INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT:

A STUDY OF COMMUNITY REPORTING IN TWO GREATER MANCHESTER URBAN REGENERATION AREAS

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Contents

List of Tables and Figures

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Abstract

Despite an unshakable belief in the UK in the empowering and regenerating potential of ICTs locating the benefits of digital inclusion initiatives for deprived urban communities has remained elusive. Given social media discourses of empowerment and social progress this thesis explores whether and how social media may be associated with a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration. I specifically focus upon the potential of the relationship between participation in community content creation and sharing, (community generated content), community empowerment and regeneration. The exploration is based on a qualitative case study of a Community Reporter Programme with a social media and empowerment focus being integrated within two urban regeneration areas in Greater Manchester. The study draws primarily on the experiences and insights of community reporter participants.

The way in which participation in community generated content becomes meaningful within urban regeneration areas and thus potentially empowering, is found to lie in a complex interweave of individual interpretative framing, aspects of identity beyond the demographic frame and strategies for the domestication of the specific social media practice of community reporting. The study finds that empowerment value attached to participation in community generated content is primarily located at the individual level and psychological and social in nature related to a 'reconnecting' and 'feel good' factor which appears to have a particular benefit for those who have been at risk of social exclusion. The value at the collective level of empowerment constructed as 'voice' is found to be limited and potentially disempowering within a social context of audience inattention and subtle dangers of 'voice' exploitation and appropriation.

The study highlights fresh perspectives on what ICTs might mean for local communities beyond the established links between online and offline social interaction and social capital frame locating empowerment value specifically in the process of social media focused content production. In line with emergent critiques of participatory culture the study also problematises assumptions of ease of participation and voice attached to social media technologies. While the study supports the emergent view within digital inclusion and community informatics research areas that the empowerment value of ICTs may indeed lie in the arena of content production, the importance of viewing the potential through a critical lens of specific co-creative media practices and shining a light on urban regeneration as a potential arena of disempowerment is identified.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the Internet in particular have long been attached to discourses of 'community' and assumptions of 'empowerment' and 'regeneration'. However, to date, conceptualising a relationship between ICTs and empowerment has proved elusive to the extent that the specialist field of research and practice built on a belief in the 'community empowerment' potential of ICTs, community informatics, still struggles to understand the relationship. There has thus been a call within this field for more critical reflection on and theorisation around the nature of this relationship. Exploring the nature of this relationship lies at the heart of this thesis which seeks to explore and understand specifically the potential of the relationship between ICTs and community empowerment. The research is also driven by the ever increasing popularisation of so-called 'social media' which have been accompanied with even greater empowerment hype and assumptions of social change which are increasingly being challenged by an array of scholars within varying fields. Therefore at its most fundamental level this research seeks to explore the relationship between ICTs, community empowerment and regeneration through the lens of social media and associated discourses. My research thus asks, whether and how social media may be associated with a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration.

My use of the term ICT is historically rooted in the discourse of the 'digital divide' and thus has generally been defined in relation to access to computers and the Internet (Selwyn, 2004). Given my social media lens (a concept which I explore thoroughly in Chapter 3) and the rapid nature of advancing communication technologies, my research considers ICT as an umbrella term for an array of technological tools, services and applications which facilitate social interaction and the creation and distribution of a variety of media forms online.

1.2 The Research Context

My exploration of the relationship between ICTs and community empowerment through the lens of so-called social media, is situated within the context of urban regeneration in the UK and thus within the broader context of deprived urban communities. In particular, I locate my

research within the historical context of urban regeneration policy as it unfolded under the New Labour Government which came to power in 1997. It was during this period of policy-making that ICTs became pivotal to regenerating deprived, predominantly urban neighbourhoods embodied in initiatives to bridge the perceived digital divide between such deprived neighbourhoods and those considered to be more affluent as part of the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal. In addition, community and empowerment became integral concepts to the neighbourhood approach to regeneration, and ICTs became attached to assumptions of value for community empowerment and regeneration.

1.2.1 ICTs, Community Empowerment and Regeneration

Community-based ICT initiatives attached to assumptions of community empowerment and regeneration proliferated in the UK during the 1990s and became characteristic of attempts to tackle the perceived digital divide within areas defined by the government as deprived neighbourhoods. However, as community-based ICT access initiatives designed to address this perceived divide proliferated on the ground, the empowering and regenerating potential on which they were based began to be questioned and calls were made to reflect upon and open up a more critical view of such assumptions (Southern, 2002; Keeble, 2003; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Stoecker, 2005; Southern & Townsend, 2005; Malina & Ball, 2005). In particular, a knowledge gap was identified with regards to the ways in which ICTs might become meaningful within the daily lives of people living within disadvantaged areas (Loader & Keeble, 2004; Malina & Ball, 2005). At the same time a wider view began to emerge that the potential for more meaningful use and therefore for empowerment and regeneration lay within the creative and in particular in the content arena of ICTs situated around the technologically enhanced capacity for people to become active producers rather than passive consumers of content (Shearman, 1999; Shearman, 2003; Hellawell, 2001; O'Bryant, 2003; O'Bryant & Pinkett, 2003; Keeble, 2003; Selwyn, 2004).

Thus my work is rooted in a particular interest in the assumed relationship between content production and a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration. The potential of community generated content has recently begun to be espoused and theorised (Mäkinen, 2006; Nutt & Schwartz, 2007) suggesting a link between community content production and community empowerment within a context of local disadvantage. Associations being made between community-based content production, community

empowerment and power represent a key driver for this research. Much of the research work surrounding ICTs, community and disadvantaged neighbourhoods has tended to focus on community networking and community technology centre models of community-based ICTs. However, community content models have received far less attention within this research arena (Beamish, 1999). Literature that does relate to community content models has delivered both a utopian and cautionary tale (Devins et al., 2003; Shearman, 2003). Additionally, wider research that has explored the question of what ICTs and the Internet in particular might mean for geographical communities, has focused on what online participation may mean for offline community participation, taking a lens of social interaction, networks and 'social capital,' such as the work conducted by Hampton (2002; 2003; 2010; 2011). While it is felt that this line of inquiry offers valuable insights, this narrow field of vision offers little for the researcher keen to comprehend what ICTs might mean for local disadvantaged communities beyond this frame. This research seeks to move beyond this current predominant field of vision which blinkers attention to the role of wider social structures within local communities (Gauntlett, 2011).

1.2.1.1 Digital Inclusion in the UK

My work is inevitably situated within the policy and research arena of digital inclusion which has taken on the mantel of developing ICTs for social inclusion (Warschauer, 2002, 2004). This arena has been characterised by a focus on identifying the so-called digitally and socially excluded and the means by which they might be encouraged to engage (Selwyn, 2004; Helsper, 2008). This focus on the means rather that the consequences of digital inclusion has been identified as having obfuscated critical reflection on the consequences of digital inclusion (Selwyn, 2004; Rodino-Colocino, 2006). Meanwhile as technologies have advanced, the government's drive toward digital inclusion, more recently reframed as digital participation, has become peppered with the technologically deterministic language of empowerment (Department for Communities and Local Government, DCLG, 2008b), subsumed with top-down agendas and seemingly devoid of accounting for the role of social structures in shaping and influencing the presumed social change (Dabinett, 2005). Therefore, this thesis is fundamentally rooted in exploring this discourse of inevitable empowerment linked to digital participation through the lens of social media and regeneration. Given the continued link between digital and social disadvantage (Helsper, 2008; Sinclair & Bramley, 2010) I also bring a lens of social exclusion to the research.

1.2.1.2 Social Media as a New Arena of the Potential for Community Empowerment

Social media represents the primary lens through which I seek to explore the relationship between ICTs, community empowerment and regeneration, as arguably it enables the capacity for people to create and share content as never before and thus opens up a greater potential for meaningful use and empowerment within this arena. The government's focus on integrating ICTs within deprived urban neighbourhoods took a social media turn towards the middle of the 2000s and gathered pace in 2009 through a programme targeting deprived local communities, focused on enabling so-called better use of social media (DCLG, 2008b). Thus the time seemed ripe to re-examine assumptions of empowerment and regeneration through a social media lens.

Social media has been accompanied by a discourse and assumption of social change and empowerment. In particular assumptions of empowerment are being framed as 'voice' and gravitating around perceived enhanced capacity for 'ordinary' people to create and share, rather than simply consume content via the Internet. In essence, a picture of a 'people's Internet is being painted associated with the potential for anyone and everyone to be seen and heard (Beer & Burrows, 2007; Jenkins, 2008) and content creation is viewed as vital within the democratic agenda (Livingstone, 2004). Given my community angle, this research is particularly rooted in an interest in the ways in which community media and social media may be intersecting, embodied in community generated content. This is an area which has received minimal scholarly attention to date, especially within the UK context.

The rhetoric of voice and democratisation associated with social media appropriation is being critiqued, in particular, within the realm of so-called 'participatory culture' which suggests a paradigm shift in media content creation and sharing associated with the empowerment of the former audience (Jenkins, 2006). It is within the frame of participatory culture that a critique of relevance to the exploration of the relationship between social media and community empowerment is beginning to emerge, with an array of scholars challenging the rhetoric of social progress, social worth and empowerment (Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Petersen, 2008; Jarrett, 2008; Beer, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009; Spurgeon et al., 2009, Schäfer, 2011). This emergent critique is gravitating around challenging the notion of democratisation of the Internet and the reality of user agency in social media environments, calling for critical reflection, interrogation and greater attention to the way in which power dynamics are

beginning to play out in these social arenas (Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Spurgeon et al., 2009; Baym, 2009; Schäfer, 2011). Indeed Henry Jenkins, (2008) who coined the phrase participatory culture, has also begun to refer to the limitations of democracy in such environments. Assumptions about ease and organic emergence of participation together with voice, related to the affordances of new media production technologies and associated perceptions of reduced technological barriers to media production are inherent within this discourse. However, such assumptions which surround the notion of participatory culture are being challenged by scholars and problematised in particular by the identification of participation divides within the arena of content creation and sharing (Jenkins, 2006; 2008; Harigittai & Walejko, 2008; Scharadie, 2011).

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

Despite the steadfast assumption in the UK that ICTs are pivotal for achieving the vision of empowering and regenerating deprived urban communities, such rhetoric has remained unsubstantiated by empirical research evidence to date. Within this discourse however, there appears to be agreement that the potential for empowerment and regeneration lies within the content domain of ICTs. Given the government's ever growing push toward digital participation and the growing appropriation of, and empowerment through, reduced barriers to content production discourse attached to social media, there has perhaps never been a more opportune and important time to revisit this assumption. This thesis thus works from the fundamental hypothesis that social media may be associated with a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration. The underlying aim of this research, guided by the literature review and perceptions of gaps in current knowledge, is therefore:

To explore whether and how social media may be associated with a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration within local disadvantaged areas.

Specifically, this overarching research aim is rooted in an exploration of the nature of the relationship between the community generated content dimension of social media, community empowerment and power, which proponents of the community empowerment value of community generated content recognise requires digital empowerment (Mäkinen, 2006; Nutt & Schwartz, 2007). This research thus seeks to explore these linked concepts

within the overall context of urban regeneration and therefore local disadvantaged areas and digital inclusion. In the light of varying theories and gaps with regard to knowledge within the research area, the following key research questions have additionally been identified as integral to the overarching research aim:

- Whether and how participation in community content creation and sharing may be of value for community empowerment and regeneration?
- Whether, how and to whom might participation in community content creation and sharing be becoming a meaningful activity within the lives of people living in disadvantaged areas?
- What factors might constrain local communities engaged in community generated content from following an empowered path?

Thus, at a broad level the research seeks to expand and nuance current theorisation of the relationship between ICT and community empowerment within the context of urban regeneration (and thus digital inclusion), viewed primarily through a social media lens with a specific focus on the potential for community generated content. The research thus culminates in the presentation of an enhanced conceptual lens through which to develop current theorising with regard to the role of ICT in community empowerment and regeneration.

1.4 Overarching Approach to the Research

The research area is multidisciplinary in nature and touches on, and is influenced by, an array of research fields including Computer-Mediated Communication, Community Informatics and Digital Inclusion research, together with the broader fields of Urban Studies, Sociology, Media and Cultural studies and Internet and Social Media studies. However, the research is primarily located within the field of Science and Technology Studies, also referred to as the Social Construction of Technology. Fundamentally therefore, the research rejects technologically deterministic accounts of social change, viewing the relationship between technology and social change as far more complex and is influenced by research: within the arena of Community Informatics (Loader & Keeble, 2004); previous research focused on and relevant to the relationship between ICTs and urban regeneration (Southern, 2002; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Leach & Copitch, 2005; Southern & Townsend, 2005); and my exploration of the concepts of empowerment and power. Erring toward the conceptual lens of domestication, I take the view that the relationship between technology and social change may be most effectively understood by exploring the ways in which technologies are

embedded within particular social practices and contexts, and how this process shapes the meaning they may come to hold within people's lives. Taking a relational and co-creative lens to social media, I thus see the consequences of these technologies as being shaped through a complex interaction between people, organisations and technologies. Therefore, the overarching view which guides my research approach is that the relationship between technology and social change cannot be understood purely by focusing on the role of technology or on the social and cultural context, but rather in attempting to understand the complex weaving of the two fields of influence.

My literature review revealed that my research topic called for an approach which is empirically rich, descriptive, rigorous, detailed and critical in nature, rooted in a specific place-based context and specifically in the everyday lives of people living in disadvantaged areas (Graham, 2004; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Malina & Ball, 2005). Overall my research follows in the footsteps of studies within the field of Science and Technology Studies which tend to be small scale, descriptive and qualitative in nature (Lievrouw, 2004). The study additionally draws on the interpretive and critical research paradigms. In order to develop an in-depth detailed view of the phenomenon of interest within its social context, I have chosen a case study methodology. The research is thus based on a case study of a Community Reporters Programme operating in two urban regeneration areas in Greater Manchester being delivered by a community development organisation. The programme, which seeks to empower local people and communities by giving them a voice through the use and integration of social media skills and tools, presented an ideal and opportune case study with which to explore my hypothesis. Thus the methodology which characterises this research is an exploratory case study combined with elements of phenomenology and ethnography. In line with such an approach, mixed methods have been used for the data collection stage of the work involving principally a combination of interviews and participant observation. A range of theories and conceptual tools have been brought to the analysis of the study from various research arenas that include the Social Construction of Technology, Sociology and Cultural studies. Interviews with research participants are a particularly strong feature of this study because of the desire to illuminate the voices and perspectives of people living in the disadvantaged areas which form the focus of my work.

1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

In what follows, Chapter 2 explores perceptions of the relationship between ICTs, urban regeneration and community as it evolved within the UK policy and practice context primarily during the 1990s. The chapter identifies the ways in which the integration of ICTs became pivotal to the regeneration of deprived urban neighbourhoods during this period, driven by concerns inherent within the notion of digital divide and the way in which community empowerment also became central to this linked agenda. Through an exploration of research within a UK-based context, the chapter identifies a gap between the perceived social value of ICTs and empirical evidence to back such claims. The journey within this chapter reveals an emergent perception that technologies which enable content production hold the greatest potential for empowerment and a move toward encouraging social and community media participation in deprived urban communities is identified. The chapter concludes by identifying an interest in the role of social media in community empowerment and regeneration together with the perceived need for reflection amid the ever increasing drive toward digital participation.

Chapter 3 moves beyond the UK Government policy and practice research context by offering a global review (predominately from the developed world perspective) of historical theories and research around the meaning of ICTs, especially the Internet, for place-based communities with particular regard to disadvantaged communities. Early discourses of ICTs and community together with research and practice surrounding the integration of ICTs within deprived neighbourhoods, set an effective context within which to explore my research objective. Locating an emergent theory that community content production can play a crucial role in community empowerment within local disadvantaged communities and viewing this in the light of the era of so-called social media, the chapter then moves on to explore what this era might mean for local disadvantaged communities. Exploring the meaning of social media leads to an exploration of the discourse, assumptions and critique of participatory culture attached to the term social media. The exploration locates an emergent critique of the rhetoric of social progress and in particular empowerment as voice in the social media era, and culminates in developing a series of research questions and a conceptual framework (in the form of the key concepts to be studied and the assumed relationships between them) for taking the research forward.

Chapter 4 focuses on outlining the research process of inquiry, discussing the research design beginning at the abstract philosophical level and moving to exploring methodologies and methods to be employed. The chapter highlights my case study methodological approach before outlining and exploring the key research methods of semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The role of theory and approach to data analysis is also discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Chapter 5 describes the case study of a Community Reporter Programme being run by a community development organisation within two urban regeneration areas in Greater Manchester. This forms the focus of the research and introduces the research participants and their role within the programme. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways in which community content creation and sharing, (termed community generated content) may be becoming a meaningful participatory activity within the lives of people living in disadvantaged urban areas. The chapter also explores the 'who' dimension of this integral research question in order to develop in-depth insights into who might be most likely to participate within this arena and thus benefit from any associated empowerment potential.

Chapter 6 utilises the voices and experiences of research participants to explore perceptions of value and limitations with regard to community empowerment and regeneration attached to participation in the programme and thus to community generated content. The beginning sections of this chapter are devoted to illuminating perceptions of value and empowerment at the individual level. The chapter then moves on to locate voice as the primary perceived arena of potential empowerment at a more collective or community level and focuses on moving beyond the empowerment frame, bringing a more critical lens again, through the voices of research participants to the inquiry and thus identifying potential areas of disempowerment.

Chapter 7 reflects on and evaluates the research objective and approach. The key findings to emerge from the research work are identified and specific contributions to knowledge are highlighted. The chapter ends by locating recommendations for further research and the conclusions drawn from the work are presented.

Chapter 2: Urban Regeneration, Community and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): The UK Context

2.1 Introduction

For many years now I have had an interest in the relationship between urban regeneration, ICTs and the community and the ways in which perceptions of the value of this relationship has and is being played out in cities across the UK, particularly in terms of value for people and communities living in urban regeneration areas. This relationship thus forms the context for my research and the purpose of this chapter is to explore this and to unravel the complexities within this field. I begin by exploring what is meant by the term urban regeneration and move on to identify the ways in which the concept of community and ICTs has become increasingly pivotal to the idea of regenerating UK cities. The discussion in this chapter focuses on urban regeneration policy and practice as it evolved during the 1990s with a predominant, but not exclusive, focus on the context of England for reasons of manageability.

2.2 Investigating the Meaning and Ethos of Urban Regeneration: The UK context

Urban regeneration is perhaps commonly understood in its most obvious form of physical transformation in relation to the visible impacts of the activity on the urban landscape in evidence across many inner urban spaces (Jones & Evans, 2007). However, urban regeneration, theoretically at least, has come to mean so much more than physical transformation as the following section will explore.

2.2.1 Urban Regeneration: Examining the Concept

Urban regeneration sits within the broad field of urban policy, which can be understood in the simplest terms as an array of initiatives that seek to address problems inherent within cities (Cochrane, 2007, p.1). Urban policy may also be further understood as involving the definition and labelling of specific urban areas as particularly problematic and in need of intervention commonly based on the social construction of urban deprivation (Edwards & Batley, 1978; Jones & Evans, 2007; Cochrane, 2007). In the UK urban regeneration is commonly discussed as a relatively new concept, which gradually evolved within the

language of urban policy (Furbey 1999; Jones & Evans, 2008), taking root in particular during the 1990s (Lichfield, 1992; Roberts & Sykes, 2000; Roberts 2000). Principally, the turn to urban regeneration within urban policy has been identified as emerging as a response to the challenge of sustainable development (Parkinson, 1996; Shaw & Robinson, 1998; Coaffe, 2009) and thus recognition that urban problems are multifaceted (Shaw and Robinson, 1998) requiring "action on all fronts" (Shaw & Robinson, 1998, p.52). The term has been defined in practical terms as "the process of reversing economic, social and physical decay having reached the point where market forces alone will not suffice" (Cebulla et al., 2000, p.169). Partnership became central to the ideology of delivering holistic policy solutions (Hambleton & Thomas, 1995; Furbey, 1999) thus becoming a process involving an array of players bringing in varying goals and perspectives and leaving the concept wide open to interpretation (Brownhill & Darke, 1998). This has led to a situation in the UK where "the same word serves as an expression of very diverse hopes" as Furbey (1999, p. 422) suggests as part of his discourse of regeneration as a metaphor.

Discourses of urban regeneration as a metaphor refer to the term as symbolic of "profound change" (Furbey, 1999, p.247), "a significant move away from the past" (Foley, 2011, p.39) and a term which has become associated with "rebirth" (Furbey, 1999, p.419; Jones & Evans, 2008). Connotations of 'rebirth' have thus led to the discussion of the term as a word with strong religious, spiritual and moral crusade leanings (Jones & Evans, 2008; Foley, 2011) within which community became a pivotal ideology during the 1990s, as discussed in the following section.

2.3 Urban regeneration and Community

Community has become "almost universally seen as a desirable means and as an end to the process of regeneration" (McCulloch, 2000, p.411). In the UK context community has come to be viewed as playing a pivotal role within urban policy and regeneration, perceived as requiring community empowerment, an area which I now briefly explore.

2.3.1 Urban Policy, Regeneration and the Turn to Community

Community, described as an "elusive, but also ideologically slippery concept" (Cochrane, 2007, p.49) has long been ingrained within the language of urban policy, and the fate of

community in the face of urbanisation and socio-economic change has long been a source of scholarly debate, particularly within the field of sociology (Mayo, 1994; Delanty, 2003). During the 1990s commentators began to speak of a reorientation of urban policy toward community commonly referred to as the "turn to community" (Duffy & Hutchinson, 1997) and the concept has steadily continued to play a vital role within urban policy (Kearnes, 2003).

Before proceeding to explore community in relation to urban policy and regeneration and in particular the growing emphasis on community empowerment within this context, it is important to briefly attend to the meaning of community within an urban policy context. Urban policies are primarily concerned with communities of place which may also be defined as neighbourhoods (Kearnes, 2003). In policy practice therefore community is generally understood as a particular area, neighbourhood or locality (Cochrane, 2007). Policy frameworks which equate community with particular areas or neighbourhoods have however been the subject of considerable debate and criticism (Townsend, 1979; Crow and Allan, 1994; Mohan, 1999; Lee, 1999; Chatterton & Bradley, 2000; Chanan et al., 2001;) which effectively suggests that area-based problems are rooted in area-based communities (Kearnes, 2003). The community as neighbourhood policy framework is nonetheless inherent in the UK urban regeneration agenda, in essence requiring "a particular territory to be identified, delimited and packaged for regeneration" (Chatterton & Bradley, 2000, p.100).

The UK government elected in 1997 came to power with an underlying ideology of communitarianism (Hambleton, 1997) encapsulated in the ideology that "tasks currently taken by the state should be turned over to individuals, families and communities" (Etzioni, 1995, p.33). Thus, community empowerment became central to the language of the urban policy discourse, (Hambleton, 1997) emphasising self-help (Home Office, 1999; Cochrane, 2007), resting on the idea of "communities shaping their own destinies, doing, not being done to" (Boetang, 1999, p.1). 'Social exclusion' also became integral to the urban policy and regeneration discourse (Robinson & Shaw 1998; Furbey, 1999; Foley, 2011). Social exclusion is identified as "almost entirely an urban problem" (Power, 2000, p.1) and is commonly understood as "a dynamic process which shuts people off from the benefits enjoyed by full citizens" (Walker, 1997, p.8; Murie & Musterd, 2004, p.1442). The Social Exclusion Unit, (SEU) set up by the government at the time, defined the concept as the "shorthand term for what can happen when people suffer from linked problems such as

unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, lower incomes, poor housing, bad health and family disorder" (SEU, 2004, p.14).

Tackling the phenomenon of social exclusion can be seen as part of the trend towards social regeneration to which the concept of community became central (Ginsburg, 1999). Several scholars have noted the turn to community within the urban regeneration context during the 1990s (Watts & Farnell, 1999; Wilks-Heeg, 2000), apparent in the promotion of community involvement and community-led regeneration initiatives. Brickell, (2001, p.11), for example, highlighted the way in which the "bonds of community are seen as a source of social good in themselves and as a tool for regenerating and renewing parts of society neglected during previous decades."

The neighbourhood and thus community approach to urban regeneration which emerged during this period was rooted in the ideology of tackling social exclusion in line with a growing belief across Europe that disadvantage is spatially concentrated (McGregor & McConnachie, 1995). This is reflected in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal emerging in 2001 (SEU, 2001), which painted a picture of such spatially concentrated deprivation as poor neighbourhoods, "detached from the rest of society", "stuck in a spiral of decline" and further characterised by "acquired poor reputations", high unemployment rates, empty homes, crime, vandalism and drug dealing (SEU, 2001, p.7). The key goal of the strategy was to reduce the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods, predominately urban areas in England (SEU, 2001) and the national average, identifying the vision that "within 10 to 20 years, no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live" (SEU, 2001, p.8).

New Deal for Communities can also be seen as part of the neighbourhood approach to regeneration and was inherently informed by the research and analysis of the Social Exclusion Unit (Furbey, 1999). This programme was launched in 1998 to seek to transform England's most deprived neighbourhoods over a period of ten years through an holistic approach with an emphasis on the key areas of crime, housing, education, health, unemployment and community (SEU, 2001). Community also became ingrained even further within the language of regeneration in the UK following the riots within UK neighbourhoods in 2001 which raised concerns that the area-based regeneration approach to regeneration was reinforcing separations between 'micro communities' within urban areas and social

segregation (Parker, 2001; Cochrane, 2007). Seeking to address barriers to 'community cohesion' thus became a further strand of the language of area-based regeneration.

2.3.2 Urban Regeneration and Community Empowerment

The idea of "reviving and empowering the community" (SEU, 2000, p.5) and building "community confidence and encouraging communities to help themselves" (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000, p.10) also became central to the policy discourse of social exclusion. The assumed break down of community, largely based on Putnam's (1993) discourse of 'social capital', also became integral within urban policy to the idea of empowering communities (Smith et al., 2007; Cochrane, 2007). Social capital is a concept which focuses on the resources, beneficial outcomes or collective assets which result from interaction and participation in social networks and are stored in such social relationships (Bourdieu, 1985; Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1994; Fukuyama, 1995; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Putnam, 2001; Gilchrist, 2003). The Social Exclusion Unit (2000) thus argued, for example, that the "social stability and a community's ability to help itself" is built upon the "vital resources of social capital" (SEU, 2000, p.24). At the heart of this discourse is the idea that communities which suffer from social exclusion are less likely to be characterised by networks of community activity and involvement (Cochrane, 2007).

The evident turn to community within urban regeneration also became interweaved with an emphasis on community empowerment (Roberts and Sykes, 2000). During the 1990s and early 21st Century the arguments for community regeneration, that is regeneration "done by" rather than "for communities" (SEU, 2001) had become increasingly strong (Thake, 1995; Taylor, 1995; Department for Environment Transport and Regions, DETR, 1998; Taylor 2000; Brickell, 2001). At the same time a government agenda of encouraging community regeneration, to which community empowerment was integral, came into view rooted in the recognition that communities need to develop the skills to play an enhanced role (DETR, 1998; Boetang, 1999; Seyfang & Pearson, 2000; Roberts & Sykes, 2000; Brickell, 2001). For example, the history of the growth of community-self help, illustrated that community activity, the recognised basis of community regeneration, has traditionally been shaped by professionals and activists with agendas of community development and empowerment (Hastings et al., 1996; Carter. 1998; Harris, 1999). This was related to the recognised barriers to community activity which have been identified as including; motivational or

psychological barriers, (lack of confidence, self-confidence, self-esteem, lack of hope, sense of powerlessness, low expectations), unemployment, linked to feelings of exclusion and poor access to economic capital, insufficient skills, knowledge and experience, and structural barriers such as the perceived decline of social capital (Beresford & Croft, 1993; Kaufmann, 1997; DETR, 1998; Boetang, 1999; Boetang, 1999; Williams, 2000; Gilchrist, 2003). Thus, this arena of activity became one strand of the empowerment focus of the urban regeneration agenda in the UK (DETR, 1999).

The erosion of social capital, defined in this context as "the contact, trust and solidarity that enables residents to help rather than fear, each other" (SEU, 2000, p.8), was identified as one of the key problems facing deprived neighbourhoods. Consequently building social capital involving a particular focus on building 'community networks' became a key goal within the context of disadvantaged communities and thus within the urban regeneration agenda (Skelcher et al., 1996; Kearnes, 2003; Gilchrist, 2003; Smith et al., 2007). Successful Neighbourhood Renewal was additionally identified as dependent on providing deprived neighbourhoods with "the capacity, opportunity and tools to help themselves" (SEU, 2001a, p.115) and the community self help ethos became integral to the neighbourhood regeneration agenda, reflected for example, in the setting up of a Community Empowerment fund (SEU, 2001a). Community also lay at the heart of the ideals of the New Deal for Communities programme, with community empowerment and capacity building being viewed from the outset as pivotal to the sustainability of the impacts of the programme (Fordham, 2010).

The language of community participation as opposed to the earlier language of community involvement in urban regeneration became synonymous with this particular era of urban regeneration policy making, a term which has increasingly become aligned with questions of power and empowerment (Arnstein, 1969). The power of the community to influence decision making is one particular issue which has drawn the attention of scholars with regard to community participation in partnerships for regeneration (Johnston & Pattie, 1996; Atkinson, 1999; Chatterton & Bradley, 2000, Foley & Martin 2000, Taylor, 2000, Jones & Evans, 2008). Community within this context has traditionally been found to be an unequal partner within the process as the voices that are heard "can remain strongly mediated by dominant interests" (Furbey, 1999, p.441). Thus, with the issues of marginalisation of community voices identified, voice also became integral to the community empowerment ideology within the neighbourhood approach to regeneration. The National Strategy for

Neighbourhood Renewal, for example, referred to measures being put in place "to ensure that communities and residents have a powerful voice in neighbourhood renewal in ways that suit them" (SEU, 2001, p.43). This was reflective of an ever growing language of community empowerment rooted in communitarianism filled with promises of placing power and control into the hands of people and disadvantaged communities and in particular, ensuring the voices of 'real' people were heard within local decision making processes (Department for Communities & Local Government, (DCLG), (2006).

Having identified the ways in which community and community empowerment in particular became central to the urban regeneration agenda in the UK, I now explore the ways in which ICTs became a further pivotal feature of this agenda.

2.4 Urban Regeneration and the Turn to ICTs: Integrating ICTs within Deprived Neighbourhoods in the UK

Towards the close of the 20th Century ICTs came to be viewed as holding great potential for resolving social problems and inequalities in a context of urban poverty (Schön et al., 1999; Castells, 1999). The belief in the fundamentally transformative nature of ICTs took hold among politicians and academics and became attached to promises of user empowerment and enhanced levels of social interaction and civic involvement as well as greater access to public services (D'Allesandro & Dosa, 2001, Katz et al., 2001, Mehra et al., 2004; Selwyn, 2004). Soon the appropriation of such technologies began to be viewed as a 'must have' in order to be able to participate and succeed in society (Servon & Nelson, 2001).

At the same time concerns began to be expressed about the "potentially divisive aspects of the information age" (Selwyn, 2004, p.342) with respect to the dangers of exclusion of the disadvantaged from the perceived opportunities being presented by new technologies (Negroponte, 1999; Mitchell, 1999; Castells, 1999; Schön et al., 1999). Manuel Castells, (1999), for example, was particularly vocal in his concerns within this arena identifying his view that the "information age" at that moment in time was, "an age of stepped up inequality, polarisation and social exclusion" (Castells, 1999, p.403).

The worldwide concern regarding the perceived gap between the so-called 'information haves' and 'have nots' or the 'connected' and 'disconnected' became conceptualised as the

digital divide (Selwyn, 2004), identified as one of the most important civil right issues facing modern society (Carvin, 2000). When applied to the urban context, Castells (1999) encapsulated such concerns through his conceptualisation of the dual city characterised by "devalued urban enclaves" and social groups bypassed by ICT infrastructure (Castells, 1999, p.27). Seeking ways to address the deep social divides based on access to, and exclusion from ICTs therefore began to be identified as one of the key challenges facing cities (Schön et al., 1999). As ICTs became integral to urban planning and regeneration strategies at a range of levels across the world (Graham, 1997; Graham & Marvin, 1999; Dabinett, 2000), Graham & Marvin (1996) warned of the dangers of viewing technology as the answer to all urban society's problems and of presuming an inevitable sequence of positive effects. They also expressed concerns regarding the potential for such initiatives to exacerbate existing social and spatial inequalities (Graham & Marvin, 1999):

> The danger is that the foci of initiatives will centre overwhelmingly on configuring new media technologies according to the needs and geographies of affluent privileged nodes, spaces and corridors in metropolitan regions, while excluding the marginalised zone (Graham & Marvin, 1999, p.27).

Thus, the concern as to whether ICTs might alleviate or exacerbate social exclusion (Selwyn, 2004) was identified as one of the key challenges facing cities during this period. In the UK, bridging this challenge became integral to the regeneration agenda with regards to deprived urban neighbourhoods. I thus now move on to explore how these worldwide trends and debates began to play out within the UK context of the regeneration of deprived urban communities.

2.4.1 Bridging the Digital Divide: Integrating ICTs within Deprived Urban Neighbourhoods

Building on earlier research in the UK pointing to both the potentially empowering effects of ICTs and to their potential to exacerbate social inequalities (Day & Harris, 1997; INSINC, 1997; Phipps, 2000) the government resolved to set about bridging the digital divide (Selwyn, 2004) and embarked on a 'Universal Access' agenda embodied in an array of initiatives promoting local public access (Selwyn 2002). However, the idea that the role of ICT in urban regeneration became central to the national political agenda in the 1990s has been said to be nowhere more apparent than in the work of the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team 15. The team was one of 18 teams set up by the government to inform the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal focused on Information Technology. As a result of the Policy

Action Team's exploration of the digital divide in the UK, ICTs became integral to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Leach, 2000).

> The PAT argued that lack of access to new technologies compounds other social and economic difficulties faced by those living in deprived neighbourhoods. Closing the digital divide and narrowing the gap between the technology rich and technology poor are therefore key elements in our National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2001a, p.197).

The Policy Action Team's report which constructed deprived neighbourhoods as facing greater barriers to ICT uptake and use, also suggested that closing the digital divide could play a vital role within the UK neighbourhood regeneration agenda, pointing to improving IT in deprived neighbourhoods as a key factor in reviving local economies (SEU, 2001a). Community was central to the emergent access agenda to tackle the divide inherent in the promotion of community-based access facilities and networks within deprived communities clearly built on earlier work which has begun to associate, for example, Community Resource Centres with empowering communities (Day & Harris, 1997, Phipps, 2000; SEU, 2001; 2001a; Hellawell, 2001). In addition, the Government's 'Wired up Communities' initiative began experimenting with the provision of home access to the Internet, targeted at people living in disadvantaged communities with a goal of ensuring that those experiencing social exclusion were not further excluded from access to government and consumer services (Devins et al., 2003). Two such areas were situated within urban 'New Deal for Communities' areas (2.3.2) and thus linked into broader regeneration agendas. In the section which follows I explore two linked agendas which emerged as attached to integrating ICTs within deprived neighbourhoods namely, tackling social exclusion and empowering and regenerating such areas.

2.4.1.1. Bridging the Digital Divide: The Challenge of 'Bringing In' the 'Socially Excluded'

Integrating ICTs within deprived urban neighbourhoods was accompanied by the assumption that people living in such neighbourhoods would be more likely to be non-users of ICTs associated with habits of non participation and isolation, for example, and thus social exclusion (Harris, 1999, p.68). Conceptually, social exclusion in the context of ICTs has become attached to the notion of 'bringing in' disadvantaged individuals and communities (Phipps, 2000; Klecun, 2008) and at the turn of the 21st Century Phipps (2000, p.64)

suggested that ICTs were being explored as "an opportunity to tackle, reduce and even prevent social exclusion."

The research sparked by the proliferation of local and community-based access initiatives however began to suggest that by and large such access focused initiatives seemed to be failing to 'bring in' or attract the so-called 'socially excluded' and therefore those viewed as most likely to be excluded from the benefits of the new technologies (Gorard et al., 2000; Harris & Dudley, 2000; Hall Aitken Associates, 2000; Selwyn, 2002; Devins et al., 2003; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Gaved & Andersen, 2006; Klecun, 2008). Concerns began to emerge that such initiatives were in fact creating a 'rich getting richer' scenario in terms of attracting those already 'well connected' and educated (Loader & Keeble, 2004; Gaved & Andersen, 2006). The evaluation of UK Online centres, a government initiative focused on promoting access to ICTs with goals of tackling social and digital exclusion did find, however, that community and voluntary sector ICT centres "attracted higher proportions of socially excluded and digitally excluded users" (Hall Aitken, 2003, p.8). In particular, the nature of the learning environment began to be identified as addressing barriers to ICT use associated with potential exclusion with particular regard to confidence (Hellawell, 2001; Loader & Keeble, 2004). The role of such centres as channels for informal learning was also identified as important in this context (Cook & Smith, 2002). Informal, innovative, and peer learning models for ICT, relevant to individual life experiences targeted at excluded groups also began to be recommended (Hellawell, 2001; Loader & Keeble, 2004).

2.4.2 The Role of ICTs in Empowering and Regenerating Deprived Neighbourhoods

Overarching the neighbourhood approach to regeneration lay a national economic regeneration agenda situated within the context of globalisation; the emergence of global cities; and economic restructuring from traditional industries based around physical resources such as ship building, steel and manufacturing industries to knowledge-based economies based around new ICTs (Landry, 2000; Jones & Evans, 2007). Thus the national agenda which began to develop was one of developing national competitiveness for the world stage and the development of ICT infrastructure became increasingly central to economic regeneration strategies (Jones & Evans, 2007, p.2). The regeneration agenda at the neighbourhood level was also overlaid with a government modernisation agenda committed to developing all government services online (Prime Minister & Minister for the Cabinet

Office, 1998) and thus focused on equipping people with the skills to participate economically and politically.

Across the UK an array of social and community ICT initiatives with objectives of regeneration thus began to proliferate (Wilcox, 1996; Williams, 1997; Dabinett, 2000). Local authority level ICT-based strategies became linked to agendas of; digital and social inclusion, community cohesion, empowerment and local social and economic regeneration (Leach & Copitch, 2005; Carter, 2007). Greater Manchester, home to some of the largest regeneration projects in the UK and indeed Europe, in particular became associated with linking urban-wide development strategies and community-based access (Leach & Copitch, 2005; Kingston, 2006; Carter, 2007). The links between local level community-based ICT integration and regeneration also began to command scholarly attention. Dabinett, (2000, p.162), for example, suggested that such initiatives "appear to have the potential to address the many different dimensions of community regeneration contained within the information society." The emergence of a range of user-led websites and networks linked to empowerment agendas (Miller, 1999, Leach & Copitch, 2005) also began to be related to ideas of transforming communities and to offering members a voice within their local area (Schopen, 2003; Leach & Copitch, 2005).

During this period neighbourhood renewal commentators became enthused about the potential of the role of ICTs in community empowerment and regeneration. Within such discourses ICTs became socially constructed as offering the potential to transform and reconnect communities, opening the door to employment opportunities within deprived neighbourhoods (Shearman, 1999; 2003) and to realising "a vision of empowered communities that have the confidence, skills and motivation to enter the mainstream and regenerate deprived areas from within" (Hellawell, 2001, p.52). Whilst there thus emerged an inherent belief that ICTs could empower and regenerate deprived urban communities, the assumption began to be challenged and critiqued as realities of ICT integration began to play out in the UK (Dabinett, 2000; Southern, 2002; Devins et al., 2003; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Southern & Townsend, 2005; Malina & Ball, 2005). In a broad sense scholars began to point to the 'vague' and 'value laden' nature of the relationship between ICT and the complex arena of regeneration and to critique assumptions of social worth and community benefit being attached to ICT on the basis of a lack of empirical research evidence to support such claims (Southern, 2002; Malina & Ball, 2005). Keeble (2003, sic) also noted the paucity of

evidence of community and voluntary organisations utilising ICTs as "tools for regeneration or empowerment" within the UK. Hence, a gap between rhetoric and reality was beginning to be identified within this area of discourse (Southern, 2002; Keeble, 2003; Southern & Townsend, 2005; Malina & Ball, 2005).

Within the realm of community economic regeneration and employment specifically, the limited evidence of benefits began to be noticed and assumptions of securing competitiveness and access to the labour market through ICT integration within deprived communities challenged (Dabinett, 2000; Southern, 2002; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Klecun, 2008). The UK government's primary agenda of promoting the use of ICTs for learning for the new knowledge-based economy (Landry, 2000) was also, it was being argued, obfuscating the potential for initiatives on the ground to contribute to empowerment and regeneration in deprived urban neighbourhoods (Sherman, 1999; Hellawell, 2001). Sherman (1999), for example, critiqued the tendency for community-based access initiatives to focus on basic ICT skills for the labour market, which she described as the promotion of 'NVQ factory style' training. The social outcomes associated with such initiatives were additionally beginning to be identified as limited, as assumptions of the ability of ICTs to foster social inclusion, social capital, community development and cohesion began to be viewed as largely over estimated (Devins et al., 2003; Malina & Ball, 2005; Klecun, 2008). In addition, the benefits of local ICT community-based initiatives for the "less well connected communities" were identified as "still an open question" (Gaved & Andersen, 2006, p.28), and Klecun, (2008) highlighted the limited evidence of long term social outcomes associated with such initiatives. However, community ICT centres with strong community activity foci have been noted to be associated with successes in terms of community involvement and the increased self esteem and confidence which could potentially lead to employment (Klecun, 2008).

That being said, the political and funding context of community-based access initiatives and broader regeneration initiatives also began to be identified as limiting the potential for communities to follow empowered sustainable paths through community-based ICT initiatives. The imposition of government targets began to be associated with the distortion of community goals and the failure of many initiatives to survive in the long term was identified (Day & Harris, 1997; Sherman, 1999; Leach, 2000; Dabinett, 2000; Hall Aitken, 2001; Loader 2002; Day, 2005; Southern & Townsend, 2005; Klecun, 2008). The associated funding context requirements for community groups to become social enterprises was also

being identified as leading to increasing marginalisation and serving as a threat to the survival of community-based ICT initiatives (Leach & Copitch, 2005).

2.4.2.1 Beyond Access: Digital Inclusion, Meaningful Use and the Turn to Content

One particular arena of critique of the government's approach to integrating ICTs within deprived urban areas was the focus on access to technologies and the skills to use them which it was argued would do and was doing little to attract those at risk of exclusion or realise visions of empowerment and regeneration (Sherman, 1999; Hellawell, 2001; Devins et al., 2003; Klecun, 2008). Additionally, Keeble, (2003) pointed out that while there were improvements in access to technology and skills in the UK, such developments did not "necessarily translate to a greater understanding of the way technology can be used as an empowering tool" (Keeble, 2003, sic). Dabinett (2000, p.164) suggested the need to move beyond assumptions that "information is power." Devins et al., (2003) also began to point to the multidimensional nature of the digital divide based on evaluations of the integration of ICTs within deprived neighbourhoods in the UK. The growing realisation of the complexities of the digital divide, and specifically the need to expand the lens of the concept beyond an emphasis on physical access to computers and the Internet led to the emergence of a 'beyond access' discourse. This discourse gave birth to an alternative framework for integrating technologies for social inclusion as reflected in the increasing use of the terms 'digital inclusion and exclusion' (Hellawell, 2001; DiMaggio & Harigittai, 2001; Gurstein, 2003; Warschauer, 2002; 2004; Selwyn, 2004; Klecun, 2008). Thus, the technologically deterministic approach of integrating ICTs within deprived communities and expecting automatic results and positive outcomes began to be rejected (Warschauer, 2003; Loader & Keeble, 2004). The alternative technology for social inclusion frame emphasised 'meaningful use', presented as opening up the mind to the array of factors which can make access useful, meaningful and relevant within the daily lives of people and communities, thereby illuminating the full extent of the social challenges involved and bringing in an additional lens of power, to the discourse (Warschauer, 2002, 2004; Selwyn, 2004). Thus Warschauer (2002, sic) suggested that engaging disadvantaged people and communities with ICTs should "focus on the transformation" rather than "the technology" and move beyond access to the "engagement of a range of resources, all developed and promoted with an eye toward enhancing the social, economic and political power of the targeted clients and communities."

Selwyn (2004, p.349), drawing on relevant research (Jung et al., 2001) also suggested that an individual's engagement with ICTs is less about access and more about "how people develop relationships with ICTs and how they are capable of making use of the social resources which make access usable." Such views were in line, for example, with views emerging from practice within the field of delivering community-based ICT initiatives on the ground, which suggested that ICTs can only be seen as a "catalyst for community development and regeneration", and further that other social factors such as capacity building and relationships built up over time play a vital role (Leach & Copitch, 2005, p, 17). Scholars have additionally identified that engagement with ICTs is likely to be dependent on local social context and individual contextual frameworks including such aspects as motivation, relevance and pleasure (Woolgar, 2002; Warschauer, 2002; Selwyn, 2004; 2006; Cushman & Klecun, 2006).

It was the 'content' dimension of ICTs which was to emerge as a particular theme within the beyond access discourse and the discourse around realising visions of social inclusion, community empowerment and regeneration in the UK. Hellawell's report (2001) for example, called for government inspired initiatives to look beyond access in relation to hardware, the Internet and skills and brought attention to the lack of relevant content aimed at socially excluded groups. Drawing on a series of case studies she suggested that ICTs can be used as a tool for social inclusion when such initiatives focus on people as potential content creators rather than consumers of information (Hellawell, 2001; Loader & Keeble, 2004). It began to be argued by commentators, that the real potential for regeneration, empowerment and social inclusion, lay in the arenas of creativity, community and content (Shearman, 1999, 2003; Hellawell, 2001). Creative approaches to integrating ICTs within disadvantaged areas which were engaging people in media production, content creation and sharing also began to be associated with greater excitement and social worth (Keeble, 2003; Shearman, 2003). Shearman, (2003) wrote with enthusiasm about the potential transforming and reconnecting value of ICTs when developed in a community context, including overcoming social isolation and developing self esteem and self confidence. Additionally, while pointing to the constraints of top down agendas, she celebrated the potentiality of the process over the products of such activities, suggesting that the skills developed in such contexts "will have an impact on economic regeneration" (Shearman, 2003, p. 15).

Therefore, it was early on in the 21st Century that experiments with engaging disadvantaged communities in content creation were beginning to take hold (Devins, et al., 2003; Keeble, 2003), with Greater Manchester again becoming particularly active in the promotion of community-based sites and community created content (Leach & Copitch, 2005; Fensom, 2007). However, such initiatives were also inevitably situated within the problematic political and funding context discussed earlier (2.4.2) and adapting to rapidly evolving technology was also identified as an issue for such initiatives (Leach & Copitch, 2005). Evaluations of the Wired Up Communities initiative in addition, pointed to fostering local content production developed with a vision of enhancing social cohesion as a problematic process characterised by; varying levels of engagement, issues around sustaining local engagement and in one case a sense of 'disenchantment' (Devins et al., 2003).

Within the broader discourse of the digital divide the content dimension of ICTs additionally emerged as an important dimension of concern (DiMaggio & Harigittai, 2001; Warschauer, 2002; Selwyn, 2004). Selwyn (2004, p.249) drawing on the ideas of Bonfadelli (2002) and Silverstone (1996) places content at the heart of meaningful use further defining such use as "where the 'user' exerts a degree of control and choice over the technology and its content." Selwyn (2004, p.347) additionally argues that given that the term 'digital' refers to the content dimension of ICTs, that is "the 'software' rather than the 'hardware'" and given the array of technologies through which people access content, "a focus on content rather than technological platform is a more accurate and useful point of reference for the digital divide debate." Warschauer (2002) has also located meaning and value within the content arena, suggesting that an enhanced model of access should be based on literacy, equating literacy not only with education but also with power.

2.4.2.2 Digital Inclusion and the Turn to Social Media

In the previous section I began to refer to changing technology as an issue inherent within the discourse of community-based ICT integration for community empowerment and regeneration. The speed of change is also quite clear in the quotation below:

> Over the last decade a new set of media, technologies, software and cultural practices has emerged that changes how we experience the city and shape our urban culture" (de Waal, 2011, p.5).

The growing invisibility of technologies which could be said to come under the umbrella heading of ICTs have also been identified as problematising the capacity for grappling with the question of their implications for urban environments (Graham & Marvin, 1996; Aurigi, 2005; Rodrigo & Carnago, 2007). Amidst ever changing and evolving ICTs the 21st Century has witnessed an ever growing emphasis on universal access and digital inclusion in the UK (SEU, 2005; DCLG, 2008b; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, (DCMS) and Department for Business Innovation and Skills, (BIS), 2009; BIS, 2010). Adapting to the next generation of technologies or next generation broadband has ensured that deprived urban communities have remained firmly in focus (Vitanen, 2008; DCLG, 2008b). Gov 2.0 and programmes to promote e-neighbourhoods are features of this renewed drive to ensure such communities do not get left behind (Vitanen, 2008, BIS, 2010). The notion of the business case for promoting ICTs in deprived urban communities has also reignited questions of the value of such initiatives to the communities they target, accompanied by a noted paucity of evidence that ICT-based regeneration initiatives injected into areas of socioeconomic decline benefit 'ordinary people' economically (Vatinen, 2008). Ensuring that efforts to tackle the digital divide as part of regeneration strategies deliver value, has been further suggested to be dependent on a greater focus on digital engagement, empowerment and capacity building (Carter, 2007).

The emergent digital agenda in the UK has become increasingly peppered with the language of empowerment. Indeed new technologies took centre stage within the government's community empowerment agenda, (DCLG, 2008a) thus largely framing empowerment in political terms. Multimedia applications, for example, are identified by the government as "powerful platforms to help people express their views and understand the views and experiences of others" (DCLG, 2008b, p.20) and the benefits of digital technology are described as follows:

> The social and economic benefits of digital technology can be profoundly empowering. Increasingly, technology supports every aspect of our lives-at home, at work, in the community, in how we communicate and in the services we use. There is growing evidence that digital technology can greatly enhance both quality of services and quality of life-particularly for the most disadvantaged citizens and communities (DCLG, 2008b, p.8).

Digital inclusion also began to be framed as requiring "urgent action" to ensure, "digital technology becomes a vehicle for empowerment" (Minister for Digital Inclusion, DCLG, 2008b, p.5) amid research pointing to the persistence of digital exclusion and the link

between digital exclusion and social disadvantage (Freshminds, 2007; Helsper, 2008). The Race Online 2012 strategy developed by the UK's Digital Inclusion Champion and Digital Inclusion Team, seeking to encourage and support greater numbers of disadvantaged people, is perhaps symbolic of the perceived urgency (BIS, 2010). Social and community media has also become central to this promise of empowerment, evident in the government's support for the innovative use of new technologies within this arena seeking to build on the existing thriving community media activity within disadvantaged communities (DCLG, 2008a; 2008b; BIS, 2010). In Chapter 3 I will explore social media extensively as a concept but at this juncture I simply explore the ways in which advances in technologies which have given rise to the popular use of social media have more recently (within the last five years) become part of the digital inclusion discourse and government intervention programme with particular regard to the context of deprived communities.

Helsper's (2008) survey-based research report explored the relationship between digital and social disadvantage in the UK and suggested that "the potential for the Internet to address social isolation and economic disadvantage is largely untapped" and further found that "a greater number of socio-economic factors influence people's use of more advanced applications such as social networking" (Helsper, 2008, p.8). In addition, the report recommends the encouragement of "innovative social networking applications" within the field of digital inclusion for social inclusion (Helsper, 2008, p.57). The Department for Communities and Local Government also commissioned research on Social Networking Sites to assess the possible links to promoting digital inclusion (Clicks and Links, 2008). The report advocates a greater use of social networking technologies for digital inclusion. Specifically, the report recommends the provision of "support for community-based 'Social Networks' as part of community engagement/empowerment and regeneration programmes" in order to "assist local capacity building and the creation of social capital" (Clicks and Links, 2008, p.24).

Linked directly to the government's citizen and community empowerment agenda, recent years have seen the launch of a digital mentors scheme in deprived areas with a stated intention to "enable local communities to make better use of social media" (DCLG, 2008b, p. 67) by supporting the development of digital content. The scheme is additionally attached to ambitions of enhancing media literacy and building the connections necessary for the pursuit of career opportunities within the media industries (DCLG, 2008a). The digital

mentors project was also later described as seeking to "bring to life community media projects" and "create a groundswell of digital media activity" (BIS, 2010, p.46). The Media Trust, an organisation with a stated belief in the "power of media to change lives" (The Media Trust, 2011) took up the leadership of this mentoring scheme providing funds to grassroots and community organisations to support digital media projects (BIS, 2010). Thus empowering voice became a key aspect of the digital inclusion agenda inherent within the Media Trust's mission to empower communities and charities to "have a voice and be heard" (The Media Trust, 2011). At the Digital Inclusion conference in 2009, a speech delivered by Baroness Andrews made this clear as she talked about working with The Media Trust to "engage, equip and skill up those citizens who feel unheard or voiceless with the digital tools to express and exchange views on issues of relevance to them and to increase individual and community empowerment" (Baroness Andrews, 2009). At the close of the first decade of the 21st Century there appears to be a marked change in language within this arena toward digital participation, signified not only by the National Plan for Digital Participation (BIS, 2010) but also by the launch of a consortium for digital participation seeking to maximise digital participation and its perceived economic and social advantages (Best, 2009). The comments of the Director of the Community Media Association who expressed delight in "working with other Consortium members to increase digital inclusion across the UK" is perhaps symbolic of this participatory turn, identifying participatory media as "a vital tool to encourage people to take their full place in the digital world, with consequent social and economic benefits for all" (Jaqui Devereux, cited in Best, 2009). The turn to social and community media and digital participation can also be seen as primarily driven by the national economic imperative, reframed as the goal of seeking to promote Britain as a global centre for the creative industries (DCMS & BIS, 2009).

The move toward supporting social and community media within the context of digital inclusion and deprived urban communities is potentially exciting given that production rather than passive consumption of content has long been seen as lying at the heart of the meaningful use and empowering potential of ICTs (Shearman, 1999; 2003; Hellawell, 2001; Warschauer; Selwyn, 2004). Such developments have been accompanied by tales of a revival of community journalism within urban regeneration areas in the face of the demise of local media and mainstream media domination, inspired by the growing context of social media appropriation which is being discussed as opening up new arenas of voice, but potentially also new arenas of exclusion (Goff & Humphries, 2009).

2.5 Conclusion

The relationship between urban regeneration and community in the UK as it evolved during the 1990s is characterised by the social construction of specific neighbourhoods, neighbourhood being equated with 'community,' as deprived and in decline. The lens of social exclusion taken to such neighbourhoods has painted a picture of communities cut off from the socio-economic advantages enjoyed by the rest of society. Thus the task at hand has been constructed as one of tackling such perceived spatial concentrations of disadvantage and ensuring that no one would be disadvantaged by virtue of the places in which they live in the future. Community in a symbolic sense, and ICTs have both been constructed within this agenda as a key source of social good and as pivotal 'tools' for the regeneration of such deprived neighbourhoods with disconnection from ICTs within such areas being seen as having the potential to create greater social and economic polarisation. The concept of community empowerment presents a key area of intersection between urban regeneration, community and ICTs in this context. That is to say that community empowerment became central to the government vision of fostering community regeneration and participation in large scale neighbourhood regeneration initiatives and ICTs came to be viewed as central to the realisation of this vision. The perceived role of ICTs within regeneration which began to take hold during the 1990s can be seen to be reflective of a belief in the power of ICTs to empower and regenerate deprived urban communities which seems to be growing ever stronger.

The rhetoric of ICTs for community empowerment and regeneration rooted in a belief in the transformative power of such technologies to bring about profound social and economic change within deprived urban areas appears however, to be unmatched by evidence of real benefits to the targeted communities of digital inclusion interventions. Meanwhile the race toward universal digital inclusion and more recently, participation, grows ever more frantic. The more recent government turn to encouraging digital participation within the realm of so-called social media including as a vehicle for empowering disadvantaged communities is however, a potentially exciting one given that the content dimension of ICTs has come to be viewed as the arena of greatest potential for meaningful use, empowerment and regeneration. My exploration has thus led to an interest in exploring whether and how so-called social media might be associated with a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration within deprived urban neighbourhoods in the UK, with particular regard to a

greater potential for voice. The following chapter thus seeks to ground this formulating question within the broader theory and research surrounding historical perceptions of the meaning of ICTs for local communities and in particular, deprived urban communities, before taking a lens of social media to the exploration.

Chapter 3: Exploring Perceptions of the Meaning of ICTs for Deprived Urban Communities and the Potential Implications of the Social Media Era

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I set the context for my research by exploring the relationship between ICTs, community and urban regeneration predominantly within a UK policy and practice frame, finding this to be situated within the digital inclusion policy and research arena. Identifying perceptions of unmet visions of the role of ICTs in empowering and regenerating deprived urban communities in the UK, I established my interest in the question of whether and how social media might hold a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration. The UK policy and practice discourse explored in the prior chapter can be said to be rooted in a belief in the social worth of ICTs for local disadvantaged communities and that ICTs can be or should become meaningful to people and communities within this context. In this chapter I take a broader (beyond the UK) research lens to this theory, drawing on research from across the developed world, to explore perceptions of the meaning of ICTs for local communities and in particular deprived urban communities. The penultimate section of this chapter focuses on exploring what the contemporary era of so-called social media might mean for disadvantaged urban communities. On the basis of identified gaps in current knowledge I conclude by setting out my principle research focus, key research questions and conceptual framework for proceeding with my research.

3.2 Exploring Early Discourses of the Meaning of ICTs for Place-Based Conceptions of Community

The debate concerning the implications of the Internet for community can be seen as part of wider scholarly debates about how technological innovation affects community, which have ensued since the industrial revolution (Wellman et al., 2002; Hampton, 2002). Baym, (2010, p. 73), has also pointed to the ways in which "hopes and concerns about mediated communication…have reverberated through the history of communication technologies." In addition, as Jones (1995) points out, prophecies of social change centred on the metaphor of community have long accompanied the emergence of new communication technologies.

Jankowski (2002) in particular makes apparent that the link between regenerating community and new communications technology is by no means new but has been accelerated by the dawn of the Internet:

> Of all the promises and prognoses made about old and new media, perhaps the most compelling has been the possibility of regenerating community through mediated forms of communication. This theme found expression during the development of the radio in the 1920s and 1930s and later with the television in the 1950s. It was particularly prominent during the introduction of community radio and television in the 1970s; it has reached extraordinary proportions with the more recent emergence of 'virtual communities' on Internet-based services (Jankowski, 2002, p.34).

It was predominantly from within the field of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), a field of study which explores the effects of CMC on human communication (Hine, 2000), that the debates about the impact of the Internet on community began to rage during the 1990s (Jones, 1995; Wellman et al., 2002; Wellman and Haythornwaite, 2002). It was additionally the Internet's widespread appropriation and rise to "popular culture" (Jones, 1995, p.1) during this period which focused academic attention on the relationship between Computer Mediated Communication and community (Wellman et al., 2002; Howley, 2005). This era can also be associated with the era of the communications revolution which introduced changes in methods of communication that warranted the use of the term ICT (Cairncross, 1998; Van Dijck, 1999). In what follows I explore two key strands of this early debate, the Internet as fostering new forms of community, that is the 'virtual community' and the implications of new ICTs for 'real' communities. I ground this firstly in an exploration of the meaning of community more broadly.

3.2.1 Exploring the Meaning of Community

Community has long been a problematic term for scholars to grapple with. For example, Fernback (1997, p.39) pointed to the complexity of community within the academic context: "community is a term which seems readily definable to the general public but is infinitely complex and amorphous in academic discourse. It has descriptive, normative and ideological connotations" and "both material and symbolic dimensions." Many sociologists have attempted to define and understand the term community (Hillery, 1955; Tonnies, 1957; Stacey, 1969; Bell & Newby, 1974; Bulmer, 1987, Cooper, 1989; Smith, 2001) but they have been unable to supply a singular definition. Hillery (1955), for example, listed 94 definitions of community and concluded that all they held in common was the word "people."

Commonalities that run through definitions of community have been identified however, (Bell & Newby, 1974; Butcher et al., (1993), Jones, 1995; Smith, 2001; Gaved & Andersen, 2006) and I see these as having a distinct practical and symbolic dimension. Building on identified arenas of commonality, practical definitions of community (more descriptive in nature) can be said to be focused on the boundary of locality or interest. Pivotal to this is community as social system and social interaction, that is to say that the relationships and commonalities between people may be seen as laying at the heart of community. At a more symbolic level community may be viewed as a value in terms of a sense of community, linked also to levels of social interaction together with a sense of attachment, belonging or identity and additionally to concepts of trust, solidarity, mutuality and commitment (Smith, 2000).

3.2.2 The Internet and New Forms of Community

Rheingold, (1993; 1994) is commonly cited as a technological utopian presenting new CMCs as enabling the birth and formation of whole new forms of community, which he conceptualised as the now commonly used concept of the 'virtual community' (Jones, 1995; 1998; Hampton, 2002; Wellman et al., 2002). He envisaged that such new online communities would open up a place where people could shape and choose their own communities. Affordances of interactivity and reach, enabling people to communicate and develop relationships across time and space, lay at the centre of this vision, which it was envisaged would free people from the constraints of geography and other characteristics such as ethnicity, gender and religion (Hampton, 2002; Baym, 2010). Rheingold's vision was also very much rooted in the idea of a supportive community, altering the condition of social connections being threatened by modern life, drawing on Weise's (1996) essay entitled, 'A Thousand Aunts with Modems" and his personal experiences of an 'online' community, (Hine, 2000).

Critiques of Rheingold's perspective, however, quickly emerged (Fernback & Thompson, 1995; Jones, 1998). Steve Jones' (1998) critique of such ideas dismissed Rheingold's vision as a "dream rooted in nostalgia for civility and sociability" shared by "those for whom modern society seems, for one reason or another, cold and impersonal" (Jones, 1998, p.3). The concept of the virtual community also sparked significant debate around whether such online social formations could and should be referred to as community (Stoll, 1995; Doheny-

Jones, 1995; Farina, 1996; Lockard, 1997; 1998; Hine, 2000; Baym 2010). Scholars began to object to applying community to online social formations based on perceptions of the centrality of place to the concept. Doheny-Farina (1996, p.37), for example, expressed the view that;

> A community is bound by place, which always includes complex social and environmental necessities. It is not something that you can easily join. You can't subscribe to a community as you can subscribe to a discussion group on the net. It must be lived. It is intertwined, contradictory and involves all our senses.

Significant discussion also emerged around the question of whether such online social formations could ever be more than 'pseudo-communities' (Peck; 1987; Rheingold, 1993; Jones, 1998). The notion of 'pseudo-community', that is to say "one where people lack the genuine personal commitments to one another that form the bedrock of a genuine community" (Jones, 1995, p. 21), opened up questions of whether such new formations could ever foster the level of commitment, connection and intimacy required for community (Rheingold, 1993; Jones, 1995; Hine, 2000) given the capacity for people to easily retreat from such communities "with a mere click" (Baym, 1995, p.36). Thus, the idea of 'real' communities being rooted in locality as opposed to the 'virtual' realm took hold within this discourse and a number of scholars became interested in what CMCs might mean for so-called 'real' communities.

3.2.3 The Implications of New ICTs for 'Real' Communities: ICTs and Participation in the Neighbourhood Community

The discussion within this section can be seen as rooted in the long held particular concern among social scientists with the loss or decline of traditionally held place-based conceptions of community in the face of complex social changes, brought about by economic and technological innovations including the emergence of ICTs (Yar, 2003). The loss of community as a key concern within the field of sociology is encapsulated in the much cited distinction made by the German sociologist, Tonnies (1957) between gemeinshaft (community) and gesellschaft (society), (Yar, 2003). Community was once conceptualised as "close knit groups in a single location," and belonging to a community was largely related to such factors as birth and physical location with interaction predominately taking place via face to face communication (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005, sic). As modern society became characterised by increased mobility and ability to communicate across distances and

in varying ways related to technological advancements in transportation and telecommunications, so the debate about the fate of community within its traditional place-based understanding ensued (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). This debate can be seen in turn to be theoretically rooted in the historical idea of community as a "good thing," and "it's passing" to be "deplored, feared and regretted" (Jones, 1995, p.23).

One argument of relevance to this arena is the emergence of the idea that there may be grounds to fear rather than celebrate new social formations (Robins, 1995; Lackard, 1997, Healey, 1997, Tabbi, 1997), based on ideas that new communications technologies would have significant moral and ethical implications, freeing people, for example, from the requirements to "deal with diversity" inherent within the 'real' world (Healey, 1997, p.63). As Jankowski (2002) points out, the perceived technological utopian Rheingold, (1993, p. 207) in fact also raised the question of whether new online social formations that enable people to organise around shared interests and form homogeneous groups would lead to "rigidifying social boundaries," for example, and create "single-niche colonies of people who share intolerances." However, the key dichotomous debate emerged around the question of whether new communication technologies would result in a loss of connections to community as a result of removing people from locally-based interaction (having key consequences for the plight of urban areas), or whether such new technologies could result in enhanced and more meaningful connections within local communities (Baym, 2010).

Thus research in the area, predominately emerging from America and Canada, soon began to gravitate towards the implications of new ICTs and the Internet, with particular regard to participation in geographic communities (Baym, 2010). Such research has tended to be survey-based seeking to measure levels of local connections and levels of community involvement in relation to Internet use (Baym, 2010). This approach to research has also tended to emphasise community as social system rooted in social networks and social interaction and therefore a concern with the concept of social capital. Some early studies associated Internet use with social isolation, depression, and a reduction in socialising and community involvement in 'real' communities. As a result, in the early days a picture began to be painted of the Internet as inherently isolating, leading individuals to retreat indoors into online worlds and as a consequence, to the demise of social interactions with neighbors and social capital (Kraut et al., 1998; Nie & Erbring, 2000; O'Toole, 2000; DiMaggio et al., 2001).

Soon however, studies began to point to the social benefits of Internet use for 'real' communities indicating an association between Internet use and greater levels of social interaction, community involvement and social capital (Katz et al., 2001; Kavanaugh & Petersen, 2001; Hampton & Wellman, 1999; 2000; Hampton, 2002; 2003), linked to the Internet's potential to increase opportunities for local social interaction (Hampton, 2002). Drawing specifically on his longitudinal study of Netville, a wired and middle class suburb in Toronto, Canada, employing a survey and ethnographic approach, Hampton (2002) identifies his finding that "CMC builds community, in the form of community involvement and in the expansion and strengthening of social networks" (Hampton, 2002, p.229). Additionally, he points to the growing agreement that "CMC can be used in the maintenance of community relations and in the exchange of aid and support" and further suggests that "ICTs may hold as much promise of reconnecting us to communities of place as they do in liberating us from them" (Hampton, 2002, p.228). However, based on the findings to emerge from the Netville study he later concludes "One question remains: Can we expect to see positive social impacts as a result of ICTs in all residential settings?" (Hampton, 2003, p. 427). He also holds the view that residents living within urban environments who are not already likely to get involved in their community are also unlikely to be encouraged to do so as a result of the integration of ICTs. A further longitudinal study of an electronic village in America (Kavanaugh & Petersen, 2001) suggested that levels of community attachment and involvement generally remained the same while social capital increased. This study suggested that positive social impacts were associated with those already active in the community and drew attention to the issue of non-engagement of the disadvantaged and marginalised, linked to the digital divide debate (Kavanaugh et al., 2005).

3.3 Integrating ICTs within Deprived Urban Communities and Agendas of Empowerment and Regeneration

During the 1990s and early 21st Century, the idea was taking hold among academics that ICTs 'grounded' in local communities rather than virtual communities may be more meaningful. This was with particular regard to the context of disadvantaged communities, in relation to reviving local community and reintegrating people within local community life by empowering community networks (Schuler, 1996; Doheny-Farina, 1996). A community network has been defined as an ICT-based system that "provides local information and a means for community residents to communicate electronically" (Beamish, 1995, p.3). Such

systems, beyond seeking to bridge the digital divide, soon became linked to goals of strengthening community and democracy, through, for example, building social capital (Beamish, 1995; Malina & Ball, 2005) associated with the perception of their role in providing a new public meeting space acting as an additional channel for communities to interact, connect and discuss issues (Beamish, 1995; Schuler, 1996; Prell, 2003). As the concern with regard to the potential for digital exclusion within deprived urban localities grew across the world during this period and the belief in the social worth of ICTs within such contexts took hold, so experimental community technology access initiatives targeting deprived urban neighbourhoods emerged (Meredyth, 2003). In the American context scholars began to speak of the emergence of 'community technology' designed to integrate ICTs to meet community goals and aspirations working with the three models of, Community Technology Centres, community networks and community content (Beamish, 1999).

In the next section I explore how such initiatives have become attached to agendas of community empowerment and regeneration and identify how concurrently locating value in this arena has appeared to be elusive. The exploration draws on research which has emerged within America and Canada with particular regard to the field of 'Community Informatics,' (as it is called in the UK, Canada and Australia, Loader & Keeble, 2004) which has been described as an arena that "experiments in developing ICT at the community level" (Malina & Ball, 2005, sic).

3.3.1 Community-based ICT initiatives for Empowerment and Regeneration: A View from the Research

Beyond the UK context it was becoming clear that addressing the digital divide was inherently interrelating with debates about social exclusion, economic regeneration of deprived areas and the breakdown of community, largely framed as "social capital and social relations" (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p. 1). Thus, such efforts were becoming inextricably linked to agendas of community empowerment and regeneration. A couple of early studies in America relevant to these linked agendas of digital inclusion, empowerment and regeneration, seemed to have located value primarily around altered perceptions of what ICT appropriation might mean for individuals and neighbourhoods. Carnfield Estates–MIT Creating Community Connections Project in Massachusetts set about integrating ICTs within a low to moderate income housing development with a goal of building community, empowerment and self sufficiency (Pinkett & Bryant, 2003) by integrating the three models

of community technology. The research, characterised by a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods suggests evidence of; a "reorientation toward technology and community" among individual residents (Pinkett & Bryant, 2003, p.205), a sense of empowerment attached to access to relevant information and an increased sense of community and connectedness (Pinkett, 2002; Pinkett, 2003; O'Bryant, 2003). At the same time, O'Bryant, (2003, p. 165) identified that the effects of technology within this arena could not be "equivocally stated" but that "something influenced a participant's sense of community and social sense of community." Pinkett (2002) also identified the part played by the existing social and cultural environment and patterns of behavior highlighting that the initiative did not seem to have transformed participatory activity or social interaction. Thus, he pointed to the "still unanswered" questions regarding the role of community technologies in community building, concluding that the primary value of the initiatives was in empowering participants "to see ever greater possibilities for themselves and their communities" (Pinkett, 2002, p. 307).

Fernback's study (2005) explored the "regenerative capabilities" of ICTs introduced into a "decaying urban neighbourhood" in America (Fernback, 2005, p.482). The study rooted within symbolic interactionism seemed to similarly point to a change in the ways residents saw future possibilities for change. The study illustrates that ICT integration within this context was viewed by the residents interviewed as holding the potential to empower individuals and play a key role in community and neighbourhood revitalisation. Such views were interpreted further as being shaped in turn by a positive symbolic framing of ICT and community among the participants (Fernback, 2005).

In addition, studies in America have drawn attention to the perceived importance of Community Technology Centres in deprived urban environments in relation to; community building and social capital, empowerment, challenging social exclusion and acting as a positive force for social change within deprived urban environments (Servon & Nelson, 2001; Servon, 2002; Fernback, 2005; Hayden & Ball-Rokeach, 2007). However, Hayden & Ball-Rokeach (2007, p. 254) note that despite the quantitative and qualitative case studies which characterise the area of research, such studies have tended to have a "speculative" flavour. It has also been highlighted that the success of Community Technology Centres in Seattle and Washington, for example, was linked to a strong neighbourhood culture of IT and community (Loader & Keeble, 2004). The study conducted by Ferlander & Timms (2005)

which focused on the integration of a 'Local Net' and a IT café in Sweden for digital inclusion and social inclusion, found the café to be more successful in terms of participation and social inclusion further thus pointing to the perceived value attached to physical community access locations. Interestingly, Silver's (2000) comparative analysis identifies the differences between a top down initiative, (Blacksberg Electronic Village) and a bottom-up initiative (Seattle Community Network), finding that the former was being predominantly used for commercial purposes while the latter was characterised by cultural diversity, the sharing of ideas, interaction and community building (Silver, 2000; Jankowski, 2002). Myles (2004) also points to a similar commercialisation process in the context of UK-based community networks, highlighting the influence of the political context within which such networks emerge.

3.3.1.1 A View from Community Informatics

Community Informatics as a practice is typically characterised by "initiatives which have been designed to explore the potential transforming qualities of the new ICTs for community development, economic regeneration, democratic renewal and social support" (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p1). Community informatics is in essence a field of study and practice which concurrently studies and integrates ICTs within local communities, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities (Gurstein, 2000; Loader, 2002). The ideal of empowering local communities is the central goal of the field (Gurnstein, 2000; 2003; 2007; Stoecker, 2005). In order to achieve such a goal the field has set about concerning itself with the promotion of "effective use" that is "the capacity and opportunity to successfully integrate ICTs into the accomplishment of self or collaboratively identified goals" (Gurstein, 2003, sic). The 'effective use' frame seeks to look beyond access in order to explore how ICTs might be more useful, usable, engaging and meaningful within a context of local excluded people and communities (Gurstein, 2003). Therefore, as Viseu et al. (2006, p.636) suggest "access is about empowerment" in this frame and this inherently interlinks with the wider discourse of meaningful use. The social challenge Gurstein (2003, p.10) identifies, thus "becomes one of ensuring that end users can do locally significant things with technology tools to which they now have access-economically, socially, and politically." The field has also been defined as a field which seeks to explore and develop the social and cultural factors which shape ICT integration and their effects, including for community development and regeneration. Thus evaluating and questioning the value of community-based access initiatives within deprived

local communities for empowerment is integral to the field (Loader & Keeble, 2003; Malina & Ball, 2005).

Loader & Keeble (2004), scholars within the field, conducted a review of relevant research around community informatics initiatives with particular regard to the key question of the value of ICTs for community regeneration in social and economic terms. The review suggests that the optimism within this arena is unmatched by research evidence and identified a "paucity of hard evidence in the subject area" (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p.3). In addition, the review found that within the "papers and reports that discuss the regeneration potential of ICTs...there is not much evidence of examples of ICT centres contributing to economic regeneration, business opportunities and/or capacity building" (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p.19). Consequently, scholars began to call for a more cautious view of claims surrounding ICTs within this arena following a period of initial hype and optimism (Loader, 2002; Loader & Keeble, 2004). In particular, reference began to be made to the ambiguity of the technology itself, that is to say the "competing notions about the technology and how it works its magic" (Loader, 2004, p.2). The relationship between such technologies and community development was thus identified as an ambiguous one "shaped primarily through a complex interaction of social, political and commercial factors which can and frequently do, produce a mixture of intended and unintended outcomes for their participants" (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p, 36). At the same time however, the social use of ICTs characterising community informatics initiatives was described as "a powerful set of tools with which to reconnect people and engage them in social relationships." Community Technologies Centres were also beginning to be perceived as vital "for community development in the information society" (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p.42).

It was from within the field of Community Informatics that the challenges posed by the political and funding context of community-based ICT initiatives mapped out in Chapter 2, were illuminated. In particular, external agendas were linked to limiting the capacity of communities to follow sustainable empowered paths (Loader, 2002). The challenge of economic sustainability was identified as ultimately driving the extent to which initiatives would be "transformative" or "simply another development fad" (Gurstein, 2005, p.2). Work within the area has thus challenged the notion of simply introducing technologies into deprived communities and expecting positive social impacts (2.4.2.1). Scholars within the field have also begun to reflect on the value of community informatics. Pitkin (2001, p.2)

notes the "inherent optimism" of a field encased in speculation and "futuristic assumptions" about the role of ICTs within urban communities. Stoecker (2005, sic) drawing on Pitkin's, (2001) observations, opened up the question of whether the field is necessarily "good for communities", pointing to the array of other more powerful actors, including academics. He also points to the poor evidence base of value at the local community level and highlights that "the evidence of whether CI really helps communities is at best speculative and anecdotal". Furthermore, he emphasises that "at the level of the local community, we are still hard pressed to show impact beyond the level of individuals" (Stoecker, 2005, sic).

3.4 The Social Media Era: Implications for Disadvantaged Urban Communities

Rappaport (1995, p.797) has referred to the "many trees in the forest of empowerment" and through my study of the literature I have found there are many trees within the forest of community-based ICT for empowerment. Amidst this forest the perception during these early years (also identified in Chapter 2) emerged amongst scholars that community content may lay at the heart of the potential for empowerment, associated with the capacity for communities to become active producers of their own content (Servon, 2002; O'Bryant, 2003; O'Bryant & Pinkett, 2003). However, research in this arena has tended to concentrate on community networking and Community Technology Centre models of development rather than on exploring community content models (Beamish, 1995). As technologies have advanced and in particular as social media technologies have become increasingly integrated into people's daily lives so arguably, the potential for communities to create their own content has never been greater. Thus, in this section I turn to explore what the social media era might mean for deprived urban communities in line with my interest identified at the close of Chapter 2 in whether and how social media might be associated with a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration. Before I focus on this arena I briefly explore the meaning of social media and the way in which the term has become attached to assumptions of empowerment and social progress.

I utilise the term social media here as a term which rose to popular use towards the middle of the first decade of the 21st Century in direct relation to the growing integration of so-called social media technologies within the everyday lives of 'ordinary' people (Carter, 2005; Mesch & Talmund, 2007; Light et al., 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Light et al., 2012).

The era can be seen as an inherent part of what Coopman (2009) refers to as a 'Pervasive Communication Environment,' encapsulating the increasing pervasiveness of technologies which facilitate the "communication imperative" characteristic of human beings (Thurlow et al., 2004; Coopman, 2009) and the continuing "collapse of old and new media" historically referred to as 'convergence' "into just media" (Coopman, 2009, sic). The implications for urban environments are becoming increasingly complex and difficult to understand as ICTs develop and become progressively 'invisible' and embedded within our everyday lives (Graham & Marvin, 1996; Aurigi, 2005; Rodrigo & Carnago, 2007). Such communication technologies are continually evolving to the degree that within the short space of a decade "a new set of media, technologies, software and cultural practices has emerged that changes how we experience the city and shape our urban culture" (de Waal, 2011, p.5).

Social media is thus an inherent part of this story of the pervasive and complex communication environment that now characterise urban spaces. In what follows I explore the meaning of social media, with particular regard to the way in which the term has become attached to assumptions of empowerment. I then move on to explore what these new technologies might mean for disadvantaged urban communities with particular regard to voice and thus the content dimension of these technologies.

3.4.1 What is the Meaning of Social Media?

In a similar manner to the term community (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005), there appears to be considerable ink being spilled within the academic world in attempting to define the meaning of 'social media.' While the term can be seen as "old, if not, older than the Internet" (boyd, 1998, p.93), its rise to popular use today can be related however, to the creation and growth of social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook towards the mid 21st Century, (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Many attempts have been made to define the term based on exploring the array of technological tools, services and applications which may come under its heading (Schrock, 2009). Taking these explorations together the term social media has been defined as including; social networking sites, online communities, virtual worlds, groupware, wikis, online gaming; user-generated content such as videos and pictures, blogging, micro blogging, message and bulletin boards, forums, texting, instant messaging, e-mails and mobile communication (Barnes, 2006; Li & Bernoff, 2008; boyd, 2008; Schrock, 2009; Dourish & Satchell, 2011).

Attempts have been made to classify and categorise types of technologies (Schrock, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) drawing on diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 1995) and theories of; social presence (Short et al., 1976), media richness (Daft Lengal, 1986) and self presentation and disclosure (Goffman, 1974), utilised and emerging from within the fields of sociology and media research. But such categorisations are increasingly difficult to apply to an ever convergent field of technology. Central to attempted definitions however, lies the illumination of social media as variously labelled tools, services, applications, platforms and digital systems which allow, enable and support people in the engagement of social interaction, sharing and collaboration (Barnes, 2006; boyd, 2008; Russo et al., 2008; Dourish & Satchell, 2011). The struggle to grapple with the meaning of the term is also inherently interlinked to the whole host of related terms which surround it and between which it is difficult to distinguish and which are often used interchangeably (Peterson, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Such terms include, Web 2.0, social software, participatory media, social networking and user generated content (Petersen, 2008; Russo et al., 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Dourish & Satchell, 2011).

3.4.1.1 The Social Media Era and User-Generated Content

The era of social media in particular, has been constructed as 'participatory', inherent in the increasing use of the term participatory culture or media (Bruns, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2006, 2008; Rheingold, 2007; Schäfer, 2011). Within this participatory frame of thought the era has been presented as characterised by a paradigm shift in the way media content is consumed and produced, associated not only with the new collaborative and interactive potentialities of Web 2.0, but predominately and inherently related to the capacity of the 'user' to get involved in creating and distributing content (Bruns, 2006; Burgess, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; 2008; Livingstone, 2008; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Beer, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009; Spurgeon et al., 2009; Burgess & Green, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61).

While the changes in production and consumption were already a characteristic of the 'digital' era, they became "most profound in the proliferation of social media that are populated by user-generated content" (Spurgeon et al., 2009, p. 277). Thus the increasing capacity of users to create and share content may be said to lie at the heart of the era of social media. The user-generated content phenomenon has also been identified as emerging through

earlier forms of Internet activity and driven in particular, by predominately textual forms, that is blogging or weblog practices (Beer & Burrows, 2007)

3.4.1.2 Social Media, Social Networking Sites and Social Software

Social networking sites and social software may be seen as fundamental to the use of the term social media and thus demand a separate exploration. Essentially, social networking sites may be understood as "socio-technological arrangements" that facilitate social networking, thus involving "social relations amongst people who have (and indeed desire) some type of relationship or affiliation" (Wellman, 1996; Light & McGrath, 2010, p.290-291). One of the affordances of social networking sites has been described as the way in which they "enable communication among ever widening circles of contact" (Livingstone, 2008, p.394). A key defining quality of this particular set of technologies has also been presented as a paradigm shift in the way people connect and interact digitally, marking a move from one-to-one and one-to-many communication, to many-to-many communication (Rosso et al., 2006; Rheingold 2007; Schrock, 2009). As social networking sites have grown and developed so they have become inherently tied in with the user-generated content phenomena. Livingstone (2008, p. 394) for example, describes the affordances of social networking sites as, "inviting convergence among hitherto separate activities of e-mail, messaging, website creation, diaries, photo albums and music or video uploading and downloading." Traditional media sharing orientated sites like YouTube, distinguished by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) as 'content communities' as opposed to social networking sites like Facebook, are also now being conceptualised as social networking sites (Lange, 2008, Burgess & Green, 2009; Light et al., 2012). YouTube has been illuminated as a site which enables socialising, communication and video sharing with the community of YouTube creating meaning and motivation (Lange, 2008; Burgess & Green, 2008). In fact Burgess & Green (2009) suggest that the communicative processes around content sharing mean more to users that the actual creation of content.

Social software, as identified earlier, is also integral to the meaning and definition of social media and can be understood quite simply as software that is supportive of group communication (Shirky, 2003), which has been developed ever since the evolution of the Internet (Gaved, 2011). Social software innovations lie at the heart of the Web 2.0 and therefore the social media era and have enabled users to ever increasingly interact, organise

into groups and create and share content. Social networking sites can be seen therefore as social software applications (Periera et al., 2010). Open source software may also be seen as a key domain of the trend toward user led content production (Bruns, 2006), the ideologies of which I explore further in the next section.

3.4.2 The Social Media Era as a Participatory and Empowering Era

The social media era associated thus with the emergence of a 'participatory culture,' has become attached to assumptions of social progress, user empowerment, disrupted power relations and access to social and political power, as noted by an array of scholars, (Beer & Burrows, 2007; Pascu et al., 2007; Jarrett, 2008; Petersen, 2008; Beer, 2009; Burgess & Green, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009; Schäfer 2011). Beyond the social power which has for sometime been deemed inherent within social networks and thus social networking sites (boyd, 2008; Shirky, 2008; Zimmer, 2008), participatory culture symbolises an era in which users or the former audience are empowered to participate in media production (Burgess, 2006; 2006a; 2008). Participatory culture can thus be seen as centred around content creation and sharing in the social media age (Burgess & Green, 2009).

The assumption of empowerment can be seen to stem from the technologically deterministic angle of perception of increased accessibility, in terms of ease of use and affordability of new digital technologies and User Generated Content platforms which enables "do it yourself distribution" (Van Dijck, 2009, p. 44). Reduced barriers to content creation and sharing, thus present a common assumption associated with notions of empowering creativity and accessing audiences as never before (Jenkins, 2006; 2008; Cha et al., 2007; Harigittai & Walejko, 2008; Schackman, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009). In particular, as a discourse of user empowerment ensues as a result of such developments, the debate is gravitating towards the assumption of voice:

> Web 2.0 has been ushered in by what might be thought of as rhetoric of 'democratisation.' This is defined by stories and images of 'the people' reclaiming the Internet and taking control of its content, a kind of 'people's internet'...This we are led to believe, has led to a new collaborative, participatory or open culture, where anyone can get involved, and everyone has the potential to be seen and heard. According to this vision there are opportunities for our thoughts to get heard, our videos to be seen, and our music to be listened to (Beer & Burrows, 2007).

Thus social media has become attached to a strong discourse of empowerment as voice or the democratisation of the Internet through an assumption of the greater potential for voice and for more voices to be heard beyond the powerful few (Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Beer, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009). This assumption is apparent in Jenkin's (2008, p.3) assertion that within "the world of media convergence, every important story gets told". The assumption of voice and a 'people's media' is particularly encapsulated in the espousal of citizen and community journalism in the social media age and no one has written with quite such enthusiasm and passion about the greater potential for a 'people's media' associated with the social media era than Gilmoor (2006).

> This is one of the healthiest media developments in a long time. We are hearing new voices-not necessarily the voices of people who want to make a living by speaking out, but who want to say what they think and be heard, even if by relatively few people (Gilmoor, 2006, p. 139).

Associated arguments are that social media environments, which are not controlled in the same way as print media or not controlled by mainstream media, may provide the opportunity for community journalism including that of an investigative nature to flourish, enabling ordinary people to voice their concerns about the issues that affect their lives which may have been previously hidden (Bruns, 2006; Burgess, 2006; Kingston, 2006; Goff & Humphries, 2009). The potential of the arena of community and citizen journalism to disrupt elite agenda settings such as mainstream media, and the enhanced capacity to bypass gatekeepers is also raised by commentators (Pascu et al., 2007; Harigittai, 2007; Goode, 2009) and may be seen as a key potential arena of empowerment for disadvantaged communities. Scholars are also bringing to light the creative practices which are beginning to emerge through "non elite social contexts and communicative conventions" (Burgess, 2006, p. 5; Light et al., 2012) beyond the traditional socialising domain of social networking sites. Conceptualising such activity as 'Vernacular Creativity' Burgess (2006) suggests that it is within this arena that questions of voice and agency in respect to 'ordinary' people may best be explored.

Software innovations in the form of Free/ Libre and Open Source software (FLOSS) are also symbolic of and a feature of the social media era, as technologies which enable users to be producers are additionally presented as key sites of potential empowerment (Lin, 2005, Bruns, 2006). Such empowerment attachments are associated with the notion of this type of software being 'free' in financial terms and in relation to offering a new potential for voice in terms of "free speech" (Bonfield & Quinn, 2007). This arena of software is also associated

with challenging authority, the role of the expert and the digital divide (Lin, 2005). In what follows I explore further what these new social media technologies might mean for local communities with particular regard to a context of local disadvantage.

3.4.3 Social Media and the Potential Meaning for Local Urban Disadvantaged Communities

The advent and appropriation of social media technologies can be said to be symbolic of change and continuity simultaneously (Light & McGrath, 2010), with the study of social media conceptualised, for example, as presenting "novel sites for age old problems" (Dourish & Satchell, 2010, p.22). As the use of social networking technologies have grown in popularity and become part of many people's lives, so they have become a fertile ground for researchers (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Light et al., 2008; Schrock, 2009; Light & McGrath, 2010). Some of the resultant research echoes earlier work with respect to online communities (Light et al., 2008). In this section I examine the ways in which social media has reignited familiar debates concerning the definition of community and the implications of the Internet for local communities, in particular disadvantaged local communities and opened up new debates around the perceived new potentialities for such communities in the social media era.

3.4.3.1 Social Media and Local Community Participation

The debate about the changing nature of social relations and the meaning of community that followed the widespread appropriation of the Internet has been reignited in the social media era (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Van Dijck, 2009; Baym, 2010). The continuity of the debate around a disconnection from communities of place is also clearly in evidence within this discourse (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Baym, 2010). Crawford (2008), for example, refers to the way in which social media, or what she defines specifically as mobile social software, can be used to build a 'cocoon' of familiarity as people live out their daily lives within urban spaces. At the same time there appears to be growing scholarly interest within the field of urban informatics in particular, in how such new forms of ICTs including social media might be used for community engagement within urban environments (Foth et al., 2011; Seeburger et al., 2012).

Some research is beginning to challenge fears of social media appropriation reducing participation in 'real' places and communities (Hampton et al., 2009, 2011; Campbell & Kwak, 2010). For example, recent survey work argues that social media affords access to social capital through enhancing the diversity of people's networks (which has long been attached to a range of social benefits within a context of disadvantage), and primarily supports participation in traditional local place-based settings (Hampton et al., 2011). It is further suggested that the perceived affordances of social media for the development of diverse networks within new and different social settings have been "largely misplaced" (Hampton et al., 2011, p.14). This resonates with boyd's (2008) study, which refers to social networking sites as 'networked publics' that support socialising in the same way as unmediated spaces. Hampton's three year "naturalistic experiment" (2010, p.1111) exploring the integration of Internet-based services for communication, which could be referred to as social media applications at the neighbourhood level, further suggests that such applications can help to overcome barriers to participation within a context of extreme disadvantage rooted in the reduced barriers to interactivity enabled by these set of technologies.

Social media has also become attached to a discourse of empowering the 'active community', to which the above discussion is inherently linked in terms of enhanced possibilities for encouraging community participation and empowering political activity. This includes grassroots movements and political and community activism linked to the affordances of voice and social mobilisation (Byrnes, 2007; Rheingold, 2007; Burgess & Green, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009; Baym, 2010). Social media therefore while feared for its potential to polarise social groups may also afford "disenfranchised groups new potential to organise for change" (Baym, 2010, p.97), a potential however which may be being overstated (Byrne, 2007; Van Dijck, 2009). Powell, (2008) has also drawn attention to the emergence of Community Wifi Network projects in Montreal Canada based on open source software which bear synergies with the early community networking initiatives, having goals of providing Internet access and community media to urban citizens, together with reinvigorating community and bringing about social and political change. Such projects are identified by the researcher as seeming to hold new potential for local community engagement. At the same time however, challenges are made to assumptions of the value of such initiatives for social action and democracy (Powell, 2008). On the basis of his research of grassroots community networking projects, Gaved (2011, p.330) postulates that engagement with such initiatives may have been affected by the "global surge in Internet based social media tools such as Facebook" and in so

doing opens up the question of the relevance of local community networking projects in the social media age. A recent exploration of the integration of ICTs within a neighbourhood in Australia to bridge the digital divide (Broadbent & Papadopoulous, 2011) is simultaneously illustrative of the continuity of community-based ICT initiatives.

3.4.3.2 Community Media and the Greater Potential for Voice in the Social Media Age

Disadvantaged and marginalised communities including neighbourhood-based communities have long been constructed as voiceless and disempowered (Mitra & Watts, 2002) and their collective narratives have traditionally been identified as "either negative, narrow, 'written' by others for them, or all of the above" (Rappaport, 1995, p.796). The result of which, when viewed within a context of urban regeneration, has been conceptualised as place-based stigma affecting the social welfare and social and economic participation of residents (Gourlay, 2007). The idea of people's media attached to assumptions of voice has a long history (Jankowski, 2002; Burgess & Green, 2009), and the promise of voice attached to social media has quite clear synergies with the broader arena of community media (including, for example, community press, radio and television), as effectively explored by Jankowski, (2002). Community media can be viewed as a response to the absence of ordinary voices in the mainstream media and policy making (Higgins, 1999) and has long been linked also to agendas of and research around; individual integration, community participation and cohesion. The idea of a people's or alternative voice for social activism and change is also integral to community media (Jankowski et al., 1992; Jankowski, 2002), including within disadvantaged neighbourhood contexts. For example, Jankowski et al., (1992, p.1) refer to being "taken by the dreams of developing or rebuilding a sense of community within new housing estates and ageing neighbourhoods, and applying new media to that task".

Community media as a scholarly field of interest can be traced back to the 1900s and it is clear that 'ordinary' people producing their own media content has a long history, and as ICTs have developed so they have become an integral part of the phenomenon (Jankowski, 2001; Howley, 2005). In recent years, community media has been illuminated as important within the context of urban regeneration in the UK, particularly in terms of functioning as a voice for local people provided through community press and radio (Kingston, 2006; Lewis, 2008). Lewis (2008, p.6), argues for example, that "community media can make a significant contribution to social inclusion, community engagement and regeneration" (Lewis, 2008; p.6). Internet-based community content creation and sharing, (which could be termed

community generated content) is also more recently being discussed as a key site for potential community empowerment within a context of local disadvantaged communities. Such discussions and evolving theories can be seen to represent recognition of the potential of the collision between social and community media. Given that participatory culture emphasises the disruption of mainstream media power, the social media era is being associated with the potential to amplify the narratives of poverty in the UK which have tended to remain marginal to, or distorted by, the mainstream media (Robinson et al., 2009). However, simultaneously challenges to 'being seen and heard' (Robinson et al., 2009; Beer & Burrows, 2007) are also being identified which will be discussed further in the sections which follow.

Mäkinen (2006) draws on examples of online citizen journalism initiatives in New York and Finland, comprised of websites for sharing neighbourhood stories and sharing and discussing local issues, to make a case for the value of digital empowerment for "community-orientated content." The author locates the perceived need to empower community orientated content in an age where the alternative voices of small media producers have been threatened by the power of mainstream media companies and within a context of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and marginalised communities. Such development rooted in the enhanced opportunity to publish content presented by the Internet, can play a role, it is argued, in "strengthening the agentive role" of marginalised communities and in enhancing social interaction, participation and social activity within such communities. In addition, within the general field of citizen and community journalism, it is being argued that social media environments present a greater potential for ordinary people and local communities to voice their concerns and the issues which affect their lives and local communities, which may have been previously hidden due to the prior power and control of the mainstream media (Goff & Humphries, 2009).

Scholars within the field of community informatics have also recently made an argument for the community empowerment value of community generated content, (in the form of community-based digital storytelling) within a context of local disadvantaged communities. Within an overall vision of 'building a story economy' it is suggested that digital storytelling and the production of digital artifacts within a community context presents the opportunity for "a more inclusive and holistic approach to community empowerment" (Nutt & Schwartz, 2007, p.1). The theorists argue that such activity can provide "greater economic mobility and social visibility" and open "a doorway to enable and empower community processes" (Nutt

& Schwartz, 2007, p.1). These writers further suggest that as barriers have been reduced to the appropriation of technology by disadvantaged communities both in terms of costs and technical capacity so "the time is ripe for communities to leverage their stories in the digital realm for social, economic, and community development" (Nutt & Schwartz, 2007, p.1). Rooted in this vision, scholars make an interesting case that links such practices to the capacity for local disadvantaged communities to access social and economic power. The potential link to economic power is a particularly interesting one given the discourse around the user generated content phenomenon, which highlights the potential for disrupting boundaries between amateur and professional media production together with the potentially negative resultant implications for the creative industries (Bruns, 2006; Keen, 2007). Nutt & Schwartz (2007) also locate the digital story and thus digital voice as the key site of power in the information economy.

Digital storytelling has long been an activity concerned with the amplification of 'ordinary' voices and individual empowerment (Spurgeon et al., 2009; Hancox, 2011). Through the platform of digital storytelling, researchers working within the arena of the creative industries have additionally started to explore the potential of 'vernacular creativity' (a term used to try to encapsulate the notion of 'ordinary' people making media as opposed to media which emerges through elite groups) for disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Arenas of exploration include social inclusion and enabling the articulation of voice within the context of social and economic development strategies (Spurgeon et al., 2009, p.275).

It is important to consider also that community media, like community activity, has not always spontaneously emerged and that it has an intervention dimension driven by wider and differing community development agendas (Mayo, 2000) enabling access to and participation in the production of media forms (Howley, 2005). In a similar vein, proponents of the potential value of community generated content for disadvantaged communities, highlight the need for interventions to promote access and participation within this realm, conceptualised as digital empowerment and emancipation rooted in a beyond access view of the digital divide (Mäkinen, 2006; Nutt & Schwartz, 2007). This reflects wider realisations that while participation in social media and content creation and sharing within the frame of participatory culture is flavoured with inherent assumptions of organic emergence (Spurgeon et al., 2009), it is "a great leap to assume that availability of digital network technologies turns everyone into active participants" (Van Dijck, 2009, p.44). The assumption that the

growing availability and power of digital technologies will turn 'everyone' into media participants (Bowman & Willis, 2003) and producers is therefore beginning to be challenged (Bruns, 2006; Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Van Dicjk, 2009). Thus, on the one hand while no era has perhaps been more associated with reduced barriers to ordinary people producing their own media than the so-called social media era, within the hope and hype discourse lays a growing concern regarding the evolution of a new participatory divide, limiting the potential for community empowerment in this arena.

3.4.3.3 New Arenas of Digital Exclusion, the Participation Divide and the Risk of Uneven Access to Voice

ICTs have been constructed throughout the world as pivotal to the capacity to participate within society and as communication technologies have advanced so the digital exclusion discourse has shifted to concerns regarding social inclusion and voice inequality (Warschauer, 2002; 2004; Burgess, 2006). As digital voice is constructed as a key site of power in contemporary ICT-based societies (Nutt & Schwartz, 2007), so the capacity for digital communication and expression (content creation and sharing) has assumed the position of the central literacy for full participation in society and is central to the democratic agenda inherent within the digital inclusion discourse (Livingstone, 2004; Burgess, 2006; Hancox, 2011). At the same time, assumptions that social media technologies provide access to voice, are being challenged and social inequalities with regard to participation in content creation are beginning to be identified. Bruns (2005, p.8), for example, writing about the enhanced capacity for content creation as well as consumption which he terms 'produsage', also draws attention to the potential for "a participatory or creative divide" to "open up between the more and less privileged strata of society" which he suggests "must be addressed through government and non-government intervention." In addition despite the rhetoric of ease of participation, content creators particularly among the adult population of users are being identified as in the minority when it comes to participation in this arena (Arthur, 2006; Pascu et al., 2007; Van Dijck, 2009). Harigittai's (2007) and Harigittai's & Walejko's (2008) survey-based research also points to a participation divide with regard to young people's use of social media including within the domain of content creation and sharing based on socio-demographics. Harigittai & Walejko, (2008) specifically identify that "engaging in creative pursuits remains unequally distributed by social background" and further conclude that:

> As online content becomes increasingly important in setting social, political and cultural agendas, the existence of such a participation gap will have

increasing implications for social inequality (Harigittai & Walejko, 2008, p. 253).

Schradie's (2011) survey-based work in the context of American adults also points to digital production inequality on the basis of class, indicating that elite groups still dominate digital realms. In the light of the emergent so-called participation divide, Harigittai (2007) identifies the importance of enhancing the opportunities and skills for creative media engagement. Burgess & Green (2009) additionally point to new media literacy as pivotal to the issue of the participation divide and thus to the problematisation of participatory culture.

3.4.3.4 Challenging the Assumption of Participation as Social Progress and Empowerment

Beyond such digital inequality concerns discussed in the preceding section lies the question of whether participation is always and necessarily 'good for' communities let alone empowering. It is interesting therefore, that a number of commentators are beginning to challenge the assumption of a relationship between social media participation and social progress, questioning the espousal of redefining power relations and the reality of user agency in social media environments (Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007, Petersen, 2008; Jarrett, 2008; Spurgeon et al., 2009; Van Dijck, 2009; Baym, 2009; Schäfer, 2011). Jarrett (2008, sic), for example, constructs Web 2.0 as a "contingent freedom" seeking to illuminate "the need to continually interrogate the fabric of digital media within the socio-historical moment of its emergence and use". In particular the assumption of voice attached to social media is being challenged and I thus explore this emergent critique within this section.

Moving beyond the empowerment window reveals an emerging murkier story of social media participation as an uncertain journey potentially leading to a road of exploitation, commodification and privacy infringements (Petersen, 2008; Zimmer, 2008; Van Dijck, 2009; Schäfer, 2011). Scholars are thus calling for greater attention to be paid to issues of 'ownership' and ethics in these new social media environments (Light et al., 2008; Baym, 2009; Light & McGrath, 2010;). Within the community informatics literature, Loader & Keeble (2004), for example, associate the recognition among large companies in America, of the value of local content with the "the risk of disempowering community groups by taking away their ownership of the content" (Loader & Keeble, p.41, 2004). Within their enthusiastic proposal of "building a story economy" for community empowerment, Nutt & Schwartz (2007, p.2) also add a note of caution that "the stories of the disadvantaged can

even result in exploitation rather than empowerment." They also further identify their view that within this context "community ownership and privacy" would require "utmost attention" (Nutt & Schwartz, p.4). Lin (2009) writing about the specific context of Free/Libre and Open Source Software, highlights that the potential and degree of empowerment will be dependent on whether the interests of local users are fully included within its implementation. Bruns (2005) suggests that the era of user led content creation may not only be characterised by content and creation but also by control. In addition, Community Informatics has long emphasised the importance of community ownership of community-based ICT systems. However, the reality for projects on the ground emerging through this field has revealed a story of control lying within the political and funding context of such initiatives. A similar picture also appears to have emerged with regard to community media projects more generally, which have been limited by their institutional enabling context (Howley, 2005; Lewis, 2008). Therefore, the extent to which social media can in reality be viewed as symbolic of social progress is identified as open to question.

Schäfer (2011) more broadly poses the question of whether the rhetoric surrounding these new ICTs is a form of 'selling utopia' involving a symbolic framing process in order to promote computers technology and the Internet. Stoecker (2005) has also raised a similar question within the field of community informatics. Opening up social media within the discursive realm, scholars are additionally pointing to the way in which social media sites are framed and positioned in particular ways through the language of community and 'platform,' for example, to entice users to participate and find a voice in a realm which may not always be in their best interests, in the pursuit of profit (Van Dijck, 2009; Schäfer, 2011). This is a particularly disturbing story when viewed within a digital exclusion discourse which stereotypes non-users and presents them as somehow different, 'lacking' and set apart from the rest of society (Wyatt, 2005; Klecun, 2008). Van Dijck (2009) also highlights the way in which the language of community has been adopted within the realm of participatory culture and associated with value for local community engagement and grassroots activism, but that concurrently, community when applied to social media is overwhelmingly about commercial and entertainment orientated communities. Participatory culture, Schäfer (2011, p.13) further argues, needs to be seen within its historical context of "claiming participation and expecting social progress through technological development", echoing a similar point made by Jones (1995; 1998) in the context of emergent CMCs.

The 'banalization' or the ordinary and ubiquitous nature of the Internet, has reawakened questions of power (Graham, 2004; Lievrouw, 2004) and in particular, identified the need to engage in uncovering socio-technical processes of power which shape the digital divide and contemporary cities (Mansell, 2002; Lievrouw, 2004). Robin Mansell (2004, p.7), for example, has also highlighted the way in which the debate around what "the Internet means and for who" tends to be "detached from the way power is embedded in and experienced through new media". Beer (2009) specifically points to an inadequate understanding of the "complex underweave of power at play in the digital mundane" which may give rise, he suggests, to "new complex digital divides" calling for more critical work to counteract "the Web 2.0 Bandwagon" (Beer, 2009, p.999). Furthermore, Jenkins (2008, p. 294) has more recently written of the tendency to have "fallen into the trap of seeing democracy as the 'inevitable' outcome of technological change." Rather, he suggests, democracy is "something we need to fight to achieve with every tool at our disposal" (Jenkins, 2008, p.294). In addition, a picture is emerging, with particular regard to the social context of YouTube, of social media environments as social spaces which do not necessarily foster community, disrupt existing power relations or invite diversity (Jenkins, 2008; Burgees & Green, 2009).

The "rhetoric of democratisation" or voice associated with social media among scholars within fields of sociology and cultural studies has thus been identified as in need of "critical interrogation" with particular regard to "who gets heard above the din of Web 2.0" (Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007, sic). Burgess (2006, p.3) also warns that the "mere fact of productivity in itself is not sufficient grounds for celebration" highlighting that participation does not necessarily equate to the transfer of power, suggesting similarly that the "question that we ask about democratic media participation can no longer be limited to 'who gets to speak?'" but rather "who is heard and to what end" (Burgess, 2006, p. 3). Couldry (2010) suggests from a media studies perspective, that voice needs to understood as both a process and a value, further highlighting that voice requires recognition through a process of listening (Tacchi, 2010). Crawford (2009, p.525) has also written about the value of listening as a metaphor when applied to questions of "attention online", thus moving beyond automatic assumptions of voice in this context. The importance of this is also highlighted within a recent paper focusing on the arena of citizen journalism;

> Stories, once online, confront various possible fates: they may be more easily buried in the vast new attention economy, if they do not capture the imagination quickly and strongly enough; or they may be amplified, sustained

and potentially morphed as they are re-circulated, reworked, and reframed by online networks" (Goode, 2010, p.1293).

Thus scholars are calling for attention to be drawn to the listening aspect of voice, arguing that voice needs to be valued and requires recognition (Burgess, 2006; Couldry, 2010; Tacchi, 2010). In addition, Jankowski (2001, p.36) points out that within the context of community media more broadly, "the results of the multitude of initiatives to achieve alternative voices reaching intended audiences are unclear". An analysis of digital storytelling conducted by McWilliams (2009) also identified that "the institutional context of production shapes the content, purpose and outcomes" (Spurgeon et al., 2009, p.277). The issue of who is heard and who is listening can also be said to be related to the concept of the invisible or 'imagined audience' (boyd, 2008; Marwick & boyd, 2011) and the recognition that as yet "understanding of the social media audience is limited" (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p.2).

3.5 My Research Focus and Conceptual Framework of Approach

In this final section I set out my key research questions, seeking to justify them on the basis of existing theories and gaps in knowledge. The section culminates in the identification of my conceptual framework, which will guide my intended research.

At the close of Chapter 2 I identified my interest in the key research question of:

Whether and how social media may be associated with a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration within local urban disadvantaged areas?

In the light of the theories that suggest that the content dimension of ICTs and in particular, participation in content creation and sharing, holds the greatest potential for meaningful use community empowerment and regeneration within a context of local disadvantage (Shearman, 1999; Hellawell, 2001; Pinkett & Bryant, 2003, Shearman, 2003; Selwyn, 2004; Mäkinen, 2006; Nutt & Schwartz, 2007), I refine the above key research question to focus on content creation and sharing and thus seek to ask:

Whether and how participation in community content creation and sharing may be of value for community empowerment and regeneration?

Existing research offers little in the way of insights with regard to this question beyond Leung's (2009) survey-based study, which relates directly to psychological empowerment and content creation online and identifies that "the process as well as the consequences of

content creation online seems to have a significant effect, although small, on psychological empowerment" (Leung, 2009, p.17).

The research is located within specifically identified gaps in knowledge in the field of Community Informatics regarding the extent of the value that ICTs may present for community empowerment and regeneration, and how the perceived potential of such technologies may be realised within local disadvantaged communities:

> The extent to which ICTs are empowering local people to generate social, cultural, political and economic outcomes need to be more rigorously investigated to further understanding of the relationship between community development and community empowerment" (Malina & Ball, 2005, sic).

> The role of ICTs in community empowerment and regeneration requires continued research. While much has been written about the potential of these new technologies, consideration needs to be given to as to how such potential may be realized in local areas, particularly those that are marginalized and deprived (Keeble, 2003, sic).

Keeble (2003) has also identified the limited understanding of how ICTs can be used for community empowerment.

Given that my research is inevitably rooted in the overall context and thus theory of digital exclusion, I automatically challenge the technologically deterministic assumption of reduced barriers to content production in the social media age. In addition, it has been identified that there is an acknowledgment that developing community generated content for community empowerment will require digital interventions, variously framed as digital empowerment and emancipation, (Mäkinen, 2006; Nutt & Schwartz, 2007).

Building on theories from the 'digital exclusion' discourse therefore (Warschauer, 2002; 2004; Gurstein, 2003; Selwyn, 2004) and thus; viewing meaningful use as laying at the heart of the potential of the relationship, engagement as highly complex and dependent on factors beyond the mere bridging of technological gaps and, noting difficulties to date in benefiting the 'socially excluded' I also seek to ask:

> *Whether, how and to whom might participation in community content creation and sharing be becoming a meaningful activity within the context of disadvantaged local areas?*

Focusing on how community content creation and sharing might become viewed as a

meaningful activity within a context of local disadvantaged areas, also offers the opportunity to address knowledge gaps again within the field of community informatics, as to how ICTs might become relevant within the lives of people living in disadvantaged areas. Such a focus may also be valuable in extending knowledge with regard to the value of community-based ICT integration for addressing social inequalities associated with digital exclusion, an arena within which the current knowledge base is limited (beyond the role of Community Technology Centres);

> Whilst the potential advantages of ICTs to those already immersed in electronic and information and communication technology appears evident it is far less obvious from the literature review how relevant ICTs are to the everyday 'life experiences' of people living in predominantly disadvantaged areas (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p.42).

> There is little existing evidence-based research which supports the contention that CI initiatives have yet made significant challenges to the social inequalities associated with ICT adoption (Loader& Keeble, 2004, p. 41).

The types of content creation which may be expected to emerge from people living in disadvantaged areas has also been identified as a gap in current understanding within the field of Community Informatics (Loader & Keeble, 2004). Research exploring community content orientated models of ICT integration has, in addition, received little attention within the research world and this research offers a particular opportunity to move beyond the social interaction, community participation and social capital meanings of community-based ICT integration within local communities. While a valuable line of inquiry, I suggest the dominance of such research has so far presented quite a limited view of what ICTs might mean for local disadvantaged communities. In so doing the complexity of the metaphor of community has perhaps been, as Baym (2010) suggests, replaced by the more convenient one of the 'social network' potentially obfuscating more complex meanings for local deprived communities. Malina & Ball (2005, sic) also note the paucity of research with respect to "what people are doing with the technology and how it actually affects their routine lives, their networks of communication and their local community" as part of a critique of "unsubstantiated claims" about the social worth of ICTs within local communities. The scholars thus identify "the need for more empirical research" focused on "how and in what ways different types of communities are utilising ICTs and what implications this use has in reality for routine daily living" (Malina & Ball, 2005, sic). In addition, research in this area to date says little about how ICTs become meaningful within the lives of the socially

disadvantaged through community-based ICT initiatives beyond the importance of the environmental context of use and informal approaches to integrating skills (Loader & Keeble, 2004).

Scholars have also located and have continued to struggle with the ambiguous nature of the relationship between ICTs and community empowerment, particularly within the field of community informatics. For example, Fortunati's (2009, sic) key-note speech delivered at a Community Informatics Conference, identified the way in which empowerment has infiltrated the ICT discourse "like a virus", calling for a time of critical reflection and specifically "efforts to better understand the relation between ICT and empowerment" in order to avoid "cultivating dangerous illusions." Thus my research seeks primarily to respond to this call by taking a critical and novel social media lens to this relationship, and in so doing contribute to the wider digital inclusion discourse with particular regard to the context of urban regeneration in the UK. Given the intention to explore the ways in which community content creation and sharing may become a meaningful and empowering activity within disadvantaged areas, the research fundamentally has the potential to develop a nuanced understanding of the relationship between ICT and empowerment. In particular, this study offers the potential to illuminate the neglected 'consequence' domain of digital inclusion research, which has tended to focus on the means rather than the ends of participation (Selwyn, 2004), thereby obfuscating opportunities for critical reflection and the development of a more complex understanding of digital exclusion (Selwyn, 2004; Rodino-Colconino; 2006). In addition, the need for critical reflection within the arena of digital inclusion is emphasised by Rodino-Colconino (2006), who suggests that the potential for scholars to explore the democratic potential of the technology and the emergence of more structural critiques within the area, has been prevented by an over emphasis on diffusion of technologies, that is a focus on addressing digital inequalities through the provision of access and skills.

The research is also rooted in the explorations within this chapter of the need to go beyond an exploration of empowerment and its inherently positive overtones by applying a more critical lens to how it may be related to ICT and social media specifically. This is in part a response to the illumination of the need and call for more "critical interrogation" of the rhetoric of social media participation as democratising and empowering, as identified within a discourse of the development of a sociology of Web 2.0 (Beer & Burrows, 2007, sic) and the growing

scholarly challenge to assumptions of empowerment and social progress attached to social media participation:

> As things stand we have so far had little opportunity to explore how new forms of power play out in this context of apparent 'empowerment' and 'democratization'...this is a pressing issue that requires urgent attention (Beer, 2009, p.985).

In addition, Malina & Ball (2005, sic) have identified that the assumptions being made within the field of Community Informatics "that new technologies set up in local communities - often without consultation or input by local people - will have positive outcomes for the community must be questioned".

My desire to bring a more critical lens to the research is also driven by the historical limitations of community-based ICT initiatives for enabling the communities they target to follow an empowered path, highlighted both in this and the previous chapter as rooted in the political, and most specifically, funding context within which they have emerged. It is therefore the case that such initiatives may be situated within a social context of disempowerment rather than empowerment. Loader & Keeble, (2004) have additionally identified the potential for disempowerment within the specific area of community content creation. The era of social media also, as the critique explored so far suggests, may not necessarily be associated with empowering social contexts. Fortunati (2009) has also identified that exploring the relationship between ICT and empowerment demands greater attention to the concept of 'power.' In opening up a more critical lens to the research focus I therefore seek to bring the lens of power and disempowerment to the study and thus seek to ask:

What arenas of disempowerment might be associated with community generated content initiatives?

It is also important to bear in mind Gauntlett's (2011) warning regarding the need to ensure that critical debates, though important and concerning, do not undermine "or stop us from thinking about the more positive potential of these technologies" through taking an academic "black and white worldview" in the form of a "single minded critical stance" (Gauntlett, 201, p.193). Through my study I therefore hope to capture what may be the messy reality of links between community content creation and sharing, empowerment, power and arenas of disempowerment.

In developing a conceptual framework for my work I seek to simplistically and coherently explain the key concepts which underpin my research and the assumed relationship between them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I seek to take a **social media** lens to the assumed relationship between **ICTs, community empowerment** and **regeneration** within an overall context of **digital inclusion** strategies. I am particularly intrigued by the community empowerment links being made between **participation** in community content production (which I term **community generated content**) and community empowerment. I will also seek to develop a view of arenas of **disempowerment** potentially hidden within the social context of content production, and will thus seek to engage with issues of **power** dynamics. Having established my research focus, key research questions and my conceptual framework, I now turn to a discussion of the pivotal concept within this research that is, community empowerment, before proceeding to describe my research approach in the next chapter of this thesis.

3.5.1 Understanding Community Empowerment

Understanding community empowerment requires firstly an exploration of empowerment and power which are highly problematic concepts, fundamentally because they are open to interpretation and mean different things to different people in different contexts related to its understanding as both a process and an outcome (Lukes, 1974; Rappaport, 1984; Keiffer, 1984; Bernstein et al., 1994; Zimmerman, 1995; Laverack, 2001; Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001). Zimmerman (1990) for example, indicates that understanding empowerment is only accessible through people's perceptions within particular social contexts. The idea of empowerment which is fundamentally linked to supporting those who are most disadvantaged and disempowered (Friere, 1972; Friedmann, 1992; Beresford & Croft, 1993) in gaining control over or enhancing the possibilities for them to control their own lives, is central to the concept (Rappaport, 1981; Page & Czuba, 1999). Empowerment has been defined, for example as;

> ...a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important (Page & Czuba, 1999).

Accessing social power, for example, is associated with the concept which includes access to social networks and knowledge and skills (Friedmann, 1992), and thus it is easy to see the

ready transference to social media. Voice is also pivotal to Friere's (1972) educational model of empowerment.

Community empowerment is commonly understood as a social process of change and conceptualised as "the potential of people to progress from individual to collective action along a dynamic continuum" (Laverack, 2001, p.134). Individual change or empowerment is commonly identified as a prerequisite for collective change (Wilson, 1996; Page & Czuba, 1999) and is dependent on participation (Laverack, 2001). Empowerment at an individual level is further commonly framed as psychological empowerment which, evolves through and is linked to collective action and includes factors such as increased self esteem, confidence, self efficacy and personal development (Laverack & Wallerstein; 2001; Rissel, 1994). Laverack & Wallerstein (2001) argue that it is in viewing community empowerment as a process that insights can be gained into the ways in which people are enabled to move from individual to more collective action, and so to social and collective change. Empowerment and thus community empowerment may further be understood as multidimensional, likened to a "path or a journey" that occurs "in relationships" (Page & Czuba, 1999, sic), and therefore may be further associated with 'relational' or 'generative power', also referred to as 'shared power' or 'power with' (Koten, 1987, Lappe & Dubois, 1984; Kreisberg, 1992, Page & Czuba, 1999). Empowerment has additionally been defined as rooted in practice and it has been suggested that it can only be understood as defined by specific people in specific unique social contexts (Rappaport, 1987; Rissel, 1994; Page & Czuba, 1999).

My study seeks to build on the understanding of community empowerment as a linked individual-collective change process that occurs in particular settings. I therefore seek to explore empowerment at both the individual level and more collective level within my study. Fundamentally, understanding empowerment as interpretive, situated and contingent is central to the way I seek to proceed with the proposed research study, the approach to which I explore in detail within the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Process

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the process of inquiry which has shaped the research design. This has taken place and is discussed at differing levels, from the abstract philosophical to the general level of particular techniques. While this does suggest that the research process was highly ordered, in reality it has been an exploratory and uncertain process. The element of uncertainty associated with the research process has been commented upon by several researchers (Silverman, 1985; Buchanan et al., 1988). The need to discuss the research design at a variety of levels is encapsulated by Jupp & Norris (1993, p.39) who highlight that:

> ...a consideration of methods of social inquiry cannot be isolated from a consideration of theory. Specific research questions are underpinned by more general theoretical paradigms…which have in-built assumptions about the nature of the social order and how it can be 'captured' and explained.

4.2 Philosophical Underpinnings and Guiding Research Paradigms

My research topic as identified at the close of Chapter 3 may be identified as multidisciplinary in nature and an array of research fields are of relevance to, and have influenced, the evolution of the research including: Urban Studies; Community Development Studies; Communication and Cultural Studies; Media Studies; Internet Studies; Social media studies; Computer-Mediated Communication; Community Informatics and the Digital Divide. This is because my research topic is predominantly rooted in practice rather than in theory. Consequently, the path to follow in order to conduct my research was difficult to ascertain. Ultimately my research has been shaped by dipping in and out of this mix of research traditions and areas. I essentially had no glaring or overriding research paradigm and faced the classic problem of social scientists, the overlapping nature of the research paradigms and their inherent conflict. The complexity faced by social scientists with regard to research paradigms and the importance of decision making within this arena to the research design is clear in the comments of Harvey (1969, p.18):

> ...judgement of what is a relevant question and what is an acceptable answer can only be understood in the context of the prevailing image, in the context of prevailing rules and conventions, in other words, in the context of diverse and often conflicting paradigms which themselves reflect and result from diverse behaviours, value systems, and individual philosophies.

Research is always based on underlying philosophical assumptions about what constitutes 'valid' research. Fundamentally, these philosophical assumptions relate to issues of ontology and epistemology. Ontology is centred in the study of being and therefore is concerned with the nature of reality (Crotty, 1998; Scotland, 2012) and theories regarding reality can be seen as "ways of making sense of the world" (Walsham, 2006 p.320). Epistemology, regarded as the most pertinent assumption, is concerned with assumptions about knowledge (Myers, 2003; Johnston, 1994). At a broad and simplistic level I reject the positivist view of the world rooted in an objectivist epistemology, that is to say the idea that there is a meaningful reality that exists apart from the operation of all consciousness. While appreciating the value of positivist research and thus "a positive, that is to say empirical science" which "yields factual knowledge that is precise, exact and certain" (Johnston, 1994, p.43), such an approach is not deemed suitable to my study. This is because I take the fundamental view that community empowerment, the pivotal concept of my research, cannot be measured or quantified (Rappaport, 1997; Rissel, 1994). This is inherently related to my understanding of empowerment, as discussed at the close of Chapter 3, as open to interpretation and thus only accessible through the meanings people apply within particular social contexts. My study therefore, is rooted rather in a subjectivist epistemology which focuses on the meaning people give to their environment. The nature of reality therefore is understood as subjective and multiple as seen by the participants in the study (Creswell, 1998).

At an abstract level the view of the world I bring to this thesis and the way I proceed with the research can be seen to be rooted in humanism and structuralism. Humanism, focuses on the "individual as a thinking being, as a human, rather than as a dehumanized responder to stimuli," (Johnston, 1994, p.55) and views that "human values have their source in experience and culture" (Oulasvista, 2004, p.247). Driven by the literature review conducted in the preceding chapter and recognising the "need to delve beneath surface appearances" (Johnston, 1994, p.97), I also draw on structuralism, which understands that "explanations for observed phenomena must be sought in general structures which underpin all phenomena" (Johnston, 1994, p.97). Giddens' theory of structuration is also of relevance (Giddens, 1979; 1984) to my view of empowerment as potentially both liberatory and manipulatory (Forrest, 2000). Structure, in Giddens' view is not purely constraining, as it is featured in Marxism, but is described as "simultaneously both constraining and enabling, whilst at the same time being reproduced and transformed by individuals" (Johnston, 1994, p.114).

Given that the study deals with technology and social change, it is also important for me to set out my philosophical underpinnings within this area. Fundamentally, in common with the well known social media researcher, danah boyd, I do not see technology as determinate of social outcomes. I thus reject technological determinism as a "reductionist philosophy which fails to account for the complex way in which technology and society interact" (boyd, 2008, p.11). Philosophically, I locate myself primarily within the field of Science and Technology Studies which is critical of technological determinism (Winner, 1993; Bijker et al., 1987; Bijker & Law, 1992; Mackenzie & Wajcman, 1999) and adopts the overarching theory of the social construction of technology or social shaping perspective (Pinch & Bijker, 1984; Winner, 1993; Russell & Williams, 2002). In its rejection of technological determinism this perspective on technology has fundamentally sought to demystify technology, drawing attention to the idea that the nature of technology does not determine social effects and that the technology should not be treated as a black box of inputs and outputs (Winner, 1993; Russell & Williams, 2002). Thus emphasis is placed on the ways in which technology is socially produced drawing attention to economic, political and cultural structures and dynamics (Williams & Edge, 1996). Community informatics adopts, for example, a social constructivist perspective defining the ambiguous relationship between ICT and community development as shaped "through a complex interaction between social, political and commercial factors which can and do produce a mixture of intended and unintended outcomes" (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p.36).

The social constructivist perspective has been critiqued, however, for focusing on explaining technological development rather than the consequences and meanings for society which limits a more critical stance (Winner, 1993). Social constructivists also tend to remain neutral regarding "ultimate good or ill" attached to technological arrangements (Winner, 1993; p.372). I seek to move beyond this neutral stance by bringing a critical lens to the study and seek to understand consequences of integrating technologies for social change. I also seek to move beyond social determinism and offer a more holistic account of the relationship between technology and change. In line with Schäfer's (2011) view that; "technology cannot be perceived as being either neutral or socially and culturally determining with regard to its use and effects" (Schäfer, 2011, p.15), I have thus been drawn to the theory of the co-construction of users and technologies (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2005).

Domestication is viewed as a particularly useful theoretical lens within the research which has been applied by scholars to aid understanding of ICTs and the way they are experienced in everyday life, (Silverstone et al., 1992; Silverstone, 1996; Silverstone & Haddon, 1996; Haddon, 2006). The concept moves beyond looking at adoption and use of ICTs to the process of "embedding a technology in practice, getting it to work adequately, making it useable, making sense of it and evaluating it" (Russell & Williams, 2002, p. 70). In looking beyond adoption and use, domestication asks, "what the technologies and services mean to people, how they experience them and the role that these technologies can come to play in their lives" (Haddon, 2006, p.195) and as such represent an extension of the social shaping perspective (Haddon, 2006; Baym, 2010).

Domestication sees technology and society as shapers of the consequences of ICT adoption and use, but also delves into the processes which shape such consequences (Baym, 2010). The process of domestication can be seen to play out at individual, local and societal levels, as people figure out the place of technologies within their lives and "more importantly" Baym (2010) argues, "who gets to use them for what" (Baym, 2010, p.45). Community empowerment as has been identified, (3.5.1) can be understood as a social process of change and thus domestication presents a particularly applicable view of technology and social change within the study. While, as the name suggests, domestication studies have traditionally been situated within the context of the home, scholars have effectively argued the case for looking beyond the home to the local contexts within which people experience ICTs because such experiences also shape whether people find a place for new technologies within their lives (Haddon, 2002). The Internet has also sparked studies which began to focus on wider social networks and the 'portable' nature of new technologies. In particular mobile phones have also encouraged scholars to look at how, and argue for, the use of the domestication framework beyond the context of the home (Haddon, 2003; Ward, 2005; Buré, 2006). Given my research focus, I am interested in domestication and its application beyond the home and it is useful to identify that:

> In the broader understanding, domestication has to do with how individual users, as well as collectives, negotiate the values and symbols of the technology while integrating it into the cultural setting...Through domestication, technology changes as well as the user and, in the next step, the culture (Laegran, 2005, p.82).

In keeping with this more abstract level, the study draws on interpretive and critical paradigms of research. My view of empowerment immediately and inevitably drew me to the

interpretive research paradigm which holds that access to reality is only through social constructions and the emphasis is on understanding a phenomenon through the meanings people assign them (Myers, 2003). At the close of Chapter 3 I justified my desire to bring a critical lens to the research and engage with notions of power and disempowerment within the study. My research thus also draws on the critical research paradigm which is concerned with uncovering and eliminating processes that cause domination and alienation within society (Myers, 2003). In a similar manner to Walsham (2005), the fusion of an interpretive and critical lens is rooted in my desire to not only understand human interpretations, but also to consider and make visible power relations. As well as examining "what is right with the world and how to make things work in the short term", such an approach to research also seeks to illuminate "what is wrong with the world" (Walsham, 2005, p.112-113).

4.3 Research Methodology

The overall approach to my thesis is qualitative in nature and qualitative research has been defined as follows:

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore social or human problems. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p.15).

The qualitative approach is guided by the preceding discussion, including my view of empowerment and the nature of the relationship between technology and social change. Complexity and holism can thus be seen to be key characteristics of my research. Complexity is inherent within the social shaping perspective, for example, which views that "technology and social arrangements develop together as part of the same process, and that technological entities are always combinations of social and technical elements" (Russell & Williams, 2002, p.51) and further that, "change emerges through an interaction and weaving together of material and non material elements" (Sorensen & Williams, 2002, p.10). The idea of opening up the 'black box' perspective of inputs and outputs also points to a goal of gaining "more detailed descriptions and explanations of the dynamics of technical change" Winner, 1993, p.365). Fundamentally, qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.5). Kaplan & Maxwell, (2005, p.30), also

writing within the field of information systems further describe qualitative research in terms of the goal of such research:

> The goal of qualitative research is understanding issues or particular situations by investigating the perspectives and behaviour of the people in these situations and the context within which they act.

Qualitative research is also particularly suited to research that seeks to delve into complexities and processes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and thus for the study of phenomena that "are not easily partitioned into discrete entities" and for those "who wish to explore the dynamics of a process" (Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005, p.31). In addition qualitative research is useful for questions of "how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.13).

Studies within the field of Science and Technology Studies have also been traditionally concerned with challenging dominant macro scale technocratic research around ICTs and society (Lievrouw, 2004). New media research, influenced by this perspective and seeking to understand technology in relation to the "contexts of everyday life", has therefore tended to be characterised by "small-scale descriptive, qualitative studies" (Lievrouw, 2004, p.13). Following in the footsteps of an array of scholars, my study is principally a small scale qualitative study which will enable me to conduct a rich, descriptive, detailed and critical study of the research area. Lievrouw (2004), drawing on Mansell's (2004) warning, has however suggested that:

> ...the current emphasis on small-scale, descriptive, qualitative studies may obscure larger-scale social, political, and economic developments, technological changes, and structures of power that do in fact constrain (if not determine) how ICTs are designed and used (Lievrouw, 2004, p.13).

While it is has been identified that small scale studies "do not articulate well with these larger scale problems" (Lievrouw, 2004, p.14), I feel that a small scale study situated within a large scale context of urban regeneration and digital inclusion provides me with the opportunity to also engage with structures of power, through an inventive approach to my methodology and methods as will unfold. Furthermore, Southern (2002, p.699), who has problematised the relationship between ICT and urban regeneration in relation to community benefit has suggested it "may be that the extent to which value is to be drawn from ICT use requires more qualitative investigation." Mehra et al., (2004) also argue that in order for research within the digital divide arena to contribute to a social change agenda for those who lack

power and are marginalised in society, a more situated approach is required to aid understanding of "the scruffy realities of marginalisation in which Internet use is embedded" (Mehra et al., 2004, p.782). They further suggest that enhancing understanding and developing the relationship between Internet and empowerment requires specifically "closer examination of the practices, system of relations and context of particular minority and marginalized users in order to figure out what is meaningful to them..." (Mehra et al., 2004, p.799). This argument has particular resonance with my work given its meaningful use dimension and empowerment focus.

In addition, scholars with an interest in the relationship between ICTs, community and urban life have called for a move beyond the 'dazzle' of the Internet (Haythornwaite & Wellman, 2002; Graham, 2004) suggesting that:

> ...social research must move beyond generalised and deterministic discourses about the 'impacts' of 'cyberspace' on society to look in rich empirical detail at the complex ways in which new media technologies are being used in 'real' ways in 'real' places (Graham, 2004, p.18).

Such an approach demands a qualitative methodology and epitomises the nature of my research.

Denzin & Lincoln (1998, p.17) point out that the key challenge of qualitative research is that it "does not have any firm guidelines or specific procedures." In a similar manner to the multiplicity of research paradigms of inquiry there are an array of research methodologies and methods available to the qualitative researcher. My research takes the form of a qualitative case study incorporating elements of phenomenology and ethnography to provide a more holistic picture of the research topic. The use of a variety of methodologies and thus methods can be described as the employment of triangulation (Denzin, 1970) which aims to add to the trustworthiness of the research and the development of a holistic picture of the phenomenon of study.

4.3.1 My Overarching Case study Research Approach

The 'case' is viewed by some as an object of study (Stake, 1995) and by others as a methodological approach (Merriam, 1988). This section discusses the case as a methodology. The qualitative case study approach presents the opportunity to explore a phenomenon within its social context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is particularly suited to my desire to gain a holistic

and in-depth view of the phenomenon of study (Faegin et al., 1991) and enables the "multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.544). "At a minimum" for example, Hakim (2000, p.59) identifies that "a case study can provide a richly detailed 'portrait' of particular social phenomena" and thus can also "provide a more richly detailed and precise account of the processes at work" (Hakim, 2000, p.60). It has been argued that empowerment cannot be measured but can only be understood within unique settings on a case by case basis (Rappaport, 1987; Rissel, 1994; Page & Czuba, 1999) and this perspective forms the fundamental rationale for my case study approach. The case is also particularly suited to a domestication approach to the understanding of the relationship between technology and social change.

The choice of my case study was opportunistic as through Salford University I became aware of a Community Reporter Programme being delivered through a not for profit social enterprise and charity called Manchester Community Information Network (MCIN), in the local area. The Community Reporter Programme was being run by People's Voice Media, (PVM) an integral part of MCIN. MCIN, during the course of my research rebranded as People's Voice Media. The extract below from various relevant documents serves to illustrate just how ideal the Community Reporter Programme and the surrounding context of MCIN and PVM are for my research ambitions, with particular regard to an evident central empowerment ethos, an emphasis on voice and a focus on social media:

> MCIN is a not for profit social enterprise and charity that increases social inclusion through ICT (MCIN, 2008)

> People's Voice Media supports communities by developing, marketing and distributing community stories, news and views through the use of social media, (MCIN, 2008)

> The primary aim of the Community Reporters' Programme is to give participants a voice and increase their confidence. Everyone has something to say and stories to tell about their local area and their lives. MCIN's Community Reporters' Programme allows people to express themselves and tell these stories online, using MCIN's network of 12 community websites to distribute their content. Reporters may use social media tools such as blogs, podcasts and wikis to produce content using mobiles, home video cameras and web cams as well as produce local community newspapers (Copitch, 2008).

> PVM aims to become a social enterprise working with local communities, which uses social media and other communication tools to empower

individuals and communities. PVM is all about participation and empowerment which has always been a core objective for MCIN. At the centre of MCIN is our Community Reporters training programmes. These help provide people with the skills to communicate what's going on where they live and also to improve their own social, educational and work opportunities (Leach in MCIN, 2008).

I was immediately excited at the idea of basing my study around this programme and was delighted when I managed to set up a meeting with the Chief Executive of PVM. During this initial meeting I found out that the Community Reporter Programme was operating in two urban regeneration areas, defined by the government's New Deal for Communities programme, in Salford and Manchester (4.4.1, Appendix D). The scene was thus set for a case study of the Community Reporter Programme within the desired context of urban regeneration.

My approach takes the form of a single exploratory case study underscored by an interpretive and critical perspective. Exploratory case studies allow for the investigation of causal links (Yin, 2003). The single case study approach is also of value in 'revelatory' cases that is, cases that may not previously have been accessible (Faegin et al., 1991). The Community Reporter Programme was seen as presenting an innovative and novel approach to digital inclusion and thus may be seen as a revelatory case study. My case study was thus bounded by the Community Reporter Programme as it operates in two urban regeneration areas. Through gaining access to this programme I was able to route my key research questions through an exploration of the value of the Community Reporter Programme with regards to community empowerment and regeneration. Fundamentally, the case study approach enables me to explore the potential of the relationship between social media and community empowerment within a specific contextual lens and to conduct the exploration rigorously through a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

4.3.1.1 Integrating Phenomenology and Ethnography

Within my overall case study approach to the Community Reporter Programme I also integrated aspects of the methodologies of phenomenology and ethnography. Qualitative research is fundamentally grounded in views and experiences of research participants and thus phenomenology is a useful methodology to incorporate. Phenomenologists make a decision before undertaking a study to examine the meaning of experiences, seeking to

understand the essence or structure of the experience. I very much wanted to understand and articulate what taking part in the Community Reporter Programme might mean for participants, thus from the outset, in line with a phenomenological methodology, I wanted to "determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience" and access those people who would be willing and "able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, 1994, p.13). This would help me ensure that my findings would be effectively grounded in the views and experiences of people taking part in the Community Reporter Programme.

Ethnography is rooted in the research tradition of anthropology and seeks to understand the phenomena of study within its cultural and social context and thus within its natural setting (Walsham, 1995; Myers, 2004). The usual approach of an ethnographic research project is for the researcher to immerse themselves in the lives of the people that form the focus of the study (Lewis, 2003; Myers, 2004) and generally therefore to spend large quantities of time within the research field (Myers, 2004). Given that ethnography often "involves immersion in a culture over a period of years, based on learning the language and participating in social events with them" (Silverman, 1993, p.32), I cannot say that I employed ethnography in its fullest and immersive sense. However, anthropologists argue that "if one is really to understand a group of people, one must engage in an extended period of observation" (Silver, 1993, p.31). I came to the conclusion early on in the research process that if I was to fully understand my complex phenomenon of study, I would need to immerse myself in the experience of taking part in the Community Reporter Programme. Thus, for a period of some nine months between April 2009 until the end of December 2009, I began immersing myself in the experience of being a community reporter through; attending 'drop in' sessions, training sessions and courses, events, focus groups, meetings, going out on 'community reporter' assignments, (primarily with one of the community reporters who was happy to work with me) and working with community reporters to create, edit and share content via community sites. Again, such an approach was designed to gain an in-depth holistic picture of the phenomenon and was viewed as a useful way to understand the complexities of the phenomenon. Geertz (1973, p.9) provides a useful account of the kind of data which emerges from such an anthropological approach, identifying that "data" in this context "are really our own constructions of other people's construction of what they and their compatriots are up to."

Ethnographic approaches to technology have been identified as valuable for the exploration of technologies which have become largely invisible through domestication (Hine, 2003, Raynes-Goldie, 2012). boyd's (2008) thesis which drew on the ethnographic methodology made the distinction between ethnographies of users and ethnographies of systems. My approach may be understood as a system based ethnography being interested in exploring as many aspects of the Community Reporter Programme and therefore shapers of the community reporter experience as possible. Overall case studies are characterised by the collection of use of a range of data sources or empirical materials thus seeking to enhance the credibility of the data derived (Yin, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008). In the next section I now explore the primary methods of data collection which characterise my research approach.

4.4 Approach to Data Collection

Before exploring the key methods employed for data collection, I will illustrate the complex organisational context within which my case study of the Community Reporter Programme is situated.

4.4.1 The Organisational Context of Data Collection

While PVM forms the principal organisational context for my study, the roots of the organisation lie firmly within MCIN. Given that I seek to explore the Community Reporter Programme within the context of its operation in two urban regeneration areas my research is inevitably situated within the organisational and thus funding context of regeneration in these two areas. Table 4.1 foregrounds this context by exploring the key role of these organisations with regards to regeneration in the area and the Community Reporter Programme, together with the basic structure, role of and number of organisational representatives who have featured as research participants in this study. Further information relating to the evolution of PVM is provided in Chapter 5 (section 5.1), and information about the background of MCIN, PVM and the regeneration and ICT context of the areas is provided in Appendix D. As Table 4.1 displays, government regeneration programmes and specifically the government's New Deal for Communities initiative in the two areas provide the key funding stream for the Community Reporter Programme and the associated Social Media Centres. A further level of contextual organisational complexity lies in the fact that PVM works with other local organisations that appropriate the Community Reporter Programme to achieve their project goals, and some community reporters get involved with the programme through these

additional organisational frames. These organisations and the further eight representative research participants are introduced and detailed in Chapter 5, Figure 5.1.

Table 4.1: Organisational Context of the Case Study of the
Community Reporter Programme

Organisation	Role within the key regeneration areas and in relation to the Community Reporter Programme	Structure/ Organisational representatives featured in the study, (role and number)
Manchester Community Information Network (MCIN), (a not for profit social enterprise and charity-no longer in existence).	Increasing social inclusion through the use of ICT (since 1993) with a focus on enabling communities across Manchester to create their own community content in the form of community portals / websites. MCIN was thus managing a distribution network of 12 community websites in 2008 (Copitch, 2008). Part of a story of the Greater Manchester strategic level vision of regeneration through ICT and associated community-based access initiatives following the impact of the decline of manufacturing and in particular textile industries (Appendix D). MCIN was identified as arising from the Manchester "tradition that emphasised locality, social inclusion and community empowerment" (Leach & Copitch, 2005, p. 9).	MCIN rebranded as PVM in 2009, which has continued to be headed by the Chief Executive who has been involved in developing community-based ICT initiatives since the launch of the very first public access initiatives in Manchester (Leach & Copitch, 2005, Appendix D).
People's Voice Media, PVM (Community Development Organisation - emerged through MCIN and rebranded as a response to the changing digital media environment, developing an emphasis on social media (MCIN, 2008).	Using social media to empower communities and give them a voice. Running a **Community Reporter Programme, s**etting up and running **Social Media Centres,** offering ICT/social media training and qualifications and support for community reporter content via 'drop-in' sessions. Undertaking **outreach work within the local community**. Maintaining and developing **local distribution channels** for local community content: BoftheBlog in East Manchester and Chalktalk, later re-launched as East Salford Direct in Salford. Establishing **working relationships** with local organisations and groups to help them develop content. **Introducing an Education model (**Appendix, F**),** establishing an Employment Agency and working with the BBC to deliver a short course: 'An Introduction to Journalism'.	**Chief Executive** **PVM Community Team:** focused on the implementation of the Community Reporter Progamme and Community Outreach work. **Salford**: Community Media Producers (2 full-time) and volunteer staff supporting the Community Reporter Programme (2 part-time). **Manchester**: Community Media Producers (3) and Content Manager (1), all full-time. 1 ex part-time member of staff who worked as a Community Media Producer. Note that all full time staff also worked across both regeneration areas and within both Social Media Centres during the course of the research. One member of staff was also working on expanding community reporter networks throughout the North West.

Organisation	Role within the key regeneration areas and in relation to the Community Reporter Programme	Structure/ Organisational representatives featured in the study, (role and number)
Charlestown / Lower Kersal Partnership (Local Regeneration partnership for Charlestown and Lower Kersal New Deal for Communities).	In 2001 the Charlestown and Lower Kersal area of Salford, defined as one of England's most deprived neighbourhoods, was awarded £53 million under government's **New Deal for Communities programme** (section 2.3.1) for the delivery of improvements over a ten year period through a partnership approach to regeneration. The programme presents the key funding stream for the Community Reporter Programme and provided funding for the development and operation of the Social Media Centre in Salford, and the Innovation forum within which it is housed (Appendix C and D).	The partnership was in the form of a coalition between the public, private and voluntary and community sector organisation. The 10 year programme came to an end in 2011. Anonymous public sector regeneration officials (1).
Beacons for a Brighter Future which was integrated within **New East Manchester** in 2007. (Local regeneration partnership for East Manchester New Deal for Communities which merged in 2007 with a larger regeneration company).	Under the **New Deal for Communities Programme** the Beswick, Clayton and Openshaw area in East Manchester, similarly defined as one of England's most deprived neighbourhoods, received £77million when combined with funding from a previous regeneration programme. The regeneration area was also targeted by the government's Wired Up Communities Initiative, leading to 'Eastserve' the management of the community website being taken up by MCIN (2.4.2, Appendix D) The programme has similarly provided the key funding stream for the Community Reporter Programme and the Social Media Centre in East Manchester, contributing to the running and management costs of The Grange Community Resource Centre in which it is based (Appendix C & D).	The partnership approach was similarly between the public, private, community and voluntary sector. The 10 year programme came to an end in 2010. Anonymous public sector regeneration officials (2).

4.4.2 Key Research Methods

In keeping with the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of my research, the key research methods used were one-to-one, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The primary data collected was thus recordings of interviews and field notes. Appendix A displays the steps within the research process which primarily took place over a period of one year, however some interviews took place after this one year period. As I

progressed along the research journey of participant observation, research participants pointed me in the direction of content produced as part of the Community Reporter Programme which I accessed via community reporter sites and YouTube. Thus I began collecting community reporter content which was predominately in the form of videos. I also attempted to build up a picture of, and record the characteristics of the places and spaces of community reporting by taking photographs of the local area and of some of the community reporter settings, in particular the social media centres. I also took screen captures of the key community reporter websites and collected PVM and Community Reporter Programme publicity material, leaflets, press releases, newsletters and e-mails.

As mentioned above, the key research methods utilised within this study are semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I now discuss these methods and include a very short section on focus groups because I have drawn on data from PVM organised focus groups. I also conducted one interview involving three people which could loosely be identified with the focus group method.

4.4.2.1 Semi-Structured One-to-One Interviews

A series of fifty interviews, as detailed in Appendix A, were conducted with an array of people and organisations associated with developing, implementing, appropriating, supporting or participating in the Community Reporter Programme and its various facets. Various adapted interview schedules according to the role in relation to the Community Reporter Programme can be viewed in Appendix B. Opportunistic interviews were also conducted with individuals whom it was felt would shed valuable light on the subject as directed to by other research participants. Key examples are the editor of a community magazine considered as the voice of regeneration, the Salford Star, in one of the regeneration areas and an ex-community reporter representing a regeneration area in Manchester but outside of the areas of focus. Two community activists using the Social Media Centre in Salford to develop their work, also form part of this opportunistic sample. Thus the research participants had varying roles within the areas and differing relationships with PVM and the Community Reporter Programme. Interviews with PVM staff, local regeneration partnership officials and organisations which have adapted and appropriated the Community Reporter Programme approach, totalling eighteen in number (Appendix A, section 4.4.1) can be seen as background contextual interviews to develop perceptions of the role and value of the

programme at varying levels and from varying perspectives. While some interviews were conducted with four young community reporters, the key twenty-eight interviews in which my analysis is grounded are those with adult community representative participants in relation to their perspectives on the value and role of the Community Reporter Programme, including community empowerment and regeneration. All other interviews were part of the sense making process of the Community Reporter Programme and its relationship to regeneration locally.

Thus the study primarily took a purposeful sampling approach, typical of qualitative research seeking to access individuals, groups and organisations who would shed light on my key research questions. Within this approach "particular settings, persons or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1997, p 87). Opportunistic sampling has also been integrated within the study involving, in essence, following new leads of relevance to the site of investigation (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This may seem like a large number of interviews for a qualitative research project but the aim was not to quantify or count numbers of people relating to various themes, but rather to be able to reflect the diversity of the programme and its participants effectively and try to ensure that diverse voices would be reflected within the findings. The number of participants is thus driven by the interpretive nature of community empowerment and has followed the principle of saturation, whereby I stopped collecting data when I felt that no new light was likely to be shed on the subject (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mason, 2010).

The identity of community reporter participants is reflective of my desire to capture as wide a range of perspectives as possible among the varying types of people engaging with the programme without imposing any specific criteria. As a result community reporters interviewed range between the ages of nine to eighty-three year olds, the majority however are adults in the thirty-something to eighty-something age bracket and include a mix of male and female participants. The core 'community reporter' research participants within the East Manchester regeneration area totalled nine people of which three were female. In Salford community reporter participants totalled twelve of which eight were male. With regards to ethnicity the resulting sample is however quite limited as the overwhelming majority of participants were white British with the exception of one female who was seeking asylum from Zimbabwe, one male Eastern European participant and one female black British

participant. In Salford I also interviewed two volunteers supporting the programme and two community activists who were engaging with elements of the Community Reporter Programme.

Research participants were mainly accessed through PVM staff, however I also accessed participants through; attending the 'drop ins' at the Salford social media centre, attending community reporter events and the focus groups with community reporters and asking research participants for advice on who might be willing to talk to me (sometime this information was directly volunteered). Towards the beginning of my research in the field, I had also noticed that I only seemed to be accessing male participants and subsequently subscribed to a community reporter e-mailing system to post a request for female participants. This actually produced no results and I eventually began to access more female participants the more I 'hung around' the general environments and social contexts which make up the community reporter world. I had similarly produced a poster requesting research participants which I placed in the two social media centres associated with the programme and its operation within the two regeneration areas of study, to which I had no response, thus direct face to face requests seemed to be the key effective way to access participants.

Having provided a background to my research participants and modes of access I now proceed with an explanation of the choice of method and a more in-depth explanation of the process. Interviewing has been defined as "one of the most common and most powerful ways to use to try to understand our fellow human beings" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.47) and they tend to characterise interpretive studies because they represent "a key way of accessing the interpretations of informants" (Walsham, 2006, p.32). I adopted a semi-structured in-depth approach to interviewing because such an approach facilitates the capacity for participants to share their own experiences and additionally makes it possible for the research to explore the meanings associated with such experiences (Mishler 1986; Kazmer & Boi, 2008). Semi-structured interviews are utilised to "elicit detailed, in-depth accounts of the interviewee's experiences and perspectives on specific issues, situations, or events" (Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005, p.32). A semi-structured approach also allows for the maintenance of control over the interview while incorporating the ability to probe and also left room for flexibility in terms of the ordering of the questions. In addition, semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity for research participants to bring in new themes and issues and I always asked at the close of interview if they had any further insights or issues which they

felt they wanted to raise. The interview schedule was often adapted as the interviews progressed. The interview schedule was designed to take approximately an hour but some were much longer and some much shorter than this. The schedule did include some brief fact-based questions to gain an understanding of how participants were integrating the Community Reporter Programme and social media more generally within their lives with particular regards to content creation and sharing and the kinds of support needs for such integration. Many of the research questions were however designed to be open-ended questions so as not to "constrain the respondent's beliefs or opinions to predetermined categories" (Wilson, 1996, p.101). There are of course disadvantages to open-ended questions. In particular, the interviewer "has to be relied upon to extract the relevant material from what may be a long response and to discard the irrelevant" (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006, p. 102). However, it is a really valuable way to capture the reality of lived experience of being a community reporter and what that experience, and thus social media, has come to mean within the lives and communities of the research participants. Interview schedules were adapted in relation to the research participant and their relationship to the programme and were also adapted during the course of the research in accordance with the themes emerging. Examples of the interview schedules are provided in Appendix B.

Interviews with community reporters, volunteers and community activists were primarily conducted in the physical location of access to technologies of community reporting including the Social Media Centres in Salford and Manchester, unless participants opted for a community location identified as being of greater convenience. All the interviews with staff took place within the two social media centre settings. Conducting interviews within the research participants' environmental setting was seen as a key way of further deepening understanding of the cultural and social context of community reporting, and thus the community settings within which technology was being integrated and is in tune with a qualitative and ethnographic approach.

I ensured that I explained the purpose of the research clearly to the research participants before proceeding with the interview providing them with a clear and concise A4 information sheet (Appendix B). I also made sure that I asked participants to sign a consent form which offered them the opportunity to remain anonymous and the opportunity for the interview not to be tape recorded (Appendix B). The interviews were conducted utilising as naturalistic an approach as possible which "presumes that reality exists in textured and dynamic detail in the

'natural' environment of the social world" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p.19). The naturalistic approach can be further described as one in which the "researcher strives to richly and accurately describe these realities without unduly disrupting-thus distorting-these worlds in the process" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Adler and Adler, 1994; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p.19). The decision was also guided by the desire to reduce the possible feeling of being a 'research subject' which can "change the subject's expression of beliefs and attitudes, not to mention behaviour, in a way that can produce results which are artificial and only of poor application to the natural world of human interaction" (Wilson, 1996, p.95). Given that in the social setting of community reporting everyone was known on a first name basis, I use first names to quote community level participants when presenting my data analysis in the chapters which follow. In the case of participants with the same name I simply use the first initial of their surname to distinguish between them.

4.4.2.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation involves the researcher becoming a member or temporary member of a group or organisation over a period of time (Walsham, 1995, p.77). In essence I became a member of the Community Reporter Programme when I participated in a community reporter course. Some three years later I could still be a community reporter in that I could carry on volunteering to go out on community reporter assignments, but I am no longer active. However, I continue to receive updates and newsletters from PVM via e-mail. As a participant observer and active researcher however, I was a community reporter for seven months. "Going into a social situation and looking" Denzin & Lincoln identify (2003, p.48) is an "important way of gathering materials about the social world." From the very beginning it was my contention that in order to grapple with my key research question I had to enter the social world of community reporting and not just observe it but get as involved as possible. My role as a participant observer resembles closely what Agar (1986) has referred to as a 'learning role' as I felt I had to learn about the practice of community reporting in order to guide my analysis. For example, Agar (1986) suggests that when the researcher adopts a learning role the questions are less about hypothesis testing and measurements and more about grappling with questions such as "Who are the people and what are they doing?" and "What is going on here?" (Agar, 1986, p.12). Characteristic of this learning role approach to research, the best way to understand the social world, and in this case the social world of community reporting, and what it might mean for communities, was seen as "encountering it firsthand" in order to

make some sense of a complex practice (Agar, 1986, p.12). Making notes was part of this observational work, which I conducted comprehensively whilst observing the social world of community reporting in a variety of ways. However, fundamentally the process was more about learning in order to appreciate the kinds of socio-technical settings which characterise community reporting, what community reporting involves and what the experience feels like. The latter provided me with a more insightful appreciation of community reporter perspectives and views.

4.4.2.3 Focus Groups

I was also invited to attend two focus groups conducted in Salford and Manchester with community reporters organised by PVM. The focus groups were principally designed to explore participant perceptions of how the PVM managed community sites for community reporter content sharing could be improved. This was driven by the fact that one member of staff had been given the task of redesigning these sites which at the time totalled thirteen community websites. However, the conversations focused around the two websites relevant to the regeneration areas under investigation. I thus attended both focus groups and took along consent forms and information sheets. The focus groups did provide me with some very useful insights and I was granted permission to tape record the discussion and invited to ask questions at the end, however this mainly formed part of my participant observation approach. I also accessed new research participants and was able to view how this new material was fitting in with my interview data

In one case, I was invited by a member of PVM staff to meet community reporters as a group within the Victoria House framing of community reporting (Figure 5.1; Appendix C) and I conducted a mini focus group with two community reporters and one member of staff contributing to the ensuing discussion. The conversation was free flowing and the participants seemed to relish the opportunity to talk through and reflect on their experiences of the programme which formed the primary nature of the discussion. Focus groups are often described as the middle ground between in-depth interviews and participant observation (Morgan, 1997) and have been said to "reduce the distance between the researcher and the researched" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.57) and allow for "multivocality of the participants" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.57). This aspect of my research enabled me also to build up a rapport with the research participants which I later followed up with more in-depth interviews

and I was also able to access and integrate fresh perspectives beyond the key research participant pool.

4.5. My Approach to Data Analysis

My overall approach to data analysis can be described as rooted in hermeneutics which presents the philosophical underpinning of interpretivism (Myers, 2004). Such an approach is primarily concerned with making sense of text-based data and thus the question becomes "what is the meaning of this text?" (Radnitzky, 1970, p.20; Myers, 2004). Hermeneutics has been described as a circular process involving uncovering various layers of meaning and moving between whole and part meanings and back again (Myers, 2004). In information systems, for example, Myers identifies that "the aim of the hermeneutic analysis becomes one of trying to make sense of the whole, and the relationship between people, the organisation and the information technology" (Myers, 2004). As part of this sense making process I have principally adopted a thematic analysis approach, rooted in searching for all possible meanings attuned additionally to phenomenology (Creswell, 1998; Boyatzis, 1998). Such an approach therefore looks for themes or patterns in the data which are then coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Principally I took an inductive approach in that themes mainly emerged through the data and thus can be said to bear some similarities to grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All interview transcripts and focus group transcripts were coded by the researcher, through the marking of transcripts and producing rough 'visual' representations of the links between data according to research questions and themes emerging and then manually coded using NVivo software. NVivo was used as a storage and organisational tool rather than as a coding tool in itself.

4.5.1 The Role of Theory in Data Collection and Analysis

Eisenhardt (1989) identifies the varying roles of theory in research, not only as a guide to research design and data collection and as a product, but also as part of the iterative process of data collection and analysis. I discuss theory here in relation to how it acts as a guide to data collection and as part of the iterative process of data collection and analysis. My understanding of empowerment, power, disempowerment and community empowerment have of course influenced data collection and analysis. Domestication also orientated my work in terms of data collection and analysis around technology and social change and I drew

on this frame of thinking more and more during the analysis. As I became increasingly familiar with my data, I began to relate it to relevant theories and concepts that had emerged through my literature review, and additionally to theories which came to light through further reading during the course of the research that I deemed useful in both analysing and making sense of my data. I further explain this somewhat complex iterative process within the remainder of this section.

I have outlined my understanding of empowerment as rooted in individual interpretations and of community empowerment as social process of change. I approached my analysis from an understanding of community empowerment as an outcome embedded in a social process of change and rooted in the interpretations of those experiencing the social phenomenon of investigation. As previously identified I also entered the field with the understanding that empowerment can only be understood through the exploration of its social context. I also approached the research and thus the data analysis with the knowledge that power, control and disempowerment are central to understanding what it can mean to be empowered.

Fundamentally, my approach to and analysis of empowerment or what it might mean to be empowered is rooted in the meanings assigned by the research participants, and thus quite simply understood as, "a positive change in people's lives-as they themselves define such change" (Parks, 2005, p.3). During the data collection and analysis within this frame it emerged that regeneration would be more effectively seen as part of the social context and process rather than an outcome of the process. This opened up issues of power and control within this particular arena. Given that empowerment is concerned with those who may be seen to be disempowered and the regeneration and therefore digital inclusion context of my study, I also brought a lens of social exclusion to the data in terms of illuminating the voices of the people within the study whose stories had the most to say regarding value within this arena. As the study progressed I also found Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943) useful in illuminating perceptions of empowerment value at the individual level.

I have also drawn on Lukes' (1977) theory of power with particular regard to the arena of voice. Lukes suggests that absence of conflict does not negate the possibility of manipulation and further that:

> ...is not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions,

> cognitions and preferences in such a way as they accept their role in an existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial? (Lukes, 1977, p.24).

The latter he argues "may not express or even be conscious of their interests" (Lukes, 1977, p.25). This informed my thinking around what 'invisible' forces of power may lay behind what was being voiced and indeed not being voiced within this specific social context, which thus influenced both data collection and analysis.

In attempting to understand how individual perceptions of change and value relate to the 'whole' social process in relation to the question of what constitutes meaningful participation or "what it can mean to be empowered by technology" (Haddon, 2006, p.198), I homed in on specific aspects of domestication and in particular, the relationship between domestication strategies and participation. Applying a framework of domestication strategies to my data was also useful in thinking about arenas of control, power dynamics and politics of participation, particularly within the arena of voice. Viewing data through the window of domestication also brought to light the value of the sociologist Erving Goffman's (1974) theory of framing for illuminating my findings with regard to meaningful participation. In addition, I found Kurtz's (2009) categorisation of varying aspects of identity useful in thinking about aspects of identity beyond demographics, which served to reinforce the value of interpretive framing as a way of viewing my data.

As I progressed with my analysis and attempted to make greater sense of the role played by technology amidst the complex interweave of factors shaping value and to apply a critical lens to the data, I turned to the field of discourse surrounding participatory culture. I began to see the notion of 'co-creative media' proposed by scholars working within the arena of the creative industries as also useful, with particular regard to my critique of the assumptions surrounding social media technologies. Spurgeon et al., (2009) propose the concept of co-creative media as a way to understand and describe "the ways in which participatory media are facilitated by people, organizations and technology" offering thus "a corrective alternative to the tsunami of hype about DIY culture and democratization" (Spurgeon, et al., 2009, p. 284). I have found co-creative media a useful way to think about the analysis of my data and thus presentation of my findings. The conceptual lens of co-creative media lens opens up a view of social media as 'participatory media' thus involving a "very broad range of media

practices, in which media consumers can also become producers" (Spurgeon et al., 2009, p. 276). Seeing the Community Reporter Programme as a co-created media practice has been very useful in analysing and making sense of my data and the potential role of technology within such a social practice in social change. The idea of co-creative media also fits in well with the idea of empowerment as a process which can be likened to a "path or a journey" and which occurs in relationships, as highlighted at the close of Chapter 3. Petersen (2008) also proposes a relational view of the technologies associated with the era of social media and as the study progressed this shaped the approach to the analysis of my data and thus the presentation of my findings. Petersen, (2008) also suggests that the differential effects within the realm of social media may be understood by considering that value and significance emerges from the relational characteristics of these technologies or "ensemble of technologies" (Petersen, 2009, sic) and goes on to explain:

> One of the most interesting, inspiring and productive aspects of Web 2.0, and at the same time one of the problematic ones when considered critically, is the relational character of these technologies. Relational thinking entails viewing the world as relations instead of objects and subjects. Usually we would ascribe significance or value to objects and subjects as if it came from within. It is evident, when looking at how Web 2.0 creates significance for its users, that it is the relations between the different elements that create significance and value. Why is this important? Because it explains why a specific type of software and practices related to it can be participatory, exploitative and create pleasure for its users at the same time (Petersen, 2009, sic).

Joshua Meyrowitz's (1985) use of situationist theory to explain how social change relates to changing media forms (Marwick & boyd, 2011) has also been useful in exploring the role of technology within the particular social practice of study. When thinking about voice and empowerment I have also drawn on theories of voice when applied to the Internet (Mitra & Watts, 2002) to analyse and present my data.

Given the inherent complexity explored within this section, Figure 4.1 thus seeks to illuminate the array of theories and conceptual tools brought to the process of data collection and analysis.

Figure 4.1: The Role of Theory / Conceptual Tools in Data Collection and Analysis

Community Empowerment   Power   Domestication

DATA COLLECTION
&
ANALYSIS

Human Motivation   Co-creative Media

Interpretive Framing   Identity   Social Exclusion   Voice   Situationism
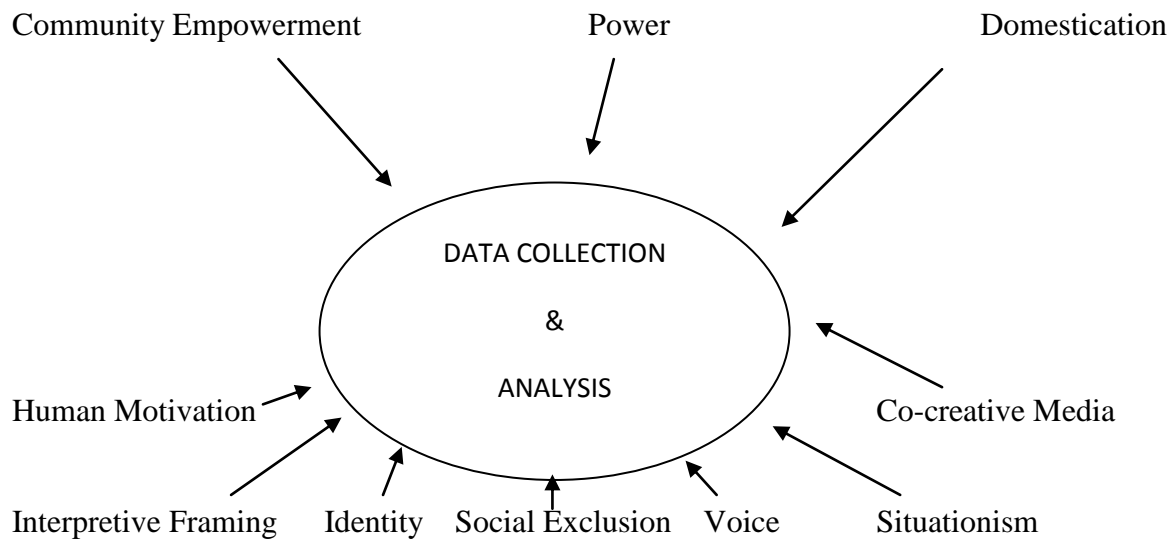
Having thus set out the essence of my research design and approach, the next two chapters explore the key findings to emerge from this complex process.

Chapter 5: Participation in Content Creation and Sharing: A Case study of Community Reporting in the Context of Two Urban Regeneration Areas in Manchester and Salford

> The enthusiasm about user participation resembles a veil behind which the actual constituents of participatory activities in cultural production are hidden (Schäfer, 2011, p. 15).

5.1 Introduction

My thesis seeks to explore whether and how so-called social media and in particular, the associated capacity to create and share content, may play a role in community empowerment and regeneration within local disadvantaged urban areas. The following two chapters explore this research topic through the lens of a case study presented in Chapter 4. The case study of a social media and empowerment focused Community Reporter Programme being developed by a community development organisation and operating within two urban regeneration areas, opens up the opportunity to explore critically the relationships between social media focused participation in content creation, community empowerment and urban regeneration. The unfolding story, as told by research participants of how participation in creating and sharing content within a community context might relate to community empowerment and regeneration, is thus explored in the following two chapters.

Working from the assumption that meaningful use is essential for community empowerment, the findings presented in this chapter serve to explore and illustrate the ways in which community generated content (content created and shared in a community context) is becoming viewed as a meaningful activity within a context of local urban regeneration areas and for whom. In so doing the work within this chapter also addresses gaps in knowledge with regards to; the 'who' of content creation in the social media age, what kind of activities are driving content creation, whether and how ICTs become meaningful within the lives of disadvantaged local areas and what kinds of content are becoming relevant within this context. The findings presented within this chapter are also useful for developing nuanced insights into the underexplored content dimension of digital inclusion. In addition, they are useful for beginning to disentangle complexities of participation within the realm of social media, more commonly referred to as participatory culture. This is of value because, as the quotation from Schäfer (2011) suggests, participation is highly complex and therefore I

suggest we cannot hope to understand any associated empowerment potential without first understanding the intricacies of participatory activities.

In what follows I firstly turn to a brief description of my case study within which my research is situated. I then explore the complexities of community reporting as a participatory form before exploring my view of participation in this context as a co-created phenomenon.

5.2. My case study: Community Reporting in East Manchester and Salford

The findings presented within the following two chapters are based on a case study of a community reporters programme developed and run by People's Voice Media, a not for profit community development organisation. The reasons for the choice of the approach and the choice of the particular case study have been discussed within Chapter 4. Following on from the details provided in Chapter 4, I now further outline the all important context of the research in terms of the organisation which developed the Community Reporter Programme (further contextual information and images of the framing of the Community Reporter Programme can be located within Appendix F). Further background contextual information regarding the two regeneration areas on which my study is based can also be viewed within Appendix D.

5.2.1 People's Voice Media: Background

People's Voice Media evolved and was part of Manchester Community Information Network (MCIN). MCIN began operating in 1994 as a not for profit social enterprise and charity with the goal of increasing social inclusion through ICT and its associated objectives also included supporting community regeneration through the use of ICT. The original activities of MCIN were centred around computer access and developing IT skills, together with community websites with a focus on information provision. Mymanchester also evolved at this early stage in the form of a kiosk project. Beginning with the recognition that Mymanchester was too generic and therefore not reflective of the diverse communities within the city, thirteen community websites evolved and were subsequently created by MCIN based on both communities of geography and interest. These websites had been largely managed by community and steering groups but sustained community engagement proved difficult until eventually MCIN was running all of the sites. Concurrently MCIN recognised that the

Internet was moving on and in particular in relation to the development of social media. Social media lies at the heart of the subsequent development of the Community Reporter Programme and the rebranding of MCIN in 2009 as People's Voice Media, which had once been part of MCIN's activities. A recent definition of People's Voice Media incorporated within one of their information leaflets reads as follows:

> ...a not for profit community development organisation that has been working with communities since 1995. We now work across the UK, using social media to develop dialogues and community cohesion and support communities to have a voice.

Historically, MCIN incorporated community regeneration within its objectives and the organisational literature placed social media and community at its heart of the definition of People's Voice Media:

> MCIN objectives include; to highlight community activity, bring people together and support community regeneration through ICT.

> People's Voice Media supports communities by developing, marketing and distributing community stories, news & views through the use of social media

5.2.2 The Community Reporter Programme: Evolution, Meaning and Components

> Have you ever wanted to tell your side of the story?

> Our Community Reporter Programme is a loosely structured programme that is flexible to the needs and interests of each individual. A Community Reporter is someone who is given the skills and facilities to produce regular online content - this can be thoughts and reflections on their life, reporting on events that are happening in their area or issues that affect a group they're involved with..."(Extract from Chalktalk, 2009).

The Chief Executive of People's Voice Media described the evolution of the Community Reporter Programme in relation to the evolution of social media. He spoke about how the development of social media was associated with the perception that producing content for the existing community websites through the vehicle of locally based community reporters could be the key to reinvigorating the sites and thus reengaging the community. One of the long term employees of People's Voice Media described noticing a shift from a more information based initiative to one which became more about reporting and telling stories, providing communities with more content to view. For him, this shift and the seed from which the Community Reporter Programme evolved was marked by one of the projects

which focused on the deaf community, exploring the use of video as a way for deaf people to tell their stories using British Sign Language. The Community Reporter Programme developed by People's Voice Media can in essence, be seen as a programme driven by the evolution of social media, with the associated perception of opportunities for reengaging the community in local community focused media initiatives and giving local communities a voice and learning in terms of developing skills training for employment. Importantly, as will be identified later in the thesis (Chapter 6) the programme and indeed People's Voice Media itself, as the Chief Executive himself pointed out, has followed the direction of government policy and thus associated funding closely throughout its lifespan. At the time of research, the programme was being funded through a mix of Regeneration Programmes, Education and Training Programmes, consultation exercises and commissions. The Community Reporter Programme sits within the broader activities of People's Voice Media, illustrated through the "The People's Voice Media Model" and "The People's Voice Media Education Model" both documents presented to me during my talks and interviews with the Chief Executive of the organisation. These documents are included within Appendix F.

Having personally participated in the Community Reporter Programme and having spoken to staff running the programme, organisations and individuals integrating the programme within their activities, partners, volunteers supporting the Community Reporter Programme and community reporters themselves, it became clear that describing what exactly the programme encompasses is unsurprisingly challenging given the problematic definitional issues surrounding social media itself, discussed within Chapter 3. This can be said to relate principally to the interpretive flexibility of the Community Reporter Programme and the nature of social media and the use of this term itself (Russell & Williams, 2002). That is to say that the Community Reporter Programme is to some degree shaped by the different ways in which people and organisations in different situations interpret meaning and value of the programme within their lives and communities. Teresa, for example, explained that she could not really provide me with an overview of the programme and how it works because of the "bespoke" and "no one size fits all" nature of the programme which fits around the particular community they may be working with, working differently thus with different groups according to their reasons for participating. The recognition that people will have different reasons for engaging means that the programme and associated training adopts a "non prescriptive" approach (Teresa). Jess also spoke about her training delivery, particularly in

Salford, being tailored to the specific group of people attending the course: "very much like…what do you guys need, what can I offer you?"

What it means to be and indeed what the term community reporter means is no less challenging and similarly open to interpretation as will be revealed throughout the presentation of the findings in this chapter. The Community Reporter Programme itself can be understood as representing a very particular framing of social media with implications for participation and this will be explored further in section 5.3.1. Fundamentally, the experience of the Community Reporter Programme may be quite different for each individual involved. I certainly feel that my brief experience as a community reporter was something quite unique to me and was in many ways shaped by timing and social setting, for example. As David tried to explain the use and meaning of the term community reporting, he expressed his feeling that "reporting" is "probably not quite the right word." He also felt that there was a lack of clarity concerning the terms suitability, but that it was functioning, at the time, as a way of explaining what the organisation was doing in terms of the bringing together of social media and community. The idea behind the term community reporting may best be described in relation to the underlying ethos that is centred on the metaphors of voice and 'storytelling'. David, for example, suggests that community reporting is about "just people telling stories" rather than "reporting" in any formal sense and Teresa concludes that "community reporting is about telling stories...it's about having a voice, having the confidence to have that voice and share it". Voice is equated here with the idea of "being seen and heard in the world" (Teresa) and thus confidence building is seen as a pivotal aspect of the programme:

> "...you know, you need to feel that you are worth something in order to have a voice and somebody's going to be interested in anything, you've got to say, so it's working at that level of confidence with people" (Teresa).

Indeed, giving participants a voice and increasing confidence was identified as a primary aim of the Community Reporter Programme in its early days, as the programme was referred to as allowing "people to express themselves" and tell their stories online on the premise that:

> "Everyone has something to say and stories to tell about their local area and their lives" (MCIN, 2008).

When viewing community reporting as being about storytelling, Teresa, one of the staff supporting the programme, explained that this can take a range of forms, from making videos to "writing a blog", "interviewing people" "making films" and "taking photographs".

5.2.3 Overview of My Research Participants in Relation to the Community Reporter Programme

I have included this section to help guide the reader through this chapter and potentially 'get to know' some of my research participants building on the background information provided in the methodology, Chapter 4 (section 4.4). Whilst my research predominantly focused on those engaging with the Community Reporter Programme within the context of its operation in the two key regeneration areas of focus, it also included insights and voices from those who have engaged with the programme elsewhere in Greater Manchester, and from those accessing support around the creation and sharing of community related content via the Social Media Centre drop-in facilities in Salford. Some community reporters enter community reporting in the context of a specific project and thus group or organisational frame and thus I also interviewed representatives of the associated organisations. Additional insights are explained in Table 5.1 below which seeks to provide a background to the participants who have taken part in this research in terms of their relationship to the Community Reporter Programme.

Figure 5.1: My research participants and the context of their Community Reporting

Manchester and East Manchester Community Reporters associated with the regeneration area and content being shared via the community website BoftheBlog	Anonymous Community Reporter, Antony, Lynne B, Paul E, Paul R & Joyce, (PVM organised focus group participant).
Community Reporters involved in Projects, developed with a group and organisational context involving the integration of the Community Reporter Programme and staff operating within the East Manchester Social Media Centre including:	
Edge Lane Allotments: Project focused on the regeneration of an allotment site in East Manchester.	Edge Lane Allotments: Patrick and Sharon.
Victoria House: A supported housing project in Manchester run by Carr-Gomm, a national charity which provides housing and support services to vulnerable people.	Victoria House: Phil, Paul A & Shona.
Parktastic: Parktastic is a citywide initiative aimed at developing the usage of local parks by providing increased open access to play opportunities and activities. Parktastic, in the East Manchester regeneration area is run by 4CT a charitable company seeking to improve the quality of life for residents. The East Manchester Parktastic programme recruited four junior workers, who got involved in evaluating the programme through the community reporter approach.	Parktastic: Becca & Chelsea.
The Manchester Communication Academy: A project integrating the Community Reporter Programme as part of the engagement goals associated with the building of an academy style school.	Manchester Communication Academy: Ruth, Nile & Sophie.

<u>The Dyslexia Group</u>: A community reporter group made up of people who face the challenge of dyslexia in their lives. The group emerged from a PVM staff member contacting the manager of a dyslexia outreach project who works for New East Manchester Regeneration partnership.	<u>The Dyslexia Group</u>: Jill.
Salford based Community Reporters	Colin, Fay, Richard, Jon, Keith, Kevin, Mike S, Jane, Tricia & Tony.
Salford-based volunteers Supporting the Community Reporter Programme	Mike C & Julie.
Salford based Community Reporters within the <u>Talk Broughton Project</u>: part of a wider partnership project which has been commissioned to research the area of Higher Broughton in Salford in order to try to identify why a high percentage of people who live in the area are inactive. Talk Broughton is an example of how the Community Reporter Programme has been integrated and adapted for use as a consultation tool within the context of regeneration	Euna & Stan.
Community activists and people involved in or getting involved in community media production, (utilising and not utilising the Salford Social Media Centre for their activities).	Phil, Angela & Stephen.
PVM Staff with a or prior role relating to the Community Reporter Programme and the Chief Executive of PVM	Anonymous, David, Jess M, Jess P, Teresa, Kate & Gary.
Representatives involved in the project being developed within an organisational context.	<u>Victoria House:</u> Parissa; <u>Parktastic</u>: Katrina. <u>The Manchester Communication Academy</u>: Lynne, Community Learning Centre Manager and Community engagement officer, <u>Talk Broughton</u>: Kiera and Ross.
Representative of the New Deal for Communities Regeneration Partnerships (Salford and Manchester)	3, all choosing to be anonymous.

5.3 Community Reporting as a Genre of Participation: Unravelling the Complexities of Participation as Content Creation

In this section I problematise the notion of participation within the realm of participatory culture and in particular the idea of 'content creators' as a distinct participatory category, by illuminating the complexities of participation in community reporting, which I view as a distinct genre of participation. The work presented in this section additionally challenges the normative assumption of participatory ease that tends to underlay the social media as empowerment discourse, as discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.4.2), through highlighting the varying roles involved in community content production in this context. The following

sections also help to place the findings presented in Chapter 6 in their context and aid understanding of community reporting as a participatory form.

Viewing community reporting as a form of participatory media (media practices that enable consumers to also be media producers), I draw throughout this chapter on the concept of co-creative media, which views participatory media as a form of participation facilitated not only by technology but by people and organisations. The concept thus views participatory culture as 'socially produced' and challenges, as my research does, assumptions of participation as "organically" arising from access to the technologies and skills necessary for content production (Spurgeon et al., 2009, sic).

5.3.1 Forms of Content Production

Content creation lies at the heart of the Community Reporter Programme and associated publicity material describes how community reporters may "use social media tools such as blogs, podcasts and wikis to produce content using mobiles, home video cameras and webcams as well as produce local community newspapers" (PVM, 2008). From my work with research participants it seemed that the work being produced by the community reporters was mainly gravitating towards visually-based content production in the form of video and photography-based content creation. Video production in particular seemed to dominate community reporter activity and thus short videos emerged as a common product of the work being developed by the community reporters interviewed. John, for example, was particularly active in this area telling me about the three hundred and fifty-five videos he has on YouTube of which eighteen were what he defined as 'community videos'. One of the community reporter courses in Salford I attended in fact quickly evolved into an Internet TV course potentially symbolising a drive toward video production within the programme, which may be linked to the MediaCityUK development in the City (Appendix D). Some participants expressed a dominant interest in still camera work – however, this tended to be integrated within video projects.

Purely audio-based content production seemed to be less common and to be associated, though not exclusively, with participants with roots in community media and in particular community radio. Jane, Mike and Paul R, for example, all talked about having integrated their community reporter activities within the context of their community radio work and

Jane and Mike were integrating such activities as part of the memory and heritage orientated audio recordings they conduct with older people in their community. In addition, a few of the participants I spoke to had attended an Internet radio training course offered by PVM.

Some community reporter activities are more focused on the written word and a particular aspect of this is undertaking play reviews, an activity encouraged by the provision of free tickets via People's Voice Media. Lynne, for example, described her experiences of undertaking theatre reviews:

> "...I've done some community reporting. I like the theatre so I've been to the Royal Exchange to see different theatre projects, and then you write blog about them and put them on the Internet. That was really interesting."

Several respondents also talked about 'blogging' as a specific participatory activity, an activity which is getting harder to define as text-based, given the common integration of visual and audio material. Kevin described his community reporting experience as beginning with the creation of his own blog:

> "The first thing was a Community Reporter course and we learnt how to use, what a blog was, which I knew but I did not know how to do it. And I created my own blog which is a music blog called 'Salford Happenings'..."

Among those already actively involved in community and local voluntary projects, skills developed via community reporting and the drops-ins were also used to develop blogs and websites to showcase and promote such projects.

The coverage of local cultural and community events and the promotion of community activity emerged as a common theme during the exploration of community reporter activity, and could thus be seen as characteristic of community reporting as a distinct genre of participation. The emergence of event based community reporting as a theme of interest was identified, for example, by one of the Salford based PVM staff members:

> "I think that we're at the moment, we've identified that events is what people are interested in, ultimately, and so if we can get lots of details of upcoming shows, and also, like, the photos and video and audio, or people writing about the event..."(PVM staff member, Anonymous).

John's community video activity and the documenting of the visual progress of community projects such as in the case of Edge Lane Allotments and a community garden project at Victoria House, are examples of what can be seen as the promotional angle of community

reporting. The showcasing of 'what's going on' in the community could be a way to talk about this arena of community reporting as a whole.

5.3.2 Platforms for Sharing Community Generated Content

> Online realms are no longer contained within their own boundaries (if they ever were). What appear to be single online groups often turn out to be multimodal. Group members connect with one another in multiple online spots, using multiple media–social network sites for making their identity and social connections visible, YouTube for video sharing, Flickr for sharing pictures, blogs for instantaneous updates, web sites for amassing collective intelligence, and so on (Baym, 2009).

At first glance sharing content within the context of the Community Reporter Programme could be seen as bounded by the regeneration areas of study through the Drupal-based community sites of BoftheBlog in East Manchester and Chalktalk, later re-launched as East Salford Direct in Salford (Appendix C). These sites may be best understood as community based appropriation of social media technologies. For example, East Salford Direct was described on the community site in 1999 as "an outlet for many Community Reporters who are uploading great quantities of Video, Radio and Images and Stories about life in Salford", and BoftheBlog was described to me as "our social networking site" (Jess P) and a "community website for people to tell their stories" (David).

However, the reality of content sharing is characterised by the use of multiple online social spaces and in some cases offline social spaces (Appendix C). Content sharing platforms which may be said to fall under the growing popular understanding of social media which feature in the context of community reporting include YouTube, Blip TV, Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, Podbean, WordPress, Blogspot and Blogger. Mike S's description of sharing audio recordings "which might go onto radio, might go onto our podcast site, you know, might turn up on … might be put out as part of a CD, of a collection" is illustrative of the complexity of the social spaces and methods being used to share content. The quotation from an interview with one of the PVM staff illustrates the way in which popular 'social media sites' and the community sites for sharing content are envisaged to work together in the context of the Community Reporter Programme:

> "...we also try and pull stuff together from those sites using a community website as well, which pulls it into a bit of a shared space as well, rather than just using the kind of web start up companies and that's it, and everyone sort

of quite separate, they're going to try and build up a bit of a community by displaying it all within the same geographically focused website."

Added to the mix, content was being distributed via various other PVM sites and organisational and community-based sites.

5.3.3 Forms of Participation in Content Creation

The key factor that struck me about community reporting as a genre of participation was the differing roles involved in content production (which can be viewed as falling within the arenas of content capture and editing) illustrative of community reporting as a co-creative social practice. In this section I illuminate these varying roles, which also problematises the notion of participatory ease evident within the rhetoric that surrounds social media and which is also clearly present in the ideals of the Chief Executive of PVM:

> What's great is that it is now easier than ever for people to share their views online in whatever way best suits them (Copitch, 2008).

Video production as the most common product of community reporting is particularly illustrative of the varying skills and roles involved in content creation. This was described particularly effectively by a member of PVM staff who was running a video orientated community reporters course with school children, and by one of the school children participating:

> "You need skills like the kids need interviewing techniques, skills in that, they also need skills like body language and we have to do team work because obviously to produce a video you need to have a filmer, an interviewer and a production manager and an editor and different other skills that come into that to produce a good quality video" (Jess M).

> "We've been recording people, learnt how to set the tripod up, the camera, the laptops, a few weeks ago or something we went to... and there was people there and we had to interview them and that's what we're putting together today" (Sophie).

John, talking here about the possibility of developing a more project-based approach to community reporting in Salford, also highlights the differing roles involved in community reporting and the need for a team-based approach:

> "I think it is beyond the scope of one guy. I think you need teams of about three people. And also...who does the production, who does the directing, who produces...who is the presenter... I think you need two or three of you because there's too much for one guy to do. You need three people to do it all."

Paul A, based within the Victoria House frame of the Community Reporter Programme also spoke about the different participatory components that characterise video creation:

> "I had in mind that we could make a good quality video to go online and that's what we've done really as time has gone on. We've got better at filming, better at presenting, all the bits the component parts that go together to make a video."

The community reporters at Victoria House clearly took a team approach to content production and team work was identified as a feature of community reporting which is illustrated by the following quotations:

> "...we are a team, we work together and nowadays, early days we used to go like a whole team but nowadays, during the week, it can be me with another community reporter, two of us..." (Euna, working within the Talk Broughton frame of the Community Reporter Programme).

> "We recently did the futuresonic festival...we were recording the guerrilla buskers in Manchester city centre so we had little teams so they could cover all the events going on" (Keith).

> "...people will send an e-mail out to say, 'I'm doing a bit of filming' in Salford or Manchester or 'would anyone like to help me with a bit of filming' or projects that go on" (Keith).

> "I was working on Saturday with the young lady from East Manchester group on the Moston Carnival... She did most of the camera work and I did the sound work. It's all a learning curve to try and improve..." (Richard).

Colin's description of community reporting was, on the surface, suggestive of participatory ease: "Really if you're a community reporter and you've got a camera in your house and a tripod, whatever's going on you can just throw it in your bag, that's what I do anyway". However, as he reflected on his journey from producing content as part of a team during community reporter training to 'going it alone' he also went on to effectively illustrate the challenge of community reporting as an individual-based activity:

> "...so now I've been out on my own filming, where I'll just leave it on, and come underneath and ask them questions and then go back and make sure it's right, and the sound; if I've got somebody with me that's great. If there are three of you, that's it you've got it cracked..."

The young people working as community reporters within the frame of the Parktastic project also felt a group or team approach was vital to their ability to capture content because of the presence and need to operate the video camera and the consequent perceived importance of having "someone to turn to" (Becca).

Interviewing is a further key activity and evident participatory role within community reporting, as illustrated by the quotation below:

> "It's camera work but you do get to ask questions, basically you are interviewing people" (anonymous community reporter).

> "Well we have been arranging interviews with different organisations and we have made some interviews from people, from organisations and we have been doing street interviewing with people on the ground, that's just getting the views of people about Broughton, what they think, improvement, negative, positive things..."(Euna)

> "On Saturday at the Moston Carnival...I took a dozen or so photographs and I did, I think I did about seven interviews..." (Richard).

> "We've done some filming around here to do with students and residents which in Salford has been a big problem for a while it would appear, so we're getting the point of view of the residents, students themselves, and the residents..." (Keith).

> "I did a blog and editing of audio format and, of course we went to interview people" (Stan).

The insights from the young people participating in the Parktastic project, which involved interviewing young people in parks with a camcorder, also illustrates how the introduction of devices for content capture within a particular social setting may require careful social management as Becca eloquently describes:

> "...like before we got the cameras out we start chatting because otherwise like they'll get scared of us, 'cause we look like we're scary, but we're not (laughter). And when they're sat there, they're like, oh 'yeh, we'll do the interviews now because like they've got to know us more..."

Editing content features as a further key role for community reporters. Video editing emerged as a particular area that challenged the notion of participatory ease with regards to content creation. The task of editing video content that had already been captured appeared to be undertaken mainly by a few community reporters and volunteer staff supporting the Community Reporter Programme, with others, such as Colin and Keith, expressing their struggles with the editing process. Tony, describing the editing process as "laborious" and "one of the hardest things, if you're a film maker" captures the amount of time involved and the 'love it or hate it feel' that seems to characterise the role of editing content:

> "The editing process, now that is probably the thing that you're going need to sit down and spend hours and hours and hours. Running round with a camera and pressing buttons is great. I mean, that doesn't take very long. But then

once you've got that raw footage, you've got to obviously edit it if you want it to look good. The editing process...some people hate it. I actually like it."

Julie's comments, one of the volunteers supporting the community reporters, are additionally illustrative of the notion of community reporting as a co-creative practice, the differing roles involved and the complexity of the editing process:

> "...when I was starting to edit stuff that somebody else had produced I kind of felt like I was playing detective a little bit and trying to kind of piece it together, and get, you know, an idea of what the message was within the information. So that kind of motivated me to work with community reporters on the ground. And so I understood and so it was actually easier to put it together."

> "I edited the allotments project, Lower Kersall Allotments project. Some time ago, Theresa went to visit them with a camera and recorded some interviews with some of the volunteers, some of the boys who work at the allotment and the co-ordinators of the Lower Kersall Young People's Group. So that's where I started. I put something together that was probably about 3 minutes long from around 90 minutes of footage."

The differing roles and tasks involved in content production was also presented as opening up opportunities for participation in content production, reflected in the idea of there being 'something for everyone':

> "...everyone has got their own little part to play if you like, their forte....people would fall into different remits some would like the filming side of it, others would like the radio side of it others the editing side of it, there's something for everyone here" (Keith).

> "I am alright at recording and for writing but I don't like being filmed. So there are probably different elements for other people. They might be alright being filmed but they are no good at writing maybe because of their spelling or whatever...Jess said to me you don't have to do it in a certain way, if you don't like being filmed, because I stutter when I get filmed, you can record or you can just write. Those that can't write can be filmed" (Julie).

Thus far I have sought to paint a picture of the complex nature of participation in content creation and sharing which characterises community reporting, pointing in particular to the co-creative nature of this participatory arena. In the section which follows I further explore the idea of 'co-created participation' through the lens of domestication.

5.4 Co-Creating Participation: Domesticating Social Media through the Community Reporter Programme

In this section I continue to draw on the idea of community reporting as a co-creative phenomenon, and present the idea that participation in content creation and sharing in this context is being co-created through the domestication of social media within the two urban regeneration areas of focus for digital inclusion and empowerment, largely with regards to empowering voice. My decision to utilise the conceptual lens of domestication to illustrate the idea of co-created participation is based on my understanding that one of the specific ways in which perceptions of technology and their relevance in our lives are shaped or co-created is through the way in which they are integrated or 'domesticated' within our daily lives and communities, including increasingly via our experiences of technology beyond the home (Haddon, 2006). This section serves to explore to some degree the question of how and to whom social media focused content creation becomes relevant and meaningful within the lives of people living in disadvantaged urban areas. In so doing this section also challenges the idea of participation in content production as spontaneously emerging through digital natives with the required access conditions, revealing participation in this context to be in essence co-created through a digital inclusion intervention. The idea of 'co-creating participation' that I present reflects research findings which suggest that participation in content creation is being shaped or 'created' by circumstances far beyond the increasing accessibility and affordances of the technologies of content creation and sharing.

In what follows I thus suggest that participation in community generated content may be understood as co-created in the context through a discussion of the relationship between organisational level social media focused domestication strategies for digital inclusion and empowerment, individual interpretive framing and aspects of identity.

5.4.1 Interpretive Framing and the Symbolic Dimension of Domestication

During the course of my research I became very interested in the concept of interpretive framing and came to view it as very useful when trying to understand and relay the ways in which people appropriate social media for content creation and distribution. Framing has its roots in Psychology (Bateson 1955) and Sociology (Goffman, 1974) and serves to aid understanding of the different ways in which people approach, interpret and make sense of

the world. Goffman utilised frame analysis within the context of 'face to face' social interaction, suggesting that individuals apply 'interpretive schema' or frameworks to interpret and make sense of their life experiences and thus approach a given situation or activity with a method for interpreting it (Goffman 1974; Lattimore, 2010). I was particularly struck by Lattimore's (2010) conceptual exploration of age related use of Facebook within which the analogy of the picture frame is identified as an ideal way to explain the notion of the 'interpretive frame', as the framing of a picture provides a distinct view or focus. This process of framing, often not a conscious process, influences the decisions and actions within a given situation and different individuals, Goffman suggests, are likely to see situations differently (Bateson 1955; Goffman, 1974).

When I began to analyse the stories of my participants, I began to see that this idea of interpretive framing could effectively assist me in capturing and explaining participation decisions in relation to content creation. Thus I decided to utilise the idea of 'framing' to assist me with the analysis and presentation of my findings. Lattimore (2010) calls this interpretive framing when applied to Facebook as a 'way of seeing' and I also found this useful when thinking about the picture emerging from the stories of my participants. Cushman & Klecun (2006, p.6) have also pointed out that "engagement depends upon individuals creating their own contextual framework and motivation for adoption", and this idea marries with the idea of interpretive framing and is very much in evidence in the findings presented within the section that follows.

The symbolic dimension of domestication "has to do with how the technology is interpreted and given various meanings, which the user may identify with or reject" (Laegran, 2005, p.82). The bespoke nature of the Community Reporter Programme and the idea of what it can mean to be a community reporter as being open to interpretation, were identified in section 5.1.2. However, it is evident that there is an element of meeting of minds or sharing of interpretive frames when it comes to participatory decision making within this arena. In this context PVM has provided a strong symbolic dimension to their strategies for domestication of social media by framing social media as 'community reporting' with a local area focus. It can be argued that the framing of social media as community reporting and in turn as primarily symbolic of community and voice, and thus as a socially worthy activity within a context of communities of geography, underpins participatory decision making in this arena.

Paul E, for example, talked about being attracted to the programme because of the community involvement element. He had been involved in a previous community-based ICT initiative which had "gone commercial," and then seeing, "so here's another project that wants community involvement" he said "I'm thinking great". He then went on to explain further, "...for me it's great, that you've got that community involvement. That, to me, was always the number one thing". Paul also described himself as "community minded" which for him is very much about 'making a difference':

> ".. I've just got to get up off of the chair and do something; make a difference. So for me that's what it is – making a difference. And as you'll see through a lot of the stuff that I do, then yeah, I do put it into practice. And hopefully that will inspire other people to go and do the same thing" (Paul E).

Tricia also referred to "community involvement" as one of the key aspects related to her sustained participation in the form of community reporting. John talked about how his participation and ultimate decision to become "a fully fledged" community reporter emerged from a desire to get involved in "the community" in Salford because he had recently moved to Salford Quays linking his participation to an interest in "the community in the Salford." Participation may also be linked to perceptions of the value of social media and community reporting for building and rebuilding community within local areas, as illustrated through the words of Mike C:

> "It promotes a community feeling. I mean, a lot of these estates now, I mean, the community's been ripped … the heart has been ripped out of it, especially with all the pubs and everything closing down. But, I mean, a lot of people do use the internet now and that could be, like, a virtual pub, virtual meeting place, for people to sort of know what's going on in their local community, rather than, like I say, going and getting drunk on a Saturday night and finding out what's going on" (Mike C).

When I asked Tony about how he got involved with the Community Reporter Programme he clearly identified with PVM's symbolic framing of social media as community reporting, referring to how he had always "been interested in the community", had "done lots within the community" and had been "making little videos for a number of years" in tune with the emergent community reporting phenomenon:

> " ...I started doing a radio programme and filming little events, just off my own bat, before anybody actually, before I even knew about this community reporting. It's quite big in Salford at the moment, and I was already doing it."

Tony also emphasised the potential value of community reporting within a local community context for community involvement and social change throughout his interview, a view which was clearly central to his participatory decision making.

In particular, my analysis revealed an identification with the framing of social media and community reporting in relation to voice, linked to perceptions about the role of community reporter as socially worthy and specifically, as a channel for voice within a local community context. John's participation, for example, can be linked to his desire to "give a voice to the voiceless" and his perception that "digital video appears to be a good way to do that". Keith revealed that his sustained motivation with regard to participation is linked strongly to a belief in community reporting and social media as something of great social value, and in particular as a channel for voice for local people. When talking about what keeps him involved, Keith said:

> "...finding out what the issues are for local people and how we can help. What keeps me involved is that people need a voice and there are millions of issues that when we start chipping away we will unearth."

Keith's participation may be said to be linked to his beliefs about the social value of the Internet and social media more broadly as further illustrated through the following quotation:

> "I think that people need a voice and there are millions of issues that once we start chipping away we will unearth and people aren't backwards in coming forwards they just need that portal or that gateway if you like to relay that message even if you just do it on the Internet."

Tony's participation is also linked to the way in which he sees community reporting as a voice for all that is "good" in Salford in the midst of negative mainstream media coverage, related to his association between the kinds of activities associated with community reporting and social worth, which will be further explored as the discussions within this chapter unfold.

Stan's participation in the Talk Broughton project was also in part driven by a view of community reporting as a socially worthy activity and a desire to be a positive force within a community with which he particularly identifies and is interested in, as illustrated through his words:

> "I have lived for some time in Salford, not in Broughton but very close to Broughton, so I was aware that there are a lot of problems there and I was aware that there is a big Eastern European community there and they seem to me to be quite isolated so they didn't integrate very well with other parts. There are two or three streets in Higher Broughton occupied by Eastern European migrants and they are very, very like some kind of ghetto

really...Oh, that's the other thing which I want to do, I want to help these people to integrate to some extent with other inhabitants of the area."

John's interview also revealed a similar passion for and belief in the whole concept of community reporting as a socially worthy participatory activity that can bring about social change. John, for example, expressed his feeling that, "what I'm doing is so valuable and so it meets the needs of the world" and his beliefs and passion in this area were identified as clearly linked to his sustained participation when asked about what keeps him involved:

> "l am going to change the world...and I'm going to engage the community in Salford with the world, show the world out there, this is a cool place to live, come here, join us, do stuff, fantastic, so my community reporting is really my window to the world, I can open the window and shout at people from the window, it's really great."

Participation is also linked more broadly to a belief in the need for the development of a voice for ordinary people or 'people's media,' a framing inherent within the rebranding from MCIN to PVM and thus in the symbolic framing of the Community Reporter Programme. One of the community reporters in East Manchester, for example, expressed his feelings that "there is a place for community reporting because basically your local rags now have turned into advertising sheets and that's about it." Keith's development of a music blog is linked to similar sentiments, as he displays when he talks about his thinking behind the blog he has developed:

> "The idea of it is that it promotes music in the Salford area, music that might not typically be advertised in the local papers, such as bands in pubs and theatres that are small, like churches and things like that, and theatre groups."

Stan identified that his participation in community reporting was linked to exploring whether social media will produce a more trustworthy form of media for ordinary people associated with the view expressed below:

> "Basically what people call the media is not really for people, generally it's for higher class or very rich people who control them, so ordinary people very often don't trust media especially in these days with a lot of scandals, that's my personal opinion...I want to examine if people will be able to...trust social media."

Julie, expressed that she sees community reporting as "...a good counterbalance to mainstream media and all that you hear in mainstream media" and associates her participation, as a volunteer who supports community reporters, with her longstanding interest in and thoughts about mainstream media and alternative democratic forms of media:

"When I was at university I was very interested in the media being used as a democratic tool, so it was more about sort of representation of everybody who consumes it rather than it just being one way traffic. So that's what brought me to come to People's Voice Media..."

"I often kind of thought to myself that, you know, are the papers reflecting what people actually think or are they trying to direct the way that people actually think? They always claim that they are reflecting the voice of the people but I don't think that it is that way."

Tamisin, a community reporter who took part in the PVM organised focus groups, identified her reasons for getting involved as follows, again illustrating an identification with the 'community' and 'community reporter' framing of social media, being presented by PVM:

"I was concerned about the way local news has kind of started to disappear, become more centralised, so it's harder to get what's going on in the community, community reporters and community papers, for example, the Metro I think used to be more Manchester based but now it's—that sort of thing, so I thought right learning how to do that journalistic slant so that at least the information can be gathered and passed on to people."

Just as terminologies like community reporting, and social media and the associated beliefs, attitudes and understanding which accompany these terms are linked to participation and sustained participation, such terms can be meaningless or irrelevant to others, and thus framing as community reporting may be associated with non participation. PVM members of staff raised this interesting point and their words serve to illustrate the way in which the concept is open to interpretation and thus the way in which such terminology can act simultaneously as an attractor and a barrier in relation to participation:

"I think the thing is that when people hear words like community reporting and even words like social media they can be a bit of a switch off. Like most words they come with quite a bit of baggage to them. The community reporter idea sometimes almost implies someone who's going out into the grassroots, very much investigative reporter trying to write stories. Then the idea of social media almost has that idea of being about quite heavy and hard hitting campaigns. When I look at the idea of Social Media or Community Reporting I think for me the emphasis is on the community and the idea behind it I think is often just getting people to tell their stories in their way and using whatever channels there are as a way of distributing those stories. So for some people terms like Social Media and Community Reporting are ideas that grab people in, for other people it's, I know it's a bit of a battle by having to explore it and almost comes down to something you've got to get over" (David).

"It's the language around this stuff, so it's the word the 'reporter'; well first you think text and then you think it's going to be text-based and BBC-based media terminology. I try and use slang in my posters, you know 'podcasts.' If you see something for something you don't know what it is why would you

engage in it because you haven't got a clue what it is...I do try and break it down but generally I still struggle, saying, 'right we're going to make a film call out for editors,' when I was little I would just think it was a news editor like for a newspaper"
(Jess M).

Connotations of journalism and grassroots investigative reporting, for example, clearly featured in the identification of community reporting and thus social media with 'people's media' among those participants discussed earlier. As a further example, when asked about whether he considers himself to be a journalist, during the PVM organised focus groups, Kevin's response would seem to imply that the word 'reporter' and the journalism connotation attached to social media in this context is something he identified with and which factored into attracting him to the programme:

> "I think I'm a journalist because I'm telling people stories that other people don't know about and I was already doing that anyway, that's why I did it, I was telling my friends this and that's on, have you heard about that and it was a good way of doing that and I needed voluntary work that was interesting, usually I do the social side but the media was never in it and this is the first place I've found both, so it's a good time for me to do it."

Keith's participation is also clearly linked to the symbolic frame of 'reporting' and his belief in and perceptions of social media as a channel for voice as he explained:

> "...but the benefits to me with social media without sounding like I am repeating myself are giving people that voice, raising important issues and getting those issues publicised and hopefully getting them noticed and picked up on, get them councillors and MPs working for their living. Hopefully bringing about social change whether that's to do with housing or investment for the youth of today or some of the stuff we've already done" (Keith).

Euna's decision to participate can also be seen to be very much based around her perceptions of and identification with PVM's symbolic framing of social media as community reporting, linked in her mind to journalism and how skills in this arena would fit into her life plans:

> "...when I saw the advert that if you want to be a community reporter you can join this programme I was like wow, this is where I belong..."

> "Well what interested me is that currently I am doing 'er a course on writing for Writers Bureau and I'm writing my own book, so I thought it was part of the course, journalism, so I wanted to gain further skills of communication and to extract information from the people" (Euna)

It may also be suggested through Paul E's discussion of his "hobby framing" of community reporting, that had he framed community reporting in these journalistic terms or as a text based activity, then he would have been likely to have precluded himself from participation:

"...I think for me anyway, it's like tie it into my hobbies now, which is photography, but if you want me to write stories, then no..."

Lynne also inherently identifies the way in which perceptions of what the role of a community reporter might entail could prevent people from getting involved:

"I think that it might put people off it they think they've got to go up to somebody in the street with a microphone...And I wouldn't personally go and do that because it's just not me. I wouldn't mind going with somebody doing that, but I couldn't do it personally" (Lynne).

Furthermore, Jess M spoke specifically about how the term social media itself can be a barrier to participation:

"If I go back before I started, I had never even heard the term before and I tend not to use it because, I know what it is now because I've worked in it for a year...it means socially using media but I think it's a little bit like you know like Eskimos have a lot of words for snow or whatever because it describes different types of snow. When I use that in a broad sense I tend to back away. I tend to just mention the obvious because I think it confuses people on the ground level and it alienates people, 'come on let's use some social media', oh alright yeh!', 'come on let's make a film about a cookery programme' then it's much more, they get it, then saying let's use some social media around your interest, they'd run off and I think it's such a broad word."

Parisa, who works with the Victoria House group of community reporters also suggested that in essence interpretive framing of social media and community reporting may present a potential barrier to participation, commenting that one of the engagement challenges faced is that "...people are just not quite sure what this social media, community reporting is all about..." and thus she explained how she tries to "sell it really" to people. Julie suggested that people may not get involved simply because "they might not see it as a good thing at all." This was particularly evident in the views expressed by Stephen Kingston, the Editor of the Salford Star, who challenged the whole notion of community reporting in this particular context as a 'good thing' related to his overall contextual framing of PVM and the Community Reporter Programme. This will be discussed in more detail within Chapter 6. Colin, also referred to people's interpretations as a factor in participatory decision making, commenting that "...it's hard to push people...they have a different idea of what it's about don't they?" For example, for Colin the symbolic framing of social media as community reporting presented by PVM seems to be a perfect fit within the context of his own life plans, as he explained: "...I already had plans before I came here for filming and stuff like that, and interviewing local people."

Within this section I have tried to illuminate the idea that the appropriation of social media technologies for community reporting within this context may be related to and shaped by the symbolic dimension of the domestication strategies inherent within PVM's approach to social media focused digital inclusion and empowerment and to an individual's existing symbolic framing of social media. Utilising Lattimore's (2010) explanation of interpretive framing as 'a way of seeing' it can be said that the social construction of community reporting presents a way of seeing social media that people may or may not relate to and identify with, which can be further fundamentally linked to participatory decision making and sustained participation. This 'way of seeing' social media which can be perceived as shaping views of the relevance of community content creation and sharing within disadvantaged areas can thus be related to strategies for domestication or digital inclusion within the 'symbolic' arena. The exploration within this section suggests that those most likely to participate in this genre of participatory culture are those who relate to and share the notion of social value attached to the specific framing of social media within this particular context or cultural setting.

5.4.2 Aspects of Identity, Participation and Interpretive Framing.

Utilising Kurtz's (2009) framework of 'aspects of identity' in this section I explore how the 'way of seeing' social media attached to community reporting and thus participation explored in the preceding section may also be related to varying aspects of identity. The findings in this section are also valuable in expanding the current limited knowledge with regards to the 'who' of content creation and sharing. Understanding identity aspects of participation are additionally seen as a crucial grounding for exploring the community empowerment and regeneration value of community content creation and sharing, which forms the focus of Chapter 6. Essentially within the sections which follow, I explore the complex interweave between varying aspects of identity, interpretive framing and thus participatory decision making. The following discussion also serves to illustrate the complexity of participatory decision making, suggesting for example, that beyond identification with symbolic domestication strategies at the organisational level, participants enter the community reporting world with their own interpretive frames. Such findings are thus in line with Cushman & Klecun's (2006) suggestion of the dependency of ICT engagement on individual contextual frameworks and motivations. Participation in community reporting and thus participation in social media focused content creation and sharing in this context is additionally highlighted in the discussion that follows as being characterised by complexity

and diversity. The exploration of participation as it relates to aspects of identity beyond demographics, the common frame of digital inclusion research, serves to illustrate such complexity and shift the focus from differences across demographic groups to the potentially hidden frame of genres of participation that bring people from diverse backgrounds together. Such insights are seen as particularly important when exploring what content creation and sharing in the social media age might mean for disadvantaged urban communities.

In order to illuminate my findings and open up understanding of participation beyond a demographic frame, I found Kurtz's (2009, sic) identification of the varying aspects of identity to be a useful frame for analysis. In particular I draw on her proposed three strands of identity framework:

- Categorical aspects which focus on "what a person is or has" (which includes demographics, such as age and socio-economic position).
- Relational aspects of identity which focus on "how a person is connected."
- Positional aspects of identity, a more complex category that I perceive to be fundamentally about "positions" and "roles" in relation to an interpretive 'whole,' which in this context could be viewed as 'community.'

Thus building on this frame of analysis I move on to explore participation within the confines of these three aspects of identity.

5.4.2.1 Categorical Aspects of Identity, Participation and Interpretive framing

Insights gained from talking to members of PVM staff and community reporters suggest that participation in this context reflects diversity in terms of the demographic categories of age, gender and race. This is evident in, for example, David's response to a question about the age range of community reporters engaging with the Community Reporter Programme in East Manchester:

> "It's a broad spectrum, we've done some work with a young group based in East Manchester called Bang of the Voice and they work with teens and upwards and the other end of the spectrum we've done work with a Young at Heart group, I think they are over 60's, that's run by one of the Housing Associations. I think we also had a project that was like a storytelling sort of online novel and that was again working with older people who were using drop-ins and centres. So there is that whole sort of mix. So it's not like saying all the people we work with are twenty something who want to work in media, it's not like that at all. It is probably more sort of old people but again it

depends on the group so there isn't a particular group. I think in terms of gender and race it's all quite mixed, we probably so have those figures somewhere but not to hand (David)."

When I asked Jess P about whether she had found that any particular groups were difficult to attract, her response painted a similar picture of diversity, "No, I work with the old, I work with the disabled. I work with the young. I work with refugees and asylum seekers". A similar picture also emerged through a further member of staff's response to this question:

"...we're engaging lots of different age ranges, people from lots of different backgrounds. There's a pretty good diversity really in people involved in the Community Reporter Programme, we seem to have covered a lot of bases."

Community reporting as an activity which reflects diversity in relation to demographics also appears to be valued by participants in the programme and may also be seen as a factor in shaping continued participation:

"I went to the Christmas event I shared a taxi with two ladies who were over retirement age...and there was one lady who was speaking to me about going on the folk train and she did a report about going on the folk train and quite a few people that I know have been on the folk train and it was nice to get a different perspective on it and I don't think I generally come into, I don't come into contact with older people or people of that age just simply because I haven't got any older grandparents and I don't meet them under the same circumstances and she was telling me how you upload on to a Mac as opposed to a PC and yes people like that. There is also a guy who is deaf and I don't really come into contact with deaf people and he'd made a video which is absolutely just for deaf people who understand sign language because it was all done through signs, I came into contact with him" (Ruth, who is in her twenties).

Patrick, within the very specific context of Edge Lane Allotments also referred to community reporting as an activity which "makes different generations communicate, which is brilliant". Kevin's views on the potential barriers to participation in this context also serve as an expression of community reporting as an activity characterised by diversity, that is one that attracts and brings together a diverse range of people, including those who may potentially be at risk of social exclusion:

"I don't think that there are any barriers in terms of race, disability or sex, or anything like that; I think everything is covered really...I've got some experience and I think the people who I work with, I'm thinking of one particular person who I work with who hasn't got technical experience, I don't think that he felt uncomfortable because there's no barriers. I'm happy that he's got a difficult background...I don't think that people from crime backgrounds are put off, or people from other troubled backgrounds are put off, from other people I've been talking to. They all seem to be happy to say

who they are. And I've noticed a few people who sound as though they've just come into the country and are coming in to do something, and they don't seem put off."

In particular, the Chief Executive of PVM also suggested that community reporting challenges the assumption of social media as being a "young thing" expressing the view that "...people make the assumption that it's only young people but it's just not true..." He then went on to identify that the age range of community reporters represents a "mixed bag" with many being adults in their fifties and above. The community reporters I interviewed reflect diversity in terms of age ranging from school age to eighty-something. There were a couple of suggestions of a gender dimension to community reporting with women potentially being less active than men in this arena, and my research sample and experiences tend to reflect this view. Lynne said specifically that, "I've noticed that the men seem more out there and are doing more than the women, whether it's a time factor, I'm not sure, or a confidence factor." Additionally, within the Victoria House frame of community reporting and the group discussion which characterised this aspect of the research, Paul A pointed out that: "The other thing we don't get, well there are more males than females here but we've not had a lot of females, have we on the course?"

A particularly interesting finding to emerge from the research was that adult participation in the Community Reporter Programme seemed to be linked to various categories or combination of categories associated with social disadvantage, and thus a greater potential for digital exclusion including being elderly, retired, unemployed, having a disability or long term health condition (Helsper, 2008). Community reporting and thus community content creation as a genre of participation in this context therefore, seems to be attracting groups associated with social and/or economic disadvantage and thus groups considered to be at risk of social and digital exclusion (Helsper, 2008) and traditionally difficult to engage in a context of community-based ICT initiatives (Loader & Keeble, 2004; Klecun, 2008).

Two of the community reporters falling within the elderly and retired category framed their participation as 'passing the time' and their participation seemed to be associated additionally with a desire to 'keep on learning' and a positive 'way of seeing' technologies associated with social media. Fay (in her eighties) for example, defines her participation as being about "something to do, something to pass the time away" and generally describes her relationship with the technologies of community reporting as "getting my brain going" and "messing

around." Fay also links the frame of 'learning' that she brings to her participation to her retired status:

> "I think from retiring I want to know about everything. All the years that have gone by and I've not learnt anything. All I've been doing is working. But now I want to know everything".

When I asked Fay about her feeling with regard to age as a barrier to participation in this arena, her reply also illustrates her learning frame of approach and her positive framing of communication technologies, no doubt associated with her positive framing of community reporting.

> "No. The barrier is yourself in how much you can learn because I think all this new stuff it's brilliant, it's amazing, what these machines can do, you know and how much you can learn from them, so I think it's brilliant. It is the tops, you know. I don't know what the word is. But I think it is amazing what computers can do so it's only got to… I don't know, I suppose it could be used for bad things as well but we only look on the good side and say only good can come from it hopefully, unless you want to learn how to make bombs. And I think the fact that you can keep in touch with somebody the other side of the world by emails… I mean I love my emails. Every time I sit down I turn it on to see if anybody's wrote to me and, I say met, I haven't actually met them but through emails I've got lots of friends and I've never met them...So you can meet people through it, you know."

Richard, (in his seventies) also talked about his participation in terms of the perception of the need for "something to keep your interest going" and his wider learning around digital content production in terms of an activity, "...mainly to keep myself occupied, keep my mind busy, keep me working." Richard's involvement may also be associated with his learning frame of approach and his positive attitude toward advancements in communication technologies generally, commenting during his interview that:

> "I'm still learning; you've got to keep learning...If you keep learning you keep living I think, I hope."

> "I think it's a good thing, I think the technology is good and to be able to communicate."

Fay did identify that despite participating in community reporter training she did not really see herself as a community reporter, pointing to age as a potential barrier with regards to the form and degree of her participation: "I think because of my age I'm not doing as much...I like having a mess". The view that advancing age is a barrier to social media related participation was also presented and contested by some of the other research participants, who suggested that barriers to participation are more to do with attitude than with age. Again

they emphasised the importance of interpretive framing in understanding participatory decision making around social media and community reporting:

> "A lot of people seem to think I'm too old, I can't do that. You can't do it if you don't try. If you try it's surprising what you can do" (Richard).

> "...no matter how old you are, you can still you know, age isn't a barrier anymore really, it's what other people think that you can't do it. I can go on Facebook, and my grandson said, 'Oh I didn't know you could do that and I could wipe the floor with him with it, you know. Well I can spy on him but he doesn't know, you see, he's nearly 18 (laughter) so I can watch everything he does..." (Joyce).

> "Older people, you know, find it hard. I don't. As I say I love messing but some of my friends, they don't want to know, you know… the young ones can understand it because even in school they're using it so they're growing up with it and it's nothing to them at all, but older people, as I say some fight shy of it, some don't, you know, but a lot of people because they've worked all their lives and just done one boring job, say, they put themselves down and think they can't do it, where if they tried they could" (Fay).

Jane, while identifying her view that older people tend be in the minority of social media engagement also identified (referring to the Social Media Centre in Salford) that "...loads of older people come here and have blogs and all sorts of things".

Some of the community reporters interviewed fall into the category of 'unemployed' some being unable to or temporarily unable to work as a result of disabilities, health conditions, asylum status or a period of being homeless. Beyond the 'rehabilitation for employment frame' discussed in further detail in Chapter 6 a 'passing the time and getting active' frame of participation was in evidence. Paul E talked about his participation in relation to being unable to work, specifically, "so you sit there twiddling your thumbs and looking for something to do" which led him along the path generally of "community projects and volunteer work". Euna, whose asylum status at the time prevented her from working related that she became interested in community reporting "...cause I am getting bored". Mike C, in recovery from a motorcycle accident also spoke about his decision to take on a support role for the Community Reporter Programme as "...basically getting me out of the house". Antony, following a long period of health related unemployment framed his participation in terms of, "still physically doing stuff" and "keeping the grey matter or brain cells working by physically doing things". A link between mental health conditions and participation was also in evidence with several community reporters linking and framing participation in relation to 'getting through or preventing depression' (explored further in Chapter 6). Phil H, who is not

strictly a community reporter but whose activities could be said to fall under the broad umbrella of community reporting and thus social media focused content creation and sharing in a community context, linked his journey into social media, for example with his journey of recovery after experiencing a breakdown.

> "Basically I was, I had a breakdown about eight years ago and ended up in hospital really poorly. I was a manager for about thirty years for quite a substantial, well I run about one hundred people, looked after in manufacturing and then I had a breakdown so ended up in hospital through overwork and everything and basically on the way to recovery accessed a free course, Start Art, or Start in Salford as some call it, and they started teaching me photography..."

From getting involved with photography Phil got involved with a local community magazine and "with getting involved in that" he said "I got involved with the Media Centre...". Overall entering the field of community reporting could be linked to attracting people on a journey of personal life rehabilitation and recovery for varying reasons. Euna's journey into community reporting could also be strongly linked to her categorical identity as an asylum seeker as her principal frame of approach was to develop the communication skills to write a book about her experiences.

A few of the research participants also had an educational background in media studies at varying levels or had undertaken varying media related courses prior to entering the realm of community reporting or spoke about having a past working life in IT, computers, and audio-visual work. Part of the story of participation and sustained participation is also just simply the frame of 'interest.' When I spoke to David, one the staff supporting the programme, about his thoughts on what might be attracting people to the Community Reporter Programme, he explained that "for some people it's just something interesting to do at the simplest level, it's something they enjoy doing and then for other people it's an opportunity to be more creative..." Colin, Keith and Paul E are key examples of community reporters whose participation is clearly linked to an 'interest' frame. For example, as Colin talked through his reasons for getting involved with the programme, he said, "...more or less it's something that I've had a vast interest in anyway". Keith similarly recounted that:

> "I've always been interested in it as a hobby if you like and I've always had ideas of what I want to do with regards to media, like my own channel, eventually maybe or my own film company."

As he talked through the reasons for his involvement Paul E also explained: "I think for me anyway, it's like tie it into my hobbies now, which is photography...". Lynne additionally offered her alternative frame of interest as part of her story of participation:

> "I saw it in the free paper that we get and I thought, 'Oh, I quite fancy that', because I've always wanted to do voice-over work. I've always fancied doing that, because I'd been a film extra at one point but I've always fancied using my voice to communicate with people."

By the same token disinterest in the arena of activity was associated with non-participation by another member of PVM staff: "There's a lot of people who are just uninterested on an individual level..." (Jess P).

There were additionally a number of research participants engaging in community reporting and content creation and sharing generally within a local community frame whose participation was directly linked to their categorical identity of 'being involved in community activity and voluntary work' thus bringing a strong community frame to their participation, which has already begun to be illuminated. I explore these arenas further in the following two sections.

5.4.2.2 Relational Aspects of Identity, Participation and Interpretive framing

Relational aspects of identity are concerned with "how a person is connected" Kurtz, (2009) closely tied to the concept of social identity (Taylor, 1998). In what follows, I seek to demonstrate how relational aspects of identity play a role in shaping the ways in which many of the research participants view community reporting as a genre of social media participation. Thus, it is suggested that this 'way of seeing' community reporting may be interpreted as influencing participatory decision making within this arena.

Kurtz (2009) points to family and interpersonal relationships as one aspect of relational identity and some of the stories of participation revealed that such relationships have a bearing on participatory decision making. Fay, for example, spoke about her social media engagement in relation to her grandson explaining in essence, how her journey into social media began with her grandson introducing her to a computer, telling me that: "My grandson started me off on the computers, by showing me how to play Solitaire" and further that "from there I bought a computer because the one he gave me it was actually broken". Richard also told me, during his interview that: "My daughter got me to go onto Facebook". In addition

Richard who sees his primary role in life as a grandfather related his 'learning', 'passing the time,' 'preventing depression' frames of entry into the community reporting world to the recent loss of his wife after many years of marriage:

> "A lot of this learning came about as a result of my wife dying and to keep myself occupied, to keep myself from going into depression. I've never had depression, I don't want it, but I don't want to risk any chances, it could quite easily happen.
> We were married 37 years and it's a long time."

Tony also related part of his story of involvement in community reporting to a frame of supporting his wife, Tricia.

> "... my wife, who's disabled, she was, she was quite depressed at the time. And, this worker came out, carer came round to see her and advised her to come to the People's Voice Media. So, I came along as support for her and got interested."

I was also aware that Keith had prompted his girlfriend's involvement in the Community Reporter Programme.

In many cases participation within the arena of community reporting and thus content creation and sharing could be related to participants with existing social connections locally through existing involvement in community and voluntary activity and existing links with local organisations and institutions. Jane, Mike S, Tony, Lynne and Paul R all linked their journey into participation with being connected locally to community media and in particular community radio; community media and radio thus featured inevitably as their primary frame of approach to participation in the Community Reporter Programme. For example, when I talked to Jane about her reasons for getting involved she told me; "I think it came from community radio because we'd done community radio and it just, we managed to kind of interlock it..." later also commenting: "Community radio...is community reporting isn't it?" essentially emphasising the interrelations between community media and the community framing of social media inherent within the Community Reporter Programme. Paul R's involvement (via the then MCIN and Hulme frame of community reporting) was similarly associated with his community radio activities as identified below:

> "I was looking to build a website. I was doing a radio show for All.FM and I wanted a site where I could put additional information up about the show. The show was called 'The Hulme Tune'. I wanted to get people on the radio, basically..."

"I approached People's Voice Media - and I think it was called something else then - and they suggested, 'Well, why don't you do some community reporting for us?'"

"I think that we came to an understanding, that yes, there would be reports and that, but that it would be also in conjunction with my All.FM show."

Lynne also talked about her involvement in relation to her prior involvement with All.FM. Mike also talked about both his and Jane's participation in community reporting as related directly to being connected to community media projects locally, explaining:

"My identity is not just as a community reporter for PVM; it's of doing recordings in the community under a number of guises. And the reason I'm here today is as a member of Retracing Salford, which is another group that we're part of and we do audio recordings at Retracing Salford events, which is mainly about interviewing older people about their memories and so, you know, the focus is on heritage" (I interviewed Mike in a community location not attached to PVM).

"Well, I think part of it is about what we're doing in other ways or in other places. So, ever since October 2007 Jane and I have had an hour on Salford City Radio... And so we've been collecting recordings to use on our show (responding to a question about attraction/motivation for getting involved with the Community Reporter Programme."

Paul E talked about how his involvement in the Community Reporter Programme was part of his story of existing connections with MCIN, (rebranded as PVM) and involvement in local community projects including a community ICT initiative.

"I have been involved since 2003 when it was MCIN, prior to that I was involved with Eastserve, I've got many other hats but this is just one of them."

"...I've been involved in community projects for quite some time. One of the last projects was the Eastserve project, which was bringing affordable broadband to the community... that allowed me to do many other things; it opened up other areas for me....because I progressed from just going in and talking about something to actively be involved, so it's like I then became a member of panels; I ended up administering the sites, or became a site administrator. I became a moderator, you know, of the chat forums. So yes, and then obviously providing content on the website was another..."

Due to such connections and associated experiences, in terms of community reporting Paul expressed that; "I would imagine I've been doing it for a lot longer than the programme's been going..."

Mike presented a similar story within the Salford context, telling me that: "I feel as though I was a community reporter before PVM", which he associated with being "part of MCIN"

previously in relation to attending a similar course in an MCIN run community café in Ordsall. He described how he felt this initial training around content creation evolved into something with more of a community focus, which, for him, represented the seed from which the community reporting idea grew:

> "...it very quickly developed into the idea of having a local website, which is Ordsall Online, which is a Blogger blog, actually, but that got set up and also we started doing a bit of video as well. So, that was where the first idea of being a community reporter came from."

Mike's existing relationship with MCIN, was central to his participation in the Salford frame of community reporting, explaining that:

> "...as Ordsall people we felt a kind of affinity that we'd been doing something in our area that was community reporting."

> "I saw it, it was almost like some kind of sister project and we were kind of colleagues in the idea of being community reporters."

Connections with MCIN and Ordsall Community Café also featured in Jane's and John's stories. John's story of participation also revealed how building local connections when he moved to the area has been implicated in bringing social media participation in the Community Reporter Programme into view:

> "...when I came to Salford, I got involved with my church and they directed me towards a café opening in Ordsall... where you can drop in, have tea and the bit downstairs, you can also learn computing..."

David also identified the way in which participation in the Community Reporter Programme may emerge from individuals who are part of existing groups, who may bring a community project frame to their involvement. He explained this through the example of Edge Lane Allotments:

> "We do get individuals who come along and are sort of interested in telling their stories and putting their stories online but the nature of the groups we work with is that it is quite a mixed group, so just as a few examples, there's people who just got interested because they run their own allotments and want to put out information around the allotment. That's something that's sort of grown from sort of a conversations from just sending out an e-mail saying 'I'm involved with doing an allotment, can you help?" and me going along and looking at how they could use the Internet and the web as a way of promoting what they do...again it's probably people who aren't coming along as a community reporter and maybe feel they don't have a story to tell and it's like saying well why don't you use it as a way of talking about what you're doing."

Patrick further identified "advertising" the Edge Lane Allotments project as the main frame for his participation. Both Patrick and Sharon and an array of others involved with the allotments thus entered the world of community reporting through their relational identity of being part of an allotment regeneration project. Angela's frame of approach to accessing skills associated with community reporting of a similar group-based frame of 'highlighting area-based problems and issues' is also directly related to her relational identity of being part of a residents association. Stan's existing relationship with a voluntary organisation focused on helping Eastern European immigrants and Salford University, also led to social connections which brought community reporting within the Talk Broughton Frame (Figure 5.1). Lynne, as a further example, associated her motivation for involvement with running a "social group for disabled and able bodied groups in Gorton" and wanting to promote the group.

Two of the staff talked about how people coming to the Community Reporter Programme as a form of social media participation will be likely to be already connected to community groups or local and voluntary services, referring to the difficulty in connecting with the most socially isolated. Jess P spoke of the challenges of "...getting people who are not already engaged in something" and Teresa made a similar point as highlighted below:

> "I don't know how you would describe them but there are lots of lonely and isolated people who aren't engaged in any groups, also I think people who perceive themselves very much as alone, they're difficult to reach because there are no networks that support them through, do you know what I mean. So if they are not going to community groups, well it might be through the doctors surgery often that they might then get a referral to a linking agency, it might be something like...social prescription, or something like that, they might get a one to one worker and we then might get a referral to us but for us to directly work with people who are isolated like that, that's very, very difficult in terms of outreach."

A number of participants including Mike C, Keith, Kevin, Tricia and Colin spoke about their participation in community reporting as emerging through, and in some cases sustained through, their connections with local organisations including social services, supported employment services and drug and alcohol recovery services. Colin additionally attributed PVM outreach work through a local organisation he was connected with, to bringing this form of participation into his view. Colin's local support connections within his 'back to work' frame also form part of his story of maintaining participation within this arena,

explaining the relationship between his participation and "Salford Services who are funding me for my ideas":

> "They're going to put in a certain amount of money for my posters or my films or the next book. They're putting the funds up...as long as I can prove that I'm doing stuff and, by dropping in here, that's one way, one big way."

Colin also spoke about his history of connections with local community and creative projects in relation to his story of recovery through a drug and alcohol programme, which led to his pursuit of activities related to community reporting including, drama, photography and film. Keith explained how he indirectly got involved with PVM and the Salford Social Media Centre through an existing local social connection:

> "I'm off work at the moment. I've been off with incapacity benefits and as a result of that I was working alongside a group called Sensia which is in Salford, St James' House. One day while I was there one day one of the people who uses Salford Social Media Centre, Kevin was sat next to me and I was talking to Sue my case worker about what I wanted to do, mentioning media and Kevin mentioned that he attended Salford Social Media, told me a bit about it gave me the websites. I had a look and thought that's exactly what I was after, right up my street, so I started attending on a Tuesday and Wednesday for the drop-ins and took it from there basically."

When I asked Tricia how she came to be involved with the programme she talked about how her involvement was shaped by her relationship with social services and her social worker:

> "My social worker brought me down to the Media Centre, his father was on a course in the Social Media Centre and he thought it would be a good idea to get involved with it..."

Shona, a resident at Victoria House, with a frame of interest in photography also identified that her participation was directly linked to her story of being homeless and thus being situated within Victoria House:

> "I've never been involved in things like this before...I was made homeless because I lost my job and my landlord kicked me out and I would never have got involved in stuff like this if I hadn't have been made homeless."

Social media appropriation could also be seen as part of a person's relational identity and the use of social networking sites was also implicated in participatory decision:

> "I use Facebook at home and I saw a request for people, well no actually, I think I joined the People's Voice Media group when it was called...first of all because my friends had joined it and it looked like an interesting project."

> "...with the advance of social networking sites and Facebook and things like that I'd already started to do my own anyway at the same time as when I came

here but that coincided" (Keith, talking about how community reporter training and technology has enabled him to put his ideas into practice).

5.4.2.3 Positional Aspects of Identity, Interpretive Framing and Participation.

The positional aspect of identity is viewed as more open to interpretation and interrelates with relational aspects of identity. I interpret this broadly, firstly as associated self defined positions or roles with regard to the 'whole,' meaning in this context the community and thus local area. The regeneration frame of community reporting in the two areas of study suggests that those getting involved with community reporting and accessing the Social Media Centres will live within these areas, but this is not necessarily the case. At the time in East Salford participation was said to be open to, "anyone who lives, works or plays in the local area", while in East Manchester participation was defined more tightly according to postcodes. Ruth, for example was living outside of the boundaries defined by the regeneration area, as she explained:

> "When I initially did contact them I wasn't within the remit because I didn't live in the right area but they paired me up with a company that was, they did some work with the Princes Trust and there was a girl there who wanted to make a film so they paired me up with her."

Positional identity, in terms of location, does however clearly play a part in terms of who is getting involved and sustained participation with regard to community reporting. Thus firstly I will talk about how the way in which people position themselves in relation to the 'local area' seems to have a bearing on participation. Part of the story of participation, for some, sits within the context of a strong sense of local identity. Tony, for example, feeling that he was "already doing" community reporting effectively before he got involved with the programme, positions himself as a "...publicist for what's good, what's going on in Salford". His response to being asked about his motivations within this arena clearly highlights the strong role played by his positional identity with regards to Salford.

> "Right. Well, I do care about my environment. I'm a Salfordian. We have had a lot of bad press about it being such a, a not very nice place to live and I don't believe that. In fact, the…walk around Salford now and a lot of people, if you haven't been here for years, you wouldn't recognise it. And, it's actually a fabulous place to live, with a lot of amenities and facilities for all sorts of people. There's always room for, again, room for improvement and I'm sure that the, we're trying to do that. So, I thought, because of the negativity, the only way you can make it positive, stand up and say, 'That's not true and I'll prove it.'"

Keith also clearly has a strong sense of local identity and relates his participation to his roots in Salford and Manchester and to a sense of positioning himself as representing these cities "one hundred per cent."

> "I just had loads of ideas and wanted to put them out there, if you like, 'erm I've always lived in Manchester, my family from Salford so, I'm connected to both if you like in that respect and I just think there are you know millions of issues that need reporting on, you could have a million community reporters and still not cover it..."

> "I'm Manchester, born and bred, my family's history is Salford as well, so I love both cities."

Keith's participation is very much linked to his local identity in terms of how he sees the role of community reporting fitting within his perceived potential role within the area:

> "I could be a voice of the people because I believe I am on their level...you know you've got to be a man so to speak...Plus I am from the area which helps you know if you can talk the talk kind of thing and you know your history, you know what you're talking about and not because you've got some researcher to do it for you, because you know the score, you know where they're coming from."

When Jane was talking about her community work collectively, which heavily interrelates with her activity within the arena of community reporting, she said: "I represent people from the past, trying to get their stories heard" and that "I feel that part of my job is to represent people's opinions in the area". This is indicative of a perception of a positional role within Salford which is implicated in her participation. Anne and Tony also expressed a similar area-based sense of responsibility, clearly tied into their appropriation of social media in this context:

> "I just think it's...your duty to make your environment, and your area, a better place. Sitting around doing nothing is not going to get anybody anywhere. Apathy does not rule..." (Tony).

> "...if you're living in an area you've got to be prepared to work hard in your community if you want things to change" (Anne).

Phil's appropriation of social media in this context is also tied in with the way he positions himself in relation to helping people with mental health issues in Salford, "I'm also pretty controversial in trying to get things changed for the better for people in mental health in Salford". Kevin also talked about his blogging activity developed through his community reporting (a music blog) in relation to his self defined role as helping socially isolated people in his local area:

"...the odd personal reason is because for a long time I had quite big periods of social isolation and there must be people out there who are in the same position who like music; where again if they could watch that they might see a gig that would get them out of the house or something. Because when I used to go to Eccles shopping for instance, there are a lot of sick people in Eccles for some reason, I'm not sure why. I think so anyway, compared to other places. They could go out for instance to the pubs in Eccles after seeing my blog, whereas they won't if they don't look at the pub window, they won't know that..." (a response to a question around the audience he was hoping to reach).

Mike S additionally positions himself feeling responsible for the "the radio side of things" in Salford, clearly linked to his sustained participation:

"I feel a responsibility to help people who've done stuff, which their natural inclination might be to think about putting it on the Internet either putting it on the PVM site or their site, or YouTube. But, then, you know, we've got the radio link"

Moving on to explore my perception of participation as complex and co-created I turn now to explore the evident practical and cognitive dimensions to the integration of social media for content creation and sharing inherent within the Community Reporter Programme.

5.4.3 The Cognitive and Practical Dimensions of Domestication: Domesticating Technological Cultural Capital for Community Reporting

Selwyn (2004) points toward the importance of technological capital, which is concerned with the economic, social and cultural resources on which people can draw when engaging with ICTs as crucial for meaningful and sustained use of ICT and for enabling people to be producers rather than consumers. In addition he highlights that differences in access to technological capital have been identified as lying at the heart of the discourse of digital inequalities (Selwyn, 2004). Beyond the symbolic framing of social media as community reporting, cognitive and practical strategies for integrating the social practice of community reporting within specific contexts and communities are also in evidence at the organisational level. The cognitive dimension of domestication is concerned with the kind of competences "needed or created in the appropriation process" (Laegran, p.82, 2005) and the practical dimension is concerned with the ways in which technology is integrated within a cultural practice. I suggest that participation (through such cognitive and practical strategies) in the context of community reporting, may be understood as shaped and enabled additionally by a process and approach of introducing and building forms of technological cultural capital within the regeneration areas, through the digital inclusion launch pad of People's Voice

Media. This may be understood in essence as a process of digital empowerment for content creation and sharing including within a community context.

Technological cultural capital is a term which refers to ICT, skills, knowledge and competencies which may be developed through formal and informal learning and also through "socialisation into technology" which can be understood as "exposure" to "techno-cultural goods" (Selwyn, 2004, p.355). PVM can be said to play a pivotal role in encouraging and facilitating sustained participation and thus developing such cultural forms of capital through a process of socialising people into and familiarising people with the technologies associated with social media and community content creation and sharing. This process of 'socialisation' into, and 'familiarisation' with the technologies associated with community reporting occurs through outreach work, community reporter training, social events, 'meet ups', volunteering opportunities and through dedicated social media centres of access to technological, economic and social forms of capital. Such a process of community domestication is effectively working to embed the social practice of community reporting within the two urban regeneration areas and beginning to create in essence a new social world that could be described as a community of community reporters. In what follows I seek to provide some illustrations of this process of 'socialisation and familiarisation.'

The outreach work of PVM was likened "in advertising terms" to "creating demand in terms of raising the profile of what these tools can do and encouraging people to do it just as an activity" (anonymous staff member) and as such may hold some synergies with Schäfer's, (2011) 'selling utopia' discourse. For example, PVM staff spend some time addressing "one of the biggest challenges" with regards to community engagement, that is "just letting people know that the technology has moved on and so it is quite user friendly...":

> "Teresa is very good at that, at saying, you know I didn't know anything about social media or this world of putting your views up on the Internet but it is pretty easy and so when she says that, it's pretty convincing" (Anonymous staff member).

Jess M, also described her 'learning by disguise' approach to engagement with older generations within the Edge Lane Allotments frame of community reporting who "didn't really want much to do with me or my laptop and microphone or anything like that...". She described the approach she takes in terms of locating something else that they are interested in, providing the example of when she asked an older member of the allotment group to show

her how to make a gingerbread cake and then simply "introduced a video camera". Informal, flexible approaches to learning were also identified by a few respondents as important for those whom the school and classroom experience of learning may serve as a barrier to learning. Patrick emphasised throughout his interview the importance of the approach to training within the Edge Lane Allotments frame:

> "I think the beauty of it is that the people from People's Voice Media can come out to the site and do it in a relaxed atmosphere."

> "I think a few people have faced various challenges, some of the older generation, but the beauty of it is that they got round it and they seem to be getting round it and it's just having to work at a slower place."

> "They work round the individual, which, a lot of individuals don't like to be in a classroom. They don't like to be stressed out or put in a lecture situation if they want to learn something. Some people like to shy away and say, well I would like to know how to do that, is there any way you can help me, and these people have done it. I think it has been great the way they have gone about it."

Kevin also emphasised the importance of the training approach within his interview:

> "I think the staff. I mean there are only two members of staff here but they're very, very patient, and the communication skills...I think it works on the level they're at, because I'm not ready to work right away. My other option prior to this was going to a local college, which I did, but I was shoved in with a lot of 16-year-olds who were messing about, and there didn't seem to be anywhere that fit where I was at. This fits someone who is out of work, sick, who wants to still use their skills and wants to be creative while they're not being paid. But they can be flexible, because I don't have to come in every day basically if I don't want to. It's up to me, and there's no pressure. I think it's pretty spot on the way they're teaching. It seems to be not pushing but being a bit strict if I mess up or I don't listen, or repeat the same thing. But a bit gentle as well, so you're not feeling like you're messing up really as much as you would if you were doing a college course and stuff. Because I'm aware that they know that I'm struggling sometimes, but it's kind of working for me" (Kevin).

Once people enter the community reporter world of access to technological capital they are commonly exposed to and experience a wide variety of technologies for content capture, editing and distribution. One particularly novel and valued feature of the community reporter experience, linked to participatory decision making and sustained participation is the capacity to borrow and personally experiment with technologies of content capture, through the dedicated social media centres as illustrated in the quotations below. As Keith and Ruth

additionally pointed out this may be particularly important in a context of economic and digital disadvantage:

> "The equipment here, isn't as far as I am aware, isn't accessible in many places, there are not many places you can go and say 'Can I borrow a video camera for the weekend I'm going to make a film' which is what I did twice..." (Kevin)

> "I use my mobile phone but there is equipment available if you need it and a lot of different equipment as well which again especially if you don't have the money like myself and you can't afford to go and buy a camera or you're not online which I'm not at home you know you don't have the capacity to be online then without something like Salford Social Media you'd be stuck, so it's vital really" (Keith).

> "I'd wanted to get into film making but I've not had the equipment, money, skills...they're good at lending equipment, they're brilliant about lending equipment...even if you don't have access to the Internet they provide it for you in their offices and they're not like, 'here you go get on with it, they're there with you every step of the way" (Ruth).

> "I have been given a video camera and a stand, a little tripod, which I don't use that often because I just get out my mobile phone and take video clips and pictures and try and piece it all together with the little bit of knowledge I have gained...But I know they have got all sorts of equipment, if you are struggling with anything they are quite willing to even letting you keep the equipment for a short while till you get used to it in your own background. So it's good in that respect, the tools are there" (Patrick).

Mike S also described the constant access to technological cultural capital through community reporter volunteering opportunities associated with enabling and driving participation in community content creation:

> "We've had training courses and we've had training events, and the other thing that I would count as training is just recently, a few weeks ago, that Smart Cities conference that we went to…because it was like on the job training. Some people had voice recorders, some people had video cameras, some people were staffing the video booth... It was like it was a training event, as well as being an active example of being a community reporter. You know, community reporters in action, is on-going training. And I don't think …my experience over the last, like, couple of years, is there's never a point where you say, right, I know it now. Like, every time you do a new event or do a new bit of a training course, you learn something new. So, that's what's really good about it. It's like a constant access to more stuff..."

> "And I think what a year ago might have seemed complicated, once you start getting your hands on it you suddenly realise that there aren't actually any limits about what you can do with these bits and pieces. You can get them on the computer, and you can start to edit them in lots of different ways, and then producing products which are actually different...You know it's like having

126

ingredients and cooking lots of different kinds of cakes. And I think that's what we've learnt."

Mike S also identified clearly how building up familiarity with the various technologies of community reporting has developed both his and Jane's confidence to utilise such technologies within the context of their community work and thus capacity to continue to participate within this arena, identifying that "...once you get started in a few of these skills you suddenly realise that you can do lots of other things..." and further that:

> "One of the things that happened is we got a lot more confident about using equipment and we wouldn't worry about somebody say, you know, here's a recorder, go to that event. We can do that, because we've had enough familiarity with different types of recorders, cameras, video cameras...We had a desktop computer at home and plugging a video camera into that seemed like a real challenge for a long time and it's only recently when we've thought about the fact, right we could go on...Like when we had this In Bloom event we went out, took some photos, put them on the computer; you know within an hour we had a little, some of the edited photos, up on the website and we never would have done that a year ago. So although we'd seen bits of equipment we'd never been confident enough about it before we got involved with PVM."

Ruth also spoke of the value she placed on her exposure to and opportunities to use various technologies associated with community reporting which she may not have otherwise come into contact with which she links to enabling and inspiring further content creation orientated participation:

> "I wouldn't have come into contact with a lot of the technology and once you come into contact with it and use it a lot more it just becomes second nature to you. It gives you the opportunity to use and knowledge about different packages for example editing videos."

> "I would say that's what they've done for me and they've given me new ideas as to what I can do, different ideas for making films I'd never think to do audio blog, with the more things that I've learnt the more I know is possible for me to do, I don't feel restricted by what kind of medium I would do something in. Before I would think I just want to do film whereas now I can do photo diaries and just a wide variety of things and that in itself has increased my creativity."

Paul A within the Victoria House framing of community reporting also expressed that the process has introduced him to technology which he said: "I wouldn't even have come across or thought about coming across."

Some of the community reporters emphasised the value of the social element of community reporting which also provide opportunities for socialisation into the associated technologies. Whenever I attended such social events and community reporter events such as the launch of Salford Internet TV, I found that there was always a wide variety of technologies of content capture and display present. Some community reporters valued the opportunity to discuss technology, such as the group at Victoria House who told me that their community reporter sessions often started with an informal conversation about technology and community reporting. Such informal discussions provide a key example of socialisation into the techno-culture of community reporting, as illustrated through David's description of how these type of discussions work within the context of informal community reporter training:

> "...the other level of support is people just being able to come in and maybe talk about projects. What will happen is you might spend half the session not necessarily getting anything practical done but it has been quite key because it's been discussing things, it's been people talking about their experiences. I think there again, the key thing there is about, you know, not viewing one person or yourself as an expert, it's more like trying to bring other people's influence in and saying, 'well you know how would you deal with this story or what is the best way of recording this interview or taking this picture."

Community reporter social events were also functioning on the level of socialisation into the technologies and social practice of community reporting and thus social media focused content creation and sharing. Such events appeared to be characterised by opportunities for community reporters to share and discuss their work, building up in the process exposure to, and familiarity with social media sharing platforms. During the focus groups organised by PVM, it was revealed that people wanted more opportunities for such informal social events and during and after my research I know that informal community meet ups had been set up. At a general level community reporters were clearly enjoying the social dimension of the role inherent in comments such as "I love the social aspect" and "I enjoy meeting people." However, such social events also function subtlety as constant exposure to, and hence increasing familiarity with, the technologies and practices of community reporting.

The social media centres and in particular Salford Social Media Centre appeared to be functioning additionally as local community spaces within which technological cultural capital may thrive and as a potential space within which social media and community reporting as a participatory activity may come into view. Through 'drop-ins' and informal training the Salford Social Media Centre in particular, seemed to be acting as a local foci of access and exposure to the technologies and social practice of community reporting and

importantly the technological social capital, (most specifically staff and peer expertise and support) which seemed to be enabling and sustaining participation in the social practice. The Salford Social Media Centre and in particular the drop-ins in Salford were identified as highly valued resources among a number of community reporters as a physical meeting place for community reporters, a place to access equipment, support and form new social contacts The friendly, welcoming environment with cups of tea and helpful, supportive, approachable staff were particular social context factors of importance to the community reporters utilising the centre (Appendix C). Keith, for example said, "...just coming to the drop-ins on a Tuesday and Wednesday are vital and essential". The patience and communication skills of staff were identified as particularly important for two participants facing health related barriers to technological learning, as John explains for example:

> "They have taken someone who...knew nothing about media and trained me in sufficiently interesting videos...One thing which does need saying here is that I am damaged goods because of my accident and the people here have been very good at bearing in mind my problems and helping me with them...So they took someone who was severely damaged goods and taught him how to communicate the needs, aspirations, desires and successes of a community to the greater world out there and we really give Salford a world voice"

However, there were some indications that while the Social Media Centre in Salford was offering a significant social media focused local foci of access, the location and social environment of the centre may present barriers to wider community engagement in Salford., For example, during one of the PVM organised focus groups, a participant commented, "I think it would be daunting to just wander in off the street" (Mike S). Jane similarly said, "I think the building is a barrier...I've heard people say that the building puts them off". A further perspective from a research participant not engaging with the Social Media Centre, (the Editor of the Salford Star) is illustrative of the view of potential location and environmental barriers:

> "For a start they were given £200,000 worth of office space and equipment and stuff like that...Now if you look at the Salford Innovation Park it's got barbed wire around it. It's got barriers. It's not a place where the community would even dream of going to...You know if you're going to do a community place, particularly in Salford, it has to be somewhere where people don't feel uneasy going in. If you look at that place it's barriers; bloody spiky railings and things. It's absolutely disgusting. It's not a community place at all...I don't know a soul that's had anything to do with that place.." (Stephen).

Fay also related potential barriers to engagement to the socio-technical environment of the centre and specifically the presence of technology within the centre, commenting during her

interview that: "Well I feel alright there but I think some people going in, they say, oh it's computers and I know people that have said this and they kind of back off". Keith, when talking about the centre, was also of the opinion that while "It's called social media...it's not very sociable at times" relating this again to the broader setting of the media centre.

However, creating such a local foci of technology access, and thus familiarity with the technologies associated with community reporting through a social media centre, was reported by staff to be more challenging in East Manchester than in Salford. Teresa explained that in East Manchester "...they've got a much smaller Social Media Centre that's effectively a couple of computers in a shared space in the front of a community centre they've had less success with stabilising a drop-in environment" (Appendix C). David identified further that "...sometimes it's quite difficult just to get people through the door" going on to explain the challenges faced, particularly in terms of integrating technologies associated with community reporting:

> "The drop-in sessions are on a Monday and a Friday but have not really taken off, the resources are fairly limited. The IMac computers we had with video capability etc only lasted for a few weeks and they got stolen. Now we've only got basic PCs with basic surfing the Internet capability."

People also enter the realm of community reporting with their own 'development of technological cultural' frame of approach, with John, for example, highlighting that: "I really wanted to learn how to use the software and to make the videos" and Shona talking about her reasons for getting involved as follows:

> "Just to learn new skills. Improve what I've got already. Like today I'm learning photo... video editing which I didn't know how to do and I've learnt how to use the Apple Mac which you don't really use because I've got a proper computer, a Windows one. So it's new technology" (Shona).

This frame of approach particularly features when participants are seeking employment, a frame of approach explored further in Chapter 6. The motivation to develop skills associated with community reporting and perceptions of the competencies required for participation in this arena may also be linked to participatory decision making in this context:

> "...you know somebody has to want to do it don't they, somebody has to want to give their time to develop their skills in using communication in this way, which isn't always what everybody's choice is, you know" (anonymous).

> "I think...what might prevent people is the work that's involved. They have to have some skills in writing and research, and of course either sound editing or digital editing, and it takes time" (Paul R).

5.5 Conclusion

The findings of my study serve to display the complexities of the notion of participation in the social media era and the value of viewing participation as a co-created phenomenon has been identified. The resultant co-creative view opens up and illuminates not only the co-creative nature of content production but also the complex ways in which community generated content may come to be viewed as a meaningful activity within the context of local urban regeneration areas. The theoretical tools of domestication and interpretive framing have served to illuminate that: complex individual contextual frames; symbolic framing of social media and community; existing relational and positional identity within the community; familiarisation and socialisation into the technologies of community content production; and continued access to technological capital (in particular technological cultural capital) all play a role in shaping the way in which people and communities find a place and meaning for this participatory activity within their lives. The findings therefore, significantly challenge the notion of participatory ease and organic emergence of participatory culture which tends to accompany the rhetoric surrounding social media, (Jenkins, 2006). The findings also build on and substantiate the knowledge within the digital inclusion discourse of the complex ways in which people develop relationships with ICTs beyond the suitable conditions of access (Selwyn, 2004) and indeed beyond demographic frames which tend to characterise digital inclusion research.

My research also finds, in particular, a link between social and economic disadvantage and participation in content production, potentially challenging existing research which identifies socio-economic background as a barrier to participation in this arena (Harigittai & Walejko, 2008). However, concurrently it appears that community generated content as a participatory activity is largely failing to reach the most socially isolated, a common concern within the field of community-based ICT integration in disadvantaged areas, as identified in Chapter 2. Having thus explored the intricacies of participation with regard to content creation and sharing through the contextual lens of community reporting, I now in the following chapter, proceed to explore whether and how such forms of participatory activity are associated with empowerment within my urban regeneration frame.

Chapter 6: Empowered Participation?
Exploring the Relationship between Community Reporting and Community Empowerment

> "In the last decade, studies and narratives on the new media have been populated by the notion of ICTs as 'empowerment tools.' In this common narrative, information and communication technologies are considered tools capable of producing user empowerment" (Fortunati, 2009, sic).

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I focused on exploring the realities and complexities of participation in relation to community content creation and sharing in the social media age through the lens and context of a case study of a Community Reporter Programme operating in two urban regeneration areas in Salford and Manchester. I argued that to explore and understand any empowerment potential of such technologies it was first fundamentally necessary to unravel the complexities of participation in this context. I also began to explore and point towards the ways in which participation in community content creation and sharing may become a meaningful and accessible activity within a context of areas socially constructed as deprived. In this chapter I move on to explore the relationship between such participatory activity and community empowerment, a further part of the story of the ways in which community generated content may be finding a meaning within the lives of people living in disadvantaged urban areas. The chapter also serves to continue with my exploration of the role of ICTs in community empowerment and regeneration through the lens of social media.

The exploration of community empowerment in this chapter relates to empowerment as an outcome rooted in research participant perceptions of value associated with participation in community content creation and sharing through the Community Reporter Programme, from an individual, community and wider regeneration contextual level perspective. The findings presented stem from responses to questions focused around individual level perceptions of empowerment, personal benefits and life changes associated with participation, together with generic questions regarding perceptions of value for community empowerment and regeneration. The chapter also serves to illuminate potential arenas of disempowerment. The findings presented draw on the voices of my research participants. With a predominant focus

on community reporters engaging with the programme, I also include insights and views from other research participants who have taken part in the study as identified in Chapter 5 (Table 5.1). Given my understanding of community empowerment as situated and continuing with the theme of co-creation I also seek to draw out the specific ways in which perceptions of empowerment may be co-created.

6.2 The Role of Community Reporter: Exploring Individual Perceptions of Value through the Lens of Social Exclusion

> "On an individual level without a doubt the work that we do has an impact. You know there's a guy who hasn't worked for 18 years and he now feels in a position to and he's really excited by that and that's just great, it's absolutely great, I really feel proud of the work that I do on that level...and there are some really great stories out there. Whether it's retired people or people who have been on long term sick or, it does, it has an impact and they've made great friendships already, really great unlikely friendships" (Teresa).

The above quotation drawn from an interview with one of the staff supporting the Community Reporter Programme is illustrative of the enthusiasm surrounding perceptions of value at the individual level of the community reporter role. When I approached the organisation about conducting the research, they were very keen to try to capture these individual stories. The problem faced here is one which has plagued community informatics research, that of a reliance on anecdotal evidence and the impossibility of pinning down the role played by ICT within the equation. In what follows I hope to bring some light to the relationship between ICT and empowerment and specifically, social media and empowerment, by exploring the perceptions of value at the individual level associated with the role of community reporter.

In order to illuminate my findings, in this section I explore the value that research participants associate with taking on their new social role of community reporter through the lens of social exclusion. I also include the voices of those who have taken on the role of supporting the Community Reporter Programme. Social exclusion when used within the context of urban regeneration reflects the idea that spatial concentrations of disadvantage have led to the isolation of individuals and households from what may be considered to be 'normal' or socially valued activities (McGregor & McConnachie, 1995; Buré, 2006). Exclusion from ICTs has long been associated with exacerbating such isolation and has thus been constructed as technologies of social inclusion (Castells, 1999; Warschauer, 2003; 2004). Social

exclusion is also associated with social isolation and a disconnection or lack of social interaction, networks and community (McGregor & McConnachie, 1995; Power & Wilson, 2000). The community reporter role is one which also appears to be associated with dismantling social isolation and reconnecting people, socially and economically. It also appears to be of particular benefit for those groups who may be viewed as at risk of social isolation. The impacts of social exclusion have been suggested to be predominantly psychological manifesting in, for example, low self esteem and a sense of powerlessness, (Boetang, 1999). The role of community reporter is a role which seems to be associated with feeling good about oneself and feeling empowered, and has particular value within the realm of self esteem.

Working within the frame of Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, I suggest that any benefits within the individual frame are dependent on self actualisation, a concept associated with the human desire for self fulfilment. The concept may be further understood as "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1943, p. 383). Maslow further suggests that the self actualisation is related to, and dependent upon, the fulfilment of esteem needs (the desire for self esteem, self respect and the esteem of others) and of social needs (the human needs of love, affection and belonging). The fulfilment of such needs are strongly associated with participation in the Community Reporter Programme.

6.2.1 The Social Benefits of the Community Reporter Role: Dismantling Social Isolation, Connecting and Reconnecting People

> "I suppose the other major value that we would take from it is the fact that it's a really good way of getting people back into an active sort of community role or an active role in society that people who might have been disengaged and not working or disengaged from main stream services..." (Ross Hemmings, Regeneration Officer for Contour Housing, Talk Broughton project).

Ross Hemmings, cited above, was involved in running the Talk Broughton Project, which formed the participatory frame for two of the community reporter research participants. The project involved training up local people to effectively conduct consultations with other local people about the issues affecting their lives and their area. When I spoke to Ross he emphasised how as an organisation they have found it hard to grapple with the 'value' of adopting a community reporter approach particularly when approached from a quantitative

angle. Some of my findings tend to agree with Ross's view that the value of the Community Reporter approach may lie in its role in somehow (and that is harder to capture) bringing people out of the social isolation that they may have faced due to periods of inactivity associated in with particular periods of unemployment, ill health, depression and or homelessness. I also suggest that value in this particular area lies in the offline social interaction aspect of the role associated with connecting and reconnecting people socially. Additionally, I suggest value may lie in preventing the social isolation of those groups viewed at risk of social exclusion and those who may face barriers to economic participation on a long term basis due to ill health and disabilities.

When talking about their experiences of the Community Reporter Programme and the benefits associated with the role of community reporter, a few of the respondents associated taking on the role with moving beyond and breaking a cycle of social isolation and disconnection. For example, Paul, who was on incapacity benefit when he entered the programme, talked about his community reporter role in terms of dismantling his personal sense of isolation and disconnection from social participation:

> "It's meant that I've been able to get out of my four walls, that's important. So that you're not isolated on your own, don't know what to do and it breaks up the monotony of your routine, get up, get dinner on, go shopping, come back, have tea, watch TV, go to bed, you know day in day out."

Antony also talked about the benefits of entering the programme as specifically associated with the dismantling of his personal sense of isolation, undoubtedly associated with his journey through depression and toward employment. "It's given me the opportunity to get out of the house." Antony also identified further that "...it's given me the opportunity to help me with this depression that I appear to be coming through". Another one of the male community reporters who wished to remain anonymous in this study identified that the benefits of participating in the programme within a personal frame were "marginal". However, he did concurrently suggest that the role was somehow breaking his tendency to isolate himself socially, which was linked to problems of depression, "other illnesses" and long term unemployment over a period of many years.

> "I've got a long way to go so it is really difficult to put into perspective. Before, even now it is hard for me to get out of house anyway and this is actually forcing me to so I am getting the benefit of that."

Ruth is at the younger end of the spectrum of community reporters that I spoke to being in her twenties and looking for volunteer work when she decided to take on the role. Ruth spoke

about the role as a motivating force and therefore valuable potentially I suggest in a context of social exclusion:

> "I wanted to find out about things to do, different things because sometimes you get stuck not doing much and I think it's quite a motivating thing to do because once you start doing it, there's more things you want to do, it gives you, lights a fire under your arse, it's like, 'Oh I can use this kind of camera, what can I go out and film? That's what it does for you..."

Both an anonymous community reporter and Kevin talked about community reporting in relation to rehabilitating their lives after a long period of illness (discussed within section 6.2.3). Kevin spoke about his feeling that the programme was working for him with particular regard to reducing social isolation, linked to his feelings of social and place-based reconnection developed through his social role of community reporter and the associated training aspect:

> "We made a video with the BBC and I really enjoyed the location work, going around on buses from one place to another, interviewing lots of people. So I have been used to being kind of being stuck in the house for a while before I did this and all of a sudden I have seen parts of Salford I have not been to for ages. So that was really good."

Kevin was particularly vocal about the way his community reporter role had related to his social self and attributed the role to his sense of "succeeding in rehabilitating my own life after a long period of illness". He went on to highlight further the value of the sense of social reconnection, feeling he had become disconnected as a result of his illness and thus a period of inactivity "...what it did that was useful for me personally was creating social connections with people that I had kind of lost through being ill". He spoke about the positives he associates with community reporting in terms of "something to talk about when I'm out with my friends, which I didn't have when I wasn't doing much". Specifically, Kevin talked about how his music blog and the video he created and shared via the blog, played a strong role in rebuilding his social connections locally:

> "What I've found is that people - the part that helps me, is that when I go into the places where I've filmed people are talking to me about the blog, and so it's easier for me to connect with people while I'm in the pub. Because when I first moved into where I lived there was quite a long period when I was just sat on my own in pubs waiting to meet people, and it seems to be an easier way to talk to people because everyone likes music."

> "...before I was like a stranger in the pub, they kind of know something about me now which is music. So it seems some people seem able to approach me about it..."

Kevin also identified how his role as a community reporter had broadened his 'social outlets' which he expressed was important to him because his family no longer live in Salford and so he has needed to make more of an effort to develop connections with people. In addition, Kevin talked about the building up of his confidence through the performance of his role, (confidence being a factor which intermingles with the next section) in relation to his capacity to make social connections.

> "When I went to...to the conference in London, it was a massive conference with people from all over the world came to it, teachers and educators from all over the world. And I'd never interviewed anyone before that and we were there for three days. I hated it at first and on the first day I thought 'I can't do this,' I'd never really shook a microphone in front of anyone's face and that was a fairly new skill. But my confidence gradually improved and it was really good just to be able to go up to anyone and say, 'How are you? Can I interview you?' Just the little steps of doing that; and then once I realised that I could do it, I now feel that I've got a new skill and I probably - the social connection of that is that I could probably go into a pub and just do that. And if you were stood at a bar I would probably say, 'Hi, what do you do, blah, blah, blah?' because I have got that skill, whereas I didn't have it. I've got it, but I've probably been nervous about using it. But this has reinforced that I can go out and talk to people. I don't know, but it's useful from where I'm at."

Kevin additionally highlighted that the role had helped to develop his interpersonal skills, through the process of content creation, "because there is a bit of acting involved."

I met Shona through a visit to the group of people attending one of the community reporter courses being run at Victoria House (Figure 5.1), a supported housing scheme for the homeless. Although Shona had only been involved with the Community Reporter Programme for a short time she did point to the social aspect as of key value to her. Her comment that: "It's let down the barriers" also suggests that her participation may be linked potentially to dismantling her personal sense of isolation which may have developed due to her period of being homeless:

> "I've never been involved in things like this before and it helps me to meet new people and get some new friendships. I was made homeless because I lost my job and my landlord kicked me out and I would never have got involved in stuff like this if I hadn't have been made homeless. So I met new people that I probably wouldn't have met before or wouldn't have spoken to. It's let down the barriers."

Richard, a community reporter who is in his seventies and Mike C, who works as volunteer to support the programme and who had been out of work for a long period of time following a

motorcycle accident, both spoke about their roles in relation to filling a participatory gap in their lives. Richard made the decision to participate in the programme to keep him active, busy and reduce the risk of depression following the loss of his wife after nearly forty years of marriage. As an older retired participant who may be at risk of social exclusion, he spoke in particular about the social benefits of the role:

> "The benefits for me, I'm meeting new people, meeting a vast array of different people or different status in life...I'm making a lot of friends."

Mike C also made a link between taking on his support role and dismantling his personal sense of isolation by bringing him back into a more active and positive role, and in common with other participants suggested that the Community Reporter Programme is somehow acting as a motivating force and having a positive social impact:

> "...it helped me...because it physically got me out of the house. So rather than moping around and feeling sorry for myself, and I get to meet nice people..."

> "... like, for me, it gets me out of my, the environment that I'm used to, is four walls and what not."

Mike C also in fact linked social media and community reporting generally to motivating people to become more active, which he views as empowering:

> "It can empower people to actually...It gets them off their backsides and gets them doing stuff, you know rather than moaning to their mates, they can moan to the world now..."

Both Mike and Richard spoke about the role in terms of bringing a new meaning and purpose to their daily lives, which is essentially how John talked about the role in terms of a new focus and self actualisation discussed earlier. Social exclusion has also been associated with a lack of purpose or meaning in life (Stilman, 2009) and thus it is suggested that the role may bring value in this context. Mike C, for example, who supports the Community Reporter Programme, when asked about whether he felt the programme empowers people or changes lives responded: "It has certainly changed mine. I've got a different outlook now and I've got something to look forward to..." Richard who is in his seventies, retired and recently lost his wife, also spoke about the role in the following way; "It's surprising and it brightens your day, gives you something to do, something to think about, worry about". The idea of an association between participation and providing people with more meaning and purpose in life is essentially also explored as part of the following section.

Paul E who is unable to work due to health issues made similar suggestions of Community Reporting being something of a motivating force linked to the framing and Paul's belief in the framing of community reporting as a socially worthy activity:

> "...but I've got to get up off my chair and do something, make a difference. So for me that's what it is making a difference."

Colin, another community reporter felt that the role was a good way to "break into the community" because he had recently moved to Salford from Collyhurst. Lynne, who suffers from depression, also talked about the social value of the programme with regard to meeting new people through her community reporter role. In particular she spoke about how meeting another community reporter who also suffers from depression "really altered both our lives." Together with the community reporters talked about in this section, a number of the other community reporters taking on this new social role may be said to belong to groups who face life challenges associated with risks of social exclusion including Keith who was unemployed and on incapacity benefit; Colin who came to the role via a drug and alcohol programme, had spent some time in prison in the past and was looking to build his economic future through skills gained; Euna, an asylum seeker from Zimbabwe who described herself as a 'nomadic person' while not wishing to be; Fay who was eighty-six at the time and retired and Phil and Paul who entered the programme via the Victoria House project for the homeless.

There also seems to be some association between the role of the community reporter and reconnecting symbolically and physically with place. Kevin was the key community reporter who was vocal about this from a personal perspective expressing the following:

> "The geography side as well I think is important. I'm becoming much more aware. I was getting sick of Salford really, because I've lived here for most of my life, I lived in Liverpool for one year. And I was getting bored with it, and I think it's made me less bored with Salford because I'm seeing much more of it. I was probably sticking to the pub next door in Eccles and getting very bored, and now I'm going to different locations and meeting different people, and it's changed my own perceptions of the town, I think, and made it look more interesting."

Kevin went on to talk about his first activity as a community reporter, which I feel illustrates the way in which the role may be associated with, or of value socially in a context of social isolation:

> "The first thing I did, actually, it wasn't for the BBC, it was in Eccles. We set up a booth, like an interview booth with a camera in it, so I was used to walking around Eccles, bored, thinking, 'What am I going to do today?' Should I go to the gym on my own? Then me and Teresa and Mick went and

set up this booth, and I went up to people and said, 'Can I just talk to you about some health questions?' And I remember I found that quite tough but I did it...actually getting along with them and we had to just try it, it felt good..."

Kevin also starts to talk about the 'feel good' factors associated with the role of community reporter which I now explore within the next section.

6.2.2 The Role of Community Reporter: The Psychological Value

Individual empowerment is often referred to as psychological empowerment and the impacts of social exclusion have been cited as predominantly psychological in nature (Wilson, 1996; Oppenheim, 1998). When I use the term 'psychological value' I am simply referring to the idea that the role of Community Reporter is something which appears to make people 'feel good' about themselves and their lives, which is particularly valuable when people have experienced challenges, disadvantages and social isolation within their lives. The role appears to have a particular value in relation to self esteem, which I additionally suggest is linked to a sense of self actualisation in terms of inner satisfaction and fulfilment. Low self esteem has been identified as one of the impacts of social exclusion and non participation (Oppenheim, 1998) and individual empowerment has been identified as beginning with the building of self esteem (Wilson, 1996) and related to the transformation of the inner self, in relation to internal beliefs and attitudes. I draw on Abraham Maslow's (1943) discourse of esteem as a lens through which to filter my findings with regard to the self esteem benefits and value association with the role of community reporter. Maslow (1943, p.382) suggests that self esteem is "based upon real capacity, achievement and respect of others" and as such esteem needs are associated with the desire for 'strength', 'achievement', 'adequacy', 'confidence in the face of the world', 'independence' and 'freedom', and with the desire for 'reputation' or 'prestige' further linked to 'recognition', 'attention,' 'importance' and 'appreciation.' Satisfying such esteem needs is associated with feelings of 'worth', 'strength', 'capability', 'adequacy', 'self confidence' and "of being useful and necessary in the world" (Maslow, 1943, p, 382). I also suggest that links between the role of community reporter and esteem gains are associated with the altered social access conditions inherent within the role of community reporter. The best way to illustrate my suggestions here is again through the stories and voices of my research participants.

Paul R was on incapacity benefit when he entered the world of community reporting. Paul talked about his experiences of the role of the community reporter in terms of esteem gains voiced in terms of feeling, "important," more "productive," and more valued within his self defined geographic community of Hulme. Paul's story demonstrated a transition in relation to self worth associated with the role of community reporting and his work within community radio, which he identified as, "kind of working hand in hand". Paul's enhanced sense of self value seemed to be clearly emanating from the idea that the role provided a route for self actualisation i.e. a route in this case for Paul to fulfil his desire to be of value and fulfil a socially worthy role within his community. Such feelings may thus also be associated with identification of community reporting as a socially worthy activity. Paul utilised the specific example of "interviewing people from Hulme garden centre" and "highlighting their cause" as an illustration of how community reporting, "helped...because you felt productive and you felt important". The idea is further illustrated through an extract from Paul's interview, following on from this example, as part of his reflection on his experiences of the Community Reporter Programme:

> "But it also gives you a sense of importance that you are important to the community, because you are also reflecting the good side of that community. You know, because a lot of people do get fed up when there are only like certain individuals who tend to do crime, drugs, shootings, knives, and stuff like that. And if that's all you get to hear about that area, then the people are trying their best to build a better community and trying their best to establish businesses, trying to make Hulme a really nice place, don't get the publicity and don't get the exposure they deserve. You know it's like, 'Let's glorify crime' and all the good parts, 'Oh, let's forget about it' and then it just makes one area look very bad when there could be so many good things that are going on. And that's what I tended to do, that's what I wanted to do: I wanted to show that there was a good side to Hulme. There are people who are really making an effort, and really trying their hardest to make Hulme a better place, and therefore Manchester a better place" (Paul R).

Paul's enhanced sense of self worth may also be said to be associated with signifiers of the respect, esteem and appreciation of others embodied in altered social access conditions and concrete feedback. Paul R, for example, talked about access to a variety of social settings or events involving access to "press showings," "movers and shakers within the community" such as councillors and community police officers and "free wine and food". Paul developed such social access through the combination of community reporting and community radio. Paul described how he developed friendships with the people he had interviewed and as a consequence was commonly "invited like a guest to one of their events". A further quotation

from his interview below seeks to illustrate the interrelation between altered social access conditions, the role of the community reporter and altered self esteem.

> "...I knew the councillors, and I knew the up-and-coming councillors, and I knew who was running the Zion Arts Centre, and things like that. So it kind of made me feel more like valued in the community, rather than just somebody who was like just scrounging or something like that...You actually become productive rather than just being a parasite really. So it was putting back into the community, for free and voluntary. So it was good for that..." (Paul R).

He additionally highlighted associations between "going back stage and getting into events for free because you are a reporter and stuff like that" and feeling "a little bit important." Paul also linked his community reporting activities and wider activities within the realm of community media i.e. community radio to self esteem needs in the form of feelings of respect and appreciation from others:

> "I was quite surprised actually, because when I was doing the radio and doing this blog people actually called mine an amusing show and I thought, 'Oh, that's nice' I might not be an MP or a councillor, I might not be a councillor or such a person or the head of a project, but it helps it all helps. And I think people did appreciate what I did, and you know I did earn some respect from the local councillors" (Paul R).

Tricia talked about "going from strength to strength" since joining the programme and spoke about enhanced confidence as one of the key benefits associated with participation. In particular Tricia associated her role and identity as a community reporter specifically with her personal sense of feeling empowered. Again here Tricia is essentially talking about altered social access conditions enabled by her role as a community reporter and her work with Salford Online in terms of the people she meets and the places she can now access as part of her role.

> "I get to meet people as well, you know, I met Hazel Blears two weeks ago. Colin...he's a volunteer, he interviewed her and I was filming it and she spoke to me personally, 'cause I'm one of her constituents and I live in Swinton..."

> "...I feel empowered by doing stuff like filming Hazel Blears for example and I feel.. I went to a convention this weekend and yeh, I feel empowerment because I show my badge and I can get in free, you know... Also I'm involved with Salford online as well, I've got two badges (laughs), yeh, community reporter and yeh, I feel empowered by that (laughs) press badges, you know. "

Tricia's story also serves to highlight the importance of self actualisation to a sense of empowerment as she approaches community reporting from varying frames of interest in social media, music, photography and the community in Salford particularly. Tricia's story of social participation is also valuable in illustrating how empowerment as a feeling is highly

142

dynamic, as people are always changing and growing. This is illuminated through her description of how her needs changed over the course of time and shaped her journey to the role of community reporter and involvement in community-based social media based initiatives. Prior to her stroke, Tricia had been an administrative manager for an IT floor which she talks about as her "past life". As a result of her stroke Tricia has had to learn everything again including how to talk, how to write and how to spell, which firstly led her to The Stroke Association.

> " ...The Stroke Association, I was involved in that when I first had my stroke and I was going to meetings and stuff and they put me in charge of the money, you know, the tea money and stuff like that and I felt empowered by that (laughs) because I couldn't count even, you know at the time but I wasn't going for about two years 'cause I had my stroke in 2001 and I went to the stroke association meetings for six years and then I left 'cause I wasn't getting satisfaction from it anymore and then this opportunity came up..."

Ross Hemming's views with regards to the value of the Community Reporter Programme within the Talk Broughton project frame, makes a similar point to that made by Tricia and Paul R about how the identity of Community Reporter is associated with esteem needs such as feeling important, which he suggested plays an role in people moving forward with their lives:

> "It kind of, I think as well, it sounds quite basic but gives them an identity because we do get this kind of community reporting and I'm a Community Reporter and that is quite a strong thing for the individuals that are skilled up, they've got this identity, a real importance I suppose and that helps them personally to go forward if they've not been in work or even if they are, you know they've helped to build their confidence and probably their ambitions, so that's how we sort of see the value of it but, so that makes it hard to quantify" (Ross Hemmings).

The Chief Executive of People's Voice Media also alluded to the positive impact of the community reporter badge with respect to identity.

Reintroducing the idea of interpretive framing is important at this juncture to help to illustrate my view, through the story of another community reporter, John, that a sense of empowerment will be dependent on an underlying belief in the framing of social media as community reporting (as illustrated through Paul R's story presented earlier in this section). Prior to taking on the role of community reporter John had suffered an accident which left him with a debilitating brain injury. When I asked John, who is very active with regards to community video creation, about whether he thought participation had changed his life in any

way he was quite passionate about his answer clearly feeling that the role had made a huge difference to his life. In particular, he emphasised the sense of self actualisation he was gaining through the role linked to his framing and thus belief in community reporting as a socially worthy activity with particular regard to voice. In fact John, during his interview highlighted and placed emphasis on his view that community reporting provides "a voice for the voiceless" suggesting for example that this quotation should be the title of my PhD. John's esteem needs are clearly being filled through his identity of community reporter and his associated sense that he is of value as a conduit for voice at the community level.

> "It's given me a focus for what I do, it's given me, 'erm do you know what actualisation is? Satisfaction in what I'm doing, people like it, I'm fulfilling a social need and giving a voice to the voiceless, which is my favourite quote of me because we are giving a voice, a world stage, to people who would otherwise be overlooked and Salford is leading the world in this"

John has a clear belief in the value of his role as a community reporter, commenting further for example that, "what I'm doing is so valuable and so it meets the needs of the world." Such beliefs can thus be linked to benefiting John at a psychological level as they suggest that he feels fulfilled and useful within the world as a result of taking on the role of community reporter. This is also evident in the following reflection during his interview:

> "...I have worked in computers, I've worked in engineering. I've worked long hours all my life, but this is the best thing I have done, because I am sitting here smiling away like a Cheshire cat here, (laughs) because it is so great."

In addition, when I asked Tricia about the benefits of sharing content online she commented: "I felt empowered." This area of 'feeling good' could be said to relate to altered social access conditions created via advances in technology as well as through the community reporter role and programme. Paul A, also talked about his positive feelings associated with sharing the content made as part of the group work at Victoria House, within a collective frame of promoting Victoria House. While referring to 'we' in his interview much of what Paul A referred to in this area reflected how he was feeling at a personal or individual level. He referred to "looking at the number of hits we've had", as for example, "gratifying" and "empowering," and stated that: "...it is really gratifying that we've got access to everybody who uses a computer. I think that's hugely empowering". Enhanced social access as a result of capabilities of the technology in this case can be identified again here as part of the story of empowerment. In a similar manner to John, Paul A also talks about the positive feelings he

experiences as a result of the fulfilment of esteem needs through a sense of recognition, attention, and achievement as a result of creating, sharing and getting a number of hits online:

> "...and it is just knowing that we've had 100 hits or 150 hits or one, because we're also videoing stuff and, filming stuff , it feels good, it feels as if we are getting something out there."

Paul also gave the example of the group showcasing their work, to the chief executive of the charity supporting Victoria House:

> "And we were able to show our work to the chief exec, who was extremely impressed with what we're doing...we like praise, it's good for us (laughs)...and the feedback we got from the stuff it's all positive, it's all good. And that makes me happy (laughs)."

He also spoke about his positive feelings associated with looking at the content created as part of the group within Victoria House:

> "I think looking at the final thing, the final results, the final what you've made is so rewarding as well, you just think, God did we do that? How did we do that? By witches and dark forces."

Paul's interview also suggested that he associates the role of Community Reporter and participation in the Community Reporter Programme with a sense of self actualisation in terms of finding it a meaningful and worthwhile activity within his life, commenting for example that "...the whole thing really is worth doing and I'll continue to make progress hopefully".

Kevin related the knowledge that people had seen his work, to enhanced self confidence and a sense of recognition and achievement, all of which are associated with fulfilling esteem needs and contributing to the whole sense of 'feeling good':

> "I was pleased last week when two people turned up who had seen my film on the web and...So I felt 'Wow I did that.' So it's doing my confidence a lot of good" (Kevin, referring here to the Social Media Centre, Salford).

Kevin also talked about the content he has created in relation to a sense of achievement, enhanced self confidence and self actualisation (used here in terms of realisation of the desire to use his creativity for example):

> "I've now got four or five films and I'm doing an audio project now, so it's five achievements if you like. I work hard but I'm pleased that I have done that and have something to look back on, I've not just sat around...got bored stiff. But I've used my creativity and it's kept my confidence up."

Additionally, Kevin talked about his enhanced self confidence related to a sense of achievement associated with the process of capturing content at an early stage in his community reporting activities:

> "And one of the things I did was, I went to a conference with (anonymous) and we filmed a conference and that was good for my own confidence. That was great that because I always thought that I couldn't so something like that but I found it was really enjoyable."

Paul E is unable to work due to a long-term health issue. For Paul his role as a community reporter and his other work with the realm of 'community' is all about feeling he has value in terms of a feeling that he is making a difference. His drive to participate is thus associated with a sense of self actualisation and a feeling that what he is doing is a socially worthy activity "...for me personally I feel I am making a difference". Paul also talked about the benefits he associates with creating and sharing content both within and outside of his role as community reporter with particular regard to sharing his photographs:

> "The benefits is the feedback that you get off other people when they say they saw the site and it's mainly my pictures... I think they cause the most...although some of my stories, I think I did one on police and crime and that went down well...it is enjoyable to them... it's the pride. I don't know if it's the pride or whatever but it did make me feel good when you sit and see online and you know that the whole world can see it...the enjoyment that people have got out of my pictures...I've even had a guy, people, you know have used them on cards. Even in China they're using some of my pictures, you know, so 'yeh I am really pleased."

Paul also spoke about how much enjoyment he gets from "going out and taking pictures, looking for a story" and essentially the pride and inspiration he gets from his creations:

> "...when I did the East Manchester festival and then I saw the results and the video, I thought wow! You know and then it inspires you to go a little bit further the next time..."

When asked about the benefits of participating in the Community Reporter Programme, Jill who runs a dyslexia outreach project and has trained as a community reporter, also spoke about the self esteem benefits associated with the role, particularly for people with dyslexia who may have faced experiences associated with social exclusion. The group have produced a number of digital artefacts and when asked about the benefits of participation Jill points again here to the esteem benefits associated with the content produced:

> "Increased confidence, sense of achievement, you have something concrete at the end of the day, for example, you can take the calendar home, you can listen to the audio and see the film. It is good for people who have been told all their lives they're a failure, so it's important, it's something positive."

Tony also referred to the benefits of the role and associated activities in relation to enhanced self esteem and self actualisation, referring in particular to his sense of enhanced confidence, and also commented that:

> "...everybody likes…when they've done something, they like to be accredited for it. And when you make a little video or do something that is being creative and then your family and that see it, it makes them proud as well, you know, of you."

Keith, who was on incapacity benefit at the time of interview clearly portrayed a real 'feel good' factor around his community reporting attached to perceptions of fulfilling a socially worthy role and conveyed a sense of self actualisation:

> "I just love the social aspect to the Community Reporters course, actually getting to the nitty gritty, you know, dealing with people, local people in Salford and Manchester and finding out a you know what the issues are and what we can do to help with those issues, or stop things happening that shouldn't be happening, or make things happen that aren't already happening."

Jane, who also entered community reporting within a strong community frame being active in community media, interestingly referred to her experiences of community reporting as something which 'feels good' but questioned the extent to which it is of value at a wider community level, commenting that "It is good, it feels good...I don't know how much effect it has on the community". One of the members of staff similarly pointed to the 'feel good' individual empowerment value as 'voice' but questioned the value at a more collective level:

> "In terms of empowerment I think there is a lot of empowerment in having a voice...if you're publishing a video on YouTube and it's getting a few hundred hits then I think that is empowering on an individual level. I am not sure that it is empowering on a community level by itself but I think word of mouth, like 'oh yeh you do that,' you made that video about that it's on You-tube' and people watched it,' I think there is a certain level of empowerment in that as well" (anonymous staff member).

A further member of staff also talked about empowerment at the individual level in relation to esteem needs in terms of developing "self confidence and people feeling they've got a story to tell and knowing that there's people who want to listen to them..." (David)

6.2.3 The Role of Community Reporter: Preparing for Economic Participation and Progression into Further Education

Greater Manchester has a strong historical ICT culture marked by considerable investment in associated infrastructure (Carter 2007; Appendix D). Vitanen (2007) has suggested that if the assumption on which the proliferation of ICT regeneration strategies generally are based is

that such investment will lead to greater economic competiveness, then the question of whether 'ordinary' people, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods, are benefiting needs to be addressed. To date Vitanen (2007) fears this is not the case and indeed urban regeneration has long been associated with 'gentrification' and a failure to 'trickle down' benefits to local people (Jones & Evan, 2007). The assumption that ICT investment will lead to a competitive advantage has also long been debated (Dabinett, 2000). Recently scholars within the field of Community Informatics have put forward the idea of building a digital story economy based on the theory that providing opportunities for people to "learn and practice valuable media production skills" will "in turn provide greater economic mobility and social visibility" (Nutt and Schwartz, 2008, p.1). Given the quite clear synergies between this theory and the community reporting phenomenon, I was thus interested to see how participation may be relating to enhanced economic mobility and I found evidence of some value at the individual level in soft and subtle ways.

During the course of my research the Chief Executive of PVM provided me with a document outlining their education model, incorporating an employment agency element that was also launched during this timeframe of my study (Appendix F). For those individuals who may have become disconnected from social and economic participation, the role of Community Reporter does seem to be associated with preparation for re entering the world of economic participation. The findings suggest that potential in this area includes and goes beyond the opportunity to learn and practice media production skills and varies according to the individual and social context. In addition, the area lies very much within a perceptual rather than actual benefit and is not experienced by all participants.

One of the community reporters (who wished to remain anonymous within this study) specifically framed community reporting, on a personal level, as voluntary work for employment. "My goal for getting involved in voluntary work in the first place was to rehabilitate myself for work." When I spoke to him about how he perceived the links between the role of community reporter and employment, he expressed that he was not yet ready to re-enter the world of work, after over ten years of non participation in this arena due to ill health and depression. However, he was at the stage where he felt he had to look into rehabilitating his life for economic participation despite his continued health issues because "society is changing quite rapidly and even I who has some major health issues, I am going to have to work until I am eighty, that is the way society has gone". Thus far he felt that the role had

value in terms of developing his communication skills, which he illustrated through his willingness to talk to me and participate in this study, saying:

> "...there is an improvement in me there, before I did this I would not have done this interview with you, I would have found some way out of it accidently on purpose, forgotten or something like that."

This particular individual viewed the development of his communication skills, (lost through many years characterised by low levels of social interaction and self esteem) as a vital step toward rehabilitating his life for paid employment. This is evident in his response to being questioned about links to employment:

> " Employment, I've actually got to get used to interacting with people. If you take over five years of mixing with very few people, you are not really good for communicating with people, you lose your communication skills, your memory goes out the window and basically your mental facets go on hold and you've got a certain amount of intelligence, it would be great if I was thick because you wouldn't know any better, but unfortunately I've got a little bit of intelligence and you go, 'I'm going to fail there, it's fear of failure' so this does make me talk to people, it's hard work but it makes me talk to people."

For Antony, the role of community reporter is similarly a route back into economic participation, following a long period of depression. He thus entered the community reporter programme with a very specific interpretive frame. "I needed to help myself come through a long period of depression that wouldn't give me too much pressure...and initially find employment at the end of it." In the past Antony worked freelance for local radio, radio five and radio one at one point and spoke about how he learnt basic radio skills in the 1980s. Antony expressed at the time that he was "looking to get back into that field" but felt that this may be problematic. Generally, Antony associated the role of community reporter with an "option" in terms of exploring the area for employment and as "an interest" if he cannot get back into economic participation within the area. While his interview reveals his scepticism about the practical and tangible gains of the role he did express gains at a more intangible level, (6.2.1) and concludes that:

> "...it is helping me with my CV and it is helping me get back into the job market, that's the opportunity it's given me, but is there anything tangible at the moment? No, it's not given me anything tangible that I can actually physically touch..."

Kevin, also identified his perception that the role "...fits someone who is out of work, sick, who wants to still use their skills and wants to be creative while they're not being paid",

outlining his perception of the role as leading to "a routine, confidence, colleagues", while testing the water regarding a potential move into employment within a creative arena.

Colin entered the Community Reporter Programme through a frame of interest in media and getting ready for economic participation, and was unemployed at the time I met him. Colin's life story included periods of imprisonment and a journey through a drug and alcohol recovery programme, and he had written a book about his life. During his interview Colin spoke about being "ready to come off the dole and go as a sole trader" and he proceeded to explain his vision for his future: "My future is, hopefully, through a website which is being created for me...So everything to do with the website, whether it's filming, interviewing, is my future." Colin's predominant frame in this respect is local history and photographs, which he described as "a way of getting back on my feet" but he also has plans to add films, posters, DVDs and his second book to the website. For Colin the role of community reporter was a valuable frame through which to learn for his future economic endeavours and he also seemed to be very passionate about the role. Colin thus arrived with his own ideas about what he wanted to do and he talked me through how the role and associated training was helping him along his path of self actualisation. He spoke about, for example, how he began making short films, with the support of a member of staff, which he then uploaded to YouTube, again in essence like Kevin, to test the water describing these films as, "just samples for what I want to do", "it's just like they were samples of how to film and then move up the ladder". He talked about completing the community reporter course and becoming "trustworthy with better cameras" as he reached the stage where he was able to go out and make films independently. To enable him to follow this chosen path Colin felt that he "needed somewhere like this" and further that "it is just perfect for me really." Colin's other areas of support beyond People's Voice Media also seemed to be working side by side in helping him to pursue his desired future. One of the staff supporting the Community Reporter Programme who wished to remain anonymous in this study, felt that Colin seemed to have become more self sufficient after attending journalism training with the BBC through PVM involving group work (also referred to in section 5.3.3.). Colin felt that the experience was "challenging" but "really good and rewarding" and "worthwhile," attributing the training to developing his interview techniques in particular. This particular experience seems to have motivated him to continue down his self chosen path, saying that the experience gave him "a right boost after that to go out doing things for YouTube and interviewing people as well".

Some of the Community Reporters I interviewed came to the role through the Talk Broughton Project (Figure 5.1, Appendix C) and this did involve specific support for individuals in terms of thinking about progression into employment. Essentially the project is focused on getting people into more active roles within a disadvantaged area. Ross Hemmings, one of the partners involved in running the project felt, "people progressed in different ways and took it in different ways and gathered up different things out of it". With regard to employment specifically he told the following story about one of the younger female community reporters whom I had met but had unfortunately not managed to interview:

> "One of them actually got this kind of a picture of her own success through the programme she built her confidence and actually got a full-time job in childcare...You know she just kind of got on the programme, enjoyed it and then went out and didn't have as much time which is kind of great but in a way it obviously affected the project."

Primarily this suggests that the esteem benefits which seem to be inherently related to the role of community reporter may be an avenue to employment beyond the digital and creative industries. In fact Ross saw confidence as one of the key values of the community reporter approach for people who may have become socially and or economically disengaged, suggesting that "...it builds their ability to actually go out and walk straight up to someone they don't know in the street or to go to someone in a room full of people". Keira Burns who runs the project also felt the community reporter frame was "a great way of providing IT and media skills". Ross also identified that one of the community reporters had gone onto employment associated with the skills developed through the community reporter role.

Euna was unable to work at the time of her entry to the community reporter role due to her asylum status, so she essentially came to the role through her inability to economically participate. She approached the role principally from an access to communication and journalism skills interpretive frame associated with being in the process of writing a book about her experiences as an asylum seeker. When I asked her about her sense of empowerment associated with social media engagement and her community reporter role, Euna responded, "wow empowered me...it has empowered me...in the sense of gaining more skills you know, so it has empowered me." Euna felt her role as a community reporter had been very positive, particularly with regards to developing communication skills to help with her writing, and this may therefore be associated with helping her move toward a self actualising career path. When I asked her whether she felt the role was helping her with the

writing of her book she gave the response below, revealing individual value may be said to lie beyond skills for media content production and around the social process of content creation.

> "Well yes, I love writing, it's just me, I get excited, sometimes I just laugh when I'm writing, so 'yeh, it is good because when you go in, you listen to people and it helps when you are writing, you can even learn some things, that, when you are writing you know because you are listening to how they say things, you, it helps you, you are getting some things out of that 'yeh."

Stan came to the Talk Broughton Project and role of community reporter role while studying media at Salford University so was clearly already on a path of social and economic participation. When asked about empowerment and the experience of community reporting, Stan talked about the opportunity to explore a professional role related to his course and improve his skills which he linked to the possibility of future employment "maybe I will end up doing some professional job as a journalist". Stan spoke about the community reporter role, for example, in the following way: "I did that as my first nearly, nearly professional job, so I did something practical and now I have got some kind of knowledge...". Stan also valued the fact that he had "met a lot of people" and was hopeful that People's Voice Media's links with the BBC would further provide him with the opportunity to develop his skills through potentially "doing something with the BBC," providing the example of potentially shadowing professionals within the BBC.

Julie came to the role of Community Reporter Programme volunteer with a distinct frame of skills for work after being made redundant. "I mean basically," she said, (when I asked her why she keeps involved) "whilst I'm not working I want to be involved in work that is getting me somewhere really." Julie did have existing multimedia skills and experience of teaching unemployed people such skills. She associates her volunteer role with something which "feels like personal development" and enables her to "keep building on" her skills in this area and "keep sort of current" within the arena, an opportunity from which she had become isolated (evident in her comments during her interview at Salford Social Media Centre):

> "It was a great opportunity for me to actually come in here and start working on projects, because I was very frustrated for quite a long time not being able to do that and not finding any opportunities to do that."

In response to a question about the advantages of her role her answer really suggests the many dimensions and personal framing of value:

> "Just basically...stuff in a production environment and being able to collaborate with people being able to be creative and learning more about things that I don't know about already, i.e. sort of Internet T.V and blogging."

When I spoke to David, one of the staff supporting the Community Reporter Programme, about the ways in which he felt the programme generally was contributing to community empowerment, he pointed to the potential of raising aspirations by providing a very specific example of some work he had been involved in with young people:

> "...one of the things, that's quite positive is just hearing, we did a session with the BBC showing some of the young people from East Manchester how to make a film using mobile phones and it was just that conversation at the end hearing a young person say, (after someone in the room talked about big chunks of the BBC are going to be moving to Salford and without going into the politics of all that), 'oh will there be job opportunities' and it was nice because without that session I don't think that person would have ever even thought about the BBC and working in media, the fact that they've been able to meet someone from the BBC in their community, that seems quite a positive thing, it might not go anywhere but just that that person had thought, oh there might be opportunities."

David then went on to say that another example would be "someone who was doing the Community Reporter Course and then through that went on to do a course in creative media". I did become aware that David was referring primarily to Phil, who was resident at Victoria House, enrolled on the community reporter course and went on to enrol on a course in Interactive Multimedia at Manchester College of Arts and Technology. When I met Phil he had moved out of Victoria House but was continuing to attend the Community Reporter Course while also continuing with his more formal course. In particular Phil pointed out the way in which engaging with and learning about the technologies associated with the role of community reporter helped him with his progression into further education:

> "The main benefit that I have had was that I got to use camcorders, tripods and the software technologies before my college course and when it came to the movie making assignment and I actually knew a few bits and pieces, had a rough idea how things worked. I knew a few tricks, that helped me along a bit. Whereas my classmates didn't. So that was the benefit I had."

Shona, who also approached the community reporter course within the context of Victoria House, talked about how she might use the skills learnt via the community reporter programme within a frame of progression into further education:

> "I'm going back to university next year so I hope to probably use these skills as a way of presenting for my course because...I know you have to do a lot of presentations and it will make me more aware and I'll also be a bit more comfortable because I hate doing presentations."

When I spoke to Paul R he was near completion of a foundation course in Journalism at the University of Central Lancashire. He is the only research participant in this study who could be described as an 'ex-community reporter'. I contacted Paul because one of the other community reporters had told me about his progression from a community reporter role to a journalism focused course. Phil did have some concerns about the community reporter role but did feel that the role can be positive and empowering in terms of enabling exploration of skills in the area, and thus participatory decision making regarding progression into further education within a relevant area. Paul also was on incapacity benefit due to a disability and thus he was also keen to emphasise the support available for people with disabilities as they progress into further education:

> "Because it's a good way to find out if you have the skills, and then you can go, 'Right, okay, I'll go for this, I can actually do a course'. Almost like a City & Guilds in video production, an introduction to journalism or like what I've done, a foundation course. So that empowers you then to go on and do something more productive. And it doesn't matter if you've got a disability, because even then the universities will help you"

Paul also identified the ways in which the skills developed during his time as a community reporter and in particular through the journalism training with the BBC, helped him to progress into further education and feel 'ahead of the game' (Sherman, 1999) once enrolled on the course:

> "...also I got some free journalism training as well from BBC Manchester which proved an asset. And all these skills also, when all added up, helped me to get onto the Journalism Foundation Course at the University of Central Lancashire. So I had an advantage over other students that also applied, and it's great that you know more than the 18 year olds that are on the course, so that was pretty good."

> "...I learnt about on-line blogging and how to do linkage, and how to link...how to put separate links in. I didn't think much of it. It is only since I've been doing this Journalism Foundation Course, how much I've realised that that was very important that I already had those skills, which have helped me in my university course."

Paul also felt that the knowledge of editing software he developed helped him and would help in the future to move along his path of further education progression. At the time of his interview he was planning to progress to studying for a combined honours degree in Journalism and Film Production and I later found out that he has indeed successfully completed his foundation course and was going on to study for the honours degree of his choice. When I was talking with Paul I expressed my interest in his story and he replied: "...it

just shows what can stem from doing something small like this really". This captures his sense of individual change associated with the community reporter role.

In the section which follows I now move on to take a critical lens to the shared interpretive framing of community reporting as voice, the key perceived arena of empowerment at a more collective level.

6.3 Community Reporting and Empowerment as Voice: a Critical View

In this section I seek to open up the symbolic framing of community reporting as empowerment through voice, a thread which has essentially run through all the findings presented. The critical lens I take to view assumptions of voice is inspired by academic critiques in this arena (Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009) and my field research. I begin this exploration by challenging the assumption of voice as 'being seen and heard' in the world, thus in essence also responding to the push for a more critical discourse of this assumption within the arena of social media (Beer & Burrows, 2007). I call this particular arena of critique 'assumptions of audience'. Given that among community reporter research participants a sense of individual empowerment is linked to a belief in their role in community empowerment through acting as a channel for local voices, taking a critical lens to assumptions of voice is identified as vital and opens up an arena of potential disempowerment.

6.3.1 Assumptions of Audience: The Challenge of 'Being Seen and Heard' in the Social Media Age

One of the key issues to emerge through my research is the shattering of the assumption inherent within the rhetoric that surrounds the era of social media of a direct relationship between sharing content via the Internet and voice, which is commonly understood, perhaps over simplistically, as 'being seen and heard'(Beer & Burrows, 2007; Robinson et al., 2009). This idea of voice as being seen and heard when applied to the Internet is also apparent in the way voice is spoken about within the community reporting world, as illustrated through the quotations below:

> "It's all about giving people voices effectively so individuals have a voice, individuals can say whatever they want to say, that's one part of what we are doing. So anything from cooking Lancashire hotpot to what do you think

about what's taking place in your local area, you have a voice to be heard and that voice can now be heard on the web" (Gary, Chief Executive, PVM)

"...being seen and heard in the world is a really important part of it and even if you are still just sat at home on your own you are reaching out and connecting with the world..." (Teresa).

"...it has empowered me...and it has also empowered the community, 'erm they know that their voices can be heard, anybody, we, anyone can say anything regardless of colour, whatever, race, whatever they can say their views and their views are going to be heard..." (Euna).

Central to the idea of voice in this context is the assumption of audience. However, my findings suggest that it is at the point of sharing community reporter content that I began to see that the empowerment potential of community reporting may in fact begin to break down or become weaker. Given that community reporters often seek to empower others, if they cannot reach these 'others' they can begin to feel somewhat disempowered. Paul R, was the first community reporter participant to bring this to my attention. While Paul was an ex-community reporter with roots in the Hulme area of Manchester his insights opened my eyes in particular to the challenge of voice within the social context of community reporting. Approaching community reporting from a clear community empowerment frame the challenge of being seen and heard in the world, he clearly felt, lay at the heart of whether community reporting could indeed be a social practice associated with inherently linked individual and collective empowerment.

Reflecting on his experiences as a community reporter in Hulme and his use of a community-based channel set up by PVM (Appendix C) to share community reporter content, he identified that his biggest concern had been whether his content was actually 'being seen and heard' by his intended community audience. Thus while associating "going online" with being "open to the world" his story illustrated the visibility challenge of community-based channels within the online world, which was clearly by no means automatic:

"There was already a website up and running called The Hulme Residents Association website or something, so that was a community website in itself in Hulme. And that had already had quite a lot of following. So that was one of my frustrations. Unless people read it, unless you have got people looking at it and reading your blog, and not just other community reporters, then there was not that much empowerment."

"...even though Manchester Digital Development Agency had heard of it – that's the MDDA – even though the City Council has heard of it: fine, but

that's not good enough. Nobody in the community has heard of it and that's who it's supposed to be for. If it's supposed to be for the community then why have they not heard of it, why has it not been publicised, why haven't people been informed or anything like that?"

"..slowly but surely it was beginning to build up to be something in the community. But there was still nothing like when you went to the library, there was no publicity, there were no adverts, there was nothing to tell people, 'Hey, we've got an on-line blog for your area, we've got a reporter, have a read, come and see it...' It was like well-hidden, and I think it was one of Hume's biggest secrets..."

Paul went on to link a sense of increased visibility and thus capacity to reach his intended audience to a heightened sense of empowerment:

"When I first joined the Community Reporting, I didn't feel that I had much power or that it empowered me greatly...It was only until the blogs got a linkage to www.mymanchester.net which was the central community website that I felt that there was like any empowerment."

Paul also talked about the content visibility challenge within the specific community-based channel for sharing content reflective of the "unstable character of Web 2.0 technologies" (Petersen, 2008, sic) creating a situation in which content is moving and being moved across platforms. Specifically, he talked about the operation of news feeds, which meant that his content would quickly be removed from view, clearly giving him a sense of disempowerment:

"...all of a sudden my story was moving off...it was getting annoying because if you put a story up and somebody else put a bit of a blog about how they went to shopping today and had a nice time and stuff like that I'd be thinking, 'Well, that's not as important as my story'

"...somebody would report on something that I thought was just totally irrelevant, you know? 'Oh, let's go down to the allotment today...' 'What? But I've got a great story here about protesters and stuff like that, and you want to ramble on about some allotment', sorry. [Laughs] You know, 'I don't care about your potatoes and you growing your own vegetables, and that you had your meeting that week and wasn't it wonderful talking about sprouts and how to grow them, and how they're better in compost', I don't care. What's it got to do with me? They're going to shut the road off when people want the 263 bus going through... So you take the rough with the smooth, and you're thinking, 'Bollocks, people might get put off and say I don't want to visit here just to talk about how grass grows in Moss Side'. [Laughs] And stuff like that, you know?"

"So you can imagine that if you were doing a lot of hard work it was a bit disheartening when there was that kind of thing. So even although it was all good fun, it was all on-line, it has to come up – you know, when people type

in 'Hulme' or 'Manchester' it has to be on the first page, or in the first ten searches of Google. People must know and people must see it."

Eventually Paul went on to purchase his own URL called the hulmetune.co.uk (which has also now ceased to be active), which he felt gave him greater freedom of voice as he started noting some element of control within the specific social context of the community content site, commenting that "...they got me on board but then they started changing the rules so I thought, 'Eh up'...". He explained that he started to note a sense of attempts to control his content within the organisational context of community reporting, illustrating this through the kind of requests he came across: 'Oh we don't really like that, can you just do a bit more... and less about this', and stuff like that". Overal, Paul found his independent approach more successful as he felt more in control and was able to pull in links to his community reporting and to his community radio activities. In this way Paul essentially also seemed to have increased his chances of reaching his audience, for example, as his blogging activity increased he told me that at one point when he typed in Hulme Tune he came up in the first ten searches of Google, saying, "and I thought, 'Yeh this is me!' I was well pleased".

Within the Salford context, at the time of my research the site dedicated to community reporter content was called ChalkTalk, which was revamped and became East Salford Direct (Appendix C). While the sites did change over the course of my research and not all the community reporters were utilising them to distribute content, I was able to capture some similar challenges to voice through these channels. While Tony pointed to the potential value of community-based sites for sharing content in the social media age:

> "...if it's a community project, people like here, you know, Media Centre, they're targeting the right people as well as who should be seeing it. You know the people of Salford should be looking at it. Put it on You-Tube and it's open to the world. That's great, but they're like focusing on what's going on in your area..." (Tony).

There was evidence of some concern regarding visibility of the content sharing site within the wider community:

> "I am not sure how well known it is though, that's my only kind of reservation about it because I hadn't really heard of it before I got involved with Peoples Voice Media" (Julie talking about ChalkTalk).

> "With Chalktalk my kind of query is, is it for our benefit or for the people and how many people in this area, know of it...I think it's just there and not many people, we need to promote ourselves more, you know social media, People's

Voice Media and Chalktalk itself, I don't think many other than us, do you know what I mean, know about it?" (Keith, focus group).

By the time I spoke to Mike C, the East Salford Direct site had replaced Chalktalk and the issue of audience reach was still evidently present, as he expressed that, "...it needs to be better promoted rather than just hoping that people stumble across it".

During the focus group conducted by PVM Mike S also identified a concern around and experience of content getting lost within the specific social context of the community site:

> "I think Chalktalk at the moment is like a scrap board where people can just pin bits up to and it's not quite at the stage where you can find your way around it because little things are all over the place and we found trying to find bits we've up, it's like we can't remember the tag we used or which group we put it under, so we have to look three times to look where it went and it's like the thing about the folders and groups and the subjects and that stuff, it's almost like somebody needs to go through it, like a filing cabinet, 'yeh, that's got all that jumble that somebody needs to go through."

Jane also highlighted that when she records people's stories as part of her role within the community, she tells them where to find social media channels but also identified the issue of content getting lost, commenting that "...it's quite different to telling people where the Chalktalk ones are, especially since we can't find it ourselves, we often end up just using You-Tube". Julie also referred to this issue, relating it to the need to increase the visibility of the site through building reputation:

> "I think one of the things about creating stuff for the web is that so many people are creating stuff on the web that stuff could be lost, or it could not be seen by as many people as people want to see it... And there's lots of different levels of quality of content as well, so I think in order to serve it's purpose it needs to have as well as like linking to other sites and things like that, it's getting reputation really for where people will find this information and these stories" (Julie, talking about Chalktalk)

In the East Manchester context of BoftheBlog (Appendix C) similar issues were also raised. Andy, also talked about the issue of content getting lost, "I just think it's a bit of a mix and it gets quite lost in there..." and commented during the focus groups that, "It's got to be more accessible hasn't it." Another community reporter also expressed a concern regarding voice within the wider community:

> "...there has got to be a stepping stone of actually letting everyone in the community know but at the moment I think they are focusing on something and they are not actually opening it up" (Anonymous community reporter, East Manchester).

159

The issue of the quality and quantity of content and its relationship to voice also emerged within the online social context of community reporting generally. This can be readily related to Mitra & Watt's (2002) 'eloquence of representation' frame of voice when applied to the Internet. That is to say that some of the community reporters seemed to be linking poor attention to 'representation' (what the site and quality of content might in essence say about 'community reporting') to poor capacity for voice:

> "If you put crap on, it just gets thrown away, that's the problem. You know if you put something on that means nothing to anyone, like I, I saw a duck there and that's it, it will get treated like that and basically if you are going to put your heart and soul into it which is what people want to do with this sort of thing, I think, then you want to be appreciated and not dropped, you want it to be something that's going to be appreciated" (Alan, focus group).

> "..none of it gives the impression of quality...I mean if you look at something on Boftheblog and it's so absolutely amateurish and low quality. A lot of people are put off by the quality I should imagine, it discouraged me after I saw it...I looked at the Blog and I thought what is this? It's not organised at all. (Anonymous community reporter, East Manchester).

Both Mike and Kevin also talked about content being 'chucked up' in the Salford context affecting the way in which community reporters would wish their content to be seen, "we're just chucking it all on and mud sticks" (Mike S). Paul E also referred to his perception of a process of "throwing content" on to the sites, referring to BoftheBlog specifically as a site which is, "...just about quantity and getting it on there". Paul also linked a lack of attention to content quality when distributing content on the sites, as a barrier to 'eloquence of representation', that is, what a community reporter may be wishing to say within the social space and to 'being seen and heard' more generally:

> "...social media has its good and bad points and there's a lot of poor stuff and it could have been done better. It could be like a brilliant story but just poorly put together. At the moment I see that as being the problem in that, yeah we need more of it but we need the quality to go up a bit. So it's...for Peoples Voice Media about getting it online as fast as they can. So it's like, say I just say to you now, do you want to be a reporter, you go, yeah? Alright, well I just want you to take, you know, why don't you just come and do this little video about this? And then the same day it will be up online. And, you know, I think, well, alright that's great, but what was the sense of achievement? I mean obviously for some they're probably proud of it. It's their first ever video about this? And then the same day it was online. I think, well, alright their first ever video and we all remember our first little bit of stuff, but at the end of the day you need a bit more to it than just getting it online."

> "...it's like if you put your name to a story and that visually doesn't look appealing right away people are, you know, they're not even going to bother looking are they..."

Potentially substantiating Paul's arguments, an 'outsider' view of the Community Reporter Programme from the Editor of the Salford Star, linked poor visibility within the community and eloquence of representation to the decision not to become part of the audience and to perceptions of poor potential for community empowerment:

> "I think it's a great idea you know, but...it's got to be some sort of quality. You know the people that I work with that make community films in Salford and elsewhere are absolutely top notch. You know the sound tracks are done by professionals...the scripts are beautiful and it's well acted and it's something that the people who are involved in the films from the community, they helped devise the scripts and stuff like that, would be proud of. You know but just shove me camera in somebody's hand and say, oh go for it. That's not empowerment, because people are laughing at it...I don't think there's that much quality control in that...they don't make much attempt to market themselves, even online. There's no links to anything. I don't bother with it. I can't be that critical of it because I never look at it. It's made absolutely no impact on anybody..." (Stephen).

At the same time, on the point of quality John had an interesting alternative take when talking about YouTube, suggesting that the audience within this social context reacts better, "if the videos aren't too slick" or "not too professional" because as he sees it "YouTube is a people's voice, it's not about TV professionals...". Within the Salford context of community reporting and in particular the progression toward Internet TV, I was also aware of conversations around the desire to be something which moves beyond and does not try to imitate the professional confines of more mainstream media. The sheer volume of spread of content was also emphasised by Paul E and this issue was also emphasised by an ex-member of staff who referred to the 'elaborate diagram' for example guiding the ways in which content was being 'pushed out':

> "So yeah I think at the moment they're spread far and wide. You've got many websites to look after...But you've got one person deciding whether that content goes and sometimes it's to the wrong area or aimed at the wrong, what's the word? audience" (Paul, E).

6.3.2 The Myth of Freedom from Place-Based Power Structures: Community Reporting as the Voice of 'Good News' Only?

When talking about the need to enhance understanding of the relationship between empowerment and ICTs, Fortunati (2009, sic) suggested that it is "only by revisiting the

concept of power" that the "comprehension of empowerment" is possible. In this section in particular therefore, I seek to take a lens of 'power' to the empowerment as voice assumption inherent within the rhetoric around social media. The work presented here has drawn in particular on Stephen Lukes' exploration of power which encourages scholars to pay attention to those aspects of power which are least accessible and least readily observed, that is to the say the more invisible forms of power (Lukes, 1974; 1995; Gaventa, 2006) associated with subtlety, for example, getting people to do things that may not be in their best interests, (Lukes, 1974; 1995).

Assumptions of voice inherent within the discourse that surrounds social media are rooted in the idea that sites for content sharing are not controlled in the same way as mainstream and print media; thus new voices which may have remained on the margins can now voice their issues and concerns (Gilmoor, 2006), enabling practices such as community journalism to flourish. In a similar manner, the empowerment as voice theory attached to the Internet generally, lies in this notion of altering the power to speak by freeing voice from the place-based power structures which constrain marginal voices, thus emphasising the 'placelessness' of the Internet (Mitra & Watts, 2002). When social media is appropriated within a local community context however, my research suggests this power through 'placelessness' idea is immediately problematised as my discussion in this section will highlight. My work thus suggests that voice is not always and necessarily freed from place-based power structures in the era of social media.

In what follows I thus expand my critique of voice in the social media age, firstly through the lens of discourses of regeneration. In this section I present my perception that voice, which can also be seen in terms of what is being said and how (Mitra & Watts, 2002), and crucially in this context what is not being said, with particular regard to discourses of regeneration, may be being controlled and shaped to some extent by largely invisible forms of power laying within the local regeneration context of the Community Reporter Programme. However, my work also suggests that there are other reasons why voices may remain silent on certain issues within particular social contexts, related potentially to interpretive framing of the social space. In this section I also explore the ways in which voice within specific organisational contexts may be shaped to emerge in particular ways through the lens of the Victoria House context of community reporting. The findings within this section in particular suggest an emergent framing of community reporting as the voice of 'good news,' an ethos

shaped in part by power dynamics, but also by participant level interpretive framing of community reporting.

In Salford, I was first alerted to the idea of the local regeneration context of the Community Reporter Programme as an invisible or subtle field of power within the community reporter frame, when a member of PVM staff spoke to me about a certain level of discomfort when viewing his role through his feelings and perceptions of regeneration locally:

> "I don't know, I find this quite difficult on a personal level because I've got a lot of problems with the government's regeneration agenda and yet I'm working within a project that is funded by regeneration money from central government..."

> "...a lot of the time some of the stuff that you're doing is maybe a bit of icing on the cake of something that isn't necessarily in the community's best interest. So you get a feeling sometimes that a New Deal for Communities will put the work into community empowerment and spend a lot of money in that area in order to keep the community happy while their housing is levelled and sold off to property developers, so it's like the bribe isn't it, so like we're part of the bribe, 'look you get a media centre', you know."

This particular member of staff expressed the need for caution when approaching the meaning of regeneration, relating this to the multidimensional and interpretive nature of the concept as identified in the literature review (Chapter 2, section 2.2.2). Thus when talking about the meaning of the concept, he expressed his view that "within that agenda different people have got their own place and are really trying to do good things" but that when understood from a property development angle, he saw regeneration as "a euphemism for slum clearance". He also conveyed his knowledge to me of the strong feelings locally regarding regeneration and thus his surprise that the community reporting was not being utilised to voice a critical discourse of regeneration, relating this potentially to self censorship based on the local regeneration funding context:

> "Obviously because of that feeling within the community and the fact that we're doing the self publishing you would have thought that there would be a lot of people that would be very keen to criticise the process of regeneration and to maybe use these skills as a way of campaigning against that process. What we've found is that actually a lot of the people that you would have thought would have done that have also taken money from NDC to do their own projects on a community level as well. So they've kind of gone, 'oh well this is probably going to happen, this money's available, someone's going to take it, it may as well be us and try and do good things with it.' So in some ways they're kind of self censoring based on the fact that they are also taking money from the regeneration process, that's my interpretation of it and it may well be that the actual criticism starts to happen when the money's runs out

and that people have no reason to self censor and then they start to maybe be more honest about how certain bits of the community have been sold on."

In relation to critical discourses of regeneration, he also said that: "It hasn't been that much of a problem, we thought it might be more of a problem in terms of, you know, 'Oh right, you can't really say that'." Further insights offered by this member of staff with regards to why such critical discourses did not seem to be emerging within the Salford context could be related to people's interpretive frame of approach. This is evident in his view that people may perceive a well known channel of community media, the Salford Star, as the voice of regeneration in Salford, or they may simply not be engaged with such issues:

> "...it hasn't happened so much here, I think mainly because there is a certain amount of self censoring going on and because, I don't know why exactly, I think maybe because there's a very strong outlet in terms of the Salford Star that does represent those viewpoints and maybe because people aren't really engaged with regeneration issues or the type of people that are using the centre are not really engaged with it."

I also found that while as soon as I mentioned the word 'regeneration', some community reporter participants were quite passionate in their critique of regeneration locally. A picture began to emerge of regeneration as associated with slum clearance and the break-up of community however, the online community spaces of community reporting did not seem to be being used generally to voice this critical discourse of regeneration.

Keith, one of the community reporters in Salford, in a similar manner to the member of staff I spoke to, framed regeneration as "modern day slum clearance" as he talked me through an emotive story of the impact on the area of his childhood:

> "I used to get the bus into town and basically I would get the 137 which went down through Great Cheetham and through Salford that way, my family originally on my Dad's side are from Salford, that kind of area, the Broughton area, Buille Street where my Nana used to live and my Dad lived for a while, that's where my family grew up and round the corner, Zebra Street is where my cousins grew up as well the houses have been part of the regeneration of Salford and basically they were built in the 50's or 60's you know traditional red brick, I always say it looks like Coronation Street, where my Nana used to live. It does, it looks like the opening credits of Coronation Street with the back to back houses and little alley ways, cobbled streets as well they used to have there and basically they've pulled all those houses down and replaced them with modern build houses where you know they're just kind of thrown up aren't they and you know they've not got the durability or the longevity that the old houses had and so in my opinion they've replaced really good structured buildings with things that aren't going to be around in 50-60 years and it's a crying shame. You've got several streets that run off Leister Lane

that have been left derelict, boarded up for numerous years and the plan is to pull them down although they might need a bit of damp work that needs doing on them because the roofs are damaged and you know just because no one lived in them for so long but for the few £1000's to fix what is already there you know they're going to demolish all them and replace them again with inferior houses. It's not just the state of the house that winds me up it's the fact in doing so it's almost like modern day slum clearance because the people who lived there, the communities that were once there and people have their own different views about Salford but anyone who knows Salford knows there was a good community spirit, I think there always has been and always will be. Despite all this, you know everyone looked out for each other and there was a good strong community spirit which is now broken because people have been moved out and some have been re-housed but re-housed in different areas to their neighbours and they're no longer together, you know neighbours that have been neighbours for God knows how many years..."

"I love Manchester and I love Salford so I feel it really breaks my heart when I get that bus and I see all the houses you know around the corner from where I'm talking about have all been demolished, some seriously old buildings, you're talking 100s of years old, some of these buildings, flattened and replaced with monstrosities of new builds and even if they're apartments, you know apartments used to be quite prestigious and sought after whereas now they're ten a penny and you wouldn't want to pay what you have to pay to live in those buildings, they're not attractive, they literally cram as many of them into the building to get the revenue, again it's all profit, it's all money, Manchester is over subscribed with apartments."

Keith also expressed his opinion that people locally feel voiceless in terms of discourses of regeneration and spoke about community reporting as a potential channel to voice such issues in the future:

"...first and foremost...it gives them a voice because at the moment they get frustrated because they feel like no one is there to listen to them, they feel let down by the council, the council are behind the regeneration so they'll come up with any answers just to fob them off, it's all money to them at the end of the day but with regards to the people themselves I'd give them the opportunity to voice their concerns, let them sound off, that's part of it in a way just letting them sound off, get it off their chest, get to the heart of the matter, you know the real - ask the locals what exactly they want."

"...because "I don't think they've got a lot of mainstream media coverage you know so they feel isolated and feel like they don't have a voice so we could offer them that opportunity and take the footage and get the council and say this is what the people want, this is what the people feel and try and ruffle a few feathers basically."

"...there has been some coverage of it but what coverage there has been doesn't seem to have made an impact as in the derelict houses are still due to be pulled down. The regeneration is still going to go ahead and like I said earlier it is all money to the council, they'll say they want to do this, they say

they want to do that but they just see pound signs so they're blinded by that as the recent press will tell us with the whole MP expenses."

Keith's goal of voicing local issues and concerns seemed to be principally future-based, but he did feel that the St George's day video he had co-created (Appendix C) could be used to highlight the issue of the impact on community groups of local regeneration funding coming to an end in the area. When I spoke to Keith at a later date as part of another research project I was involved with, he also relayed to me his 'good news' framing of community reporting, "...a lot of the stuff I like to feature is heart warming, good stories" rooted in his perception that "there's so much in Manchester that deserves plaudit and recognition and attention and I just think the mainstream media fails miserably at doing that". This local historical context of negative media coverage and thus the good news framing of community reporting, as noted earlier, could potentially be part of the story of why critical discourses of regeneration do not appear to be emerging.

For Keith voice was framed more around the 'listening' role of the community reporter than affordances of the technology, seeing himself as a potential "voice of the people." When asked about her views with regard to the role of social media in empowering people, Jane's response reflects a similar perspective:

> "...it's not so much technology as such empowering people...I think the empowerment comes from actually asking people, actually speaking to them and asking them, asking them their opinions, asking them to tell their stories. And it's not necessarily technology that enables that so much as the will, the will to listen..."

Thus here again, the idea emerges of empowerment potential laying in the roles inspired by social media rather than in the affordances of the technology.

Jane, who was living in Ordsall, outside the regeneration area of study but also within the heart of a regeneration area, also clearly held strong feelings about the impacts of regeneration in Salford:

> "... regeneration spells the end of communities for some, so. Well yes, it does, places have just disappeared. And as you can see, I'm quite on communities and building them up [laughs]. But that's just me, I would hate to live in those places that they've built in Broughton, say. Those sterile places, where you don't know anybody, that's not my style. So I think regeneration might have destroyed some places. I like the toilets."

> "... it's notable that nobody in regeneration seems to live in the area or know anything about it...I challenge them to how many people actually live in regeneration areas. They don't, they've no idea. And if they realise consequence of destroying social networking that has gone on for many, many years. But if you move people out, they can't do it anymore..."

I interviewed Jane at Ordsall Community Café and as we walked through Ordsall she also pointed out to me various places that had been tarnished by the demolition of housing areas. When I asked Jane if she felt social media and community reporting could give people a voice in relation to this issue, she simply replied: "I don't know who is listening. Who is listening to them? I don't know". Taking Keith's and Jane's perspective together, this can be interpreted as a subtle form of power within the regeneration context that has created a situation in which voices remain silent simply because they have become accustomed to not being listened to. Jane had also however, brought her own particular interpretive frame to community reporting as being for her about 'good news,' telling me that, "I always want to put the good things" amongst the "denigrating things" people have to say in order to "even it up a bit". Additionally, Jane is involved in capturing discourses of regeneration through another community project, with a strong existing voice of regeneration and in particular, the impacts of slum clearance during the 1960s and 1970s in Salford:

> "Retracing Salford does give a voice to… I've got loads of people on tape, saying oh those were the days. Everybody helped each other, everybody in the same boat. You can't reproduce that. And I don't know, but certainly the feeling of families round here is very, very strong and if you suddenly, which they are doing, move in a load of yuppies like us, if people don't get that contact locally, it'll go."

Tony also presented a similar narrative of regeneration in Salford:

> "...a lot of people have been forgotten. I believe they've been pushed out to various other places. So, regeneration...it's had its good points but it's most certainly got its bad points as well, in my mind. I know a few councillors who would agree with me as well on that matter."

> "The regeneration projects have been coming under a lot of criticism because it's not, you know, like, certain houses and that being built and bought off local residents and them not being able to afford to buy them back after they've been turned upside down or whatever you want to do. Like Chimney Pot Park, for instance. That was a crying shame what happened there."

When I asked Tony whether he felt any of these kind of issues have been highlighted via the social media sites he said, "not directly, no". Bringing a similar interpretive frame to voice through community reporting as Jane, he spoke about seeing himself as a voice for "what's

good" and "what's going on in Salford," as part of a response to the City's "negative publicity." For example, Tony highlighted that:

> "...when I make a film that, to do with a lot of historical ones, we try to show the positive things in Salford to encourage other people to get involved. You can focus on the negatives as much as you want but it's got to have a balance, you know."

Tricia also displayed a possible 'good news' framing to her community reporting when she spoke about a video she had made about the BBC move to Salford Quays, commenting that, "it's good for the community to see that it's happening, you know that there's something positive happening around Salford" (a response to a question about whether she has any concerns about publishing content online).

In Salford a member of staff informed me that some subtle voice control strategies had been put in place, based on awareness of the problems which could arise from uncontrolled voices emerging within a site funded through the local regeneration partnership:

> "So we actually put in place ways to get around this so that we weren't censoring people and saying that they couldn't use the centre to do that kind of message, by getting people to set up their own blogs, so we can go well we're actually not endorsing what they're saying we are just giving them the skills and what they say is kind of is none of our business really it's on their own blog and then that way we'd only feature stuff on our own website that kind of wasn't too controversial, at least it's fine if its controversial as long as there's a right of reply. So, say something came up that fiercely criticised the regeneration company at least then they would have a right of reply by writing something or recording a video that addresses that, that's happened much more in East Manchester, there's been a real dialogue..." (Anonymous).

He told me however that the problem had not materialised in any significant way, but the very acknowledgement of the potential need for control suggests the operation of subtle power within the local regeneration context.

The Editor of the Salford Star, one of the key voices of the critique of regeneration locally, also conveyed to me the strong feelings regarding regeneration in Salford. His views also bring to light the possible implications for voice within an online social space funded by the local regeneration body:

> "I mean People's Voice Media, you'd expect them to be giving people a voice and I can't see any criticism of any of the regeneration in Salford...And if you look at where the funding's come from, which is New Deal for Communities and the council..there won't be any criticism, otherwise they'll shut them down. It's not independent."

"Because they're being financed, because the money is coming from NDC and the council. They're not going to look at anything...So community reporters, yes they can report on anything apart from their own life. Apart from things, you're house coming down, or whatever. And people are very, very angry around here, very angry, because they've messed up completely."

"It's all very nice. Put a video in front of somebody and say, "Here you are. Why don't you shoot the lovely in Bloom in Salford' or whatever they do...Yes it's very nice and it's got it's place. Don't call it People's Media for God sake ...People's Voice, because it ain't giving anybody a voice. That's my criticism of it. It's nothing personal against them. It's just the way it is. You can't have a real community voice being financed by the City Council and New Deal for Communities. It just doesn't work."

"I mean I'm not knocking the workers that work for them, I'm sure they try very hard, but they're up against it. There's no bugger trusts them because they've got NDC written on their forehead."

Interestingly, it also came to light, through speaking to an anonymous regeneration representative research participant that the funding of the Community Reporter Programme in Salford emerged essentially, in part, through a local regeneration agenda of "getting the messages out about the work NDC was doing in the neighbourhood". This particular participant described "...coming into the neighbourhood, bulldozing houses, building new houses, telling you where you're going to go and what you're going to do..." as "old fashioned regeneration". This participant, at the time of the interview was working with PVM and talked about "...using community reporting to go and collect the stories that are important to the neighbourhood". East Salford Direct was also spoken about in terms of giving "people an opportunity to put their messages on the website in a very positive way". Similarly, the Community Reporter Programme was viewed as a channel for delivering the "positive messages...that things are happening in the neighbourhood...", "...as opposed to a constant negative than maybe you would see in some of the tabloids of some of the newspapers that are produced within Salford, particularly such as the Salford Star". This desire for community reporter content to reflect positive messages can be seen, in part, as a subtle strategy to try to silence critiques of regeneration, as is evident in the quotation below:

"...unfortunately in neighbourhoods like this people will believe what they want to believe so people will look at the Salford Star and when it says, you know, regeneration is shit in this area, people will believe that whereas you know they don't see what's going on around them or what they've been involved in, you know, they will portray, you know that £53 million was wasted in Charlestown and Lower Kersall whereas actually they have got no facts to prove that, that's just something, you know that they can throw out..."

Attempts to silence the voice of the Salford Star certainly did seem apparent within the local funding context:

> "The Salford Star. It's a perfect example: a magazine came out called The Salford Star...It got a bit controversial...because that's the way Stephen is...He was doing really well, it's won awards galore...and basically what had happened is, he applied for a bit of funding, you know to the Salford Council, and they refused him because he was too controversial, so that proves my point. And that's what it's like within Salford and it's not just the council, it's embedded in the services as well" (Phil)

> "...we've been victimised...because we tell the truth, because we give people a voice, because we print things no other magazine would print, we can't get funding for it. So now it's online we can't get it out, we can't actually afford to print it. We get turned down for every single bit of public funding we applied for..." (Stephen, Editor of the Salford Star).

It was also interesting to find out that "generating good news stories" was amongst the targets set by funders of the Community Reporter Programme (Teresa) and became integrated within the symbolic framing of community reporting, evident in a stated mission of: "Working toward a Community Reporter on every street creating good news stories about their communities", which appeared on PVM's website in July 2010. Thus, I also began to think that there may be, or there is in this context, the potential for exploitation of the 'good news' interpretive frame that some people bring to the world of community reporting.

While the idea of more of a 'real dialogue' sparked off around regeneration in the East Manchester context of the Community Reporter Programme had been suggested to me, I was particularly struck that the dominant voice with regard to discourses of regeneration within the BoftheBlog site appeared to be the head of regeneration in East Manchester, as explained by a member of PVM staff:

> "...you've got the head of regeneration in East Manchester who is a community reporter and he uses the website kind of as his personal TV channel in some ways, he kind of films updates, films himself talking about updates and responds to questions on the website and all that kind of stuff, so there is that, which is good, just to get that conversation going" (Anonymous).

Edge Lane Allotments however, as identified were also using the site and community reporting as a way of "talking about" and "advertising" their community-based regeneration project and the head of regeneration had responded to a question about the future of Edge Lane Allotments (Appendix C).

When approaching community reporting from the angle of voices of regeneration Paul E felt that the issue was not being covered by community reporters responding with his view that, "...the only person who'll do that is me" and going on to present his feelings with regard to regeneration:

> "I just think it's rubbish. At the end of the day regeneration is just about a council who let some areas go into dilapidation and then it gets so low that then you'll get the money to sort it out. It's like, you have to reach a certain level first. We had a series of houses and they're gradually going down one by one, people moving out, until gradually we had a whole estate where nobody lived there, then you get the regeneration kick in. Whereas I want to see regeneration kick in before it gets to that stage."

Paul, as has been highlighted, also preferred to frame community reporting in essence around 'good news' identifying that people associate 'reporter' with reporting about issues within the neighbourhood and commented that, "... people wanted me to put on well a lot of bad things.." Being aware of the possible repercussions of such a frame of community reporting, he went on to say that he decided he wanted to "be selective" further identifying that, "I want to be doing, events, festivals, all the good things".

However, Paul did describe the way in which he had voiced the issue of the housing dimension of regeneration in East Manchester within the context of his own community reporter site, which he had set up as a response to his frustration with PVM's community content sharing spaces, telling me:

> "Although I did write the odd rants now and then, which is good. I've got one now at the moment... I did one about the housing and right now it is a massive thing, is housing. I did one on the state of housing. If you look around East Manchester you'll see a lot of houses – new buildings – but if you look at them they're all very... they're like clones."

> "..I like what I did about housing, although my reporting isn't brilliant, you know, I'm not a reporter as such. I can't write well. But I do know what the issues are and I can already see, if you ever remember the 70's, it was appalling. We're back there. And now it's because a) this area is under regeneration. We lost a lot of people who went out of the area and now they're trying to bring them back by building houses. But they've changed my neighbourhood to the point now I don't even recognise it anymore, because they've brought in people into my community that, well, I don't understand and I'm sure, you know, they probably feel the same, but it is just about getting people into this area now, and I feel the housing is of such a poor standard..."

Thus I began increasingly to think about whether the primarily 'good news' framing of community reporting may in fact be working to limit voices of regeneration. However, it was also true that the Community Reporter Programme was an emergent social practice.

Within the East Manchester context, additionally, a couple of research participants raised concerns relevant to possible power dynamics of subtle control. One community reporter for example, expressed the emerging common narrative of regeneration, referring to regeneration as meaning "increasing property prices" and a situation in which the housing dimension of regeneration had led to a scenario in which he felt "every last community in East Manchester now is just about broken up". At the same time, when asked about his perception of the role of community reporting in community empowerment, he went on to express his view that "it's got huge potential to be good for the community but there doesn't seem to be any campaigning aspect to it" and further that:

> "There is a group of us doing this community reporting and we really want to go a lot further, now I don't know whether it has really got the freedom to go further" (Anonymous).

He also described his experience of community reporting as one in which he was not necessarily in charge of the voice being expressed through the social practice, telling me that; "...you do get to ask questions, basically you are interviewing people, at the moment. I half hope to do a little more than that, more insight, coming from me or what I am being asked to ask people." Antony made a similar point when asked about the link between community empowerment and reporting, "...it has the potential to empower. You're empowering somebody if they want to raise an issue which is a bit "touchy" but felt similarly that the power to speak was somehow constrained or controlled, perceiving a reluctance within the community reporting world to address issues which may be more controversial. Antony said, for example, "...if somebody was a bit more radical it would make more of a contribution" and further that:

> "...they should be a bit more aggressive in what they do. But they can't maybe because of some of the people they deal with you know, some community reporters may not want to be more radical."

> "A Community Reporter from what I can see is not particularly hard-hitting. I think it's to give people basic skills or perhaps how to compile a report on any issue."

The character of community reporting within Victoria House in East Manchester was also based around the idea of voice as 'good news'. This particular case also shows how the

172

potential of voice as community generated content within this context may be best understood as contingent and situated within varying local social contexts. That is to say that I was informed that "...the nature of Victoria House" was that "...everything has got to go through someone in Victoria House before it goes online" (David). Phil also explained that: "They want to have a professional, what do you call it, reputation, yeh, you know." Paul A and Phil explained their decision to include a positive promotion of Victoria House angle to their community reporting; whilst they saw a potential issue embedded in this essentially 'only good news' ethos, their decision was based around quite clear perceptions of personal and social value:

> "...most of the stuff though they do say well, online, is positive and why not? Because that is the experience that I have had and Phil's had is positive, so why, it's dead easy to be negative you know and make something shocking and horrible and you know, right in your face but we've done the positive really..." (Paul A).

> "...you asked me what I get out of it, I think purely selfish reasons, a lot of the staff in senior management are very interested in what we are doing because we are promoting Victoria House in a positive fashion. Now there's a problem with that because most blogs or videos people would show Victoria House warts and all. And I'm not saying that there's no problems here because there are, when you get 40 people here with 40 different personalities and 40 different life experiences all around homelessness issues, drugs, alcohol, the tension here and there are negative points but we made a conscious decision that early on that if we were going to film anything in Victoria House we would promote positive aspects of it rather than the negatives" (Paul A).

While potentially the Victoria House social context of community reporting could echo possible exploitation of the 'good news' interpretive framing of participants as mentioned within the Salford regeneration context, Paul A is quite clear about the value of the positive promotional lens:

> "...I can compare, I've been in some rough hostels; I've been in probably the worst in the country. So for me Victoria House works well at what it does. And I've never seen anything like this similarly in my homeless career, which is some...it goes in for some time my homelessness career so it's over two, three years. I've seen some projects and as I say they vary massively. So to get this out into the community that's the way to do it."

Phil's insights also identified the role of group dynamics in controlling voice, relating back to the idea of community reporting as a co-creative practice.

> "I think perhaps one of the faults I've got is one of our other team members always wants to report whenever we're doing a piece wants to put in things like, yeah but that's rubbish that. We can't say it's rubbish. Paul will say...

it's not constructive and I'll say we don't want to do a negative piece we want to do a positive piece. So you have to look at whether or not I'm feeling that or because I'm trying to blow the thing up as being very positive and everything's good and saying no we shouldn't be saying this is bad and this is rubbish, we should be saying it's something good. But then again for every community reporter it's hard to stand up and say no let's just do a positive piece there's bound to be at least another reporter who will turn round and say, oh no it's just rubbish let's just say it's bad. So hopefully it all balances out in the universe."

There was also an identified issue which could potentially be leading to a loss of control over voice through subtle appropriation beyond the original intention, a key hidden domain of power within the organisational and thus place-based context of community reporting. Paul E, suggested, from personal experience that, "...people are not clear what People's Voice Media can do with their content...", "...they're taking ownership of content." In particular, PVM did seem to be shaping and utilising community generated content emerging through training in subtle ways to promote the Community Reporter Programme and PVM. One member of staff also pointed to the organisational appropriation of community generated content, viewing this as a fair trade for support while acknowledging this as an area in need of careful consideration:

> "...if we're giving them more support, say they are part of the Community Reporter Programme, they go off and make a bit of content with lots of support then it seems only reasonable that we should be able to use it for our purposes and so we'd have some kind of rights over usage...I think there are some issues that haven't been ironed out..." (Anonymous).

From my personal experience I found that my research work and images of me in the midst of community reporter activity were starting to appear on PVM sites (Appendix F).

6.4 Contingent empowerment

In Chapter 5 I introduced the idea of participation in community generated content within the context of the social practice of community reporting as co-created in part by the organisational level strategies for domestication of social media. The literature review revealed that within the context of community-based ICT initiatives it has long been recognised that the capacity for local communities to follow an empowered path is likely to be directly affected by the economic sustainability challenges and associated wider political contextual constraints that such initiatives face (Loader & Keeble, 2004). Domestication is also understood as a contingent process shaped by the wider local context of an initiative.

From my interviews with staff supporting the Community Reporter Programme, the challenge of economic sustainability was looking likely to impact on future access to the techno-cultural capital dimension of enabling and sustaining participation in the two regeneration areas. In Salford, there was evidence of a particular concern around the capacity to sustain the Social Media Centre which works to co-create participation and the empowerment discussed within this chapter. Teresa in particular talked to me about this issue:

> "...it does feel like a luxury in a way to be able to have this centre where people can just come and be themselves and build these really nice informal relationships with people."

> "...it would be nice to think that there were social media centres as part of the Community Reporter Programme because I do think they offer a support outlet, I think physical space is really important, however being realistic and coming back to I mean money it may not be the easiest to sustain in the way that its funded.."

The short term and time limited nature of funding for community development projects and within regeneration generally, was in particular associated with concerns around having raised hopes and then having to withdraw the technological cultural and economic capital and spaces which are implicated in the co-creation of participation and empowerment value, potentially leading to a path of disempowerment and disenchantment:

> "..I feel like for change to happen, there needs to be so much work done at a really you know...delivered in a really committed way for the long haul and you can't just dip in and out of communities and attempt to make a difference and it is a real problem I think again coming back to the funding, the way that projects are funded there isn't kind of a long term view, even with us we're funded for 18 months and really you know what can you do in 18 months. You can't expect to regenerate a person or a community... In terms of us and how we maybe, I just think people need a lot of support and we've only been here a year and for our work to come to fruition we're going to need some more time... and ideally we're going to know that we've got that time because otherwise what you do is you start panicking and take your eye off the ball and go and try and bring some money in from somewhere else and then you don't deliver on your promises that maybe you set out to people. You've made me all depressed now. What are we doing? I sincerely don't want to be another thing that comes in with a great bang and then just disappears off the radar because that's just really letting people, it's really messing with people's sense of commitment, you know why give anything to this because it's just going to be another thing that disappears and I really don't want us to be that..." (Teresa's heartfelt response to a question around impacts of the Community Reporter Programme within the realm of empowerment and regeneration).

"I think one of the problems is always, the idea of community development and community work is this idea that you want to build something and support people so that when you take a backward step it still continues to go on...So the hope would be of building up so people can continue but I also guess that another issue as well is that what the Community Reporter Programme offers is the people but we can also offer a space but we can also offer access to resources and we can also offer a sort of place to publish content. So it's like if you have to take back any one of those would people then? It's like people can have great ideas for making films but if they don't have any resources to continue, so I guess there's that element" (David).

One ex-member of staff also felt that the need to chase funding was taking attention away from critical reflection on what was already being built up in Greater Manchester. Staff interviews revealed that training and formal qualifications were likely to be the route to continuity, which David suggested would be likely to change the nature of the 'audience' currently engaging with the phenomenon of community reporting. From my own experience of participating in both an informal and a formal qualification form of community reporter course, and through interviews which revealed informal training as a crucial player in participation and empowerment, I did feel that such a route would be likely to disrupt the arrangements working to co-create the 'feel good' and 'reconnecting' factor. However, at the same time, rewards and recognition including in the form of qualifications were being called for by community reporters and qualifications were identified as important with regard to progression onto careers such as journalism. Importantly, the focus groups revealed, along with my talks with community reporters, that potential for following an empowered path was likely to lie in offering a flexible interpretive path which could be constrained should a pure qualification route emerge.

One member of staff felt that embedding skills for self publishing would address concerns regarding continuity after the life of the project commenting that, "...with social media skills because they're self publishing skills it can just reshuffle and present itself in a different way if funding for a particular project closes down" (Anonymous). This research participant also related teaching people to set up their own blogs, for example, as "...getting rid of that centralisation of publishing and ideally making those skills and that empowerment sustainable on that kind of level". However, another member of staff called into question the empowerment and sustainability potential of free and open source software on which the community sites are based. Because of the "nature of open source" he explained: "I think you still need to be quite technical or have an interest in the technology" and further commented

that:

> "I think it's often you've got to be careful of just saying well just because something's free, sounds daft but it can actually be more expensive in a way because...people then have to work out how to use the programmes and jump through all the hoops."

Paul E, a long standing community reporter, expressed that he found the Drupal software, on which BoftheBlog in East Manchester is based, limiting in terms of the extent to which he could control the way his content was being presented. Again Paul raised the idea of something not necessarily being good because it is free and presented his experiences of the software within the frame of the Community Reporter Programme with a sense of loss of control, leading him to set up his own community reporter site, which he has had to pay for:

> "You can do it for free of course, but I want a bit more control, because if you do it for free you've got no control whatsoever. And then you've got people like MCIN who'll give you a bit of space of somewhere to post it on, so again you are reliant on what they're using...For me it's appalling. I hate it with a vengeance."

Some of the staff and one of the volunteers supporting the programme related building the capacity to download free software to enhancing accessibility. The increasing accessibility of technologies for media content creation and sharing were also being spoken about in relation to opening up opportunities to participate and enhancing the potential for people to follow a more empowered participatory path:

> "...the technology that's available, the prices these days you could set up a media company with a half decent multimedia laptop and a HD video camera for under a grand...I've got a mobile phone, Nokia E71, which is currently recording this interview as well. That has the facility to take pictures, film video, voice recorder as well. Your journalists on TV they're just there with their mobiles recording people, celebrities or whoever just because the technology is there." (Keith).

> "...a lot of people from these sorts of areas don't have a lot of money. Yeah, they may have enough to scrape by with their dodgy copy of Windows and the internet but, like I say, things like Wordpress and, you're going to ask me to name some aren't you? Wordpress, all these free sites and Blogger and stuff like that, yeah, and YouTube accounts. Yeah, I think it's good" (Mike C).

> "… it used to be very expensive once upon a time, being a photographer because it was film and you couldn't afford to make mistakes. But, now you can take a hundred photographs and if you don't like them, you just bin them. Or you can take a hundred photographs and one of them might be great. So, a lot of people don't even realise that" (Tony).

"And the cameras you can get today are wonderful and quite cheap, some of them. You know, cameras, now, these little cameras are fantastic. You can run around, do all sorts and once upon a time, like I was saying about photography before, now everyone can become a film maker. Everyone can make a film. You don't … it could be about anything. It could be a short, two minute film, or something like that, 30 seconds, but you can do it. That is, thank God for this technology that we have got. It's opened my eyes and it's brought out creativity in me" (Tony).

"Now video cameras are going to get to that stage. You press go and you film stuff and you don't worry about the vision levels and the white balance. It's all been done before you, and the same levels; it's all been done for you. And what that means is that ordinary people can do stuff" (Mike S).

At the same time the community reporting world particularly in the Salford context also exposes people to technologies that are less accessible in relation to affordability, implicated in shaping the value associated with participation.

"It's a chance to use expensive equipment that you wouldn't get the chance to if you were just doing our own camcorder and that. Some the cameras that I've used here you would never get the opportunity to use because they'd be far beyond the working man's pocket" (Richard).

However, there was some evidence of an ethical dilemma with regards to introducing less accessible technologies and the skills to use them if they could not then be readily transferred into people's everyday homes and lives.

"We do lend equipment out but sometimes there's that balance of you know telling people they can do this and then people finding they haven't got the equipment they need to do it. So that's an issue, that's the practical bit of it, they might well not have the equipment to go and do it themselves" (David).

Teresa clearly felt that capacity to transfer technologies and skills into everyday lives was vital seeing value firmly in the process of content creation rather than the product. Below she is referring to video orientated activities which were taking place at the time, introducing people to complex editing software to which I have referred earlier:

"I know Gary always talks about technology in the pocket and I think we've been maybe a bit guilty here of setting the bar too high, too soon, so with the new batch of community reporter training, I mean I know again (anonymous) done it because he's a film maker and so he likes you know good quality product at the end, he likes good quality content and it is very satisfying for people to be involved with that process and come out with something that's really nice in the end but I think that if it's not something people can do in their own home then I'm less interested and so we have this bit of kind of tension here, that (anonymous) likes to raise people's aspirations by getting them involved in this generally but I'm much more interested in saying you know I don't give a toss if the sounds pretty crappy really it's really shaky and

you've done it on your camera, on your mobile phone, I'm much more interested in having a go and the process of having a go and starting to think more about of like, 'oh look I could do something about that or what if I took a photo of that. I want people to engage at that level and I don't give as much of a toss about what they actually produce..."

The contextual differences between the Community Reporter Programme in Salford and Manchester, linked to financial resource issues, illuminates what I mean by contingent empowerment. One ex-member of staff, for example, talked to me about her perception of stark differences between content production levels in Salford as opposed to in East Manchester. In East Manchester she felt that a lack of support and adequate physical meeting space in comparison to Salford, was acting as a barrier to the motivation among community reporters to produce content emphasising her view of the pivotal role played by the physical meeting space within the Salford context. This view also re-emphasises the possible loss of the Social Media Centre in Salford as a potential arena of disempowerment. The planned expansion of the programme across the North West was also linked by one community reporter to a concern regarding moving attention away from the Greater Manchester domain of community reporting.

This extract from one community reporter interview also reflects a view of a contingent relationship between advancing technologies and organisations like PVM in co-creating enhanced opportunities for 'people's media' within local regeneration areas:

"When that woman came down to the community café a couple of years ago to talk about the fact that the BBC were moving to the Quays, she was from the BBC, right? A man with a huge camera on his shoulder that was interviewing people, okay? She's a professional. Well, she was only asking questions that we could have come up with. She was filming people and she had equipment then, but now, PVM have got cameras... It was going back to the office and it was being edited. But really we've got the gear to do the editing, at the PVM centre" (Mike S).

"So putting that stuff together, and also there were graphics, there was stuff about the unemployment rate in Ordsall and, you know, it being a deprived community. Well okay, I think we can do that. So that's the thing, isn't it? What separates professionals from amateurs? It's partly about experience and training and skills and confidence, but also it's about having equipment and I think if technology developed to be smaller, to be more portable, to be more accessible and, the vital element, being easier to use... Because the thing is if you've got a video camera and there's six different buttons you have to push

179

before it will work, then it's daunting for people. That's two things. So I think technology is the key, and especially if an organisation like PVM can be the channel for that, if they can get hold of the stuff and bring it to the people and then provide the training and the backup, it really can be people's media in the future" (Mike S).

When approaching the potential value for empowerment from an employment frame a further question emerged through research participants regarding whether the integration of the social practice of community reporting would lead to employment for 'ordinary' people such as the volunteer community reporters interviewed within this research. Paul E, made a particularly poignant point in this regard viewing that:

> "..there's very few success stories whereby this person went on to become, you know a reporter with the BBC or a camera man with...you know I want to see that sort of thing happening. I mean they've been going quite a few years now and, so, where are the success stories...whether you want to become a journalist, a cameraman, a photographer, I want to see real success stories where a person had got a job from it, is working in you know media, with the BBC, ITV or a newspaper..." (Paul E).

When I asked an anonymous public sector representative of the New Deal for Communities partnership in Salford about the economic angle of the programme the response seems to provide further grounding for Paul's concerns:

> "Employment is probably, you couldn't really measure...it's giving people an opportunity, it's not really giving them a job. I mean Peoples Voice Media is a social enterprise at the end of the day, they can't really afford the luxury of taking on lots of people..."

> ...some of them have gone on and even if it's not full time employment, they been able to sort of be agency or be contracted in to do pieces of paid work and again you know it's that relationship, you know they've got the link with the University, they've got the link with media city and the BBC, so these people have had opportunities they never would have had previously."

One community reporter entering the programme with an employment frame also expressed the concern that jobs being created through the programme may not be trickling down to 'ordinary' local people:

> "There is a suspicion on my side that it is a nice little bread winner for certain types of people that are professional volunteers leading these things rather than looking for driving it on. Job creation for the arty-farty's, I can't think of a way of saying that" (Anonymous community reporter, East Manchester).

This seemed to bear some synergies with a view from outside PVM of how the initiative might be framed within the wider holistic regeneration context in Salford:

> "...the People's Voice Media, the Social Media Centre, whatever it's called, even where they're based, they're in the middle of a fifty two million pound regeneration zone, NDC, and look at the place. It's a mess. You know, it's like, where has that money gone? And I'll tell you where the money's gone: it's gone on salaries for middle class people that have come in to do it, which includes People's Voice, you know," (Stephen, Editor of the Salford Star).

When taking a wider angle of regeneration (in the Salford context specifically here, Appendix D) and how initiatives like the Community Reporter Programme and thus digital inclusion initiatives might link into employment opportunities locally, Tony's view below perhaps best defines the feeling of hope that the holistic picture of digital investment will trickle down to local people:

> "...obviously, with Media City coming...I mean, it's because of the regeneration and what's going on in Salford and Manchester, is that the BBC have decided to come up here because they know it's a place where it's … some talents, as well, up here. And I'm just hoping that the people from in and around Salford actually do get the opportunity to work in a place like that, for the BBC 'cause it's not just going to be the BBC. It's Media City at the end of the day. It's not going to just be them. And there are lots of little places popping up as well. I'm just hoping that the people of Salford don't…are going to get offered more than just, like, cleaners jobs and … I'm not knocking cleaners, it's a perfectly honourable job. And security guards, I'm not knocking them, either, but let's hope that they're not just offered them jobs. Let's hope they're offered jobs which, obviously, they can afford to buy a house, one of them upside down houses. They might be able to afford to buy one of them, that would be nice, wouldn't it? You know, if it's gone full circle and that the, they've created a job, they've created houses and it would be nice if these people could actually buy them. That would be a wonderful thing, wouldn't it?"

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the relationship between participation in community reporting and thus community generated content creation together with perceptions of, and issues around, community empowerment and regeneration. In particular, the findings within this chapter have sought to contribute to the exploration of the relationship between ICT, community empowerment and regeneration through the lens of social media. I have identified significant perceptions of empowerment value at the individual level which may be viewed as predominately psychological and social in nature locating a particularly interesting 'feel good' and socio-economic 'reconnecting' value being attached to participation. The insights and stories of the research participants also suggest that participation within this arena may have particular value for people at risk of or have experienced issues associated with social

exclusion. The new social roles and thus identities inspired by the social media era, together with the resultant altered social access conditions and social interaction contexts, appear to be implicated in shaping empowerment value in this context. Such value may also be said to be related to, and shaped by, individual interpretive frames and the associated symbolic framing of social media as community reporting at the organisational level. A particularly interesting finding is the location of empowerment value within the content production process, and it is suggested that empowerment value may be most usefully understood as co-created.

Perceptions of value with regard to community empowerment, evident in the findings presented in both this and the preceding chapter, are firmly located within the arena of voice for communities let down by the mainstream media with particular regard to distributing 'good news'. While empowerment at the individual level is intertwined with playing a community empowerment role with regard to voice, sharing content via community-based social media channels is found to be a particular arena of potential disempowerment, in line with the emergent critique of assumptions of voice attached to the social media age. Inadequate reflection on the audience for community generated content is identified as leaving a significant question mark over the extent to which efforts to create content lead to a voice that is recognised and valued. The wider political and funding context of community reporting is also identified as a potential arena for disempowerment with dangers of; voice exploitation, raised hopes and thus the potential for shattered dreams.

The national digital inclusion agenda with regards to social and community media assumes that digital participation in content creation and sharing will lead to a path of inevitable empowerment particularly within disadvantaged urban communities commonly framed as a voice. The research has shown that associations between participation in community content creation and empowerment are far from inevitable and may be understood as co-created, shaped by a complex interweave of people, organisations and technologies. Additionally, such practices are not purely about having a voice. The application of this metaphor has the potential to obfuscate consideration and thus support for the complex social practices and contexts through which voice or community content creation and sharing becomes a meaningful and empowering experience within deprived urban areas.

Chapter 7: Reflections and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the research process which characterises this thesis, summarises the key findings of the work, makes recommendations with regard to further research and highlights the overall conclusions to be drawn from the study. The chapter begins with a review of the key research aims and objectives before moving on to evaluate the research in relation to approach, conduct and contributions to knowledge.

7.2 Review of Research Objective

The research began with an intrigue about the way in which the relationship between ICTs, community and urban regeneration was developing in the UK during the 1990s, and the policy review revealed the emergence of an assumption that integrating community-based ICTs within deprived urban neighbourhoods would fulfil visions of community empowerment and regeneration. However, towards the middle of the first decade of the 21st Century a glaring gap was emerging between the rhetoric of ICT enabled empowerment and regeneration and the research evidence to back such assumptions of resulting community value. Despite this, the drive for digital inclusion, more recently framed as participation within deprived communities, has remained strong. Given the growing popularisation of social media toward the mid 2000s and the growing attachment of the content production dimension of ICTs to a greater potential for empowerment, the time seemed ripe to revisit the question of the role of ICTs in deprived urban communities. Therefore, the aim of this thesis has been to explore the question of whether and how social media might present a greater potential for community empowerment and regeneration to help inform future policy, practice and research directions within the fields of Digital Inclusion and Community Informatics.

Moreover, theory of relevance to this question, inherent within Digital Inclusion and Community Informatics research and practice, begins largely from a belief in ICTs as empowering and regenerating, and this has obfuscated a more balanced scholarly critique of this proposed relationship. The objective of the research was therefore to advance and nuance critical theorising around the relationship between ICTs, community empowerment and

regeneration through the lens of social media. The intention was to develop a nuanced theory to reflect the messy realities of potentiality within this arena.

Chapters 2 and 3 set the policy and research context of the exploration. Chapter 2 explores in particular, the way in which the digital divide debate has evolved over time and taken shape in policy and practice with regard to deprived urban neighbourhoods in the UK. Chapter 3 moves beyond the UK context to explore the historical and global research context of the existing theory around what community-based integration of ICTs might mean for deprived urban communities, in order to foreground a consideration of the potential role to be played by social media. The underlying thought behind both chapters was to consider how the role of ICTs has been conceptualised historically, and continues to be conceptualised, in the wake of social media. The work within both chapters led to the development of a conceptual framework for proceeding with the research. The conceptual framework places participation in community content creation and sharing (community generated content) centre stage in the proposed potential of social media for community empowerment and regeneration. The literature and thus the conceptual framework also pointed to the importance of looking beyond empowerment to engage with questions of possible arenas of disempowerment rooted in the power dynamics within the social context of participation.

Chapters 5 and 6 tell the story of community participation in, and perceptions of, empowerment value attached to social media focused community content creation and sharing (community generated content) in the form of a Community Reporter Programme in two urban regeneration areas in the UK. Guided by the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 3, the findings move beyond empowerment and explore potential arenas of disempowerment 'hidden' within the social context of the programme. The analysis was structured around conceptual tools brought from theories inherent within Sociology, Cultural Studies and the Social Construction of Technology. This analytical journey has led to the development and enhancement of the theory that ICTs have potential for community empowerment and regeneration, which I present in this chapter.

7.3. Reflecting on and Evaluating My Research

> "Most of us would find it easier to conduct research if there were a clear set of rules to follow, if we could be assured that the paths of least resistance would be the most fruitful, or if were we guaranteed at least one "aha" moment in

which it all fell into place and the right route was revealed. Qualitative research is never going to offer these things." (Baym, 2009, p.173).

Conducting and defending qualitative research in an arena with limitless available paths to follow can be an exciting but also frustrating and emotional journey, and one which can end in heavy critique for failure to "adhere to the canons of reliability and validity" (Le Compte & Goetz, 1982, p.31). As Peshkin (1993, p.23) points out, research "which is not theory driven, hypothesis testing or generalization producing can be dismissed as deficient or worse." Thus qualitative research can be simply seen as a wholly unscientific method, the product of which is purely "subjective assertion" (Finlay, 2006. p.319). Qualitative researchers therefore need to make a strong case in defence of their work, which is highly challenging as the question of appropriate criteria remains highly debatable (Finlay, 2006; Baym, 2009). The question is perhaps even more pertinent and problematic for Internet researchers because of the requirements for such work to be "grounded in and speak to multiple traditions", (Baym, 2009, p. 177). The greatest challenge to qualitative research work is thus one of demonstrating the quality and trustworthiness of such efforts (Finlay, 2006).

7.3.1 Appropriate Methodology

It is accepted that methodological choices should be compatible with research objectives (Silverman, 2001). Qualitative research was conducted to gain an understanding of the potential of social media for community empowerment and regeneration. Given the highly interpretive, contextual, contingent and process-orientated nature of 'community empowerment', a survey-based approach would not have provided access to the in-depth, rich contextual insights necessary to advance and nuance theory in this area. The case study approach was therefore most appropriate to studying a complex phenomenon in its social context from a range of perspectives as discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.1). In addition, the digital divide literature points to the importance of situated research (Mehra et al., 2004). Drawing on the research methodology of ethnography was found to be a very useful way of understanding, exploring and interpreting socio-technical processes, settings and contexts associated with empowerment, and also emerged as a key way in which to access and build rapport with research participants. One essential unique feature of ethnography as opposed to alternative research methodologies is the way in which ethnographers seek to discover what people do and why they do it before they consider the meaning (Schensul et al., 1999). My

research topic could be described as entailing the need to discover and understand what people are doing with technology and why and how this might relate to meaning, and thus this methodology was very much suited to the research topic. Combining such an approach with phenomenology was also valuable since a phenomenological approach helps to establish the "truth of things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57), enabling me to gain the grounded view (rooted in participant experiences and meanings) required to explore the interpretive phenomenon of empowerment. The value and limitations of the specific methods used will be discussed further as part of the sections which follow.

7.3.2 Considering the Credibility of My research

Qualitative research views reality as subjective and interprets phenomena through the multiple perspectives of different people in different situations and contexts. Owing to the relativistic nature of such research, credibility becomes an important consideration for the researcher and the reader of such accounts of the world (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility has been defined as concerned with the value, truth and "believability of the findings" (Leininger, 1994; Patterson & Higgs, 2005, p.35; Finlay, 2006). Guba's (1981) model of aspects of trustworthiness of research has referred to this criteria as the 'truth value' that has been identified as potentially "the most important criterion for the assessment of qualitative research" (Krefting, 1990, p.215). Within the field of qualitative research the truth value has been defined as accessible "from the discovery of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by informants" (Krefting, 1990, p.215), and this has been a key goal and characteristic of my research approach. Reflecting on the credibility of the work involves considering such questions as "Did we get the story right? (Stake, 19995, p.107) or "Did we publish a wrong and inaccurate account?" (Le Compte and Goetz, 1982, p. 31). I explore the credibility question in the section which follows.

7.3.2.1 Credibility and Authenticity

Authenticity is essentially part of credibility and is concerned with portraying the experiences and meanings of a phenomenon as perceived and lived by the research participants, and this can be described as a key characteristic of my research (Walsham, 2006). The semi-structured interview method has featured strongly in my study, which included a number of

open ended questions identified as "the most effective route" toward the authentic understanding of human experiences (Silverman, 1999, p.10). I have also sought to provide an authentic account through the heavy use of quotations in seeking to convey the meaning of the experience and thus "bring in the voice of the participants in the study" (Creswell, 1998, p.170).

Interviews are fundamentally dependent on the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, and the data which emerges is heavily dependent on such factors as rapport, trust, and the skill of the researcher (Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005). "Access to people's thoughts, views and aspirations requires good social skills and personal sensitivity on the part of the researcher" (Wilson, 2006, p.78). Therefore, I adopted an approach of constant reflection on how to potentially enhance such skills. The data which emerged was also dependent on the evident interest of the research participants in the research topic and desire to advance the field, which I feel helped them to be more open and honest with me. I recorded the interviews, which has been identified with the potential to "make the interviewee less open or less truthful" (Walsham, 2006, p.323). However, by offering the opportunity to the research participants not to be recorded, the comfort of the research participants was ensured. In addition, community reporter participants are exposed to technology and recording devices all the time and are generally accustomed to being recorded, and thus in the main were unfazed by the prospect; there may have been a wholly different response in a different social setting. In the end I feel that the recording of interviews enabled me to bring an authentic voice to the research as effectively explained through Walsham's (2006, p.323) discussion of the advantages of such an approach:

> One advantage is a truer record of what was *said* compared with taking of notes during the interview, no matter how extensive. It is possible to return to the transcript later for alternative form of analysis, and it is useful for picking up direct quotes when writing up. It frees the researcher to concentrate on engaging with the interviewee.

'Being there' through the method of participant observation was also very much part of my research strategy and this was an important route to gaining an in-depth understanding of, and portraying an 'authentic' picture of views and experiences of, the research participants within a very specific context. I spent time in the field, while of course limited in true ethnographic terms, and documented my own experiences within the field, both of which strategies have been associated with ensuring credibility and authenticity (Morrow, 2005; Walsham, 2006).

However, Walsham (2006, p.326) describes authenticity as the "ability of the text to show that authors have 'been there' by, conveying the vitality of life in the field." The extent to which I feel I could convey the "vitality of life in the field" (Walsham, 2006, p.326) has been severely limited by the sheer array and volume of experiences encountered and the difficulty in conveying a multimedia, multi- activity worlds in a primarily textual document.

Credibility was also built into the study by bringing in multiple voices and perspectives during the data collection process. However, as Baym (2009, p.175) identifies, "Internet research can go almost anywhere and still stay on topic. Yet expanding infinitum is rarely practical - even if it were more 'accurate'". In my desire to build up an authentic picture of diversity in the field I did, to an extent, fall into the trap of inviting more complexity than was manageable (Baym, 2009) within the confines of this thesis. This is characterised by the relatively large sample size for a qualitative study; whilst attempting to follow the principle of theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) I found that there was always some new light being shed on the phenomenon and new perspectives to be uncovered. In the end I had to make the decision to focus the study according to key themes emerging from both the literature and the data, thus in the process reducing the participant voices that feature in the study. For example, it was recognised that the young people interviewed as part of the research were going through a particularly distinct form of the Community Reporter Programme and therefore their voices and experiences feature less within this thesis. I have taken this as a learning curve and hope to integrate their voices and experiences at a later date in further research so that the time they spent with me and the support staff has not been wasted. The experiences of specific community and organisational level projects have also been largely eliminated from the study, or integrated as more of a background context within which community reporting is situated. Again, it is hoped to take the work forward elsewhere so that these experiences are not lost and the generous time given by the research participants is not wasted.

Thus, in essence I offer partial insights and one interpretation of no doubt many possible interpretations of the rich, detailed and diverse data which has emerged through this study. In addition, whilst I have desired from the outset to capture complexity through developing an holistic account, the metaphor of crystallisation perhaps best encapsulates the way in which I now view my research as offering a partial and snapshot view of a complex phenomenon:

"…crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know" (Richardson 1994, p.522).

7.3.2.2 Credibility and Plausibility

Plausibility concerns "how well the text connects to the personal and professional experience of the reader" and whether the findings fit with the data from which they have emerged (Walsham, 2006, p.326). Presenting aspects of the findings of my work at various conferences during the course of my research could be viewed as a process of testing the degree to which my findings and interpretations would connect to potential readers. The invitation by the organisation that provided entry to the field of study to present documents, case studies and summaries of key findings, which were then posted to one of their websites, can also be seen to have served as a check of the fit of the emergent story to participants' own accounts. However, there was a limited response to these documents (Appendix, E), and on reflection, had there been time it would have been beneficial to organise a focus group to check the fit of my emergent interpretive story to research participant perceptions. Plausibility and authenticity were also enhanced by an approach to analysis that involved total immersion in the textual data provided by research participants. The emergent themes and story were related back to the literature constantly in order to identify synergies and gaps and to help ensure that the findings would speak to a variety of audiences. The transparency of the research methods used, the detail of the research process provided and the availability of access to an NVivo based record of interview transcripts and themes derived, may also aid judgement of the plausibility of the findings produced.

One of the tensions in attempting to deliver a plausible account, that is to tell a good story that will resonate and move the reader and so be valued, is that the messy reality, particularly in the case of Internet research, inevitably has to be reduced to something neater and simpler (Baym, 2009). This has inevitably meant that some stories have remained untold or underexplored, as discussed in section 7.3.2.1.

7.3.2.3 Credibility, Criticality and Researcher Reflexivity

Given that my research draws on the interpretive and critical paradigms, I was required to go beyond interpretations to explore "the social and historical origins and contexts of meaning"

(Fossey et al., 2002, p.720) from which they emerged. I thus assumed the role of participant observer and "being there" was certainly valuable in developing the "intimate familiarity" which, as Krefting (1990, p.217) points out, can (and did) lead to the "discovery of hidden facts". 'Being there' was also a vital part of my journey in relation to being able to access research participants. Walsham (2006, p.321) describes the benefits of the role of the "involved researcher" eloquently. I concur with his view that such an approach is "good for in-depth access to people, issues and data. It enables observation or participation in action, rather than merely accessing opinions as in the case of an interview only study". However, familiarity can also lead to possibilities of distortion of the research process as I discovered when a member of staff effectively 'hijacked' my first few interviews, but I saw this as a learning curve and took steps to ensure that this would not happen in the future.

In addition, the degree of closeness between the researcher and research participants can: present a "major threat to the truth value of a qualitative study" (Krefting, 1990, p.218); reduce "critical distance" (Walsham, 2006, p.322); and mar separation of personal experiences from those of the research participants (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). Insurance against this lay in combining participant observation with the interview process and in keeping my personal experience intentionally out of the account presented. Inevitably however, such experiences will have influenced my 'way of seeing' the world of community reporting. This helped me to see things more effectively through the eyes of my participants and to present a more accurate account of their experiences. At one stage I thought about including an auto-ethnographic element to my writing, but then decided that I wanted this study to reflect the lived experience of my research participants as much as possible and that my experiences would disrupt the authenticity of the resultant story.

A further factor which could have potentially affected the authenticity of the data collected, for example in terms of the level of honesty and openness of the research participants, again related to perceptions of my role as a researcher from a participant perspective (Walsham, 2006). In the main I felt the research participants viewed me as an 'outside researcher' with a 'neutral' position, by which I mean that:

> "...the people in the field situation do not perceive the researcher as being aligned with a particular individual or group within the organization, or being concerned with making money as consultants are for example, or having strong prior views of specific, systems or processes based on previous work in the organization." Walsham (2006, p. 321)

This perception may have become a little blurred when I was obliged to tell participants that I would be feeding back findings to the organisation based on their request for access to some of my research. However, I feel I overcame this by being clear about the intention of my research at the start of all the interviews by showing and explaining the research information sheet (Appendix B) to the participants. Additionally, one of the staff members identified that the option of anonymity enabled participants to offer a more open and honest perspective.

In Chapter 4 I identified that critical research seeks to explore what is wrong as well as what is right with the world. Walsham (1996, p. 328) refers to this as "the moral dilemma of truthful reporting against expedient reporting". My particular moral dilemma was one of offering a useful critique of the research area while potentially appearing somewhat disloyal to the organisation and staff that opened the research field door wide for me and continually helped me along the way. In some ways I feel I tackled this head on through the preliminary findings report I submitted to the organisation, which included some but not all of my critical insights. I also knew that had I limited the critical domain of my research, I would have been doing other research participants an injustice. I also acknowledge that my research took place at a particular time and that some of the more critical elements I raise may have been resolved or altered in the process of writing up my research. My research has only been possible because of the interest and time generously given to me by the research participants, and I have had a great internal struggle with regards to shedding a critical light on what for some participants is clearly a treasured part of their lives. I can only hope that my research participants will understand my reasons for doing so, and that this has only ever been the case owing to my ambition of ensuring that the 'good things' that can come from new technologies can be made to work more effectively for those most disadvantaged in society.

Finally, it is widely accepted that "all inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer" and that "all observation is theory laden" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.420). I have already identified that the story told in this thesis is ultimately my interpretation of other people's interpretations and experiences. I have also laid out in the thesis the theories brought to this work so that the reader has a clear view of what may have shaped my interpretation. My background in researching ICT, community and regeneration whilst completing my MPhil thesis, which explored this arena more broadly, has no doubt influenced the assumptions I took to the research field, assumptions which were in fact challenged significantly by what greeted me there. In particular, I brought my research lens of narratives of regeneration to the

field, which could be critiqued for imposing a view that social media in this field ought to be being used to voice regeneration concerns. This was informed by the literature review around urban regeneration and revealed intriguing insights, but nonetheless sat somewhat uncomfortably with my desire for the study to reflect predominately community reporter voices and experiences. At the same time bringing this lens enabled me to open up a more critical world view. In addition, given that I was brought up in (and my Mother still resides in) one of the most disadvantaged areas in London, which is now also defined as an urban regeneration area, I undoubtedly could not help but bring my own set of assumptions about regeneration to the research.

7.3.3 The Question of Generalisability

The issue of generalisability has long troubled qualitative researchers and can be viewed within this realm as a tension between explaining a phenomenon and "...offering something to those involved in other contexts in which that phenomenon may be meaningful," (Baym, 2009, p.175). There are those who argue against the capacity for generalisability to be applicable to qualitative research, particularly from a single case study (Yin, 1989) such as the one that has been presented within this study. The key limitations lie in the representativeness of the research population, which by nature was relatively small and made up primarily of people already engaged digitally and socially with the phenomenon of interest. Looking beyond the engaged community has shed some light on how the wider community might view the phenomenon, but this aspect of the study has been limited due to the timeframe and manageability of the research project. Additionally, most research participants were living in the regeneration areas of exploration. However, the main purpose of the study was to explore a socio-technical phenomenon *in situ*, and perceptions in relation to that phenomenon and the sample simply reflect the diverse and complex nature of urban life. In addition, the areas of study have a rich cultural grounding in community-based ICTs, a strong cultural heritage and sense of identity and in Salford there is the hope and promise of a thriving media industry symbolised by the development of MediaCityUK (Appendix D). All these factors may have had a bearing on perceptions of empowerment. Therefore, research based within other contexts and experiences may have offered quite different insights and findings. A further factor is that through my own experiences as a community reporter I became keenly aware of how everyone is likely to have their own unique experience and feel empowered, or not, in different ways. Thus a different set of research

respondents within the same contextual setting may have produced a very different story. Additionally, community empowerment is situated in a particular place, process, context and worldview, and is therefore by nature both unique and dynamic. However, it is in identifying links between process, context and interpretations that I feel my study can offer wider value.

'Comparability' and 'transferability' have been suggested as alternative criteria for qualitative research, that is by offering insights beyond the specific context of the study (Baym, 2009) and enabling audiences to assess the degree to which findings could be applied to other contexts through 'thick description' of the research setting (Geertz, 1973; Finlay, 2006). Walsham (1995) also identifies that interpretive case studies can make a contribution to knowledge in four different ways: the development of concepts; the generation of theory; provision of rich insights; and the drawing out of specific implications. Thus in section 7.5 I draw out my specific contributions to knowledge.

7.4 My Key Findings: Exploring the Role of ICTs in Community Empowerment and Regeneration through the Lens of Social Media

This thesis has been based on exploring the assumption that ICTs have a key role to play in empowering and regenerating deprived urban neighbourhoods in the UK. At a very broad level, the study supports the potential of the Internet as a positive force within geographically defined communities, as emphasised by scholars such as Schuler (1996), Doheny-Farina (1996) and Hampton (2002; 2010). Exploring the assumption through the lens of social media would appear to substantiate the theory that meaningful use, which lies at the heart of the potential for empowerment, may well lie in the content domain of ICTs. ICT content domains enable communities to become active producers of their own content and foster a greater potential for creativity and community, as advocated by several academics and scholars (Sherman, 1999; Hellawell, 2001; Servon, 2002; Keeble, 2003; Selwyn, 2004; O'Bryant, 2003; O'Bryant & Pinkett, 2003; Nutt & Schwartz, 2007). The study extends this discourse by: offering some in-depth insights into how community generated content may become meaningful within disadvantaged communities (including how and for whom); identifying ways in which such activity may be linked to community empowerment and regeneration; and moving beyond empowerment to locate possible arenas of disempowerment.

7.4.1 Community Generated Content and Meaningful Participation in the Social Media Age

The study challenges the participatory ease assumption attached to the era of social media, (Jenkins, 2006; 2008), which has begun to be challenged by commentators (Beer & Burrows, 2007; Van Dijck, 2009), who identify that content creation and sharing within this particular genre of participation is complex and co-created as it involves a set of relations between people, organisations and technologies with varying roles. Ease of participation within the arena of community video production is seen as a particularly problematic area with regards to the accessibility of editing technologies. In particular, meaningful participation, that is the way in which participation in community generated content has come to be viewed as a meaningful activity (foregrounding empowerment) for people living in disadvantaged areas, is found to be driven by a complex interweave of individual interpretive framing and digital inclusion strategies for the domestication of community generated content. Findings within the arena of interpretative framing hold some synergies with Fernback's (2005) research regarding the centrality of the symbolic framing of ICTs and community to the ways in which ICTs may come to be viewed as being of value within a context of regeneration areas. The findings also support the role of individual motivations and conceptual frames in terms of the extent to which ICTs come to find a place within people's lives (Ferlander & Timms, 2005, Cushman & Klecun, 2006).

The notion of natural emergence of participation is inevitably challenged by this study (Jenkins, 2006), and the need for digital empowerment strategies to support the emergence of community generated content for community empowerment as reported by other scholars is supported by the study (Mäkinen, 2006; Nutt & Schwartz, 2007). In particular, the research finds that the symbolic framing of social media and approaches to embedding technological cultural capital are pivotal to the way in which community generated content may come to be viewed as meaningful to people living in disadvantaged areas. The continuing importance of community access centres and their environmental context, along with opportunities for informal learning, are also identified and found to be pivotal to the way in which participation in community generated content comes to play a meaningful and empowering role within a context of social disadvantage, as indicated by previous commentators and research (Day & Harris, 1997; INSINC, 1997; Phipps, 2000; Hellawell, 2001; Liff & Steward, 2001; Servon, 2002; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Ferlander & Timms, 2006; Klecun,

2008). Friendly, supportive, approachable support staff as well as flexible, informal and novel approaches to learning, are also found to play a significant role in a sense of meaningful participation, in part facilitated by the mobile nature of technologies for content capture. Contextual differences between the two urban regeneration areas in which the study was based also serve to reinforce findings about the continuing importance of the provision of access to an array of technological economic and cultural capital within such disadvantaged areas.

The study also indicates that whilst community generated content has been demonstrated to be of potential benefit to people struggling with life issues and challenges, which could be associated with social exclusion, the socially isolated may still be remaining on the margins of the activity. Thus the research work also suggests paradoxically, in line with previous studies, a continuity of the theory that those most socially disadvantaged may be the least likely to benefit from the potential of ICTs while potentially having the most to gain from participation (Helsper, 2008). However, a close inspection of interpretive framing reveals that while participation within this arena may have significant value in contexts of social exclusion, the value is likely to relate to those with an existing propensity toward digital and community engagement, thus supporting prior scholarly work which locates community involvement tendencies as integral to the potential community building role of ICTs (Pinkett, 2002; Hampton, 2003). The challenges to the ease of participation and the complex array of factors which serve to shape meaningful participation also challenges the national digital inclusion policy perspective of equating content creation and sharing with voice and empowerment.

7.4.2 Locating the Potential Value of Social Media Participation for Community Empowerment and Regeneration

The study finds that empowerment value attached to participation in community generated content practices, is located primarily at the individual level and is psychological and social in nature, with an associated potential for economic empowerment. In particular, the study finds a significant 'feel good' and socioeconomic 'reconnecting' factor attached to participating in co-creative practices of content production, which seems to be more significant for those who have been at risk of social exclusion and is associated with the individual change process required for community empowerment (Wilson, 1996a). The stories which have emerged from this study of participation as part of self-rehabilitation for

social and economic participation are potentially exciting, for example. The study thus goes some way to support theories that creative uses of ICTs and digitally empowering community generated content may indeed have value for community empowerment and regeneration when developed in a community context of content production (Shearman, 2003; Mäkinen, 2006; Nutt & Schwartz, 2007).

Crucially, beyond the community context, being able to follow a self-actualised and non-prescribed path of participation is pivotal to empowerment value at the individual level. However, given that, in common with prior studies, this study finds that empowerment value is located mainly at the individual level (Stoecker, 2005), there remains somewhat of a question mark over the potential for community-based ICT initiatives to contribute to community economic development and regeneration (Loader & Keeble, 2004). The potential for participation in this arena to lead to more creative and rewarding relationships with ICTs than have so far been in evidence (Southern, 2002; Klecun, 2008), that is relationships which may lead to a path of self-actualisation, is an exciting prospect which would benefit from further exploration.

In particular, this study finds that feelings of empowerment are linked to perceptions of potential for wider community empowerment, conceptualised primarily as voice, and evidence of a sense of empowerment can also be seen to lie in new community roles and social access conditions enabled and inspired by social media technologies. This supports Meyrowitz's (1985) theory that altering social roles and social situations are pivotal to understanding the social changes associated with new media. These new social roles and situations arguably present a greater potential for communities to follow self-actualised paths (Maslow, 1943), and thus present more empowering routes than was possible via 'NVQ' factory style training approaches (Sherman, 1999) to integrating ICTs within deprived urban neighbourhoods. The study also supports Gauntett's (2011) theory regarding the social connection value to be found in the technology-driven shift from a 'sit and be told' culture to a 'making and doing' culture. In addition, the study supports Leung's (2009) findings of a significant psychological empowerment effect attached to the process of content creation as well as to its consequences. Also the role of technology should not be forgotten, specifically that portable content capture technologies can be viewed as playing a pivotal role in the 'reconnecting' empowerment value identified. This study thus places the value of social media significantly within the arena of the social practices, roles and situations being inspired

and created, rather than within the social software domain. When viewed in light of the question of whether new ICTs take us away from or connect us to local communities, the study supports Hampton's (2010) espousal of the value of such technologies for social relations within disadvantaged communities and adds fresh perspectives on the perceived 'cocoon' role played by portable technologies within urban spaces (Crawford, 2008).

7.4.3 Community Generated Content and Potential Arenas of Disempowerment

This study problematises assumptions of empowerment as voice attached to social media, in line with emergent participatory culture critiques (Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007) and the challenges to voice in the new attention economy highlighted within the arena of Citizen Journalism (Goode, 2010). Such challenges are also reflective of historic concerns raised in the field of Community Media (Jankowski, 2002). In particular, the study reveals that an individual's sense of empowerment, often attached to the prospect of collective empowerment through voice provision, has the potential to break down at the point of sharing content via community-based social media channels due to insufficient consideration being given to issues of commanding audience attention at the organisational level. This break down was found to be attached to a discourse of barriers to achieving an eloquent community voice. That is to say that participants expressed representational concerns related to what they felt the content and its organisation within its social context of sharing might say about the value of their work. Evidence of a sense of loss of control over content at the point of sharing on the community open source sites, adds weight to Lin's (2009) concerns regarding the limitations of the empowerment value attached to Free/Libre Open source software devoid of local user input. The need to move beyond assumptions of voice to explore and develop an understanding of the listening aspect of voice in such environments, as identified by other scholars (Crawford, 2009; Couldry, 2010), has therefore also emerged from this study.

Whilst community generated content is associated with the potential to reclaim representational power from mainstream media through a 'good news' ethos, the lens of disempowerment revealed a more subtle potential for disempowerment of voice rooted in the local social context of apparent empowerment. The idea that social media may have simply shifted the risk of participant communities becoming information conduits for existing organisations (as identified by Dabinett, 2000), to becoming voice conduits, is thus presented as a concern. The study therefore echoes warnings regarding the potential for exploitation and

disempowerment of community voices, as identified by Nutt & Schwartz (2007) and Loader & Keeble (2004). The continuity of community voice marginalisation within urban regeneration contexts is also identified in this study. The fallacy of celebrating content production as transference of power, as identified by Burgess (2006), and the assumption that new forms of participatory media are necessarily better or more socially worthy is challenged, in keeping with ideas presented by Spurgeon et al., (2009) in the arena of digital storytelling.

This study resonates with the finding that the political and funding context has historically shaped and constrained community-based ICT initiatives (Shearman, 2003; Loader & Keeble, 2004; Gurstein, 2005; Leach & Copitch, 2005). Specifically, the study has identified the political and funding context of urban regeneration as a potential arena of both empowerment and disempowerment, impinging on whether ICTs might realistically have a role in empowering communities, or lead to disempowerment and disenchantment. Challenging the rhetoric of empowerment based on perceptions of the accessibility of technologies for media content production, the study finds that empowerment value was perceived to be partly contingent on sustained access to varying forms of technological, cultural and economic capital, and thus identifies a potential for disempowerment stemming from threats to the continuity of such access. The symbolic messages emerging from the contextual differences in access to technologies of content production between the two urban regeneration areas is also identified as an arena of disempowerment.

The differences in perceived value and engagement between the two areas also points toward the kinds of technologies that link into a sense of empowerment, value and voice, suggesting that if empowerment through technology is a goal within deprived urban communities then investing in 'inaccessible' technology may be important. Overall, the study problematises content production characterised by accessible technologies as this fails to account for the complex array of technologies surrounding the capture, editing and distribution of content, that help to create a meaningful experience and voice for local communities. Finally, the assumptions of voicelessness that the national digital inclusion agenda brings to this arena are challenged by this study, and it is suggested that the implications for existing community media outlets may not have been thought through. This finding bears synergies to academic work around non-use and critiques of the social construction of non-users (Selwyn, 2006; Wyatt, 2005).

7.4.4 Theorising the Role of ICT in Community Empowerment and Regeneration

Based on my fieldwork, the policy and research-based literature review and an examination of this relationship through a social media lens, I suggest the *futility of viewing empowerment and regeneration on an outcome basis*. I also suggest that the potential for empowerment through ICTs *demands an understanding of ICTs as co-creative practices*, in order to open up a more effective view of how ICTs might be working to both empower and disempower disadvantaged communities. With such a co-creative practice lens and working from the findings presented in this research, *community empowerment comes into view firmly as process,* and *regeneration as a political context or key site of power which may work to empower or disempower* such practices. *Viewing digital inclusion interventions as processes of domestication within community contexts* also opens up the capacity to engage and unpick power relations, and thus arenas of empowerment and disempowerment essential for social learning to guide future interventions. *Being ever mindful of the array of interpretive frames people may bring to such practices,* and thus incorporating flexibility rather than rigidity is perhaps one of the key lessons to emerge from this study.

7.5 Contributions to Knowledge

The major contribution to knowledge resulting from this study has been to develop and nuance the theory that ICTs have potential for community empowerment and regeneration. This is likely to be of value and interest to researchers, policy-makers and practitioners within the arenas of Digital Inclusion and Community Informatics. The research has also responded directly to illuminated gaps in current knowledge with regards to the role of ICT in community empowerment and regeneration, and to the need for theoretical advancement of the understanding of this relationship by suggesting ways in which existing conceptual tools can be employed to enable scholars to make greater inroads into exploring the relationship.

Chapter 2 offers rich insights into the digital inclusion policy agenda in the UK with particular regard to its intersections with the urban regeneration agenda and the concept of community empowerment. Chapter 3 additionally offers rich insights into the ways in which the meaning of ICTs for deprived urban communities has been socially constructed, often through a combined practice and research lens.

The exploration of the Community Reporter Programme offers rich insights into the ways in which ICTs, and specifically social media and thus content creation and sharing, may become meaningful to people living in deprived urban areas, thereby beginning to fill an identified knowledge gap within the Community Informatics literature. In particular, the exploration of the programme has located significant empowerment value within the arena of co-creative practices of content production, moving the social media for empowerment lens beyond considerations of the affordances of social software.

The study adds to and enriches domestication studies that look beyond the home and the exploration of what it can mean to be empowered by technology, which has received scant attention. The study also offers a novel 'integration of social media technologies within local communities' perspective, and suggests that the domestication of social media practices rather than specific technologies may be more fruitful and manageable for studies in this arena. The value of utilising and unpicking the concept of 'co-creative media' is also highlighted.

The study also points to implications of the Internet for local communities beyond the social interaction and social capital lens, and in so doing extends the discourse and provides fresh and novel insights into the potential meaning of new ICTs for urban and, in particular, deprived urban communities.

The study also offers social learning within the field of digital inclusion, particularly with regards to access to voice. It is suggested that applying the metaphor of voice to content creation and sharing may serve to obfuscate the development, support and value of media production processes, that is the processes through which voice is created.

In particular, this study contributes to and offers rich insights into the emergent critique of participatory culture through the lens of local community appropriation of social media, and significantly problematises inherent assumptions about voice, democratisation and participatory ease.

Specific implications of the research stem from locating empowerment value attached to the appropriation of social media within the under-discussed realm of the content production

process. The need to view such practices through a critical co-creative lens is identified, as is the need to develop greater understanding of the audience for community generated content.

7.6 Recommendations for Further Research

The study presented within this thesis and the vast literature that surrounds it suggests an array of possible avenues for further research. Therefore, in this section I will seek to illuminate areas that I have developed an interest in through the process of conducting the research, all of which may offer fertile ground for additional research activities.

- My research has been situated around the novel social practice of Community Reporting and this study has only been able to provide a snapshot of the phenomenon within the specific social context of urban regeneration. As a relatively new participatory genre, exploring the social implications of social media through this and similar media practices would certainly be of value in advancing the discourse around the implications of ICTs for society. In fact as I write, an academic book focused on the relationship between community reporting and social inclusion has emerged (Manuel at al., 2012), undoubtedly marking out this arena as a fertile ground for further research.

- The economic empowerment potential of community reporting and community generated content practices would benefit from further research as the links here still seem to be quite hazy. A follow up longitudinal study to this research would be particularly valuable to explore the extent to which the apparent role of employment rehabilitation may lead to self actualisation in relation to career paths. The commercial value of community generated content and thus value for community economic development, including the potential for disempowerment in this arena, would also benefit from further research.

- The study's findings regarding the value of community reporting for breaking down barriers to social isolation related to, for example, long term ill health and

unemployment are interesting and potentially exciting, and would benefit from further focused research.

- Beyond the risk of hidden voice appropriation and exploitation, the risks associated with developing community generated content within local community contexts have not been discussed in this thesis for reasons of manageability. Thus a study that explores such issues would also be of value.

- Given the opportunistic inclusion in this study of the story of the experiences of an originally print-based community magazine and the interesting insights this revealed, a comparative study of social media inspired community voice and print-based inspired community voice would add further in-depth insights of value to this broad area of research.

- Overall, the study supports the value of seeing social media technologies as socio-technical arrangements that afford both continuity and change, and thus present novel sites for exploring age old problems (Light & McGrath, 2010; Dourish & Satchell, 2010). The study also supports the need for more research that critically interrogates the social progress, empowerment and ease of participation assumptions attached to the social media era as identified by an array of scholars (for example Burgess, 2006; Smith & Smythe, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Petersen, 2008; Beer, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009; Spurgeon et al., 2009; Schäfer, 2011). The need to explore the listening aspect of voice and the extent to which voice is valued is beginning to be illuminated by scholars in the field of Media and Cultural Studies (Burgess, 2006; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Crawford, 2009; Couldry, 2010) and is supported as a vital avenue of future exploration, particularly in contexts of disadvantage. More work is also required to develop knowledge around the 'invisible audiences' (Marwick & boyd, 2011) of social media, without which voices cannot be heard.

7.7 Conclusions

The findings of this study point heavily toward the importance of moving beyond a blinded belief in the power of new technologies to empower and regenerate deprived urban

communities. The social or participatory media era associated with technologies of voice and creativity do seem to be opening up the potential for more meaningful and empowering uses of new communication technologies within the context of deprived urban areas. The study suggests that there appears to be much value to be found in supporting and developing community generated content practices within contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage, and locates a particular value in the processes of content production. However, such value is identified as co-created and shaped by a complex interweave of people, technologies, organisations and the cultural contexts and interpretive frames within and through which they are embedded and viewed. The capacity for communities to follow empowered paths through community generated content practices may be limited by assumptions of voice being directly attached to so-called social media and therefore to technology. Thus it is vital to ensure that such assumptions are continually opened up to critical reflection by moving towards an understanding of social media as part of a story of co-creative media practices with no inevitable outcomes. This study has placed regeneration firmly as the context within which the potential role of social media for community empowerment may or may not flourish, rather than as an outcome of integrating technologies within local communities. By employing this contextual lens and listening to the voices of the research participants that have taken part in this study, it is identified as crucial that digital inclusion does not become just another part of the story of regeneration as symbolic, not of rebirth, but of shattered hopes and communities.

Appendices

Appendix A: An Overview of the Research Process

Date	Research Method/ Activity	Objective/Kinds of Data Collected
January-February 2009	**Initial meeting & interview with the Chief Executive** of People's Voice Media As a result I was asked for summaries of some of my major findings and how I think it works for regeneration and case studies: "*I would really like case studies, so you present to me a series of case studies that says, this is what has taken place, this is the intervention and as a result I can come out with case studies that say this is how this person's life has changed, this is how we have impacted something from what we are doing. I suppose for me to get case studies would actually be really useful*" (Gary).	To find out more about People's Voice Media and the Community Programme; • To explore how to gain access to the Community Reporter Programme and thus community reporters; • To access the Chief Executive's perspective on how the programme contributes to community empowerment and regeneration. • To explore meanings attached to 'social media' within this context. • To find out more about the kinds of people targeted by and participating in the programme.
March-April 2009	**5 initial interviews** with People's Voice Media Staff. I interview also took place a year later with an ex member of staff.	• To gain a sound grounding in and a staff perspective on how the Community Reporter Programme works; • To explore the kinds of roles and processes which underpin and support the programme; • To access staff perceptions of the value of the programme with regard to community empowerment and regeneration and the kinds of issues that may be emerging around that; • To generally explore meanings attached to 'social media' within this context; • To find out more about the kinds of people targeted by and participating in the programme.

Date	Research Method/ Activity	Objective/Kinds of Data Collected
April-May 2009	**Attending 7 community reporter drop in sessions**, (Tuesday afternoon, 2-4pm) at the Salford Social Media Centre. Community reporters were free to come in and gain access to equipment and support from staff supporting the programme.	• To familiarise myself with the cultural and social context of the Community Reporter Programme with a particular eye to the way in which technology was being embedded within the programme. • To familiarise myself with community reporters, get an idea of what they do and access potential research participants.
May-September 2009	**24 Interviews with community reporters** i.e. people participating in the Community Reporter Programme. **1 group interview** with community reporters (3 participants including one member of staff). **I also conducted 2 very short 'interviews' with some school children** who were taking part in an adapted form of the Community Reporter Programme.	Interviews were designed to gather data and perspectives and insights within the following area: • Research Participant: how they got involved, motivations & background, experience ('community' activity, ICT & social media) • The Community Reporter Programme: descriptions of experiences of the programme & kinds of activities involved. • Content /Community Content generation and sharing: motivations, choice of platforms for sharing content & issues /risks associated with sharing content via social media sites. • Perspectives on inclusion/exclusion: perspectives on participation requirements and needs e.g. access to technology, support and support contexts needed, perspectives on technical challenges/ease of participation and questions around barriers to participation. • Perspectives on the role of community reporting in relation to community empowerment and regeneration including associated perceived meanings of 'community reporting' 'community' and 'regeneration' and any further insights/issues.

Date	Research Method/ Activity	Objective/Kinds of Data Collected
May-August 2009	**2 Interviews with volunteers supporting the Community Reporter Programme.**	Interviews with volunteers had a similar form to those with community reporters but were designed to gain a volunteer perspective on the Community Reporter Programme and thus widen the emergent picture of the cultural phenomenon.
May-December-2009	**8 Interviews with representatives of organisations appropriating the Community Reporter Programme.**	Some community reporters were engaging with the community reporter via an organisation beyond PVM while additionally being supported through the PVM Community Reporter Programme. Such organisations were clearly a relevant social group in terms of shaping the delivery and form of the Community Reporter Programme and the ways in which, for example, technology was embedded in it; types and forms of content being produced and the experiences of the community reporters. Once access was gained to the key individuals within such organisations involved in running such adapted Community Reporter Programmes I sought to gain understanding of the varying appropriations of the programme.
Throughout 2009 into 2010	**Collecting PVM documents and promotional material.**	To gain a thorough background in and further insights into the Community Reporter Programme.

Date	Research Method/ Activity	Objective/Kinds of Data Collected
May-December 2009	**Participant observation** including: Initial *observation of: community reporter course* sessions, (3 sessions); *Observation of community reporting in action on a community allotment project* (1 visit to the allotment site including helping out at the site); Participation in *a community reporter course*, (6 weeks) which evolved into an Internet TV course involving a number of visits to Salford Social Media Centre ; Participation in *qualification orientated Community Reporter Course*, (10 weeks). Participating in and experiencing *community reporting in practice* through: • training course assignments; • attending a community reporter information session, attending 3 social / showcase events.	To familiarise myself with the way the Community Reporter Programme works, the way in which technology is embedded within the programme and what/who may be shaping the direction of the programme; To gain an understanding of the types of experiences, interactions and social settings which characterise the programme and the way in which technology is embedded within them To seek to gain an understanding of the types of technology ensembles which characterise the programme; to build up connections and rapport with community reporters for the interview process; to gain an understanding of the types of content being produced by community reporters and drivers for kinds of content being produced; the places and spaces of content sharing and the issues around content creation and sharing. Overall to open up understanding of how the programme and its various forms may shape community empowerment outcomes/benefits being reported by participants.

	Participant observation continued: Participating in and experiencing *community reporting in practice* through: • volunteering for a community reporter assignment; • 'going out' and assisting one of the community reporters with whom I built up a rapport to create and edit community reporter content, (resulting in the creation of 3 videos); • Observing 2 focus groups conducted by a PVM member of staff with community reporters.	
Date	**Research Method/ Activity**	**Objective/Kinds of Data Collected**
May 2009 & May 2011	**Interviews with 3 representatives of the New Deal for Communities regeneration partnership** in the two regeneration areas of focus.	To gain further insights into the links between community reporting, community empowerment and regeneration (building on insights gained during interview process).

Date	Research Method/ Activity	Objective/Kinds of Data Collected
May-August 2009 & July 2011	**Opportunistic interviews (Following leads)** **I interview with an ex community reporter** **2 Interviews with local people using the Social Media Centre in Salford in the context of their local community/voluntary work** **1 interview with the editor of a local community magazine** covering issues of regeneration in the one of the regeneration areas. **Informal conversation with an ex member of staff supporting the Community Reporter Programme**	To generally gain more insights regarding the role / perceptions of the role of social media and the Community Reporter Programme in community empowerment and regeneration.

Appendix B: Practical Research Process Materials:

(Interview Schedules, Focus group schedules, Requests for Participation, Information Sheet, Consent Form & Poster Request for Participants)

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule the Chief Executive of Peoples Voice Media

- Ask more about the kinds of feedback desired
- Can you tell me a bit about the Evolution of the Community Reporter Programme?
- How do you see the programme currently contributing to community empowerment?
- How do you see the links between the programme and regeneration?
- Can you tell me a bit about the 'community', what kinds of communities are you targeting? What kinds of people are currently engaging with the programme
- Can you tell me a bit about approaches to engaging the community and any challenges/successes?
- Is community empowerment actually measured?
- Where is the content that is developed by the Community Reporter Programme generally distributed?
- Could you tell me a bit about how the Community Reporter Programme is funded and any limits/constraints?
- What do you see as the key factors that keep the Community Reporter Programme going or People's Voice Media going?

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Peoples Voice Media Staff supporting the Community Reporter Programme

Introduction: Basically I hope get a really good picture of how the programme is working in terms of the people, organisations, groups and the technologies for community empowerment and regeneration.

<u>Background</u>

- Role within PVM / the Community Reporter Programme

<u>Contribution of social media to community empowerment and regeneration</u>

- How would you define social media in the context of this centre?

- Generally, how do you feel social media contributing to community empowerment within PVM? What links are there between such community empowerment and regeneration Specifically, how is the community reporter's programme contributing to community empowerment and regeneration?

- How is the contribution to community empowerment and regeneration measured?

- How have networks built up around the Community Reporter Programme-what has been the benefits?

<u>*Engaging people*</u>

- What people / communities do you target?

- Are there any set criteria for accessing resources at the media centres/taking part in the Community Reporter Programme?

- What have been the approaches and challenges to engaging people?

- Are there particular people / groups who have been 'hard to attract'/Have you noticed any reluctance to use the technology, do you know the reasons for this?

- Any particular 'success factors in engaging people?

- What do you think attracts people to the Community Reporter Programme? Are you aware of any factors that act as barriers to people embarking on the reporters programme?

- What kind of people are using social media for community reporting (e.g. background, prior experience / use of social media / ICT, areas where they live, goals in life, already active in the community etc).

Access and Use of social media

- What can people access and when?

- How are people / communities using social media e.g. are they those envisaged by the organisation?

- Who are you supporting i.e. individuals/groups?

- What devices do community reporters use and where do they access them. Any particular challenges with use of specific devices?

- Where is content being published –any that are more prominent than others, benefits/challenges of each?

- Do you record / have general idea about what kinds of content is being produced/ issues are being discussed by community reporters? Does PVM control / guide this is anyway?

- Have there been any drawbacks / unanticipated negative or positive consequences to using social media for community reporting?

- What has been the response to the PVM/ the Community Reporter Programme locally-positive and negative?

- Have people / communities influenced the types of technology available through the organisation?

Supporting Use

- What are the main challenges people face in using social media? What kinds of problems do people face in using the technology for community reporting, if different?

- Can you tell me about the types of support provided and the challenges to providing that support?

- Who is involved in providing the support required?

- What skills are required for supporting social media use e.g. for community reporting?

- How long is the training programme and how often are the training sessions held, where does the training take place? (Could I come along to observe?)

- How do new ideas regarding use of social media emerge and become implemented within the organisation?

- Who do you work with to achieve your objectives and how do they impact on PVM/ Community Reporter Programme?

Future / Sustainability

- What do you think the key factors are in keeping PVM going overtime?

- How long has the Community Reporter Programme been going?

- What key factors are keeping Community Reporter Programme going?

- Do any of the participants drop out of the programme, do you know why?

- Do people stay as community reporters for a long time-do you know why?

- Are there any concerns regarding the long term future of PVM generally / the Community Reporter Programme specifically?

- Use/benefits /challenges of availability of free software? (see it as potentially overcoming sustainability challenges often experienced by community-based initiatives?

- How do you envisage the future for the Community Reporter Programme? e.g. how do you view the potential of becoming 'a reuters of the community', use of social media for consultation? How has the young reporters programme emerged, what stage is it at?

Future hopes if you could help me

- To interview as many community reporters as possible and hopefully with their permission do some content analysis (research to focus primarily on impacts on local communities)-can you introduce me / suggest the best way of approaching them for participation in the research?
- To develop case studies (impact on people's lives)-do you have any existing information I could get access to?
- To interview any other actor's that influence the Community Reporter Programme.
- To observe use in community settings –take a look at / get an idea of the physical devices / technologies involved, take photographs.
- To attend relevant events, if possible
- Feedback-how would you like feedback from this research?
- Anything else you would like to know?
- As I learn about the organisation and the Community Reporter Programme it is likely that more questions will emerge, would you be happy to talk to me again?

Many thanks!

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Community Reporters

(Note that this basic interview schedule was adapted for community reporters going through particular organisational routes, local members of the community using the Social Media Centre in Salford & volunteers supporting the Community Reporter Programme).

The Community Reporter Programme

- How did you get involved with the Community Reporter Programme/ what interested you or motivated you to join the programme?

- Did you have IT skills/use social media prior to getting involved with the programme?

- Were you involved in community activity prior to embarking on the programme?

- As a community reporter –what does the 'community' aspect mean to you (e.g. do you see yourself as belonging to a specific community?)

- Can you describe your experiences of the Community Reporter Programme to me, the kinds of things you have done, what has it enabled you to do, what training you have done, what skills have you gained?

- Can you tell me about the social media tools you use and why?

- Which aspects of the training and support have been important to you and does the training/support currently meet your needs, could it be improved in any way?

Publishing content

- What kinds of content do you publish online/what has been your motivation?

- Where do you publish content online and why e.g. are you trying to reach a specific audience?

- Do you work with others to produce the content?

- What have been the benefits of publishing content online?

- Did you have any reservations about publishing content online?

- Any challenges or issues related to producing content online?

- How have people responded to the content you produce?

Community empowerment and regeneration

- What have been the benefits to you of using social media for community reporting?

- Has community reporting empowered you and how e.g. changed you / any aspect of your life?

- Do you see social media use for community reporting as contributing to community empowerment and how?

- Have you used community reporting / social media to help with community issues or regeneration issues?

- Is empowerment through use of social media for community reporting linked to community and local regeneration (e.g. people coming together to solve their problems/meet their needs?, engagement with regeneration discourses and decision making?).

- Do you see social media as a tool for consultation on regeneration issues?

Access / usability of the technology

- What types of physical devices /software do you use as a community reporter and where do you generally get access to them?

- Any difficulties in accessing technology?

- Where do you use social media tools (locations) for community reporting (e.g. do you take technologies out into the community)?

- Any particular challenges in using any aspect of technologies i.e. the equipment or the software?

- Any particular barriers you faced to the use of the technology that you feel you have overcome and how?

- What kinds of additional support in using the tools have you had / has been valuable to you?

- Is there anything you feel you need additional support with?

- Is there anything about the technology / use of the technology that you feel limits your role as a community reporter?

The future

- How long have you been a community reporter?

- What keeps you involved with community reporting / keeps you producing work, any factors that affect your continued involvement?

- How do you see your future in terms of community reporting / social media use e.g. relation to future goals?

Further contacts

- Are you aware of people who won't engage with social media / the Community Reporter Programme and why?

Other

Would you be willing for me to contact you in future if I have any more questions? (Contact details)

Can I have a look at some of the work you have produced through the programme?

Examples of tailored Interview schedules for organisations appropriating the Community Reporter Programme

Talk Broughton

Re: Research on the contribution of social media to community empowerment and urban regeneration

Can you tell me about the main goal of the project and your role within it?

What role is technology playing in helping to achieve the goal?

I have seen the video produced by the community reporters, can you tell me about:

- The overall aim of the video?
- Who it is available to?
- The role of the video in bringing about change?

I have also looked at the Talk Broughton website, can you tell me:

- Who has it been developed by?
- Who is it owned by?
- What role does it play in the project/ bringing about change/what's the overall goal?
- What audience does it / does it hope to reach?

What are your views on the value of the community reporter approach to consultation?

- What have been the key benefits of the approach?
- Can you tell me the nature of the guidance/support provided to the community reporters e.g. were they provided with key questions?
- Were there any particular obstacles in getting people's views via the community reporting approach?
- Has it helped to get people involved, do you know whether the technology encouraged people to get involved?
- Overall has the technology helped in reaching the goal of the project?
- How do you feel it has benefited local people so far?
- Are you of aware of any challenges related to the technology itself?
- What are the plans for the future in terms of the project and community reporting?
- Would you suggest I speak to anyone else who was involved with the project?

Victoria House

- Can you give me a bit of background to Victoria House and how the Community Reporter Programme came to be integrated within it?

- How long did the programme run for?

- Where / when did the people get access to computers etc?

- What has been the value and benefits of the programme?

- How do you / do you feel the Community Reporter Programme has played a role in empowering people/brining about change in their lives?

- How has the technology itself played a role and what other factors have led to outcomes?

- Have you been aware of any particular challenges to people engaging with the programme / social media?

- Were there any concerns about people putting content on line?

Additional tailored questions for people using the social media centre locally

- Can you tell me a bit about how you got involved with the Social Media Centre/ what attracted you?

- How has involvement helped you achieve your goals?

- Have you done anything like this before?

- What kinds of challenges have you faced?

- Do you think there is anything that might put people off doing this kind of thing?

- What's your general view on the role of social media in community empowerment and regeneration

Key guiding questions for interview with the Editor of the Salford Star

- Can you tell me a bit about the Salford Star and how you see its role in empowering people in Salford?

- Can you tell me about the decision to go online?

- Can you tell me about what community journalism means?

- What's your views about the role of social media in community empowerment and regeneration

- What are your views on the community reporter approach and the potential role of such an approach for community empowerment and regeneration?

Interview Schedules for Regeneration Officials

East Manchester

(Note Mr McGonigle, referred to in the questions below, was the head of regeneration but I could not get an interview with him)

- **Use of social Media for community empowerment?**

- A lot of people ask me what I **mean by regeneration**, can you give me your take on that?

- Can you tell me a bit about how **New East Manchester got involved with People's Voice Media** and the Community Reporter Programme?

- What was the **goal / motivation for engaging with social media / community reporting**?

- What does the **term 'community' reporting** mean to New East Manchester e.g. what role does it play, what is understood by the term 'community'?

- Has Mr Mcgonigle taken part in the Community Reporter Programme?

- What kinds of community reporting activity have taken place (kinds of content and purpose etc?) e.g. mainly videos and why?

- Where is the **conten**t produced generally published and why?

- Have there been any concerns about publishing content online?

- What has been the response been like e.g. have **discussions been generated around regeneration issues**?

- Do you know / feel that more people have engaged with discourses around regeneration in East Manchester or voiced concerns as a result of gaining a voice through social media/community reporting?

- What kinds of issues have emerged/been tackled through social media/community reporting?

- Has anything changed as a result e.g. **influenced decision making**, policy or actions, future plans?

- What have been the key benefits of engaging with community reporting?

- What have been the challenges?

General

- What do you think the key challenges are to engaging people in regeneration through social media?

- What is your **general view on the contribution of social media to community empowerment** and how do you feel that is linked to regeneration?

- What's your view on the role of social media as a tool for consultation on regeneration issues?

- Is it currently used for consultation / in any other way and if so how?

- Any other issues / comments you wish to make?

- Any contacts/suggestions for other organisations /agencies affecting the regeneration of East Manchester

Interview schedule: New Deal for Communities, Salford, (Charlestown & Lower Kersal)

Social Media, urban regeneration and community empowerment

- Can you tell me a bit about your **role** and how you got involved with People's Voice Media and the Community Reporter Programme?

- What in your view does **community empowerment and regeneration mea**n in the context of regeneration?

- What's your take on the role of social media in urban regeneration and community empowerment in East Salford?

- What do you feel have been the **key benefits of community reporting** in East Salford have been and can you tell me about the aspects you are taking forward and why?

- Do you think that contributions to community empowerment /regeneration can be measured?

- Who do you think is likely to be excluded from opportunities of social media / community reporting?

- Is there anything that might be preventing community reporting from reaching its full potential?

Request for PVM staff participation in the study, (e-mail and attachment).

Dear -----

I am a PhD student at the University of Salford investigating the topic of social media technologies and community empowerment. I am very keen to conduct a research study of People's Voice Media with a specific focus on the Community Reporter Programme, the results of which will be fed back into your organisation. Following an initial meeting with Gary Copitch, his suggestion was to contact you to request your assistance with my research. The attached document provides information about your potential participation and provides various options with a view to minimising disruption to your working day. If you are happy to participate please let me know which option would be best for you, along with the most suitable interview dates and times. The interviews will last no longer than one hour and if you are able to help me with this request I would like to begin the interviews in the week commencing 23rd March. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Best wishes

Eileen Wattam

Request for Research Participants

My name is Eileen Wattam and I am studying for a PhD degree at the University of Salford in the School of Music, Media and Performance. I am researching how ICT can contribute to regeneration and in particular how social media can be used for community empowerment. I am basing my research on People's Voice Media and plan to focus on the Community Reporter Programme. I have conducted an initial interview with Gary Copitch and during the first phase of my research I hope to conduct interviews with all staff who help to run the programme. The interviews will focus on the work of People's Voice Media generally and then on the Community Reporter Programme in particular, and will last a maximum of one hour. I understand that you are all very busy so if you are agreeable to my request the interviews will be conducted in a way that causes minimal disruption to you, for example through individual or group interviews at the Social Media Centres or other suitable location. If this proves difficult then telephone interviews would also be possible.

The interviews are designed to investigate:

- how social media tools are contributing to community empowerment;

- the links between community empowerment using social media tools and community regeneration;

- how social media tools are being integrated within communities for community empowerment;

- the challenges in using social media tools for community empowerment;

- how social media tools might help communities to become self-sustaining.

If it would be helpful I can provide you with a copy of the questions before the interview and a brief information sheet about the research and your involvement. My research outcomes will be fed back to People's Voice Media and if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me, (E.N.Wattam1@pgr.salford.ac.uk). Your help with my research would be much appreciated.

Kind Regards

Eileen

The PVM organised Focus Groups

Background: One of the staff members was organising some focus groups with community reporters and I was asked if I would like to attend. These are the question PVM wanted to investigate:

- Why are community reporters getting involved?
- What are community websites being used for?
- What they want out of a community website? Why would they use it? What would make it valid?
- What they hope to get out of it?
- What would get you more involved? What incentives can we give them to produce content?
- How can we attract other people to get involved?
- Things to do with publishing –why are they making the work in the first place?
- Civic/community journalism
- Their relationship with us and how it can be improved and what are the problems?

Research Information Sheet & Consent Forms

Consent Form

Title of research project: The Empowerment role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) within Community-based Urban Regeneration.

Name and contact details of researcher: Eileen Wattam, E.N.Wattam@pgr.salford.ac.uk

Please tick

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I can I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason

☐

I agree to take part in this study.

☐

	Yes	No
I agree to the use of my name for quotes for publications.	☐	☐
If no, I agree to the use of anonymous quotes in publications	☐	☐
I agree to interviews being audio recorded.	☐	☐

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Name of Participant   Date   Signature

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Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

Research Information Sheet

Eileen Wattam

University of Salford

Purpose of study: *To investigate whether and how social media technologies are linked to community empowerment and regeneration*

About your involvement:

People's Voice Media has been selected as the main case study for this research with a focus on the Community Reporters Programme. If you decide to participate in this study you will be asked a series of questions informally about your experiences as a Community Reporter. Please also note that:

- Information about individuals will be kept strictly confidential;
- You can remain anonymous unless you are happy for your name to be cited as part of the study;
- Any information you provide will be reported accurately and honestly;
- The information you provide will enable me to advance academic knowledge in the area through completion of a PhD and written publications and the results of my research will also be fed back to People's Voice Media.

If you have any further questions or want copies of any written documentation you are welcome to contact me.

Eileen Wattam: E.N.Wattam1@pgr.salford.ac.uk.

Thank you, your participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

Appendix C: The Places and Spaces of Community Reporting

The Social Media Centre, Salford: Images from outside and inside

PVM Website images: Shooting a film for the qualification orientated community reporter course outside and inside the Social Media Centre, (2010)

Notice boards in the Social Media Centre in Salford

From Chalktalk to East Salford Direct, (screen shots 2009-2010)

- Content
- Volunteering
- About Us
- Drop In
- Courses

- Log In
- Register

Search

- Video
- Audio
- Images
- Blogs
- Events
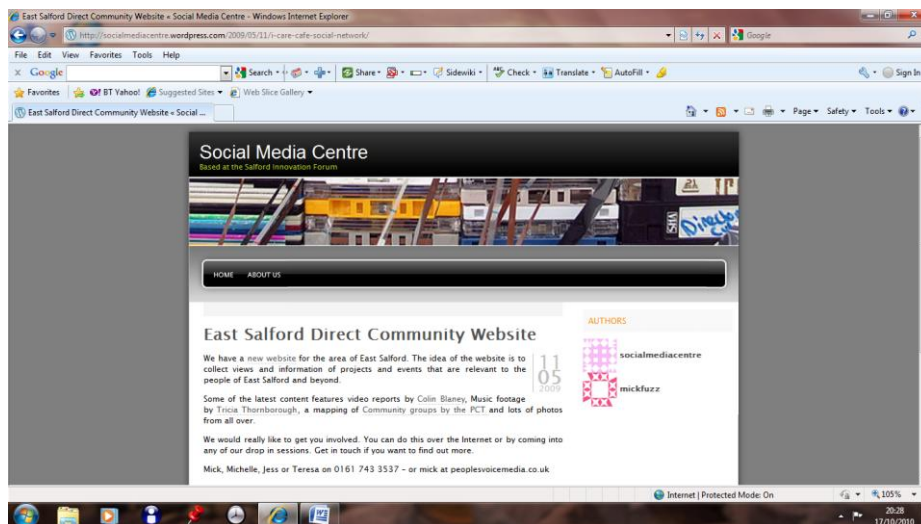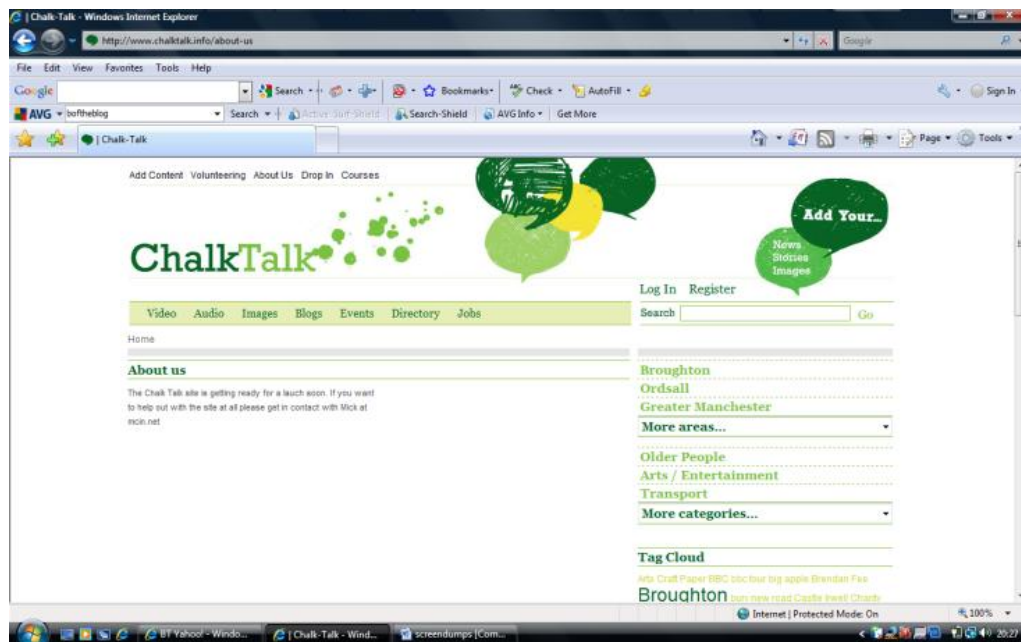
The screen shot below shows one of research participant video's embedded in East Salford Direct from YouTube,

(screen shot, East Salford Direct, July, 2009).

Community reporter work embedded in community site from YouTube

Tricia Thornborough, (uploaded March, 2009)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqhUOaMe9LI

Screen shot, East Salford Direct, (November, 2009).
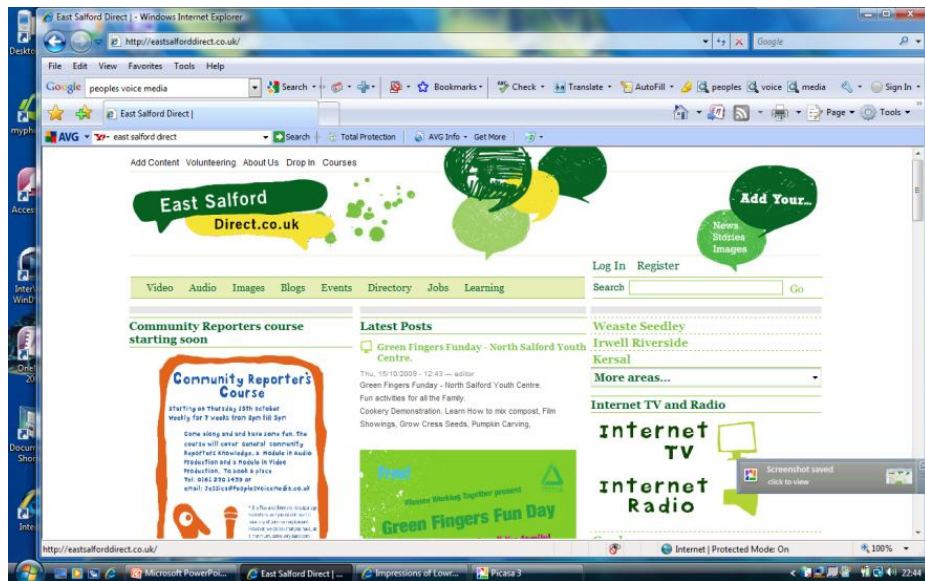
(Screenshot 2010)

Examples of other Community Reporter Space, Kevin's blog, 'Salford Happenings,' (October, 2009) & Jane and Mike's community group Salford Lids, (2009)

#
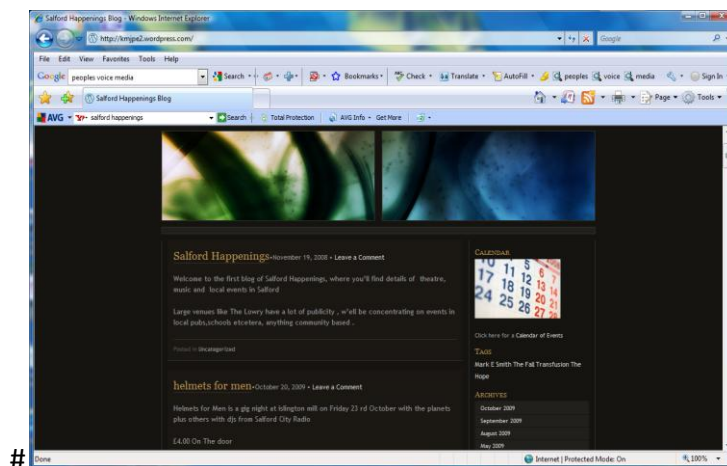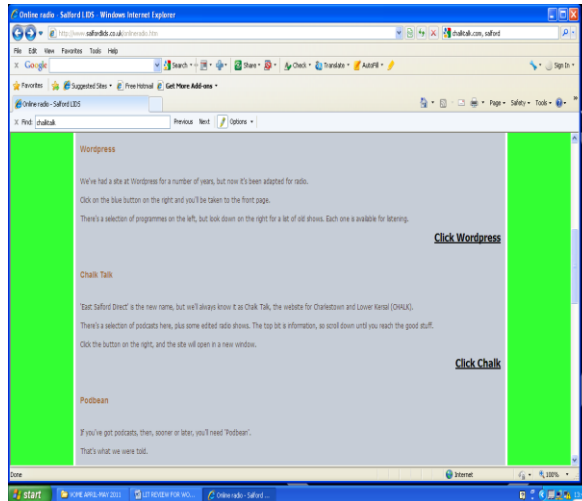
Examples of Community Reporter videos including those emerging through the Internet TV training

Kevin on a community organisation in Salford

http://blip.tv/east-salford-direct-tv/esd-tv01-starting-point-a-band-from-salford-2560562

Keith's St George's day video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxKNTbYNVcE

Enviromental Context of Social Media Centre in East Manchester:

Images from outside and inside

The Social Media Centre located in a Community Resource Centre. Image supplied by 'The Grange '

Image from boftheblog / associated activity (2008-2010)
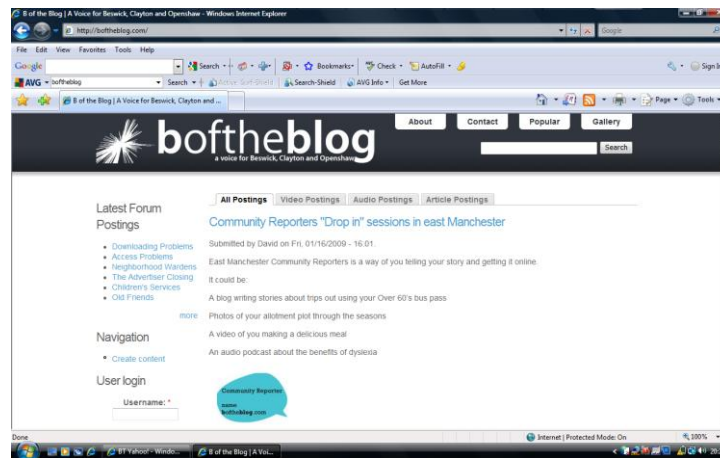
(Video post, Head of Regeneration East Manchester, 2008)

Edge Lane Allotments

Patrick Maher, April, 2009:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7Uz-NuR-Rc

Victoria House Community Reporters in action

Mywebconnect screen shot, (archive material, 2007)

Site that was used by an ex community reporter whose insights have been included in this study.
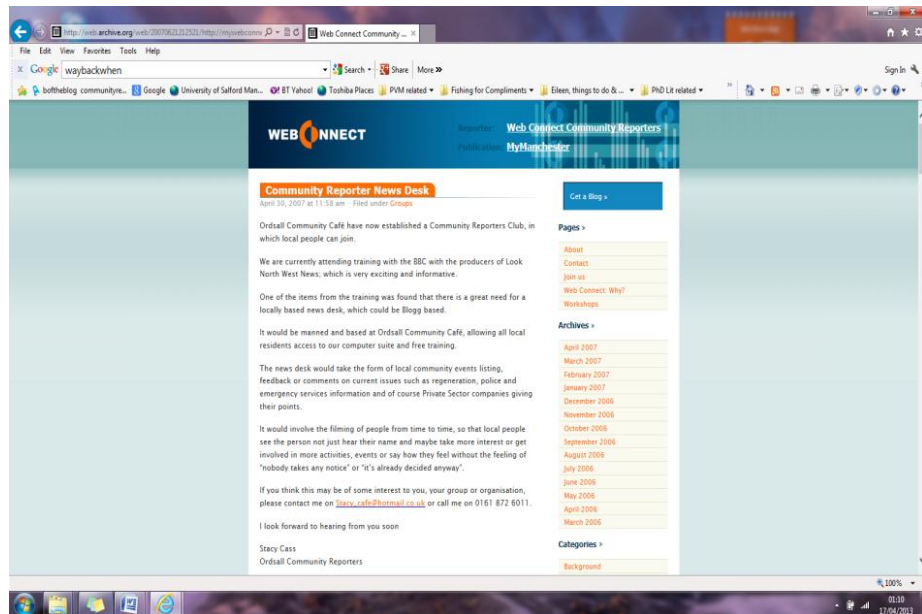
The People's VoIce Media Sites, (2009-2010)
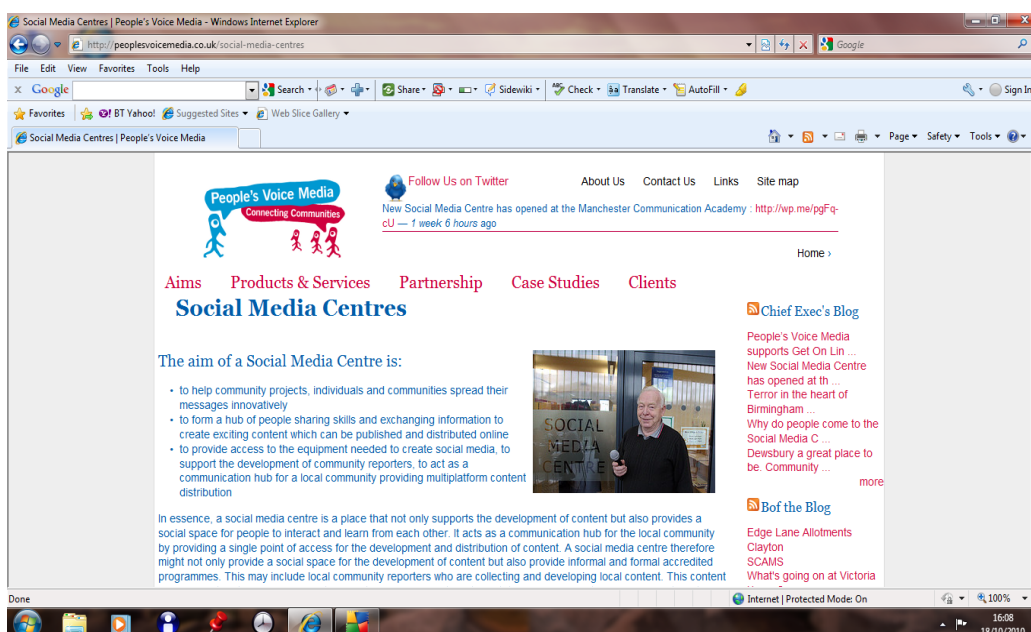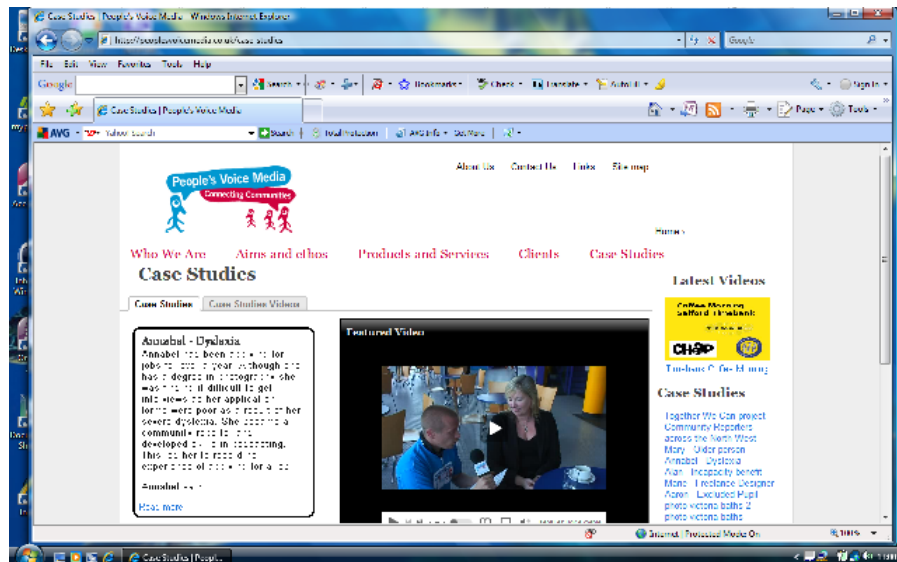
Examples of other arenas of content distribution i.e. YouTube, BlipTV, Flickr

(Images taken in 2010-2011)
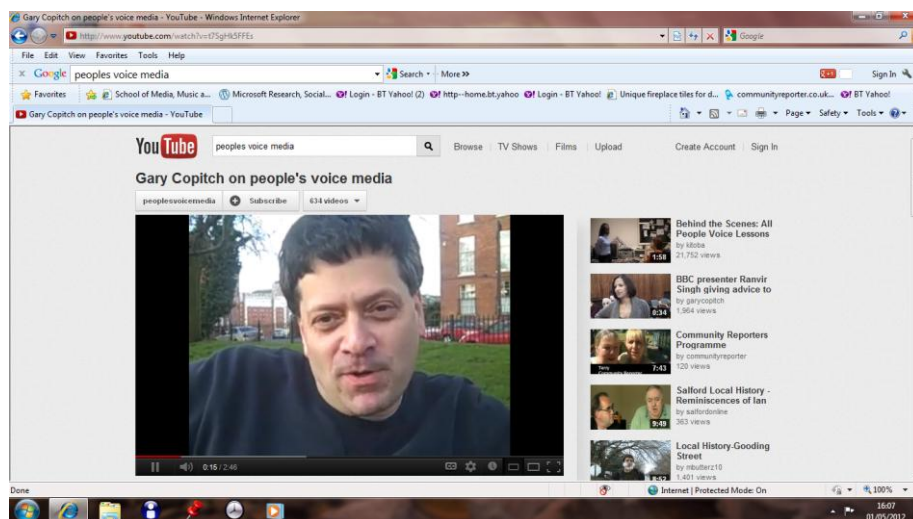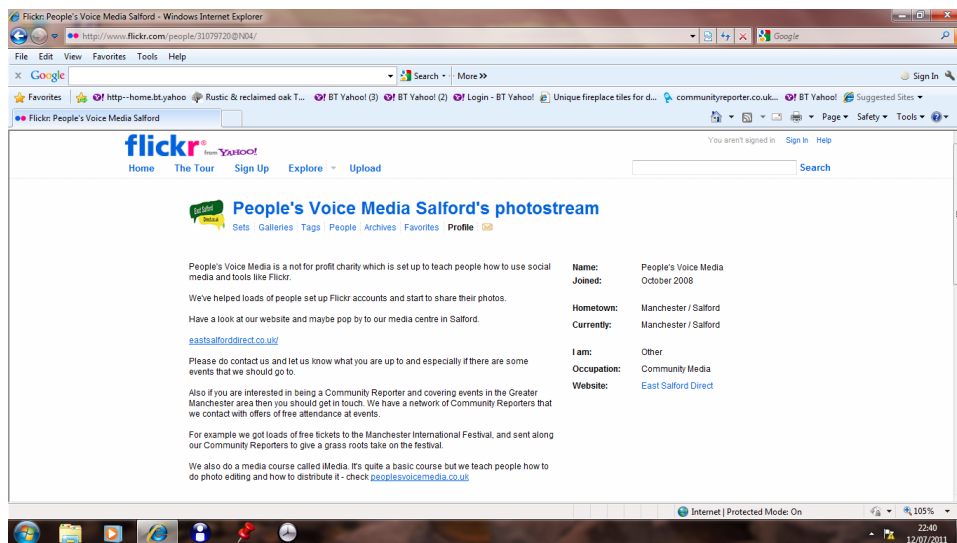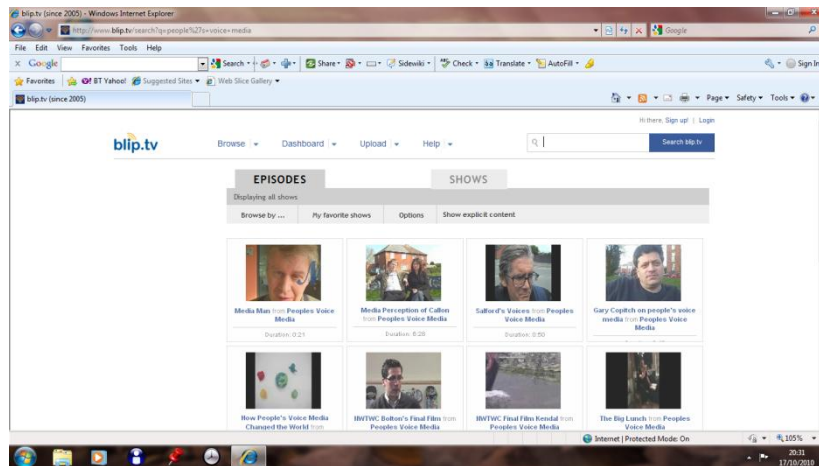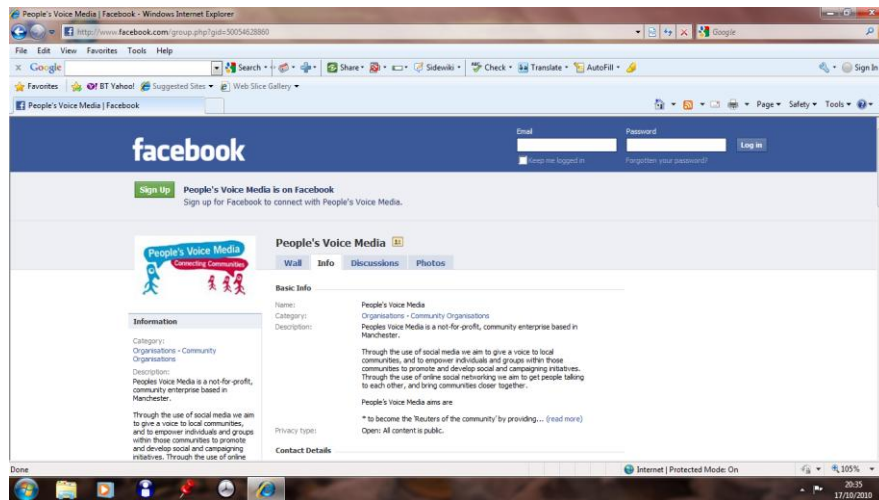
Example of organisation level appropriation of the Community Reporter Programme: The Talk Broughton Project
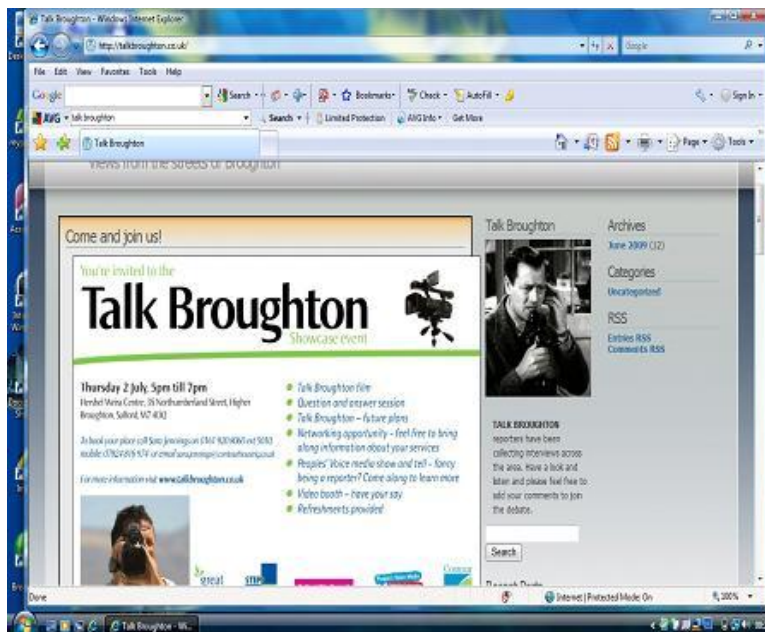
Introduction to the Talk Broughton Project

http://communityreporter.co.uk/videos/talk-broughton-introduction

(uploaded by PVM, 2010)

Appendix D: Urban regeneration Areas in Manchester and Salford: Contextual Information

My study explores two regeneration areas in Greater Manchester defined by the Government's New Deal for Communities regeneration programme. The New Deal for Communities Programme which has been discussed in this thesis, represents an area-based focus to regeneration that targeted funding at areas that were assessed to be England's most deprived neighbourhoods. This essentially meant that certain areas received funding to bring about improvements to be managed through local New Deal for Communities Partnerships made up of coalition between public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations (SEU, 2001). The Programme sought to transform England's most deprived neighbourhoods through an holistic approach with an emphasis on the key areas of crime, community, housing, education, health and worklessness (SEU, 2001) and as has been discussed access to ICTs within such neighbourhoods became central to the agenda of neighbourhood renewal.

In 2001, the **Charlestown and Lower Kersal area of Salford** was awarded £53 million pounds to be utilised within the area over a ten year period under the Government's New Deal for Communities Programme, which came to an end just after I had completed my research. The programme provided funding for the development and operation of the Social Media Centre and the Innovation Forum in which it is housed. The second area of regeneration within which PVM operates and thus my study focus is in East Manchester, which has been defined as one of the most deprived areas in the UK (Fensom, 2007). The New Deal for Communities programme in East Manchester, focused on the neighbourhoods of **Beswick, Clayton and Openshaw** and was a ten year programme ending in 2010 (New East Manchester, 2012). The programme "sought greater balance between investing in buildings and investing in people" and incorporated a strong emphasis on community empowerment, (New East Manchester, 2012). The area received around £77million in total when combined with funds via a previous Government programme, the Single Regeneration Budget. The New Deal for Communities partnership in the area contributed to the running costs and management of The Grange, which is a Community Resource Centre housed in a converted disused building within the grounds of a school (McNeil, 2010). The Grange evolving thus as a New Deal for Communities Project is now managed by a community-based charity and houses People's Voice Media's Social Media Centre in East Manchester, (discussed as part of chapter 5). The New Deal for Communities Programme merged with

New East Manchester in 2007, a regeneration company overseeing one of the largest regeneration programmes in the country (New East Manchester, 2012).

Due to huge losses in the manufacturing industries during the 1980s and in particular closure of textile mills and the resultant impact on people and place, ICT was in many respects seen as potential saviour in terms of promoting economic and social development (Fensom, 2007). In the early 1990s, "Manchester launched the UK's first public access communications and information system, the Manchester Host, run by a not for profit company, Poptel" (Leach & Copitch, 2005). This was soon supported by the development of Electronic Village Halls (EVH's) in the area defined as "places which could provide access to the new online technologies and training so that people could be able to use them (Leach and Copitch, 2005). This combined infrastructural provision was very much tied to a vision of enabling local social and economic regeneration (Leach & Copitch, 2005, Fensom, 2007). With advancements and developments in relation to Government policy, and specifically UK Online, the area later became populated by some 6000 local ICT centres (Leach & Copitch, 2005).

Manchester Community Manchester Community Information Network which was rebranded as People's Voice Media and in particular the Chief Executive of the organisation was very much at the heart of the story of Manchester and community ICT. Manchester Community Information Network and thus People's Voice Media was said to have arisen out of the, "Manchester Tradition that emphasised locality, social inclusion, community capacity building and a belief in the transformative potential of ICTs" (Leach & Copitch, 2005). The objectives of the initiative were also identified as tying into the social inclusion and community empowerment goals of the Local Strategic Partnerships, sitting within the Government's new commitment to regeneration through the vehicle of partnership. The initiative also rejected a broadcast model in favour of a community-based model enabling communities to create and distribute their own content, via the community portal approach. Fensom (2007), suggested that this focus on community owned websites and community created content while not unique, "was typical of the Manchester approach." The development of the initiative was also associated with the idea that technology became easier to use during the 1990s (Fensom, 2007). During this time Eastserve also emerged based on the idea that "disadvantaged communities can enthusiastically adopt and benefit from quite advanced technologies ahead of the rest of society" (Fensom, 2007). Eastserve emerged through the Government's 'Wired Up Communities' initiative and its aims were related to

'breaking the cycle of decline in East Manchester," again with an emphasis on community-based access and community involvement in implementation (Fensom, 2007).

Greater Manchester and the City of Manchester in particular became and continue to be particularly active in integrating ICT within the regeneration strategies for the city and city region with a strong emphasis on digital inclusion (Carter, 2007) and building on its tradition of community ICT. This is perhaps represented in the establishment of ONE Manchester, (Open Network E-Manchester). Current strategies which cover Manchester and Salford emphasise the links between digital inclusion, regeneration, community, community cohesion, social inclusion and empowerment building a strong tradition of community ICT approaches in Manchester (Carter, 2007). Such strategies display a clear belief in the transformative properties of ICTs, associating developing capacity to use digital media with transforming lives and neighbourhoods (Carter, 2007).

Salford is part of the Greater Manchester story, and has a strong historical relationship with media and an active community media context including Salford City Radio, the Salford Star and Salford Community Media Partnership (SCMP), a partnership of voluntary and community organisations active in the creative and media industries (www.scmp.info) with People's Voice Media added into the mix. Community media has been used as a channel through which to critique and influence urban regeneration and development in Salford, with SCMP being set up specifically in response to the MediaCityUK and the BBC move to Salford Quays, to help ensure that local people have the skills to benefit from the move and from Salford's focus on the digital and creative industries. Manchester has similarly developed a strong relationship with the digital and creative industries, closely associated with the promise of MediaCityUK (Fensom, 2007).

Appendix E: PVM Distribution of My Research Work

Background

I was asked to a report of my finding and produce 3/4 case studies of community reporters including; their story, why they came to PVM, the impact on their lives and how they see their future. We also had some discussion around who would be a suitable subject for the case studies. Gary also said he wanted to know: Why are people getting involved? Are they all 'technology geeks?' The key focus of the report should be on 'users' and their key issues, thoughts, needs and wants. Gary emphasised he was not interested in staff /organisational issues. Much of this was thus coinciding with what I was keen to explore.
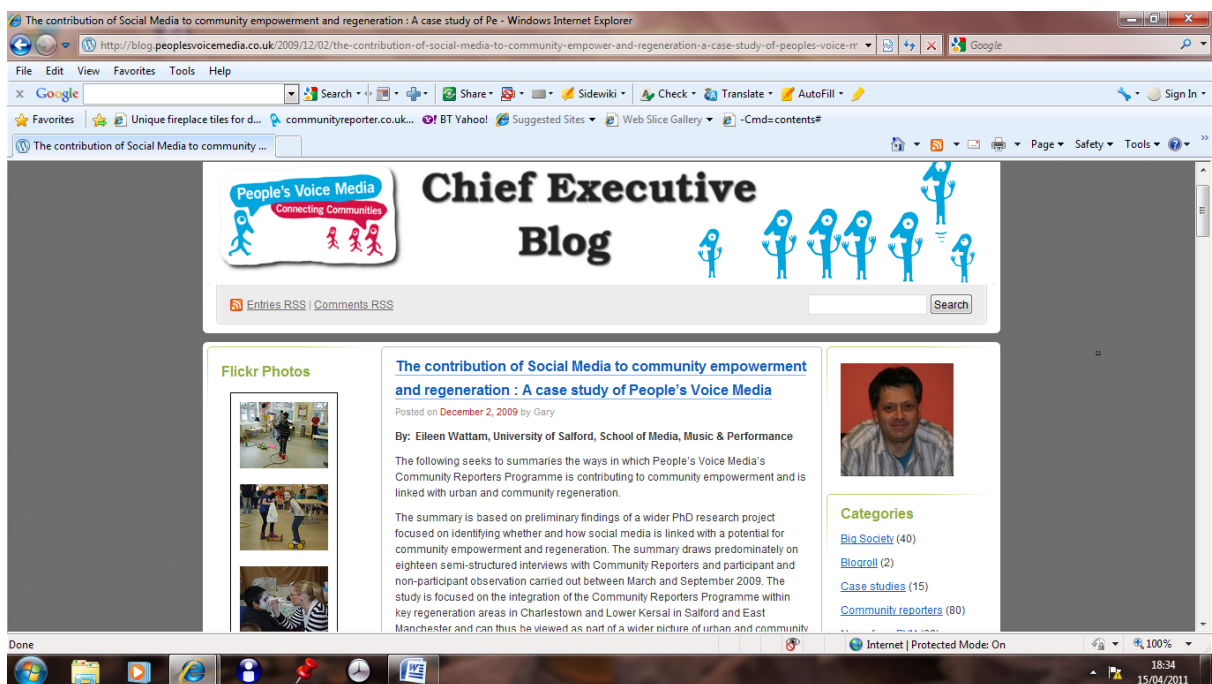
Paul Edwards said

December 4, 2009 at 7:12 pm

Hi Eileen

Would like to know if there is more to come, you mentioned "preliminary findings of a wider PhD research project" which is why I am asking.

So far so good, and I would like to add a little bit.

Schemes such as the **Community Reporter Programme** only really work if they are backed by real conviction and MONEY, it is no good governments saying they want to empower me or anybody else and then tie one hand behind my back. The Programme has made a difference to people like me who want to contribute in some small way, I have acquired new skills and this in turn has taken me into other areas that I had never considered before. However now the feeling is one of disappointment, not because of the Community Reporter Programme, but because of lack of funding means there is less on offer for anyone else in my area.

So as far as I am concerned these are token gestures just to make them look good short term, what we really need is some forward thinking person looking a few years ahead and putting real money in the pot. Why would this be beneficial, well one thing is very clear looking at the present state of this country, we have a serious skill shortage in many areas, perhaps a legacy from the eighties I think.

One area where we have excelled is in the film/tv industry, what does the future hold regarding people skilled enough to carry on with great tradition we have for producing quality media. While the Community Reporter Programme is quite basic, it could lead to someone taking it further, and that may in turn lead to employment within the Film/TV industry or even Journalism.

thanks for listening to my little rant, see you soon.

Do I feel empowered now, ohyeeaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh

Cheers
Paul Edwards
http://www.pauledwards.org.uk

Reply

○ 　

Eileen Wattam said

January 8, 2010 at 6:40 pm

Hi Paul

Sorry for my delay in responding, good to here from you and thank you for your comments. I will certainly be integrating the kinds of crucial issues and ideas you raise. I am in the process of analysing interviews with community reporters in more detail and have interviewed a number of other community reporters since producing this summary. Interviews with staff and participant observation have also yet to be analysed and incorporated within my findings, so yes there is a lot more to come. In the future I plan to publish my findings in academic journals and ultimately to produce my PhD thesis which centres

on the Community Reporter Programme. I will of course forward any future publications to anyone interested.

Bye for now

Eileen

[Reply](#)

2.

[Gary](#) said

[December 5, 2009 at 9:12 am](#)

Paul,

Thanks for the comment. It would be great if government would recognise that these sort of programmes are important and have value. Often when we talk about digital inclusion its about access and rarely about content. These tools allow a different form of democracy and also involvement in design and delivery of public services. Isn't that digital inclusion.

[Reply](#)

Kevin found being a community reporter helped him socially, boosted his confidence, reconnected him with his local area and improved his job prospects

Posted on March 18, 2010 by Gary

Kevin has been a community reporter for over a year and found out about Peoples Voice Media's Community Reporter Programme while searching the Internet for voluntary work that matched his interests and background in audio visual work. When he joined the programme he had been out of work for medical reasons for three years and [...]

Filed under: Case studies, Community reporters, News from PVM | Tagged: University of Salford, social media, BBC, PVM, blogging, training, education., case studies | 2 Comments »

Paul says about community reporting "you are important to the community because you are reflecting the good side of that community"

Posted on March 18, 2010 by Gary

Paul joined the Community Reporter Programme in 2007 because he was looking to build a website to provide additional information about his radio show for the local community radio station, All FM called the Hulme Tune. Paul approached People's Voice Media who suggested that he try the Community Reporter Programme. When Paul joined the programme [...]

Filed under: Case studies, Community reporters, News from PVM | Tagged: University of Salford, BBC, Community reporters, PVM, case study, training, education., case studies | 2 Comments »

Extract from www.blogpeoplesvoicemedia.co.uk, (2010).

Distribution

Once they have begun creating content, Community Reporters can continue their social media activity in the way that best suits them. Reporters can manage their own blog, upload to the People's Voice Media Community Reporter content site (communityreporter.co.uk), or share their content on our local community sites and wider distribution networks. The Reporter is in control, and the range of options available ensures that their voice will be heard.

As one Community Reporter said:

"It's given me a routine, confidence, something to talk about when I'm out with my friends, which I didn't have when I wasn't doing much, connections with possible work - it is sort of opening up my life very quickly, that's what's been good about it."

Further opportunities

Flexibility and choice are at the heart of the Community Reporter Programme. We empower participants to tailor the Community Reporter experience to suit their needs, from the pace at which they progress and the technology they choose, to the subjects they talk about and the content they produce.

For those Reporters who want to take their social media experience further, People's Voice Media can offer Level 1 and 2 accredited courses and can support people in developing

UK Network

We now have an ever-growing network of Community Reporters across the UK, sharing their content on the communityreporter.co.uk site. This means that people can access all of the really local content about their own community whilst also seeing what other reporters are creating across the nation. They can search the site by hobby or interest area - e.g. allotments, music, football - which stimulates their involvement and inspires them to feel more involved in the wider network. It is also a place where Community Reporters can provide peer review and support of each other's work.

To find out if there are any Community Reporters in your area, check out the website
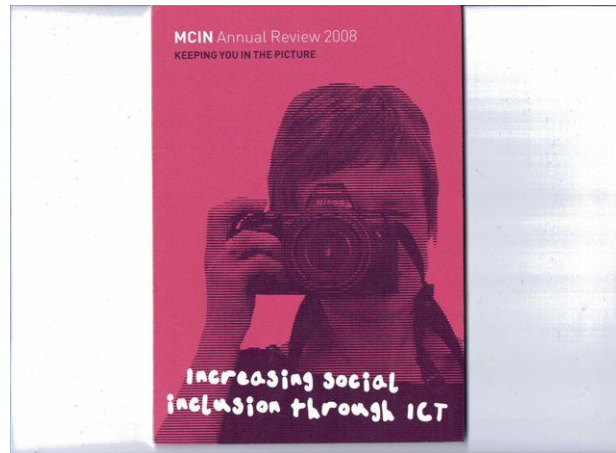www.peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk/clients-and-partners

UK NETWORK

(Extract from one of the submitted case studies including a quotation from one of the community reporters embedded in a PVM publication).
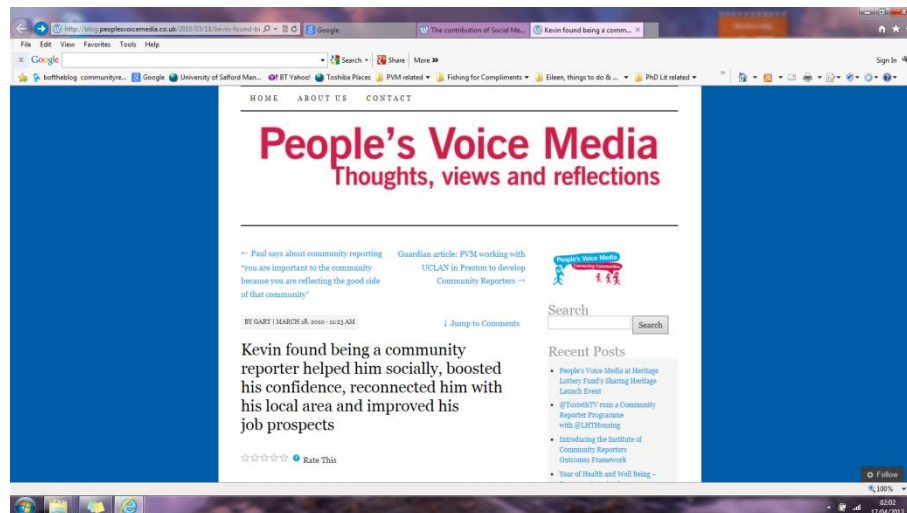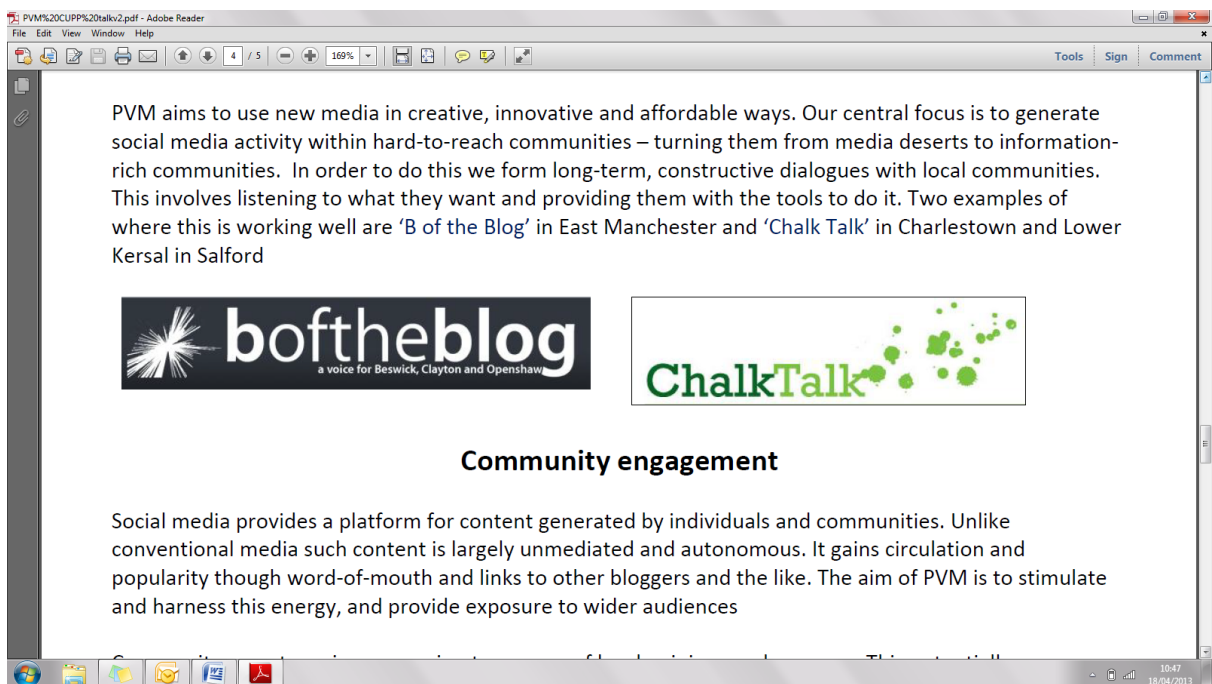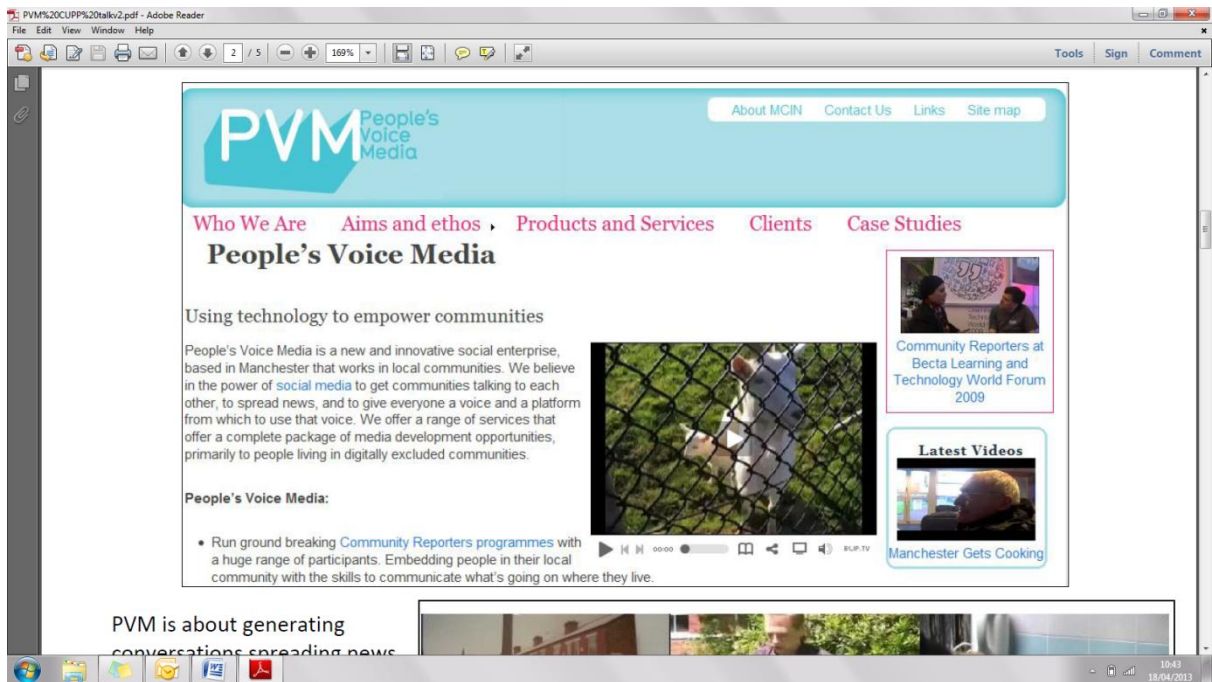
My case study work was also and continues to be channelled through the Chief Executive's Blog (Screen shot April, 2013).

Appendix F: From MCIN to PVM: Framing of Technology and the PVM Model and Education Model

From Coptich et al., (2009)

People's Voice Media
Community Reporters
Programme

Using technology to empower communities

The community Reporter Programme is an exciting
and innovative way for people to build confidence,
learn new skills and have a voice using mobiles,
video cameras, webcams and other 'technology
in the pocket' devices.
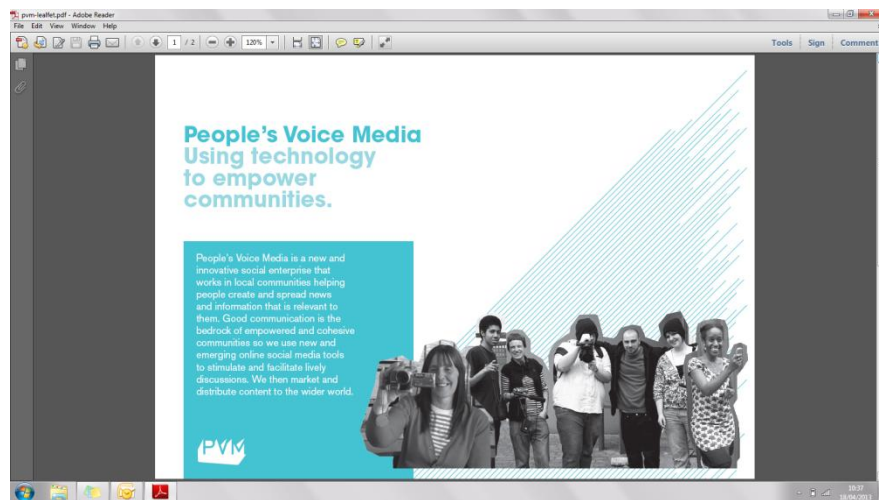
The community
Reporter programme

From PVM Publication (2011)

The People's Voice Media Model

*We operate **within communities** often at local community anchors: this could be a local community centre or children's centre.*

From there we might offer general ICT training, IT and media qualifications, social media training and drop in. This could take place either in **ICT suites** or at **Social Media Centres.**

*From this local base we undertake **outreach work** within the local community, reaching out to local organisations and groups establishing and developing a working relationship supporting them to produce content. We find that these centres also attract individuals especially through our **drop in sessions.***

We support these individuals and groups to develop content using "**technology in the pocket**" for content capture, using low level technology (such as mobile phones, webcams, mp3 recorders, digital cameras) which many people have and is easily available.

*People can tell **their story** in a way they like which may be through **photos text, audio or video** which can be posted to a blog. The content they produce is **distributed** through People's Voice Media's **distribution channel** which currently includes 14 community web sites, community bulletins and social networking platforms such as FaceBook, and Twitter.*

As people produce content they become part of our **Community Reporters programme** where they are given an opportunity to attend an "Introduction to Journalism" at the **BBC** which is led by the news gathering editor of North West Tonight. Community Reporters also receive a **badge** which helps give a sense of credibility when they go into communities to produce more content.

*Local Community Reporters become part of the broader programme which **links them** to other **Community Reporters** across the North West.*

Reporters can also attend **social events** and go on **assignments** either undertaking theatre reviews, commissions or become volunteer Staff Community Reporters.

*The longer term plan for People's Voice Media is to develop a **"Reuters of the Community"** where we market and distribute content produced by Community Reporters to mainstream agencies and media outlets.*

As the social media centre or local community anchor develop we would support the development of a **local community site** where content can be posted and also develop **community Internet Radio and Internet TV.**

As the number of Community Reporters grow this allows us to create dialogue between agencies and communities in order to improve consultation and also to gather evidence to provide the base for public policy.

People's Voice Media is the new name of MCIN.
Charity No: 1059681 Company No: 3083575

261

The People's Voice Media Education Model

Community based
We operate within communities often at local community anchors: this could be a local community centre or children's centre

Training
From there we might offer general ICT training or short introduction courses on social media

BBC - Introduction to Journalism
As people produce content they become part of our Community Reporters programme where they are given an opportunity to attend an 'Introduction to Journalism' at the BBC which is led by the news gathering editor of North West Tonight. Community Reporters also receive a badge which helps give a sense of credibility when they go into communities to produce more content

Regional links
Local Community Reporters become part of the broader programme which links them to other Community Reporters across the North West

Real life experience
Reporters can also attend social events and go on assignments either undertaking theatre reviews, commissions or become volunteer Staff Community Reporters

Qualifications
We also offer IT and media qualifications to level 2 which learners can progress onto

Employment agency
Community Reporters receive are eligible to join our People's Voice Media employment agency which includes:

- Freelance / Volunteer Trainers
- Social reporting at conferences
- Apprenticeships / Internships / Student placements
- Experience of reporting (Staff reporters)
- Work experience with partner agencies e.g. BBC
- Content Management
- Commissions

Further Education
Learners can progress onto Further Education and we are in partnership with a number of local FE colleges

Progression
We also work closely with HE establishments and students can progress onto HE courses

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