

Shakespeare Lives in 2016

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

March 2017

1 Project Aims

Social media activity around the Shakespeare Lives (SL) campaign was analysed for the period January to December 2016. The approach to data gathering is outlined in the Appendix.

This document contains:

1. an overall summary of findings and recommendations across all the five languages studied as they pertain to the project aims;
2. a summary of the specific findings of SL in Arabic, English, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish;
3. a summary of findings and recommendations relating to the Instagram analysis.

2 Overall summary of findings

The findings of our social media research are organised according to the three project aims agreed with the British Council (BC).

- To assess the value of the Shakespeare anniversary programme and the impact it has had around the world especially on how Britain is perceived – whether the UK is seen as creative, welcoming, diverse, and innovative.
- To assess the extent to which the SL programme encouraged people to visit, work, do business, study in the UK and consume UK culture.
- To go beyond quantitative measures and assessment of reach to arrive at a deeper understanding of the quality of intercultural interactions and dialogue generated by SL. Also, to provide a range of evidence in attractive visual formats about how and where users have engaged with SL.

2.1 How did the SL programme stimulate values associated with the UK?

- Across the entire period, the majority of social media interactions around the SL campaign involve **members of the public sharing information** and are **neutral** in sentiment. Where users did express opinions about Shakespeare or the SL campaign,

the sentiment expressed is almost entirely positive or neutral, across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, VK and Weibo.

- **Engagement around particular values depends on and can be shaped by the type of events and promotions BC chooses to run.** In our initial analysis (Report 1) we found the SL campaign focused mainly on the UK's **creativity, quality and mutuality**. Our later analysis focused on responses to specific SL events and found that the values that these events stimulated in social media interactions depended upon the type of event. For example, tweets associated with the Mix the Play app tend to elicit tweets that stress its **innovative** qualities. On the other hand, tweets which emphasised **mutuality** were associated either with visiting celebrities, or with the perception that BC was engaged in a global campaign
- English-language events and interactions stimulated associations with **quality and creativity**, interactions in other languages and cultures allowed for values of **welcoming and mutuality** to shine through. An English playwright or actor visiting Russia or China may convey an image of the UK as welcoming, but it is difficult for English-language social media conversations to express regard for BC activities as welcoming when they involve English-speaking actors or plays that are already part of the culture. **What audiences value about SL is not simply a function of their attitudes to the UK or Shakespeare but reflects their relationship and cultural proximity to British culture.** The closer the cultural relationship to the UK, the greater is the tendency to engage positively with the values associated with the UK

2.2 How did the SL programme encourage engagement with the UK?

- **The main hashtag #ShakespeareLives became more closely associated with the specific BC events over time.** This may indicate a more event-focused strategy across language services by BC as SL evolved.
- **The visibility of BC in the social media data that we gathered varies enormously.** In the English-language study, BC's own tweets were so frequent that we had to exclude them from our sample in order to identify tweets from members of the public. In Arabic only nine tweets out of our 87,000 sample were from BC. Does it matter, for BC, if most members of Arabic publics who engaged with posts around the SL campaign did not realise that the campaign was directed by BC? In Report 1 we suggested that a subtle, unobtrusive and even invisible presence could be regarded as the best kind of **soft power in action**, as engagement would seem to be spontaneous and not prompted or directed by BC. However, is it an internal aim of BC to *be seen to be* promoting a particular vision of Great Britain?
- **There is scope for greater reciprocity with cultural relations partners.** Shakespeare's status as a world writer (as well as a British one) encouraged a frequently expressed view that he "belonged to the world." **SL triggered a cascade**

of sharings of Shakespeare reinforcing a sense of mutuality . Partners promoted #ShakespeareLives and Shakespeare often without referring to BC or Britain. In the international competition for attention and trust, forms of reciprocity and mutual benefit could be worked out with greater cross-national/institute coordination or ethos of sharing.

- For Russian, Arabic and Chinese users, any activity related to learning English or providing links to language training opportunities is popular. The SL campaign allowed for the elicitation of audiences' favourite quotes and offered. **SL strengthened the connections between cultural engagement and language-training programmes.**

2.3 What do we learn about the quality of intercultural interactions?

- **Celebrity drives high levels of engagement** but which celebrity drives what kind of engagement is variable. In the Spanish-language study for instance, we found that one local actor in Mexico triggered a proliferating set of interactions while well-known Spanish celebrities made little impact. Engagement requires the **right celebrity in the right local context**. This suggests that BC will derive huge benefits by **supporting and enabling its local teams to recruit and harness celebrities who resonate well in local events**.
- **The rate of response is much higher for tweets connected to a particular event**. In Mandarin, for example, social media interactions were dominated by Sir Ian McKellen's visit, eliciting tweets that expressed mutuality. It is hard to gauge whether the sense of mutuality identified in these tweets is representative of the tweeters' perception of Britain in general, or whether this was a particular response to the specific events. **To explain the precise nature of drivers of engagement would require further research**. Comparative research would also be beneficial. The Goethe Institute's Instagram account produces far more engagement than BC's. BC can learn from such comparison.
- There has been **great improvement** in many SL activities since we made our recommendations in interim Report 1 but also **some mixed successes**. On Twitter, BC is driving fairly robust levels of engagement and good quality conversations in Spanish, especially in Mexico. It is also extremely active in English. Against this, BC Arabic is less active and BC Mandarin is yet to set up a Twitter account, despite the presence of a huge Chinese diaspora on Twitter. BC's success on Weibo indicates how it could perform if it engaged on Twitter. Nevertheless, some regional teams are interacting impressively with users, particularly on Facebook, and experimenting with great creativity on Instagram. This suggests BC has responded to our call in Report 1 **'to work with the grain of each medium'**. However, there remains room for improvement. The creativity applied, for example, to Instagram often relies on

techniques alien to it as a platform or service. The result of this is little audience engagement despite creating a highly imaginative innovation in content and form. Interestingly, the creative visual and interactive materials posted on Facebook in Arabic and Spanish tend not to be reproduced on Twitter. This is a missed opportunity. Our conclusion in Report 1 still holds true. The BC ‘need to **work with the grain of each medium and learn how to create effective cross-promotion of content from one medium to the others**. This second step – cross-platform coordination and promotion – remains a challenge. We would add that few organisations in any domain get this right.

- There is great scope to produce engagement around live broadcasting via social media, harnessing local staff to translate and add context for local audiences. **Building strong connections to local cultures around specific events enhances audience engagement.** This was evident across languages. The rather ethereal, detached time/place of the Instagram European campaign was the exception that proved the rule. The Arabic findings show that live events allow BC to demonstrate engagement, not just talk about it. The Russia findings showed how moderators could keep engagement going around events broadcast with a mix of audio-visual content.

3 Overall summary of recommendations

- **Localise celebrity engagement.** Find the right celebrities that have social media followings and credible connections relevant to drama and theatre in local languages. Cultural intermediaries of various kinds who are locally prominent are very useful ‘multipliers’ (spreading information and enthusiasm) as well as ‘influencers’ (attracting and grabbing attention and persuading audiences about the value of activities/events). Such **cultural intermediaries should be very directly targeted, engaged, promoted and rewarded.** This should not be at the expense of using British celebrities; rather, a balance can be struck. **Encourage local and British cultural intermediaries to work together on social media as this is an effective way of promoting intercultural dialogue and exchange.**
- **Time posts carefully to coincide with events and buzz around events.** Post quotes from Shakespeare and encourage users to play with quotes at times that coincide with local events. Allow users to express their own perspectives and to **be creative and playful with language** - as well as feel a direct connection to Shakespeare.
- **Value social media. Train, motivate and reward local teams for using social media effectively** and not just for promotion, marketing and communications. Treat it as a medium of communication and tool for engagement. Establish a Chinese-language BC Twitter account and coordinate its content with the BC Weibo account. In addition, the BC Arabic Twitter account is relatively inactive. Given the interest in Shakespeare and Shakespeare quotes among Arabic audiences, and the huge success of the MENA Learn English digital platforms and Young Arab Voices, an opportunity for wider engagement was missed.

- **Continue to experiment on different platforms but innovation comes with risks that need to be understood.** The Instagram re-versioning of Shakespeare's plays is highly innovative but often alienates and excludes because of a number of reasons: instructions are not clear about how to engage; it is poorly set up; expectations and conventions are flouted in ways that confound users.

4 Shakespeare Lives in Arabic

4.1 Executive Summary

- On average, 50% of the sample of Arabic tweets that we analysed made direct reference to the SL campaign. The majority of these were posted by various media sources and the British Council. Overall, the SL campaign had a **disappointing level of reach and influence**. Social media interactions did not manage to stimulate sufficient online conversation to trigger the desired engagement and interaction levels.
- SL Tweets mainly expressed a sense of the UK as **'welcoming'**. Those posted by BC also expressed the **pleasures of Shakespeare**.
- Four **trending topics** were discussed on Twitter in Arabic: prominent figures celebrating Shakespeare; the doodle designed by Google to mark the event; Shakespeare's achievements as a playwright and his influence on world literature; and mentions of the SL events in the MENA region.
- **Direct quotes** from Shakespeare comprised a large proportion of the overall sample. There was no lack of interest in Shakespeare in the MENA region. Our data collection showed that between May and September 2016, there were over 87K mentions of Shakespeare by Arabic-speaking Twitter users – a relatively high number.
- **Members of the public were aware of SL events taking place but very few tweets associated them with BC or Britain.** Whether this contradicts with SL's mission of portraying Britain as a welcoming, diverse, creative and innovative nation is an open question.
- The Facebook analysis showed that SL posts portraying local people showcasing their talents or taking part in the campaign were more likely to receive high engagement levels. **Promoting local celebrities and cultural intermediaries encourages users to interact with the content and enhances mutuality.**
- The Facebook analysis revealed that **BC is seen mainly as an educational provider rather than as a cultural organisation in the MENA region.** It is seen as a centre offering English language courses, examinations leading to desirable qualifications, and information about pursuing a higher education degree in the UK. **The SL campaign reinforced the link between BC and desirable qualifications.** This may encourage people in MENA regions to study in the UK.

4.2 Recommendations

- **Adapt campaigns to local markets:** relevant content encourages greater interactivity, better reach, more exposure and better quality of engagement. Flexible adaption to local cultural contexts and circumstances includes carefully timing and coordinating posts in relation to local events to ensure high engagement, delivering relevant support for campaigns to staff in the region, and taking language and cultural preferences into account.
- **Listen to the conversation:** the findings show that users really enjoy posting quotations from Shakespeare's plays. BC could build on this in future literary/cultural projects by encouraging users to share their favourite passages and quotes. Asking users to post their favourite passages online will generate engagement and trigger conversations on social media platforms.
- **Use cultural engagement to offer language/education and vice versa to form a virtuous circle.** There are definite mechanisms or logics at play - a mix of supply/demand and cultural push/pull. In further research it would be good to understand how these logics work across the languages and platforms.
- **The high interest in Shakespeare in the MENA region provides a great opportunity for BC to build on this highly engaged audience in future campaigns.** BC could play a driving role in creating online conversations around Shakespeare and experiment with other British literary figures, especially those who have some connection with MENA region.
- **The Facebook analysis shows the potential of promoted posts** – financially boosted posts generated a very high return in engagement levels, reaching 16k interactions and 399 shares. This could be useful in promoting the SL campaign.
- **Showcasing participation and involvement in events** is very effective in encouraging users to engage with the content at hand.
- **Offer users added value and rewards:** The Facebook analysis also showed that lessons could be learnt from the potential held in offering users an added value if they were to attend/subscribe/join an event/competition/test for example.

5 Shakespeare Lives in English

5.1 Executive Summary

5.1.1 Twitter and Facebook

- **Promoting or providing information.** In the first phase of our Twitter analysis during the Shakespeare weekend, 22-25 April, more than 50% of the 1000 tweets

analysed either promoted or provided information about the SL programme or Shakespeare himself. 20% tweets that provided information about SL came from the BC's own Twitter feed. Of 1000 tweets analysed for the second phase covering June 20-22, half of them (50%) promoted or provided information about the Midsummer marathon. Informing others about the Midsummer Night's marathon was reinforced by using Sir Ian McKellen, as well as BC, other cultural relations actors, and the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office @GREATBritain who were a major funder of SL.

- **Offering an opinion about the SL campaign** was the second most popular type of engagement. Between 20% and 30% of tweets across our sample offered an opinion about SL plays, actors or technological application.
- **Quoting Shakespeare was a popular and enjoyable form of engagement.** 15% of 1000 tweets in our first data set contained quotes of Shakespeare. Twitter accounts from BC and Penguin Books (a partner to SL) fostered this trend by asking users to post their favourite quote or expression coined by the Bard. This was a good strategy.
- **Technological innovation and creativity promote engagement:** Twitter users comment positively on technological and creative innovation expressing their appreciation of the Shakespeare emoji, the BBC iPlayer, Periscope and Mix the Play application.
- **The attractions and enjoyment of Mix the Play:** Our Twitter analysis in November 2016 focused on a new version of the Mix the Play application. We coded 500 tweets focusing solely on this app. Unsurprisingly 96.4% of the tweets about the Mix the Play application praised its innovative qualities. About 50% of these (244 out of 500) judged the Mix the Play App to be creative. 13% of Twitter users also stated how pleasurable and enjoyable they found this new version of the Mix the Play application. The application was also described as being unique and pretty.
- **The sentiment expressed was mainly neutral.** The majority of the tweets (more than 50% from April 22-25 and 80% from June 20-22) provided information or promoted SL events and they had a neutral tone. More than 35% of the tweets expressed positive sentiments from April 22-25 and 20% from June 20-22. 177 out of 500 tweets about Mix the Play application denoted a positive tone. We found no significant number of negative tweets.
- **The pleasure principle:** Twitter users mostly expressed their "enjoyment" (12%) or appreciated the "quality" (13%) of performances when discussing the Shakespeare adaptations broadcast during the Shakespeare weekend in April. In contrast, comments on the live performances of plays were rare during the Midsummer marathon in June. Rather, members of the public praised the actors chosen for SL plays and interacted with them. Quality and enjoyment were mostly ascribed to the actors rather than SL.

- **Celebrities are key talking points** for both Twitter and Facebook users. Hamlet received attention from the public in April due to its being cast with several prominent actors, as well as Prince Charles. Twitter users welcomed the visit of McKellen to their country in June and the global tour of the actor created a buzz on both Twitter and Facebook.
- **Twitter users rarely mentioned British Council.** However, the following social media engagement strategies worked well and enhanced interactions: directing questions to the public; motivating Twitter users to share photos and quotes; interacting with other cultural relations institutions, partners and government accounts.
- **Cultural intermediaries, competitions and controversy drive traffic:** Prince Charles was key in motivating users to engage with SL and comment on it. SL competitions and posts with controversial messages also created a buzz on both Facebook and Twitter. Twitter users liked to explain why a particular play or actor was their favourite amongst the others and convince other users to this end.

5.2 Recommendations

- **Respond and react: There was a low, slow, no response among** SL actors and the British Council to the comments directed to them on Twitter and Facebook and even to the questions that they themselves posed to audiences. It is of course not possible to respond to each query. However, directly engaging with the public's questions really drive traffic and engagement. By asking direct questions to Twitter and Facebook users regarding SL events, and scheduling a Question and Answer session, for example, the actors could further engage with users and create a much greater buzz around SL and future programmes. Inviting responses and offering no reply is not a good strategy.
- **Sharing photos about SL events or videos** on Facebook by actors that speak directly to audience drives engagement. Ian McKellen used this tactic successfully in his global tours and one of his photos in front of the Great Wall in China went viral.
- **BC could have made more use of Shakespeare performances and performers from around the world alongside British actors.** This would help create more buzz among overseas publics and enhanced mutuality – a key BC value being promoted by SL.
- **Personalise:** British Council tactics on Facebook, such as engaging with the personal stories of people, especially those who joined the charity programmes, might be useful to boost the popularity of both BC and charity programmes on Twitter.
- **Create strong partnerships:** Partnerships, such as with Penguin books, could be further exploited. Penguin could, for example, be associated with a “favourite quote”

or actor or type of event. The benefits would then accrue if the themes of such events were well chosen.

6 Shakespeare Lives in Mandarin

6.1 Executive Summary

6.1.1 Twitter

- The major actor categories among Twitter users were ‘**members of the public**’ (40%) and ‘**alternative media and bloggers**’ (40%).
- 60% of the actors’ locations were untraceable on Twitter; the **traceable accounts respectively were distributed in East Asia, North America, Europe, Australasia, and South Asia, 35% among of which were located in Taiwan.**
- The key focus of tweets was on the SL campaign from 1 May onwards.
- 85% of Tweets **promoted and provided information about SL programme or Shakespeare.**
- The ‘**alternative media/bloggers**’ and the ‘member of the public’ played a major role in promoting SL campaign and Shakespeare on Twitter.
- ‘Members of the public’ were a major actor in reporting their engagement in SL activities (62% of all types of actors) on Twitter.
- The **information that Twitter users tweeted was mainly about when and where the performance of Shakespeare’s plays.**
- **The tone of 74% of the tweets was neutral.** 25% of the tweets had a positive tone. The positive tone largely emerged from tweets regarding promotion of the SL campaign, and providing information about it.
- Through the SL campaign, **Britain was perceived as a nation that respected the value of ‘mutuality’** (42% of 295 tweets). By smaller numbers of Twitter users, it was also seen as ‘welcoming’ (16%) and creative (14%). There was no evidence that SL promoted an image of the UK’s ‘diversity’ (less than 1%) or its ‘innovation’.
- 92% of the values identified in the tweets as associating Britain with ‘mutuality’, ‘welcoming’, ‘creativity’ and ‘diversity’ were registered in tweets that were promoting or providing information.

6.1.2 Weibo

- **Cultural sector organisations played the most active role in publishing SL related posts** on Sina Weibo (26.4%), followed by BC (25%) and government/policymakers (23%)
- **81% of the Weibo users were located in Mainland China.**
- **90% of the Weibo posts were identified as focusing on the SL campaign**, only 9% of the posts were focused on Shakespeare himself, and 1% of the posts referred directly on Britain.
- 80% of posts promoted and provided information about SL programme. **BC, cultural sector organisations and government/policymaker were the key actors in promoting and providing information about SL campaign on Weibo** (respectively 31%, 29% and 24% of all types of actors in promoting SL). This includes a prominent role for British embassies and consulates.
- **‘Members of the public’ on Weibo published most posts about their engagement** in SL activities (50% of all types of actors), followed by government/policymakers (28%).
- The information about SL campaign posted on Weibo was much more diverse, but the majority of the posts were published by 艺述英国 (UK NOW) that appeared on the SL topic page on Sina Weibo.
- Other actors especially partner cultural organisations and government/policymaker published a variety of SL activities on Sina Weibo, and some posts contained diverse and comprehensive information about British culture and its values.
- 54% of the posts adopted a neutral tone, whilst **40% of the posts adopted a positive tone**. The positive tone largely emerged from posts regarding promoting and providing information of SL campaign, and Weibo posts from partner organisations contained much more positive posts (57%) than neutral posts (43%).
- Britain was mainly seen as a nation of mutuality (54% of 818 Weibo posts), welcoming (22%), diverse (22%), creative (21%) and innovative (10%) by Weibo users.
- **Government/policymakers was the major actor in projecting the five values that** Britain wants to be seen to cherish via SL and BC. (50% of all actors), followed by cultural sector organisations (30%). 11% of the BC posts reflected the values that
- 76% of the Weibo posts that reflected the five values related to promoting and providing information of SL campaign, whilst only 12% came from the posts of reporting engagement.

- **#PlayYourPart was the dominant theme of the BC Weibo posts (68%)** from 1 July to 19 October, followed by the theme of **‘performance of Shakespeare’s works’ (19%)** and **‘celebrity’s engagement in SL’ (5%)**.
- **70.5% of posts registered a low scale engagement**, and 24% of posts attracted very low attention from Weibo users.
- To put engagement into perspective, the posts that registered the highest scale of engagement received much lower attention than the posts regarding Sir Ian’s visit.
- **The most popular theme – ‘play your part’ failed to receive significant attention.** Most of the posts were located low on the scale.
- The analysis of the comments indicates that **Weibo users responded to BC posts in a positive tone in general.**

6.2 Recommendations

- The active use of social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) by Chinese mainstream media, official institutes and government organisations for public diplomacy exercise, indicates that **BC would benefit from establishing accounts on these social media platforms to target the Chinese diaspora and audiences from the Greater China area (i.e. Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan).**
- **BC should utilise more of the Weibo functions such as trending topics to gain more public engagement.** A hashtag #ShakespeareInChina could have been created to direct discussions and focus attention among Weibo users to enhance their engagement with SL events; **mainstream and alternative media, active bloggers and celebrities could be involved or @ed (mentioned) in the discussion.**
- Partner organisations played a very active role in promoting SL campaign and projecting values of Britain on Sina Weibo. **Online engagement with partner organisations could be strengthened and extended to other social networks.**
- Considering the high engagement rate from Sir Ian’s participation in Play your Part in June, **BC should continue to use this strategy of inviting Chinese or British celebrities to take part in such event that can gain high publicity and register more public engagement.**
- **Instead of posting large numbers of Shakespeare’s quotes, the UK NOW could repost links about Shakespeare related events (i.e. seminars, performance), discussions about Shakespeare-related British culture from Chinese mainstream media (i.e. China Daily, Xinhua news agency), cultural institutes/organisations, universities.** BC should diversify the content and distribution channels of posts if it wishes to promote British culture and the values that Britain wishes to promote.

7 Shakespeare Lives in Russian

7.1 Executive Summary

7.1.1 Twitter

- In the first phase of our research we analysed a broad sample of tweets that shared information about Shakespeare in Russian. Our second phase focused on specific SL events and campaigns hosted in Russia. Overall, we sought to sample a broad range of attitudes towards Shakespeare and, through Shakespeare, gauge attitudes towards Britain, its values and culture, as well as more detailed image of the reactions and engagement with SL campaigns in Russia.
- **Russian Twitter users tend to share information, links and opinions on the platform**, but do not usually engage in longer, in-depth discussions on the topics related to Shakespeare, or SL campaign. Comparatively few tweets reflected on the values that SL sought to associate with Britain – only about 12%. The vast majority of tweets were neutral in tone.
- **The most common value that was reflected or pointed out in the tweets related to SL was creativity.** Twitter users admired the creative nature of the SL campaign events. The high quality of SL programming, sense of mutuality, welcoming nature and enjoyability of SL events were the next most commonly expressed values.
- **The reach of the SL campaign was wide and we noted significant generational differences in responses.** People of various backgrounds, and located across Russia and the Russian diaspora shared their messages about Shakespeare and SL campaign. As a general rule, younger people (high school and university students) tended to express emotions and report engaging with SL events/campaigns, while older groups were more likely to be discursive and providing intellectual opinions in their messages.

7.1.2 Facebook and VK

- British Council Russia (BCR) shared a variety of high-quality content on its Facebook and VK accounts, which appealed to diverse audiences. BCR's content and general patterns of followers' engagement with it were almost identical on both platforms. **BCR have not adopted different strategies for these two platforms.**
- **There were low levels of engagement with BCR's content on FB and VK**—lower numbers of likes, shares and comments than the main British Council Facebook page in English, but higher than other cultural diplomacy accounts in Russian: British Council Kazakhstan and *Russkiy Mir* Foundation. Typically, the reaction of followers

of BCR Facebook and VK pages ranges from dozens to hundreds of likes and often multiple shares.

- **The highest levels of public engagement were noted in the posts sharing contests and resources.** Posts on the SL campaign often included positive reviews of various elements of the campaigns and expressed gratitude to the organisers. Many of the users who commented asked practical questions about the hosted events and programmes. **Very few negative comments were observed, and these mostly disputed results of contests.**
- **There were few discussions about Britain or British culture,** and the comments largely constituted short expressions of emotion rather than extended discussions with BCR or other members of general public.
- **Audiences were most excited about posts featuring celebrities, strong audio-visual elements, or useful/quirky content.** Such posts as the one featuring BBC Russia's video of Ian McKellen riding the train in the Moscow metro, were a good example of bringing together all these elements together to promote a meaningful conversation among the followers.

7.2 Recommendations

- **Competitions drive engagement and feedback:** hosting competitions that prompt public responses and evaluation of the campaign (or future campaigns) offers an incentive for people to share their memories, photos and experiences at the various parts of the SL campaign (or future campaigns), and get direct and meaningful feedback through it.
- **Keep the tone positive and content engaging:** create appealing and interesting posts targeting diverse audience.
- **Do not use social media mainly for public relations and information** but strive to engage audiences via social media. This requires a greater investment of resources and training. If BC invites responses from audiences, then it is very important to respond to their questions and comments.
- **Rely on strong visual elements and topical content** to engage a wider range of audiences in conversation and prompt them to share content.
- **Create opportunities to harness the potential of social media to reach new audiences.**
- **Develop** closer cooperation with partner cultural and government organizations, celebrities and media personas, and mass-media channels. Their influence over social media audiences is usually much larger than that of BCR, which means they can help to promote BC's messages to the wider public.

- **Go to where the audiences you want to reach are and don't always expect them to come to you:** Share specific content with interest groups on Facebook and VK depending on the topic to reach wider audiences and potentially increase following of the BC pages. If other event and pages are created on Facebook ad VK pages, promote them more widely.
- **Be clear about who you are trying to reach**

8 Shakespeare Lives in Spanish

8.1 Executive Summary

These conclusions about the SL campaign in Spanish-speaking countries and recommendations for BC are the result of combining main findings from Phase 1 and 2. Different aspects of the campaign yield different results depending on particular events, locality, users and hashtags used on Twitter.

8.1.1 Twitter

- **The SL campaign was successful in adapting itself to local contexts in the Spanish speaking world.** In Spanish-speaking countries, Shakespeare was celebrated as a part of the commemorations of World Book Day and St. George (16% of tweets). Shakespeare was also often remembered alongside Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) (27%).
- **Global-national-local dynamics were used to good advantage in BC's localising strategies.** Key to this was collaborating closely with domestic partners in order to organize and promote events. Users engaged with SL events via the mediation of the local cultural organization and not through BC (e.g. *Otello*).
- **Expressions of positive engagement, emotions and opinions as well as reflections on the values associated with Britain were frequently found** in relation to specific events and Shakespeare more broadly, rather than towards BC, the SL campaign or Britain.
- **BC is effective in engaging at the local-national level, but some controversy still arose as a result of cross-cultural differences in perceptions.** While mutuality is highlighted in the majority of cases, the fact that the SL campaign might stir some negative comparisons is still something to be mindful of. For example, the fact that Shakespeare was given an emoji by Twitter and Cervantes initially was not viewed negatively by some users. Mutuality has to be real and felt.
- **The local staff in Spanish-speaking centres are highly instrumental in campaigns like SL.** They show a high awareness of their role as agents of cultural relations and

work towards building cultural bridges by promoting British culture while rooting it in the national and local context as well as tapping into digital networks.

- **Good responses from local staff.** The BC centre in Mexico interacts frequently with its users and always responds to comments on Facebook, improving the relationship with its students and broader public that visits its page.
- **Use of multiple social media accounts official and personal professional helped engagement.** The centre in Madrid has a wider range of initiatives that are promoted not only by their official Twitter and Facebook accounts, but by the accounts of the local staff which both feed into and from it. They do not only embed different interventions into the local context, but into domestic social media networks, reaching a number of users that are beyond the reach of BC alone.
- **Events from the SL Campaign were received very positively by users from Spanish-speaking countries.** The most popular events on the Spanish Twittersphere were live events like the Shakespeare and Cervantes Live festival or the performance of Henry V dramatized by the actor Mario Iván Martínez accompanied by the Mexican National Symphony at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico on 6-8 May in Mexico, as opposed to digital initiatives such as Mix the Play.
- **Twitter users also expressed enjoyment and surprise about technological innovation.** Shakespeare's emoji was often noted.
- **Users engaged frequently with live events that they could access through social media.** Users valued being able to watch streamed live events such as #RSCLive via Periscope (23 April, report 1) or Verdi's *Otello* (24 September, report 2).
- **The campaign did not succeed in developing an interest in Shakespeare.** One of the main limitations of the campaign in Spanish-speaking countries was that it appealed mainly to people who already had an interest in Shakespeare, Britain, and BC for that matter. **The challenge is to expand this to a wider public.**
- **A high proportion of younger public interacting with BC and partner organizations** was noted both because of the educational character of BC and because of the age profile of many social media users.
- **Spanish users tweeting about Shakespeare like to display their cosmopolitan 'cultural capital.'** They state that Shakespeare is a representative not only of British but of World Literature. They enjoy sharing their knowledge, quotes and "behind the scene" experiences.
- **Shakespeare is particularly valued by users involved in theatre** (and music for *Otello*) It was notable that some of the users were themselves, many of whom are actors and musicians.
- **The campaign was well-received by Twitter users with a prior expressed interest in Shakespeare and particular celebrities** such as Benedict Cumberbatch.

- **SL's perceived aim to bring Shakespeare closer to wider publics and appeal to popular tastes was seen as "welcoming"**. Users often commented on the openness and accessibility of usually high-end, expensive cultural products that were offered free.
- The popularity of the performance by Mario Iván Martínez highlights how **local and genre specific celebrities are a way for users to engage with events of the campaign**. The popular Mexican Shakespearean actor or opera singers Ermonela Jaho and Gregory Kunde received direct compliments from the public. **All these artists interacted with the public through social media**. Although known to a very specific audience, they are an example of how **targeting the right mediator can be essential to strengthening the relationship, and opening possibilities of engagement with new users**.
- **Celebrities (international or local) do not appear that frequently in Spanish tweets** and when they do attention from the public varies hugely. For example, the campaign Play your Part in Spain was not widely commented upon by users, despite using well-known Spanish actors. On the other hand, Sir Patrick Stewart's tweet wishing Shakespeare a Happy Birthday in Spanish was the single most popular tweet in this study (711 retweets and 3,646 likes).
- Overall, **the majority of tweets come from Latin American countries, particularly Mexico**. The Mexican BC twitter account is very active (as is its Facebook account), but a lot of the **promotion also comes from partner Mexican cultural organizations**. As a consequence, the majority of the members of the public that engage with the campaign in Latin America are also Mexican.
- **The majority of the tweets coded were neutral in tone**, in the samples of Spanish-speaking tweets the proportion of positive tweets is higher than in other languages, accounting for 36% around the time of the anniversary on 23 April, 24% during 1 Mary-17 September, 65% for *Otello* on 24 September and 34% for the Shakespeare y Cervantes festival in Mexico during October 2016.

8.1.2 Facebook

- **BC's Spanish-speaking Facebook activity was generally less effective at generating engagement with the campaign than its Twitter equivalents**. Different Facebook accounts have different levels of activity in promoting local and global SL events. The SL-related posts are liked by some users, but are usually not as popular as other campaigns within their same account. Overall, the BC Facebook accounts are not the place in which conversations about the SL campaign or Shakespeare take place. One reason might be that BC is generally regarded primarily as an organisation of language teaching. Some of the comments that users post on Facebook seem to reinforce this view.

- **Most of the interest of users is focused on English language courses, issues around language, studying and grants.** Other popular posts include those that ask direct question about British culture or give quirky information about the UK, British popular music (The Beatles, George Michael or David Bowie) or the English-language. **The links between Shakespeare and language generates the most engagement on Spanish-speaking BC Facebook accounts.** Posts with quizzes that are also entertaining – for example videos like the series of cartoons on Shakespeare on the Uruguayan Facebook page – are usually the most commented by users. BC could use these direct appeals more frequently when trying to engage followers in a conversation about Shakespeare.
- **The Mexican Facebook page has the most users of all Spanish-speaking BC Facebook pages.** The launching of the Shakespeare and Cervantes Viven festival was the most popular post not of the SL campaign but one of the most popular ones overall in recent activity in the Mexican BC Facebook page, indicating the popularity of the event. Users expressed their excitement with the event and engaged with the festival and BC in an intercultural conversation not only about the quality of the performances but about Shakespeare more broadly.

8.2 Recommendations

- Use the possibilities offered by social media to **strengthen the relationship** with existing users and to **establish new relationships** by tapping into different **networks**.
- **Make better use of cultural intermediaries** such as relevant national, local as well as global partners. **Diasporic intermediaries are a great way to link diverse user groups globally.** Spanish and Latin American celebrities as well as Twitter “celebrities” could also act as intermediaries on behalf of BC and further engage the Spanish-speaking public by acting as cultural bridges.
- **Take much more advantage of the digital turn and look to the digital future of cultural relations work.**
- **Find ways to expand reach** by better interacting with users on the social networks that Twitter and Facebook provide. Try to expand reach a broader audience and different (local) contexts.
- **Support, train, provide resources and encourage local staff to use social media not just for information and PR but to engage users.** If local staff are very active on social media they can **become digital agents of cultural relations**.
- To promote **mutuality** and **connectivity** by **exemplifying** it; for example by ensuring that the different domestic social media accounts refer to each other, and that the main @BritishCouncil helps promote local centres globally and at home in the UK. This would be a simple way to showcase initiatives and help relationships to become more

reciprocal. It is easy to do with live streaming of events that could be broadcast globally more effectively by reinforcing social media promotional strategies.

- **Use the advantages of digital platforms in order to provide more users at a global and domestic scale with a variety of experiences that can be accessed through social media** (Periscope, Facebooko, youtube, etc.). Events should also be **broadcast live** more often. This combination seems to have been the most popular among Spanish-speaking users. By contrast, digital interventions such as Mix the Play were not as successful in the Spanish Twittersphere as in other languages (see English report). It's the mixture of global and domestic or local that users value.
- Continue to organize and promote local live events that are **accessible** to a wider (and younger) public (open, free, in familiar settings like universities or schools) such as the Shakespeare and Cervantes Viven Festival in Mexico. This has been particularly valued by users who highlighted the **welcoming** nature of the institutions involved. BC could also act as a broker between high-popular culture, making events available to a wider and global public as enabled by technology and social media.
- Continue **partnering with Spanish-language cultural organisations**. Users shared almost exclusively content in Spanish or originated in Spanish-speaking media. They commented on events also primarily through domestic partner's social media outlets. BC has been very successful in partnering with Spanish-speaking institutions in order to promote the campaign.
- If culture can sometimes function as an invisible barrier that can distort messages, there is a cultural advantage for the indigenous media, and one way of bridging that cultural gap is to **build good media relations**. However, BC then loses visibility and the conversation does not refer back to Britain. BC could think of ways of better coordinating the promotion of events via social media. BC might want to try to make itself more present, while ensuring that users' do not perceive this as an instrumentalist approach. BC might attempt to balance this out by strengthening **global-local digital networks** and **encouraging partner organizations to mention them specifically** on their social media platforms via replies, likes, comments or retweets.
- Encourage users' **creative engagement** with Shakespeare and the campaign. Social media users are active in reusing and appropriating different content, creatively and critically engaging with it. To continue requesting specifically the collaboration of users, by asking questions, responding to their comments, having contests, quizzes or sharing quotes. Users often respond to direct questions when offered tickets to assist to an event, but also when directly asked to share their experiences on social media.
- BC could deploy its **knowledge and awareness of culture and literature** to anticipate and take the lead in bringing conversations to the fore. On occasions, like with the Otello performance or the Shakespeare and Cervantes Viven festival, BC could have taken the lead to spark conversation on **diversity** in the first instance (like

done through BC's short film on Othello) or **mutuality** in the second, even if risking controversy. Values need to be made felt and real.