how it will impact them. It’s never a problem until it is a problem...For some people anytime is not a good time...

Are Web 2.0 technologies suitable for the formal consultation process?
They have their place but there will still be those who’ll always want those face-to-face opportunities. You may get a few more comments and submissions [online]– it may be easier.

Why did you decide to tie in consultation with community events?
It’s just another way of reaching out to the public because it is at any event people are going to and it gives people, you know people are there, and it gives them an opportunity. We find that was useful talking about other things. It is used by other departments too such as animal control.

What documents do you think need to be more interactive?
The district plan. Some councils have an EPlan, it is more interactive and perhaps going forward we can have that kind of set-up.
Does the demographics of employers effect the uptake of new technologies?
We have an older workforce but some people can pick it up very well. It’s more an understanding of how technology can be helpful. How we do our job is changing all the time. It’s an evolving field really.
A.3 Council 2

General chit-chat

I can appreciate the value of social media because I’ve seen it in because my most recent job with was with the and I had local guys like for example. The had a Twitter account so if the wanted to advertise a training session they could put it on Twitter and it would reach 50,000 people...so the power of the tool is massive in terms of the reach and that was certainly something that was reinforced to me because when I went to Australia in 2008 social media was really only starting to happen, was still a baby, but it really took off and it certainly suits the Australian side. They love to self-promote so um it’s very much in the athlete’s sphere and the atmosphere, it’s an ego driven thing but, you know, for organisations you can use that.

So, it’d be quite different with the council, then wouldn’t it?

The principles are the same, the use is different. For example, we find that the most Facebook posts response are around lost dogs and animals. I’m picking that if we went down the baby route that would probably be higher than normal. But it is, it’s one of those things that you’ve got to drive the habit. Get people into the habit of using it and oddly for the council the opportunity for us is around our operational stuff. If our roads going to be closed, if the pass is out of action. It might not seem like big stuff but it’s useful to the community. So, we can use those tools to get that information out straight away but you’ve got to have them using it first so it’s a case of slowly building up and them expecting that information to come from that source so getting them on the council Facebook is the first bit or getting them following the council Twitter and once you’ve got them they start getting that information and it becomes their habit that they’ll expect it. We live in a world of the mediums don’t we, what worked 10 years ago doesn’t work now – the flunky coms teams that everything had to go in a press release and it had to be signed off and that sort of rubbish, there’s no time for that you get the information straight away, it’s two degrees of separation.

So how do you get people to link to your Facebook?

By making it useful as I said before you have making it useful on a daily basis, the operational material. But that takes time for people to cotton on to the fact that it’s going to be useful to be on Twitter to be following the council account because it’s a big change for them, it’s not what they expect, it’s not what they are used to so that will take time and it will take promotion but the cool thing is that we are on the ground rather than, you know, there’s plenty of scope, we are only just starting to build the building in that area.

So, do you still do any of that stuff?

Well I’ve chopped press releases because I don’t think there’s any value in them anymore. The way the news media works now is that the um if more than one person got the information it’s no longer a news story because Fairfax, for example, their focus is Stuff – they’re driving everything to the website first and we’ve got to be the same and in many ways organisations, and again this is probably a legacy of my time in Australia, they are controlling their own news a lot more rather than relying on the third party being the media and that’s again where social media plays a big part, social media is the hook, social media allows you to hook them to the website...we are getting behind the eight ball, people can go to our website to get a resource consent but they won’t go there every day
And, so, we’ve got to build up the content so that they do and we are re-shaping our coms team to do that.

**So rather than doing press releases, you’d still do write-ups for the internet?**

Yeah it’d go on the internet and also your Tweets and use Facebook to bring people to it. Interactive tools are another thing that we are just touching out toe in the water with. We had a recent proposed plan change around natural hazards, effectively about flooding and we needed to liaise with the community around how that would impact on them. We had an interactive tool whereby they could go on the website, type in their address and it would bring up their house and it would tell them where they fitted, whether they were high hazard, medium hazard or low hazard and they could find that information out without having to ring us it was there and they could follow-up with a call if they wanted to so, you know, interactive participant tools and again it’s all just removing the runt of the middle man because we are in an age where people expect, you know, we are in an age of convenience where we expect everything, we don’t do our business by mail anymore, we do it by phone. Our phones can do everything so you’ve got to react to that I guess because we are in a relatively conservative area demographically, a lot of older people etc. um it’s probably taken a wee while for this council to move in that direction and that’s understandable.

**How do the older people get their information?**

Um that’s where you’ve still got to use the local community newspapers. You can’t completely ditch the old ways but it’s more being proactive in the new space a lot more. Although you’d be surprised that the demographic of Facebook is older than you think in terms of people who say they access their information that way. So, we introduced an interactive app called ‘Snap, Send, Solve’, whereby if you see a pot hole you take a photo of it, use the app, it goes straight to the council the GPS of where the pot hole is so they can go straight to it. That’s proved out popular.

**What did you say it is called?**

‘Snap, Send, Solve’, all the Canterbury councils are using it, basically they all did a deal whereby they shared the cost of this tool. It’s only a minor thing. It hasn’t meant that the number of reports have gone up, it’s just another way of sending it in and we’ve found that that’s been pretty popular so it highlights the power of interactivity, people don’t have to do anything, they don’t have to even pick-up the phone and ring, take a photo, done.

**So, do you see that those sorts of ways are going to increase even more?**

Totally, totally, oh yeah, oh yeah. The only limitations anyone would have, and certainly our organisation would have, is the finance and you’ve also got to be smart so much as the technology is changing so rapidly you’ve got to be careful that you don’t buy into some technology that is already becoming obsolete. For example, I was quite keen on the idea of getting into the app world but our website providers suggested that we hold fire because they might be coming outdated themselves as there is other technology that started to come. So, that is one of the awareness’s you have to have around A) What technology is going to suit your area, there’s things you do in rugby that you wouldn’t be doing here, but also the cost.
What about in terms of engagement like getting people’s views?

Well the interactive tool provided a good tool for the consultation process. I mean you’ll get the feedback on Facebook that for a formal process it’s not enough. You know, they need to front and speak to them. The reality will be that because Facebook and Twitter are what you call permissive media you’ve got to be in the tent before they’ll use it. You know, they’ve got to have linked to your Facebook accepted your Twitter before you can use it. If they don’t then you can’t access them so for the formal consultation process, it’s not really appropriate yet. The technology’s not such that it’s there.

Did you find the earthquakes have had an impact, has it meant that you’ve utilised these technologies more than you would?

Well I wasn’t here so I can’t really…I guess the answer is no in so much as the social media tools weren’t strongly used when I arrived. I think my approach to it and that’s based on my background um both sport and I did a brief stint setting up the to use social media and online use was negligible. It’s something we are getting started with as opposed to being in the position where I can’t really judge what happened before last December but I would suggest not a lot.

What else have you experienced in terms of the technology that the council uses even if it’s like from a planning perspective?

I think probably because of the demographics of the employees we are probably not using them as effectively as we could but that’s more a learning process and, as I say, we’ve got a lot of people that have been there a long time and when you’re doing anything for a long time you get into your habits don’t you and you always do it that way so change is hard and it takes time and that’s, you know, the change has been so rapid in the last seven or eight years, I mean it’s impacted massively on the media, you know the way they operate now. A lot of the journalists will spend most of their time trawling websites looking for information or following social media feeds. If I want to know what Dan Carter doing I get onto his Facebook and see what he says and the journalists are doing that too so it’s a big, you know, the change has happened right across the world of communications it’s not just something that council has to face up to. But different councils are probably taking a different tone to that. It’s down to resource, I mean Auckland City are very active in that space particularly for the money. They are an organisation that…we’ve got to decide which is the most effective that we can do with the resource we have and we’re still learning. Like, I don’t know a lot about social media marketing. We ran a recent campaign advertising on Facebook so that was a learning thing for me so, you know, we are still dipping our toes in the water and we are a little bit behind the eight ball but we’ll catch-up. And it’s a case of working out what’s going to service this community best in terms of our delivery and that means not taking for granted the fact that some people will always rely on the community newspapers for information so we can’t neglect that even though we are charging into the online and digital sphere as much as we can and certainly we will continue to do that.

In terms of Facebook and Twitter, do you filter any of the comments that go on?

A little bit but not a lot. We are pretty fortunate; we haven’t had too much in the way of negativity. Um, again that reflects the demographic. If I was in I would be and I’m sure they do but out here we’re probably, we’ve got less liability around that. I mean, it’s still looked at but there’s not much that’s not appropriate.
So, you’d only delete the stuff that’s not appropriate rather than any negative towards the council?

Oh, no, people are entitled to their opinions against the council, their name is on it. Ultimately it’s a tool of dialogue, isn’t it? If you start censoring it too much then people won’t use it and that defeats the purpose of what we’ve got it for in the first place. The website is more of the PR side than social media. Facebook is certainly useful. What we are trying to do is use it a lot more to advertise community events and that’s again where it’s been lacking and it’s more the fact that we haven’t had the skills internally to do that and we’re changing that now. It’s very quickly becoming a specialist role, social media. Most corporates now have social media teams. You know, the guy that was running the social media at the IRU he only lasted a year, one of the sponsors head hunted him for him to go work for them so it is becoming more specialist and you’ll find a lot of the bigger corporates have got digital editors and the link between social media and online is massive but there is in the past the online person would’ve been the boss now you’ll find it will be the social media person that is because their role is more interactive so they are dictating more how things weigh out.

What are you trying to achieve by using these technologies?

Well I think it’s a good tool for public information and education what the council does, on a daily basis what are all these people doing. Social media provides a good opportunity back to the website to explain that and another area that we are not in yet but we are looking to get into very quickly is video because people don’t read now, they watch. That’s the habit. The few times we have had videos they’ve gone gang busters. Social media is a good hook to get the link and watch it so, you know, they are a very powerful visual way of explaining what we are doing, educating etc. etc.

So, have you done quite a bit of that already?

No, we are looking to and one of the new roles will be in the video space. Not entirely video but that will be a big part of it. It’s what people expect. Every story you see on Stuff will have a video playing. The reason for that is that a lot of people are watching rather than reading. And they have commercial reasons too. They can go and say 30 million people watched this video you could be the sponsor of it and when you click on the video you get a Smiths City add first for 20 seconds and then you get the video. It’s a very very powerful advertising tool and you get a lot of money, that’s what they’re after so.

Would that sort of thing be appropriate for the council?

No, no, no. Ours is a public service we wouldn’t seek sponsors.

General chit-chat...

...The only thing we suppress with the council is staff is that you’re always representing the council and it’s the same thing you talk about to the players when I worked with the [insert name], you are always an [insert name]. You know, it doesn’t matter whether you’re out on the chopper in Wanaka or at your grandparents place in Invercargill when people see you they don’t think oh there’s ‘Jo Blo’ they think oh there’s [insert name] and it’s the same with the council staff in that all their friends on Facebook, all the people that follow their Twitter, they know they work for the council so they have to assume that with anything they say will be interpreted as council policy so umm don’t go slagging off the mayor on your social media account or something like that.
What sort of stuff do you do around election time?

Well the council has to be very neutral. There are pretty clear guidelines. We’ll use social media and are using social media to encourage people to vote. At the moment, the nomination period is on so we’re encouraging people to get involved but we won’t talk about issues or anything like that. It isn’t appropriate, it isn’t our role and we’ll keep an eye on the councillors and what not around leveraging off social media, what they can and can’t say. So, we can’t, for example, support any councillor. We can’t do what the democrats were doing in America where they were supporting Clinton over Sanders. We can’t do that.

There’s rules in the Local Government Act around that?

Exactly, so you’ve got to be very neutral and the staff will be briefed on that.

Do you find that these sorts of tool make consultation easier?

Well, at the moment, they are more of an add on. They are good for advertising as a process but they can’t on their own. At this point they can’t. They are not making websites redundant, they are more of a driver to a website. Facebook, I’ve watched the Australian election very closely and certainly keeping a good eye on the American one because social media has been a massive part of what’s going on over there. In Australia, Malcolm Turnbull wouldn’t do a debate head-to-head with Bill Shorten live on TV but they did one on Facebook and Facebook is just getting into video now so there’s no doubt the influence is going to expand so yeah it becomes really important but they are not there yet as a consultation tool on their own they are still more of a hook. Over time the pace that technology is developing they probably will be but they’re not there yet. We could stream live council meetings, we’re not but we could and that will happen over time...There’s no doubt that there are a number of councils that are trying to decide how to use them best so the corporates are taking the lead because they’ve got the money to get into that space and use it.

Have you faced any difficulties with trying to use the technology?

Well, resource is the biggest thing and it is. I mean, you need to have constant information so you need a news gathering sense to get that information. They’re [the news media] are a very hungry beast they always need information. So, it’s trying to keep up that steady flow and we’re not there yet but the changes we are making will hopefully get us there. Great opportunity at the moment for young journalists not to go into the papers because there are no jobs there but to get jobs where you’re doing social media and websites for companies as that’s where the news is now. Companies are taking control of their own news a lot more using these tools. There are a lot of opportunities going around. When I advertised at the for a video journalist/social media person over a hundred applicants for that role.

Do you have any demographic data of who participates on social media?

We probably do but I haven’t taken any notice of it yet and the reason for that is that I don’t want any preconceived ideas about where we are going. Where we are going in the moment is almost irrelevant it’s not where we need to be so I’d rather make the changes that we are making and then review it then. I mean, we’ve got four-and-a-half-thousand followers on Facebook. In a district that’s got 54,000 people four-and-a-half-thousand is nothing. We’ve got about twelve-hundred followers on Twitter. Again, that’s nothing.

We’ve got data on how many people have the internet in the district and that’s something we build on in terms of being realistic about our targets and everything ties in together like for example I’m
wanting to introduce an e-newsletter and the idea of that is to both put out our propaganda but it would also allow people to link to our social media. Any opportunity to promote because its habit, it’s 101, you keep hitting the message until people are sick of it then you hit them again because they don’t forget it then. And what we hope is when we’ve built our tools to the point where they are useful people will go on it and then they’ll say to their mate I went onto Twitter the other day and I got a message that saved me 10 minutes to go down this road which was closed. It’s making it useful and the variety of information so, you know, it goes beyond just closed roads and footpaths it could be events that are on or charity promotions and stuff like that, anything that’s community related and that’s the productivity that an organisation like ours needs. You know, not the big bad council.

Most of us that live in this community live just over the river so it’s again goes back to my sports upbringing that you can’t get respect you earn it and we’ve got to earn it and these tools are very useful way of doing it because they present the human face of the council and I would suggest the more bureaucratic the organisation the more you need to use these tools. It’s very hard to think ill of someone you like it’s very easy to think ill of someone you don’t like. So, use these tools to present who we are then maybe people would like us then you get the understanding that goes with that.

**Does council respond to the comments on Facebook?**

Absolutely, yeah. It’s got to be two ways so yeah more often than not it’s responding to stuff you’ve put up there so you don’t need to respond. But all the times where people ask questions or whatever so you go back to them. The trick there is that if someone has a real crack then sometimes it’s not worth you could launch into a big die or try* but that’s not going to help, it’s only going to make it worse so you have to accept the times that some people are going to have the views that they are not going to change so you give them the basic information you’re not actually targeting that person you’re targeting the other people that are reading it because you know you can’t change that person’s mind and that’s just human nature you know but we all have certain views and it doesn’t matter what we’re told we’ll stick to it so you can’t worry about it.

**Are there any instances where people’s comments have affected decision-making?**

Well it’s not so much a social media, that’s more of a consultation process where people have got the process to formally, you know, you could say that social media has played an impact to help advertise the consultation process was happening but no I can’t think of anything where someone’s Tweeted something or commented on a Facebook post where it’s changed the council’s decision, yet. But again, the power of the tool for us is not where it needs to be. Maybe if you come back in twelve months I might say yeah but we’re not where we need to be. The biggest steps are to put the resource in place and then it is to educate the public that these tools are really useful and it’s worthwhile checking the website every day. It’s trading the habits. Getting people into the habit. You know, I bet there is websites that you go to pretty regularly and you go there because they were useful to you. Every lunchtime I go to the BBC website best news website I’ve seen, it’s my habit. So, what we’ve got to train the locals to do is go to our website, go to our Facebook get into that habit. That’s all about providing the information that makes it useful so from a strategic perspective you can’t expect them to go there if it’s not useful. Would you keep going to a website if it never changed? - Of course you wouldn’t and for now because councils like government departments it’s, you know, I need a resource consent I know I can get that there but I’m not going to go on a daily basis. Interactive, the ability to pay your bills, that’s the sort of thing we need to get into, or that we are, but that presents a whole lot of challenges and you’ve got to be very careful in that space. There’s still a bit of work to go there. Council really has only scratched the surface of social media’s potential to date – the challenge now is to get a lot more out of it as an engagement tool.

*Follow-up interview*

**Why is technology not suitable for planning and plan-making?**
We have used technology but we want more of it. For our natural hazards strategy, we used an interactive tool that allows people to look at their property and see how they are affected so there is technology there but...we can get into it more than we have been.

**How is feedback used?**
To improve the level of service and, at the end of the day, the council is there to serve the community...so all feedback is taken on board, that’s what we have engagement processes for...

**Turnout...**
Depends on what they are, some are more popular than others it depends on the profile of the issue...You’ll get certain sectors that are really engaged and others aren’t. We had a 40% voter turnout. (Wants to engage other 60%).

**What else could be done to increase engagement using Web 2.0 technologies?**
We are certainly looking at expanding our digital technology and are employing people for it. We’ve remodeled our coms team...interaction is the key part of that...

**Is social media unsuitable for formal consultation?**
It is a good hook. It’s not at the stage where you will use it alone. It is a means of getting people involved. Certainly it is heading that way, tools in the space are rapidly expanding but at this stage it’s more of a hook...it doesn’t have the detail that is required it is easier to do on a website than it is on Facebook.
A.4 Council 3, person 1

Could you explain your role at the council just for some context?

I’m in charge of the planning department so in charge of the district and the strategy and policy team and the resource consents team so the strategy and policy team deals with the District Plan, they deal with a range of strategic documents under the LGA, environmental monitoring and reporting side of things and we make a range of submissions on various governmental and Productivity Commission and those type of reports that are released and we make part of planning related and RMA related so we make submissions on those as well so strategic policy essentially for resource management for the council and resource consents is as it sounds (processing resource consents) and I was in charge of monitoring and enforcement but, still in charge of monitoring, but enforcement has moved to another department within the council. So, that’s my role to manage the two teams and we are currently undertaking a district plan review so that’s quite a significant project for the council for the next two to three years.

Okay, so what forms of technology do you make use of for your job?

So as far as computer systems that we use for consenting so we use an NCS system which is our database for all our consenting, Microsoft Suite for writing reports and all that sort of stuff, we have another system called Doris SharePoint which we use for both policy and consents as well. We use Adobe, Trapese, all those sorts of systems, GIS mapping (Map viewer). We are looking for a more electronic system for resource consents so we currently use a system called Alfa in the building consent area so I’m currently having a look at if that has some scope to be broadened to resource consents as well and so potentially we go from having ad hoc systems. So, we are largely paper based, we still make up files for resource consents. So, our resource consents system is sort of part paper, part electronic so all the documents are all saved in – you know we write documents in Word or whatever and we save it into NCS but we make up paper copies of files for the planners to process the consents. So, I want to shift away from something paper-based to electronic which is where we should be looking at the Alpha System which is an online module system which goes right through to processing of building consents through to code compliance and inspections so we want a similar sort of system for our resource consents so arguably you’ll be able to apply once for a resource consent and it would take you right through your resource consent, building consent, everything. All your information, all your data is all in that one system, right through. In the policy area we have a digital district plan, we have an EPlan, so we’ve put our existing district plan into an e-format and that e-format will be building a second generation of planners called e-planners...taking the whole concept of integrated electronic systems ideally we would have our EPlan where ideally you would go from having a portal where you type in an address for a property you find out what you want and you can and can’t do through the District Plan and if you breach a particular rule potentially you might be able to just click on a button which allows you to apply for a resource consent for a breach of that rule. A Mum and Dad type of approach where you’ve got a set of plans and you want to breach a recession plane, for instance you can click on that rule and it pre-populates it into an application form load your plans in and send and it loads it straight in, you pay your fee and it puts you straight into the system so then it comes up in our system and you just take it right through to process. So, it’s a one-stop shop from conception right through to the key of walking into your house. The Alfa System, we’ve won some awards for that so it’s quite a well-respected system for processing.
Do you have any technology that you use to engage with the public, like your GIS does it have an engagement element?

Not really, not that I’m aware of. We tend to use our website as the main forum for engaging with the public outside of normal communication – newspapers and that type of thing. But yeah, the website seems to be the large, the main portal and we have our district plan online now which you can search for your own property information but for submissions, say for the district plan review, will be where we are looking for a submissions portal for the review which ties in with the EPiPlan software that we use, it’s all integrated so if you make a submission on a particular rule you can click on that rule in the proposed plan and you’d be able to see who the submission is in detail and if there were further submissions you’ll be able to see who that is and see whatever decisions have been made from it so it’s an all integrated system that we are currently working on with the company that does our EPiPlan.

How about social media, do you use that to engage with the public?

We don’t particularly with our department but our coms team uses social media for communicating with the public and so do our councillors as well.

Do they forward tricky things to you, if they get sent something they can’t answer?

Yeah so we have a media team that handles most media inquiries so we respond to them so if there is a particular planning issue they might come through to us and say we’ve had an approach from whatever newspaper and they are asking about a particular project that we’ve been working on and we can provide them with a response, an update, or answer a particular question and that will go back out through them.

Do you respond to all of them?

There’s not that many generally. We are not flooded with inquiries. We have a district planner phone line for people to ring up and inquire but if its media related then generally it’s through either managers or the media inquiries team and anything someone off the street want to ask about planning then that just comes through our duty planner line or you can email through the duty planner inbox and ask a question and we can respond.

Has there ever been anything that has been forwarded to you from the coms team that has affected any decision-making or any processes in the council that you are aware of?

Our decisions aren’t based on media inquiries. It is based on robust information that we assess. They’re put to us for our awareness generally but we do respond to media inquiries. I mean it’s usually just a portal for the communication of information that’s what it is, it’s not about decision-making necessarily. There are council decisions on various projects and submissions and things that we make so if I have to do a decision on a proposed NPS I might take that through to council for their support and they might sign off on it before it’s lodged and that is communicated through our media team as well to various newspapers and on our website and things like that. We have a thing called [illegible], a thing that goes out which puts a whole range of decisions and things in it.

In what ways in participation in planning matters encouraged?

It’s always encouraged.
Are there any examples of ways it is encouraged?

In terms of any legislative requirements around participation in terms of engagement and consultation with various parties – so we are required to do that by the Act. I mean in terms of any particular strategic planning projects that we undertake in the policy team we might go out and engage with the community and we actively seek participation and that, so it’s obviously notifying a range of stakeholders and advertising these things through our website and other forums, so we try to engage with people as much as we can. Obviously, it’s not as strong as we like so we are looking at other ways of doing that as well. I mean a lot of people are over consulted. I think they feel there is always another thing that we are going around and consulting on but in terms of planning and resource consents where a decision is required to be notified or something that’s a participation of neighbouring properties or the general public depending on the circumstances.

Would you say that still face-to-face interaction is more the thing to do, rather than online interaction?

I don’t really have a view on that to be honest. I think both are important. We have face-to-face interaction with people at the counter, we have over the phone interaction with people. I think we need to be more in that digital space because technology has changed and its allowing us to opportunities there as well. I don’t think we have quite come to grips with it as much as we could. It’s something we are thinking about through our district plan review about how we engage with people and, you know, instead of just having maybe an evening where you arrange a community meeting or something and two people turn up maybe there’s other ways of doing that that would potentially get a greater turn-out and involvement from the general public so you get some meaningful engagement and meaningful feedback. There’s stuff we are looking at, at the moment.

Can you tell me a bit about why you think people are over consulted, why do you think they are over consulted?

It’s some of the feedback from people we’ve had in the past is that we’ve consulted on the LTP. In planning, we’ve had 2031, we’ve had our area plans, we’ve had the LTP, there’s a range of different thing that we’ve consulted on. We’ve consulted on the LURP, we’ve consulted through those forums and often people say that same thing, they make the same submissions and, you know, it’s not that we have ignored that at all, it’s just there’s always another thing that the council in general, not just planning, but the council in general is consulting on and, I think, it’s not just us as a council but it’s in that wider, greater Christchurch Canterbury context that people are consulted on a range of different things and it’s trying to get that meaningful input from people. I don’t think you can ever consult too much but it’s just a matter of how you go about it and how you take on board the feedback that you’ve actually had and how do you use it so it’s meaningful participation as opposed to just consulting.

Have the earthquakes changed anything in terms of public engagement?

I think people are reasonable engaged post-earthquake with the communities and in a Greater Christchurch context there’s various different groups that have popped up post-quake representing various community interests and things.

With the earthquakes, have you noticed a change in the sorts of comments that you’re getting?

We are in a little bit of a different circumstance in where the earthquakes haven’t affected us in that there’s lots of housing loss and insurance battles and all that sort of stuff, you don’t really see that out here. We are dealing with growth; we are dealing with the flight from the city. A number of
people have moved out to [redacted] because of the increased stability and new housing and things like that. They are earthquake related issues – people have moved, communities have changed and things like that but certainly I think [redacted] different level and possibly as [redacted] well with the issues they’ve got with red zoned and things like that but we are dealing with growth and rapid growth and the socio effects from that but I think generally people are pretty passionate in their communities we’ve got some pretty strong residents groups in [redacted] and township committees voicing various opinions on various planning processes and other things and some bigger players in the development market as well.

**Are there any weaknesses that you’ve discovered in the participation process?**

Yeah, we’ve had some engagement evenings and things with the community. We’ve just been going through our area plans process which is developing township plans for growth management strategy for wider Canterbury district and some of the engagement we’ve had there has been pretty low in some areas. For example, I think we had one evening where we had two people turn-up and we had about four staff and four councillors so there’s that sort of low engagement with the council on that night for whatever reason but that’s why I say, the way we’ve always done it is have evenings and days where we invite people to participate and hear what we have to say but is that the best forum to be actually getting that information across and getting people’s opinions because sometimes you just get a low turnout.

**So, is there any technology that would help with that process if you did have it?**

I’m not really that aware of what’s out there but obviously social media is one way – getting things on Facebook and Twitter and those types of things are ways of communicating with the public on various issues and there are blogs and forums and things you can go on as well. It’s trying to get that interactive nature of it and getting that wealth of information across to people and having their understanding of it as well. There are certainly opportunities there, I think, it’s just understanding that and I think that’s something we’ll be discussing further with our coms team around how we communicate with the public on various projects, particularly our district plan review there’s a real opportunity there to maybe look at something that is slightly different than what we’ve done in the past.

**So, do you work with the coms team quite a bit on that sort of stuff?**

We do. They heavily engage with us on projects at various times so we do communications and engagement strategies and things on different projects plus the general day-to-day work as well.

*Follow-up interview*

**Have there been any updates since we last spoke?**

No, we are still working on our current EPlan. We’ve have our current EPlan and our district plan review is still going. By the time we have our draft EPlan, our second-generation EPlan probably about another year or so away at least.

**With the new EPlan you will be able to see the submissions under each rule and the decisions...?**

The new EPlan will be...flexibility around the issues, around the submissions...... visible and transparent and more transparent have flexibility. The people that were working on the district plan
review resigned about a month ago, and I wasn’t involved around the submissions portal myself personally. The advice I had is that they will have the submissions portal and they were going to have the EPlan was going to provide that...submissions which related to each rule in the plan.

**What does meaningful engagement mean to you and what stuff are you looking at, at the moment?**

It’s engagement with the community with some of the issues that they have of concern. I mean...been through a range of processes with our community with local government processes to develop things like...we have consulted on a range of things...and these will feed into our district plan review. It’s a whole lot of feedback that we need to take that feedback. So, we go back to the community and say “yes we have heard you before” and not asking the same questions again and letting the community know “this is what I’ve heard” and building on that.

**Are you receiving useful feedback to online submissions?**

When we get feedback its generally positive...Any feedback we receive is useful, whether it’s positive or negative. We can use that feedback to improve our processes going forward...

Through the resource consenting process, we have a range of issues that are raised. There are things that are picked up by consultants, by people in our community. They understand what works, what doesn’t work. We’ve just done a SWAT analysis of our district plan...We’ve had a range of different things. We’ve confirmed some of our thinking as well. We take feedback on, that is why we are doing the district plan review, to tighten up rules, tighten up policies, tighten up things that aren’t working.

**What else could be done to increase engagement using Web 2.0 technologies?**

I haven’t given it a huge amount of thought but we don’t use social media as much as we probably could. There’s plenty we could do to engage with the community as well. Like we might have webinars or something online about the district plan process...Having access to info online as well e.g. access to tablets and laptops or use of technology on site. It’s using technology to our advantage.

**Do you make use of face-to-face or online interactions more?**

I think we probably use more online...there are opportunities for face-to-face at the counter, we do a lot of phone calls – we have a duty planner line and we get a lot of inquiries through that, via emails well, we get input from community meetings or council meetings. We offer a lot of information on our website as well.
Do you think Facebook is user friendly/useful for managers?

If the right information is going on there it can be useful. Councillors use Facebook...I don’t use Facebook for work, I have my own personal Facebook but I don’t use it for work purposes. I guess we try and channel that through our coms team, you can get different conversations going on, on different streams...that’s why we have a centralised coms team, so that all content goes through them so they can screen what it coming in and out the organisation as well...In some ways it could be quite good to put a particular opinion on something but what I said could be different than what someone else said so it’s good to have a coordinated approach as well.

Is technology unsuitable for the formal consultation process?

No I think its suitable. Reaches a wide audience. Changing demographic. Can reach a larger group of people through things like webinars or social media.
What forms of technology do you make use of for your job?

Well, a lot. I look after most of the social media, so we have a council Facebook page and I think there’s about eight other Facebook pages that are managed by various staff associated with the council so like, different facilities and stuff, so like the Aquatic Centre has their own Facebook page, the libraries have their own Facebook page, [blank] Community Centre and [blank] Event Centre have their own, the Youth Council one. So I manage, mostly I do the council one which is the biggest page and then I’m also an admin for about three of the other ones but I tend not to do the admin role as I’ve passed it onto other people. It’s just in case I need to post for emergencies and things. I look after the council Twitter account as well and there’s also another Twitter account which is our council tourism Facebook page as well. We’ve got a YouTube account; we’ve got a Four Square account which we don’t really use.

Foursquare, what’s that?

It’s like, it’s a little bit like Trip Advisor. It shows up, it’s like an app thing and it has a map and people can like, it shows up all the attractions in the area. So, say you’re in Christchurch it might show up the Botanic Gardens, all the things that are near to where you are and it has the overall rating of what people have rated them as. So as I say, it’s a bit like Trip Advisor plus the map function and then you can read reviews and add a review. So yeah I looked at that and thought that’s quite useful. So yeah we’ve got an account there, and we’ve got an account for the aquatic centre as well I think and we’ve also got a couple of Google Plus accounts. We’ve got one for the council and one for the aquatic centre, I’m not sure if there’s any more.

What are the reasons you make use of technology?

Generally, if we think it’s something we think people in our district would use. For example, like the tourism page is targeted more at people visiting [blank] so if it’s something people in that audience will use or even like the Four Square one, I looked at that and, I thought that looks like that’s useful and that looks like something people would want to use so that’s why I set-up that account even though it’s not that well used. When I set it up it was about a year ago so I don’t know I’ve got to go and have a look and see if it’s increased since then.

In terms of planning, what sorts of campaigns have you used it for?

So Facebook is the one we have the most followers and the most interaction on so the council page is about 5000 followers which doesn’t sound like that many but our population is about 54,000 so it’s actually nearly 10 per cent of the population and you only need one person per household to sign up. So, we tend to use that for events, we use it for consultation so if it’s a consultation opening or closing we remind people of that and how they can make a submission. We also use it for recent council decisions to announce things. They are kind of the main ways we use it. So some of those planning things are covered in the consultations or council news and decisions come into those things. One of the things we did recently was one of the main processes was around consultation
around the town centre so for that the planning team actually created a video showing how Reserve would change in the future and how it would be used. They want to develop it from just being a reserve – part of the reserve would become commercial shops and there’s a new big library to be developed on the site so it was showing how the use of the reserve would change and when we put that on Facebook that got a lot of views like I think around 10,000 views, can’t remember exactly but it was a lot. People were liking the video and commenting on the video. Twitter we post stuff, we don’t make that much use of Twitter because we have about 900 followers now but it’s more like, I’d say, about half of them are kind of like organisations so like media organisations, corporate businesses and things, there’s not a huge amount of normal people who live in on Twitter so because of that I probably post about three times a week on that but we get a lot of interaction and comments and things through Facebook.

How about Snap, Send, Solve, do you have anything to do with that?

I don’t really run that but we haven’t had that many people use it so far. We need to do a bit more promotion of it as we haven’t done that much. But yeah, it’s kind of like, I think for the reason we have a limited use of Twitter, like some of those things like Twitter I think that’s more like an urban young audience who uses that whereas if you look at our demographics we’ve got quite a lot of people in kind of the 35-45 age group and then a lot of kids up to 15. So we don’t have a lot of people in that kind of like 15-35 demographic which I think is a lot of people who use Twitter and Instagram and those kind of things and that’s kind of what I think about Snap, Send, Solve as well. I think like in kind of like rural areas it takes people of bit longer to pick-up technology or they don’t like some of them don’t find it as useful as maybe like urban audiences.

Do you still use press releases?

Yes, we use them a lot.

So, in terms of sort of face-to-face versus online interactions what do you make use of more?

It’s a bit hard for me to comment on that because the planners do that but we use media releases so we use like print media so it would normally be for a normal consultation. I just need to; I’ll talk about consultation first off so normally we would do a media release and we also have council publication called so normally we would probably notify it as a public notice or do a story in that and then often if the planners think that someone’s affected they will send a letter out to property owners specifically affected by something. Quite often they’ll be a public meeting or drop-in session or something as well and that’s more for people who have questions that they want to talk to planners about. But if they don’t have that they can always call someone and speak to them and then we tend to also use Facebook and Twitter as well. So, from that the things that we are getting the most interaction, we are finding that in most cases less people are going to like drop-in sessions or public meetings and often we get a lot more comment on Facebook but it’s not always on our Facebook pages, there are community Facebook pages like Community Facebook page that has about 10,000 followers or members so often people just chit chat about an issue and they don’t always make a submission.

Okay, so does council make use of the comments that go on Facebook?

Well what we do currently is we monitor discussions about council issues and they get sent to a relevant council staff but I don’t know that the planners always include those discussions in reports.
It’s a bit like unclear legally in terms of planning processes what status those kind of discussions have, if they have any status.

So, that’s kind of like a consultation process but a resource consent is a different process. The thing with the resource consent stuff is that you have to be careful not to treat one consent different from another so like for most, unless it’s something huge, we wouldn’t do a media release about it because it goes through statutory process so if we notified it more than other consent applications then maybe the applicant might get annoyed because maybe they don’t actually want submissions so they just want to be treated like the same as everyone else and not have any extra publicity or process around it. The notification is decided when the planners do an assessment into the legislation so they assess it and it’s either notified or non-notified or sometimes it’s limited notified so that normally just means the neighbours so that’s like a technical legal assessment and then that determines whether, so if it has to be publicly notified then it’s notified in the notices section in the newspaper or in our own publication so normally with things that are a big deal, what we normally do is do more publicity about the decision after the event.

**Why is that?**

Just so people can understand what a decision was and what it means and there’s lots of public interest on it.

**Do you think social media has become an expected tool, like people expect it?**

I guess it depends on where you are and whether your council has been using it or not. Like if you were in say like a really little area somewhere like Mackenzie District, where they have 20 staff or something, so I think some of the really small councils don’t have Facebook pages still and their communities might not expect that and also like probably more rural areas there’s probably less Facebook users. But I think even if we didn’t have a Facebook page our community would probably want us to have one here because things like the local community Facebook pages are really busy so lots of people are using Facebook.

**Are there any ways you’re trying to grow engagement?**

Yeah so, we haven’t started on it yet but, we want to do some work around so we did a survey around communication preferences and on that we identified that there was kind of a gap with communication with young people by that I mean 15 to 30 year olds and part of the problem is that there is less reach for newspapers which has been one of the main ways we’ve communicated with people through so our council publication is put in the local newspapers so because of that we will do some research around what information they want from the council and how do they want to get it so my initial thought are we might look at things like maybe Instagram from that research.

**Okay, is that because young people said that is what they wanted?**

Well they are really high users of Instagram.
In what ways is participation in planning matters encouraged?

For communication, we try and simplify the issues as much as we can because a lot of the problems and barriers for planning matters are the issues are really complicated and like if you go and read a report then it is like 50 pages long and most people don’t have time or don’t have any interest in doing that.

Do you respond to the feedback from the public?

I think one of the issues and barriers with planning is often we just get random questions about what’s happening with [Town Centre] and with planning they have very different timeframes for people to make a submission on something so it’s normally like a month or so but people often don’t know about it or they ask about it like they want to be able to make a comment but they the process is really closed or else they want an update on what’s happening but planning is very process orientated so it’s like at this stage they call for submissions and if you miss that opportunity they don’t want to hear from you again and then you might wait a long time sometimes up to a year to get a decision like cause often decisions get appealed and so it can take quite a long time for the outcome to be announced and then you get people who’ve either made a submission or are asking about the process so they want to know where it’s at so the process itself can be a bit of a problem in terms of those narrow timeframes for making a submission and can take a long time to get a decision.

Have you noticed any change in the way people are using the internet for communication?

Well I think now that there’s an expectation that everything is going to be online so you can make a submission online I think finding the information online.

Do you filter any of the comments on Facebook?

Generally no, we’d only do that if people say something that is offensive so we’ve got some guidelines around Facebook page. At the moment we are sometimes because of local elections so we, because of the electoral guidelines, we can’t let out Facebook page be used for candidates to campaign so there’s some restrictions. Sometimes we’ve been hiding posts if it’s like “whoever for [District Council]” so because they’ve got their campaign title on their Facebook post it’s like they are campaigning on their page.

Are there any other changes you want to make (apart from Instagram)?

I personally would like Facebook to be more user friendly for managers so like at the moment it’s hard to scroll back more than a couple of weeks and find things so better search functions especially going back further. I think some of the customer service staff might be looking at our online form to make that process easier.

Why isn’t it easy at the moment?

It is kind of easy but I think it could be better and I think the way that the customers use it, it could be better so it could direct itself to different areas which it doesn’t at the moment. I think it goes to someone and they have to decide who it’s supposed to go to and then send it onto them.
Are there any instances where people have posted things on Facebook, or a lot of people have said the same thing on Facebook, and that’s affected a council’s decision?

Yeah I’d say so. So it’s more like when people are concerned about something some issue or they want information about something. I know there has been quite a few cause what happens is that we monitor Facebook and that goes to staff but it also gets sent to councillors to look at so often there’s some discussion on the Facebook page concerned about some issue or they want information about something so that often leads us to put out information to explain something or else it can influence what we do. It tends to not be so much in formal processes because for formal processes people need to make a submission it’s more like information things. So like an example of how I’ve used it is like on the Facebook page often there’s been lots of discussion around the state highway, the motorway extension, and safety issues around the existing motorway so from that I was watching that and then I talked to NZTA and asked if we can do an update on the state highway project cause basically the issue is like this route between and town and is getting busier and busier and there’s also lots of bad driving and some of the intersections that you turn onto the state highway you have to wait quite a long time so people are making stupid decisions to like turn on and they should really be waiting so it’s like a safety concerns so basically a lot of those things that’s part of the reason why they are doing that motorway upgrade so what will happen when they get the new route is they’ll take probably about half the traffic off the old route so that will be congested and they are also going to making the old route, I think they are installing a barrier down the middle of the old route so people can’t like do right hand turns anymore and things that have been unsafe will change so basically explain to people what’s planned so they can stop doing it. Part of the reason we do that is people get confused about who actually maintains the state highway so we don’t do that as the council, NZTA does that but they get confused and are like “why isn’t the council sorting this out”?

Do you find that a lot, like people blame things on the council even though it’s not the council’s area?

Yeah, so that’s probably the most common one is that people get confused between things that NZTA does and things that we do um but there are other things like often people get confused between things ECan does and things we do so a lot of water issues they get confused and think that we do things so like an example is we put water restrictions in place, part of the reason can be council related issues. For example a lot of the issue is that we’ve got a consent from ECan that has restrictions on how much ground water we can take out under our consent so that means we have to put the water restrictions on because we’ve all taken too much water and one of the issues there is that we’ve got like huge sections in lot of new sections so a lot of them are taking more water because they are creating their lawn so they have to water it more so a lot of people blame us and blame the council but the restrictions are actually because of ECan’s ground water levels.

Are there any weaknesses you’ve discovered in the participation process (I guess, you’ve been saying that people don’t turn up to face to face things)?

Well I don’t think that’s a weakness, I think that’s a trend that it’s easier for people to read something on Facebook and make a comment rather than attending a meeting and a lot of people feel they don’t do that anymore because if they want information it’s there. But, you know, I was saying the time issues and like I said also the consent process um the actual process itself and having to be consistent so we can’t just really decide that I want to put a notice about this consent application if it’s non-notified even if lots of people are interested in it because then you’re treating that applicant differently to what the law says.
Have the earthquakes had any impact on how social media is used for public participation in general?

Yes, so I wasn’t working here when the earthquakes happened. I’ve been here since 2013 but from what I’ve heard it’s the reason why the council set up a the Facebook page and Twitter page um that was done close to the earthquake to keep people informed presumably because a lot of people were using Facebook and Twitter and I think from what I’ve heard about, I’ve been to some emergency conferences they’ve said that like Twitter got thousands and thousands if not millions of users and hashtags going on in the earthquakes, there was lots of people using it. I guess the other thing for us is that kind of intensified people moving out here, something like that created a lot of demand for the Community Facebook Page so a lot of people use that to ask about being new to the area, what’s the best school, the best builder, where are cafes, so they are finding out the information about the area and getting recommendations. In other areas there are Facebook pages too.
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She has been there 10 years and she has observed that there is more opportunity to have direct communications with the council.

Significant base of people that prefer to read technologies.

Barriers: Migrants. Have added Google translator to the website and found that there have been 300 translations a year.

Some people not literate. Might be easier for them to use tablets with lots of graphics but not so easy to use websites full of text.

Disability barriers.
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