

The BBC operates under strict rules regarding commercial activities. These can be found in section 2 of the BBC's Fair Trading Guidelines:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/policies/fairtrading/>

b) Who agreed the decision to allow these social networking sites to have permanent linkage on many of the BBC pages and what is the reasoning behind the decision?

The proposal to allow links on the BBC's web pages to Facebook and Twitter was put to and was agreed by the BBC's Editorial Standards Board and BBC Fair Trading. The presence of Facebook and Twitter linking buttons on the BBC website is not necessarily permanent, nor are the arrangements exclusive, as explained below with regard to the Share button, and is subject to a six monthly review process. We are in an experimental phase with this form of linking and are assessing its impact on a regular basis.

In determining the approach to linking to social sites, the BBC used three main criteria: referrals, technical capability and market share.

1. Referrals

In the UK, Facebook and Twitter sites provide most referrals to BBC Online and the number of referrals is increasing, making them the most effective sites in meeting the BBC Trust's imperative of offering users greater control over how they consume BBC content. The widespread use of third party applications for Facebook and Twitter suggests that their referrals are likely to be even higher than actually reported.

2. Technical capability

Not all external social sites have the necessary technical capability to enable the BBC to deploy share tools. Facebook and Twitter, along with the sites provided through the "Share" button, have the necessary capability to support "sharing" behaviour, that is, the ability to take a URL and easily post it on the third party site in order to highlight it to the users' friends.

3. Market share

Facebook is currently the largest social network in the UK and its audience share is growing year-on-year. Twitter, although having a smaller audience than Facebook, is growing faster than any other social network.

c) Does the BBC consider in any way that they may be unfairly promoting these particular social networking sites at the expense of lesser known rivals?

Our adherence to our Fair Trading guidelines ensures that we have a consistent and objective approach to assessing the viability of linking to other social network sites in accordance with the above criteria.

d) Is the promotion of these particular two sites for any specific agreed period of time?

On the BBC News web pages and elsewhere on the BBC web site, there are three buttons that allow users to share links with external websites: "Facebook", "Twitter" and "Share". The Share

button provides a choice of four additional social/bookmarking websites - currently Digg, Reddit, Delicious and Stumbleupon.

In the UK, Facebook and Twitter are the social networking web sites that licence fee payers are currently choosing to use over others and the BBC's aim is to reflect users' choices and help them make use of their preferred sites.

The popularity of social sites will inevitably change over time and the BBC will continue to monitor the success of these sites and will keep under review the list of sites available for linking so that we continue to match the preferences of licence fee payers. BBC Fair Trading approval was dependent on regular six-monthly reviews of our choice of social media sites to ensure that there is no adverse market impact.

More information about sharing with these sites can be found in the "help" page at this link: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10623543>

We hope you find this information useful.

Appeal Rights

If you are not satisfied with this response you have the right to an internal review by a BBC senior manager or legal adviser. Please contact us at the address above, explaining what you would like us to review and including your reference number. If you are not satisfied with the internal review, you can appeal to the Information Commissioner. The contact details are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, telephone 01625 545 700 or see <http://www.ico.gov.uk/>

Yours sincerely

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Future Media & Technology