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## **Local Democracy: How Social Media can help support the Representative**

Are you ready to harness the potential of the social web?

Enhancing Local Democracy  
Conference

16<sup>th</sup> July 2010

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[public-i.info/citizenscape](http://public-i.info/citizenscape)



How do you become part of that virtual community so that you can represent it?

People now have virtual lives as well – it's important that our representatives are there too

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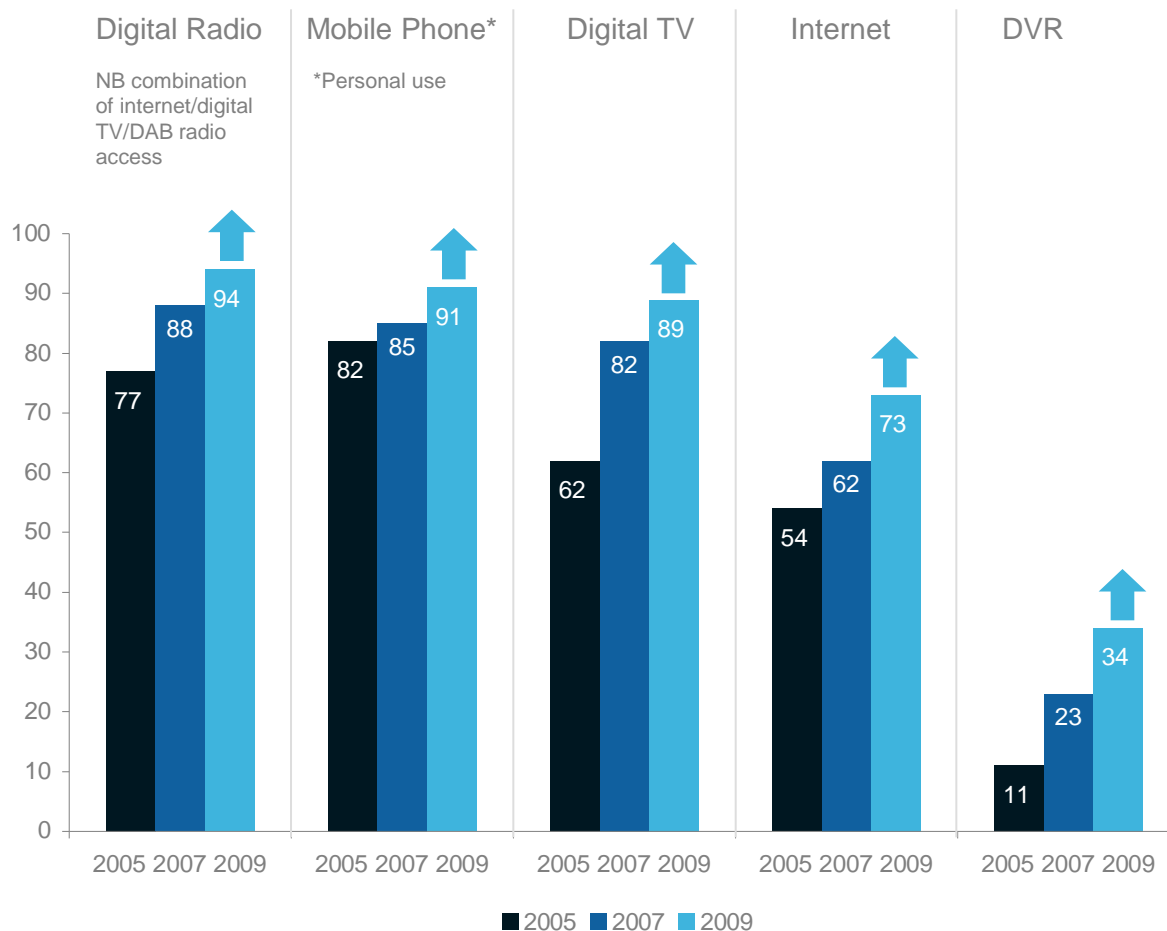
“A whole generation of people – our communities – are growing up using social media as their primary communications tool and they are not going to stop. By failing to engage with them we risk allowing people to become more and more remote from their officers”

- › Assistant Chief Constable **Gordon Scobbie**
- › West Midlands Police, ‘Citizen Focus’, ACPO Lead for Digital Engagement
- › <http://www.west-midlands.police.uk/latest-news/press-release.asp?id=1640>

**And this is just as true for elected representatives**



# Communication is moving online



T1/T2/R1/IN1/M1 Can any of your TV sets receive additional channels other than BBC, ITV, Channel 4, S4C, and (where available) Channel 5? Do you have a recorder for your TV service which can record and store TV programs onto an internal hard drive, and also pause and rewind live TV? In which of these ways do you ever listen to radio in your own home? Does anyone in your household have access to the internet at home through a computer or a laptop? Do you personally use a mobile phone? (Prompted responses, single coded)

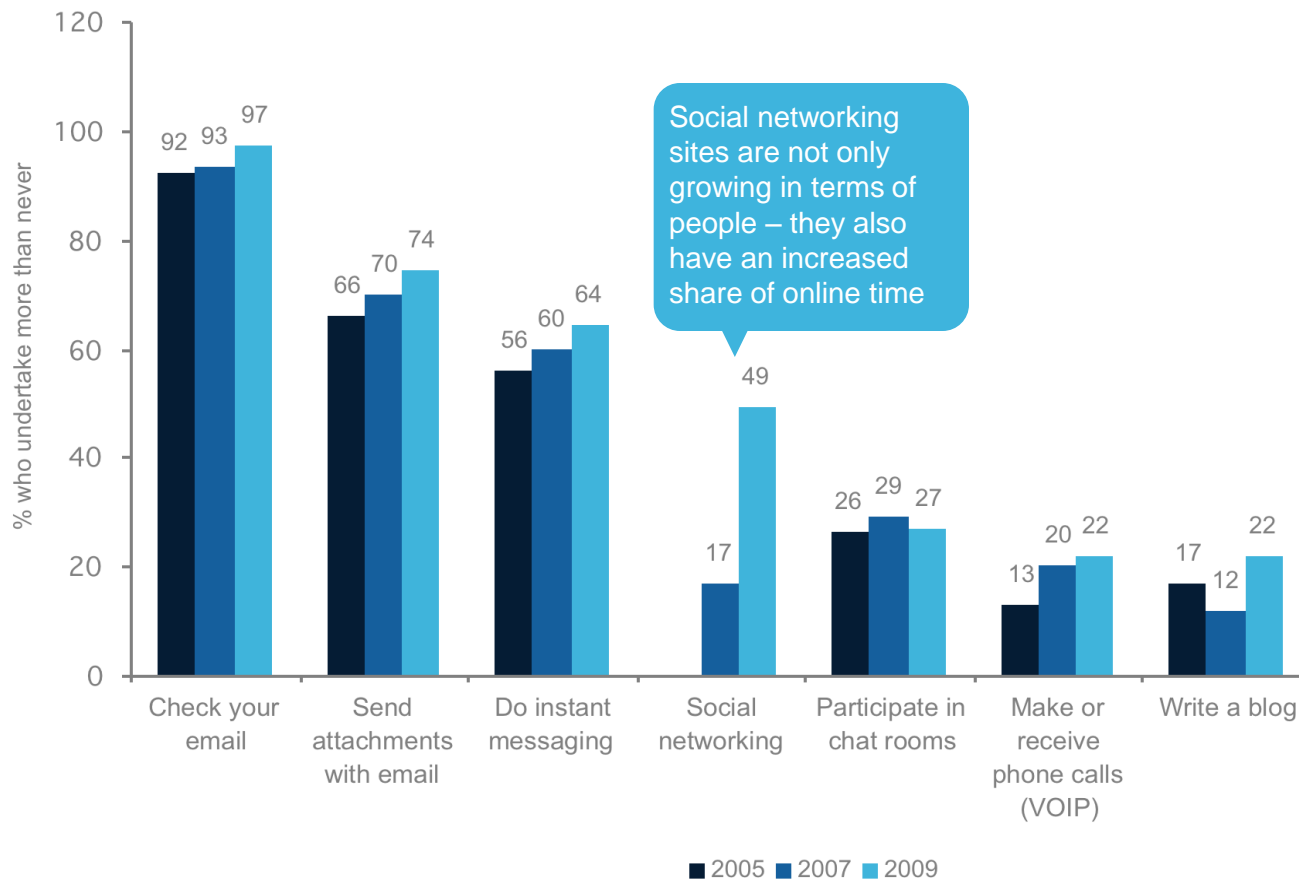
Base all adults aged 16+ (3244 in 2005, 2905 in 2007, 812 in 2009) Significance testing shows any change between 2007-2009.

Source: Ofcom research, fieldwork carried out by Saville Rossiter-Base in April to May 2009



# And social media is the fastest growing trend

Online communication and social networking 2005-2009



Oxford Internet Surveys: <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis>

Citizenscape: a product by Public-i



# But can social media transform local democracy?



Buckshaw Village Forum, Chorley  
<http://www.buckshawvillage.com/forum.php>

Make Poverty History  
<http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/>

Leap Anywhere  
<http://www.leapanywhere.com/>

Iranian use of Twitter  
<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2009-06/11/iran-s-wired-generation-challenges-ahmadinejad.aspx>

Ventnor blog  
<http://ventnorblog.com/>

Networked Neighbourhoods  
<http://networkedneighbourhoods.com>

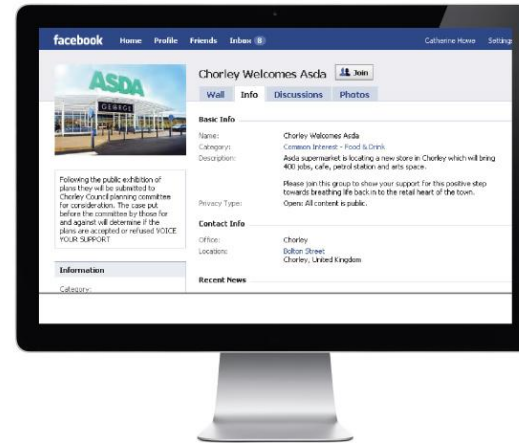
Whether councils like it or not, their publics are already interacting with each other using a wide range of social media tools. Now is the time for local government to start using social media as an integral part of the communications mix.

Simon Wakeman, Head of Communications, Medway Council



# Because social media is already used...

## ...by councils and communities



## ...to communicate and campaign



<http://www.harringayonline.com>

# And there are a variety of conversations going on

Coventry Telegraph

myspace

YouTube  
Broadcast Yourself™

facebook  
North Warwickshire Borough Council  
Walt Info RSS Blog Photos Discus  
North Warwickshire Borough Council - Fans North  
Join Fans

WordPress

BBC  
COVENTRY &  
WARWICKSHIRE

bebo

twitter  
Essex  
County  
Council  
Essex\_CC

facebook.

Harringayonline  
The Official Website of Harringay Council

VentnorBlog™  
It's not just about money™

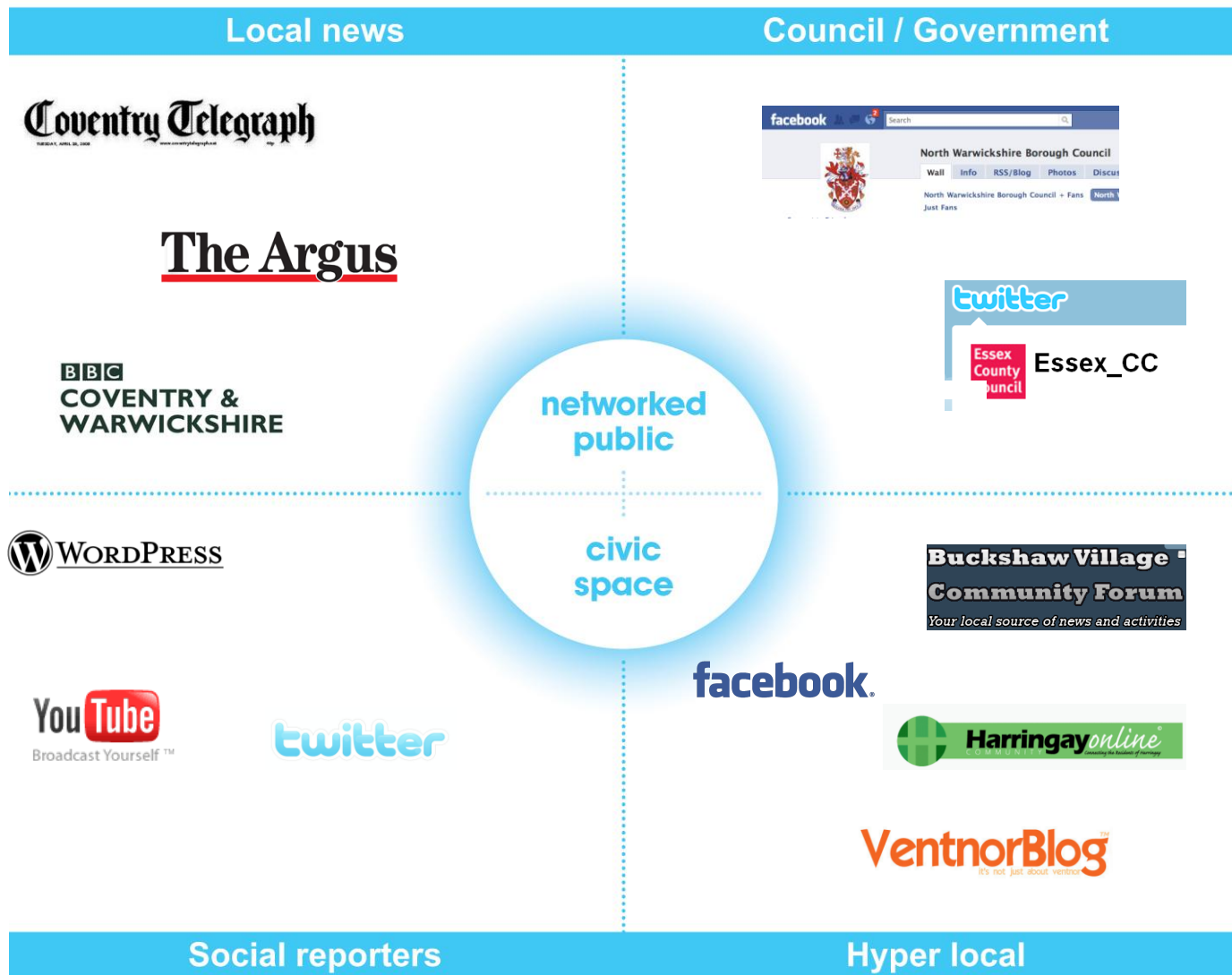
The Argus

twitter

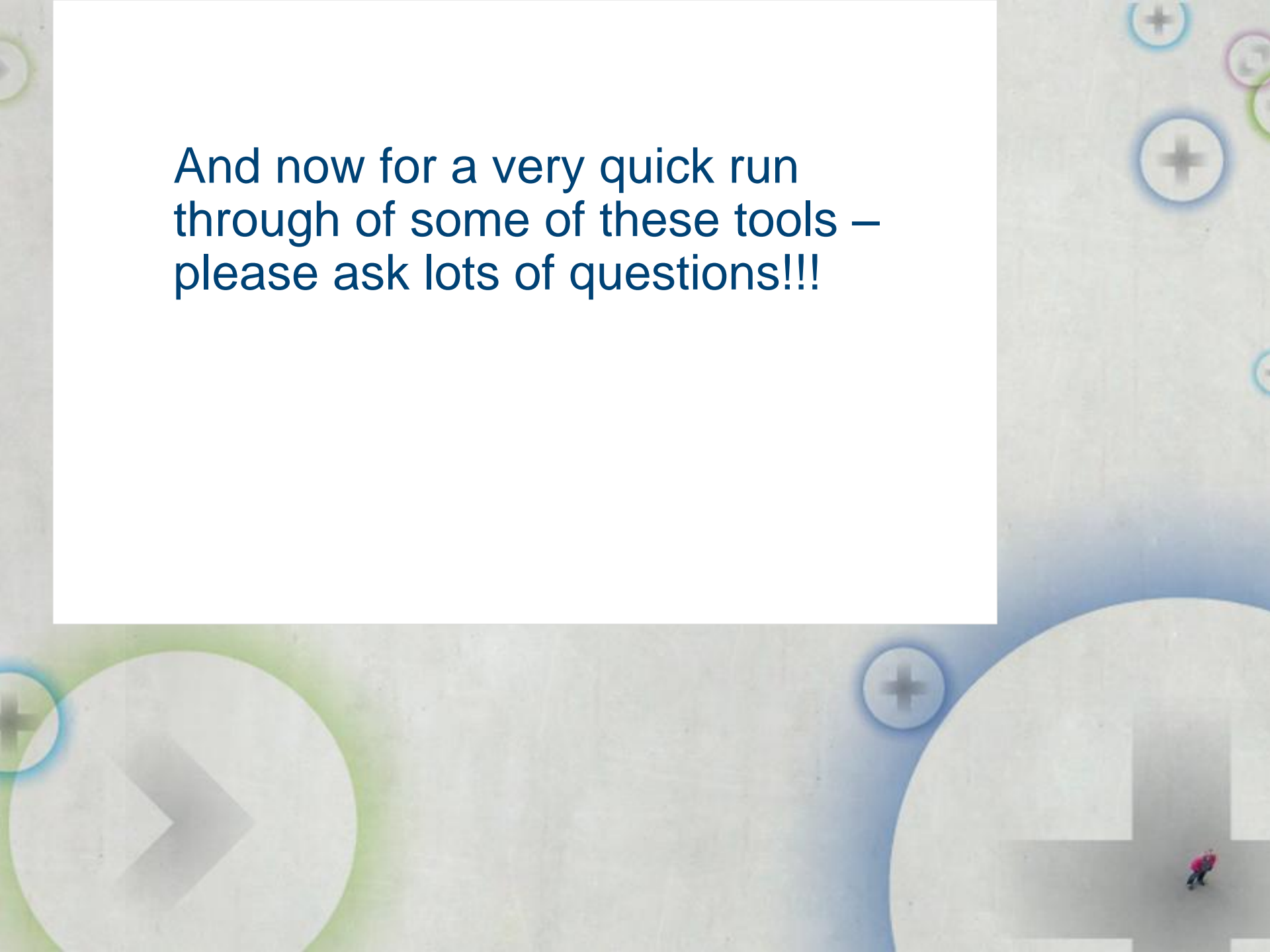
Buckshaw Village  
Community Forum  
Your local source of news and activities



# From all these different social media spaces



And now for a very quick run through of some of these tools – please ask lots of questions!!!



## Different types of tools to think about: Social Networks

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- › Places where you share information about yourself and connect to other people
- › Different types of networks for different purposes
- › Emphasis is on sharing information about yourself and joining groups

The LinkedIn logo, featuring the word "Linked" in black, "in" in white inside a blue square, and a registered trademark symbol.The Bebo logo, with a red lowercase "b" followed by "ebo" in black.The Facebook logo, the word "facebook" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.The MySpace logo, featuring a blue rectangle with a white icon of three stylized figures and the word "myspace" in white lowercase letters.The Mumsnet logo, featuring a blue silhouette of a family (two adults and three children) above the word "mumsnet" in blue lowercase letters, with the tagline "By parents for parents" in a smaller blue font below it.

## Different types of tools to think about: Social Reporting

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- › Focus is on talking about yourself and your interests – but as part of a wider conversation
- › Can either be in real time (twitter) or more reflective (blogging)
- › Emphasis is on creating content and being part of the conversation



## Different types of tools to think about: Content Sharing

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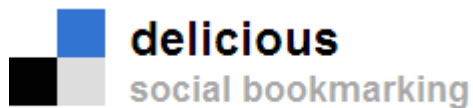
- › Often used by enthusiasts for a particular medium
- › Highly viral and good take-up really relies of hitting the right tone



## Different types of tools to think about: Collecting and sharing

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- › Used as a way of sharing information with other people in the community
- › More 'geeky' than some of the other tools
- › Incredibly useful if you can access it
- › Also known as Social Search



## Different types of tools to think about: Social content on other sites

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- › Now everyone is doing it....local newspapers, regional news outlets – anywhere where you asked if you want to make a comment
- › Big difference here is that editorial control is owned by the host of the site – in most of the other examples the editorial control is very limited/light

**BBC**  
**COVENTRY &**  
**WARWICKSHIRE**



**The Argus**  
**Coventry Telegraph**

TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 2008 [www.coventrytelegraph.net](http://www.coventrytelegraph.net) 45p

## Different types of tools to think about: Mobile

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- › Location based services are a big part of mobile social media
- › See what your kids want for Christmas and then decide how much to worry about them
- › Mobile web offers enormous power and access – we need to start thinking about it



And that's before we start to look at:



The most important thing to remember about the virtual world is that it is actually very real



# Virtual Life = Real Impacts

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- › Real emotions
- › Real relationships
- › Real communities
- › Real impacts

“Some are tempted to think of life in cyberspace as insignificant. It is not. Our experiences there are serious play. We belittle them at our risk. We must understand the dynamics of virtual experiences both to foresee who might be in danger and to put these experiences to best use.”

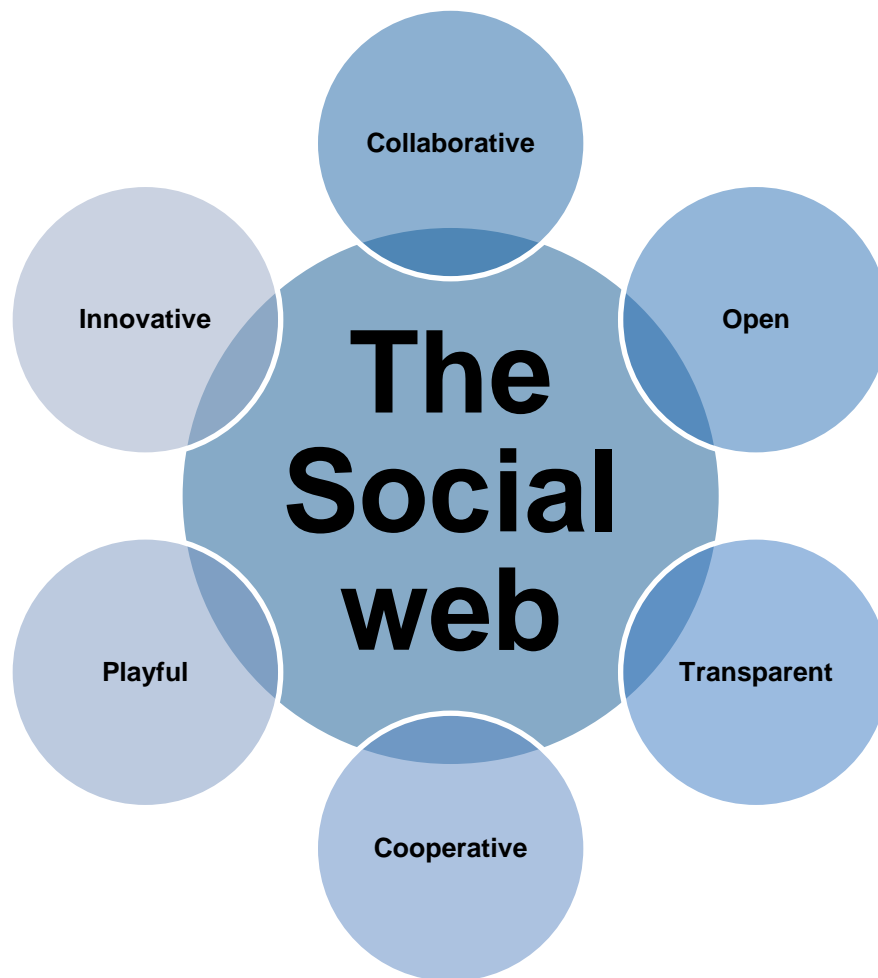
*Sherry Turkle, Life on Screen*

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## And it has its own culture

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## And so are the communities

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- › New communication media means that new social phenomena are going to arise that differ in significant ways from everything we've known. We are going to have to get used to the idea that the word "community" is going to have to stretch to include groups of people who communicate socially and work together cooperatively and never meet in the real world.
  - › *Howard Rheingold, The Virtual Community; Homesteading on the Virtual Frontier*
  - › (<http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/>)
- 
- › **And that was 10 years ago**



# Hyperlocal communities

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Today virtual communities are as likely to gather together people who live on the same street and those that live thousands of miles apart

Hyperlocal communities connect people separated by time and not necessarily space

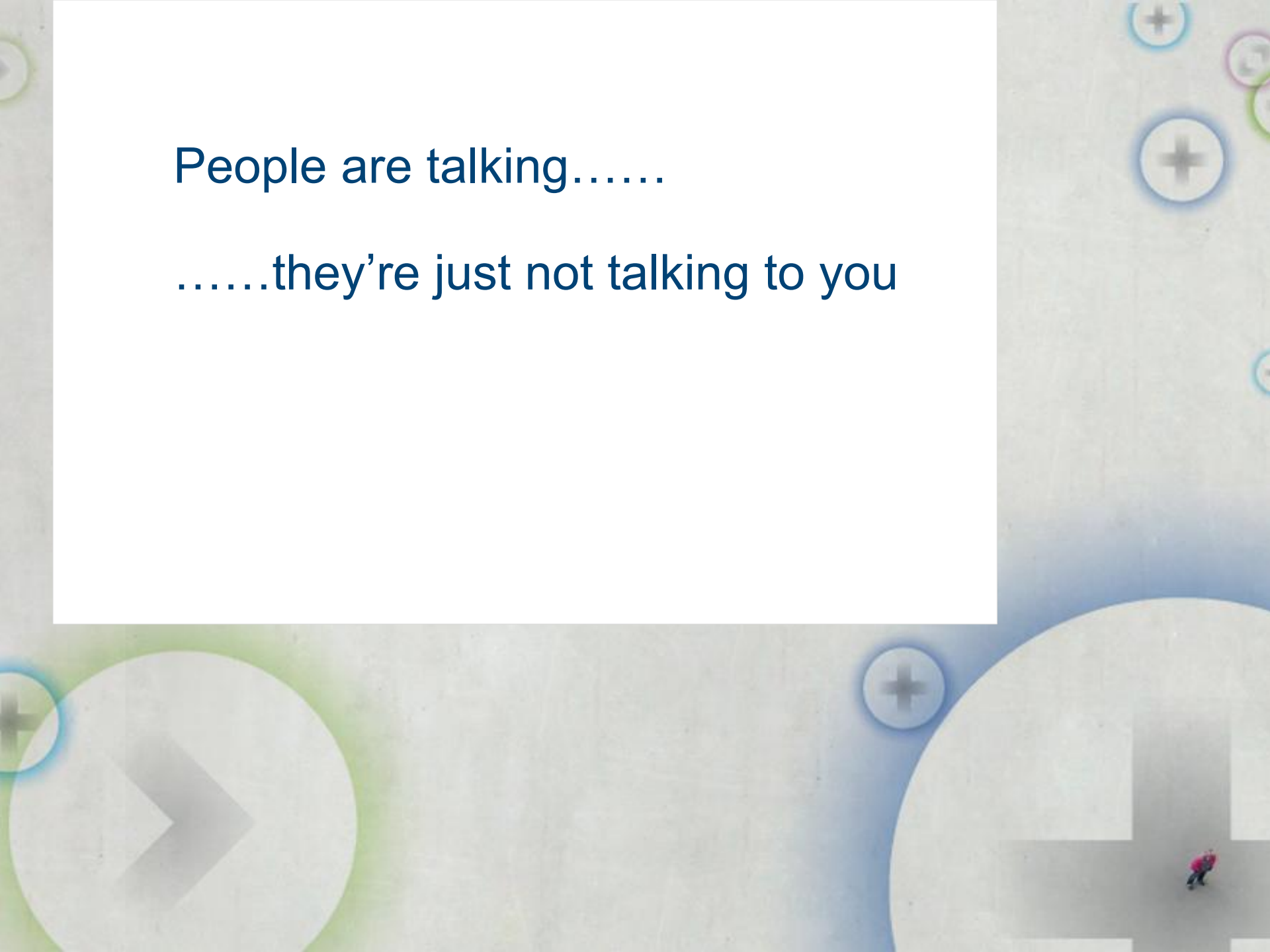
Three useful references:

- Networked Neighbourhoods: <http://networkedneighbourhoods.com/>
- Talk about Local: <http://talkaboutlocal.org.uk/>
- Podnosh: <http://podnosh.com/>



People are talking.....

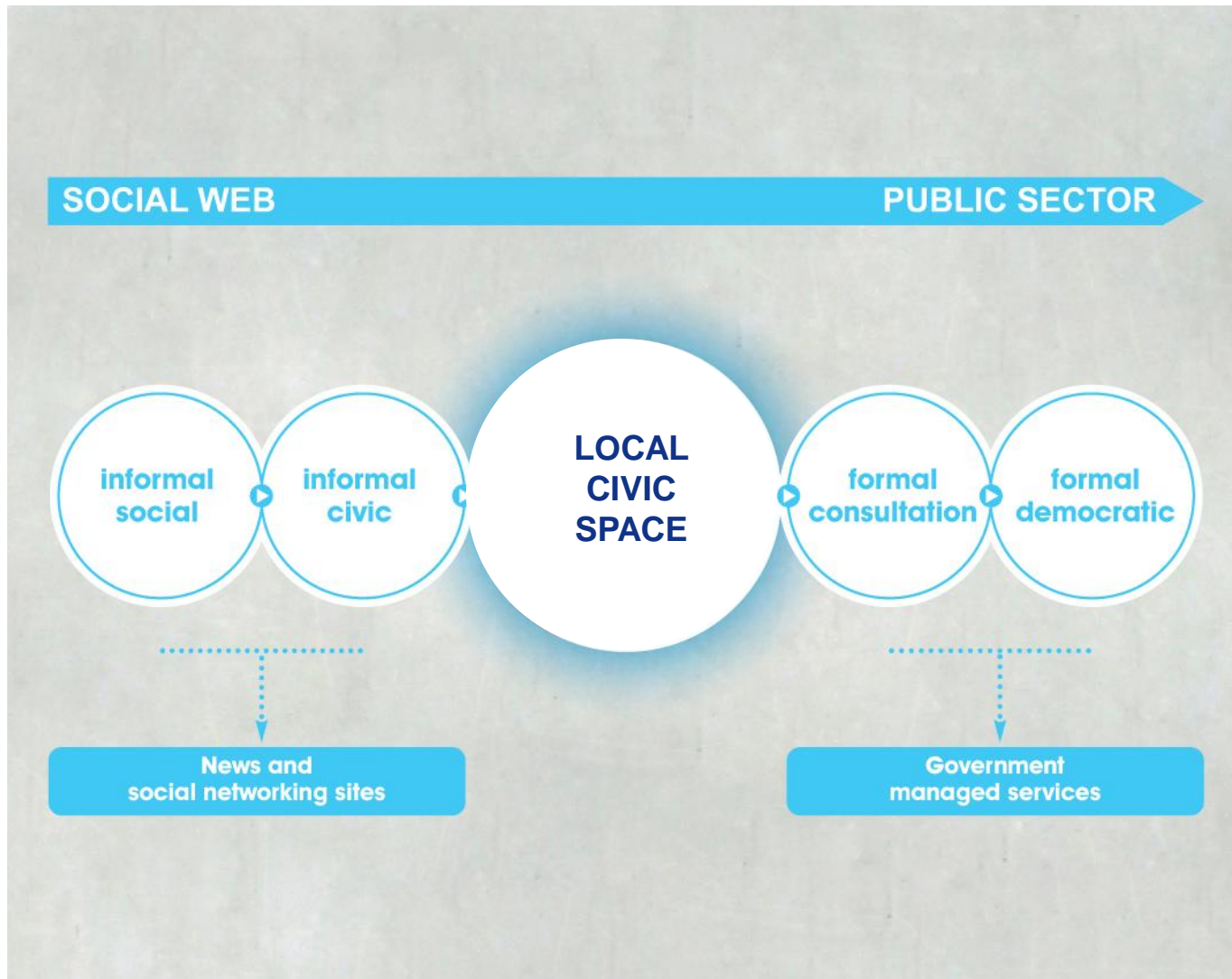
.....they're just not talking to you



# And are beginning to connect more people to the democratic process

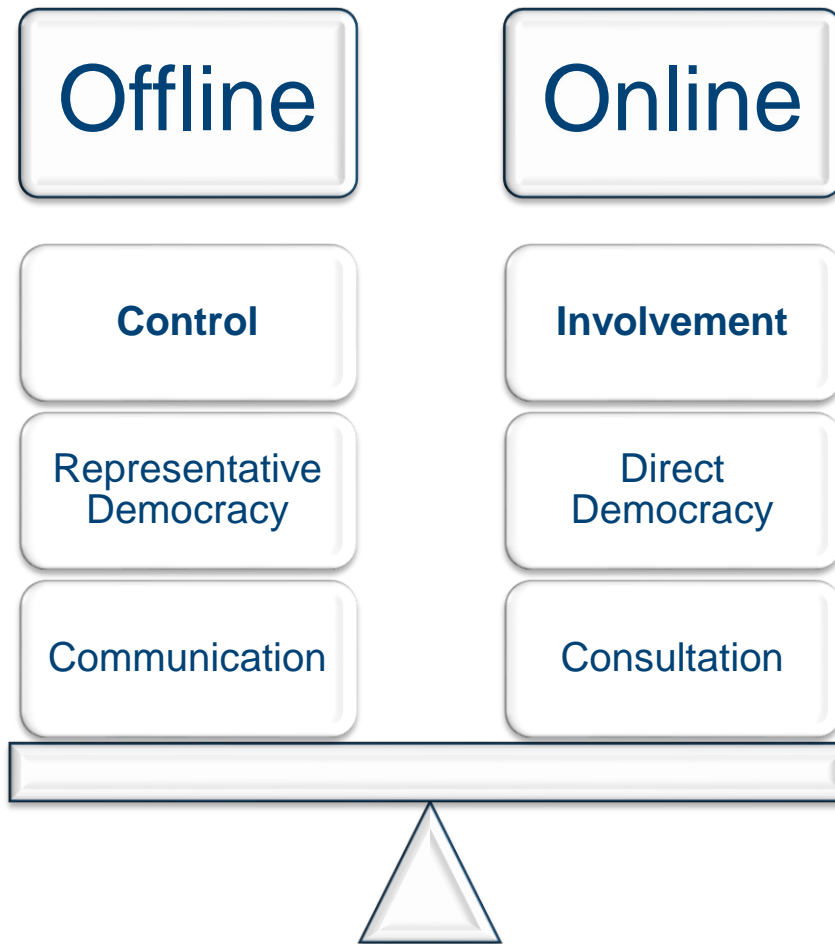


# By harnessing the potential of social media



# We need to balance the tensions

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WIKINOMICS  BETA

WIKIPEDIA

**The new social web is an environment  
superbly suited to Participatory Design:  
Co-creation**



# The democratic question.....

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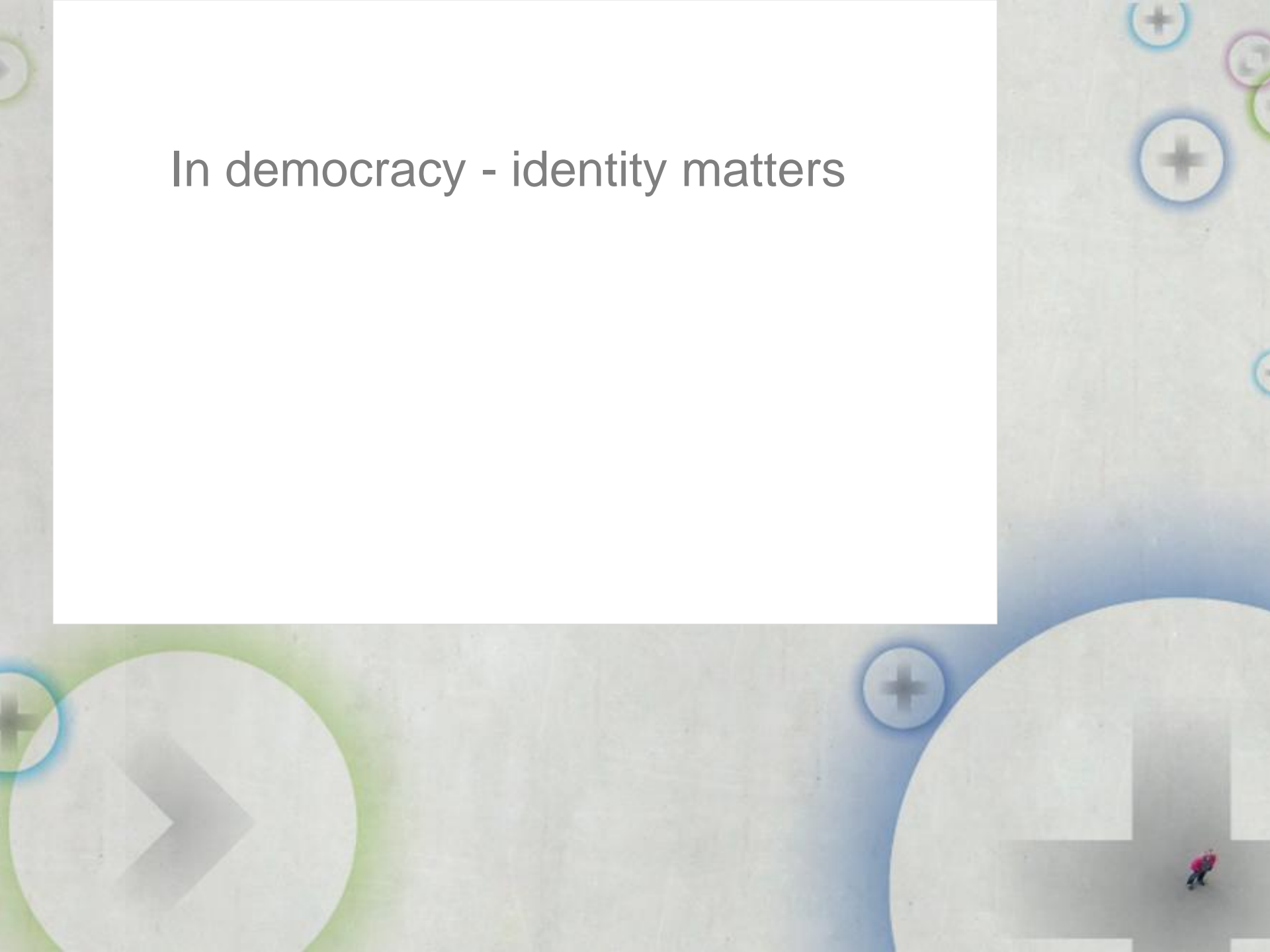
**Social websites are profoundly different to most government spaces.....**

**....and so is democracy....**

**.....we can't make a decision on the basis of how many people join a facebook group**



In democracy - identity matters



You'll have seen this before.....

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## On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Dog

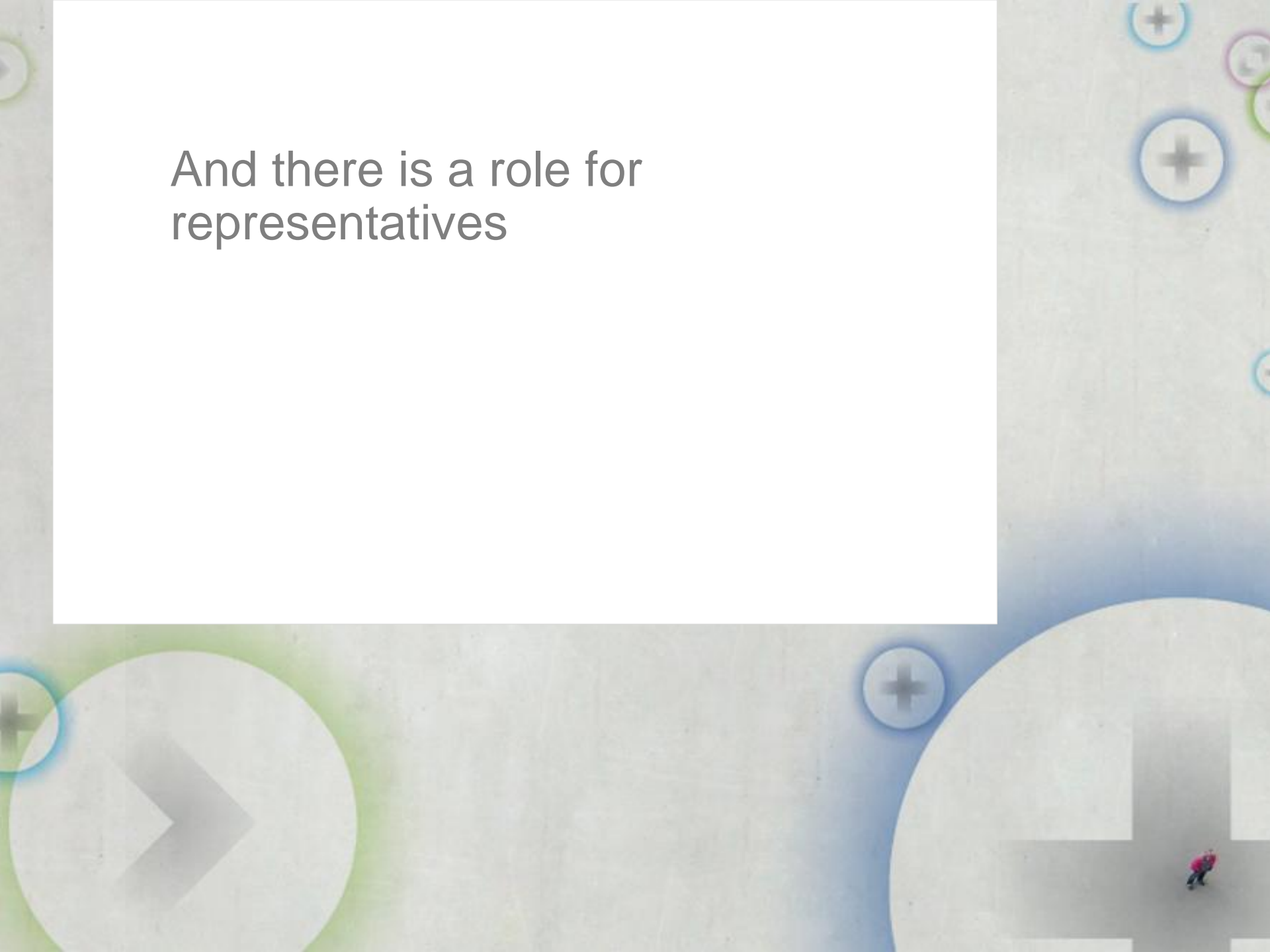


*"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."*

But it makes an important point

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And there is a role for  
representatives



# People want to be represented

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- ▶ But they also want to be part of the agenda setting process
- ▶ They want to know and trust their representatives
  - ▶ They want fast and accurate answers to questions
- ▶ They want a more direct representation than they have had so far – and in a form that fits the new culture of the social web



# Imagine a Virtual Town Hall

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- ▶ A **permanent civic space** which will provide an online space for democratic activity
  - ▶ **Manage identity within this space**
- ▶ Somewhere where citizens can take an equal part in shaping the outcomes of their engagement: **a co-created space**
- ▶ Not a website – **a web space which brings in content from the existing social web** and connects it with democratic activities and outcomes



# And how does Government need to change?

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- ▶ Ensure that '**Local**' is user defined – its not about you!
- ▶ Build an environment for **co-creation**
- ▶ Unlock the potential within Councils - **trust officers to engage**
- ▶ Create the idea of **Councillor 2.0**
- ▶ **Change gears** to work at a speed closer to that of the internet: this means taking risks



# How do we build this?

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- ▶ **Do not compromise on democratic principles** - accountability is essential even if its not web 2.0 friendly in terms of identity
- ▶ **Build an idea of better citizens** - and help people to embrace this
- ▶ **Equip our representatives to respond to the Citizens**
- ▶ **Build the spaces** which are needed to enable this to happen
- ▶ **Build beyond the next trend:** think of Civic Architecture



Digital engagement is about  
working with your communities in  
these new spaces

Effective listening is the easiest  
way to get started

# There are risks

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- › Resources are constrained and you want to use them wisely
- › Your good reputation is vital – you don't want to undermine it
- › You already have an engagement strategy – you don't want to compromise what you have already done
- › But you also need to learn how to get the best out of these new technologies



# But risk is complicated

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## › Some risks are dealt with easily

- › Lack of knowledge => training
- › Legal or process confusion => NPIA has loads of guidance
- › Creating a social media policy => NPIA has done this as well!

## › And others need you to make some changes

- › Create a business case – at least for experimentation
- › Decide where social media sits within the organisation
- › Make sure you have a process for experiential learning



# Then there is the really tricky stuff

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- › **Make sure you have senior support: This process needs leadership**
  
- › Think about co-production – how you involve the public in your actual decision making – which is what good engagement is really about (identify, act, feedback is one interpretation of this)
  
- › **Start making the culture changes that you need:**
  - › Openness
  - › Transparency
  - › Collaboration
  - › Cooperation
  
- › **How do you operate in a way which is effective in this new environment?**



## But it's really not all doom

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- › There really are more opportunities than risks
- › You can do it cost effectively
- › And it's a world where people will tolerate experimentation and help you
- › If you get this right then you can create a fantastic resource and enrich your engagement with the public

We already know that community engagement is a big contributor to increases in trust- good use of social media is about trust and authenticity which builds on this

## But this doesn't mean it's all about online

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- › Effective use of social media can complement your important offline events
- › Imagine replacing two of a monthly community meetings with social media, to considerably increase the number of people you meet – and to communicate the remaining meetings more effectively
- › Its about changing the balance
- › It's not about replacing existing tools its about adding to them cost effectively



# There are some easy ways to get started

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- › Map your local conversations – find out who is talking
- › Start a blog or a regular podcast – start using tools in a controlled way
- › Look at tools like Facebook and YouTube and come up with a specific campaign for each of them
- › Think about Twitter as a second step – it works best when you have some content of your own
- › Think about giving your community meetings an online presence





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## Thank you for your time

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