

Here's a guide to social listening and how it can help you understand your audience and stay ahead of the curve.

What is social listening?

Social listening is a valuable practice for anybody working in digital communications.

Using a variety of tools and methods, social listening analyses online conversations to better understand how people are feeling about certain topics. These tools only look at comments sections and public posts on social media platforms, not any private data or conversations.

In simpler terms, it's like very skilfully eavesdropping in a busy public square. But online, and not in an invasive way.

In the social media world, we use this to keep track of sentiments (whether people are feeling positive or negative about something), finding out emerging trends (what people are becoming interested in or obsessing over), and popular topics of conversation (which big debates are going on).

In a public square, this might mean listening out for whether people are feeling positive or negative about the weather today, finding out that people are suddenly obsessed with straw hats, and that everyone is arguing over green grapes vs. red grapes.

But in our world, we use social listening to identify the relevant online sentiments, trends, and debates.

For churches, this means paying close attention to discussions about faith, ethics, community concerns, and local events.

By doing all of this, churches can understand their community, communicate better with their community, and even reach new people to welcome in.

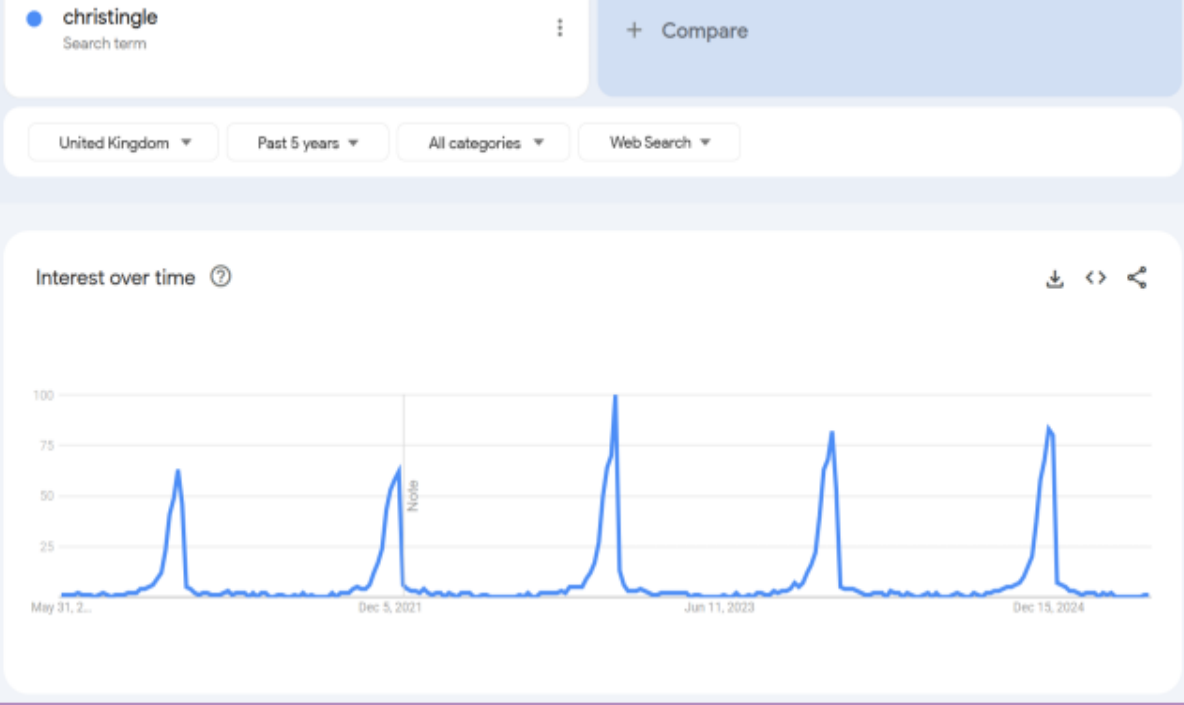
Understand your community

How to do social listening

Lots of free or paid tools are available. Spend some time looking through the different tools and platforms available, you'll want something that matches your budget and the type of thing you'd like to do.

Free tools like Google Alerts can be used to track mentions of your parish, key dates and events, or relevant keywords such as "faith," "support" or "volunteer opportunities". You can set up alerts for specific keywords so you can stay informed and be proactive about certain topics.

Google Trends (see screenshot below) can also be very helpful to see what times of year certain topics are most interesting to your audience.



And social media management platforms like Buffer and Hootsuite offer free plans that allow you to monitor keywords and hashtags across different social media networks.

Be consistent

Don't just set up your alerts or listening systems and leave them, keep updating them so they match your current plans.

Once you've set up the keywords you want to keep an eye on, make sure you keep checking in and updating them as things progress. If you'd like to start keeping an eye on a new discussion topic, add to your keywords.

And, during important times of year (such as Lent and Easter, Advent and Christmas), you might want to change the keywords to help inform those specific campaigns.

Other things you can do

Regularly review the interactions on your social media posts. Are people asking questions in the comments sections? Are certain posts generating a lot of debate or discussion? Are some posts prompting complaints or suggestions?

As with most social media practices, a collaborative approach can be very useful. You could also check in with other local churches, your diocesan communications teams, or any partner organisations with similar audiences, to share ideas and find support.

Encourage audience responses in your content. For example, with a reflective post, you could ask your followers how they feel about something, ask them for recommendations for what to read next or what they'd like to hear about next time. With an explainer post, you could ask what people want to know about your church or one of your priests. Or with a post about an event, you could ask what kinds of events people would like to see in your church in the future.

Speak to your community: What to do with your listening

Once you've set up your social listening processes, you'll be able to implement what you've learned. It's helpful to build your social media strategy with the flexibility to reflect what your community are talking about. Make sure you have the time and energy to respond to the insights you get from social listening.

For example, if your Google alerts show that people are wondering what nativity services they can bring their children to, that would be a good opportunity to post something about your Christmas plans.

Existing explainer content (for example, you might have a video explaining why Christians make Christingles) can be re-used when

inevitably turn to Christingles.

Resourceful content (such as “Here are some free classes/workshops/events that happen every week in our church) can be shared when conversations turn towards what to do with your kids during the long summer holidays.

Below is an example of explainer content on the topic of Ascension Day that also invites audience responses:

[@dioceseofbristol](#) have you heard of ascension? [#ascensionday](#)
[#dioceseofbristol](#) [#christiantok](#) [#askavicar](#) □ [original sound - Diocese of Bristol](#) □

And here is an example of demonstrating social listening through engaging responses to audience questions about faith:

[@father...andrew](#) [#onthisday](#) □ [#priesttiktok](#) [#tiktokpriest](#) [#TikTok](#)
[#churchtiktok](#) [#church](#) [#christiantiktok](#) [#God](#) [#holyspirit](#) [#Jesus](#) [#joy](#)
[#faithtok](#) [#prayer](#) [#spirituality](#) [#Walworth](#) [#se17](#) [#community](#) [#fyp](#)
[#abcxyz](#) [#xyz](#) [#bcaxyz](#) [#foryoupage](#) [#abc](#) [#vir](#) [#viral](#) [#viraltiktok](#)
[#anglican](#) [#priest](#) [#vicar](#) [#rector](#) □ [original sound - Father Andrew Mumby](#)

Reach new audiences: When social listening is going well

When your social media content matches what your current or target audience are interested in, your engagement increases. This means more people see what you post.

Social listening also helps you to understand what people think about you, so you can amplify, respond, or shift those perceptions.

Good social media practice demands that you stay relevant and up to date. Social listening helps you stay on trend and ahead of the curve.

By leveraging social listening tools and tapping into trending topics, you can identify and address community needs, create a social media presence which resonates with your audience, and better amplify your message online and offline.

- Church House Social Media Team

Contact us at digital@churchofengland.org

- Digital discipleship made simple for everyday church life

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- How often to post on your church's social media channels

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