



In-Memory Insight | May 2017

The use of social and digital media in-memory



LegacyForesight

In-Memory Insight is an ongoing programme to map, measure and research in-memory giving and fundraising. We work closely with a learning circle of leading charities who agree to pool their budgets, experiences and data to help build evidence and insight.

Our 2016/17 research focussed on how donors and fundraisers use social and digital media in memory of those who have died. This report highlights some key insights from the in-depth consumer research conducted for the project. We are grateful to our learning circle members for agreeing to share these findings more widely.

We defined the social & digital media (or S&DM as it became known) landscape broadly, including not only popular social media channels (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat), but also discussion forums (like Mumsnet, MoneySavingExpert.com and Petforum.com), online giving platforms (e.g. JustGiving, Virgin Money Giving and GoFundMe), Tribute Funds (whether run by MuchLoved or charities directly) and charity websites.

Our research aimed to explore some important issues, such as:

- How are social media and digital marketing being used in-memory? By the public? By charities and other bodies?
- What is the role of third-party influencers and intermediaries?
- How does social media link with other media, on and off-line?
- How do in-memory donors engage with digital fundraising and charity sites? How well do the sites meet their needs?

Throughout, we were looking to help our Learning Circle members address three vital strategic questions:

- How do we best use social media and digital marketing as part of an in-memory fundraising strategy?
- How should we assess the effectiveness of our online in-memory 'offerings'?
- How can we measure and track online in-memory performance?

There were six elements to this research:

- The **context**: listening to the online conversations taking place around in-mem and remembrance
- **Consumer insight**: in-depth qualitative research, mixing depth interviews and focus groups
- Consumer **potential**: quantitative research to measure the take-up of social media and charity websites in-mem
- **Current practice**: what social media and digital resources charities have, and how well they can respond to trends
- **Best practice**: case study research drawing on good practice and great ideas from member charities
- **Implementation**: practical suggestions on assessing your current in-memory social and digital media offer, and developing an effective future strategy

Consumer insights: the in-memory donors' experience

This year's qualitative research comprised four focus groups with people currently using social or digital media in memory and fourteen depth interviews with people who are at the forefront of S&DM in-memory of a loved one or could influence others in future. These 'cutting edge' respondents included highly motivated in-memory campaigners/donors using a variety of social and digital tools in memory; people responsible for making decisions about Facebook pages or other digital media after a loved-one's death and people who had considered or facilitated the production of a 'digital will'.

Social media is changing death and remembrance

Social media is changing the way people talk about death and remember their loved ones. Indeed, for those under 45 it was the main way in which they expected to hear about a death (unless very close family). But there was a general feeling among all ages that through social media, deaths – whether of intimates or celebrities – are more widely publicised and discussed, whether people approved of that or not.

At a time when people were in great distress, social media made it easier for them to let a wide circle of family and friends (however far-flung) know they had lost someone dear to them. The medium also made it easier for people to talk about the person lost – to say more, to craft messages and to feel less upset (than talking face-to-face) in the process.

Most of the people in this research did not want to forget their loved one and social media helped them to remember. It was a *place* where they could go, for some the main place of remembrance, particularly if they did not have a grave or other special place to go. Some actively talked to their loved one through social media as though they were still alive.

Some generational differences persist

There are undoubtedly generational differences in people's attitudes and usage of social media. Those over 45 tended to value tangible media (such as letters and printed photos) and **personal interaction. They were somewhat less comfortable about sharing personal** information and promoting fundraising on social media, in part because they trusted the technology less. On the other hand, those under 45 appeared to have fewer qualms, perhaps because they live their lives in a social media 'window'.

Social media allows people to create a rich collective memory

If grieving is helped by the quality of people's memories, social media undoubtedly enabled more and better memories to be collected from a wide range of friends and relatives. Social media was being used to store and share memories, anecdotes, photos, messages of condolence and offers of help. This was of enormous value and had the added benefit of bonding family and friends together.

Facebook is *the* social medium for remembrance

Facebook appears to be the social medium that is most relevant to remembering people who were loved and lost. This is because it is relatively private and because people can post both messages and pictures to pay an appropriate tribute to a loved one. In that context, Twitter is too public and abrupt, and Instagram does not enable enough to be said.

When it came to charities, people used Facebook to communicate information and galvanise action around their loved-ones' cause. For example, they might share information about the

symptoms or treatment of a particular disease or urge their contacts to sign up to lobbying campaigns. Facebook was also the key social medium for publicising fundraising events and asking for sponsorship. While for some the sheer ubiquity of Facebook threatened fundraising overload, most people felt that it was hard to match the versatility, personalisation and reach of Facebook through any other medium.

There is comfort in connection

Bereaved people derived great comfort from talking to family and friends who knew their loved one well. They also appreciated hearing from other people who had been through a similar experience. They were often touched by small gestures and kindnesses, even (and sometimes especially) from strangers. They sought to make connections with their loved one through the people, places and organisations they had cared about.

Some people actively sought connections with the charities involved in their loved one's life. This was most often the case for charities giving end of life care but could also apply to 'loved-in-life' charities who reflected the deceased's interests. Bereaved family and friends wanted to feel close to their loved one through the connection, so they were interested in what the charity did, and how they could help.

Where in-memory supporters connected with charity Facebook pages it enabled them to see what the charity was up to and in some cases to connect to other supporters who shared a common experience. These supporter connections tended to happen unexpectedly, as an evolution of an initial charity connection. Some people, most commonly the highly engaged 'catalyst donors', gained comfort from talking to those in the same position as themselves, and reward from offering help or advice.

Bereaved people need to evolve and move on

Perhaps inevitably, there was a pattern to how people remembered loved ones in social media. The most activity was in the first one- or two-years following death – thereafter it settled down to a lower level, focused around anniversaries and special dates. Although no one we spoke to wanted to close down memory pages, there was also a recognition that in-memory had its own, natural, life.

This was particularly true of fundraising in-memory, where several catalyst donors talked of how they had evolved their activity and messages to keep their fundraising fresh. This could mean moving on from the story of their loved one to other stories, awareness-raising and campaigning.

Charities can provide a more spiritual space than other sites and organisations

Facebook is widely used to collect memories and photos and its modus operandi helps to keep memories alive. Yet it is not seen as a truly private space and has its own issues about security, lack of control, and an unwelcome sense of being always 'on'.

In contrast, charity memory pages enabled supporters to talk about their loved one online, sharing memories and information with invited family and friends in a more intimate way than more 'public' social media spaces. It also enabled them to connect with the charity, its staff and other supporters if they so wished. A charity memory page has the potential to be a more personal space for remembrance and where there was a strong connection between the deceased and the charity, a more spiritual one.

More about In-Memory Insight

In-Memory Insight explores the size, shape and scope of in-memory giving in the UK. The programme aims to collect objective evidence and insight on in-memory giving, in order to build the case for investment, inform fundraising strategies and help manage relationships with supporters.

The In-Memory Insight programme is funded by a Learning Circle of leading British charities who agree to pool their budgets, experiences and data to help build our collective knowledge. We operate a rolling research programme, with each year building on the one before.

We define in-memory as “any type of charitable giving or fundraising commemorating the life of someone special”. A range of in-memory motivated activities are covered in our research, including gifts at funerals, direct in-memory donations both one-off and regular, the setting up of ‘Tribute Funds’, the purchase of commemorative objects such as benches and trees, participation in fundraising events such as marathons and bike rides, and legacies made in honour of a loved one.

The programme sets out to explore:

- What motivates in-memory donors to give to charity – and how does it make them feel?
- What do in-memory donors need, expect – and experience – from the charities they support?
- How many/much In-memory gifts are being given? Through which channels?
- What is the current status of In-memory fundraising in the UK?
- What can we learn from good practice examples – both here and overseas?

To answer these questions, we use a variety of research techniques including focus groups and depth interviews, omnibus surveys, good practice case studies, the analysis of performance data from Learning Circle members and interactive member workshops.

For more information on In-Memory Insight contact Caroline Waters:

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Time to book a Health-Check?

Have you reached a pivotal point with your in-memory fundraising? Are you wondering how to pinpoint exactly where you should be focusing attention and investment?

An In-Memory Health Check from Legacy Foresight could give you the confidence to move onwards and upwards with a sound base of evidence unique to your organisation.

To talk to us informally about your charity’s needs, please contact Kate Jenkinson, Head of In-Memory Consultancy: kjenkinson@legacyforesight.co.uk