Third Sector Research Centre

Working Paper 140

Community Action and Social Media:

Trouble in Utopia?

Kevin Harris and Angus McCabe

February 2017

Abstract

This briefing paper is based on an exploratory study of the use and non-use of social media by community groups and small, more formal, voluntary organisations in England. The study followed a detailed literature review ([Working Paper 139](#)) and explored the gap between the claims for the transformative power of social media, and its use by grassroots community groups and organisations. It also considers more generally how organisations relate to these technologies and their evolving culture.

The research considered:

- evidence that social media use 'makes a difference' for small voluntary and community sector organisations
- the benefits and costs of investing in a social media presence, and
- explanations for non-use and lapsed use of social media.

The study suggests that despite the compelling logic of social media use, there are fully-understandable reasons why it has not been adopted as widely by community organisations and groups as some might have expected. Beyond the positivist rhetoric around the transformative power of online exchanges and communications, Utopian visions may need to be reviewed.

Keywords

Acknowledgements

Contents

Project Background

This working paper explores the use and non-use of social media by community groups and small, more formal, voluntary organisations in England.

As a pilot research project, its origins lie in conversations with grant making trusts which had invested in developing use of social media platforms to encourage debate and networking by and between the groups they funded. Substantial time had been committed by these trusts to encourage debate, information sharing and online mutual support through initial blog posts, creating discussion forums and signposting to other digital resources. However, few of the funded groups made use of the platforms.

That experience prompted an initial review of the literature on social media, which is available as Third Sector Research Centre Working Paper 139 and is summarised in chapter 3 below. The review identified three levels of material in the academic, grey and online literature:

- a broad body of work which argues for or assumes the transformative power of digital media, in challenging hierarchies, organising protest and social action at a national and international level and 'democratising' the media and channels of communication;

- a narrower literature on the use made of social media by formal voluntary organisations: this literature is largely focused on social media as a means of marketing and fundraising rather than mobilising communities;

- a small amount of literature on the use of social media for community development and at neighbourhood level. As far back as 2005, in a special issue on community informatics for the journal *Community development*, it was noted that:

    'Since ICT represents what numerous observers and policy makers have called a "transformational technology," the slowness of our efforts to think critically about what we are doing seems strange' (Pigg, 2005, p1).

    The slightness of this particular literature suggests that the pace has barely quickened in the 12 years since.

From the point of view of community organisations and groups, the logic of the technology suggests three areas of significant advantage when the low entry cost is considered:

- democratisation of voice, in that the acoustics of the public sphere have changed to at least accommodate, and often to favour, alternative and minority voices;

- the relative ease with which it is possible to identify and connect with likeminded others;

- the low costs of finding ways to collaborate – and there are associated tools to make collaboration more effective.

The logic suggests that social media can enable community groups and organisations to communicate, multi-directionally, more efficiently and inexpensively, and connect with wider networks (globally if appropriate) to raise awareness, publicity and support. If this is the case, it ought to follow that community groups and organisations using these platforms will be functioning more effectively, accumulating trust, mobilising support, achieving their objectives and generating social benefit in a wide variety of arenas.

The current report explores the gap between the claims for the transformative power of social media, and its use by grassroots community groups and organisations. It considers:

- evidence that social media use 'makes a difference' for small voluntary and community sector organisations
- the benefits and costs of investing in a social media presence, and
- explanations for non-use and lapsed use of social media.

This is an exploratory study. A much larger sample of organisations would need to be involved to draw definitive, or indeed, generalizable, conclusions on the patterns, implications and cost/benefit of both investment and non-investment in social media in the sector. However, the findings suggest that, beyond the positivist rhetoric around the transformative power of online exchanges and communications, Utopian visions may be subject to review.

The following sections of this working paper therefore:

- outline the research methodology (chapter two)
- summarise the literature in this field (chapter three)
- present the findings of primary research (chapter four)
- discuss the implications of those findings and draw conclusions (chapter five), particularly on the explanation for apparent levels of non-use and the future implications for groups and organisations associated with collective action.

Box 1: Definition of terms

The terms social media, community and community action are contested. The following working definitions have been adopted for the purposes of the current report.

Social media is an umbrella term that describes online technology and practices used to share opinion, insights, experience and perspectives. This technology was enabled by the transition from 'Web 1.0' - the first phase of the World Wide Web 'when it was a set of static websites that were not yet providing interactive content' – to 'Web 2.0'. Web 2.0 is described by Techopedia as 'focused on the ability for people to collaborate and share information online via social media, blogging and Web-based communities'.[1]

Social media can take many forms like text, images, audio and video (Gupta *et al*, 2013). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), there are six different types of social media: collaborative projects (*e.g.* Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (*e.g.* Twitter), content communities (*e.g.* YouTube, Flicker), social networking sites (*e.g.* Facebook, MySpace), virtual game worlds (*e.g.* World of Warcraft, Whyville), and virtual social worlds (*e.g.* Second Life) (cited in Gupta *et al*, 2013).

Social media has transformed the Internet from a largely static space concerned with the transmission or broadcasting of information, through a group of applications 'that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content' (Taylor, 2012, p3).

This report follows the convention of using the term 'social media' in the singular.

Community action: various authors have noted the contested nature of the term 'community' (Somerville, 2011). Indeed, the term has been interpreted broadly (and interchangeably with terms such as community empowerment, engagement or self-help activity) to mean 'informal groups of people, acting on a voluntary basis, working together to solve common problems by taking action themselves and with others' (Richardson, 2008, p1). Recent research broadens that definition out from 'solving common problems' to any form of community activity such as self-organised carnivals, events and social gatherings (Taylor, 2015). These definitions can be extended to capture the nature of national and international social movements (Della Porta and Diani, 1999), and more political and politicised concepts of community mobilisation, the 'liberation' of knowledge from the control of elites (O'Donovan, 2014), and collective action (Ostrom, 1990).

Whilst starting with these broad definitions of community action, the main focus of the current working paper is on the extent to which social media is or is not used by groups and organisations involved in community action at the local level.

---

[1] https://www.techopedia.com/definition/27960/web-10; https://www.techopedia.com/definition/4922/web-20

The current research was conducted between February 2015 and May 2016 and included the following elements:

- Literature review

- Scoping exercise, comprising telephone interviews with experienced commentators and an exploratory seminar

- Questionnaire survey

- Three focus groups on social technologies and social networks

- Case studies generated from follow-up telephone interviews with survey respondents.

Insights from the following other studies have contributed to the development of this research:

- A study of social media use in four communities in England conducted over two periods in 2016 for other Third Sector Research Centre activities.

- A study of the use of smartphones by people on low incomes, carried out for Cosmos in 2014 (Harris, 2014).

The main components in the study are described in more detail below.

Literature review

The literature review was conducted in three phases. The first involved a 'broad sweep' of generic materials on social media and information technologies. The second focused on articles related to the voluntary sector and social media. The final stage was then to identify materials in the community development literature that related to social media to activity in communities of interest and at a neighbourhood level. Search terms included; community, community action/activity, organising, mobilising voluntary action, social action/movements, social media, information and communications technology, democracy/democratic, change, social networks/networking, voluntary and community organisations/groups and civil society.

In total, 407 relevant items were identified from a wide range of sources. Some 250 articles were collected from academic journals (including online journals such as *First Monday*). The voluntary sector literature on social media is dominated by issues of marketing and fundraising, while the more general literature on the sociology of the media is largely focused on 'engagement' and activism or protest. The six most productive academic journals provided 125 items (50 per cent): these titles are shown in Figure 1. None of these six

sources is among the established journals in the fields of social policy, community development or voluntary action: they all have a focus on aspects of media, technology and society. Third sector sources such as *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, when they do consider social media, tend to focus on its uses for marketing and fundraising and not as a tool for campaigning and community action. Eight journals that could be said to be representative of the community and voluntary sector (one of them is now defunct) provided just 14 items – less than six per cent of the journal literature identified, or around three per cent of the total material captured for this bibliography.[2]

Figure 1: Community action and social media: main literature sources

Journals supplying 15 items or more
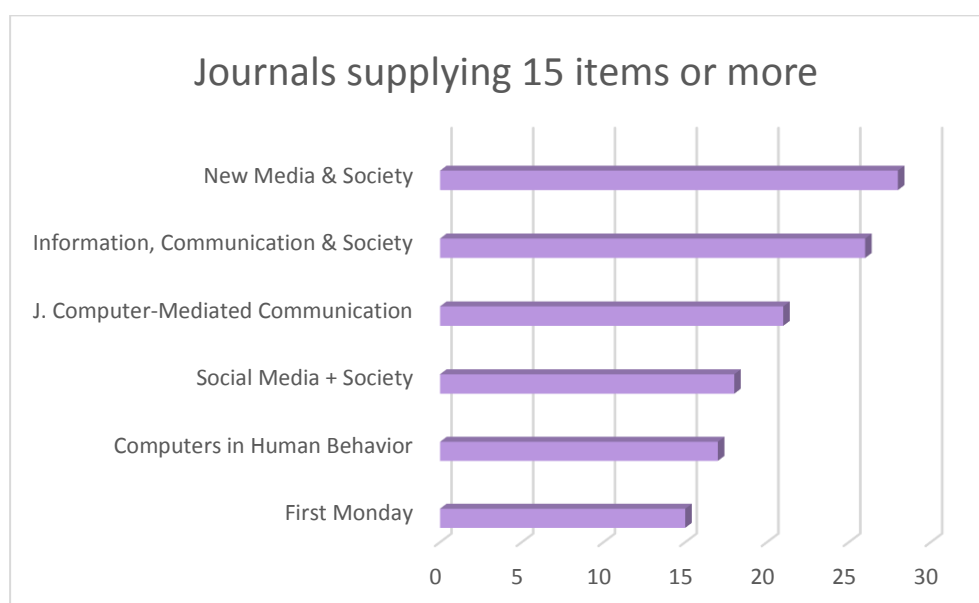
Scoping exercise

Semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with nine experienced commentators in order to clarify the focus of the study. Each could claim several years' working with community groups and organisations on information and communication issues, and each could be described to a greater or lesser degree as a 'champion' of social media for the sector or part of the sector.

The conversations took place in the winter of 2014-2015. Interviewees appeared to welcome the opportunity to contribute to an independent study to clarify issues of use and non-use. Most have clients or member organisations in the sector. Key themes covered included:

---

[2] The eight sources were: *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research, Community Development, Community Development Journal, Concept, Interface, Journal of Community Work and Development* (now defunct), *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* and *Voluntas*. Arguably, *Journal of Community Informatics*, from which one article was collected, could be added to this list.

- The rationale for use of social media in the community sector
- Is it fair to distinguish more than one distinct 'speed' of take-up – a significant group readily exploiting the technology and other groups undecided, disregarding or rejecting it?
- Issues of support for groups and organisations
- Examples where an organisation's role or mission may have shifted as a consequence of what can be achieved using social media
- Differences and tensions between personal use and organisational use of social media
- Different experiences in using social media for broadcasting and for relationship building
- Organisational strategies and social media policies – and how social media is or might be prioritised
- Information overload and its implications
- Use of social media for fundraising.

Among other issues that were touched on were technical differences (*e.g.* around Facebook and Twitter) and the challenges in rural areas. Finally, all interviewees were asked 'What would you like the research to show…?'

Notes from these conversations were written up using a thematic matrix. In chapter 4, comments from these interviews are referenced as '*[EC]*'.
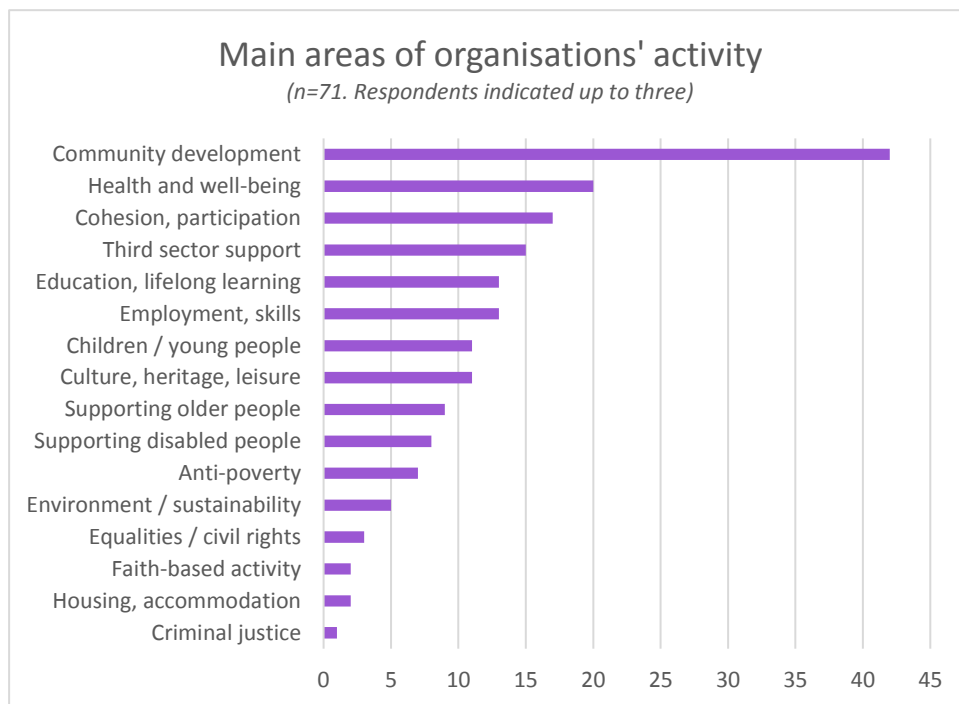
In addition, an exploratory seminar was convened, attended by 12 representatives from small voluntary and community organisations alongside social media advocates. The aim of this session was to explore the apparent gap between the rhetoric around the transformative power of social media and the everyday experience of those active in their community. In addition, the discussion contributed to the framing of questions for the subsequent online survey questionnaire.

Questionnaire survey

An online questionnaire survey was developed and tested using Survey Gizmo. After feedback from testing, the link was publicised through three national networks supporting small scale community and voluntary groups, in May-June 2015. In total the questionnaire went out to 750 such groups with 71 completed returns. This represents a response rate of 9.46 per cent.

Respondents were asked about their areas of activity and the results are shown in Figure 2. This confirms that a significant proportion of the sample is working in some aspect of community development.

Figure 2: Survey respondents by main area of activity

Main areas of organisations' activity
(n=71. Respondents indicated up to three)

Area	Value
Community development	42
Health and well-being	20
Cohesion, participation	17
Third sector support	15
Education, lifelong learning	13
Employment, skills	13
Children / young people	11
Culture, heritage, leisure	11
Supporting older people	9
Supporting disabled people	8
Anti-poverty	7
Environment / sustainability	5
Equalities / civil rights	3
Faith-based activity	2
Housing, accommodation	2
Criminal justice	1

In chapter 4, comments from survey respondents are referenced as *'[S]'*.

Focus groups

In addition to three focus groups at the outset of this research, the current report draws on three previous focus groups carried out as part of a study of ethnicity, poverty and social networks (Harris, 2013; McCabe *et al*, 2013) where social media was reported by participants as an important means of maintaining links with countries of origin. Material from these meetings used in Chapter 4 is denoted as '*[FG]*'.

Case studies

A total of 22 survey respondents agreed to take part in semi-structured follow-up telephone interviews. Of these, three subsequently declined further involvement, and eight did not respond to further contact. A total of 11 interviews were carried out in autumn 2015.

Respondents included seven social media users and four lapsed-users or non-users. In addition, an interview was conducted with a local worker (social media user) who works with groups that do not use social media. Figure 3 shows the geographical spread of these 12 contacts.

Figure 3. Geographical distribution of interviewees
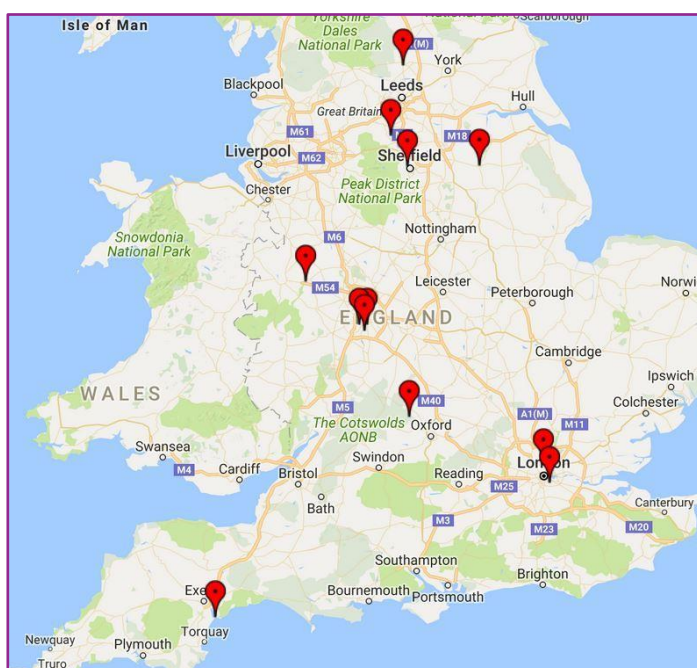
The telephone interviews began with clarification of any issues emerging from the individual's survey response or from a review of their organisation's web presence. For **users**, a range of issues was then covered guided by a topic sheet that included the following:

- Does using social media help you think about different audiences? – say for tweets and re-tweets on the one hand and Facebook on the other, for example?

- Is your social media use about attracting attention to what you're doing? Does it generate conversations?

- In your survey response you said that your main uses of social media are…

    o Is this how you want it to be, or are you working towards… (some other approach, perhaps a different balance)?

- As you know we're interested in assessing whether organisations' use of social media is having an impact or helping to bring about change. With regard to monitoring and evaluation, in your survey you said …

    o Are you happy with this or would you want to have more or different information?

- Can you think of any instances where your organisation brought about change and some of that could be attributed to social media?

- Can we review what you see as the advantages and disadvantages of using social media?

- In our survey we asked about personal and organisational accounts, and you told us…

- o Do you see this as a problematic issue, or just something that has to be worked-through?

- I'd like to ask you now about how you see your social media activity in relation to face-to-face activity.
  - o Does one stimulate activity in the other, and how does this contribute to the aims of the organisation? How strategic would you say you are in this respect?

- Looking to the future – how do you see your social media activity in the future – *e.g.* more important/different media/new uses?

Various prompts were prepared for these questions, with key verbatim quotes captured at the time and repeated back to the interviewee for confirmation. Detailed notes were taken and written up using a thematic matrix.

For **non-users,** a less structured approach was adopted, beginning by clarifying any past experience they or their organisation had had with social media. It was of particular interest to try and capture anecdotes of success or failure. Respondents were asked if they could remember the reasons for trying to use social media if they had done so (*e.g.* expertise available at the time; pressure from the surrounding rhetoric etc). They were then asked questions based on their survey responses and probed for reasons for not sustaining use, barriers, and what (if anything) might persuade them to try again. Prompts for these questions mostly came from the list of suggested reasons for non-use in the questionnaire survey.

In chapter 4, comments from these interviews are referenced as '*[TI]'*.

Social media study in four localities

An analysis of social media use in four neighbourhoods (two urban and two rural) in England was also undertaken in November-December 2015 and April to May 2016. The aim of this was to develop 'snapshots' of social media use in small, closely defined, localities over time. In total some 155 Facebook (55) and Twitter (100) interactions were analysed using Pearson Correlation Analysis (Evans, 1996). Whilst this is a relatively small sample, it is comparable with the number of tweets (220) analysed in national US based research on non-profit organisations' use of Twitter (Auger, 2014). The findings of this element of the research have subsequently been reinforced by a larger scale project, reviewing social media use in Big Local (community led change) initiatives in England (Bussu, 2016).

This chapter brings together key points from the extended literature review, carried out as part of this project, which is available as [Working Paper 139](#).

Individualism and community

Social change and media change are profoundly entwined (Adolf and Deicke, 2015). Social media reflects and may reinforce a number of clear social trends including social diversification, an emphasis on identity, and the assumed weakening of hierarchies. Community groups and organisations use social media within the broad and evolving context of a networked society – globally connected - with assumptions of mobile connectivity and networked individualism (Rainie and Wellman, 2012).

The relationship between personal social networks and community, described in the work of Wellman and others (Wellman *et al*, 1988; Wellman, 1999, 2007), resonates throughout the literature. Results from recent multi-national research indicate that individualised networking may not necessarily be carried out at the expense of group allegiance:

> 'the primary effect is to reproduce forms of traditional kinship organisation… Social media has thereby shaped new, modern forms of tribal allegiances' (Miller *et al*, 2016, p185).

The transformative power of social media

There is a substantive literature on the use and transformative power of digital media generally and social media in particular. A common theme is the role of social media in democratisation:

> 'By making it quick and easy for anyone to share information with others, modern social media gives ordinary people a collective agenda-setting power that was previously restricted to large publishers and broadcasters, and that is capable of striking fear into those in authority' (Standage, 2013, p239).

Some commentators argue that, through social media, the nature of collective action is being restructured and redefined as another way of 'doing politics'. Bright for example argues in a blog post that social media offers:

> 'new digitally enabled ways of involving people in any aspect of democratic politics and government, not replacing but rather augmenting more traditional participation routes such as elections and referendums' (Bright, 2015).

Collective action and the role of organisations

Several researchers and theorists have explored the political implications of personal social media use in relation to collective action, introducing concepts such as the 'networked

democratic spectator' (Kreiss, 2015) and 'connective action' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). It has been argued that:

> 'the combination of challenges associated with personalized communication and affiliation between organizations and their publics... [feeds] the concern that personalization ultimately undermines the political effectiveness of collective action' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011, p773).

A key point here is that, in the context of networked individualism, collective identity need not necessarily imply a role for organisations or even groups. This theme could be profoundly significant for community practice, not least because when it comes to networked collective action and large-scale campaigns, 'some of these protests seemed to operate with surprisingly light involvement from conventional organizations' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p741).

This observation points to a substantial sub-set of literature relating to alternative voices to the state – social media as a means of organising rapidly, for protest and mass action in ways that are horizontally networked rather than vertically controlled.

Social media and protest
In the West, the literature on social media and protest has focused on two high profile social movements, Occupy (Garcia-Jimenez *et al,* 2014; Adi, 2015) and Anonymous (Fuchs, 2013); or global movements on specific international issues (see for example Hopke, 2015, on anti-fracking actions). Globally, the majority of writing on these themes relates to national movements and events: the Arab Spring (Alaimo, 2015); the Maidan Square protests in Kiev (Kurkov, 2014); the Libyan crisis (Morris, 2014); the Gezi protests based around Taksim in Istanbul (Smith *et al,* 2015; Haciyakupoglu and Zhang, 2015); or the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong (Lee *et al,* 2017). At a more local level, a study of content posted on YouTube concerning disturbances in an area of Bristol (Reilly, 2015) shows how the documentation of events on social media struggles to compete, in terms of influence, with traditional news media.

Authors on these forms of mass protest argue that these movements are qualitatively different to earlier revolutions and protests in that:

- they do not rely on 'traditional' forms of organising, such as trade unions or revolutionary political parties (Lynch, 2011)
- they are horizontal by nature and not reliant on a charismatic individual leader or figurehead (Theocharis, 2013)
- the locations of protest can be spread rapidly and virally
- their communication may have a 'highly visual character' (Poell, 2014) often highlighting the spectacle that accompanies protest events
- social media can sustain protest over time by refreshing and relieving protesters, and drawing in a wider network of 'off street' actions (Kurkov*,* 2014).

Much of this literature argues for the transformative power of social media in terms of political, economic and social power relationships. Discussing events in Egypt, Alaimo (2015) argues that 'social media is a more powerful platform for promoting political change than previously appreciated' and that the Facebook Page *We are all Khaled Said* 'helped promote the Egyptian revolution' (p2). While these claims seem fairly modest, they lead on to contested ground. Bardici (2012) for example finds the media representation of the role of social media in Egypt 'overstated and constructed', 'rhetorical and exclusionary'. Roberts (2014), however, notes that:

> 'New media helps to empower those who privately hold oppositional views to a government regime and then translate these into public expressions of opposition. This "information cascade" was particularly noticeable in Tunisia and Egypt, whereby "the courageous early movers sent a signal to a generally sympathetic public of the value of joining in"' (Roberts 2014, p159, citing Lynch, 2011, p304).

Roberts places information and Web 2.0 technologies in the context of a broader global struggle between corporations that seek to control, incorporate or monopolise social media platforms, and alternative world views:

> 'New media is part of the battle for hegemony in and around political and social projects and has certainly altered the terrain through which this battle is fought' (p20).

Much of the literature explores concepts not of empowerment but transformation: in power relationships, global reach and the dismantling of hierarchies and orthodoxies (Castells 2000). A more nuanced, cautious impression emerges from recent research-based (as opposed to polemical or theory-based) publications. Smith *et al* (2015) for example focus on the concept of 'vicarious experience', whereby individuals are motivated to act by others' experiences. They point to the importance of straightforward 'broadcasting' as well as networking - 'efforts to seek change in social media are realized through information dissemination more than through calls to action and social organising' – and focus on the ways that social media users seek to influence 'through vicarious experience… [rather] than direct personal experience' (Smith *et al*, 2015, p499).

Indeed, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that, to 'move on' from vicarious experiences to action, there needs to be a connection between online and face-to face relations, and this requires both:

> 'the familiar logic of collective action associated with high levels of organizational resources and the formation of collective identities, and the less familiar logic of connective action based on personalized content sharing across media networks' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p739).

In a sense, this is an old debate of 'the personal as political' and vice versa, re-framed for the network society. Other researchers go further. In an experiment to test whether individuals'

willingness to express support online publicly is influenced by calls-to-action through different social media sources, Nekmat *et al* conclude that

> 'invitational acts by people in one's close personal networks (*e.g.* friends, family members) are most influential in motivating individual participation, followed by people belonging to more impersonal groups such as distant social networks (*e.g.* friends of friends) and, lastly, organizational sources… This indicates that alternatives to formal and direct organizational communication might be more critical in rallying support for activism on social media' (Nekmat *et al*, 2015, p1086-1087).

Bodhanova (2014) acknowledges the role of social media in the Euromaidan demonstrations in Kiev and in achieving their ultimate goal of ousting President Yanukovych, but strikes a note of caution:

> 'This does not mean that all social media–enabled movements are bound for success. After all, technology is only an instrument; it does not necessarily guarantee a specific type of outcome' (Bodhanova, 2014, p140).

So while it can be suggested that 'the revolution will be live-streamed, tweeted and posted on Facebook' (Bodhanova, 2014, p136), politics 'as normal' has since returned to the Ukraine (Kurkov, 2014); authoritarian regimes have returned (for example in Egypt); or the country has descended into extended conflict, as in the case of Libya. Lynch (2011) concludes that social-media-based forms of political organisation 'have major weaknesses when the time comes for negotiating the terms of democratic transition' (p302).

Further, the networks that have emerged may not be immune to the challenges affecting traditional voluntary organisations. For all of the rhetoric on Occupy being entirely open, transparent and horizontal in organisation, Adi observes that:

> 'like corporations, Occupy groups also struggle to find the balance between managing their reputation, controlling their image, sharing their messages and identifying and incentivizing conversations online' (Adi, 2015, p508).

Social media in the local civic context

One lesson from the literature on local e-government is that, rather than being transformational in terms of governance and changing practice, the technology has been used largely as a tool for customer relations, efficiency savings (*e.g.* online reporting of faults, bill paying etc), personalisation in the delivery of public services (Bannister and Wilson, 2011) and as a means of delivering those services more efficiently (Magro, 2012). It has been concluded that, after more than a decade of e-government effort, Web 2.0 tools merely mean:

> 'a step forward for local governments that make more use of ICTs to provide information and services to external audiences' (Bonson *et al*, 2012, p132).

More participative uses are reviewed by Bright (2015); while recommendations on the design of e-participation platforms emerge from a study of the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review (Kropczynski *et al*, 2015). A study of crowdsourcing policy in Finland suggests that:

> 'Crowdsourcing makes it indeed possible to bring the dispersed and often unheard knowledge and voice of the people into the public sphere' (Aitamurto and Landemore, 2015, p3).

Social media and voluntary organisations

A comparable emphasis on managerialist and instrumentalist approaches, rather than transformative effects, can be seen in the (more limited) voluntary sector specific literature. In addition to a range of guides and handbooks (*e.g.* De Vera and Murray, 2013) aimed at the voluntary, charitable and public sectors, the literature highlights the potential and role of social media in:

- fundraising (Saxton and Wang, 2014)
- attracting volunteers (Farrow and Yuan, 2011) and cost effective approaches to staff recruitment (Doherty, 2010). It has been suggested that the technology could be used 'to encourage, screen, and manage volunteers automatically' (Aldridge, 2010, p2)
- managing community and public relations (Curtis *et al*, 2010) and community building (Taylor *et al*, 2001; Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012)
- knowledge management and transfer (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012)
- promoting behavioural change amongst service users and the wider public, particularly in health related charities (Gupta *et al*, 2013)
- managing an awareness campaign (Taylor, 2012).

Social media for fundraising

The majority of both UK and international literature in this field, however, relates to marketing (Phethean *et al*, 2012; Quinton and Fennemore, 2013) and in particular to the use of social media for fundraising (Miller, 2009; Waddingham, 2013; Mano, 2014; Saxton and Wang, 2014).

Increasing attention has been paid to emerging donations platforms such as JustGiving (a 'traditional' online donations platform) through to Savoo (where retailers donate a percentage of the cost of goods purchased to the customer's named charity). Waddingham explains the sense in which fundraising through social media differs from traditional fundraising:

> 'Given that each Facebook user has an average of 130 friends, just one share could reach many people that the charity does not have access to — and the message may be more effective coming from that friend than from the charity itself' (Waddingham, 2013, p189).

The numbers are impressive. On the JustGiving platform, which secured £60 million for charities advertised on the site in 2014 (Sheppard, 2016), people are encouraged to share their actions with their Facebook friends:

> 'the impact of a share on Facebook changes depending on the context of who is sharing and what they are sharing. For example, if a donor shares a message on Facebook about them donating directly to a charity, it is worth £1 per share, but if someone shares a message about donating to a friend's fundraising page, it is worth around £5. But if a fundraiser (i.e. someone taking part in a fundraising event for a charity) themselves shares a text update about their event, it is worth around £12 per share. And then if the fundraiser records a video about their event and shares, the average value per share increases to £18' (Waddingham, 2013, p188).[3]

This transformation was anticipated, for example, by Miller who suggested that charities will need to 'flip the funnel' so that supporters become 'a key channel through which we communicate':

> 'the professional fundraiser's role will increasingly become that of community manager rather [than] campaign manager, as each community fundraises in the way that works best for them' (Miller, 2009, p369-370).

Mano (2014) also found that both online and offline donations are significantly increased through participation in social media and networking. In a study using data from *Facebook Causes*, Saxton and Wang explore what characterises charitable giving in social networking environments, and conclude:

> 'Facebook donors do not seem to care about efficiency ratios, their donations are typically small, and fundraising success is related not to the organization's financial capacity but to its "Web capacity". Moreover, online donors are prone to contribute to certain categories of causes more than others, especially those related to health' (Saxton and Wang, 2014, p850).

Some recent literature has explored the potential of civic crowdfunding for voluntary organisations, social enterprises and micro businesses (Stiver *et al*, 2015). This is a relatively new area of research, although a range of advice on good practice is available (see *e.g.* Yeh, 2015). The work of Stiver *et al* (2015) focuses on crowdfunding platforms established specifically for the funding of civic projects (Citizinvestor, ioby, Neighbor.ly, Spacehive). On the whole they disregard other social media platforms while noting that 'social media integration with platform features remain underdeveloped'. They hint at potential advantages for local community organisations, since geography appears to have an impact

---

[3] There is an alternative view, that the 'the dollars per donor analysis' is not the right metric for success. Facebook's 'Causes' tool for example was described as 'a friending tool, not a fundraising tool' (see Red Rooster Group, 2010, p23-24). In summer 2016 Facebook began a service whereby donations could be made without leaving the Facebook page: see https://www.engadget.com/2016/07/01/facebook-personal-fundraising-tool/.

on stakeholder contributions, with both contributions-in-kind, and coordination of volunteers, benefitting from proximity.

Davies (2014) presents the rationale for this form of finance in a direct way in a blog post:

> 'The average civic crowdfunding campaign organizer who wants to create a new community resource may be an expert in her field… but may not have the time or resources to maintain an organization. That doesn't mean that she should shelve the work she wants to do. If a tactical, small-scale, short-term intervention brings opportunities for education and growth, social impact practitioners should encourage it… With crowdfunding, a single powerful campaign can show a community what's possible and spark a range of other activity'.

Elsewhere Davies puts forward three areas of concern:

> 'the extent to which civic crowdfunding is participatory, the extent to which it addresses or contributes to social inequality, and the extent to which it augments or weakens the role of public institutions' (Davies, 2015, p342).

These are all themes that are likely to matter to community organisations – particularly the suggestion from early indications that civic crowdfunding 'may be structurally biased toward outcomes that either reproduce or widen existing inequalities' (Davies, 2015, p352).

The above sample of research suggests strongly that fundraising through social media is a valuable extra dimension for most charities, if not all. It would seem to favour campaign-oriented organisations and special issue organisations. The New York-based consultancy Red Rooster Group (2010) has offered an impressive range of short case studies on this theme. However, the extent to which these findings and examples can be applied to community groups and organisations in the UK remains uncertain as the majority of papers are based on research with large, multi-million dollar, American foundations and not-for-profit organisations (NTEN, 2013).

Clicktivism: 'low cost, low risk, and low impact'?

It is clear that social media lowers the threshold for people to contribute to collective action, for example through online donations; signing petitions; forwarding messages, links or tweets; or just a simple 'Like'. Opinions differ, however, about the implications.

Thus it has been suggested that this low-cost, low-risk form of engagement dilutes 'real' activism (Morozov, 2009; Harlow and Guo, 2014; Howard 2014) and constitutes a 'failure to create true activists' (Anonymous, 2016); whereas Halupka (2014) argues that so-called 'clicktivism' or 'slacktivism' is a legitimate political act, and Schumann (2015) regards it as 'part of the repertoire of contention' that facilitates civic participation. Karpf (2010, p7) described such high-volume actions as 'a single tactic in the strategic repertoire of advocacy groups'. Christensen found no evidence that online activism substitutes for traditional forms of off–line participation, claiming that, if anything 'the Internet has a positive impact on off–line mobilization' (Christensen, 2011, np). Further, there may be other benefits: a study of

the use of Facebook by an environmental group suggests that the new activism has subtle advantages:

> 'Online action can be more conducive to a low-key approach that lends itself to a persuasive strategy of engagement rather than a confrontational one' (Hemmi and Crowther, 2013, p4).

Social media, community engagement, development and neighbourhood organising

There is a relatively small, but growing literature on the role of social media and community engagement. The latter term itself is contested (Gilchrist and Taylor, 2016) and implies something less than citizen control according to Arnstein's (1969) model of participation. Concerns about clicktivism, discussed above, reflect perceptions about passive forms of engagement.

Indeed, the academic literature on social media that directly uses the term engagement is fragmented. It refers, variously, to advocacy projects (Obar *et al,* 2012), youth engagement (Wells 2014b), 'political consumerism' (de Zúñiga *et al*, 2014), the development of local online storytelling (Chen *et al,* 2012) or promoting community events (Bussu, 2016).

However, given the transformative claims made for social media, and the social justice and change objectives of community development, the lack of literature bringing together ideas of community engagement and development is surprising. Three recent books in this field (Ledwith, 2016; Popple, 2015; Taylor, 2015) make only passing references to social media and community development; while only a small number of journal articles have been published in the specialist academic literature on community development (Deschamps and McNutt, 2014; Eimhjellen, 2014; Hemmi and Crowther, 2013; Matthews, 2015, 2016; Pigg, 2005; Nah *et al*, 2016; Svensson, 2016). More research and theoretical activity might have been expected, given established arguments about the power of internet communication to transform political dialogue, create new (and less hierarchical) relationships, open up new forms of association and support less geographically bounded networks (Amin, 2000; Castells, 2000; Williams *et al,* 2014).

Popple, in the revised edition of *Analysing Community Work* (2015) frames the relationship between community development practice and new media as a series of questions that appear to imply challenges to community development core values:

> 'The question that is raised now is whether people are living in a virtual world and whether our lives are devalued or lessened compared to before this technology was introduced. Has this affected the way we interact in our various communities? Has the new technology produced new communities that are more meaningful than the traditional communities that existed before?' (Popple, 2015, p4).

These three sentences characterise the sense of detachment in many community development approaches to digital media. While raising questions about changes in relationships (and perhaps clouding these questions by reference to 'meaningful'

communities), Popple adopts an either/or stance, which appears to overlook evidence that relationships have changed in ways that are sometimes deemed better, sometimes worse, sometimes just different. Among the most widely-cited, methodologically-robust research is that of Hampton, who concludes that:

> 'Internet use does not privatize; it does not isolate people from the parochial realm of the neighborhood. Internet use over extended periods appears to be an antidote to privatism – it affords the formation of local social networks... The evidence here suggests that the Internet is already slowly building local social networks, at least in those neighborhoods where context favours local tie formation' (Hampton, 2007, p739).

Taylor (2015) takes a less binary view than Popple, arguing that online can enhance and reinforce face-to-face relationships and broaden their geographical spread (Kavanaugh *et al*, 2014). Nonetheless it is noteworthy that the examples used to illustrate this are international and national online movements rather than local community-based action. Gilchrist and Taylor (2016, p116) argue that new technologies have 'opened the way to new forms of activism and campaigning' at the local level, though again the majority of examples used are national or international actions.[4] Examples of individual and community engagement with larger issues at the national scale (such as the 2014 floods in England (Miller 2015a)) have been documented, as has the use of social media for mapping local social activities (Marcus and Tidey, 2015) and for environmental activism at the national level in Scotland (Hemmi and Crowther, 2013). Research at the neighbourhood level confirms the applicability of social media for reinforcing face-to-face networks and building bonding capital (Harris and Flouch, 2011a; Kim and Shin, 2016; Xu *et al*, 2013).

Research into digital activism in Wester Hailes in Edinburgh suggests that 'social networks online often merely recreate social networks offline' (Matthews, 2016, p432). It could be added that this might not necessarily be a bad thing; but the finding is in contrast to research into online neighbourhood networks in London (Harris and Flouch, 2011a). However, given the chance to consider the options, residents might be hesitant or show resistance. Factors uncovered in one US study included:

> 'inequality of access and fears that some neighbourhood residents might be left out (not democratic enough), concerns that social media would become the only communication outlet, expectations of residents that neighbourhood communication should be face to face, and perceptions of social media as being too intimate and, simultaneously, too impersonal for the neighbourhood context' (Johnson and Halegoua, 2014, p71).

In most cases, neighbourhood online networks have arisen organically from the initiative of one or a few residents (Williams *et al*, 2014). In low income neighbourhoods, developing

---

[4] The same applies to Squirrell's (2012) chapter on 'Virtual engagement', which makes extended reference to Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign.

social media-based networks is likely to be problematic without some form of community development (Harris and Flouch, 2012). Evaluating their potential in this respect, Harris and Flouch suggest that:

> 'Neighbourhood online networks can contribute to local quality of life by providing easily accessible, up to date information as well as citizen-led discussion and conversation. These roles are mutually-reinforcing, allowing coverage of topics from the most worthy of civic issues to frivolous gossip, which in turn reinforce face-to-face interaction' (Harris and Flouch, 2012).

Matthews however concludes that

> 'social media do not offer immediate opportunities for community development in deprived communities. While the technologies can clearly make banal engagement easier and cheaper, particularly with the widespread availability of such technology even in deprived neighbourhoods, achieving greater activist engagement is more difficult' (Matthews, 2016, p.433).

Critiques, counter-views, and non-use

The literature on social media and its impact has been predominantly positive: it can transform political and organisational structures and help people to challenge established hierarchies of power and communications. There is, however, a smaller – but growing – literature which is sceptical about and occasionally antagonistic towards these claims. At a macro level, there are those who argue that the original free, inclusive, principles of new technologies have been co-opted by neo-liberal agendas and by the large multi-national corporations (see *e.g.* Jarrett, 2008; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Roberts, 2014; Taylor, 2014; Banning, 2016; Skeggs and Yuill, 2016). Thus McChesney (2013) notes that

> 'monopolistic firms that have capitalised on the digital revolution have grown to world-historical proportions. In 2012, four of the ten largest US corporations in terms of market valuations, including number one and number three, were internet giants Apple, Microsoft, Google and AT&T' (p131).

Rather than, as Mason (2016) suggested, transforming capitalism into more egalitarian systems, new technologies have become a means for extending the reach of large international corporations and what is being played out is a battle between neo-liberal hegemonies and their potential to 'contribute towards developing a contemporary socialist hegemonic project' (Roberts, 2014, p188). Turner, quoting Hindman's (2009) study of democracy and the internet in the US, goes further and suggests that rather than fundamentally challenging established hierarchies, social media reinforces existing divides:

> 'Again and again, this study finds powerful hierarchies shaping a medium that continues to be celebrated for its openness. This hierarchy is structural, woven into the hyperlinks that make up the Web; it is economic, in the dominance of companies like Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft; and it is social, in the small group of white, highly

educated, male professionals who are vastly overrepresented in online opinion' (Hindman, 2009, p18-19. Cited by Turner, 2010, p136).

It has also been argued that new media has been used as a means of state and corporate surveillance of citizens and consumers respectively (in a neo-liberal context that deliberately blends the two); and contributes to the erosion of civil liberties (Pantazis and Pemberton, 2012).

At other levels social media has been criticised for:

- spreading false information (ProCon.org, 2011) and 'fake news' (Manjoo, 2016b)
- facilitating bullying through online posts (Juvonen and Gross, 2008)
- stimulating and publicising narcissism (Davenport *et al*, 2014)
- increasing the risk of increased isolation, 'atomisation', mental distress or 'Facebook Depression' (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011)
- spreading hate messages and encouraging hate crime (Awan, 2014).

It is important to recognise the need for balance in some of these debates. The SecDev Foundation (2016) for example notes that social media platforms

'can lower the bar for participation, enable lone wolves to embrace transnational extremism, facilitate recruitment and enforce fear and control. Social media can also be used to help track these individuals, analyse extremist narratives and combat them through joint initiatives by the government and private sector'.

As social media availability approaches ubiquity there is growing interest in why some people refuse to use, or opt out of using, social media. The (questionable) vernacular use of the term 'suicide' (see *e.g.* White, 2008) to dramatise the act of rejection has even reached the academy: one study describes closing a Facebook account as 'virtual identity suicide' (Stieger *et al*, 2013). Proponents of these technologies tend to attribute this to personal pathologies, not to any inherent problem with the technology. But quite apart from widely-publicised negative personal experiences of social network sites, research suggests that non-use and lapsed use can be a rational choice linked to 'excessive time spent online' or 'lack of interest' (Turan *et al*, 2013); socio-political reasons (Portwood-Stacer, 2012); lack of interest in 'social grooming' (Tufekci, 2008); and privacy (Gartner, 2011; Stieger *et al*, 2013; Bright *et al*, 2015). One study lists 'lack of motivation, poor use of time, preference for other forms of communication, preference for engaging in other activities, cybersafety concerns, and a dislike of self-presentation online' (Baker and White, 2011, p387).

Measuring impact

Some commentators recognise the need to go beyond the metrics of clicks, retweets and likes in the pursuit of impact evidence. As Hannah Taylor (2012) notes in her case study of a social media campaign:

'it is difficult to measure offline impact and to know what online activity might have inspired more widely in terms of longer-term social change' (p35).

Similarly, Phethean *et al* (2012) concede that 'further work and input is still required to understand the relationship between actions of intent on social media, and the resulting 'real' action occurring offline' (p6). Chung offers a basis with the three key metrics of: exposure ('reach', or the number of times contents were viewed), engagement (number of people who respond to a message), and insights (whether audience engagement is positive, neutral, or negative) (Chung, 2015, p115).

Systems to help users improve the quality of monitoring data, such as Facebook's *Insights*, are being developed. Clarke (2013) has used an example from a social media surgery to demonstrate use of *Insights* and how the 'reach' of a single post was far more extensive than the surgery participant assumed. The Klout system calculates a score for influence across a range of social network sites,[5] and Klout have indicated that they are already looking at ways of scoring 'sentiment' *(Fanucchi, 2015).*

*In the meantime, Ihm, u*sing the Twitter accounts of major US non-profit organisations, has developed and tested two network measures, designed to capture (i) two-way communication between organizations and stakeholders, and (ii) communication among stakeholders, which can develop into autonomous communities to support the organisation (Ihm, 2015).

Ihm's study may well usher-in a new period of work on systematic frameworks for evaluating the impact of social media activity in community and voluntary organisations. An important consideration will be the extent to which it proves to be applicable to smaller groups.

Concluding note

This chapter has summarised relevant literature and highlighted a number of issues that can be expected to be of interest or concern to community and voluntary organisations. Within these debates – between social media as a transformational or democratic force, a tool for protest, a managerialist device and a potentially malevolent force with accompanying challenges to the individual and to civil liberties – what stands out is the lack of research on the experiences of community organisations with social media. The primary research reported in the next chapter sets out to begin addressing this shortfall.

---

[5] For an example see Taylor (2012) p30.

This chapter presents findings and insights from the primary research outlined in chapter 2 above. Box 2 provides a key to the various sources of comments from respondents used in this chapter.

Box 2: Key to sources of quoted remarks

See Chapter 2 for a description of these sources.

EC Scoping interviews with experienced commentators
FG *F*ocus groups
S Survey respondents
TI Case study telephone interviews

How social media is seen in the community sector

Rationale for use of social media in the community sector

For many community organisations, the rationale for using social media is uncomplicated, as enumerated by one respondent in previous survey research:

'We use social media to share information and ideas, create and continue dialogue, respond to questions people have, offer people support, help to promote the work of others and ourselves and flag up activities and events… We know that what we share has been useful when people respond to it and we know we are building relationships when there is conversation online' (Anonymous respondent quoted by Roche, 2014, p6).

In addition to such benefits, respondents pointed to a few other ways in which the logic was compelling, either as part of the rationale for an initial organisational commitment, or retrospectively:

'It has allowed us to promote what the organisation does and engage with a wide range of people, not just customers'.

'Bit by bit we developed the capacity of residents to explain the story of what was happening locally, our voice was made audible'.

'On the whole it's positive for generating a sense of local community and kick-starting activities' *[TI].*

In some cases, specific benefits were put forward, such as the usefulness of Facebook for a volunteer centre:

'We post details of new volunteer roles, and add volunteer roles from the wider region. It tends to be new or urgent. There's not so much activity, but sharing

information and thereby engaging with a large number of people. It's the quickest and most efficient way of getting out information about new roles' *[TI]*.

This amounts to using social media ('Web 2.0') in a non-social way (as 'Web 1.0'), the point being that this makes perfect sense: Facebook enables the straightforward broadcasting of information to an audience that is wider – because of social media – and who are likely to make use of and share it (using Web 2.0).

For several case study respondents, the potential of social media was viewed primarily in relation to specific target groups:

'I believe we are not keeping up with a particular group of people especially the under 30 years age group'.

'What's important are the segments of the market that do not receive communications in the traditional formats'.

'Our main target group is older people who are less likely to use social media; but they have families, carers and volunteers who know them'.

'We haven't been able to connect effectively with the young people who will benefit directly [from the project], and also parents who are working and busy'.

'We need to connect with a wider, younger social-media-savvy group' *[TI]*.

Social inclusion and empowerment were seldom referred to in this research, but in just one instance a justification based on the democratic inclusiveness of the media was offered:

'Non-professionals can be influencers – that's a key point about social media. Social media empowers local residents to become influencers' *[TI]*.

In addition, one commentator noted the value of social media for some social housing tenants:

'In housing associations, a lot have got the idea of storytelling, as a way of dealing with the stigma of stereotypes, and finding that they can fight back with social media' *[EC]*.

Perceived benefits of social media for community organisations

Some case study respondents were very clear about the perceived benefits of using social media. One from a local development agency asserted that these technologies 'are now an integral part of our information and communication system, they are totally connected to any success we have'. Connections with other organisations and individuals are central to the way people think about the benefits:

'Reaching new audiences, creating evidence to show colleagues in other branches the value of using social media tools. Increased awareness of our presence and improved relationships/ new relationships with local organisations/ public sector' *[S]*.

'Forming partnerships' *[TI].*

'You make incidental connections – the power of these media includes being able more easily to connect with others' *[EC].*

One respondent referred to the value of the effort invested in a social media campaign to attract private sector partners: the subsequent development of a relationship with a recruitment agency resulted in network benefits that, over time, outweighed the cost.

Survey respondents who used social media were asked to choose and rank up to five uses from a suggested list of fourteen. Figure 4 below is generated from 35 useable responses and suggests fairly clear preferences. Outcome-related uses such as lobbying and petitions do not score highly; and neither does engagement ('involving others in discussion'). These respondents see social media as useful for profile-raising – general promotion and marketing, advertising events, showcasing achievements, and information-sharing were the highest scored uses. This could be seen as an affirmation of the use of social media in 'Web 1.0' mode.

Figure 4. Uses of social media
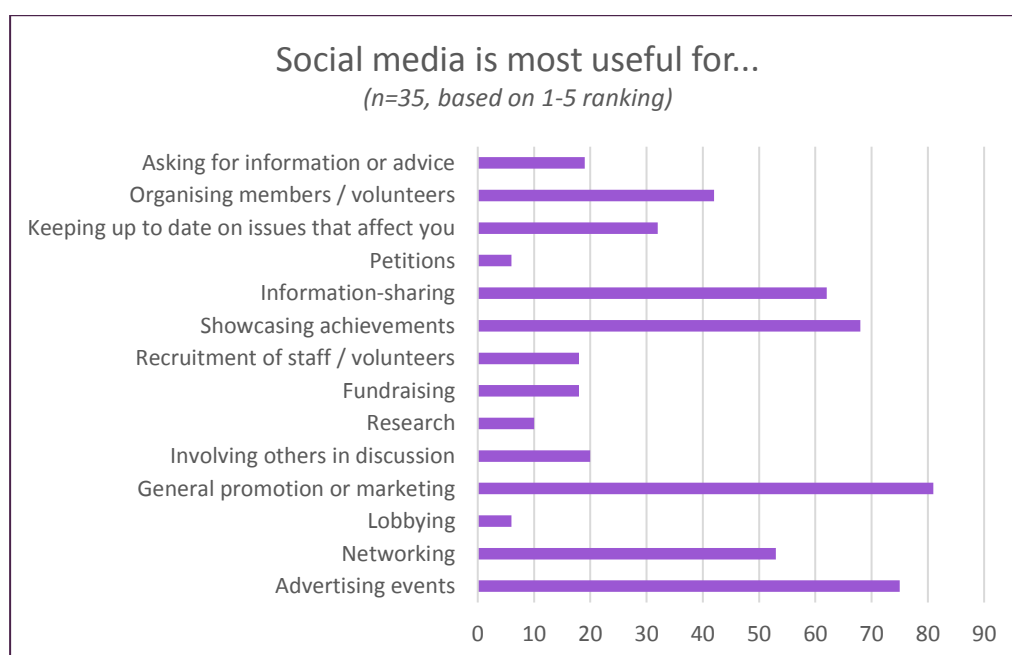
In an open question, respondents were asked 'What do you think have been the benefits of using social media, for your group or organisation?' Several responses confirmed the significance attached to raising awareness and the potential to use social media to attract attention. For example:

'Increase awareness of our organisation's activities and for networking with like-minded organisations'.

'Reach a wider audience'.

'Increased awareness of our presence' *[S].*

The language of promotion can be found throughout the responses, with terms and phrases like these:

‘Raise profile’

‘New audiences’

‘Promote our events’

‘Exposure’ *[S]*.

There was recognition of the potential to reach ‘a different target audience than alternative (more traditional) methods of publicising information’ and some respondents identified specific groups for whom social media was an effective channel:

‘Have allowed us to raise profile with non-traditional groups, has helped raise profile with district councillors and local MPs’.

‘Attracting internet-savvy younger people’.

‘We now have followers from all the major political parties who hadn't necessarily taken much interest in us before’ *[S]*.

The question also revealed some awareness that efforts may need to be fine-tuned:

‘Now trying to get more of the right followers, at the moment followers are not the people that we want to engage with at a grass roots level’ *[S]*.

One respondent remarked that ‘Feedback from users on social media is more valuable than feedback from conventional sources’. However, there was no indication as to why this was felt to be the case.

Several comments hinted at a sense of low-cost efficiency with these new media, through immediacy or by multiplying the benefits:

‘More immediate way of contacting people, easy way of saying thank you to funders, a good way to promote events’.

‘We can provide instant news of how we are working on our lottery-funded project’.

‘Great for sharing memories (particularly photos) of events and activities with community. Quick way of organising events/activities. Another way of keeping in touch with community members. Good way of sharing links to mutual interests’ *[S]*.

The questionnaire also invited respondents to describe any ‘specific successes or breakthroughs’ for their group or organisation, that could be attributed wholly or in part to use of social media. In a noticeable proportion of responses, there was a tendency to generalise. For example:

‘We've requested help with specific things and spread links about campaigns’.

‘More people heard about us than before’ *[S]*.

The point here is that even when specifically invited to do so, people find it hard to point to evidence of positive outcomes resulting from social media use. Impact, monitoring and evaluation are discussed at the end of this chapter.

The following examples were offered:

> 'We managed to fill the final place on a training course using Facebook. A small achievement maybe, but it meant a lot to us'.

> 'A parent posted a video of her child learning to cycle with us on Facebook. It attracted many views and resulted in many enquiries. As a result, we were able to launch a paid-for one-to-one tuition service (in addition to our free group classes which are grant-funded). If the grant funding was no longer available we could carry on offering a paid-for service. This activity has stopped being grant-dependent literally because of one Facebook post'.

> 'gathering 13,600 signatures (more than 9% of our entire city electorate) on a petition - both online (38 Degrees) and paper, reinforced by messaging across social media. This petition forced the city council to overturn its own City Solicitor's faulty legal advice and accede to our demand for a statutory repairs notice on a key, iconic listed building' *[S].*

Perceived negative aspects of social media

In telephone interviews, users as well as non-users spoke unprompted about negative aspects of online interaction. Some of this was related to lack of trust and to 'the narcissistic side' of social media:

> 'You get a lot of trivia also on Facebook. There's a degree of obsession. So much drivel… there is quite a lot. There's also something in there about showing off'.

> 'Social media can feel a bit insular, even claustrophobic at times' *[TI].*

One of the commentators wondered whether this feature might partially explain relatively low take-up:

> 'Is social media associated with individualism and self-promotion, and is that why it's problematic for some people in the sector?' *[EC].*

One respondent was highly critical of the kind of post exemplified as 'Share this if you like this baby or scroll down if you're heartless'. She noted that the injunction to 'Re-post if you care' – whatever the cause being proclaimed – makes assumptions about others' compassion and in fact suggests a lack of empathy on the part of the person posting *[TI].*

Other comments expressed a sense of anxiety over uncertain relationships in this space:

> 'It does bother me that what you post could be misinterpreted, there's a lot of suspicion and uncertainty'.

'There's a lot of fear of doing the wrong thing. Safeguarding and security issues; technical know-how; protocols; trust; behaviour… You hear a lot about permanence on social media' *[TI]*.

One respondent drew attention to the importance of discernment in individual use of social media, the need for individuals to recognise that it is a space where judgement and a sense of caution may be called for:

'The older people who use Facebook don't tend to post about their problems, they're very stoic. They post positive things and light things…. Older people also unfollow, systematically protecting themselves from persistent negativity' *[TI]*.

The reality of the virtual

There were observations about what might be called the reality of the virtual, as expressed separately by two respondents:

'The presence of some information on Facebook seems to make something more real and definite to people, more than just a poster or newsletter - a kind of authenticity'.

'It's an endorsement of something as real – if it's on Facebook it's happening. People would be less inclined to engage with something if it didn't exist on Facebook' *[TI]*.

This hints at facets of psychology well beyond the scope of the current study, to do with receptiveness to the personal immediacy of the medium and the ability to screen out other kinds of reality. The strong combination of the personal and the social, combined with the sense of affirmed reality, seems to contribute to a tendency to be positive at all costs, as noted by another respondent:

'People project such a positive image of themselves on social media, which is fine up to a point but it's not real life' *[TI]*.

This echoes a remark reported in the literature, in which a young person in poverty explains their defensiveness towards Facebook:

'Social networking promotes happy perfect lives, designer labels, going out, new clothes. You can't do this if you're poor. I avoid Facebook' (Breslin Public Policy, 2013, p10).

This research suggests that some community sector practitioners are ready to reflect on such issues, but there were no indications of a wider community sector debate.

Enthusiastic belief and scepticism

Some interviewees acknowledged a sense of insistent pressure to adopt social media, in spite of uncertainty over the likely benefits:

'We have nobody who has come to us as a consequence of using social media; or because they read a newspaper article. Word of mouth doesn't work for us either. They arrive through social services'.

Q. So for service users, why do you need social media?

'Because people keep telling me to' *[TI]*.

It seems likely that such pressure is felt both as a consequence of the positive profile of social media channelled through news sources, and from individual network contacts closer to hand. There were two kinds of response to this, which can be characterised as 'enthusiastic belief' and 'scepticism'. Thus one respondent said:

'You need a belief, everybody needs to buy into it, it's about enthusiasm. Talk to somebody who's made it work... Communicating with someone who is a couple of steps ahead, who can communicate that enthusiasm' *[TI]*.

Expert commentators also expressed belief:

'The more civic minded people there are using social media, the better for our democracy' *[EC]*.

But others may take more convincing:

'If I had more feedback about what it was doing… You can't say if it's working. I feel duty-bound to keeping doing it' *[TI]*.

And there was some evidence of the kind of robust scepticism and concern for efficiencies that has always characterised the community sector:

'We don't have the kind of dedicated resource that could make a difference. But I'm not convinced that investment in that resource would be more than a buzz that doesn't make a difference' *[TI]*.

How community organisations use social media

Case Study 1   What works in local social media broadcasting?

If community organisations use Facebook and Twitter to broadcast a range of content, including general local issues, they may be more effective in terms of generating use by residents than those that just post information about their specific organisation and activities.

As part of the research, in 2016 a content analysis was undertaken of social media traffic generated by four community-led change projects in the North West, Midlands and South East of England. All used Facebook on a regular basis with occasional use of Twitter and YouTube. The amount of content posted varied considerably, however. Participants in one area posted on a daily basis (particularly in the run-up to community events) while

others posted in 'short sharp bursts' general matters of local interest followed by periods of 'silence' of up to a month.

The rationale for using Facebook, as opposed to other social media formats was that 'it's easier to use, lots of people round here are on Facebook and they like to see things rather than just get (Twitter) text'. However: 'we only use [social media] to support the messages we are giving out face-to-face and in posters locally'.

Analysis suggests that the frequency of activity was less effective than content in terms of generating use by residents. One area only posted information about their specific organisation and its activities. The other three tended to post about general community interest issues: posting some organisational information but then generating other content from their local online and face-to-face networks.

This general interest approach generated four times as many followers (and likes) on Facebook and, where Twitter was used, three times more re-tweets than the group which only posted organisationally-specific information. See Bussu (2016) for a more detailed study of uses of social media in Big Local project areas.

Duration and frequency of use of social media

Survey respondents were asked 'How long has your group / organisation been using social media?' Two thirds of the organisations (39 out of 57 respondents) have been using it for two years or more.

Figure 5. 'How long has your group / organisation been using social media?'

Only recently	7
One year	11
2 years	15
3-5 years	17
Longer than 5 years	7
	57

Respondents were also asked about the organisation's frequency of use of social media. Typical use appears to be three times each week or more frequently: 81 per cent of respondents who answered this question indicated this. For a few, use was fortnightly, monthly or just 'occasionally'.

Figure 6. 'Thinking about the one or two social media platforms that you use most, how often would you say you use them?'

Several times a day	20
Daily or up to 3 times a week	28
Weekly	6
Fortnightly	1
Monthly	3
Occasionally	1
	59

Most respondents (36 out of 57) were 'experienced' users in that they used the media three times per week or more frequently *and* had been using it for two years or more.

Managing social media

It has been noted that 'the costs associated with account management can be considerable' (Waters and Feneley, 2013, p226). Various aspects of the way organisations adopt and exploit social media were referred to in this research. One of these is the use of tools like Hootsuite, that help people to manage and schedule their messages across various social network platforms. One respondent promoted this approach strongly, but another disagreed:

> 'It's a managerial planning approach to communicating, quite inauthentic. Scheduling is ok if you use it to start a conversation' *[TI]*.

A second concern relates to the fact that social media is open '24/7', as summarised by some commentators:

> 'Those who use social media a lot are starting to hit boundaries of privacy… It raises the question – is social media a conversation you are always part of, or an organisational tool? The ability of people to track others down is stronger, and there's a need to shut the world off. Good networkers give a lot of themselves, is it fair to expect that organisationally?'

> 'If you are on social media all the time, an enthusiast, there is the danger of getting trapped. It builds other people's expectations of instant responses so the risk is you are still on Twitter or whatever evenings and weekends. We tell staff to switch off – they are not at work all the time' *[EC]*.

An example was put forward from the case studies:

> 'One evening someone put up a link to a business and it was inappropriate use, it took 18 hours before it was spotted and removed. We don't manage our accounts outside of working hours' *[TI]*.

Respondents who remarked on this issue agreed that it is wise to try to resist the pressure:

'There are lots of misconceptions about the frequency with which stuff needs to be pumped out, you can get deceived and pressurised into trying to keep up with the pace generated by larger organisations, this perception of constant churn…' *[TI].*

A third, related concern is the potential for information overload. Are people put off by the constant powerful flow of information around them? One commentator's response was: 'Yes, but there are solutions – some tools, plus having a clear plan'. Another said that it is 'about whether or not people have the skills to manage the flow' and a third noted:

'I don't think it's about temperaments. People always think there's a communications overload. It's about finding your level' *[EC].*

Policies and strategies

Given some of the challenges discussed in this study, including issues of expertise and the technologies, the research explored views on whether community organisations should establish formal policies and clear strategies for the use of social media? Or should they just 'get stuck in and give it a go'?

Survey respondents were asked whether their group or organisation currently has, or has ever had, 'a written policy or strategy on social media use'? Twenty-six said yes and 44 said no.

Among the 36 'experienced' users (*i.e.* those who used the media three times per week or more frequently *and* had been using it for two years or more) just 14 said that their organisation has a written policy or strategy on social media use. This proportion (less than 40 per cent) does not suggest that there is a consensus on the importance of having such a policy in place.

Those 44 respondents who said that they did not have a policy in place were then asked, was it:

- consciously decided that a policy was not necessary?

- just something that hasn't got done yet?

- not something that anyone's thought about?

The results are shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7. No social media policy because…

consciously decided that a policy was not necessary?	4
just something that hasn't got done yet?	20
not something that anyone's thought about?	19
no response	1
	44

These figures do not suggest that people are rejecting the idea of having a policy for their group or organisation; but neither do they suggest that they find it something that is easy to justify or prioritise. It is also apparent that some organisations are able to encompass social media use in other policies that they have already developed:

'We have purposely decided not to have a separate social media policy - appropriate communication and use of the web are covered in existing policies. We may develop guidance to support staff, though we have found it's much easy *(sic)* to show people and talk them through it, and signpost to existing good guidance or support on the web' (Anonymous respondent quoted by Roche, 2014, p5).

The scale of the organisation is also likely to be a factor, as one commentator pointed out:

'In large voluntary and community organisations, different services will need their own accounts. You have managers looking at how to use social media within their role, which differs from managing social media for the organisation as a whole. There's potential for confusion, so it needs careful managing and policy' *[EC]*.

Survey respondents' comments confirm both the variety of practice and the sense of uncertainty. For example:

'We do have a strategy but it isn't a written one, it is all in my head'.

'We included social media use within our Internet use policy - but only to ensure that there wasn't excess of personal use within working time'.

'A severe lack of volunteers means this would not be high on our priority list!'

'Don't know where to start'.

'Our Twitter account is run by our sole employee and no-one else has access to it. As a new organisation we'd need to make a conscious effort to prioritise an activity which is not yet a priority for us' *[S]*.

Another comment hinted, apparently from bitter experience, at the risks of going without a policy, given 'the open nature of social media'. The respondent described a situation where

'certain other testosterone-laden colleagues, fired by misplaced self-belief, have used their own judgement to shoot their mouths off on Facebook and Twitter to blow up public controversies that caused us some temporary but significant damage. They were more interested in chest-beating and self-aggrandisement than achieving political gain for our cause... Social media's easy inclusiveness and democratic platform gave them a soapbox from which to be damaging to our overall cause and our previous community solidarity and group unity'.

The conclusion was unambiguous:

'With a collegiate approach, it seemed - and was - unnecessary to have a policy on social media. In hindsight… it was completely essential to have such a policy to guard

against lack of discipline in the easy mass forum of social media where everybody may think their opinion should be heard and transcends any other consideration' *[S]*.

In the case study interviews, respondents largely favoured having policies in place:

'It's common sense to have a policy. It's not a long policy, just a one-pager'.

'Our social media policy is an extension of existing conditions of work. You need to think very carefully about the context of what you write or say, think through the consequences'.

'It's not problematic. We set up policies in the first place because not everyone can separate their roles and accounts'.

'We do have some individual accounts but they have a series of guidelines for use. There is a choice for staff' *[TI]*.

One experienced user said 'No we don't have a policy. It's not something we've thought about,' and there was no indication that this approach had been problematic. A commentator in the scoping study summed up some of the nuances of this issue:

'If you start from having a policy it frightens people, it starts them off on the basis of 'what I can't do, what I mustn't do'. But you do need some kind of framework to get it right. Keep it light. There are people who need structures but they need them to be empowering not constraining. Social media does change the way you work' *[EC]*.

Further, the range of issues that can arise, from responsibility for 'corporate voice' to management of passwords, may need more planning time and thought than some feel able to give to it. One non-user said:

'I'm not using these issues to dismiss social media. There's a need for knowledge and understanding of the technology issues; steps and procedures need to be in place' *[TI]*.

Organisational 'fit' and capacity

Commentators reflected on widely differing levels of take-up of social media in the community sector, and some attempted to rationalise this:

'You meet some real stars who are in quite unlikely places. It's difficult to categorise where they are in terms of the community sector. But yes there are different speeds of take up'.

'It can depend on established connections between the group and, say, a community centre or CVS'.

'Hierarchies try to control social media. Like the NHS. You can get this effect in tenants' and residents' organisations' *[EC]*.

For organisations working with specific user groups or in particular areas, the case for investing time and energy in social media may be harder to justify. In the preliminary focus groups exploring issues of ethnicity and social networks, participants in Cumbria made the point that internet access is still slow and expensive in many rural areas (Harris, 2013). This point was re-asserted by commentators in the scoping study:

'If it [social media] is not core to an individual's life then it just does not get used in rural organisations'.

'In rural areas there's not much of it going on, partly because of poor broadband. People say, what's the point, we haven't got broadband anyway. Agencies in rural areas are reluctant to use social media because of poor infrastructure'.

'To be honest not a huge number of members really use Twitter. It tends to be high profile individuals in larger rural organisations – especially housing associations – that engage with Twitter and will re-tweet our material' *[EC]*.

Another commentator felt that in some cases, differential rates of interest and adoption could also be explained by (a) generally lower use by age, because of greater reluctance with the technology; and (b) association with 'traditional council set-ups and officers', and this extends to some traditional organisations such as some residents' groups.

The users, non-users and lapsed users in the case study sample all referred to aspects of their organisation's capacity to exploit social media. Time and expertise were the two main challenges, two crucial resources that often overlap. Expertise is discussed later in this chapter. One non-user listed the main barriers as follows:

1. We're busy.
2. We've not got the time or skills to get out of our relative comfort zone.
3. We need a readiness to accept the technology (*i.e.* dealing with off-putting systems) *[TI]*.

A successful user of social media in a CVS offered this conclusion from their experience:

'The biggest learning is, you've got to put the time in' *[TI]*.

It was also apparent that some users have experienced a decline in use, related to their organisational capacity:

'The challenge now is in terms of capacity, we're using it less than before, but I'm convinced of the benefits'.

'There's been a decline in interactivity with the young people on the Facebook page. A member of staff left and it went into a tailspin for a period of time. The conversation declined, contact with the young people is very much face-to-face now, that's how it happens' *[TI]*.

None of the interviewees whose use had declined expressed disappointment in the 'offer' of social media, although there were issues about the awkwardness of the technology, which are discussed later in this chapter. Where there was a decline in use, this was typically attributed to the organisation's capacity to exploit the media. This could be as stark as not being able to prioritise it:

> 'When we have an event to publicise or something to announce, I forget about it [social media]. We don't get any further because it doesn't get prioritised. Social media can't fight its way to the top of our priority list. It's still too awkward' *[TI]*.

One commentator, with extensive experience working with local groups, confirmed this reality:

> 'For some groups it's just that other stuff gets in the way' *[EC]*.

One respondent seemed disappointed with the level of engagement achieved, and anticipated reducing their time investment:

> 'It's a time issue. We will probably use social media less if it continues to be 'flat' in terms of engagement' *[TI]*.

Case study 2   Social media and organisational capacity

Even with a positive approach and commitment, some community organisations find it difficult to make use of social media consistently, because of lack of capacity or an awkward 'fit' with the ways in which they work.

Zing is a community development trust working across three peripheral estates in Northern England. Staff are 'active users' who are 'convinced of the benefits':

> 'The challenge now is in terms of capacity. We're using it less than before'.

They have been using social media since 2013, when they worked with a marketing company to draw up plans for a 6 month awareness-raising campaign. Subsequently, use of social media became part of a broader strategy and it was felt that it played a role in raising the organisation's profile across the city with a new range of stakeholders: 'Social media was an effective part of the overall campaign'.

A volunteer was then appointed in a marketing and business development role, which included managing the social media, for example scheduling tweets. This then became a paid role when grant-funding was found. However, 9 months into the 12 month contract, the volunteer left and the organisation does not have the capacity to maintain the social media presence.

> 'I've tried and not succeeded in getting others to post but it's time, capacity, it's not the focus of people's jobs, not prioritised, also there's a lack of confidence'.

How might an organisation of this kind 'prioritise' its use of social media? It may be difficult to justify that without evidence of impact:

> 'There is a bit of blind faith that it's making a difference… We're not doing any analysis of what happens. But we do get engagement, enquiries, comments, we do engage with people. There are people who pick up and re-tweet what we say. It did feel like, when it was a six month campaign, social media was playing a part'.

Staff are very conscious of the reasons for and effects of reduced involvement in social media:

> 'The fact that we're doing it less, it's definitely about capacity… When there was more capacity, there were more conversations. New people do follow us but the numbers are much smaller'.

Taken together, these reflections raise questions about where there is a natural 'fit' for social media in some kinds of organisation, while others find it more awkward. One user illustrated this clearly, and was reinforced by one of the commentators:

> 'If you were speaking to national charities you would get examples of fundraising. It's harder if you're local and it's harder if you're not a single-issue charity but working across several issues' *[TI]*.

> 'If they're young greens in the transition movement that's one thing, if they're a traditional group working at local level that's another… In online campaigning, social enterprise, the transition movement, people are very innovative… Elsewhere you have *ad hoc* traditional groups with minimal support using whatever their client group is comfortable with' *[EC]*.

When specialist knowledge is called for, it presents a recurring issue for community organisations and groups: how to invest in that specialism, and in sharing the knowledge across the organisation, which will typically be small and already stretched? Several respondents mentioned Facebook pages and other accounts that had been set up by a long-departed volunteer. In one case an interviewee, a lapsed user, remarked ruefully: 'I think it has fallen into disuse'. But as one user argued,

> 'Without voluntary or intern expertise, it won't become embedded as part of what the organisation does easily and sustainably' *[TI]*.

Personal or organisational? Tensions in the use of social media

There are tensions between the use of personal and organisational social media accounts. These reflect the nature of the technology, as one case study respondent observed:

> 'With social media you could represent your organisation in a corporate way, but it's still personal technology' *[TI]*.

Survey respondents were asked: 'Thinking now about your group or organisation's social media activity: is it managed from a personal (individual) account?'

Figure 8. Use of personal social media accounts

	Users	'Experienced' users	Lapsed / non- users
Yes, several	12	9	0
Yes, just one	3	0	2
No, it's the organisation's account	39	27	0
Not sure / Can't say	5	0	2
	59	36	4

Just fifteen respondents used personal accounts for their group or organisation's social media activity, with 39 having organisational accounts. Among the 36 'experienced' users (*i.e.* those who use the media three times per week or more frequently *and* have been using it for two years or more) some 27 (75 per cent) were using organisational accounts, with just nine using personal accounts for their organisation.

Figure 9. Using personal or organisational social media accounts: 'experienced' users

27	using organisation account
8	using several personal accounts
0	using only one personal account
1	using a mix of personal and organisational accounts
36	

The predominant use of organisational accounts by experienced users could be taken to suggest a sense of good practice, acknowledging boundary and accountability issues, although it is not clear-cut. Some of the comments reinforce the uncertainty and variety of practice:

'We do have some now obsolete accounts set up by former members of staff using personal accounts that we can't now disable'.

'I have a few Facebook groups for different things... and a personal one too' *[S]*.

'You see smaller organisations where people use their own personal accounts and definitely see a difference, they recognise the need to get some kind of presence on social media, even if just broadcasting, that's enough'.

'There's an enormous divide between smart individual use and organisational use' *[EC]*.

In other cases a sense of slightly fraught confusion was expressed:

'I'm unsure of the account, the wider staff team haven't had training and Management don't know how it operates internally' *[S].*

The case study interviews helped to explore these challenges in more depth, often suggesting that expectations of a straightforward process were frustrated:

'When we started out, we set up personal accounts just so we could get going. It was just lack of knowledge about how to set up an organisational account and the pressing need to get going'.

'We need expert support to migrate our Facebook account to an organisational account. It's so hard to get your head round. It shouldn't be, it should be easy' *[TI].*

Difficulties can arise from the ways in which accounts are set up, often by volunteers or interns:

'The person who set it up used my personal details - this should not have been done'.

'The login details are secret: I never know whether I'm posting as me or as the organisation' *[TI].*

And even one of the most successful users referred to historical problems:

'One person was dismissed and we've had a couple of close shaves on political grounds' *[TI].*

Nonetheless, this particular organisation has a clear strategy encompassing:

- an emphasis on organisational accounts
- a clear policy
- consent for staff to use personal accounts.

Other respondents also expressed satisfaction with the arrangements they have in place:

'People can use their personal accounts, I don't have a problem with that, we ask them to link to the organisation's account'.

'I'm very happy with the way organisational and personal accounts are set up. I wouldn't want to have to use my personal Facebook account for work. It's important to see the distinction between the person and the work persona. I can't see us changing this. Facebook doesn't like people having false profiles but there is a case in the professional world' *[TI].*

Survey respondents were asked what they see as the advantages and disadvantages of running a group or organisation's social media activity from a personal account. Comments confirmed some of the complexities:

'The organisation may lose control of the account if that person leaves, personal posts may inadvertently get mixed with organisational posts. The difficulty is that

some platforms (*e.g.* Facebook and LinkedIn) require access through a personal account'.

'Personal accounts reflect a risk to the security of the organisation'.

'Operating under group activity does allow individuals some privacy and protection too' *[S]*.

'Often it raises the question, whose is the voice of the organisation? Are people expected to differentiate between their personal contacts and organisational contacts?' *[EC]*.

Several respondents noted the advantage of a personal style in communication, but it was also pointed out that in a small organisation 'the organisational page is in effect very personal' *[S]*. This comment is a reminder that it makes sense to consider different approaches to this question for different platforms: some organisations might have a group Facebook page but be using individual Twitter accounts, both highly effectively. One commentator from a national organisation noted:

'We do encourage people to use some personal interest information on Twitter. It just makes them seem more approachable' *[EC]*.

As for the rationale for choice, one survey respondent offered the following thoughts on the use of personal accounts:

'Pros: Fosters personal relationships. Personal approach makes individuals in community feel valued & cared about.

Cons: The organisation gets lost in personal tweets, etc. so it doesn't really raise its online presence. Personal contacts unconnected with the organisation aren't interested in its news' *[S]*.

Commentators saw advantages in people taking personal responsibility for their use of social media on behalf of their organisations:

'Finding people – it depends on the people, not on the kind of organisation, it comes from personal inclination'.

'We might need to know more about how those with different temperaments use social media – those with networking inclinations, comfortable with collaborative and horizontal ways of working; and those more comfortable in a hierarchical structured context…' *[EC]*.

Another experienced user remarked:

'I don't recommend either. I like the simplicity of an organisational account, it makes it easier for people to interact with you. There's an argument that you get more reach with a personal account. With Facebook you can have groups and lots of

individual accounts, with lots going on. With smaller voluntary groups, people tend to prefer not to use their personal accounts' *[TI].*

Networking: 'audience', broadcasting, engagement and relationship building

Case study respondents spoke about different audiences for different platforms, although some saw their contacts more as 'connections' rather than 'audience'. It was noted that an organisation's audience is not usually defined by social media:

'We see about 600 people a year. About 20% are on Facebook' *[TI].*

Another pointed out that because social media has an instant effect, 'you can become complacent about it. We have a much bigger audience than is represented by social media'. Nonetheless, there are expectations that social media will help to increase that audience, and one of the commentators felt that:

'The biggest problem is that groups think that the audience is already there and they don't have to build it. But some people really understand that it's about conversation and takes time' *[EC].*

One interviewee referred to the concept of the 'invisible audience',[6] noting:

'people are seeing stuff but may not be doing anything about it so you don't know if they've been reached or affected or engaged. Then people will turn up at meetings and you ask how they found out and they say well I saw it on Facebook or whatever' *[TI].*

Case Study 3: Using social media to sustain a small local network

Facebook can be used in modest, effective ways to help sustain a small local network of people who share a common focus.

St Jude's is a church and community centre in the suburbs of a Midlands city. The local area contains both relatively affluent owner occupied properties and a large local authority housing estate. Their use of social media is characterised by an informal approach. Core activities at the centre are social events: a pensioners' club, pre-school and family sessions and drop-ins. For St. Jude's online activity is an extension of that social focus. In their survey response they noted that social media 'fosters personal relationships':

'Personal approach makes individuals in community feel valued & cared about… A little bit of gentle online banter - again helps to build a little bit of community spirit and get to know people'.

---

[6] Research has suggested that social media users underestimate the number of people they reach 'by a factor of four' (Bernstein *et al*, 2013).

The emphasis is very much on using these technologies to reinforce face-to-face relationships and confirm the sense of mutual support and interest.

> 'Social media is useful for keeping in touch on an individual level, reinforcing what is said in the church. For instance an older person – a member of congregation - was very upset about the migrant situation and had made a comment on their own Facebook page, which stimulated conversation which led in turn to an appeal in the church. The poor PA system meant that this wasn't well-heard; but it was re-iterated on the church Facebook pages'.

Facebook is particularly useful when it comes to events:

> 'I work with older people. Through Facebook I have organised a couple of trips to a local tearoom for afternoon tea by sharing their Facebook page. This generated interest very quickly. Older people not on Facebook were told about the event by those who were and were keen to join in so that they did not miss out. It was a very quick way of organising an outing.'

Participants use the media themselves to reinforce the network:

> 'After events, people do post pictures, for example of trips, community BBQ… sharing memories reinforces the shared experience'.

This kind of use is not about marketing the organisation, nor is it a systematic device for organisational coherence:

> 'It's mostly sharing nuggets of information, it's not explicitly about generating conversations. If it's kept light, it works in terms of keeping the network going'.

It was also recognised that connections can easily be established with people beyond the primary constituency:

> 'We attract people who are not local at all but interested in the issues I pick up' *[TI]*.

Two commentators felt that the use of social media for fundraising, by establishing reliable sympathetic connections, was very much overlooked:

> 'The big area with much more scope for community and voluntary organisations to be using social media is in terms of direct fundraising, for example building content while engaging people to share time or money – building a constituency and tapping it'.

> 'A lot more could be done, people should be fundraising with a mobile or they're missing a trick' *[EC].*

Several commentators were critical of groups and organisations which use social media mostly for *broadcasting*:

'Social media is not meant to be for broadcasting, there is a lot of it but hopefully it's decreasing'.

'Broadcasting can harm your reach' *[EC]*.

Another sought to explain why this happens among some groups:

'They're aware of the social dimension but often not able to invest the time or energy in networking' *[EC]*.

The commentators certainly felt this was an important issue for consideration, and views varied:

'Using social media for broadcasting works if you're Coca Cola. When you're a community group and you need people to know there are places available on a free course or there's a room for hire, you have to resist the temptation to broadcast, you'll not build a new audience unless you try in a new way, your audience won't grow'.

'On its own broadcasting is not a bad thing. The technology allows sharing information and creating a record of progress and change – but you'd want to see it used also for building relationships and trust'.

'Groups need to appreciate that it's about social capital and networking… Not seeing their mission in a 19th century hierarchical way, but that communications and relationships are a key part of fulfilling their mission and keeping it under review' *[EC]*.

By contrast, only one case study respondent touched on the issue of broadcasting, observing from extensive experience:

'From the group or organisation perspective, they tend to think of social media as a channel to share information about what they're doing' *[TI]*.

While the survey findings seem to confirm this - with respondents seeing social media as most useful for general promotion and marketing, advertising events, showcasing achievements, and information-sharing - in practice it was clear that some users have put a considerable amount of thought into their social media use for *engagement*:

'The original purpose was for reaching people and raising profile, mainly Facebook for engaging. When we tweet, it's mainly for stakeholders. There are blurred edges… Who are we trying to engage with? On Twitter we're more likely to be engaging with professionals and influencers than through Facebook; whereas our customers are more likely to be looking at and liking our Facebook page' *[TI]*.

It was pointed out that the use of social media for mobilising people 'is very powerful' *[EC]* (see also Case study 4). This commentator remarked on the potential to get 'a broader range of voices than previously':

'The police and tenants' meetings are now better attended after live-tweeting which opened up the floor and challenged the agenda. Live-tweeting breached the defences. You can get a big shift in the perception of priorities' *[EC].*

Going beyond engagement, the use of social media for *relationship building* was of paramount importance to the commentators:

'Social media gives you the power to publish but it's also about developing relationships and that involves trust' *[EC].*

Although the case study interviewees did not reflect on this aspect, other commentators reinforced the point in various ways, for example:

'Relationship building gives the best value from social media. You find who is on a similar wavelength to you'.

'It's about building relationships and getting something back. Not just telling people what you do, but tapping into their expertise'.

'Groups do tend to struggle to get the point about relationship building. It can be difficult in social housing'.

'You need to invest energy in building audiences and generating conversations' *[EC].*

The focus groups illustrated that there can be clear cultural differences in approaches to social networks, suggesting that there are ethnic characteristics in the use of social media to help build relationships. Among members of the Nepalese community in Carlisle, use of social technologies was admittedly cautious and applied to re-assert their culture of mutuality. At the same meeting, in sharp contrast, an individualistic culture was described by participants who originated from east European countries. One claimed that in his (Polish) culture,

'people are in their social networks for personal benefit'.

Another expressed this culture as meaning:

'you are only important in the case we need you' *[FG].*

These participants said that their use of social media reflected this approach, implying that levels of trust were weak and therefore community groups would have to work hard at this aspect of their social media use.

Case Study 4: Using social media for local action

Social media, integrated with other digital technologies, can be a powerful communication tool for local civic action. It can be used very efficiently to inform and mobilise residents.

Camberwick is an urban area in the south east of England undergoing substantial regeneration and investment in improved transport links and infrastructure. About five

---

years ago, a number of local residents felt that they were being excluded from planning processes and decision making and decided to take action.

Local activist Caroline puts a lot of emphasis on the use of online and database technologies to support the interests and involvement of local people:

'In my area there was a lot of hoo-ha about transport and traffic, there was a petition and we started with a list of about 100 email addresses… In the local area (42 streets) we've now got 1,200 email addresses, approximately 10 per cent of the adult population. These I have concentrated on knowing which street people are in, so they are indexed by street. I have about 80 per cent in my street, but I'm very conscious that it is not ubiquitous so I get people to talk to others in case'.

In total the group has a list of about 3,000 email addresses, now supplemented with 4,600 Twitter followers and 1,600 on Facebook. An action group was set up in 2005:

'Within weeks, one member sent a digitised picture of *[specific local amenity]* when it was originally built, which I sent round to the email contacts. This changed people's perception of what the building and surrounding buildings could look like. Using the image was crucial in recruiting people to help change the vision for the area'.

'I developed a process of producing bite-sized information – morsels - about planning and development issues, put out in small email messages. Also a newsletter for some time, but I stopped that because it gets in the way. The email list has been a low-level tech connection with thousands of people. I've been using Twitter and Facebook for five years. The way I was doing it before was with a website which is an archive for people to brief themselves. The website and email were always deeply inter-linked. Then I started using Facebook to post the bite-sized morsels… More interaction goes on on Facebook and the conversations can go on without me'.

The group makes concentrated use of digital technologies for local information and communication in order to enhance the vigilance of residents, monitor planning and challenge unwanted developments. Caroline claimed that the social media campaign had contributed to success in attracting new regeneration money to the area. It is not necessarily about building relationships or growing social capital:

'It's about activating and mobilising residents to be more alert to what is happening locally'.

She goes on to stress the fundamental significance of the linked technologies:

'We couldn't have existed without these media, because it means we can communicate with a wide-enough group of people in a timely manner at low cost

> with minimal resources. The information system wouldn't be possible without the technology – the reach that we've got, and the contact base…
>
> 'Social media has made it possible to keep in contact with people who've come out of the woodwork because of an issue and would otherwise have gone back in again'.

Online and/or face-to-face?

For local community groups and organisations, face-to-face engagement is often seen as fundamental. Many are based in community centres or run drop-in sessions which thrive on programmed, coincidental or serendipitous encounters. Respondents spoke about the ways in which social media can augment and strengthen these face-to-face connections:

> 'The (face-to-face) conversations are essential... The online stuff is only meaningful because of the face-to-face conversations'.
>
> 'A lot of people interact face-to-face in the first place and then go to social media to consolidate these relationships'.
>
> 'If the older people who use Facebook weren't connected face-to-face with those who aren't, it wouldn't work' *[TI].*

For one group working on neighbourhood planning issues, there was an emphasis on having 'some kind of online presence' to follow up on any first contacts made, for example at a meeting or street fair. Another respondent distinguished between the main platforms:

> 'On Twitter you don't get so much face-to-face engagement as a consequence but with Facebook, you get plenty of face-to-face with people who have been into the centres, or contacts of people we know who join us on Facebook after we've met them face-to-face' *[TI].*

**Main reasons for non-use of social media**

Survey respondents who had indicated that their organisations were non-users or lapsed users of social media were offered a suggested list of eleven reasons for non-use (with the option to add others).[7] They were invited to rank those that applied in their case. The results are shown in the table below.

---

[7] This list was compiled after reviewing previous studies and through telephone interviews with two known lapsed users.

Figure 10. Main reasons for non-use

Main reasons for non-use
(Ranked responses from 9 respondents)
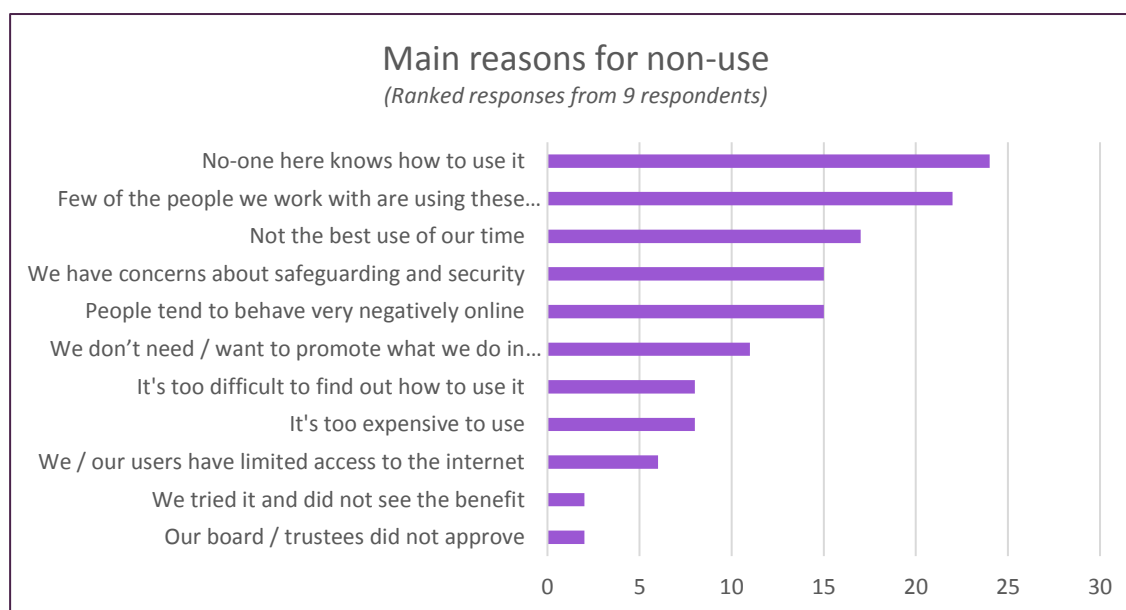
While this is a very small sample, it suggests that there could be a couple of dominant reasons for non-use ('No-one here knows how to use it' and 'Few of the people we work with are using these media'); and three others that should be taken into account ('Not the best use of our time', 'concerns about safeguarding and security', and 'People tend to behave very negatively online').

These results may also suggest that two possible reasons for non-use ('Our board / trustees did not approve', and 'We tried it and did not see the benefit') could be insignificant. However, given other findings from this study, the last of these would certainly merit further testing.

Survey research with non-users or lapsed users is inevitably challenging, but there is a strong case for future research with this group because the findings could have broad significance in helping to understand the ways in which the community sector does or does not exploit technology.

Case study 5   Experiences of two lapsed users

Lapsed use of social media is not necessarily about lack of interest or dismissal of the potential benefits. It can be explained at least partly by lack of time and capacity, and the challenges of using the technology.

The Langbury Community Centre in the north of England has used Twitter and Facebook in the past 'for a very short period of time'. Angela, one of a small staff team, said:

'The member of staff who set it up left the organisation and the expertise was not passed on… I feel it would be worthwhile our getting to grips with using social media, but time (and expertise) is the problem'.

Angela feels that they definitely are missing out, and the motivation and pressure to exploit social media comes from being 'barely visible - we need to market ourselves quickly':

> 'We are extremely under-resourced, we have to generate a lot of our income, partly because it's not a low-income area. We haven't got sufficient resources to do our own marketing'.

Angela reflected on the twin challenge of lack of time and the need for expertise:

> 'The accounts were set up wrongly, we still have the Facebook page but nobody uses it… We don't have sufficient skills. It's about use of time – about being able to prioritise investment in something that would offer perceived benefit in the longer term'.

Farnsey Road Community Association has also used Facebook in the past but no longer does so, and also had a negative experience with staff or volunteers moving on. The main reason given in their survey response was that 'no-one here knows how to use it'. According to one member of staff, Helen, this is largely to do with expertise:

> 'It's about skills, you do need the basic technology but that's not expensive, it's having the skills and know-how. It looks daunting'.

In contrast to the Langbury Centre (above), Helen does not feel under particular pressure to use social media, because the centre is well-used:

> 'But there are other things we could, perhaps should be doing, also we need to market and target people for our satellite premises… I think we're missing out, I just think that more and more people, especially the younger generation use it a lot and it's part of their lives'.

In addition to the need for expertise, Helen felt there is a problem to do with 'the time and commitment needed to keep updating and posting information'. The individual who set up their original Facebook account did so while on a placement: she went away, but is now employed by the centre so may pick it up again. Helen is 'very keen to see this happen'.

Technology, expertise and impact

Is the technology itself a barrier?

Facebook and Twitter are the most consistently used social media platforms. Almost all the respondents who answered the survey question about platforms used both, either occasionally or consistently. There was a degree of popularity with three other platforms – Linked In, YouTube and Google+ – and use of blogs.

Figure 11. Social media platforms used 'consistently' or 'occasionally'
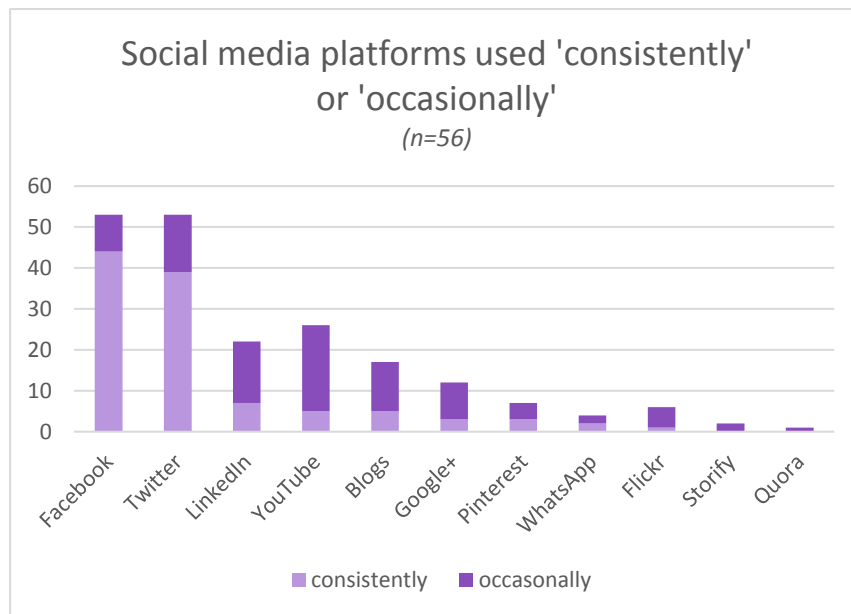
There are important differences between the two most popular platforms (Phethean *et al*, 2015), as several respondents noted:

'Twitter, it's comparatively difficult to use and more technical, and the audience reflects this'.

'It's much more radical, politically, on Twitter than on Facebook'.

'Twitter will not ever become an accepted channel for residents on estates… Facebook is much more approachable, easier to access. Most residents don't have computers at home but they do have internet access and smartphones'.

'Some people just get Twitter – it's global eavesdropping – but it took me a while to get it. Facebook is about reaching people'.

'We use Facebook for befriending volunteers and engaging potential volunteers. We encourage people to friend us. On Twitter we connect with stakeholders, promote activities' *[TI].*

Both of the common platforms were widely criticised:

'It's complicated sometimes in Facebook when I forget where I am'.

'There's a lack of confidence. Twitter can be quite intimidating'.

'People get tripped up by Facebook because it's confusing. Using Facebook for an event is very confusing'.

'Facebook is quite complex'.

'It's complicated technology and it changes. Facebook is frustrating'.

'Twitter, I had no idea what to put in it, I didn't have a clue' *[TI].*

One respondent felt the need to ensure that other platforms were also covered:

'I've got to get into Instagram, I'm discovering there are audiences that don't use Facebook or Twitter' *[TI]*.

However, one of the commentators felt that:

'the danger is that some organisations feel they have to use a range of social media rather than concentrate on one or two and then don't have the time to do it well' *[EC]*.

It became apparent that in organisations with experienced users, as well as among non-users and lapsed users, the complexity of the technology could be a challenge:

'The technology: it is difficult, it's not necessarily intuitive, the learning curve is pretty long for most people. I think the learning curve is much longer than the period where you find any kind of tangible benefit, that's why we see so many people dropping out'.

'I've tried to demystify it but it's not resulted in others using it' *[TI]*.

With regard to Twitter, the technical complexity has been acknowledged as a problem by the company's chief executive (BBC News, 28 October 2015). By contrast, one respondent who was a user but speaking on behalf of a neighbourhood organisation that was not yet using social media, regarded the technology as 'straightforward: it's not a challenge' *[TI]*. When asked whether they felt that the barrier was the complexity of the technology, or lack of competence of the individuals, one interviewee replied: 'We blame both, it's both' *[TI]*.

The value of using visual images to engage people was stressed by one of the experienced users and reinforced by one of the commentators:

'Using the image was crucial in recruiting people to help change the vision for the area. Graphics are useful for helping people to see what can be achieved. I rarely put out Facebook posts or tweets without graphics. We do put up photos as well' *[TI]*.

'A lot of people struggle with the relationship of digital and literacy, so be as visual as much as you can. YouTube is massive, for example young people, using YouTube rather than Google or Wikipedia to find out about something, because a short video works better for them. So tell stories using video. People are using Instagram a lot now. Young people are showing off a lot on Vine. We live in a world where people who make policies do so by documents, and their policy has an impact on people who don't use documents' *[EC]*.

However, another respondent felt that material on YouTube 'gets forgotten':

'People forget what they put there and anyway it can be difficult to find, for others' *[EC]*.

The need for support and expertise

As has been noted, community practitioners seem to accept the rationale to adopt social media, and/or they acknowledge peer or media pressure to do so. But the technology is widely described as awkward to use. So the challenge becomes one of expertise.

Survey respondents were asked 'Does your organisation / group have any ongoing expert support (provided informally or formally) in the use of social media?'

The number of respondents who say they do not have expert support is 41, more than twice the number (18) who say that they do have support. In telephone interviews, several reported struggling in this respect:

> 'We did have a member of staff for 9 months who managed our social media (amongst other things) but the funding for this post was short-term'.

> 'We don't have sufficient skills. One of them went on a course but it wasn't adequate. They found Twitter off-putting' *[TI]*.

One commentator felt that there are risks in depending on expert support:

> 'The challenge is that professionals stand in front of their clients… They tell you that the clients are scared of the technology, and it's true they can be scared of it. But people are more likely to be scared of a particular approach to technology. They can be put off by the approach as much as by the technology itself. So both process and technology can be off-putting' *[EC]*.

Another noted that 'there are fewer [community] workers around these days' *[EC]*, hence support in general is harder to come by.

Expertise and the development of skills and confidence are related to available time, which is often the most scarce resource of all:

> 'There is plenty of expertise but very little time' *[TI]*.

> 'If we did not employ a PR consultant this would not happen' *[EC]*.

Impact, monitoring and evaluation

Discussing organisations' sense of impact in using social media, one case study respondent noted that community organisations often feel demoralised about what they see as 'low response levels'. However:

> 'It's not that minimal: compare it with traditional leafleting for a community meeting. This kind of community action translates readily into social media' *[TI]*.

Uncertainty about impact was expressed in both practical and hypothetical senses:

> 'If we felt that we were getting huge attention we would be using it. We're saying *maybe* that's something that would work; we're not saying that's something we *should* be doing. We'd put more effort in if there was a compelling case'.

'We'd want to schedule tweets weekly according to a monthly plan. I don't know if that would be better, because we don't have evidence' *[TI].*

One commentator felt that some conflict between the encouraging rhetoric surrounding social media and the lack of systematic evidence was 'inevitable' and acknowledged that 'we make an assumption that it's beneficial'. Nonetheless, their view was that:

'It's happening: and it might be better to make the case that it's detrimental not to get involved' *[EC].*

At the same time, there was an appreciation of why some organisations are reluctant to keep investing time and effort:

'It is hard for people to see what they get back from their investment in social media… It's an issue of capacity and time and working out what is core to the organisation and not seeing a return where they have tried, and then thought – this is not working for us, given the time' *[EC].*

The questionnaire included separate questions about whether organisations' use of social media was monitored and whether it was evaluated. Digital media are known for the relative ease with which monitoring can be carried out, and with social media there is a range of options that appear to be readily used.

Figure 12. Counting social media reactions and interactions

No. of respondents (n=59) who say they count the number of:	
followers or friends	52
likes	44
views	39
visitors	37
comments	32
re-tweets	31

When asked whether they evaluate their use of social media, a clear majority say that they do not.

Figure 13. Do you evaluate your use of social media?

Do you evaluate any aspect of your organisation's / group's use of social media?	
Yes	18
No	41
n=	59

Survey respondents' comments hint at recognition that potential insight might emerge from evaluation, while also suggesting a lack of distinction between monitoring and evaluation:

> 'Looking at types of followers we are able to target sections of the community who don't follow us'.

> 'We monitor the number of tweets on quarterly reporting but I'm not sure to what purpose'.

> 'Which messages are most successful in terms of views / shares, time of day and so on'.

> 'It is something that should be done but isn't due to time constraints!' *[S].*

One case study respondent argued that the options for assessing and demonstrating impact are not as weak as is sometimes supposed, with a potential market for a practical tool:

> 'Twitter and Facebook are now actually quite good, for example Facebook Insights can be used for extracting who your audience is, timing and so on. It's possible to extract this information in the context of what you are doing as an organisation. Using Twitter Analytics gives you a much better idea of the invisible audience, it gives a number of impressions, it's about reach. If you wanted to evaluate you couldn't do much without this kind of data. But it's a bit impractical to expect people to spend time doing this with their data. There is a gap to provide a tool to help people' *[TI].*

Other telephone interviewees were clear about the need to go beyond the arithmetic of likes and re-tweets:

> 'We need to monitor not just the level of engagement but also the *value* of engagement'.

> 'Evaluation – it's so vast, you've got to capture your data as you go along. It's enormous, a massive task, I do it on a very rough and ready scale, I have a look at the data to see if reach and return are offering, I do this in a very ad hoc way'.

> 'It's very hard to tease out the added value offered by social media. Evaluation needs to look at trust, relationships, connections. But it's possible to generate content on social media that is tailored to get more evaluation-oriented responses' *[TI].*

There may be some way to go in generating a culture of impact evidence in this field. However, if accessible, easy-to-use evaluation tools could be developed, it seems likely that they would be adopted widely.

This working paper has brought to the surface a range of issues, with regard to the use and non-use of social media among community organisations, and also more generally with regard to how organisations relate to these technologies and their evolving culture. These issues are discussed in this chapter.

Understanding non-use and lapsed use

The rhetoric surrounding social media carries two implied assumptions. First, that the benefits are universal - that social media is of value to all kinds of organisation and group, as well as to individuals. Secondly, that non-use reflects irrational resistance and that people may just need careful explanation and introduction to the technologies to overcome fear or ignorance.

This research suggests that these assumptions can, and should, be challenged. Lapsed-use and non-use appears mainly to be a story of willingness undermined by insufficient capacity, inappropriate organisational 'fit', and lack of expertise in the face of 'awkward' technology; compounded by the under-development of measures to demonstrate impact. The primary research undertaken as part of this project suggests that there are a number of reasons for non-use, and that this can be an informed choice and/or a realistic assessment of juggled priorities in pressured circumstances.

Both the literature review and the primary research indicate that non-use is complex, with no single difficulty that could be overcome by a single approach. A range of research (including the survey reported in chapter 4 above, together with *e.g.* Quinton and Fennemore, 2013; Miranda and Steiner 2013; Zorn *et al*, 2013) has provided a number of explanations or justifications:

- 'No-one here knows how to use it'

- 'Few of the people we work with are using these media'

- 'Not the best use of our time'

- lack of understanding and basic skills to get started

- lack of resources

- lack of perceived usefulness

- inability to measure and demonstrate the return on investment.

The particular pressures on community and voluntary organisations have to be taken into account. Several respondents in the present study reported 'burned finger' experiences for their organisations, typically after social media channels had been established by a volunteer or intern who then left. While this can be seen as an endemic problem within the

community and voluntary sector, reflecting resource shortages, it also reflects the awkwardness of the technology, which is far from transparent to the novice.

The size and age profile of an organisation can be an explanatory factor. In a Norwegian study of the use of social network sites (SNSs), Eimhjellen *et al* (2014) concluded that

> 'a certain numerical point must be reached in terms of organizational and community size, for SNSs to be useful. Small associations in small communities with few active volunteers might therefore not gain much from adopting SNSs, contrary to larger and more complex organizations' (p749).

Further, in some groups and organisations, social media use simply may not fit with organisational purpose. For example, a community gardening group was mentioned by one correspondent:

> 'They're not campaigning, not in need of funding, they won't see the need for it'. *[EC]*

For groups like this, face-to-face interaction may be seen understandably as offering sufficient and more appropriate means of supporting communication and participation.

In other organisations, there are rational cost-benefit decisions being taken, often under pressure, that effectively consign social media to the 'nice-to-have' category. For these, the surrounding insistent rhetoric, implying that they are somehow backward in not exploiting social media, could well be demoralising and possibly damaging.

Irrespective of the specific circumstances of individual organisations, which will dictate the priorities of energy and time, it is likely that many organisations would make progress with social media if (a) the technologies were less awkward to use, and (b) uncomplicated processes for demonstrating impact were available. Whilst this may change with the increasing ubiquity of smartphones, non-use and lapsed use cannot simply be regarded as irrational or outdated.

How social media is seen in the community sector

Generally, people seem to be persuaded by the logic of social technologies: it is appreciated that they accelerate communication and offer the potential to reach new, possibly wider and more influential, audiences. Some respondents felt that social media is far from being a universal blessing, but it is something that requires a degree of faith as well as cautious investment of effort and time. It brings technological and associated challenges, and assumed benefits that may be hard to identify or claim.

Whilst there was clear organisational interest in using social media to engage with certain client groups – in particular young people – it is hard to find evidence of interest among community workers. One explanation may be that email dominates their communication habits, and the volume can be over-powering; or it may be that community workers mainly use social media designed for professionals (*e.g.* LinkedIn). Another explanation could relate to the recent demise of several lead organisations in the field, resulting in less direction and

support for the roles of community workers, and hence less record of what they are involved in. Clearly, individuals active in communities do use other social media on a very regular basis, to share information about their community as well as about their organisations' activities (Bussu, 2016).

How community organisations use social media

Use appears to be very uneven across the voluntary and community sector. However, this study did not have the resources to plot levels of use against kind or size of organisation. The research has shown the need to look more closely at organisations' *capacity* to adopt and exploit social media. There is no consensus on the use, or relative benefits, of organisational or personal accounts; nor concerning the need for an organisational policy or strategy. Groups and organisations seemed not to be concerned if they are using social media more in 'broadcast mode' than for engagement and relationship-building, whereas expert commentators felt that there were grounds for criticising this. Lack of expertise, and social media not being an appropriate 'fit' for the organisation's role or clients, emerged as the main explanatons for non-use in this study.

What is meant by 'engagement'?

Research into uses of social media may be held back by lack of clarity over what is meant by 'engagement'. Is it manifested through 'likes' and retweets, or some further correspondence with an organisation or campaign? Can it be positively identified as a precursor to radical activism? Is it evidence of social connectedness (Bussu, 2016)? Is it a valid component in accounts of passive 'clicktivism'? Does it refer simply to the existence of a connection that can in theory be exploited – and energy or resources mobilised - by either party at short notice in the future?

Kang (2014) draws attention to 'definitional ambiguities' in the use of the term 'engagement' and highlights the importance of trust and satisfaction as 'antecedents' to engagement. Similarly, in an analysis of Twitter messages associated with the Taksim protests in Turkey in 2013, Smith *et al* note that

> 'what we term change engagement… may differ from organizational engagement (employee-based or stakeholder-based organizational involvement), civic engagement (involvement in politics), and brand engagement (involvement with a brand)' (Smith *et al*, 2015, p505).

Social media may gradually force the clarification of what is meant by 'engagement' and this in turn may give rise to a more nuanced and useful general understanding. Kang (2014) goes on to propose and test a 13-item scale of public engagement that could prove a sound foundation for future attempts to assess social media impact.

Looking forward

The extensive literature on social media (see [Working Paper 139](#)) reveals three further pertinent themes that add insight and context to the primary research. These themes raise questions about the role of community organisations and the ideology of the community sector in an age where social media use is widespread.

1. **Networked individuals and the future of organisations**

   An important sub-section of the literature relating to social technologies concerns the changing nature of collective action and political participation - both in terms of a 'fifth estate', populated by bloggers and online commentators who augment the 'fourth estate' of independent media channels (Dutton, 2009); and with regard to a new typology of political involvement, theorised by Maria Bakardjieva, Stephen Coleman (Coleman *et al*, 2008) and others. Bakardjieva's (2009) delineation of 'sub-activism' is significant in two respects: it helps to explain the widely expressed sense of individual empowerment in relation to political and civic issues; and in doing so it clarifies the sense of detachment and reluctance that characterises the approach of many community groups and organisations to social media. Meanwhile, however, it has been argued that the increased visibility of 'ordinary people' through social media does not necessarily imply the democratisation of politics (Turner, 2010). The key insight from the celebrated use of social media in global protest movements may be that, as Wells (2014a) suggests,

   > 'to the extent that we see movements faltering at their opportunity to take power, we may be observing the limits to nonhierarchical, noninstitutional mobilization' (p211).

   Bennett and Segerberg (2011) distinguish what they call 'connective action', for which the formative element is 'sharing' - 'the personalization that leads actions and content to be distributed widely across social networks' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p760). McCosker (2015) in his analysis of YouTube video activism concludes that while these digital tools might be expected to accelerate coherent civic or dissident cultures, they can in fact confuse and obscure 'notions of political identity, affinity, and affiliation' (p9).

   This debate seems to imply a reduced role for community organisations in *organising*. Bennett and Segerberg (2012, p760) argue that technologically-enhanced sharing displaces the previous 'centrality of the resource-rich organization'. The technologies take on some of the organising functions, of course: elsewhere the researchers note the function of Twitter streams as networking mechanisms, 'embedded in various kinds of gatekeeping processes' (Segerberg and Bennett, 2011, p202). Subsequent commentators observe this in different ways:

   > 'Increasingly, organizations choose to stay in the background, providing social technology outlays and generating action frames that can be taken up by the public' (Theocharis *et al*, 2015, p204-205).

'Civic action is becoming increasingly flexible, temporary and elusive. This type of non-traditionally organised collective action often stays below the radar of public discourse' (Milan and Hintz, 2013, p8).

It could be added that there is nothing new about discovering small scale community based actions 'below the radar'. But it may be the case, as McCosker's (2015) analysis suggests, that networked individuals now carry out community action roles - such as awareness-raising, stimulating and coordinating reactions, feeding traditional media, and provoking policy – more, and more efficiently, than organisations. Collective action and connective action may be seen as complementary, not conflicting (Halupka, 2016). Further, the meaning of 'membership' may shift and one of the issues for organisations and groups becomes how to align themselves, through online networks, with supporters who are not 'members'. It may be significant that social media was found 'to blur the boundaries between the inside and the outside' of the Occupy movement in a way that suited its values of inclusiveness and direct participation (Kavada, 2015, p872). What can be concluded from the literature is that, while individualism does not necessarily imply the loss of collective identity, at the same time *the expression of collective identity does not necessarily require a significant role for organisations, or even groups*.

2. Radical media, that reinforces conformity?

Some commentators, such as Miller *et al* (2016, p186-188), emphasise the ways in which social media is used to create and maintain conformity, accumulating a sense of 'the conservative impact of public-facing social media'.

This appears to conflict with the considerable amount of research that has focused on the role of social media in large-scale national and international protest movements (*e.g.* Petray, 2011; Uldam, 2013; Bohdanova, 2014; Adi, 2015; Alaimo, 2015; Theocharis *et al*, 2015; Treré, 2015; González-Bailón and Wang, 2016). This literature largely confirms the radical communicative power of the media. However, it does not point to any clear social transformation as a consequence. From the point of view of community organisations and groups, the heralded transformative power of social media, in terms of the distribution of power and the dominance of hierarchies, remains unproven. Indeed, in a study of the uses of Web 2.0 platforms by residents of favelas in Brazil, Nemer (2016) concludes that while social networking sites are recognized as an important space for civic and political engagements, 'they also amplify pre-existing social tensions'. Research thus contributes to the sense that social media presents as ostensibly radical, while reinforcing the *status quo*.

3. Social media in the context of neo-liberalism

Commentators have also raised questions about the ideology surrounding social media and its association with the politics of neo-liberalism: this applies especially to Facebook (Jarrett, 2008; Hindman, 2009; Turner, 2010; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Roberts, 2014;

Banning, 2016; Skeggs and Yuill, 2016). More recent negative associations include, for instance, accusations that Facebook's system allows advertisers to exclude Black, Hispanic, and other 'ethnic affinities' from seeing advertisements (Angwin and Parris, 2016); and accusations of the role of Google and Facebook in the propagation of 'fake news' in a time of 'post-truth politics' during the 2016 US election. Manjoo (2016a) describes 'an ecosystem in which the truth value of the information doesn't matter'. Claims of the appropriation of social media by the radical left (Galis and Neumayer, 2016), meanwhile, are scarce.

If this is largely theoretical and perhaps contested ground, it certainly raises questions with regard to *the values embedded in the systems from which enhanced levels of participation and engagement are expected to flow*. It also raises questions about who benefits most from the affordances of these technologies. These questions seem seldom to have been expressed or addressed within the community sector or the academic literature in this field: the nearest example appears to be a protracted and inconclusive discussion on the *Community informatics researchers' list serv*[8] - 'Facebook: for or against community development?' The views were summarised as follows:

> 'opponents of Free Basics largely expressed their concerns around Facebook's exertion of power affecting the internet environment with regards to net neutrality and potential risks to the users as the company might be able to access and manipulate information. In contrast, the proponents mostly focused on what could be gained at the individual and collective levels as a result of using the service and argued that decisions surrounding the use should ultimately be made by the people in the developing world' (Yim *et al*, 2016, p219).

Questions raised

This working paper has reported on a small scale study, and the issues discussed above give rise to a number of research-related questions beyond its scope. Some of these may be fairly technical, or technological, questions:

- What will be the medium to long term impact of more widespread use of smartphones? Will this further blur the boundaries between personal and organisational communication? How will it affect the relevance of organisations that are based in a given place, and only approachable at certain hours of the day?

- What kind of support is needed to help organisations address and resolve the tensions between organisational and personal use of social media?

- This study has focused on organisations and groups, but it is clear that use of social media by residents who are active in their local communities, or activists in interest groups, merits closer study. What is known about how and why activists use different

---

[8] http://vancouvercommunity.net/lists/info/ciresearchers

platforms in different ways to reach different audiences, or abandon particular platforms?

- Can widely-accessible processes be developed to help organisations demonstrate impact, taking evaluation beyond the deceptive metrics of social media traffic-counting?

Beyond the technological, a number of more sociological questions arise:

- Does social media use favour certain kinds of social capital (for instance, bonding capital, strengthening close ties) over other forms (such as bridging capital between diverse groups) (Valenzuela *et al*, 2009; Hampton *et al*, 2011; Lampe *et al*, 2013; Tsatsou and Zhao 2016)? If this works against the purposes of community organisations, what might they do about it?

- To what extent does use of social media serve to stimulate cohesion and the integration of minority and oppressed groups, without necessarily eroding the celebration of their distinct cultures (Byrne, 2007; Harris, 2013; McCabe *et al*, 2013; Johnson and Callahan, 2015)?

- Given the current interest in 'big data' as a means of understanding complex social problems (Provost and Fawcett, 2013), what is the potential for 'small data' facilitating understandings of complex issues between people at the highly local level in their communities, with a role for social media applications?

- What kind of opportunities help move social media use from 'fun' (Bussu, 2016) to concerted community organising and community action? Does it matter if community and voluntary organisations use social media primarily for broadcasting?

Concluding remarks

As noted in chapter 1, there is a compelling logic for the use of social media in community action. In groups and organisations working to address the concerns of residents and communities of interest, *whether online or real-world*,

- people mobilise around a shared cause and respond according to their motivations and capacities

- relationships depend on trust and perceived trustworthiness

- questions of truth, falsehood and misrepresentation have to be sifted and weighed

- abuses of power have to be identified and contested

- information and opportunities are shared and acted upon

- action can be short-lived, but dormant networks can be re-activated subsequently at times of need

- activism can be both/either homogeneous or heterogeneous, cohesive or divisive

- the loudest voices are more likely to attract attention and hold sway.

If allowance is made for the ethics and politics of its commercial basis, not only does social media *not contradict* the processes of community action, in theory it fits comfortably and even promises to enhance it. This study has found little evidence, however, to confirm that promise. Possibly this reflects the shortcomings of research activity, which may not yet have brought the necessary focus and methodologies to local achievements. At the same time, the study has shown that there are still fully-understandable reasons why social media has not been adopted widely by community organisations and groups.

Social media platforms are often seen as awkward to use, creating a need for expertise that generates additional pressures on time and energies. It is very hard to demonstrate impact that can be attributed to social media use. There are concerns such as inappropriate behaviour online, security, '24/7' pressures on privacy, and misinformation, that also partially explain non-use.

What is apparent is that representatives of community organisations are not, typically, rejecting social media out of hand. It is fairer to say that social media makes too many demands – in terms of skills, time, and the demonstration of impact – to make its adoption sufficiently straightforward for community organisations.

References

An extended bibliography can be found in [Working Paper 139](#).

Adi, A. (2015). Occupy PR: an analysis of online media communications of Occupy Wall Street and Occupy London. *Public Relations Review*, *41*(4), 508–514. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.06.001

Adolf, M., & Deicke, D. (2015). New modes of integration: individuality and sociality in digital networks. *First Monday*, *20*(1). https://is.gd/4Mhy9Y

Aitamurto, T., & Landemore, H. (2015). Five design principles for crowdsourced policy making: assessing the case of crowdsourced off-road traffic law in Finland. *Journal of Social Media for Organizations*, *2*(1), 1–19. https://is.gd/zW3FBB

Alaimo, K. (2015). How the Facebook Arabic page "We Are All Khaled Said" helped promote the Egyptian revolution. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604854

Aldridge, N. (2010). *The big society online: harnessing technology for social change*. Cabinet Office. https://is.gd/eedARn

Amin, A. (2000). Spatialities of globalisation. *Environment and Planning A*, *34*(3), 385–399.

Angwin, J., & Parris, T. (2016). Facebook lets advertisers exclude users by race. *ProPublica blog*, 28 October. https://www.propublica.org/article/facebook-lets-advertisers-exclude-users-by-race

Anonymous. (2016). The way charity workers encourage slactivism is dangerous. *Guardian Voluntary Sector Network*, 20 January. https://is.gd/Tt9Y4c

Arnstein, S. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *35*(4), 216–224.

Auger, G. A. (2014). Rhetorical framing: examining the message structure of nonprofit organizations on Twitter. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *19*(4), 239–249. https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1499

Awan, I. (2014). Islamophobia and Twitter: a typology of online hate against Muslims on social media. *Policy & Internet*, *6*(2), 133–150. https://doi.org/10.1002/1944-2866.POI364

Bakardjieva, M. (2009). Subactivism: lifeworld and politics in the age of the internet. *The Information Society*, *25*(2), 91–104. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972240802701627

Baker, R. K., & White, K. M. (2011). In their own words: why teenagers *don't* use social networking sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *14*(6), 395–398. https://is.gd/Ia0c9R

Banning, M. E. (2016). Shared entanglements: Web 2.0, info-liberalism and digital sharing. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(4), 489–503. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1061573

Bannister, Frank, & Wilson, Diana. (2011). O(ver)-government?: emerging technology, citizen autonomy and the regulatory state. *Information Polity*, *16*(1), 63–79. https://is.gd/h4EspD

Bardici, M. V. (2012). *A discourse analysis of the media representation of social media for social change: the case of Egyptian revolution and political change* (Masters thesis). University of Malmo, Malmo, Sweden. http://hdl.handle.net/2043/14121

BBC News. (2015). What Twitter must do to save itself. *BBC news*, 28 October, 2015. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-34654894

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2011). Digital media and the personalization of collective action: social technology and the organization of protests against the global economic crisis. *Information, Communication & Society*, *14*(6), 770–799. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.579141

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(5), 739–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661

Bernstein, M. S., Bakshy, E., Burke, M., & Karrer, B. (2013). Quantifying the invisible audience in social networks. In *CHI 2013*. Paris, France: ACM. https://is.gd/rSBA4Q

Bohdanova, T. (2014). Unexpected revolution: the role of social media in Ukraine's Euromaidan uprising. *European View*, *13*(1), 133–142. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-014-0296-4

Breslin Public Policy. (2013). *A series of doors: young people talking about the experience of poverty*. London: Breslin Public Policy. https://is.gd/GV8hPI

Bright, J. (2015). Crowdsourcing for public policy and government. *Policy and internet blog*, 27 August. http://blogs.oii.ox.ac.uk/policy/crowdsourcing-for-public-policy-and-government/

Bright, L. F., Kleiser, S. B., & Grau, S. L. (2015). Too much Facebook? An exploratory examination of social media fatigue. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *44*, 148–155. https://is.gd/Mc4Q4F

Bussu, S. (2016). *Big Local online: the social media presence of Big Local: how areas are using social networks*. Local Trust. https://is.gd/Z4zG9U

Byrne, D. N. (2007). Public discourse, community concerns, and civic engagement: exploring black social networking traditions on blackplanet.com. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), 319–340. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00398.x

Castells, M. (2000). *The rise of the network society: the information age: economy, society and culture*. London: Wiley.

Chen, N.-T. N., Dong, F., Ball-Rokeach, S. J., Parks, M., & Huang, J. (2012). Building a new media platform for local storytelling and civic engagement in ethnically diverse neighborhoods. *New Media & Society*, *14*(6), 931–950. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811435640

Christensen, H. (2011). Political activities on the internet: slacktivism or political participation by other means? *First Monday*, *16*(2). http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767

Chung, J. E. (2015). Antismoking campaign videos on YouTube and audience response: application of social media assessment metrics. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *51*, 114–121. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.04.061

Clarke, S. (2013). When it comes to social media think "quality not quantity". *Podnosh blog*, 23 August. http://podnosh.com/?p=7021

Coleman, S., Morrison, D. E., & Svennevig, M. (2008). New media and political efficacy. *International Journal of Communication*, *2*, 771–791.

Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K., & Sweetser, K. D. (2010). Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations. *Public Relations Review*, *36*(1), 90–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.10.003

Davenport, S. W., Bergman, S. M., Bergman, J. Z., & Fearrington, M. E. (2014). Twitter versus Facebook: exploring the role of narcissism in the motives and usage of different social media platforms. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *32*, 212–220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.12.011

Davies, R. (2014). Civic crowdfunding: a new way of spending down? *Stanford social innovation review*, 16 September. https://is.gd/nHoNDm

Davies, R. (2015). Three provocations for civic crowdfunding. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(3), 342–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.989878

De Vera, John Christian, & Murray, Braelan. (2013). *The art of listening: social media toolkit for nonprofits*. Berkeley, CA: Greenlining Institute. https://is.gd/8AHXQz

de Zúñiga, H. G., Copeland, L., & Bimber, B. (2014). Political consumerism: civic engagement and the social media connection. *New Media & Society*, *16*(3), 488–506. https://is.gd/t7u1gW

Della Porta, D., & Diani, M. (2006). *Social movements: an introduction* (2nd ed). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Deschamps, R., & McNutt, K. (2014). Third sector and social media. *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, *5*(2), 29 – 46. https://is.gd/h1JAPi

Doherty, R. (2010). Getting social with recruitment. *Strategic HR Review*, *9*(6), 11–15. https://doi.org/10.1108/14754391011078063

Dutton, W. H. (2009). The fifth estate emerging through the network of networks. *Prometheus*, *27*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/08109020802657453

Eimhjellen, I. S. (2014). Internet communication: does it strengthen local voluntary organizations? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *43*(5), 890–909. https://is.gd/1lxsTR

Eimhjellen, I., Wollebæk, D., & Strømsnes, K. (2014). Associations online: barriers for using web-based communication in voluntary associations. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *25*(3), 730–753. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-013-9361-x

Evans, J. D. (1996). *Straightforward statistics for the behavioral sciences*. Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole.

Fanucchi, F. (2015). The Klout Score methodology secrets revealed. *Klout blog*, 5 November. http://blog.klout.com/t5/Klout-Blog/The-Klout-Score-Methodology-Secrets-Revealed/ba-p/177

Farrow, H., & Yuan, Y. C. (2011). Building stronger ties with alumni through Facebook to increase volunteerism and charitable giving. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *16*(3), 445–464. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2011.01550.x

Fuchs, C. (2013). The Anonymous movement in the context of liberalism and socialism. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, *5*(2), 345–376. https://is.gd/Q3VBof

Galis, V., & Neumayer, C. (2016). Laying claim to social media by activists: a cyber-material détournement. *Social Media + Society*, *2*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116664360

Gartner. (2011,). Gartner survey highlights consumer fatigue with social media: press release. Gartner, 15 August. http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/1766814

Gilchrist, A., & Taylor, M. (2016). *The short guide to community development* (2nd revised). Bristol: Policy Press. http://policypress.co.uk/the-short-guide-to-community-development

González-Bailón, S., & Wang, N. (2016). Networked discontent: the anatomy of protest campaigns in social media. *Social Networks*, *44*, 95–104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2015.07.003

Gupta, A., Tyagi, M., & Sharma, D. (2013). Use of social media marketing in healthcare. *Journal of Health Management*, *15*(2), 293–302. https://is.gd/6iUtjC

Haciyakupoglu, G., & Zhang, W. (2015). Social media and trust during the gezi protests in turkey. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *20*(4), 450–466. https://is.gd/d9gIYM

Halupka, M. (2014). Clicktivism: a systematic heuristic. *Policy & Internet*, *6*(2), 115–132. https://doi.org/10.1002/1944-2866.POI355

Halupka, M. (2016). The rise of information activism: how to bridge dualisms and reconceptualise political participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(10), 1487–1503. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1119872

Hampton, K. N. (2007). Neighborhoods in the network society: the e-neighbors study. *Information, Communication & Society*, *10*(5), 714–748. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180701658061

Hampton, K. N., Lee, C. -j., & Her, E. J. (2011). How new media affords network diversity: direct and mediated access to social capital through participation in local social settings. *New Media & Society*, *13*(7), 1031–1049. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810390342

Harlow, S., & Guo, L. (2014). Will the revolution be tweeted or Facebooked? Using digital communication tools in immigrant activism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *19*(3), 463–478. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12062

Harris, K. (2013). 'Social technologies, poverty and ethnicity'. Unpublished paper, TSRC.

Harris, K. (2014). *Use of smartphones: report on pilot questionnaire survey*. Local Level. https://is.gd/dGHrjd

Harris, K., & Flouch, H. (2011a). *The online neighbourhood networks study*. Networked Neighbourhoods. http://networkedneighbourhoods.com/?page_id=409

Harris, K., & Flouch, H. (2012). *Online neighbourhood networks in low income areas*. Networked Neighbourhoods. http://networkedneighbourhoods.com/?page_id=1144

Hemmi, A., & Crowther, J. (2013). Learning environmental activism through social networking sites? *Concept*, *4*(1), 1–7. https://is.gd/yK2HF7

Hindman, M. S. (2009). *The myth of digital democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. http://press.princeton.edu/titles/8781.html

Hopke, J. E. (2015). Hashtagging politics: transnational anti-fracking movement Twitter practices. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115605521

Howard, E. (2014). How "clicktivism" has changed the face of political campaigns. *The Guardian*, 24 September. https://is.gd/Z7e9lM

Ihm, J. (2015). Network measures to evaluate stakeholder engagement with nonprofit organizations on social networking sites. *Public Relations Review*, *41*(4), 501–503. https://is.gd/WupEgY

Jarrett, K. (2008). Interactivity is evil! A critical investigation of web 2.0. *First Monday*, *13*(3). http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2140/1947

Johnson, B. J., & Halegoua, G. R. (2014). Potential and challenges for social media in the neighborhood context. *Journal of Urban Technology*, *21*(4), 51–75. https://is.gd/FcjunC

Johnson, J., & Callahan, C. (2015). Media and identity in the margins: the Garifuna response to social media. *Journal of Social Media in Society*, *4*(2), 73–105. https://is.gd/PffEDE

Juvonen, J., & Gross, E. F. (2008). Extending the school grounds? Bullying experiences in cyberspace. *Journal of School Health*, *78*(9), 496–505. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2008.00335.x

Kang, M. (2014). Understanding public engagement: conceptualizing and measuring its influence on supportive behavioral intentions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *26*(5), 399–416. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2014.956107

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, *53*(1), 59–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Karpf, D. (2010). Online political mobilization from the advocacy group's perspective: looking beyond clicktivism. *Policy & Internet*, *2*(4), 7–41. https://doi.org/10.2202/1944-2866.1098

Kavada, A. (2015). Creating the collective: social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(8), 872–886. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043318

Kavanaugh, A., Tedesco, J. C., & Madondo, K. (2014). Social media vs. traditional internet use for community involvement: toward broadening participation. In E. Tambouris, A. Macintosh, & F. Bannister (Eds.), *Electronic participation: 6th IFIP WG 8.5 international conference, ePart 2014, Dublin, Ireland, September 2-3, 2014. Proceedings* (Vol. 8654, pp. 1–12). Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-662-44914-1_1

Kim, Y.-C., & Shin, E.-K. (2016). Localized use of information and communication technologies in Seoul's urban neighborhoods. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *60*(1), 81–100. https://is.gd/jRqK03

Kreiss, D. (2015). The networked democratic spectator. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115578876

Kropczynski, J., Cai, G., & Carroll, J. M. (2015). Understanding the roles of artifacts in democratic deliberation from the Citizens' Initiative Review. *Journal of Social Media for Organizations*, *3*(2), 1–22. http://www2.mitre.org/public/jsmo/pdfs/02-01-understanding-artifacts.pdf

Kurkov, A. (2014). *Ukraine diaries: dispatches from Kiev*. London: Harvill Secker.

Lampe, C., Vitak, J., & Ellison, N. (2013). Users and nonusers: interactions between levels of adoption and social capital. In *CSCW '13. Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 809–820). ACM Press. https://doi.org/10.1145/2441776.2441867

Ledwith, M. (2016). *Community development in action: putting Freire into practice*. Bristol: Policy Press. http://policypress.co.uk/community-development-in-action

Lee, F. L. F., Chen, H.-T., & Chan, M. (2017). Social media use and university students' participation in a large-scale protest campaign: The case of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement. *Telematics and Informatics*, *34*(2), 457–469. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.08.005

Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: how nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *17*(3), 337–353. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x

Lovejoy, K., Waters, R. D., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Engaging stakeholders through Twitter: how nonprofit organizations are getting more out of 140 characters or less. *Public Relations Review*, *38*(2), 313–318. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.01.005

Lynch, M. (2011). After Egypt: the limits and promise of online challenges to the authoritarian Arab state. *Perspectives on Politics*, *9*(02), 301–310. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711000910

Magro, M. J. (2012). A review of social media use in e-government. *Administrative Sciences*, *2*(4), 148–161. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci2020148

Manjoo, F. (2016a). How the internet is loosening our grip on the truth. *New York Times*, 2 November. https://is.gd/Dwwp6p

Manjoo, F. (2016b). Social media's globe-shaking power. *New York Times*, 16 November. https://is.gd/ai8lIj

Mano, Rita S. (2014). Social media, social causes, giving behavior and money contributions. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *31*, 287–293. https://is.gd/eDD2eS

Marcus, G., & Tidey, J. (2015). *Community mirror: a data-driven method for "below the radar" research* (Nesta Working Paper). London: Nesta. https://is.gd/VwFk8t

Mason, P. (2016). *Postcapitalism: a guide to our future*. London: Penguin. https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/188551/postcapitalism/9780141975290/

Matthews, P. (2015). Neighbourhood belonging, social class and social media: providing ladders to the cloud. *Housing Studies*, *30*(1), 22–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2014.953448

Matthews, P. (2016). Social media, community development and social capital. *Community Development Journal*, *51*(3), 419–435. https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsv040

McCabe, A., Gilchrist, A., Harris, K., Afridi, A., & Kyprianou, P. (2013). *Making the links: poverty, ethnicity and social networks*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. https://is.gd/yqHrlU

McChesney, R. W. (2013). *Digital disconnect: how capitalism is turning the Internet against democracy*. New York, New Press.

McCosker, A. (2015). Social media activism at the margins: managing visibility, voice and vitality affects. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115605860

Milan, S., & Hintz, A. (2013). Networked collective action and the institutionalized policy debate: bringing cyberactivism to the policy arena? *Policy & Internet*, *5*(1), 7–26. https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.20

Miller, B. (2009). Community fundraising 2.0: the future of fundraising in a networked society? *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *14*(4), 365–370. https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.373

Miller, C. (2015a). *Social action on social media*. London: Nesta. https://is.gd/jRAkHo

Miller, D., Costa, E., Haynes, N., McDonald, T., Nicolescu, R., Sinanan, J., Spyer, J., Venkatraman, S., Wang, X. (2016). *How the world changed social media*. London: UCL Press. https://is.gd/I6xrJJ

Miranda, A. F., & Steiner, A. (2013). *About that first tweet: a practical guide to social media for charities & social enterprises*. Unity Trust Bank and Social Misfits Media. http://www.socialmisfitsmedia.com/downloads/About_that_First_Tweet.pdf

Morozov, E. (2009). The brave new world of slacktivism. *Foreign policy blog*, 19 May. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104302141

Morris, L. (2014). Contextualizing the power of social media: technology, communication and the Libya Crisis. *First Monday*, *19*(12). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i12.5318

Nah, S., Namkoong, K., Chen, N.-T. N., & Hustedde, R. J. (2016). A communicative approach to community development: the effect of neighborhood storytelling network on civic participation. *Community Development*, *47*(1), 11–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2015.1094497

Nekmat, E., Gower, K. K., Gonzenbach, W. J., & Flanagin, A. J. (2015). Source effects in the micro-mobilization of collective action via social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(9), 1076–1091. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1018301

Nemer, D. (2016). Rethinking social change: the promises of Web 2.0 for the marginalized. *First Monday*, *21*(6). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v21i6.6786

NTEN. (2013). *2013 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study: an analysis of online messaging, fundraising, advocacy, social media and mobile metrics for nonprofit organizations*. M+R Strategic Services and The Nonprofit Technology Network. https://is.gd/vV1Fan

Obar, J. A., Zube, P., & Lampe, C. (2012). Advocacy 2.0: an analysis of how advocacy groups in the United States perceive and use social media as tools for facilitating civic engagement and collective action. *Journal of Information Policy*, *2*, 1–25. https://is.gd/FM3lQF

O'Donovan, O. (2014). The commons, the Battle of the Book and the cracked enclosures of academic publishing. *Community Development Journal*, *49* (suppl 1), i21–i30. https://is.gd/grEoBT

O'Keeffe, G. S., & Clarke-Pearson, K. (2011). The impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families. *Pediatrics*, *127*(4), 800–804. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-0054

Ostrom, E. (2015). *Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press.

Pantazis, C., & Pemberton, S. (2012). Reconfiguring security and liberty: political discourses and public opinion in the new century. *British Journal of Criminology*, *52*(3), 651–667. https://is.gd/j64Vjn

Petray, T. L. (2011). Protest 2.0: online interactions and Aboriginal activists. *Media, Culture & Society*, *33*(6), 923–940. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443711411009

Phethean, C., Tiropanis, T., & Harris, L. (2015). Engaging with charities on social media: comparing interaction on Facebook and Twitter. In *Internet Science* (Vol. 9089, p15–29). Cham: Springer International. https://is.gd/hSXhUL

Phethean, C., Tiropanis, T., & Harris, L. (2012). Measuring the performance of social media marketing in the charitable domain. In *WebSci 2012: proceedings*. Evanston, US. https://is.gd/uhHsR7

Pigg, K. E. (2005). Introduction: community informatics and community development. *Community Development*, *36*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330509489867

Poell, T. (2014). Social media and the transformation of activist communication: exploring the social media ecology of the 2010 Toronto G20 protests. *Information, Communication & Society*, *17*(6), 716–731. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.812674

Popple, K. (2015). *Analysing community work: theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Milton Keynes: Open University Press. https://is.gd/UgA895

Portwood-Stacer, L. (2012). Media refusal and conspicuous non-consumption: the performative and political dimensions of Facebook abstention. *New Media & Society*, *15*(7), 1041– 1057. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812465139

ProCon.org. (2011). Are social networking sites good for our society? *ProCon website*, 13 April. http://socialnetworking.procon.org/#Background

Provost, F., & Fawcett, T. (2013). Data science and its relationship to big data and data-driven decision making. *Big Data*, *1*(1), 51–59. https://doi.org/10.1089/big.2013.1508

Quinton, S., & Fennemore, P. (2013). Missing a strategic marketing trick? The use of online social networks by UK charities. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *18*(1), 36–51. https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1450

Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: the new social operating system*. London: MIT. https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/networked

Red Rooster Group. (2010). *Social media for nonprofits: who's doing it & what works*. New York: RedRooster Group. https://is.gd/gpVmOp

Reilly, P. (2015). Every little helps? YouTube, sousveillance and the "anti-Tesco" riot in Stokes Croft. *New Media & Society*, *17*(5), 755–771. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813512195

Richardson, L. (2008). *DIY community action: neighbourhood problems and community self-help*. Bristol: Policy Press. http://policypress.co.uk/diy-community-action

Roberts, J. M. (2014). *New media and public activism: neoliberalism, the state and radical protest in the public sphere*. Bristol: Policy Press. https://is.gd/Xd452E

Roche, P. (2014). *Connections to be made? Social media use by infrastructure organisations supporting the voluntary sector in the West Midlands*. Birmingham: RAWM. https://is.gd/pnyvVC

Saxton, G. D., & Wang, L. (2014). The social network effect: the determinants of giving through social media. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *43*(5), 850–868. https://is.gd/lgnsUu

Schumann, S. (2015). It's more than just a click! Why we should stop referring to online activism as slacktivism. *PS21: project for the study of the 21st century*, 15 June. http://wp.me/p51aZX-nN

SecDev Foundation. (2016). Prevent violent extremism and social media: expert views. *SecDev Foundation website*, 31 March. https://is.gd/kSVRJr

Segerberg, A., & Bennett, W. L. (2011). Social media and the organization of collective action: using Twitter to explore the ecologies of two climate change protests. *The Communication Review*, *14*(3), 197–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2011.597250

Sheppard, E. (2016). Can Facebook's new donate button help turn likes into charity cash? *Guardian Voluntary Sector Network*, 6 July. https://is.gd/ueZYJZ

Skeggs, B., & Yuill, S. (2016). Capital experimentation with person/a formation: how Facebook's monetization refigures the relationship between property, personhood and protest. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(3), 380–396. https://is.gd/11wrja

Smith, B. G., Men, R. L., & Al-Sinan, R. (2015). Tweeting Taksim: communication power and social media advocacy in the Taksim square protests. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *50*, 499–507. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.04.012

Somerville, P. (2016). *Understanding community: politics, policy and practice* (2nd ed.). Policy Press. http://policypress.co.uk/understanding-community-1

Squirrell, G. (2012). *Engagement in practice: theory and practice for successful engagement*. Lyme Regis, UK: Russell House.

Standage, T. (2013). *Writing on the wall: social media: the first 2,000 years*. London: Bloomsbury. https://is.gd/E2ZPWm

Stieger, S., Burger, C., Bohn, M., & Voracek, M. (2013). Who commits virtual identity suicide? Differences in privacy concerns, internet addiction, and personality between Facebook users and quitters. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *16*(9), 629–634. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0323

Stiver, A., Barroca, L., Minocha, S., Richards, M., & Roberts, D. (2015). Civic crowdfunding research: challenges, opportunities, and future agenda. *New Media & Society*, *17*(2), 249–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814558914

Svensson, L. (2016). Empowering rural youth with Facebook: lessons from a local Swedish case-study. *Community Development Journal*, *51*(3), 436-451. https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsv024

Taylor, A. (2014). *The people's platform: taking back power and culture in the digital age*. London: Fourth Estate. https://is.gd/ZRd7VF

Taylor, H. (2012). *Social media for social change: using the internet to tackle intolerance*. London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue. http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Social_Media_Social_Change.pdf

Taylor, J. (2015). *Working with communities* (2nd edition). Melbourne: Oxford University Press. https://global.oup.com/academic/product/working-with-communities

Taylor, M., Kent, M. L., & White, W. J. (2001). How activist organizations are using the internet to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, *27*(3), 263–284. https://is.gd/Xpgmb5

Theocharis, Y. (2013). The wealth of (occupation) networks? Communication patterns and information distribution in a Twitter protest network. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *10*(1), 35–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2012.701106

Theocharis, Y., Lowe, W., van Deth, J. W., & García-Albacete, G. (2015). Using Twitter to mobilize protest action: online mobilization patterns and action repertoires in the Occupy Wall Street, Indignados, and Aganaktismenoi movements. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(2), 202–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.948035

Treré, E. (2015). Reclaiming, proclaiming, and maintaining collective identity in the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico: an examination of digital frontstage and backstage activism through social media and instant messaging platforms. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(8), 901–915. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043744

Tsatsou, P., & Zhao, Y. (2016). A "two-level social capital analysis" of the role of online communication in civic activism: lessons from the role of Facebook in the Sunflower movement. *Social Media + Society*, *2*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116671967

Tufekci, Z. (2008). Grooming, gossip, Facebook and MySpace: what can we learn about these sites from those who won't assimilate? *Information, Communication & Society*, *11*(4), 544–564. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180801999050

Turan, Z., Tinmaz, H., & Goktas, Y. (2013). The reasons for non-use of social networking websites by university students. *Comunicar*, *21*(41), 137–145. https://doi.org/10.3916/C41-2013-13

Turner, G. (2010). *Ordinary people and the media: the demotic turn*. London: Sage. https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/ordinary-people-and-the-media/book233425

Uldam, J. (2013). Activism and the online mediation opportunity structure: attempts to impact global climate change policies? *Policy & Internet*, *5*(1), 56–75. https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.22

Valenzuela, S., Park, N., & Kee, K. F. (2009). Is there social capital in a social network site? Facebook use and college students' life satisfaction, trust, and participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *14*(4), 875–901. https://is.gd/lW5csh

Waddingham, J. (2013). The future of Facebook fundraising. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *18*(3), 187–191. https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1460

Waters, R. D., & Feneley, K. L. (2013). Virtual stewardship in the age of new media: have nonprofit organizations' moved beyond Web 1.0 strategies? *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *18*(3), 216–230. https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1469

Wellman, B. (1999). From little boxes to loosely-bounded networks: the privatization and domestication of community. In *Sociology for the twenty-first century: continuities and cutting edges* (pp. 94–114). Chicago: Uni. Chicago Press. https://is.gd/0o7XBh

Wellman, B. (2007). The network is personal: introduction to a special issue of Social Networks. *Social Networks*, *29*(3), 349–356. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2007.01.006

Wellman, B., Carrington, Peter J, & Hall, Alan. (1988). Networks as personal communities. In *Social structures: a network analysis* (pp. 130–184). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://is.gd/8b1rCw

Wells, C. (2014a). Civic identity and the question of organization in contemporary civic engagement. *Policy & Internet*, *6*(2), 209–216. https://doi.org/10.1002/1944-2866.POI359

Wells, C. (2014b). Two eras of civic information and the evolving relationship between civil society organizations and young citizens. *New Media & Society*, *16*(4), 615–636. https://is.gd/KOtwV8

White, M. M. (2008). Facebook suicide. *Adbusters blog*, 4 June. https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/77/facebook_suicide.html

Williams, A., Barnett, S., Harte, D., & Townend, J. (2014). *The state of hyperlocal community news in the UK: findings from a survey of practitioners*. University of Cardiff. https://is.gd/wITCQB

Xu, W. W., Li, L., Stefanone, M. A., & Fu, Y. R. (2013). Does social media users' commenting behavior differ by their local community tie? A computer–assisted linguistic analysis approach. *First Monday*, *19*(1). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i1.4821

Yeh, A. (2015). New research study: 7 stats from 100,000 crowdfunding campaigns. Indiegogo blog, 6 October. https://is.gd/ShB831

Yim, M., Gomez, R., & Carter, M. (2016). Facebook's "Free Basics": for or against community development? *Journal of Community Informatics*, *12*(2), 217–225. https://is.gd/wak6qP

Zorn, T. E., Grant, S., & Henderson, A. (2013). Strengthening resource mobilization chains: developing the social media competencies of community and voluntary organizations in New Zealand. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *24*(3), 666–687. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-012-9265-1

About the Centre

The third sector provides support and services to millions of people. Whether providing front-line services, making policy or campaigning for change, good quality research is vital for organisations to achieve the best possible impact. The Third Sector Research Centre exists to develop the evidence base on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Working closely with practitioners, policy-makers and other academics, TSRC is undertaking and reviewing research, and making this research widely available. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, ensuring its research reflects the realities of those working within it, and helping to build the sector's capacity to use and conduct research.

Third Sector Research Centre, Social Policy and Social Work,

University of Birmingham, Birmingham, B15 2TT

Tel: 0121 415 8561

Email: a.j.mccabe@bham.ac.uk

www.tsrc.ac.uk

Below the Radar

This research theme explores the role, function, impact and experiences of small community groups or activists. These include those working at a local level or in communities of interest - such as women's groups or refugee and migrant groups. We are interested in both formal organisations and more informal community activity. The research is informed by a reference group which brings together practitioners from national community networks, policy makers and researchers, as well as others who bring particular perspectives on, for example, rural, gender or black and minority ethnic issues.

Contact the author

Enter Kevin Harris

Email: Kevin@local-level.org.uk

Hosted by: **UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**

Funded by: **E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL**   **BARROW CADBURY**