

County Durham Breakfast Seminars

Social Media – The Double Edged Sword

Wednesday 11th December 2024

Social media has transformed the ways people communicate and engage with one another, creating both opportunities for connection and risks of division.

In light of the riots in the summer of 2024, in this seminar we ask, does social media connect our communities or divide them?



About the Breakfast Seminars

Operating since 2011, quarterly Breakfast Seminars provide an opportunity for participants to listen to provocations and discuss important topics that affect our communities. With a guest speaker each meeting, elected members, officers, partners, and faith communities take part in roundtable conversations to explore some of the ethical and moral issues that affect policy decisions in a thoughtful and collaborative way.

About our Speakers

Our speakers for this seminar were 8 young people from Durham Youth Council (DYC). DYC are a cohort of young people from across County Durham who come together to be a collective voice for change. There are 92 active youth councillors currently engaged with the youth council and several are coming to speak to the seminar and join the conversation.

The presentation covered the topics of what social media is; how members of DYC use social media; and their experiences of it – both good and bad. The speakers shared their positive experiences, for example connecting with friends and family and how it can provide educational information, or learning about the world around them. They also spoke movingly about how it is used as a tool for bullying, or for spreading hatred and false information.

Seminar Discussion

In the usual format, participants broke into small discussion groups and were joined by members of DYC. Three questions were asked of the groups:

- How do we use social media and what connections do we make?
- What are the benefits and challenges for us?
- What is the role of faith groups in using social media as a tool to promote empathy and collective wellbeing?

The feedback from the group discussions highlighted:

- Education should promote negative and positive values of social media. It was felt that young people hear a lot about the risks and less about how to use it well.
- Protection of vulnerable groups should be considered. Young people receive education on how to recognise bullying and false information through school lessons, but how are older people given the same information?
- Young people might benefit from learning about how to challenge ideas that they disagree with in a way which gives them the ability to confront without being confrontational in order to maximise social media as a tool for communication. To disagree, nicely.
- Social media is frenetic. There is a need for stillness and reflection. We could do more to provide opportunities to facilitate this when we are using social media.
- Social media creates echo chambers of information which limits understanding and differing perspectives. Critical thinking is important and we can encourage people to use multiple sources of information and to avoid the content pushed by algorithms so we aren't caught in doom scrolling loops.
- Ignoring harmful messages and content is not the answer – views should be challenged to affect change.