

Big Local online

The social media presence of Big Local: how areas are using social networks

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Executive summary

This paper examines how Big Local communities are using social media. The analysis is threefold. First, a mapping of Big Local areas' presence online allowed us to identify how many areas have their own webpage and/or accounts on social media platforms. Secondly, having established that Facebook and Twitter are by far the two most popular social media platforms among Big Local areas, we used the software for qualitative analysis [NVivo](#) to carry out semi-quantitative content analysis of all Big Local Facebook and Twitter accounts. Thirdly, we undertook in-depth content and thematic analysis of how 13 areas active on social media and 10 randomly selected areas use Facebook and Twitter, in order to identify differences among areas and across different platforms.

Our findings support prior studies on charities and social media showing how Facebook and Twitter are mainly used as tools for broadcasting *information* about events and activities, highlights from previous events, news, etc, rather than as a mobilisation tool (Guo and Saxton 2014).

Big Local areas tend to post about:

- community activities
- events
- volunteering opportunities.

Interactions that can help build an online *community* through conversations with members are less common, although they appear to be more prevalent in those areas that are more active on social media and in particular within Facebook groups, which show more variety in terms of both topics and contributions from different users. These conversations can generate a lot of attention (i.e. likes and comments) and tend to span beyond just Big Local activities, often focusing more generally on community life and potentially proving more effective as part of long-term community building efforts.

What posts generate more interest from members on Facebook and Twitter? Our research found that people seem to like debating about community issues and welcome posts about local business. However, there are limited opportunities for this type of conversations, and our analysis suggests one-way communication from the Big Local areas' official accounts towards members/followers is most common.

Based on our findings, we can put forward a few suggestions on how to make the social media engagement of Big Local areas more effective. We are all aware that Big Local areas mostly rely on volunteers and their resources are limited, so the emphasis should not really be on doing more than they already do, but doing things a bit differently, as we learn what works best on different social media platforms.

Moving from one-way communication on social media (i.e. broadcasting information about activities and events) towards a two-way communication can help us make the most of social media platforms' functions and encourage more engagement. There are a few easy ways of doing that:

1. Ask a question, rather than just post a statement.
2. Make your language personal and relevant to the people you want to engage (i.e. know your audience).

3. Make more, better targeted use of tags, mentions and #hashtags in your posts, to engage specific users directly and join other users' relevant conversations.
4. Online networking with other Big Local areas might prove a good long-term strategy to access peer support on specific issues and address similar challenges/issues across different areas and regions.

One thing to keep in mind is that social media is just one of many different engagement approaches that might help Big Local areas reach out to specific groups. Online channels can be attractive, as they are perceived to be low-cost; however, not everyone is online and an understanding of online access patterns is important when deciding how much resource it is worth investing in online activity, and to ensure that no one is being left behind.

1. Introduction

Social media have become important tools for individuals and organisations to build and/ or maintain personal and professional networks. These networks can be based on common interests or causes (communities of interest); shared trades and expertise (communities of practice); or shared places, whether neighbourhoods, towns etc. (communities of place). Different social media platforms will be most effective at facilitating certain types of interaction, making each more suitable than others for specific aims. For instance, Facebook helps reach a variety of segments of an audience, with the average user being between 25-45 years old and a gender split of 51% female and 49% male. Facebook can encourage dialogue and depth and might be an ideal platform for sharing personal stories, testimonials or detailed information about activities. By contrast, Twitter is aimed at people looking for quick information and news and immediate responses about activities or events, as well as reaching out to similar organisations. Known for its hashtag (#) communication functionality, Twitter, which has a younger average user (18-29 years old) and a gender split of 54% male and 47% female, might be the best platform for publicity purposes when traditional media do not respond (IPSOS Mori 2015).¹ LinkedIn is used for building professional networks, while Pinterest acts as an online scrapbook, for instance to showcase events through using pictures.

Social media popularity might support optimistic views that people interacting and engaging online can transform the process of information production and communication. Furthermore, the media hype around social networks might lead to assume that social media really have the potential to increase engagement. Community groups such as Big Local areas can benefit from social media as these offer low-cost opportunities to produce a number of different outcomes: from raising awareness about activities and events to increasing traffic on the website, to building relationships with community members or other local agencies and community groups. However, to date our understanding of how effective social media are at establishing stable engagement and translating online activity into offline engagement is very limited.

As most Big Local areas already have a social media presence or are in the process of setting up their website and/ or Facebook and Twitter accounts, this paper attempts to examine how Big Local groups are using social networks, as part of their work with the community. The analysis mainly focuses on how Big Local groups use Facebook and Twitter, since the initial mapping showed that these two platforms are the most popular.

This report tries to answer three main research questions:

1. How do Big Local areas use social media, and in particular Facebook and Twitter?
2. What factors influence greater reach on Facebook and Twitter?
 - 2.1 Do certain topics/ types of posts generate more or longer conversations with other users?
3. Are there specific differences in terms of engagement strategies on social media between the most active Big Local areas and the rest?

The analysis is threefold. First, a mapping of Big Local areas' presence online helped find how many areas have their own webpage and/ or accounts on social media platforms. Secondly, we used the software [NVivo](#) to import all Twitter and Facebook accounts and carry out some general semi-quantitative content analysis. This analysis offered insights on levels of activity and overarching differences between how each social media platform is being used. Thirdly, we used NVivo to undertake in-depth analysis of social media activity on Facebook and Twitter by 13 social media active Big Local areas² and 10 randomly selected Big Local areas³. Content⁴ and thematic⁵ analysis (Robson 2011) of Facebook posts and Tweets/ Retweets was carried out for all these areas.

This type of analysis inevitably presents several weaknesses. We only considered Facebook and Twitter accounts set up under the name of the Big Local area, but we are aware that in some cases, Big Local areas will rely on specific individuals' personal accounts to share Big Local work online. This means that some activity has been overlooked. Furthermore, as explained in the methodology section in the Appendix, in order to address limitations of time and capacity, in-depth thematic analysis only focused on specific 10-day periods during 2015:

- 1-10 June 2015;
- 1-10 September 2015;
- 1-10 December 2015.

These periods were selected because they coincide with event organising for the summer holidays, the beginning of the school year, and Christmas, with predicted higher levels of activity in Big Local areas.

The paper consists of five main sections. The next section briefly summarises the literature on social media, with a particular focus on the charity and voluntary sector, in order to identify key themes that have informed our research questions. Section three and four describe in detail the findings respectively of the overall analysis of Facebook and Twitter accounts and the in-depth content and thematic analysis of select areas. Finally, section five discusses the findings and draws some conclusions, suggesting a few "next steps" for both Local Trust and Big Local areas.

2. What the literature on social media says

Social media are expected to help non-profit organisations to engage their stakeholders and reach out to new audiences, in order to share, cooperate and mobilise supporters (Golbeck et al. 2010; Greenberg & MacAulay 2009). An interactive and decentralised environment can offer low-cost opportunities to mobilise and foster a dialogue with large audiences (Bortree & Seltzer 2009; Lovejoy et al 2012). However, although non-profit organisations are increasingly using social media as part of their communication and fundraising strategy, they still fail to make use of what social media can offer in terms of multidirectional dialogue (Bortree & Seltzer 2009; Greenberg and Mac Aulay 2009).

Until recently most analysis has been quantitative and focused on whether charities and community organisations use social media. More recent studies have been focusing on how and why these organisations use social media, through message-level content analysis (i.e. Facebook status updates; Tweets). These studies found that social media play an increasingly relevant tool for political and advocacy campaigns, to bring awareness to wider audiences about specific causes/ issues that traditional media have showed limited interest in, and to facilitate civic engagement and collective action (Petray 2011; Obar et al. 2012; Ammann 2010).

The literature on communications can provide helpful frameworks for understanding non-profit organisations' advocacy online. Lovejoy & Saxton (2012), in their study of how the 100 largest charities in the US use Twitter, identified three key communicative functions: information, community and action. The first function covers information about the organisation's activities, highlights from events, news, reports and publications, etc. The community function covers Tweets that aim to interact, share and converse with stakeholders to help build an online community. Finally, the action function includes messages that encourage followers to "do something", whether by donating money, attending events or engaging in activities.

Guo and Saxton (2014) build on this framework in their study of 188 US civil rights organisations. Their inductive analysis helped them to identify new types of social media-based advocacy work as a three-stage process: 1. reaching out to people; 2. keeping the flame alive; and 3. stepping up to action. This is a hierarchical model, whereby each successive layer is built on the one below. Therefore, first the organisation reaches out to and brings awareness of the organisation's cause; once a constituency is built, the next step is to sustain it and keep the flame alive among supporters. The final step is about mobilising supporters to act. In the fluid social media environment these three stages can happen simultaneously with different groups of stakeholders.

Overall all this literature suggests that, although social media platforms are often praised for offering opportunities for interactive, two-way communication, most non-profits still use them to broadcast information. This might indicate a reluctance to move away from primarily information-spreading behaviours (Phethean et al. 2015).

There is limited clarity about the actual success of social media in relationship building. Effectiveness of engagement is generally measured by number of likes for specific posts, shares or replies, which do not indicate whether users have a strong relationship with the charity (Phethean et al. 2013). Furthermore, one important aspect to consider when assessing engagement building through social media concerns online "lurkers". Bernstein et al.'s research on Facebook shows that people frequently underestimate the reach of a given post (2013). For any online community, around 90% of members would fall into the "lurkers" category (Nielsen 2006), or people that do not contribute or interact but rather consume content created by others. Waters & Jamal (2011) claim that there is a difference between "passive lurkers" and "active lurkers", whereby the latter might use the information they access online in an offline setting. Crawford (2009) suggests that a term with a more positive connotation such as "listener" should be used instead to describe this type of users and dispel the undeserved stigma. In fact, listeners can be engaged in a conversation as much as frequent commenters, but their contribution cannot be captured by any social media analysis.

Another important phenomenon to consider is "slacktivism" or activities that are low-cost and low-risk but generate satisfaction in the actor (Rotman et al. 2011). One example would be clicking *like* rather than just doing something. If the satisfaction generated by interacting online by clicking *like* replaces that of engaging more proactively, whether online or offline, there is a risk that

charities and community groups misinterpret this level of online engagement on their social media platforms with real engagement, and their returns will not correlate (Phethean et al. 2015).

In the end, social media represent just one aspect of any engagement strategies; they can help reach out to new audiences but building stable relationships and long-term engagement necessarily relies on a combination of both online and face-to-face approaches.

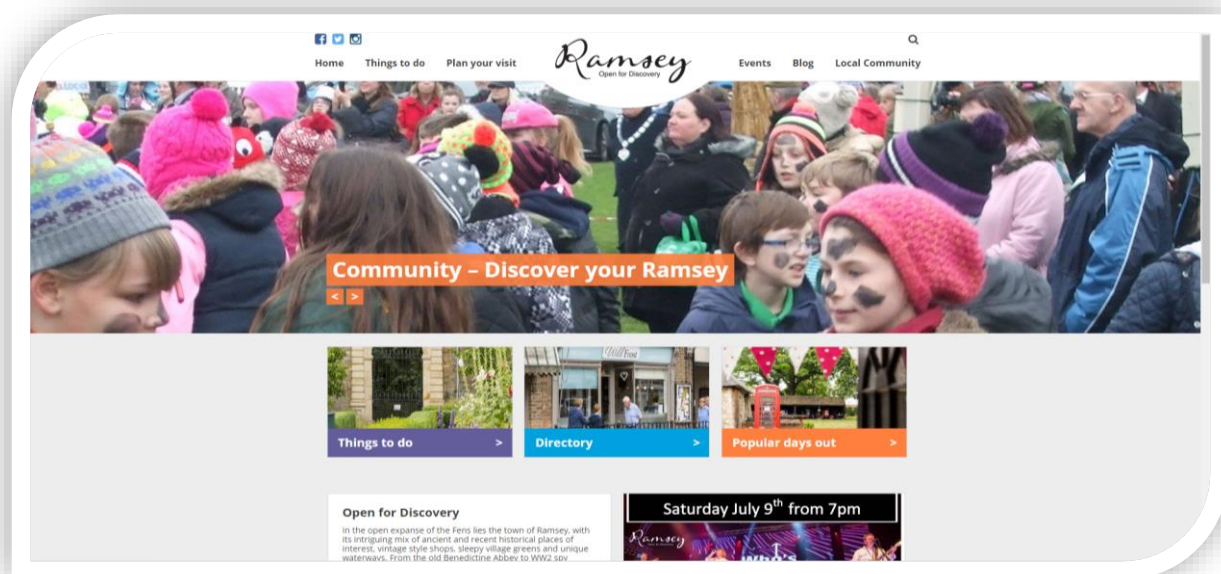
3. All that buzz: mapping Big Local's presence on social media

An initial mapping of the overall presence of Big Local areas online

The first stage of this analysis, the initial mapping, allowed us to assess the overall social media presence of Big Local areas at the time of the mapping (April 2016).

- A large majority of Big Local areas had an active webpage (105), which they used to share information on progress, events and various activities. A few websites are quite sophisticated and include links to Twitter and Facebook accounts, and in a few cases to other social platforms, such as the area's YouTube channel, or accounts on Instagram and Flickr. Some webpages also display blog spaces for residents to share their stories. However, generally webpages show limited activity and the only up-to-date content is often on either Facebook or Twitter.

Fig. 3.1 – an example of a Big Local webpage



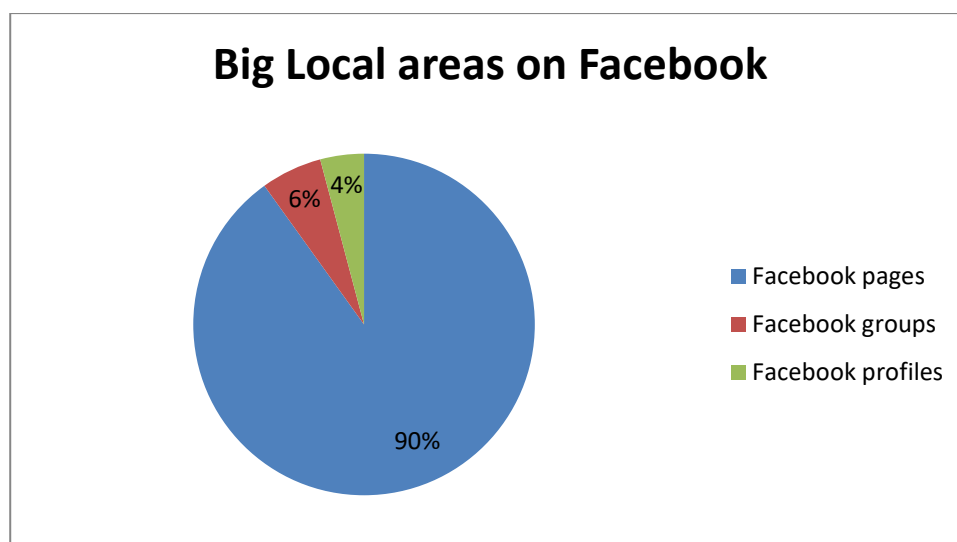
- A large majority of Big Local areas have a significant presence on two main social media platforms: Facebook (121 accounts) and Twitter (100 accounts). While most areas have set up a Facebook page, only few have opted for a Facebook group (7) or a Facebook profile (5 accounts).

On Facebook public-facing organisations would generally choose to set up either a page or a group (or both), in order to interact with their audiences, as personal profiles have higher privacy settings and are more focused on the individual user, but less conducive to widening involvement and larger conversations. Pages and groups each present different sets of advantages and disadvantages, which might affect communication strategies.

Facebook pages are ideal for two-way communication: from the Big Local partnership to members and from members to the Big Local partnership, but do not facilitate horizontal communication between members. They are generally more suited to making announcements to large groups of people to promote events and activities.

Facebook groups allow for more equal communication between all members of the group and tend to promote an online community with no one person or organization dominating, although the group administrators often tend to be the most active users. It is telling that although Facebook groups represent only 6% of Big Local presence on Facebook, two of the most active areas on Facebook use a Facebook group. These two Facebook groups, which count several hundred members, have been included in the content analysis of selected areas in section four. This will allow to highlight differences between Facebook groups and pages in terms of the type and intensity of conversations between members.

Fig. 3.2 – Big Local areas on Facebook



While slightly more areas have an account on Facebook, two thirds of Big Local communities are also active on Twitter. In some cases, the same area will have high levels of activity on both Twitter and Facebook, often cross-posting similar messages on more than one platform. Most areas, however, even when they have accounts on both social networks, tend to show a clear preference for one or the other, as indicated by different levels of activities in each platform.

The tables below report data on number of Facebook *likes* and Twitter followers across all Big Local areas with an account, as a preliminary indicator of engagement.

The average number of Twitter followers is slightly higher than Facebook members, perhaps because Twitter allows users to quickly build communities of practice among like-minded charities and community groups. Nevertheless, the overall highest number of *likes* for the most popular Big Local Facebook page is nearly twice as large as the highest number of followers for the most followed Twitter profile.

Table 3.1 Number of Facebook Likes

FACEBOOK	<i>Likes/Friends</i>
<i>Average</i>	228
<i>Median</i>	163
<i>Highest number</i>	1670

Table 3.2 Tweets and Twitter Followers

TWITTER	<i>Tweets</i>	<i>Followers</i>	<i>Following</i>
<i>Average</i>	375	261	218
<i>Median</i>	185	204	160
<i>Highest number</i>	4218	895	959

- An increasing number of areas has its own YouTube channel (28 areas), while a large number of areas (107) has produced and shares video through other organisations' YouTube channels (e.g. Local Trust; [Our Bigger Story](#); local community organisations). These videos are often short films promoting events or achievements, but also include short podcasts and video diaries from Big Local residents.

Fig.3.3 – A Big local area's own YouTube channel

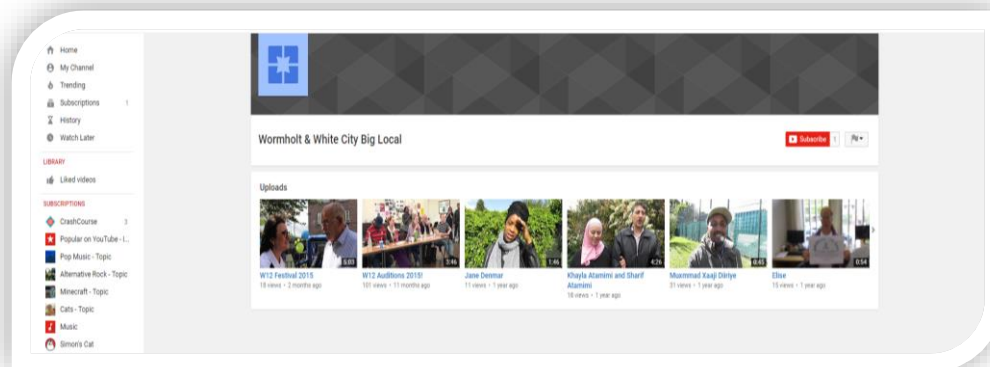
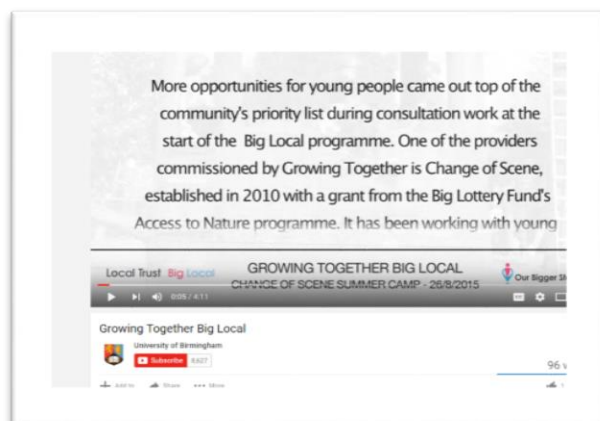


Fig. 3.4 – A video from a Big Local area shared on the University of Birmingham's YouTube channel



- Only a small number of areas (10) appears to use other social media platforms (e.g. Instagram; Flickr) with any regularity or significant followership.
- Finally, a very small number of areas does not have any social media presence and we are aware that a few of these areas are currently in the process of setting up their own webpage and/or Facebook or Twitter account.

Analysis of Big Local areas' use of Facebook and Twitter across all areas

All Big Local Twitter and Facebook accounts were imported as datasets and analysed on NVivo.⁶ Automatic coding was carried out based on specific coding patterns (e.g. Tweets v. Retweets; tags and mentions; usernames etc.) to identify broad themes and interaction patterns.

Big Local on Twitter

Figure 3.5 shows the words that most frequently appear in Tweets and Retweets across all 100 Big Local profiles. The high frequency of words such as *local*, *community*, *event* and *meeting*, while not surprising, indicates a clear focus on promoting activities and events, often linked to the Big Local plan and highlighting the novelty of the programme (*new*) and the accessibility of Big Local activities (*free*). The hashtag *#biglocal* features prominently; this could mean that on Twitter Big Local areas emphasise their identification with the national-level programme.

Fig. 3.5 Word frequency across Twitter profiles

BOX 3.1

RT @doverexpress: Dover 54mph winds causing delays on all @Port of Dover ferry services



The cluster analysis (fig. 3.6) shows how specific words are linked to other words (i.e. in the same post – the @localtrust will often be used in conjunction with the #biglocal hashtag) and allows us to identify 3 broad conversation topics:

- Partnership meetings and inviting new members to join;
- Sharing information about activities and events and encouraging engagement;
- Interactions with residents, for instance by thanking them for support and celebrating achievements.

The high number of Tweets compared to Retweets (fig. 3.7) suggests a strong focus among Big Local areas on promoting their own activities and priorities rather than sharing Tweets from others. However, it should be noted that often Twitter users repost messages from others in a new Tweet, so that it might be difficult to distinguish them from original posts through this type of semi-quantitative content analysis (see example in the Box 3.1).

Fig. 3.7 Tweets v. Retweets

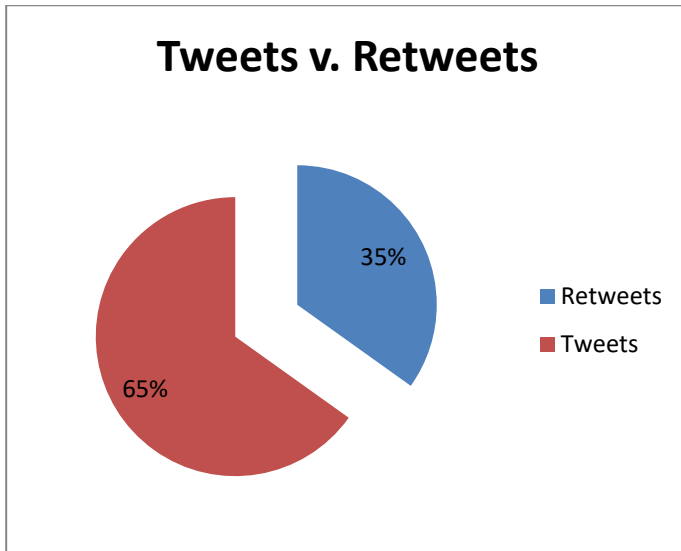
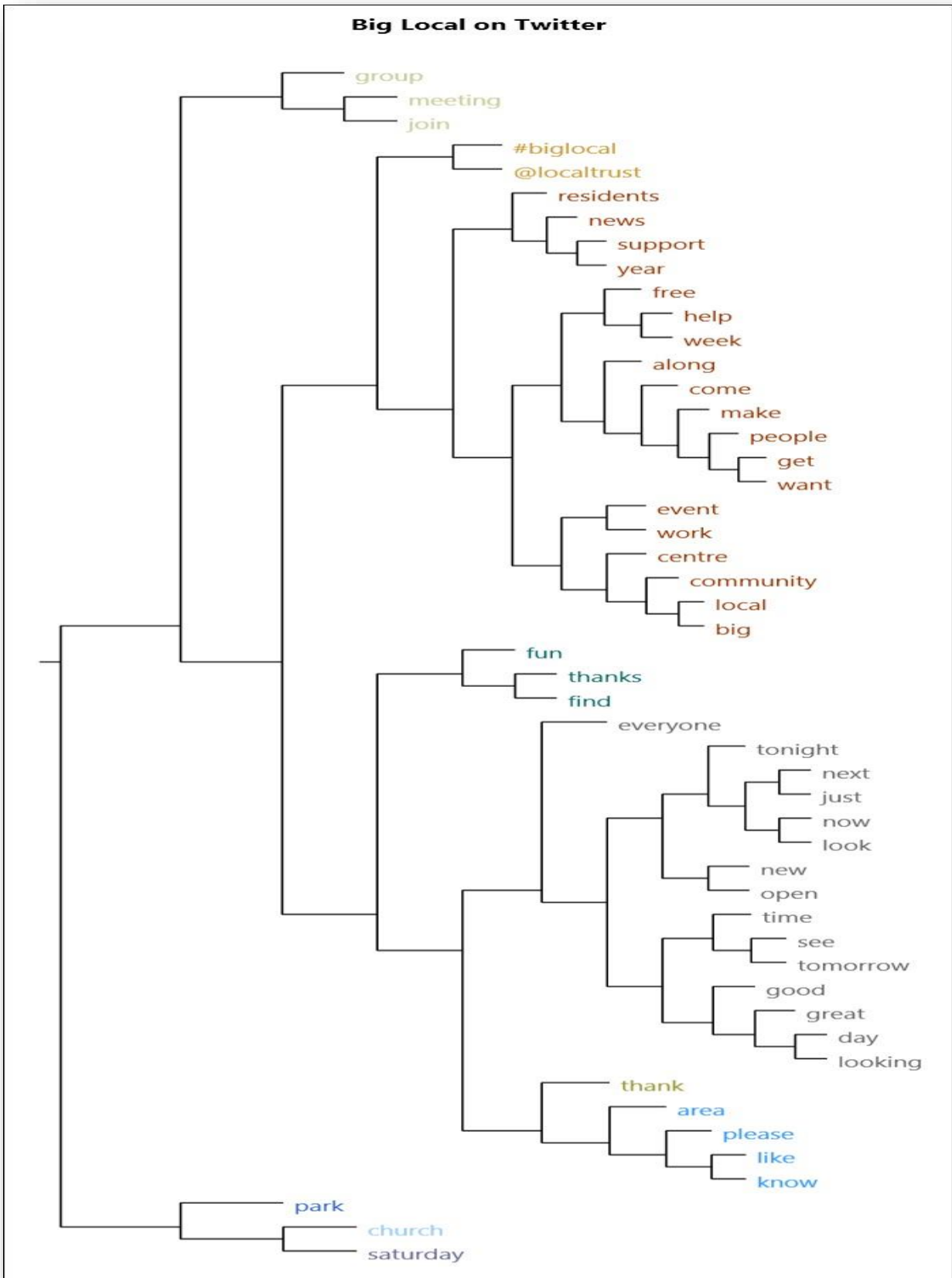


Fig. 3.6 Cluster analysis of frequent words



Big Local areas generally make limited use of hashtags. The hashtag - written with a # symbol - is used to index keywords or topics on Twitter. People use the hashtag symbol (#) before a relevant keyword or phrase in their Tweet to categorise those Tweets and help them show more easily in Twitter searches. This function allows people to easily follow topics they are interested in and join in conversations with other users around that topic. By clicking on a hashtagged word in any message it is possible to view other Tweets that include that hashtag. Hashtagged words that become very popular are often listed as *Trending Topics*.

In this analysis, after identifying the hashtags used across all areas, we differentiated between the source (the Big Local account) and the references (how many time that hashtag was used). While generally each Big Local profile uses different hashtags that are closely related to their area's activities, organisations etc., a few hashtags were used across different areas. Table 3.3 shows hashtags that were used by at least 10 Big Local areas and reports how many times each hashtag was used (references).

Hashtags can offer a broad understanding of common conversation topics. As noted above, #biglocal is by far the most used hashtag: by April 2016 (when the profiles were imported into NVivo for content analysis) 87 areas had used it at least once and overall it was mentioned 3851 times. Unsurprisingly #community and #volunteer or #volunteerweek are popular hashtags, as well as other topics linked to priorities and activities (i.e. jobs; business; family; charity; Christmas events), but also programme-level conversations around Local Trust initiatives, such Star People.

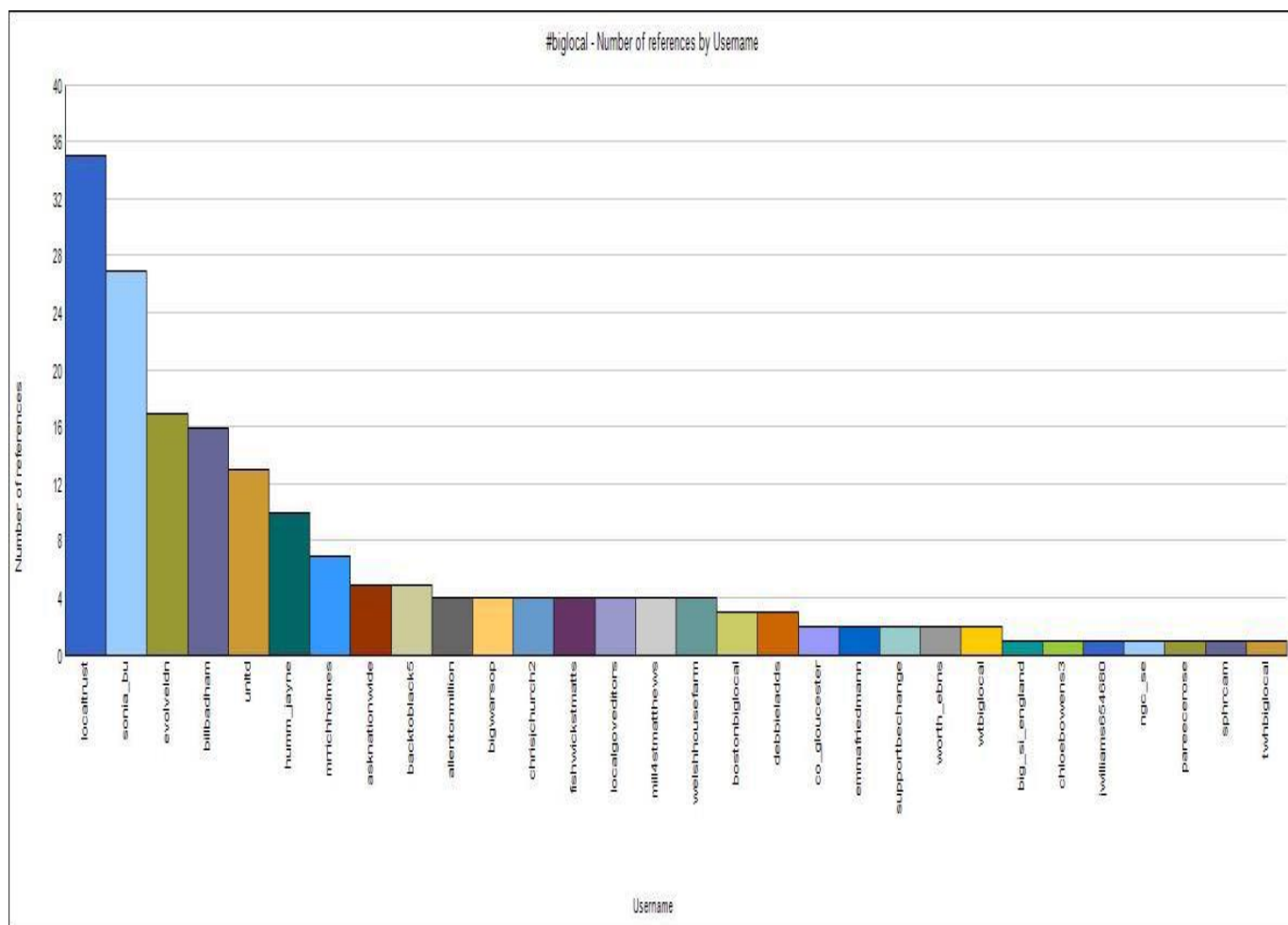
Table 3.3 Twitter hashtags used by Big Local areas

Hashtag	Number of references	Number of Big Local areas
<i>Big Local</i>	3851	87
<i>Community</i>	312	54
<i>Local Trust</i>	120	25
<i>Socent</i>	111	23
<i>Jobs</i>	82	29
<i>Volunteering/volunteer</i>	69	36
<i>Get involved</i>	45	24
<i>Volunteer's week</i>	40	19
<i>Business</i>	39	13
<i>Starpeople</i>	39	12
<i>Funding</i>	34	13
<i>Christmas</i>	32	20
<i>Free</i>	31	21

<i>Arts</i>	26	18
<i>Springevent16</i>	26	18
<i>Charity</i>	22	17
<i>Have your say</i>	17	11
<i>Ukhousing</i>	16	12
<i>Family</i>	15	15
<i>Localgov</i>	12	10

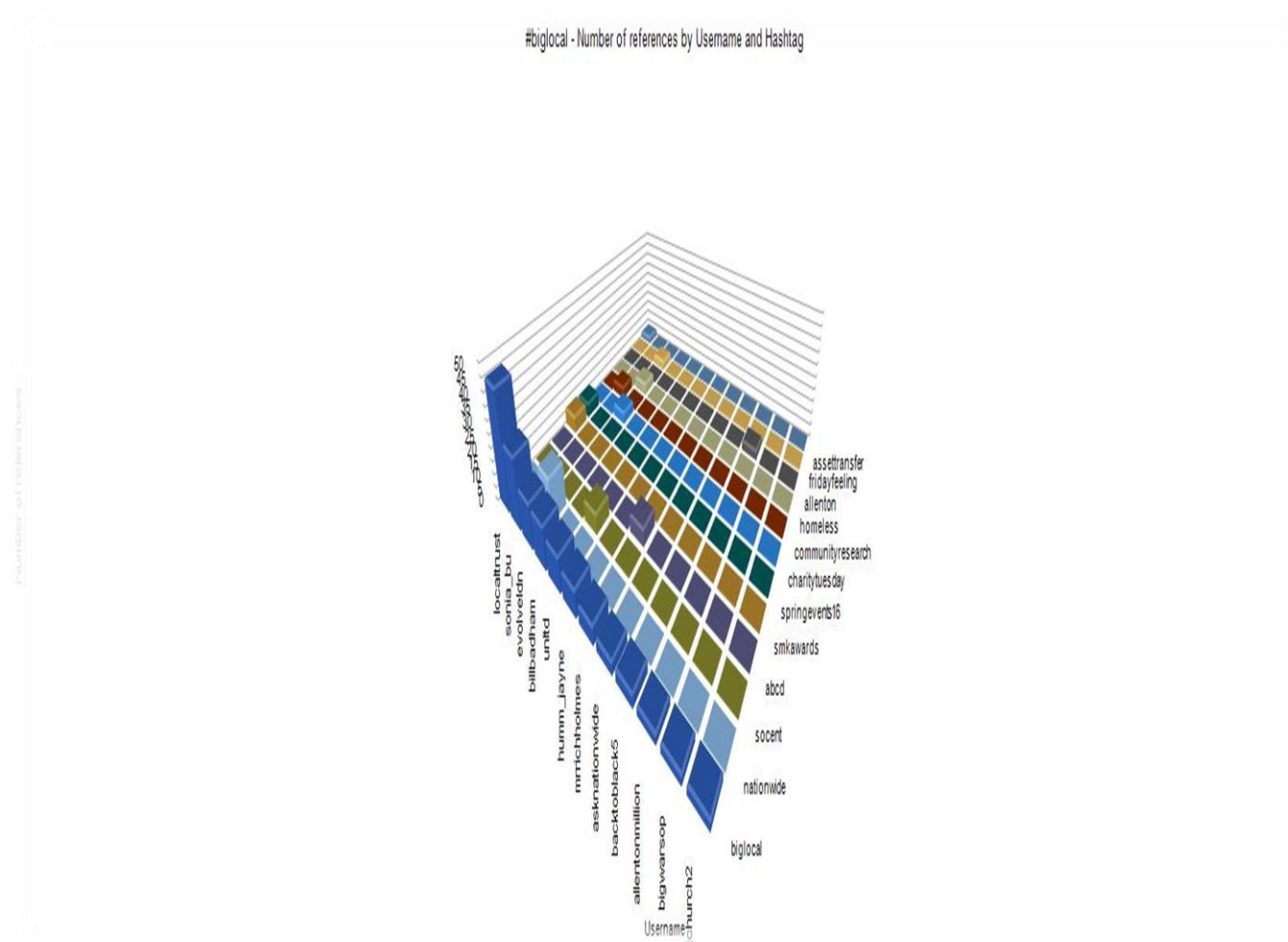
The chart below shows overall activity under the #biglocal hashtag by username.

Fig. 3.8 – Number of references of #biglocal by username



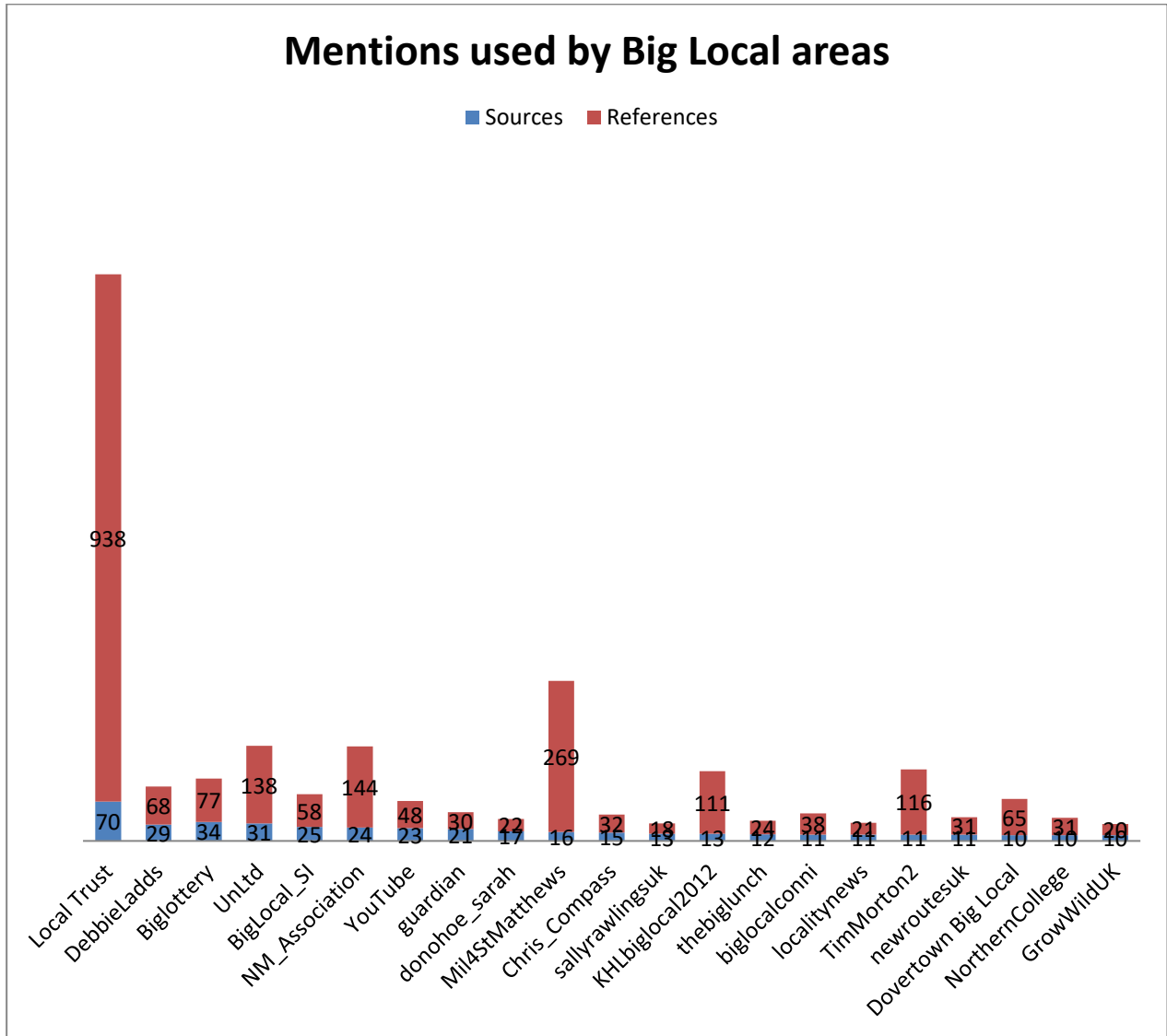
The figure below shows how the hashtag #biglocal is associated with other hashtags by frequent users.

Fig. 3.9 – Number of references of #biglocal by username and hashtag



A mention is a Tweet that contains another user’s username, preceded by a handle @, anywhere in the body of the Tweet. Mentions are a way of engaging other users directly within Tweets or replies to other users’ Tweets. Mentions can be understood as a strong indicator of direct engagement and multidirectional conversations. Interactions through mentions are limited among Big Local Twitter users and tend to involve people, organisations and local institutions within the community. There are, however, mentions that are used by several different areas; those used by at least 10 areas (**sources**) are presented in the chart below (figure 3.10), which also lists the number of **references** for each mention. Unsurprisingly, Local Trust and Big Local partners received the highest number of mentions, but it is interesting to note how some Big Local areas also received several mentions, often from other Big Local areas around specific activities these areas had been leading on. This might be understood as an indicator of promising networking across Big Local areas via Twitter.

Fig. 3.10 Twitter mentions used by Big Local areas



Big Local on Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social network within the Big Local community, with about 20% more Big Local areas preferring it to Twitter. The word frequency and the cluster analysis show similar conversation topics on Facebook as on Twitter, but the emphasis is slightly stronger on activities that engage families and children, as well as encouraging resident engagement, with words such as “people” and “please” ranking very highly among the most frequent 50 words.⁷

Fig. 3.11 Word frequency across Facebook pages/ group and profiles

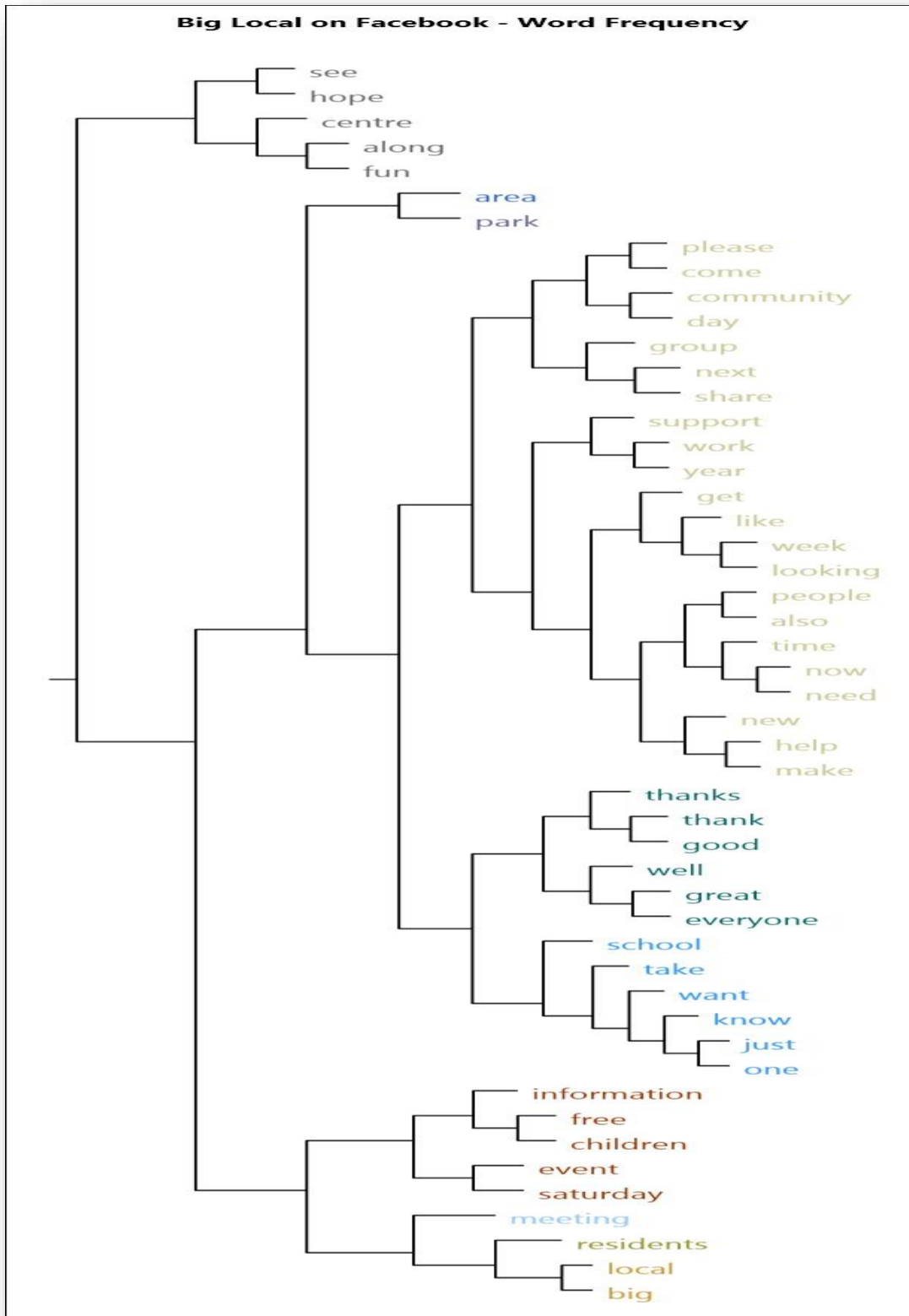


Looking at the clusters in figure 3.12, we can identify three main themes, with an overall strong focus on *community* and *people*:

- Encouraging people to come along to events;
- Sharing information about activities and events, with a strong focus on children and school activities;
- Interactions with residents by pleading, as well as thanking them, for support.

Overall, on Facebook as on Twitter, the tone is very positive, with words such as *fun* featuring in several posts.

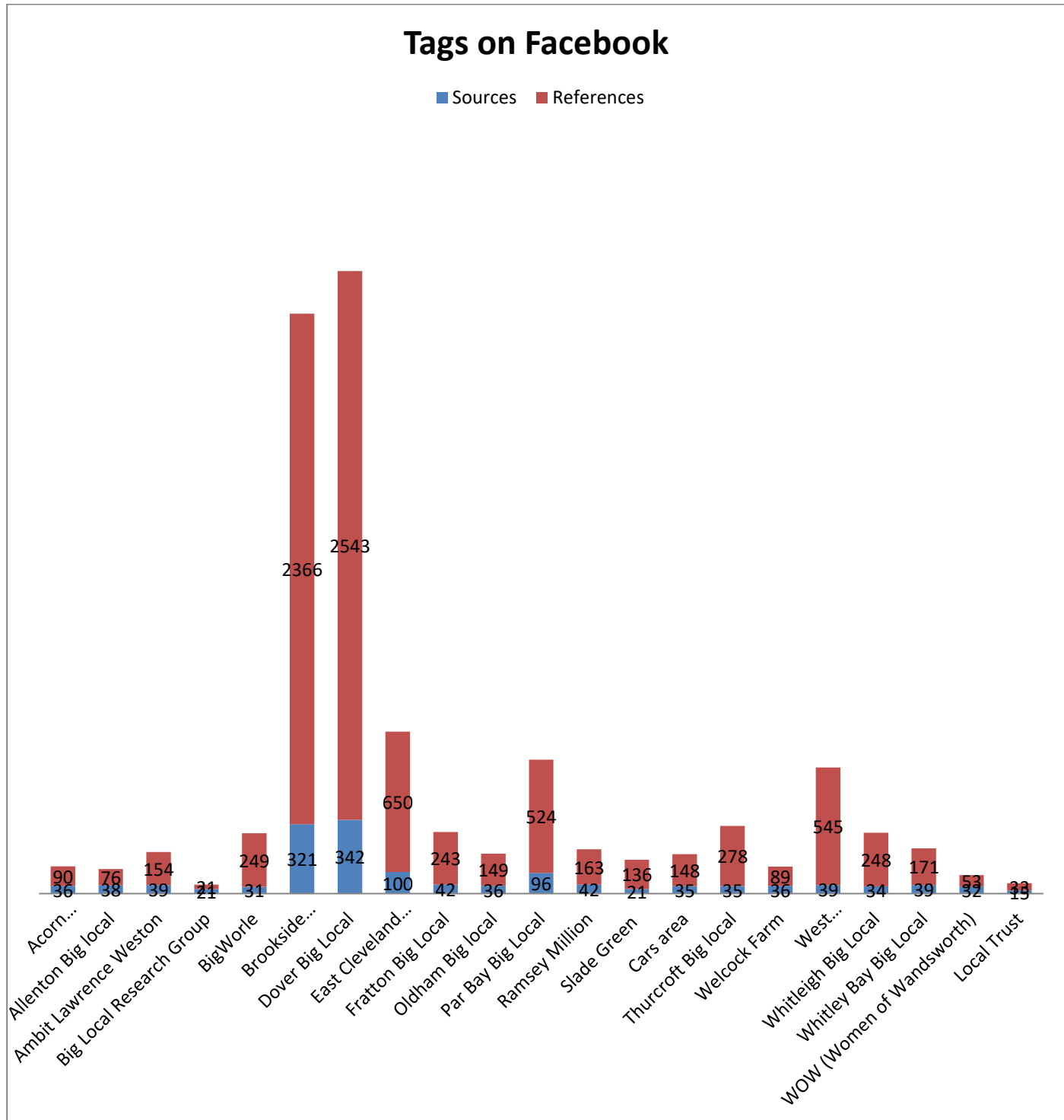
Fig. 3.12 Cluster analysis of most frequent 50 words



Unlike on Twitter, Facebook's usage of hashtags is generally limited; thus, we could not use this function to identify broad conversation topics. On Facebook, however, it is possible to tag other

users in order to communicate with them directly but publicly (i.e. not through private messages), similarly to how @handles work on Twitter. When you tag someone, you create a link to their profile. The post you tag the person in may also be added to that person's Timeline. For example, you can tag users on a photo or on a status update, which may also show up on that user's Timeline, depending on their privacy settings. When you tag someone, they'll be notified. This is therefore a function which can help understand how users interact with each other.

Fig 3.13 Tags on Facebook Big Local pages/ groups



The chart above (figure 3.13) shows users tagged by at least 20 other users (**sources**) and the overall number of tags (**references**). A few Big Local areas are particularly active on Facebook and this is reflected in the high number of tags, as an indicator of interaction. In the chart we also included Local Trust, although it only had tags from 15 other users; the organisation's levels of activity on Facebook are clearly much lower than on its Twitter profile. The Big Local Research Facebook group, which was set up only a couple of months prior to data gathering for this research, features in the chart with 21 tags from 21 different users.

This general analysis offers a broad picture of how Big Local areas are using social media and what they are talking about, but it fails to explain how communication happens. The next section tries to address this gap by analysing the content of Facebook posts and Tweets of a few select areas and by examining how much attention they received from their audiences. The rationale is to try and elicit more detailed information on what themes and communication strategies are most effective at catching people's attention or sparking debates and conversations, and how different platforms might affect engagement approaches and strategies.

4. Talking to people or talking with people? Content analysis of Tweets and Facebook posts

We selected 13 areas for content analysis to capture a mix of areas very active on either Facebook or Twitter or both.⁸ After selecting these 13 areas, we triangulated with an existing internal document produced by Local Trust, which lists Big Local areas' priorities, as set out in the budget forecast included in their first plan. 13 areas included Communications among their priorities, but only three of these areas were identified as highly active on Facebook and Twitter. This might suggest both that Communications as a priority naturally includes more than just social media, but also that this is often an overarching priority even when not stated in the plan.

Out of the 13 active areas, two only had a Facebook account, while the other 11 had both a Facebook and a Twitter account, although all but two were most active in one or the other, and in a few cases the less active account was abandoned and shows no recent activity. Out of 13 Facebook profiles, two were Facebook groups and the remaining 11 were Facebook pages.

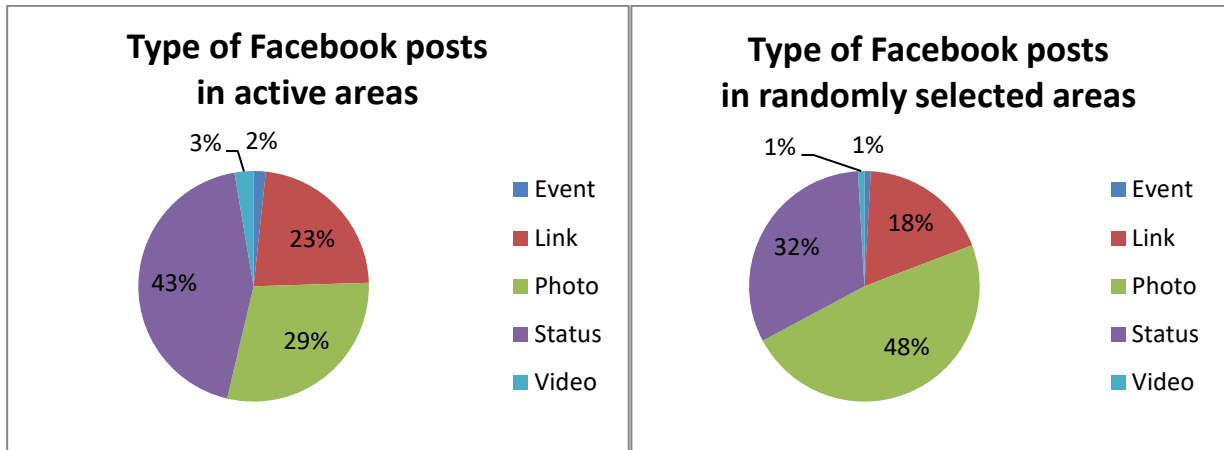
We also randomly selected a further 10 areas to examine differences in the types of online conversations between very active areas and other areas. Out of the 10 randomly selected areas, six had both a Facebook and a Twitter profile, while four only had a Facebook account. Among these areas, all Facebook accounts were Facebook pages.

As detailed in the Appendix, we restricted content analysis of posts to three specific periods (i.e. 1-10 June; 1-10 Sept; 1-10 Dec 2015). These are times of the year which generally report high levels of activity because of summer events, the beginning of the school year, and Christmas events, respectively. Out of ten randomly selected areas, however, four did not have any activity on Facebook and six did not have any activity on Twitter during the selected periods. Nevertheless, all areas were included in the overall analysis.

A preliminary analysis of all Facebook posts across active and randomly selected areas highlights a few differences (fig 4.1). While among the randomly selected areas most posts are pictures, among the active areas there is a predominance of status updates. These data might appear counter-intuitive, as common sense would suggest that pictures are a more effective tool than words at encouraging a response and catching the audience's attention. This is generally

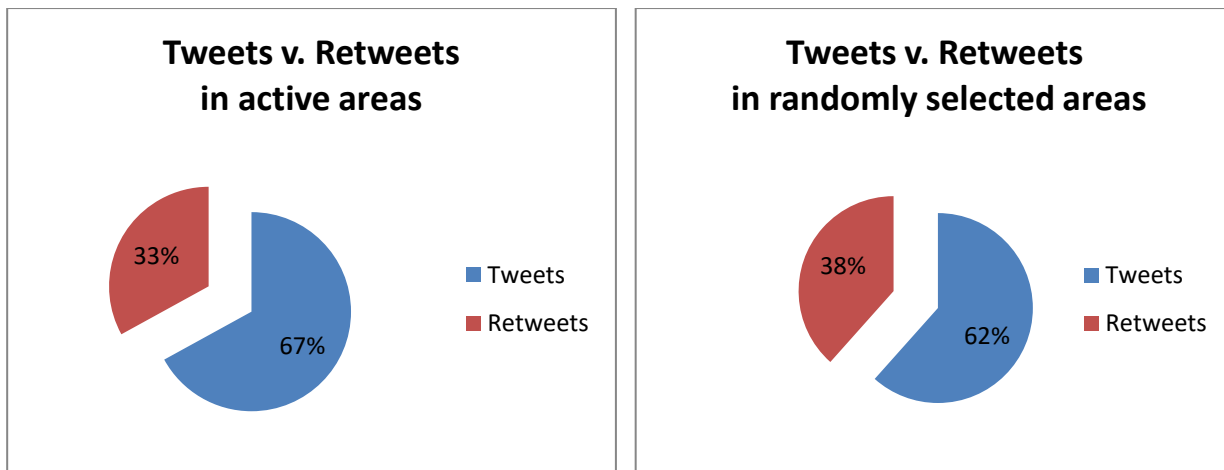
the case, however, it is possible to interpret these figure in light of the fact that many of these pictures are often “shared” and are not original materials (e.g. not the Big Local areas’ own pictures).⁹

Fig. 4.1 – Type of Facebook posts



On Twitter, consistently with data across all areas (see section 3) the number of Tweets is much higher than Retweets across both active and randomly selected areas.

Fig. 4.2 - Tweets v. Retweets



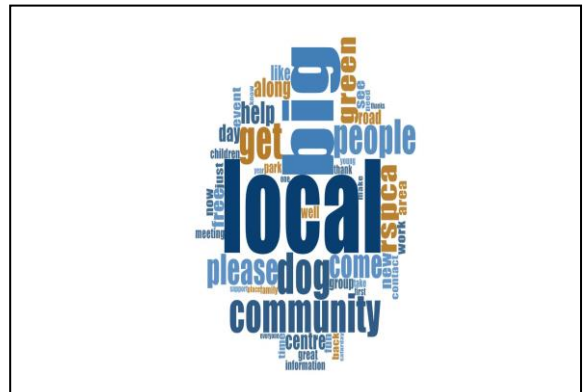
Before delving into the content analysis of messages, we present one more high-level comparison between randomly selected and active areas to highlight word frequency on Facebook and Twitter. The figures below (figures 4.3 to 4.6) present data as word clouds and clusters.

Fig. 4.3 – Word frequencies on Facebook

Active areas



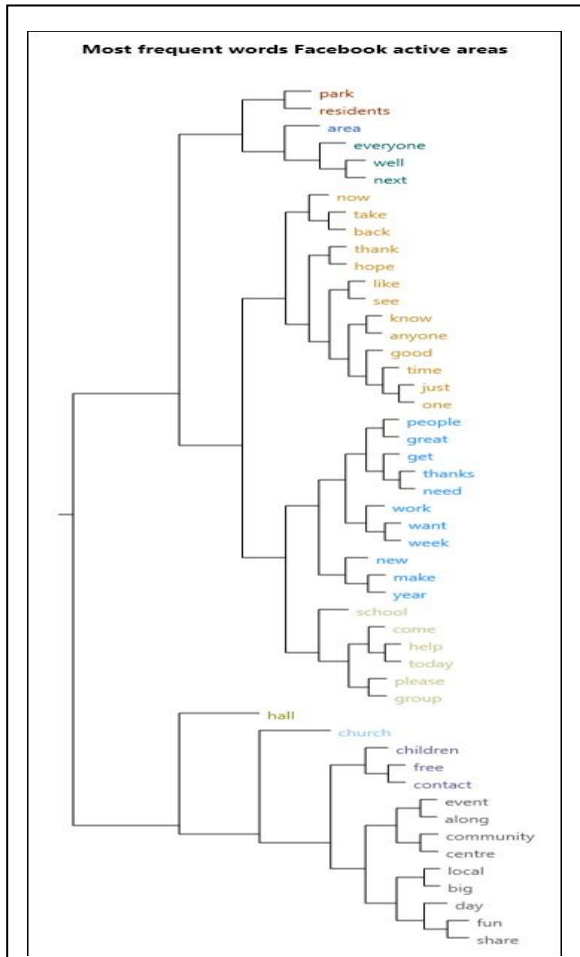
Randomly selected areas



While both on Facebook and Twitter active and random areas appear to choose similar words and conversation topics, the emphasis is slightly different. On Facebook, randomly selected areas use “big local” more than “community”. As clarified by the cluster analysis, and consistently with data from across all areas, in both random and active areas the dominant themes centre around people, to get them to participate and to help; community spaces; children activities; and the environment. On environment, however, in the random areas there is a clear emphasis on dogs, whether linked to cleanliness around green spaces or adopting abandoned pets (*rspca*). Active areas also appear to use words that might encourage engagement more often, such as *free* and *please*.

Figure 4.4 - Word frequencies on Facebook – cluster analysis

Active areas



Randomly selected areas

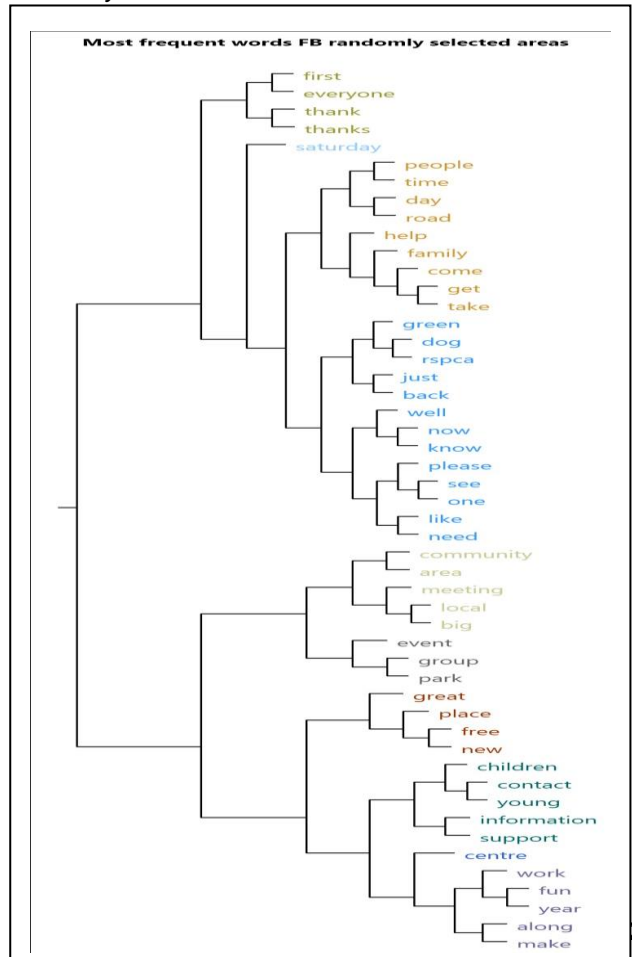
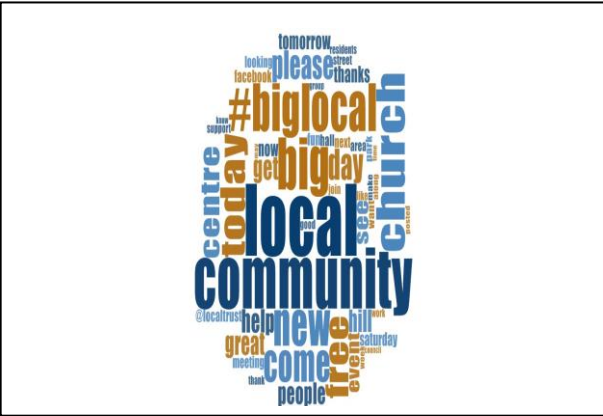
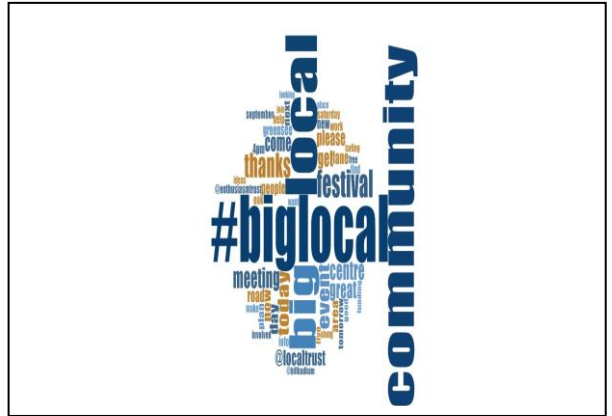


Figure 4.5 – Word frequency on Twitter

Active areas

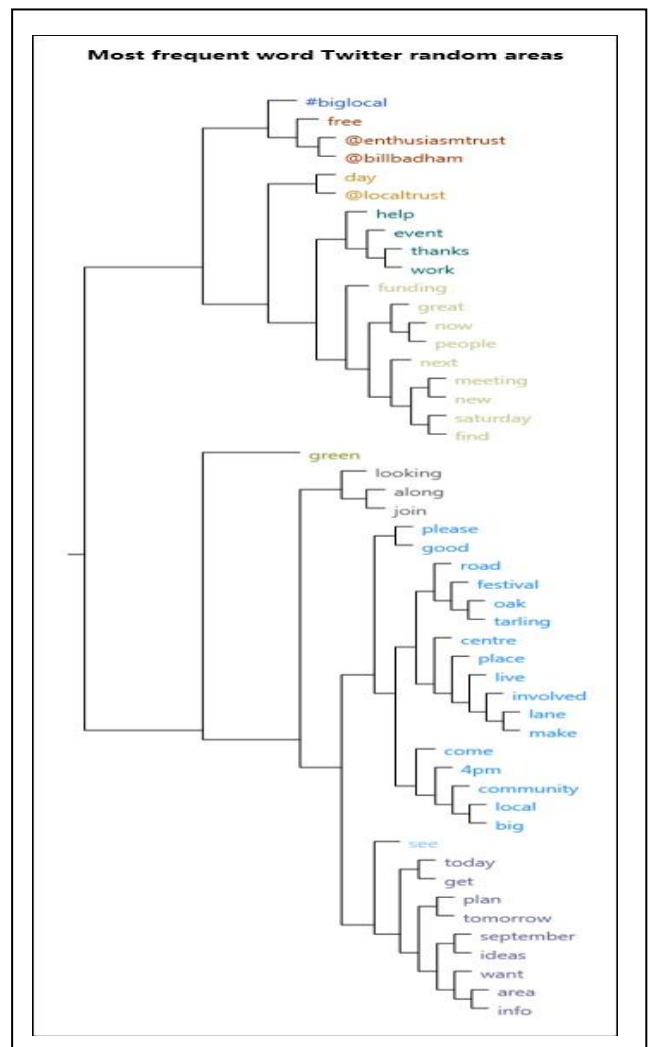
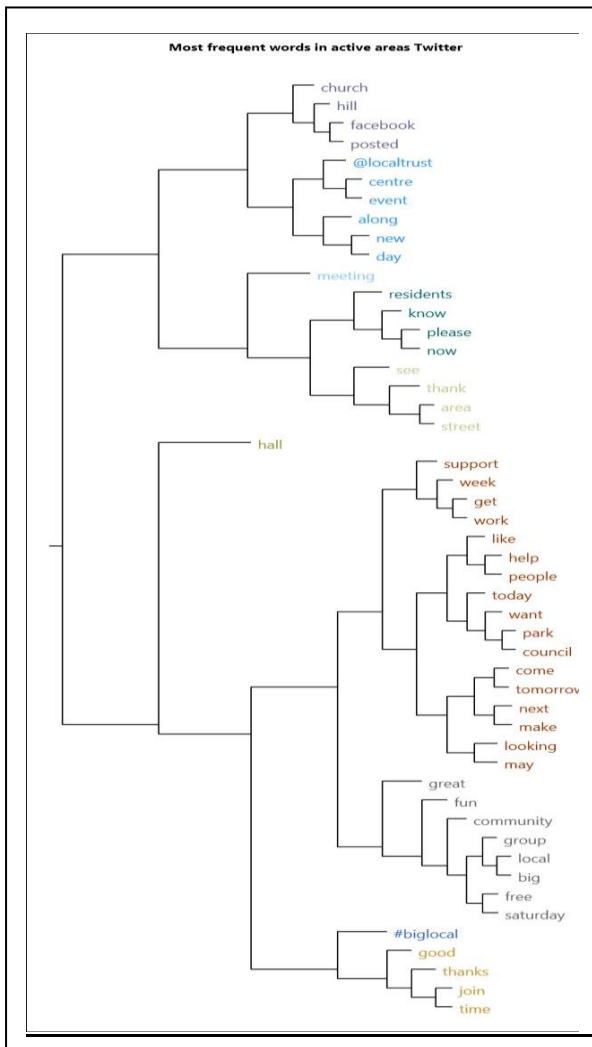


Randomly selected areas



Similar conversations also happen on Twitter, as often the same messages are cross-posted on both social networks. The random areas appear to place greater emphasis on Big Local, also through greater use of the #biglocal hashtag.

Figure 4.6 - Word frequencies on Twitter – cluster analysis



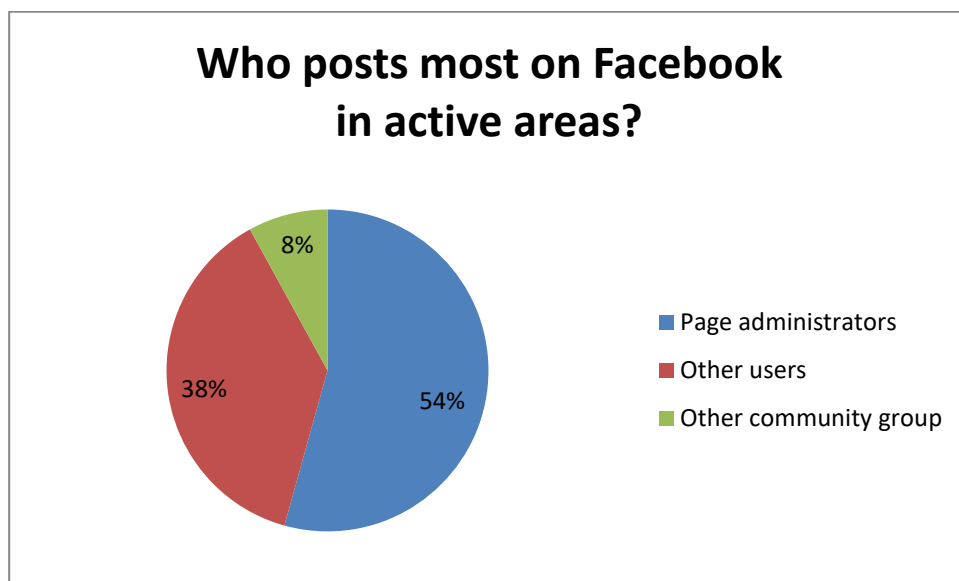
In active areas, activities linked to religious institutions appear to play a big part in Twitter conversations. In both active and random areas, the @localtrust mention is often linked to a specific day and activity as areas are keen to show their achievements. In all areas the key themes often centre around getting people involved, sharing news about funding and thanking people for their support, but the active areas would appear to use a more positive tone and used the word “fun” more frequently than the randomly selected areas.

The next couple of subsections examine in more detail communication patterns in active areas first and then randomly selected areas.

What happens in the active areas?

The active areas were purposefully selected because of their particularly large followership on either Facebook or Twitter, or both, and because they tend to post more frequently than the average Big Local area. The coding framework that we developed for this analysis, which can be found in the Appendix, allows for some general insights to begin with. We could establish, for instance, that across the active areas it is the page administrators that post the most.

Fig. 4.7 – Most active users on Facebook



In the framework we distinguish between the Big Local account and page administrators posting from their personal account, which can help identify key people behind Comms activity. These page administrators will be most often part of the Big Local partnership or work closely with it. While in general most posts come from the official Big Local account, in the two Facebook groups all the posts from administrators are from personal accounts.¹⁰ The two areas with most posts from “other users” (generally personal accounts rather than organisations or the page administrators) were using Facebook groups. Facebook groups would seem to encourage contributions from a wider range of users and might be more conducive to building multidirectional communication, as shown in the figures below.

Fig. 4.8 – Who are the page administrators?

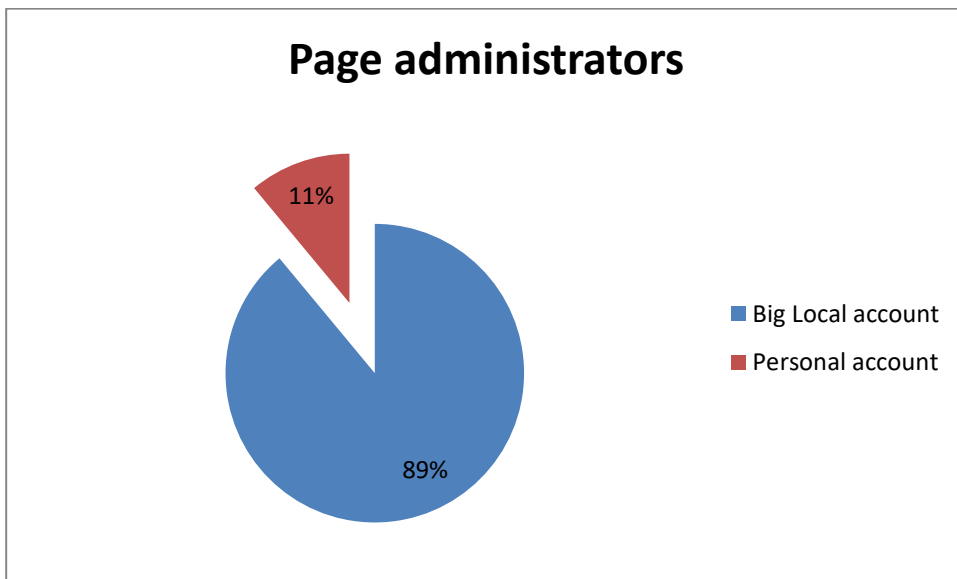
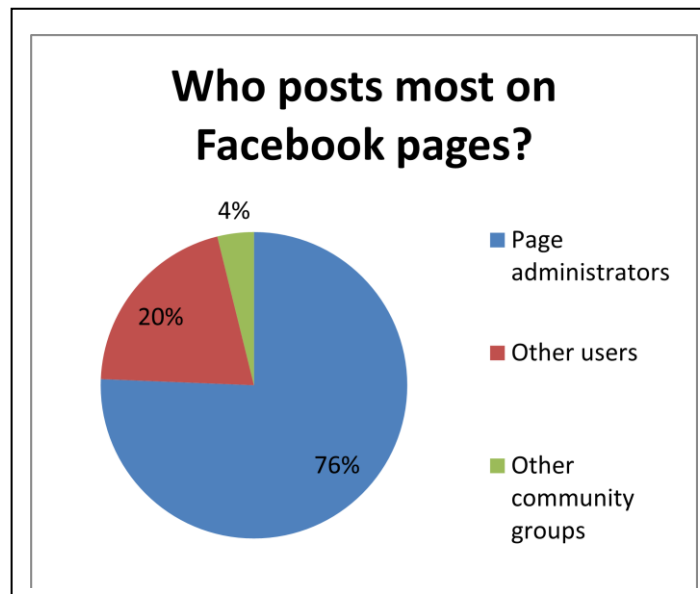
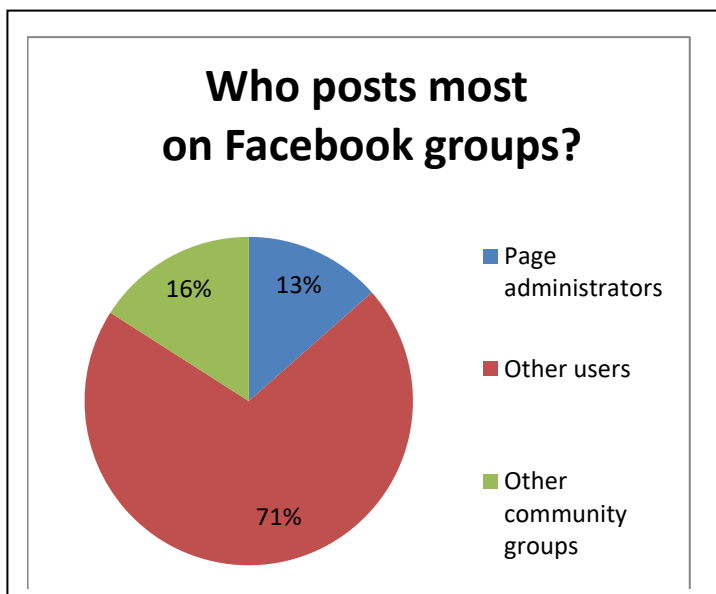


Fig. 4.9 – Which users post most on Facebook



Community activities, events and volunteering are consistently the most popular themes across active areas on Facebook (see Boxes 4.1 and 4.2), although some areas show a wider variety of topics than others. The predominance of these themes is likely to depend, at least partly, on the periods selected. These were periods where a number of events were being organised (e.g. Christmas) or new community activities launched (e.g. the beginning of the school year). Higher

pressure on the partnership at those times might explain a higher number of posts calling for volunteers to help out with Big Local activities.

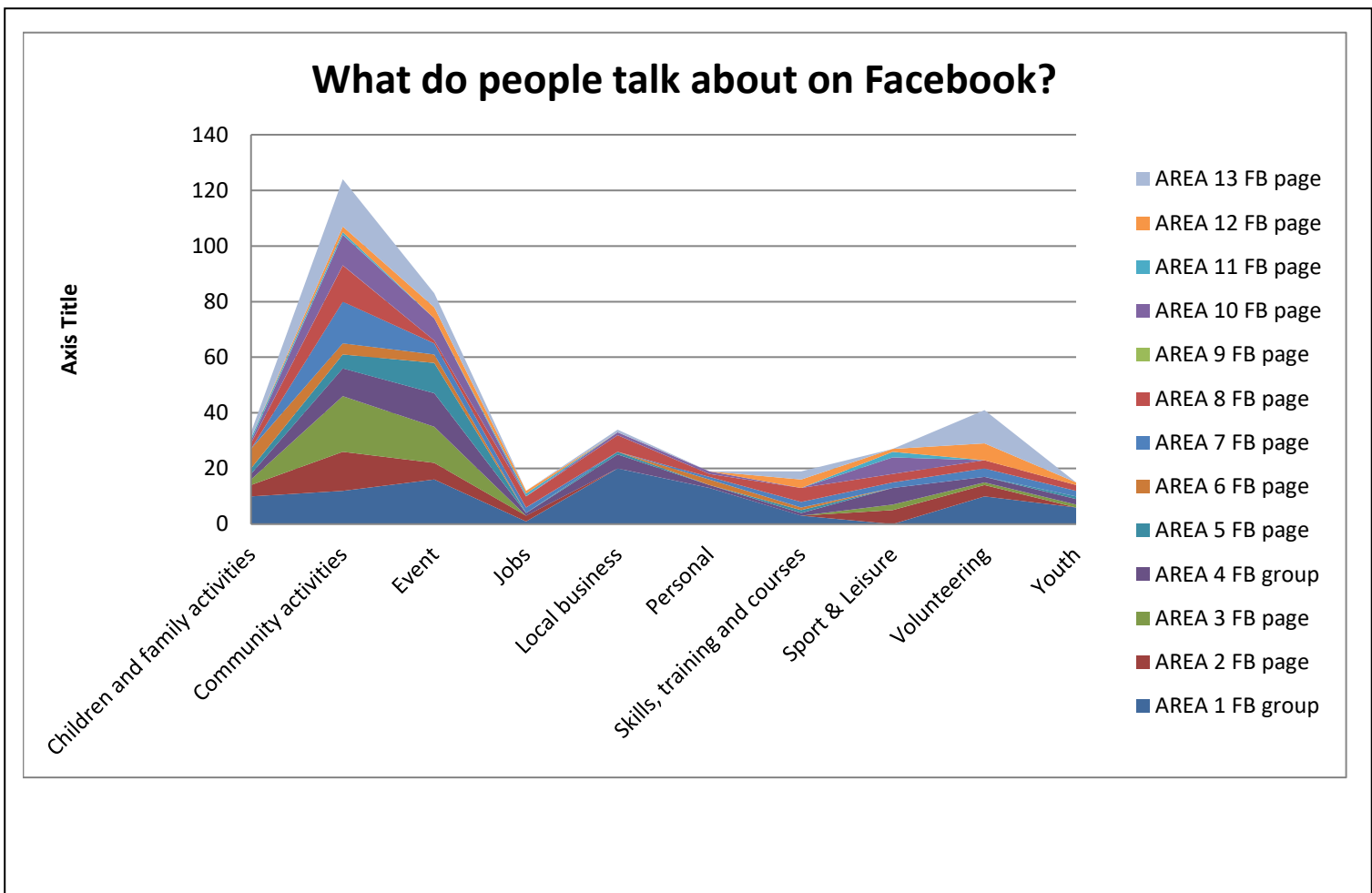
BOX 4.1

Free ticket to XXX!!! We need some volunteers to help out at XXX this year. Anybody interested in helping out in return for free food and tickets - PM asap...

BOX 4.2

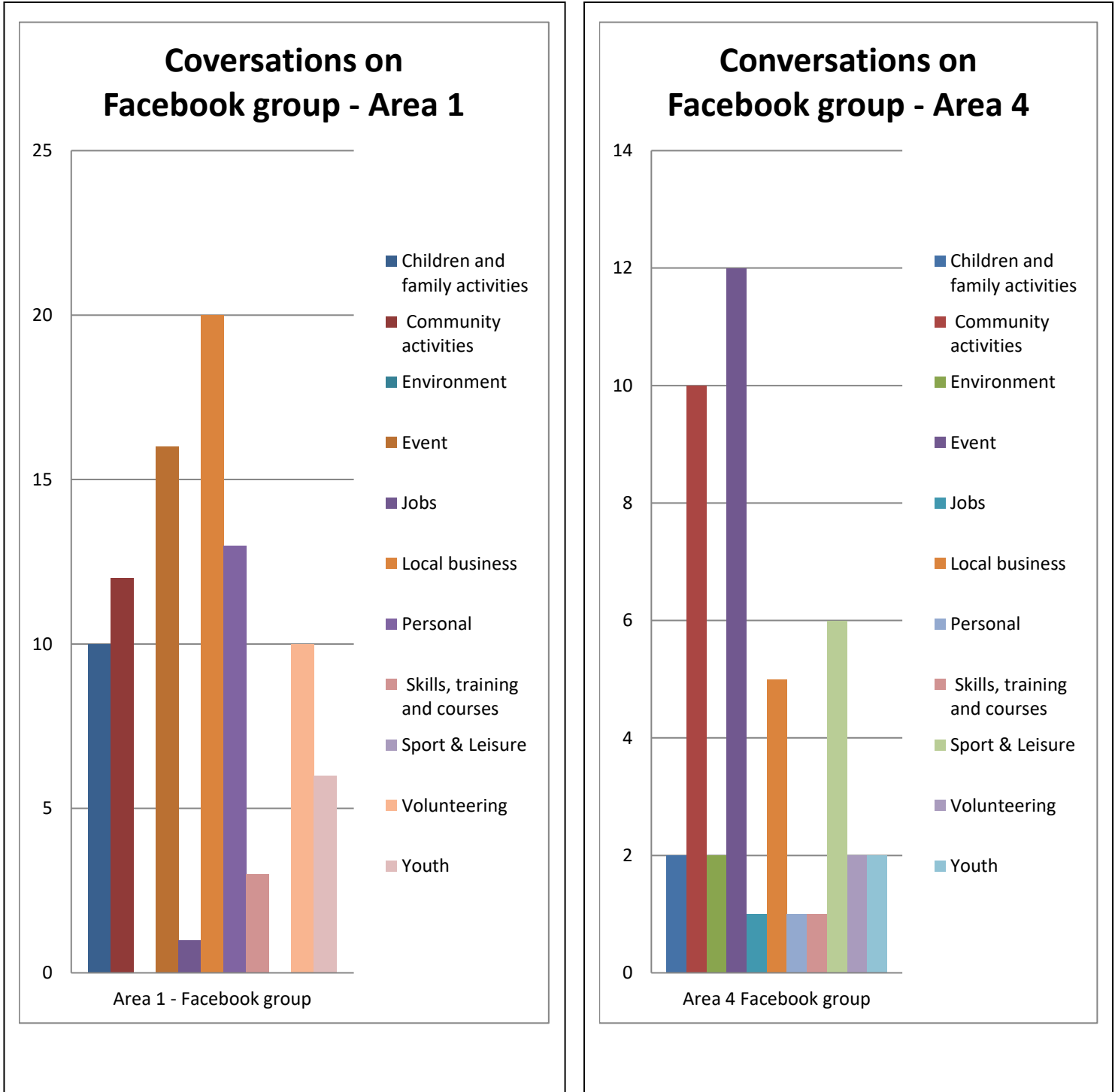
Come and see how your 'hub' [...] is coming along - also, we are supporting the Xmas Lights switch on day in the pop up shop opposite M&S where there will be face-painting, a photo booth, craft stalls etc etc. See you tomorrow!!

Fig. 4.10 – Most popular topics on Facebook among active areas



Perhaps as a result of a wider range of users interacting on the same platform, Facebook groups also seem to have a wider range of topic of conversations.

Fig. 4.11 – Topics on Facebook groups



The multidirectional interactions in groups allow for more personal topics to emerge, as well as users asking for help or information, or more generally discussing very local affairs and problems (see boxes 4.3 and 4.4).

BOX 4.3

Post:

“Does anyone have the name of the head teacher for XXX school, looking to contact for my son to start in sept”

Reply:

“ms XXX was in there yesterday u need admissions at XXX council for a school change :-) I'm in process of moving from XXX and had a call off XXX yesterday there open Monday for uniforms etc do maybe worth trying then”

BOX 4.4

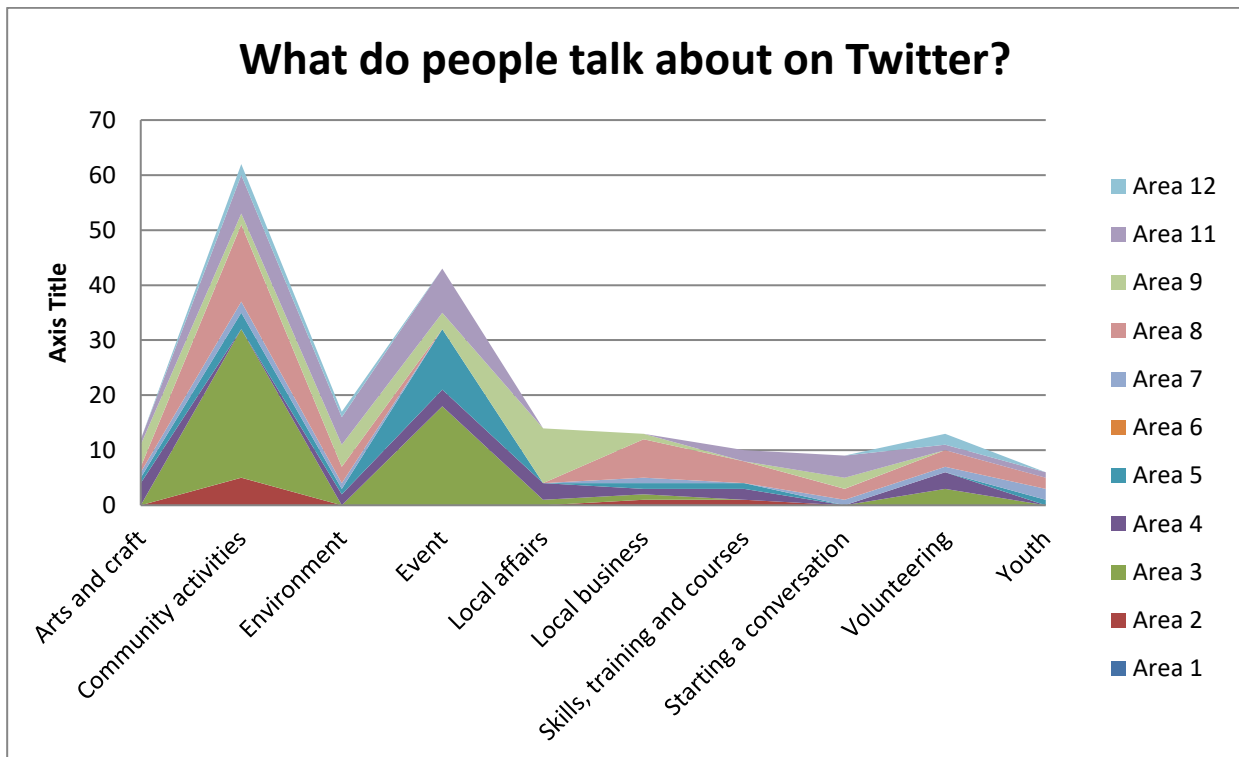
Post:

“Can anyone offer a 6 year old ginger cat a home, sadly his elderly owner passed away and now he is living rough poor thing”

Reply:

“Thank you to XXX. The cat now has a loving home, and XXX Donated a blanket for him to sleep on xx”

Fig. 4.12 - Most popular topics on Twitter among active areas



Similar to what happens on Facebook, on Twitter community activities and events are also the most popular topics, followed by environment, local business and volunteering. Boxes 4.5 and 4.6 offer a couple of examples.

BOX 4.5

It's Small Business Saturday this weekend! Please support your local retailers and other small businesses...

BOX 4.6

Residents have joined XXX Council staff to clear more than 10 tonnes of rubbish off the streets of XXX.

Our analysis also tried to understand what posts tend to encourage more interactions and we focused on the topic but also the type of message, whether it is a link to broadcast information, or a direct question to engage audiences in a debate, or a picture/ video.

Figure 4.13 – Topics and engagement levels

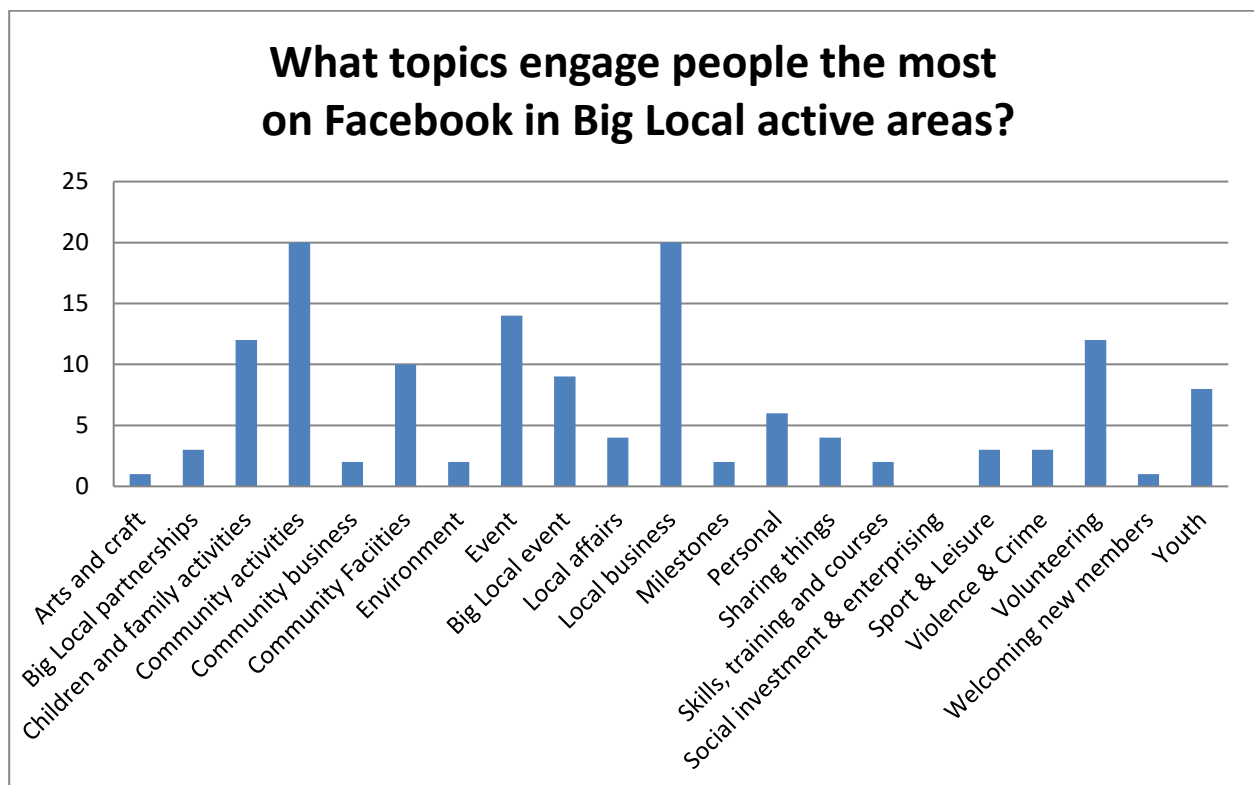
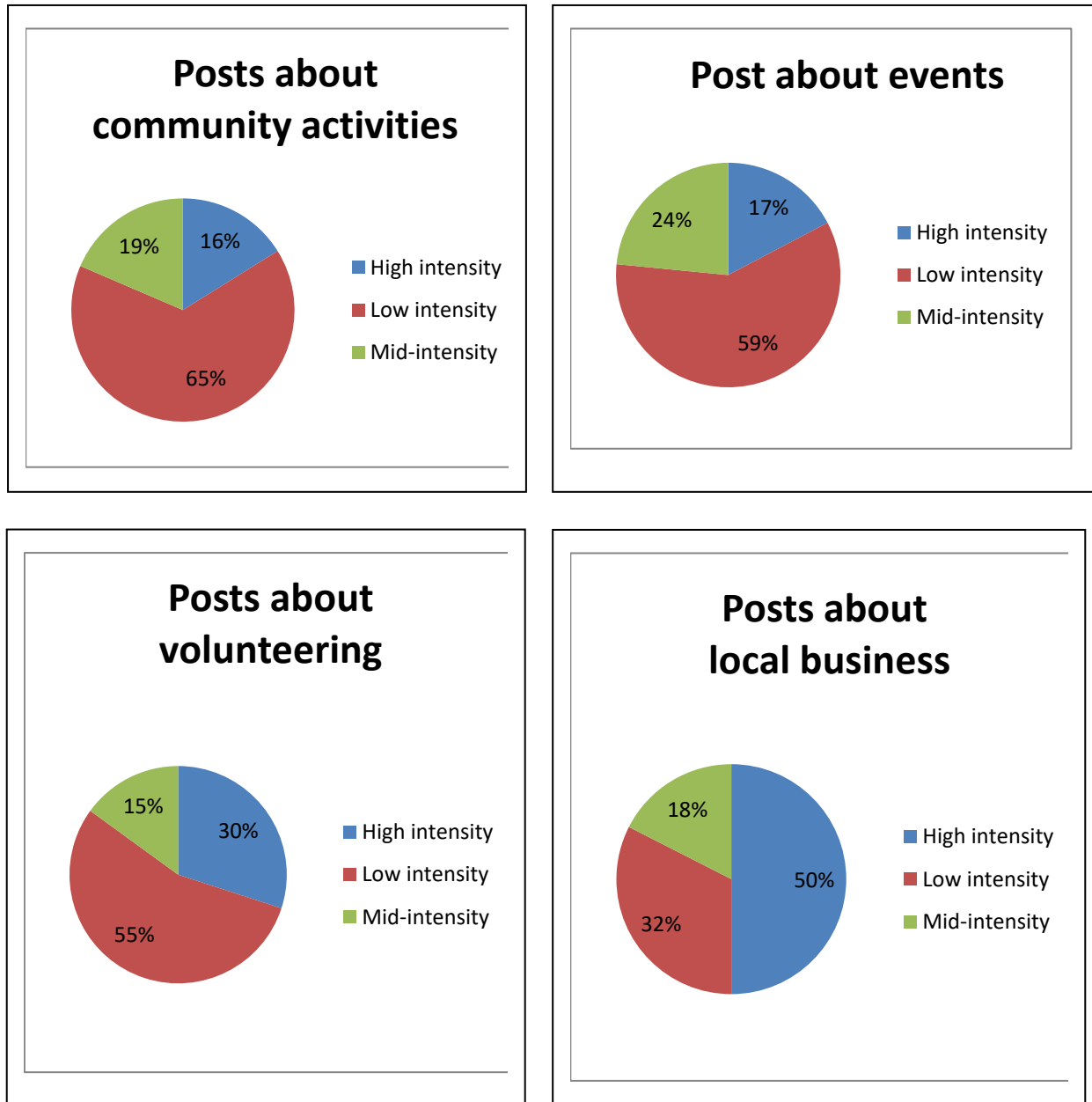


Figure 4.13 shows what topics received most likes and replies on Facebook. This is a fairly crude representation of engagement, but looking at posts with high engagement as a percentage of the overall number of posts on that given topic might offer a better understanding of what audiences are most interested in (see figure 4.14). For instance, community activities as a topic scores high in terms of engagement, but that is because Big Local areas tend to post mostly about the activities they are organising. Therefore, there are several posts about this topic, of which a relatively small percentage received high levels of interest. Considering the posts with high engagement as a percentage of the overall number of posts on that specific topic helps us to get

a better picture, where topics such as volunteering or local business (including community business) would seem to generate the most interest.

Fig. 4.14 – What are Big Local members interested in?



Box 4.7 shows an example of Facebook post focusing on local business which received high levels of attention from members.

BOX 4.7

"It's taken 15 long months to get the compound and here's the keys to it.

As we are a community interest company with limited funds and lots of work to get the place ready.

We need quotes for electrical and plumbing work, Windows and doors and a alarm. So if your [sic] in any of these trades and think you can help then please contact us!"

On Twitter engagement levels are overall slightly lower, with local affairs (i.e. things that happen in the neighbourhood beyond Big Local) and community activities featuring quite high, compared to Facebook. Twitter appears to be a better channel to have broader conversations about the area (Box 4.8 and Box 4.9), connecting with other community groups and local institutions, while Facebook encourages more focused conversations with Big Local residents.

BOX 4.8

I've seen many comments here over the past few weeks Requesting contact into and local school opening times for the new term. Do we think that it would be an idea to have all this info centralized on the BBL website?

BOX 4.9

Tweet

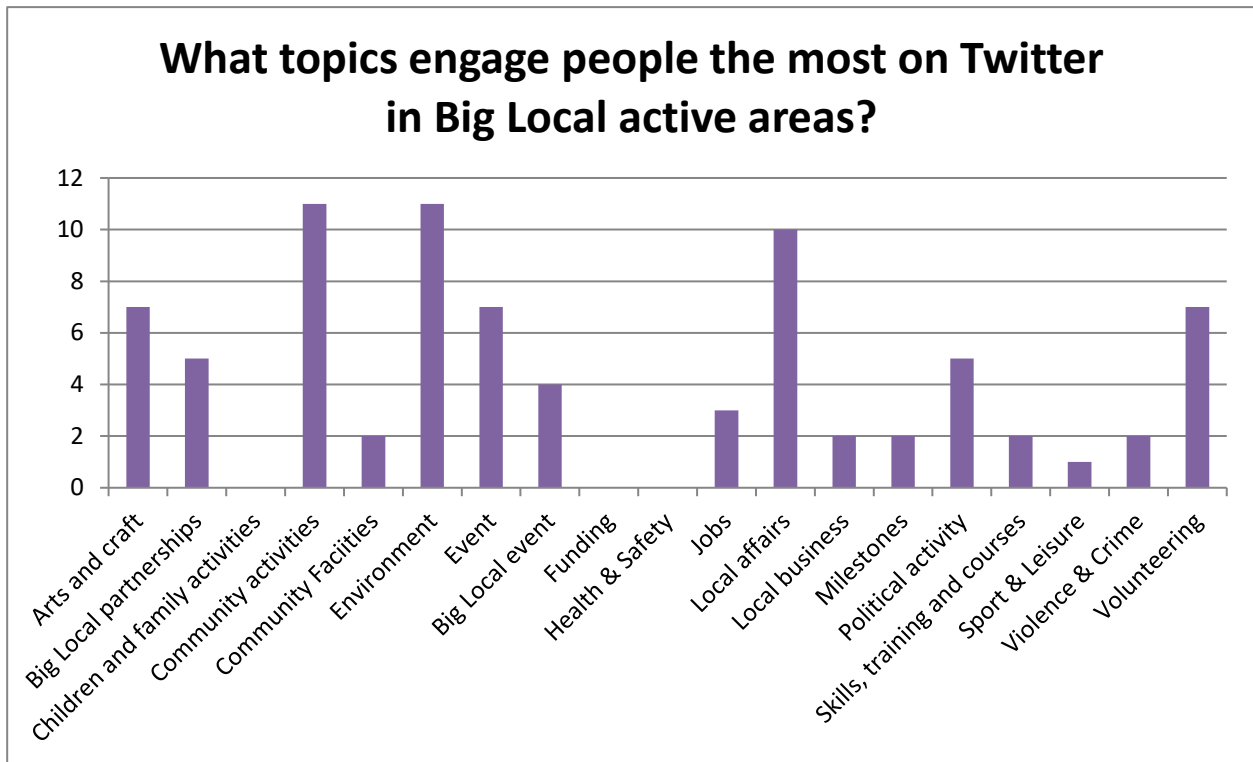
Hi @XXX can u let us know the data from this traffic measuring device as the wires lead to non-existent box?

<http://t.co/8KpsjTUn4V>

Reply

@XXX thank u4 responding, next to XXX Sports Centre on XXX. It's not BH or FR village scheme, unsure why is there

Fig 4.15 – Twitter topics and level of engagement – active areas



Beyond the topic, what appears to make a difference in terms of encouraging engagement online is the type and tone of the message (see Box 4.10). Unsurprisingly, on Facebook messages thanking people or celebrating achievements, messages encouraging a debate, perhaps through exchanging information (i.e. peer-support), or requests for help register higher levels of interaction. Images and videos inevitably get more attention than informational messages. However, the latter (one-way type of communication) are still the most prevalent way of using social media. Posts encouraging multidirectional conversations (i.e. general questions and invitations to share ideas/ stories) appear to be more effective on Facebook than Twitter, where addressing people directly through mentions or joining in conversation via hashtags is by far the most successful engagement strategy. Based on our sample, Big Local areas do not use hashtags and mentions very often and do not appear to have defined communication strategies based on different social media platforms.

Facebook, and in particular Facebook groups, can represent a space conducive to debates on

BOX 4.10

Facebook Post

Just wanted to take a minute to recognise and celebrate what one family in XXX give to the community through voluntary work. No reflection on others who don't - we all have our reasons and choices.

[...] I think this family is inspiring in how much they choose to give, and deserve celebrating. An inspiration and role model for their kids, and very glad we have them here."

Reply

A great family and glad to know them all

local issues and local concerns that tend to gather high levels of responses from members. If there is good facilitation on the part of the page administrators, these exchanges can play an important part in community building (see Box 4.11). However, as we only have a very small sample of two Facebook groups, it is difficult to infer that higher levels of activities are determined by the type of social media platform.

BOX 4.11

Facebook Post

"after what I've just seen at the community centre, I'm so glad my son doesn't go to the youth club, totally unacceptable behaviour by lads climbing the tree and literally ripping the branches off and finding it funny so where's the organisers of the youth club? surely a few words need to be said, we have a fantastic new community centre which we all should be proud of but by the looks of what I've witnessed tonight it doesn't matter about all the hard work that's been put in to make it nice for us all [sic] they want to do is wreck it"

Replies

"surely then it's the responsibility of parents that when their children attend youth clubs that they remain at the youth club and make some effort to listen to staff but we work with a variety of young people and we are always more likely to work with those who are on the margins of our community for which I make no apology [sic!] for those are the young people most in need."

"I think the positives to take from this are that we are sharing experiences of what we don't want to see - trees being damaged - and of how some of us feel when we see this - intimidated."

"Let's look for a positive solution. Great that XXX takes the time to read this page and comment. Hard for the youth workers to be in all places at all times but am sure they will do what they can now they are aware of this issue."

"Important too to let our local police know. They are in the centre now till midday and every Wednesday for a drop in. In the cafe area, with a sign, just sit and talk to them. I think XXX is doing this as I write. If they are aware of particular issues at particular times perhaps they can help."

"A longer term help can be to engage these kids outside positively. One of the ways we want to do this regularly is using music, and there are plans through XXX Big Local to explore this."

The tables below show levels of engagement per type of post in the active areas.

Table 4.1 Type of posts and engagement levels on Facebook – active areas

Type of Facebook post	High intensity	Mid-intensity	Low intensity
Celebratory	20	11	36
Debate	3	0	1
Encouraging involvement	13	14	93
Exchanging information/ peer support	15	4	1
Images and videos	15	19	43
Informational Message (broadcasting information)	15	32	138
Ref to other social media account (link to own Twitter account)	1	1	18
Request of information and questions	6	4	10
Starting a conversation	0	2	8
Tags and mentions	10	6	46

Table 4.2 Type of posts and engagement levels on Twitter – active areas

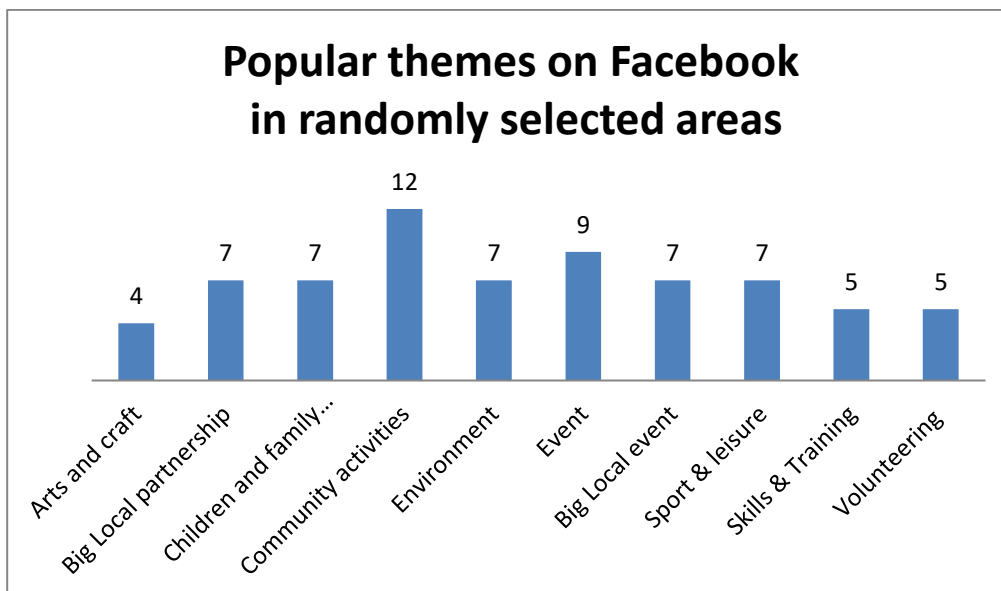
Type of Tweet	High intensity	Mid-intensity	Low intensity
Celebratory	2	9	32
Encouraging involvement	0	5	30
Exchanging information	2	2	3
Images and videos	0	1	13
Informational Message	4	13	66
Ref to other social media (link to own Facebook account)	0	0	3

Request of information and questions	3	0	2
Starting a conversation	2	2	5
Tags and mentions	16	24	37

What happens in randomly selected areas?

Among the randomly selected areas on Facebook (6 areas only), close to 100% of Facebook posts came from the Big Local account. Whereas in the active areas the page administrators often post from their own personal accounts, this never happens in the randomly selected areas, which always post as Big Local.

Fig. 4.16 – Popular topics on Facebook



Posts and Tweets are generally on similar topics as in active areas, although there seems to be a stronger focus on the Big Local branding, with more posts about the Big Local partnership's activities and Big Local events, rather broader community events and issues (Figure 4.16). This might indicate a strong identification of these areas with the overall programme, which might take priority over local identification (see Box 4.12 as an example). Implications could be on two levels: on the one hand, in the long term this could facilitate the emergence of a Big Local social movement that cuts across areas and communities of place to build communities of interest around key issues; on the other hand, this might mean that in each area fewer people are involved, as the core Big Local groups drive the process.¹¹

Compared to the active areas, on Twitter there was more talking about funding and grants offered by Big Local (see Boxes 4.13 and 4.14).

BOX 4.12

Environment...Landscape and Gardening Project

YOU SAID!

That the area was a bit tired and run down and could be made a more attractive place for people to come and live and work. They also felt that this would have a knock on effect of bringing more people from outside the area and that this would benefit local businesses.

WHAT BIG LOCAL DID!

Commissioned an environmental project with XXX and XXX to provide:

- Work for young people that lead them into an employability pathway via an accredited programme or into other education and/or training.
- Work with schools to develop a volunteer/peer led scheme that focuses on small-scale gardening projects within and for the benefit of the local community.
- Work with local partners, public, private, voluntary and community and business to develop a high profile 'gateway' scheme for the Big Local XXX area.

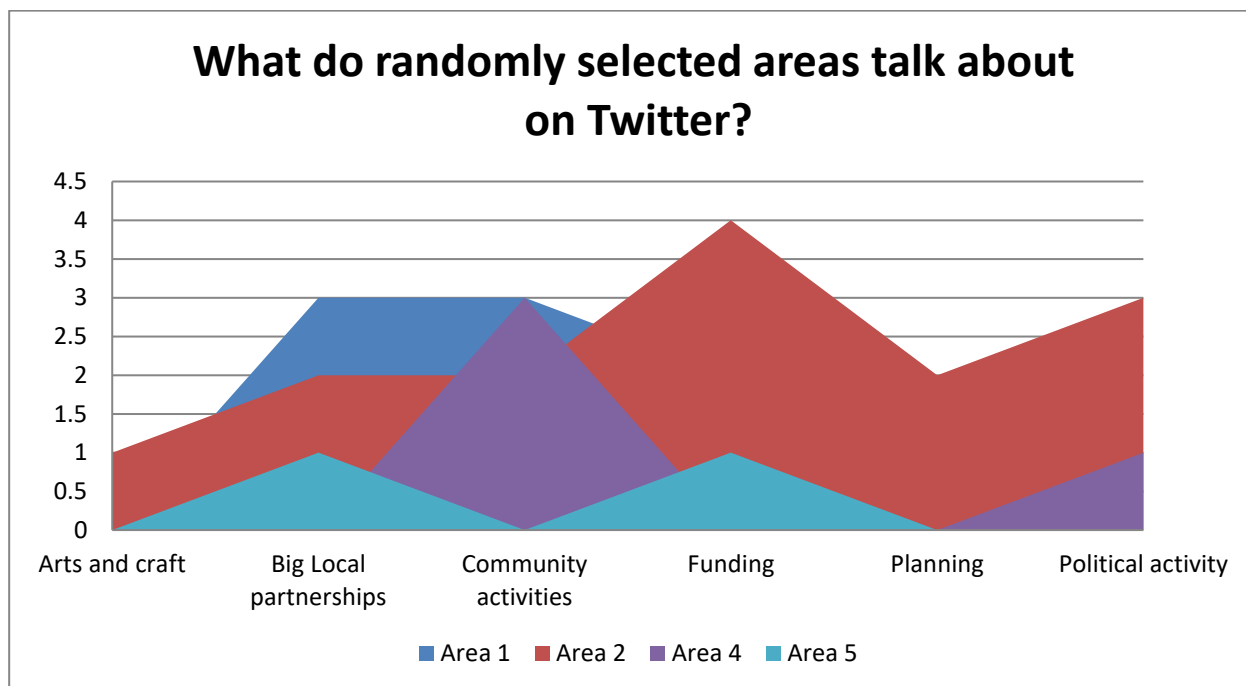
BOX 4.13

Are you thinking of starting a new course this autumn? See if you qualify for our bursary scheme [http... #XXX](#)
[#biglocal](#)

BOX 4.14

@XXX Have a business idea that will benefit the local community? Come to XXX Centre on 15 June 12-3pm [http...](#)

Fig. 4.17 – Popular topics on Twitter



The level of engagement based on both theme and type of post is much lower among the randomly selected areas, as shown in the tables below (4.3 to 4.6). This is mainly because on average these areas had a much lower reach (i.e. number of followers/ members) than the active areas. The randomly selected areas also tend to post less frequently.

Table 4.3 – Level of engagement based on themes on Facebook – randomly selected areas (no post coded as high intensity)

Themes	Mid-intensity
Arts and craft	1
Children and family activities	1
Community activities	1
Environment	1
Health & Safety	1
Jobs	1
Sport & Leisure	1

Table 4.4 – Level of engagement based on themes on Twitter – randomly selected areas

Themes	High intensity	Mid-intensity
Big Local partnerships	0	1
Community activities	1	4
Community Facilities	1	1
Event	1	0
Funding	0	4
Local business	0	4
Milestones	0	1
News & media coverage	0	1
Political activity	1	0
Sport & Leisure	0	1
Volunteering	0	1

Table 4.5 – Level of engagement based on type of post on Facebook – randomly selected areas (no post coded as high intensity)

Type of post	Mid-intensity
Celebratory	2
Encouraging involvement	1
Images and videos	2
Informational Message	1

Table 4.6 – Level of engagement based on type of post on Twitter – randomly selected areas

Type of Post	High intensity	Mid-intensity
Celebratory	0	3
Encouraging involvement	0	6

Informational Message	1	6
New initiative	0	3
Starting a conversation	0	1
Tags and mentions	3	8

The next section summarises and discusses the findings and draws some conclusions.

5. Information, community and action: can social media help Big Local areas and how?

Our analysis has engaged with the three research questions:

1. How do Big Local areas use social media, and in particular Facebook and Twitter?
2. What factors influence greater reach on Facebook and Twitter?
 - 2.1 Do certain topics/ types of posts generate more or longer conversations with other users?
3. Are there specific differences in terms of engagement strategies on social media between the most active Big Local areas and the rest?

We focused on *whether* Big Local groups utilise social media, but also paid attention to *how* they use it through content and thematic analysis. Specifically, we examined activities on the two social media platforms that proved to be most popular among Big Local communities, Facebook and Twitter.

The framework presented in the literary review identified three key communicative functions: information, community and action. Both the semi-quantitative content analysis of all Facebook and Twitter accounts and the in-depth thematic analysis of posts in the select areas have helped us to identify popular topics and broad interaction patterns. Our findings support prior studies on non-profit organisations and social media showing that Facebook and Twitter can be powerful tools for broadcasting *information* about events and activities, highlights from previous events, news, etc. However, they are not used much as a mobilisation tool (Guo and Saxton 2014).

Big Local areas tend to post about:

- Community activities
- Events
- Volunteering opportunities

Tweets and Facebook posts that aim to interact and converse with stakeholders to help build an online *community* are less common, although more prevalent in the active areas and particularly within the two Facebook groups examined. In the latter, administrators using their own personal account, rather than the official Big Local account, and more interaction from other users seem to engender greater reach of posts and more varied conversations, in term of both topics and number of contributions. These can span beyond just Big Local activities and focus more generally on community life, potentially proving more effective as part of long-term community

building efforts. For instance, based on our small sample of areas, on Facebook exchanges of information between members enjoy greater reach than information broadcasting from the Big Local area's official account. Posts that celebrate people and thank them for their support are also welcome; people seem to like debating about community issues and appreciate posts about local business. However, there are limited opportunities for this type of conversations, as our analysis suggests a preference for one-way communication, from Big Local's official accounts towards members. Facebook groups would seem to provide more opportunities to engage in multidirectional dialogue, but given the very small sample it is difficult to establish with certainty a correlation between the type of platform and the type of interaction between members. Qualitative fieldwork might help to clarify these interactions. It is interesting, however, that out of only 7 Facebook groups across all Big Local Facebook accounts, two had such high membership rates.

Some Big Local areas showed some degree of media savviness in their use of tags and mentions to engage with other users directly, but overall most areas do not make the most of these functions. This is something Big Local areas who want to expand their social media profile might want to consider, as our analysis shows that on Twitter in particular @handles seem by far the most effective way to ensure greater reach.

The last function of charities' social media strategy identified by the literature, *action*, often serves to encourage followers to "do something" or engage in activities. Our analysis found a number of posts that serves this purpose, but they appear to be slightly less popular than expected. However, as examined in section two, it is hard to understand through this type of analysis actual reach, beyond likes, shares/ retweets and replies, and the effect on what the literature calls online positive lurkers or listeners, who might not interact online and yet pay attention and perhaps translate online information into offline engagement/ action.

The content analysis of Facebook posts and Tweets in select areas highlighted a few main differences between the active areas and the randomly selected ones, although we should emphasise our sample, particularly with regard to random areas, was very small. While random areas, consistently with the general analysis of all Big Local accounts, mainly share informational messages on events and activities, active areas place slightly more emphasis on community building, by creating a safe space online to encourage conversations that go beyond just Big Local activities and focus on community life. As noted above, this is particularly true for the two Facebook groups.

Overall it seems that areas have not yet developed clear communication strategies; they do not appear to be tailoring their posts to specific audiences or different social media platforms. Often the same messages are cross-posted on both Twitter and Facebook. Social media could be an effective tool to redirect and increase traffic to the webpage; instead there is little integration between Big Locals' websites and other social media accounts, even when the website displays Facebook/ Twitter links and timelines. Only a handful of engagement tactics dominated; these mainly focused on informing and encouraging direct involvement, with no evidence of *insider* strategy. However, this is not unusual, as social media advocacy generally tends to be indirect in terms of strategic orientation (Mosley 2011); unlike emails which can be more selectively stratified, Twitter and Facebook pages require a *mass* approach, as Tweets and posts go out to everyone (Guo and Saxton 2014). This mass approach works better with indirect engagement tactics that aim at diffused, broad stakeholders; it works less well with other advocacy tactics such a lobbying, for instance, or addressing specific population groups, who demand a more targeted approach.

Given their highly interactive framework, social media offer many opportunities for constituency engagement. As also noted by Guo and Saxton (2014), the number of media platforms employed and the number of accounts and users involved in sending messages on social media on behalf of the same Big local area can increase the number of voices involved in communicating with the public. This could have positive implications by increasing the reach of Big Local, but it might also lead to a “cacophony” that makes it harder to recognise a unified voice.

One further issue that needs addressing is that individual followers might not necessarily have a connection with the Big Local area. These members/ followers are able to join in and exit easily and this might affect types of engagement strategies - since anyone can *like/ follow* a social media account, not just residents. This might also raise a number of issues about how Big Local areas can make the most of this loose network of online followers, with cross-organisational coalitions forming and splitting fluidly, which could have a centrifugal pull toward decentralised advocacy work (see Guo and Saxton 2014).

In this respect, it is important to remember that social media should be seen as just one of many different engagement approaches that might help reach out to specific groups, such as younger people, other community groups and organisations, etc.’ or simply help to continue and solidify interactions that happen offline. Online channels can be attractive, as they can a low-cost option; however, not everyone is online and an understanding of online access patterns in a given area is important to decide how many resources it might be worth investing in online Comms and to ensure that no one is being left behind.

6. What next?

Based on these findings, we can put forward a few suggestions for next steps for both Local Trust and Big Local areas. We are all very aware that Big Local areas mostly rely on volunteers and their resources are limited, so the emphasis should not really be on doing more than we already do, but doing things a bit differently – perhaps more effectively – as we learn what works best on different social media platforms.

Local trust:

- Continue to support Big Local areas through the provision of training and learning and networking events on communication,¹² to develop an understanding of different social media platforms and how to make the most of the different functions they can offer
- Through plan review feedback, encourage Big Local areas to use social media platforms, as a way to provide evidence of activities to be included in their plan reviews
- Regularly monitor and build on this initial mapping of Big Local areas’ social media presence to offer timely support and tailor Local Trust’s own communication strategy online, in order to:
 1. Communicate more effectively and in a targeted manner information on events and opportunities
 2. Start online conversations with active Big Local areas that can help capture key information on successful activities; achievements; challenges; and identify particularly active residents beyond the Big Local partnership. These conversations could later broaden to engage other less active areas and share learning from the active ones.

3. Facilitate more effective online networking between Big Local areas across a number of different issues of common interest, i.e. through topical Twitter chats

Big Local areas:

- Try to move from one-way communication on social media (i.e. broadcasting information about your activities and events) to a two-way communication to make the most of these platforms' many functions to encourage more direct engagement. This doesn't mean doing more but rather doing it differently. For instance, you can:
 1. Ask a question, rather than just post a statement
 2. Make your language personal and relevant to the people you want to engage
 3. Make more, better targeted use of tags, mentions and #hashtags in your posts, to engage specific users directly and join other users' relevant conversations, without always waiting for people to come to you and react to your posts
 4. Online networking with other Big Local areas might prove a good long-term strategy to create constituencies on specific themes and address similar challenges/ issues across different areas and regions
- Consider starting thematic Facebook groups to facilitate conversations about community issues, beyond just Big Local activities, to actively encourage online community building
- Continue to experiment with different social media platforms, trying to monitor what themes and types of posts raise more interest and generate more interactions
- Consider social media as just one of many different engagement approaches that might help you reach out to specific groups, such as younger people, other community groups and organisations, etc.

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Appendix 1. Methodology

The mapping was carried out in April 2016. For this mapping, we looked at Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Flickr. To ensure our mapping captured as much and as up-to-date information as possible, we triangulated a number of searches: through Local Trust's area pages; Google; Big Local areas' pages, which often have links to social media accounts.

This mapping allowed us to identify the most active areas, based on several indicators:

- number of followers/ friends
- number of posts/ Tweets/ Retweets
- date of last post (to ensure the account is still regularly used).

Having established that Facebook and Twitter would be the focus of the analysis, the software for qualitative analysis [NVivo](#) was used to save all Twitter and Facebook accounts as datasets and carry out auto-coding across all areas. This analysis offered more in-depth insights on levels of activity and overarching differences between how each social media platform is used. As part of this analysis the hashtag #biglocal was also saved as a dataset, to elicit findings on which areas/ users tend to utilise the hashtag the most and how.¹³

Finally, a sample of 13 active areas was selected, based on the indicators set out above, to ensure a mix of areas most active on either Facebook or Twitter, or both. A further 10 areas were randomly selected. The content analysis also covered replies to posts and captured mentions and tags to identify as many levels of interaction as possible. Content analysis only covered three specific periods:

- 1-10 June 2015
- 1-10 September 2015
- 1-10 December 2015

These periods were selected because they tend to mark greater activity in Big Local communities linked to respectively summer events; the beginning of the school year; and related family and children activities; and Christmas events.

The message-level analysis was mainly inductive, but several overarching themes were identified prior to beginning content-analysis and were informed by the theoretical framework highlighted above¹⁴:

- Level of engagement
 - Low
 - Medium
 - High
- Theme (e.g. environment; community activities; facilities; family and children; older residents; youth; personal matters etc.)
- Tone of the contribution
 - Positive
 - Negative
 - Constructive
- Type of posts (to capture types of interactions – e.g. unidirectional v. multidirectional; status updates/ links v. pictures/ videos; mentions and tags etc.)
- Users (person; organisation; Big Local area; local institution etc.)

Specifically - and acknowledging previous findings from the social media literature and the limits in assessing engagement on social networks - the level of engagement on each message was coded as follows:

Low intensity of engagement:

- Facebook
 - < 5 likes or
 - < 5 likes + 1/ 2 comments by the same user
- Twitter
 - < 3 Retweets of own post
 - Retweets of others' posts

Medium intensity of engagement:

- Facebook
 - 5-10 likes
 - 5-10 likes + 1/2 comments
- Twitter
 - 3 to 5 Retweets of own post
 - When post includes mentions or several tags
 - When user is mentioned and engaged with directly

High intensity of engagement:

- Facebook
 - > 10 likes
 - More than 2 comments from at least three different users
- Twitter
 - > 5 Retweets
 - @mentions and tags + user engaging in conversations with others

An understanding of engagement as interpreted through the coding above therefore places greater emphasis on conversations and direct interactions rather than simply clicking to like or share.

Appendix 2. Content analysis framework

Name	Sources*	References
Engagement level		
High intensity	23	115
Low intensity	45	547
Mid-intensity	32	168
Themes		
Arts and craft	24	63
Music	1	4
Big Local partnerships	21	41
Bills & Finance	3	8
Children and family activities	23	58
Community activities	39	278
Community market	4	10
Competition	4	5
Community business	2	7
Community Facilities	13	26
Environment	25	57
Event	28	180
Big Local event	23	99
Funding	11	22
Health & Safety	8	11
Housing	5	5
Jobs	15	28
Local affairs	11	42

Local business	23	69
Milestones	8	13
Miscellaneous	1	6
News & media coverage	3	6
Old people	3	3
Personal	9	22
Planning	9	11
Political activity	16	25
Sharing things	10	15
Skills, training and courses	23	46
Social investment & enterprising	6	7
Sport & Leisure	19	44
Starting a conversation	15	33
Violence & Crime	7	19
Volunteering	25	74
Welcoming new members	4	6
Youth	18	32
Tone of contribution		
Constructive contribution	19	111
Negative	11	20
Positive	37	247
Type of posts		
Celebratory	37	187
Debate	4	15
Encouraging involvement	40	243

Exchanging information	12	54
Images and videos	27	139
Informational Message	40	407
Motivational	8	10
New initiative	6	16
Offer	2	8
Ref to other social media	9	29
Replies or retweets	33	291
Request of information and questions	18	39
Request for help	10	11
Tags and mentions	37	332
Big Local area tagged	8	18
Big Local hashtag	5	12
Council and local institutions	10	32
Local trust, reps & partners	4	10
Other Big Local areas tagged	4	4
Users		
Administrators	45	749
Big Local account	41	683
Personal account	9	39
Charity or community group users or links including	20	111
Local Trust or partners	6	10
Institutional Users or Links	15	35
Posts by other users	17	198
Local business	3	3

Posts by frequent users	3	22
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*Sources include Facebook and Twitter accounts from 13 purposefully selected active areas and 10 randomly selected areas.

Notes

¹ Ipsos Mori (2015) Tech Tracker Quarterly Release: Q4

² Areas are defined as active based on indicators such as 1. number of followers/ friends; 2. number of tweets/ posts; 3. date of last tweet/ post (to ensure the accounts are still actively used).

³ Areas were selected out of all the areas with a Twitter or Facebook account, after excluding the most active areas already chosen.

⁴ Content analysis is a semi-quantitative technique for counting the number of instances of each category or code (Robson 2011:349).

⁵ Thematic analysis helped identify themes from coded data (Robson 2011:475).

⁶ NVivo 10 includes a function called NCapture, which allowed us to import Twitter accounts and most Facebook pages and groups (depending on users' privacy settings) as datasets that can be later analysed. The datasets will contain both quantitative information, such as number of followers/ likes and tweets/ retweets/ posts, as well as messages and conversations that can be coded and analysed qualitatively.

⁷ 4th and 5th respectively, following big local and community.

⁸ Initially we had selected 14 areas, but one area very active on Facebook had to be excluded from the analysis, since privacy settings did not allow us to download the page as a dataset.

⁹ It should be clarified that when carrying out autocoding on NVivo, "event" is intended only as the ad hoc "event page" specifically created by a user. Later in the analysis we carried out thematic analysis and we coded as "events" any references to events on links and status updates.

¹⁰ Groups can only be linked to personal profiles rather than organisations' pages.

¹¹ In a few cases, the active areas had partnerships that built on pre-existing community groups already involved in a number of other activities in the communities, which might contribute to explaining a broader focus, beyond just Big Local.

¹² Over the past few years Local Trust and its partners have delivered core and bespoke events specifically on social media and/or digital activism (3) or covering more generally (local) media and communication, including social media (3).

¹³ NVivo 10 allows to save and analyse 1% of all activities under a given #hashtag, since its creation.

¹⁴ See the complete framework of content analysis in Appendix.