

Social media, community development and social capital

Peter Matthews

Abstract Initial growth in Internet use in the 1990s resulted in many digital pioneers viewing new information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a means to radically empower people through new global connections and extensive social capital. This has extended into an interest in exploring how ICTs can contribute to international development, and particularly in the field of ICT for development (ICT4D). Evidence from the minority and majority worlds has tempered some of this initial enthusiasm and visions of technological determinism. This article is structured around a piece of coproduced writing to reflect on a project in a deprived neighbourhood in Edinburgh, Scotland, to empower a community through new technology and digital art. The approach involved social history in the form of an archive of images of the neighbourhood, a blog and Facebook page, and a range of physical outputs including social history walking guides and a digital totem pole. The article sets the coproduced paper in the broader literature on ICTs in community development to draw out lessons on the challenges and also the strengths of using novel methods to engage communities. While ICTs cannot develop extensive social capital within deprived neighbourhoods, it was clear that they can offer low-cost ways for institutional social capital to be developed improving partnership working.

Introduction

The rise of information communication technologies (ICTs), social media or social networking sites (SNS) and the development of web 2.0 has led to a resurgence in the sort of the utopian thinking that occasioned the early

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rise of the web and the first dotcom bubble of the mid-1990s (see, for example, [Wellman, 2001](#)). The rise of Facebook as a global communications giant and social phenomenon, as recounted in the film *The Social Network*, caught even the Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg unaware. As Facebook has expanded beyond its original home in university campuses and has been joined by endless new social networks – Twitter, Google+, reddit, LinkedIn, plus countless others that have fallen by the wayside there is increasing interest in social networking online and the new communities being created and recreated on these websites (see [Hargittai, 2007](#) for an interesting insight into how quickly SNS can vanish from public consciousness; during peer review of this article Google+ came and went). For community development, the interest is in what new opportunities are offered by these technologies. Global initiatives such as One Laptop for Every Child have received substantial investment and attention as they seek to use the potential of ICTs to transform lives and deliver development (see, for example, [Toyama, 2011](#); [Burnell and Hamdi, 2014](#)).

This article uses a participatory coproduced research project in the deprived neighbourhood of Wester Hailes, Edinburgh, Scotland, to explore the potential of web 2.0 in community development and particular in building social capital. It uses a functionalist understanding of social capital as networks between people that enable them to improve themselves and wider communities, building on the work of Robert Putnam ([Portes, 2000](#); [Putnam, 2000](#); [Field, 2008](#)). As discussed in greater depth below, this focus on social capital in the project came from a localized sense of the pattern famously identified by Putnam in *Bowling Alone* – that engagement in collective activities had declined in the neighbourhood. Among partners to the project, there was a desire to use ICTs and online social networking to see if a former activist spirit and high levels of social capital could be revived.

Rather than a traditional academic article, the core text is a coproduced paper exploring these issues written by two academic partners and two community partners in the research. Before this is reproduced, the article reviews the literature on the potential for ICTs and SNS to help community development. This frames the question for the coproduced paper – can ICTs, digital engagement and public art be a key part of community development and tackling issues of social justice? The article produces a conclusion highlighting the importance of the activities in spurring initial activity and developing lasting, trusting partnerships between community organizations and developing institutional social capital. In conclusion, the case study presented in this article supports the evidence from the recent ICT4D literature that we should be cautious in our enthusiasm for using ICTs to support community development activities and in adopting technological deterministic visions. Ultimately, the case adds support to the view that ICTs can amplify or

catalyse activity (Toyama, 2011) and that ICTs are likely to encourage a more mundane type of ‘cultural vernacular’ of banal online interactions, but there is value in this as effective use (Gurstein, 2003; Burgess, 2007).

Social media, social capital and community

From the earliest developments of the World Wide Web and Internet in the 1990s theorists have suggested ICTs are transforming communications and thus society and communities. For example, human geography, derived from Manuel Castells work on the network society, initially considered the web to be a technology assisting the distancing of propinquity as geographic space and scale is disrupted by the immediacy of modern communications and our previous assumptions around space-time dissolved (Amin, 2000; Castells, 2000). Social connections and communication that were previously only possible at a local level, or that were limited by telephone and postal services, could now occur instantly over vast distances. The networked society, arguably, reduced the bonds of place and industry that characterized earlier capitalism (Castells, 2000).

Further, the anonymity of email and ‘web 1.0’ technologies allowed a new form of more ephemeral communication to develop with fewer of the social and geographical ties that bounded offline communication within spatial communities (Hampton, 2002; Couclelis, 2004). For highly connected and highly literate people identities such as gender, place, nationality, ethnicity and socio-economic status dissolved, offering new possibilities for social interaction and developing transnational social capital. At its most starry-eyed, these discourses around the impact of ICTs were utopian and

It is remarkable how often the metaphor of the ancient Greek agora, with its connotations of ideal small-town democracy, recurs in the most upbeat of these pronouncements, as if the very globality of the Internet were feeding a yearning for its opposite – a smaller, simpler, more localized world where every person can make a difference.

(Couclelis 2004: 8)

Thus these new online spaces were seen as opportunities for the discourse and civic activity of communities that writers such as Putnam had identified as having declined markedly in the post-war era (Putnam, 2000; Field, 2008).

The growth of social media over the last decade, through blogs and sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, to name but a few, is continuing this focus on the ability of ICTs to develop social capital. International campaigns on Twitter and other SNS bring the ability of modern ICTs to develop transnational networks around specific issues into the public domain. Well

connected, often young people, engaged in social movements are creating new communities around issues on Facebook and other SNS (Yerbury, 2012).

This means that the public domain is changing, with new ways for people to share information and make it public, engaging with a selected or broader audience altering the visibility of social interactions, and

That level of moderate, widespread publicness is unprecedented. There are more layers of publicness available to those using networked media than ever before; as a result, people's relationship to public life is shifting in ways we have barely begun to understand.

(Baym and boyd 2012, p. 4)

This new unprecedented publicness provides opportunities for a wide range of engagement at different levels: from the stereotypical sharing of a photo of breakfast on Instagram; sharing stories of a neighbourhood's history on Facebook (Matthews, 2015); to empowered hyperlocal news and campaigning developed through a Facebook page developing community leadership (Williams *et al.*, 2014). For many, new technologies are offering new opportunities for local activism. It was from this excitement in fostering new forms of social engagement through ICTs and SNS that this project emerged. The coproduced research sought to understand if it could be used in a deprived neighbourhood in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Context and methodology

This section focuses on two areas: first the participatory methods of research that sought to explore whether social media could develop social capital, in line with the literature above; and second the coproduced paper. The research project that this article reflects on came out of a digital design perspective and the idea of applying the language and techniques of the digital practice of 'hacking' to the resurgent focus on community development following the election of the UK coalition government in 2010 with its policies of localism and the Big Society (Khan *et al.*, 2015). The coproduced research activities took place in Wester Hailes, a neighbourhood in south-west of Edinburgh, with a majority of socially rented housing and one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

Construction of the estate began in 1968 and immediately the poor quality housing and few local services, both public and private, led to the emergence of community activism with limited support from community development funding. This led to extensive community development activities, drawing on a network of over 20 neighbourhood councils, feeding into an umbrella organization, the Representative Council (RepCouncil) and a range of

projects tackling local problems, including a local free weekly newspaper delivered to all households, *The Wester Hailes Sentinel*. The area was subject to an extensive regeneration programme between 1989 and 1999 with over £100 million invested in new housing, improving the neighbourhood and further community development activities (Gilloran, 1983; Matthews, 2012a).

During the research, the activism of early residents was seen by community workers and long-term residents as an expression of social capital. It is recognized, although contested, that working class communities are characterized by strong bonding social capital, webs of reciprocity, trust and close connections that help people get by (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Bailey *et al.*, 2015). Strong social networks and a sense of shared endeavour to change the neighbourhood was seen by partners to exist in Wester Hailes from when the first residents moved in 1968 and declining markedly in the 1990s. Key actors in the activism were often women and were expressing an extension of the domestic role into the upkeep of the neighbourhood, for example developing children's activities, as in similar neighbourhoods (Jupp, 2008; Grimshaw, 2011).

In 2008 the local authority, the City of Edinburgh Council, ceased funding of the local newspaper, *The West Edinburgh Times* (successor to *The Sentinel*) and the Wester Hailes RepCouncil. This was an upsetting time locally and for many represented the ending of a previous era of an engaged neighbourhood, where residents had a strong activist voice. Although this activism had led to extensive physical regeneration and new housing (Figure 1), the neighbourhood still experienced numerous problems and many residents felt that the previous activist spirit to get these problems solved had gone from the local community (Matthews, 2012b).

When publication of the local newspaper ended, its archive was saved by the local housing association. As an experiment they started posting photos on a blog and then a Facebook page – From There to Here (<http://on.fb.me/FromThere>). Slowly the page gained more interest, particularly when photos of people and groups were posted as the ability to tag faces meant people were tagging friends. Viral activity through these links meant the site gained over 2000 'likes' from existing and former residents in two years.

From 2011, this community-led activity has supported research coproduced with university partners. The research projects aimed to coproduce community activism, engagement and to utilize SNS in the neighbourhood through action research ICT-based interventions (Khan *et al.*, 2015). In particular, the projects aimed to test whether the photos and memories – many of them of activist activities or the physical symbols of activism – could be used to inspire current residents to renew this activist spirit. Noting the ability of social media to develop social capital, partners were excited at



Figure 1. Refurbished social housing in Wester Hailes (Prospect Community Housing Association).

the possibility of SNS to help make links within and outside the neighbourhood. It was also hoped this would challenge negative stories and stigma about the neighbourhood and present the everyday lives and positive histories contained in the photos and comments (for analysis of the impact of stigma on deprived neighbourhoods see, for example: [Dean and Hastings, 2000](#); [GoWell, 2010](#)).

Part of the project was to place in a prominent location a physical link to the growing cloud of data about the neighbourhood. In December 2012, a digital totem pole was unveiled by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh (Figure 2). This features a number of Quick Response (QR) codes that can be scanned by passers-by with their smartphones to access online resources. There was also a 'code book' of local social history walks with QR codes for people to scan to access further information. The totem pole became an object of novelty and interest and led to further activities. First, the amount of interest raised by photos of the Wester Hailes fun run on the Facebook site from the 1980s and 1990s led to it being restarted as an annual event in 2012, supported by a range of local community organizations. The former community newspaper was resurrected as *The Digital Sentinel*, a community-led news service using social media to record news stories on free-to-use websites.

The coproduced nature of the research activities also led to the specific coproduced method of writing the core of this article. The aims of the modest



Figure 2. The 'digital totem pole' (WHALE Arts)

research interventions were very ambitious: to renew activism through some digital initiatives and small projects to effect positive change in the neighbourhood. It would have been very easy for a critical academic analysis to suggest, using the title of the famous CDP report of 1977, that these initiatives were merely 'gilding the ghetto' (CDP Interdisciplinary Team, 1977). The persistent problems of Wester Hailes are those of poverty, income inequality and unemployment and it is difficult for these small interventions to make any substantial difference. However, this criticism would be unfair on those who participated, who had genuine enthusiasm and desire to effect change. Rather than criticising from an academic distance, the 'gilding the ghetto' argument produced a starting point for a coproduced paper with the community partners.

The growth of coproduced research in the UK is partly driven by the desire for research to deliver impact (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2015). This has raised a number of issues around the ethics of this approach to research, and indeed whether it is 'coproduced' or whether this is just used as a label for research meeting contemporary metrics. More positively this could be a means to use this new higher education governance context to deliver social justice aims (Pain *et al.*, 2011). As Beebeejaun *et al.* argue, coproduced research done well should lead to: 'a more equal partnership with communities and practitioners; working in a dynamic relationship to understand issues, create knowledge and then implement findings for transformational social change' (2014, p. 41). The approach to coproducing the paper presented below was an attempt to roll all of these aims into one with a focus on reflecting on the latter point and the delivery of outcomes in the community.

It must be acknowledged that the use of a written text was not useful or suitable for all participants (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2014). Most community partners struggled to contribute as they simply could not afford the writing time. Other community partners did not have the desire or confidence to contribute to something that was intended to be reproduced in academic contexts. Further, the project produced extensive discursive reflection in meetings and in email exchange. Much time was spent pausing and reflecting on progress and working through problems and barriers. While this context cannot be reproduced in full here, it must be borne in mind by the reader that what is reproduced below was part of a broader process of reflection. What was written represents a useful coproduced reflection on the interventions providing new avenues for the exploration of the intersection of new technologies, hyperlocal media, social capital and community development. The paper is now reproduced in full, with minor amendments to preserve anonymity.

Gilding the ghetto – coproduced paper

Researcher 1

So, my submission to the symposium¹ sprang from the title of the 1977 community development [text] *Gilding the Ghetto*. This carried the message that much as community development projects might be doing very good work, there was no way they could overcome the overwhelming economic inequality and problems such as the mass closing of factories that were occurring. This is a problem that has niggled in my mind throughout all of the activities in Wester Hailes. However, I'm not that much of a gloomy Marxist – I think the totem pole and all the other activities can deliver social justice in other ways. So as my first intervention, I thought it would be good to use [another academic's] comments on this as a starting point: 'We felt, however, that it needed more elaboration, particularly in terms of the (lack of) translation between the localized effects of coproduction and wider structural change in support of social justice. On the one hand you seem to be saying that the former are still largely symbolic but, on the other, that social justice outcomes (and their expression) are complex, and that local-level community interventions are important'. So can any of you elaborate? How are these projects helping to link up co-production at a local level to wider social justice?

Researcher 2

For me it is important to recover the conceptual starting point of the first small grant that led to my engagement with the Wester Hailes community.

¹ The text of this article was intended to be presented at a symposium in autumn 2013.

Following an academic workshop, a few of us were interested in the concept of 'hacking' that had re-emerged in the mid-2000s that described how people were breaking into the increasing array of black box technologies such as mobile phones and personal computers and adapting them for their own use. We were curious as to what extent these 'practices' could be compared with the social tactics that community residents have developed to adapt to the conditions imposed by the City Councils and wider National/UK policies including badly build accommodation in the 1970s, but also the more recent round of spending cuts.

Although new to Wester Hailes, within the first few months of the project in 2010 it was clear that there was a rich history of residents that had developed what could be described as 'workarounds' to make their lives better. On a personal scale, these might be clever ways to 'game' the benefit system, or on a larger community scale the construction of Venchies – hand built adventure playgrounds constructed by residents as places for their children to play.

However, although 'hacking' practices and workarounds are still an active part of coping with life in Wester Hailes, it appeared through interviews with residents that many of the bold, large-scale community practices of the 1970 and 1980s had been lost as government policy and changes in lifestyles had atomized the community into individuals forced to fend for themselves. Thankfully one of the many self-initiated community practices of the 1970s was a local newspaper that documented many of the large group activities which formed strong bonds between people. Photographs from events such as fun runs and dancing troupes, now remind residents of the incredible cohesion that was formed through the community-led initiatives.

It was the recovery of these photographs and their re-circulation through social media that in many ways led to the team of academics, WHALE Arts, Prospect Housing and [community activist] to begin developing our own series of 'hacks' – hacks that would have a material manifestation as well as a wider socially engaging digital framework. Hence the pole and the new Digital Sentinel community newspaper.

Community worker 1

In 2008, the West Edinburgh Times closed. Originally the Sentinel, it had operated for over 30 years reporting on current issues, campaigning, celebrating local success and highlighting connections between life in Wester Hailes and the wider society it was part of. Part of its legacy was a large archive of material including copies of the newspaper from across the years, a huge stock of photos and other related documents. Recognizing the value of this archive, Prospect [the local housing association] offered to provide safe storage. We also felt a responsibility to make this archive more public

and after helpful discussions with Central Library, we launched the blog *From There To Here*. Blogging on a weekly basis, we have included articles, recollections, opinions and analyses linked by the theme of the social history of Wester Hailes. There are also extracts from the *Sentinel*, photographs and community maps. As well as looking at the larger issues of the day such as the condition of housing and lack of infrastructure, we also included posts about sport, music, transport, carnival days, etc. to document the breadth of life in Wester Hailes.

The blog has a regular following and has enabled us to build an online archive that shows the rich and complex history of Wester Hailes. The resulting images, both past and present, often challenges the negative portrayals and on-going stigma associated with the area. Like many blogs, it does not attract huge amounts of comment. We would have to be much more proactive in interacting with other blogs to generate greater levels of dialogue. For us, it has been about documenting a broader view of Wester Hailes, challenging some of the simplistic and stereotypical views about the area and reminding people of a time when Wester Hailes fought for change.

We set up a Facebook page in 2010 to promote the blog at a more local level, to generate more interaction and to showcase the photographs that were such an important element of the *Sentinel*. This has a much larger following and has resulted in higher levels of comments, memory sharing and stories. Being involved in these online projects has brought us into the collaborative partnership *Our Place In Time*, connecting in particular the Facebook page to other online and QR code focused projects. We have always been clear that our interest in the blog and Facebook is around increasing engagement and contributing towards the creation of a network. The blog has also been helpful on occasion in giving a historical context to current issues such as the recent campaign to improve pedestrian access to the new *Healthy Living Centre*, enabling those campaigning to point out there had been an official failure to address the issue for over 20 years. I would say that the other main success from the blog has been the revival of the fun run; after blog entries on the popularity of the event, a planning group came together and the event was restarted.

Of course on their own, these occurrences seem minor and almost a distraction from the major issues currently affecting the area: rising unemployment, harsh welfare reform measures and falling income levels. How can these projects and the others within *Our Place In Time* have any meaningful impact? It would be naïve to suggest that a totem pole, some QR codes and a website on their own are creating a transformational experience for the area. It would also be patronizing to say that the *Digital Sentinel* is giving the community a voice, suggesting that without professional intervention local people cannot speak for themselves. However, I would argue that they are

contributing to the creation of new networks, skill building and engaging with a wider range of people. If the community is going to challenge current levels of social injustice, it will need a loud, confident and cohesive voice. Wester Hailes used to have that. In the early days, local residents quickly realized that they needed to mobilize if they were to see any kind of proper infrastructure development within the area to change it from being a collection of tower blocks into a functioning community. They were not naive in this: they recognized that they had been let down by official government structures and that it should not be their responsibility to sort the situation. But they were pragmatic, understanding that if they waited for the state to intervene, there would be no solution. They therefore chose to take matters into their own hands, discovering in the process how powerful a community can become if it bypasses public sector bureaucracy and manages its own resources.

Of course, the last thing officialdom wants is a community in charge of its own affairs, and one of the hard lessons learnt from Wester Hailes' history is the trade off in power and independence if you accept public funding and state partners. The Digital Sentinel is not about giving the community a voice; it is about reminding Wester Hailes that it already has a voice, a right to be heard and the potential to take the agenda back. Individuals involved in this project have found fresh and effective ways of expressing their opinion through gaining new skills. They have started to take this experience back into other networks they belong to, sharing their skills and knowledge. Similarly, the ability to write back on the social history detailed through the totem pole, the code books and the Facebook page gives validity and equality to views that often contradict official records, engaging participants in a process that identifies them as partners creating content, rather than recipients of information. Because all the projects are linked, it is easy for anyone accessing one project to start interacting and contributing to others.

This is all at a very early stage and one of the frustrations for projects such as this is that they need time to increase their impact and the opportunity to change their outcomes if the unexpected happens. Funding is often not flexible enough to enable this sort of gradual evolution. Support from academic partners and sources of funding has been refreshing in that their research focus seems to include an innate understanding that what is proposed is not always what results but that this can be informative and of value in itself.

Researcher 1: Community worker 1, that's really interesting. I liked your opening gambit – and it's telling that in the parallel email exchange I commented that it would be 'telling' if community partners did not have the time or resources to take part in this activity, and your reply was that you'd been busy developing funding bids for projects around welfare reform. Sad and angry-making times. I find what you've said really interesting – the

important thing here is links; what we social scientists call 'social capital'. So we might not be able to use the projects to alleviate the maldistribution of economic capital, but we can do something about social capital.

Community worker 2

Researcher 1, you've just hit on the point that I've been mulling over until I got a chance to sit down and write.

I'm representing Wester Hailes' community arts project and we were slower to get involved in the social archiving that Prospect and some of the other contributors started off. I always maintained that because of our remit, we would be happy to become involved when we could see a way of either responding creatively to archive material or bringing creativity to the projects in another way. The first piece of work that we led on was the design and carving of the totem pole on which the QR codes would sit. We are very pleased that the resulting piece criss-crosses all sorts of lines – public art, storytelling, archiving, ancient craft and the newest modern technologies. The greatest success of it however is that it is not an end product but a gateway, particularly to the emerging Digital Sentinel. Our interest in the ongoing Digital Sentinel project was strengthened by our desire that the Totem Pole should not be written off by the community as a 'gee-gaw' as I believe you put it but could become a tool in a project that could genuinely affect change.

It is a constant anxiety of community arts projects that our work does not become 'gilding', is not simply keeping the masses occupied while their quality of life plummets. Realistically though, arts projects are not going to change the economic reality for the large majority of the local population (unless perhaps you are Sistema Scotland with millions of pounds of funding and national and international political will behind you). So we are used to having to see our impact on the community as creating small but powerful incremental changes. And surely that's what community development is? If there are enough agencies, community-led projects and community activists impacting gradually but consistently, chipping away at ingrained injustices, then communities move forward. (Sadly this is less and less the case in Wester Hailes as we see the voluntary sector seriously damaged by funding cuts.)

What I think has worked particularly well with the group of Our Place in Time projects is that they have all been immediately appealing to local people, have sparked their interest and engaged them quickly. People enjoy telling their stories, looking at old photographs of their school friends, talking about what they love and hate about where they live. The projects have placed value on this social interaction and used it as the building blocks of community development. What's important is that we do not stop here and I think that the Digital Sentinel when viewed alongside the From There to Here blog and Facebook page will begin to build a real sense of a rooted,

resilient and empowered community, a face that will have to be acknowledged by the community itself as well as the rest of the city/country/world.

I do not think anyone could seriously expect the type of community development we are engaged in to be able to stop the tide of injustice that is welfare reform in the same way as those commentators in the 1970s saw that communities could not escape the oncoming tide of economic devastation. But deprivation is not measured simply in economic terms. The definition of deprivation encompasses access to education, standard of health and crime rates. These are things that can be affected by community development and the building of social capital and this is the area we should be confident and comfortable to work within.

Conclusion and discussion: social media for community development?

The key theme that emerged in the coproduced paper is the importance of social networks in the aims of the projects in Wester Hailes, tempered with an awareness of the variable achievement of them. As discussed above, there was a desire that a previous collective, civic identity could be renewed through these activities. The projects had produced some important outcomes in this regard. As recognized by Community worker 1, the activities 'are contributing to the creation of new networks, skill building and engaging with a wider range of people' including stronger links between the organizations involved. This was logically linked to giving local people a stronger voice to make the neighbourhood better.

The community partners also expressed a frustration that people were not getting involved in the various activities, or not in the engaged, activist way hoped for. This is defended by Community worker 2 as the projects 'have all been immediately appealing to local people'. The various outputs were recognized and used in the local community, which in a deprived neighbourhood was a valuable achievement. In many ways, this was DIY community action supported by university research funding (Richardson 2008). However, during the research attempts to turn some of this activity into more engaged activism, for example through posting messages or meeting notices to the Facebook page, were met with little response. We therefore have to question whether a 'real sense of a rooted, resilient and empowered community' (Community worker 2) can be quickly created through SNS-based activities.

The literature on human-computer interaction and ICT4D can explain why this is the case. It has long been recognized that access to ICTs does not necessarily lead to effective use. The correct contextual conditions, particularly links to existing activities that can be assisted by ICTs, have to be in place for effective use to flourish (Gurstein, 2003). Evidence on the use of

social networks is also now growing. It should be noted that many studies of early SNS have limited utility; for example, most published studies on Facebook are studies of student use as the social network was initially limited to students and alumni of higher education institutes (Hargittai, 2007; Aydin, 2012). However, this research suggests that social networks online often merely recreate social networks offline. For example, in terms of gendered behaviour, women are much more likely to replicate offline styles of interaction in online spaces, using social networks to enhance friendships, while men will use them for information finding (Colley and Maltby, 2008). Similarly, highly connected people are likely to also have expansive online networks and be able to use these to access social capital and other resources (indeed the research project in Wester Hailes would have never occurred without such networks). There is thus an equity issue apparent in the use of ICTs such as SNS, as Toyama succinctly argues, '[t]he greater one's capacity, the more technology delivers; conversely, the lesser one's capacity, the less value technology has. . . thus widening, not narrowing, the gaps between rich and poor' (Toyama, 2011, p. 77). Therefore, technology must be recognized as an enabler not a creator. Online networks reflect, catalyse or amplify offline social networks; they do not create them (Ibid.). The limited engagement in the digital aspects of the projects reflected on in the paper also point to further barriers around digital engagement, particularly around the cultural capacity of people to engage – can they use the appropriate language and social norms – and their motivations (Hampton, 2010; Toyama, 2011).

In this case study, these differences in use were particularly reflected in the strong sense of place shared among members of the Facebook page (Matthews, 2015). It is also revealed by analysing the 'Insights' data provided by Facebook. During the focused period of action research, the active use of the page (likes and comments) became dramatically gendered and limited in age range. From attracting a wide range of engagement in February 2012, six months later the site became dominated by activity from women (65 percent) and people in the age range of 35–44 (45 percent). This reflected the content posted – mainly photos of young women who would now be 35–44 – but also could be understood as working class women expressing the sorts of social and cultural capital they express in offline environments (Colley and Maltby, 2008; Jupp, 2008; Grimshaw, 2011). The conversations that were happening on this Facebook site could have just as easily taken place over a cup of tea in someone's living room; the only novelty is that they were taking place using digital technology although it must be recognized that this was cheaper and easier than other ways to meet might have been.

This analysis of usage statistics does present a picture of very banal, everyday social interaction in the online world. This suggests that the initial intention of the action research project to create new community activism might

be more difficult. This is the sort of cultural vernacular behaviour identified by Burgess (2007) among a much more technological able group. This is not the politically engaged, activist group that the project aimed to create, but banal engagement on the everyday (Postill, 2008). As discussed above, the ability of net-pioneers and then social media pioneers to turn their offline social capital into global social capital led many web utopians to view the new technology as disruptive of existing social relations and revolutionary in terms of its potential to empower individuals and communities (Wellman, 2001; Couclelis, 2004). The reality in this project was a large amount of reminiscence and slow development of activism, for example with the fun run and a local campaign to reopen an underpass under the railway that bisects the neighbourhood.

In conclusion, the answer to the question the coproduced essay reflected on is that SNS 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 (Ofcom, 2012; Scottish Government, 2014), achieving greater activist engagement is more difficult. As the literature on ICT4D and human–computer interactions shows, the recreation of offline inequalities and behaviours online means that the effective use of these technologies for activism is likely to be easier and more productive for more affluent communities who are already engaged in activities (Matthews and Hastings, 2013). However, the coproduced paper does highlight that the most important aspect for the research partners was the work among themselves to develop their partnership working. This institutional social capital was a valued outcome of the coproduced research in terms of delivering social justice aims. A result of this has been a continuation of this working and the development of further engagement activities and activism by a wider community of residents.

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