

# Participate User Research Report 2006



WP2.3 Design Methods

D2.3.1 User Motivations in Mass Participation

May 2006

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Research undertaken by Sparkler

**BLAST THEORY**

**BBC** Research & Innovation

Microsoft  
**Research**



Commissioned by: Luciana Baptista, Anne Fairbrother & Dr Adrian Woolard  
BBC Creative Research & Development, May 2006

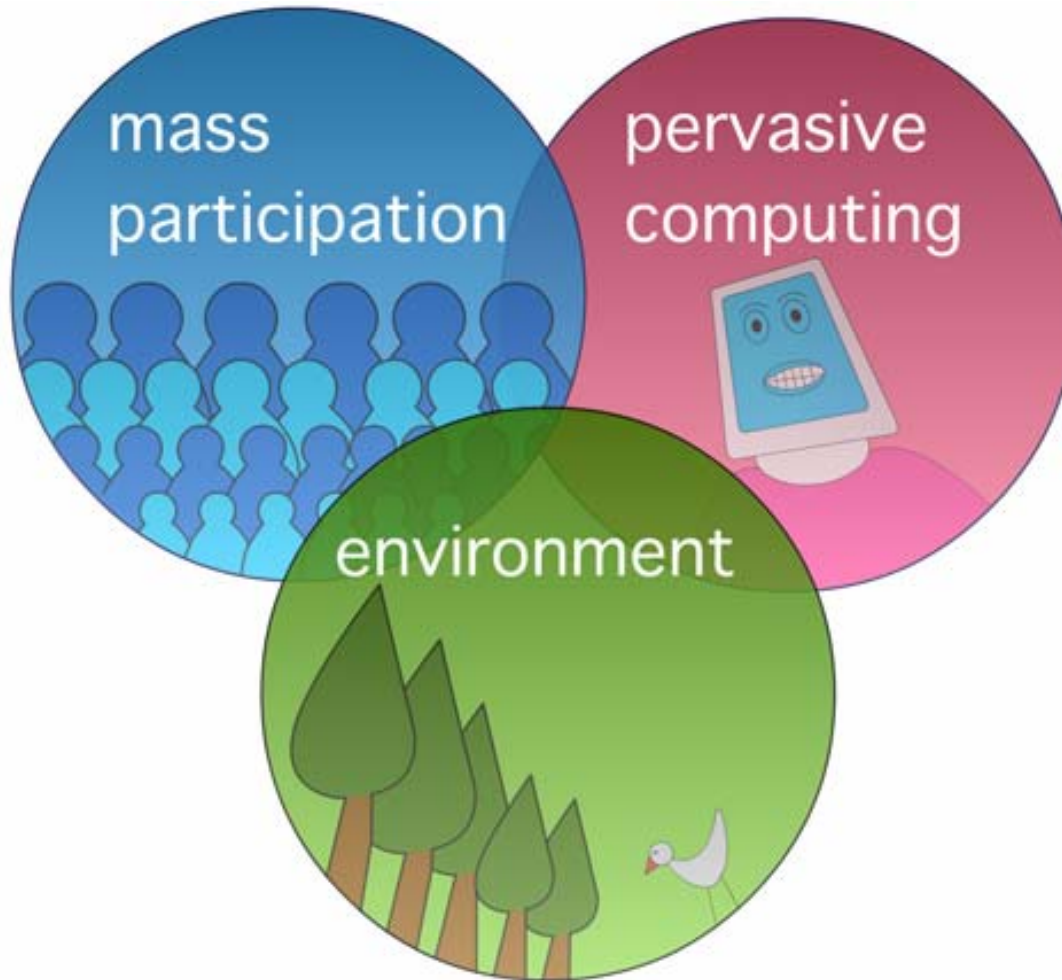
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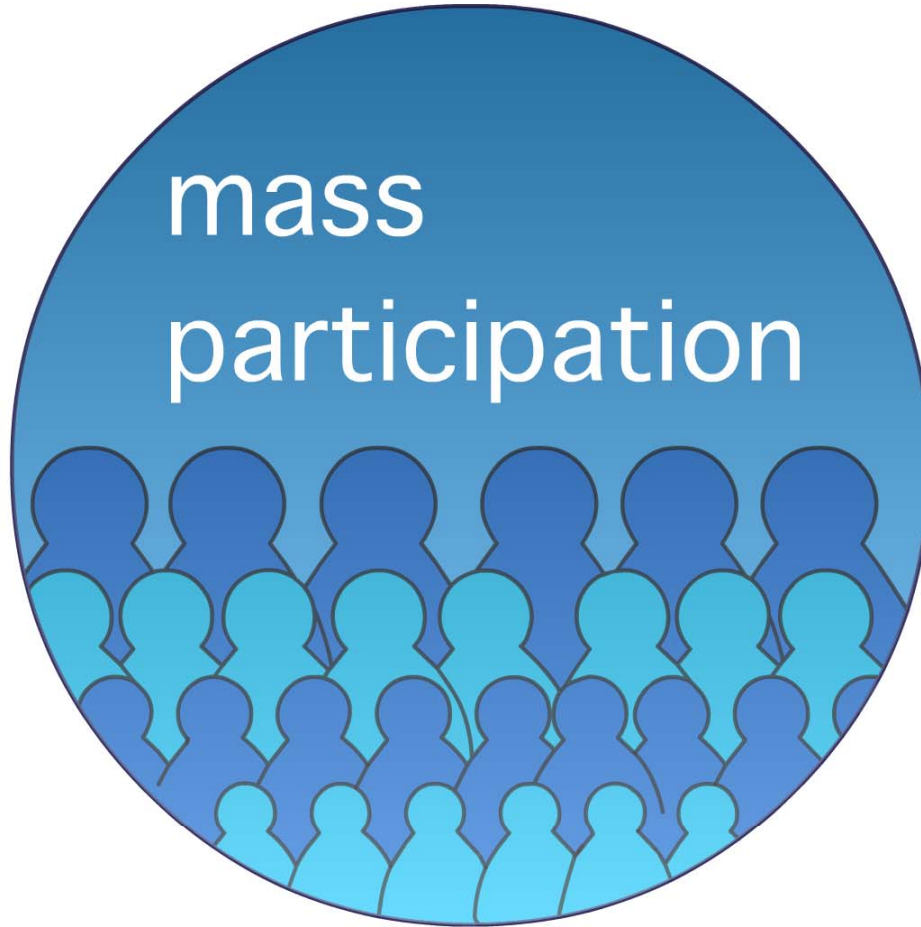
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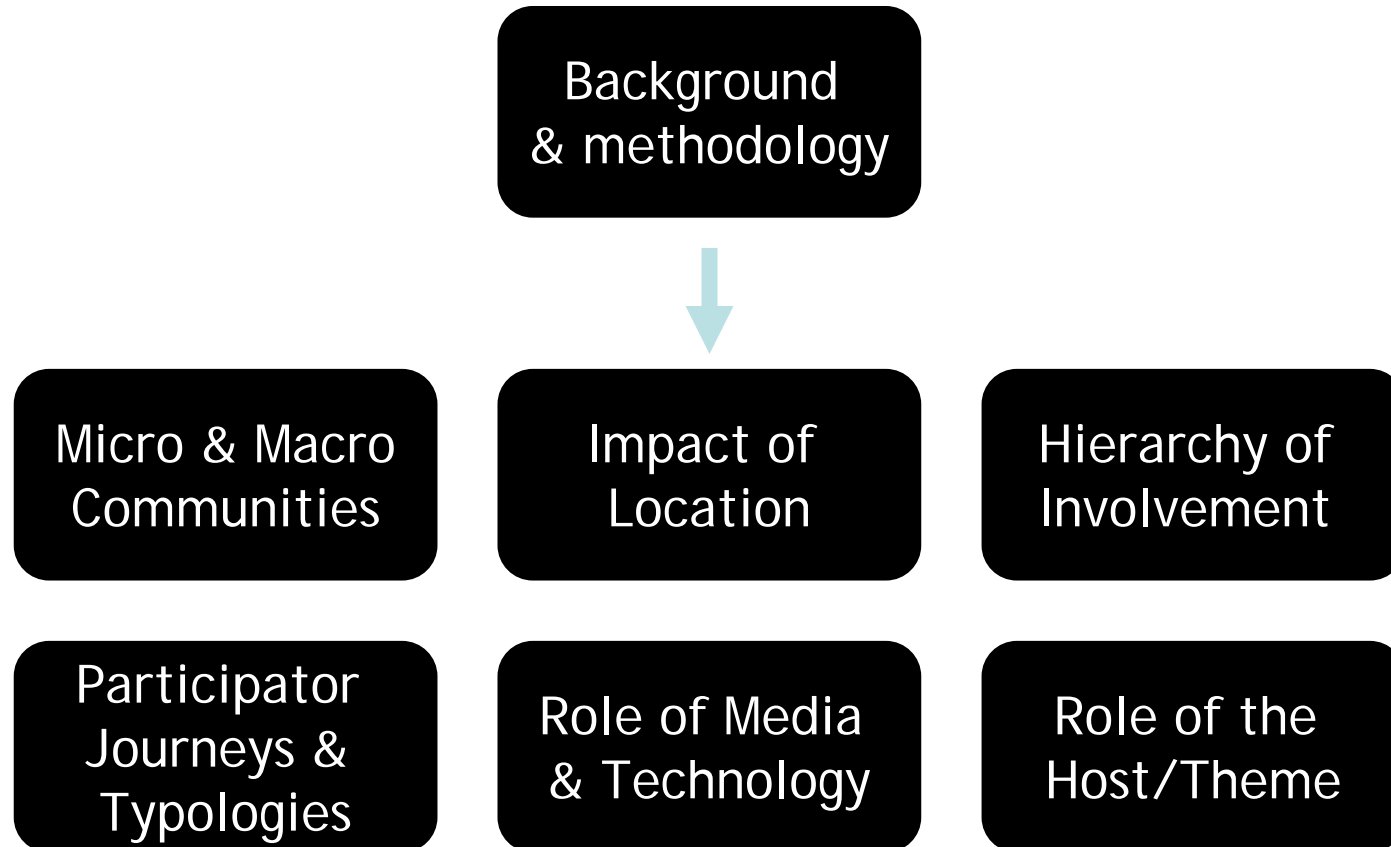
# Three pillars of Participate



mass  
participation



# What we will cover here



# 1. Background & methodology



## Background (i)

- We were approached by BBC creative R&D to assist in the Participate project:

*“A three year DTI supported collaborative research project into future audience mass participation through pervasive/ ubiquitous computing within a location based community.”*

- In order to assist the project team build meaningful user experiences using pervasive technology



## Background (ii)

Our brief was to provide insight in two dimensions:

Understanding the context of people's engagement in mass participation events and campaigns

Understanding motivations and needs in order to participate in such events

With a specific focus on location-based communities



# A definition of 'mass participation'

*Where an individual in society does something or creates something or sends something to a 'host organisation'. In sending something to that 'host organisation' there is then either explicit or implicit permission given by you for that 'host organisation' to use your data/content to further its own ends.*

- Mass was defined not in absolute terms, but relative to the size of a given population
- A movement that mobilised all the residents of a small village could therefore still be recognised as mass, even if the actual numbers involved were small



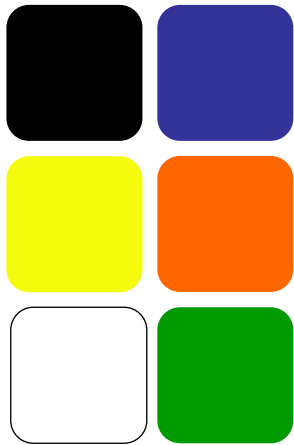
# Methodology

- 12x 90 minute, six person focus groups, across six locations in England and Scotland
  - Split out urban, suburban and rural
  - Half male, half female, single sex groups
  - A broad spread of ages represented in each group: 25-65, with, wherever possible, one person in each 'decade'
  - All pre-tasked with maps

Each group included local, national and global participators, recruited against an approved list



# Preserving anonymity

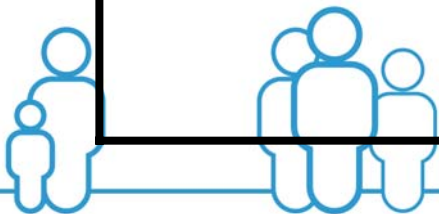


- In order to preserve respondents anonymity, yet retain the ability to reference them directly, we invented a colour coded naming system
- In each group we gave each person a colour
- Throughout the group they were referred to by this colour
- Eg Miss White, Mr Red, Mrs Blue, Mr Orange, Miss Yellow or Mrs Green









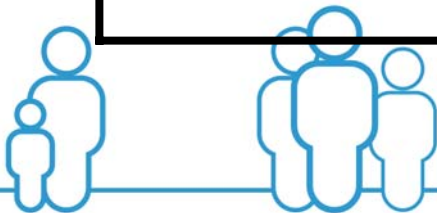
# The sample in detail

	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Scotland	Inverurie, Aber'shire M, 25-65	Barrhead, Glasgow M, 25-65	Central Edinburgh M, 25-65
	Inverurie, Aber'shire  F, 25-65	Barrhead, Glasgow F, 25-65	Central Edinburgh F, 25-65
England	Milbourn, Oxon M 25-65	Stockport M, 25-65	Hackney M, 25-65
	Milbourn, Oxon F 25-65	Stockport F, 25-65	Hackney F, 25-65



# A snapshot of the locations

	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Scotland			
England			



# Who we spoke to



I moved back here after I got divorced, so I could be near my parents



I've got two TVs, a mobile.. & a microwave

My best friend at university is from Russia



Home is where the people you care most about live



## An overview on the sample

- The broad generational spread in the groups gave a brilliant perspective on macro social change in the UK
- I.e. increased social/geographical mobility & new global relationships
- It also highlighted the impact technology is having & gave us a clear feel for where we are on the tech adoption curve



## How we will debrief the findings

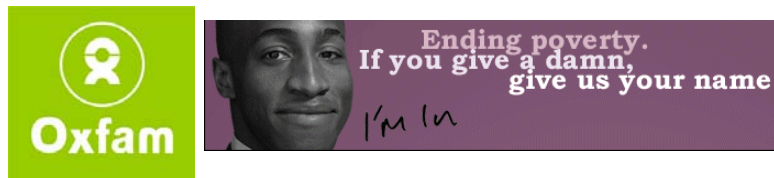
- We spoke to a broad range of people who participated in a broad range of activities
- The notion of participation was however unfamiliar & new to them
- There's no space in people's minds already marked 'participation'
- Consequently, the task here is part definitional, part analytical: finding a common thread through the breadth
- Which lends itself to a more 'academic' discussion than might be expected for a research debrief



## 2. The role of micro & macro communities in participation



# People participate in lots of different things



SEX I.D. find out how your mind works!



# There is lots of variation between these types of participation

Big vs small

Frivolous vs worthy

Local, national, global

On-going vs temporary

Rooted in the present  
vs past

Spontaneous  
vs planned

Proactive  
vs reactive

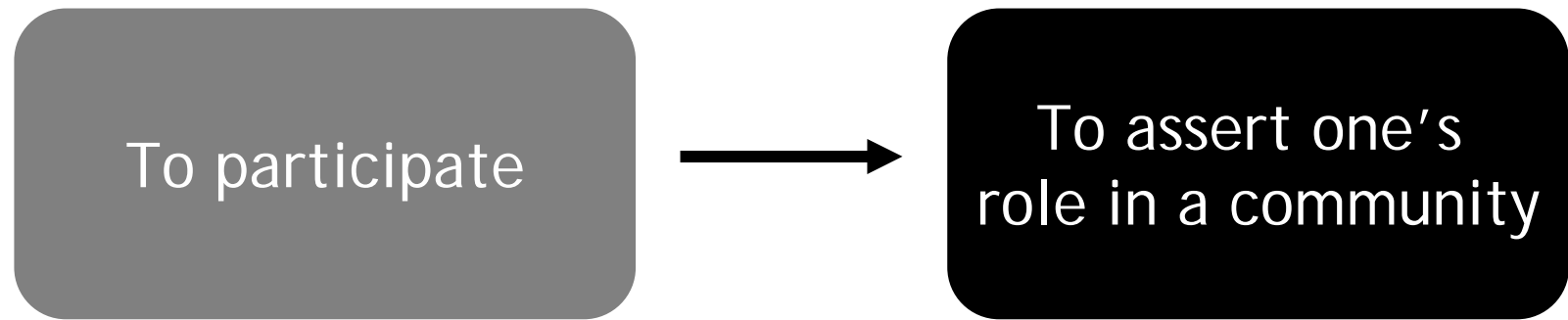


# However, there is a common thread throughout

- There is one thing that links all forms of participation
- No matter what their definitional boundaries are...
- ... that thread is community



# Community is central to the idea of participation...



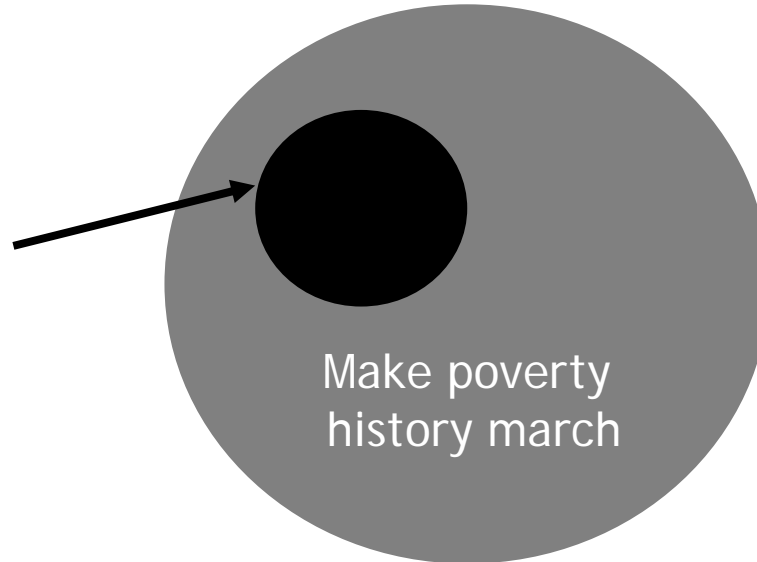
## ... & for the mass, micro communities are most important

- Whilst some participatory communities are very large
- The action is actually happening on a much smaller scale
- I.e. micro communities exist within the macro
- The key to understanding participation is getting under the skin of these micro communities



## For example, in Edinburgh

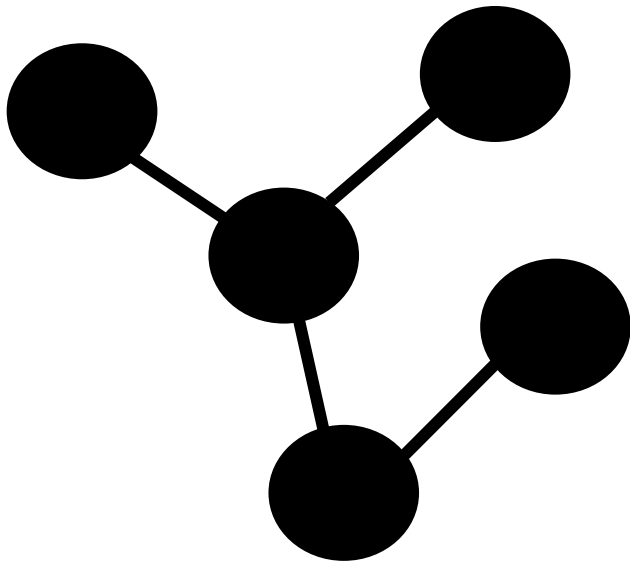
My family  
walking round  
Edinburgh for  
the day...  
doing our bit



- Although the cause was the catalyst, the strength of feeling was primarily about the micro community of the family



# A series of micro communities make up the macro



- So rather than thinking of 'mass participation'
- We must think of micro communities
- Some of these join together in the context of a larger movement
- Some of these remain small, localised & discrete



# Family & friends are the ultimate micro community

*"The best thing about Barrhead; you're surrounded by your family"*  
*Mr Green, Barrhead*

- For the majority of people, their micro communities consist of family or friends
- Potentially work colleagues too
- These groups form the engine of mass participation
- This is where the energy is... between people who know each other well



## So what role do 'causes' play?

- If the root of participation is community
- Then 'causes' act as the catalyst
- They provide a reason/rationale for coming together



Mrs Green thought do something for Children in Need would be a good way to bring people together at work

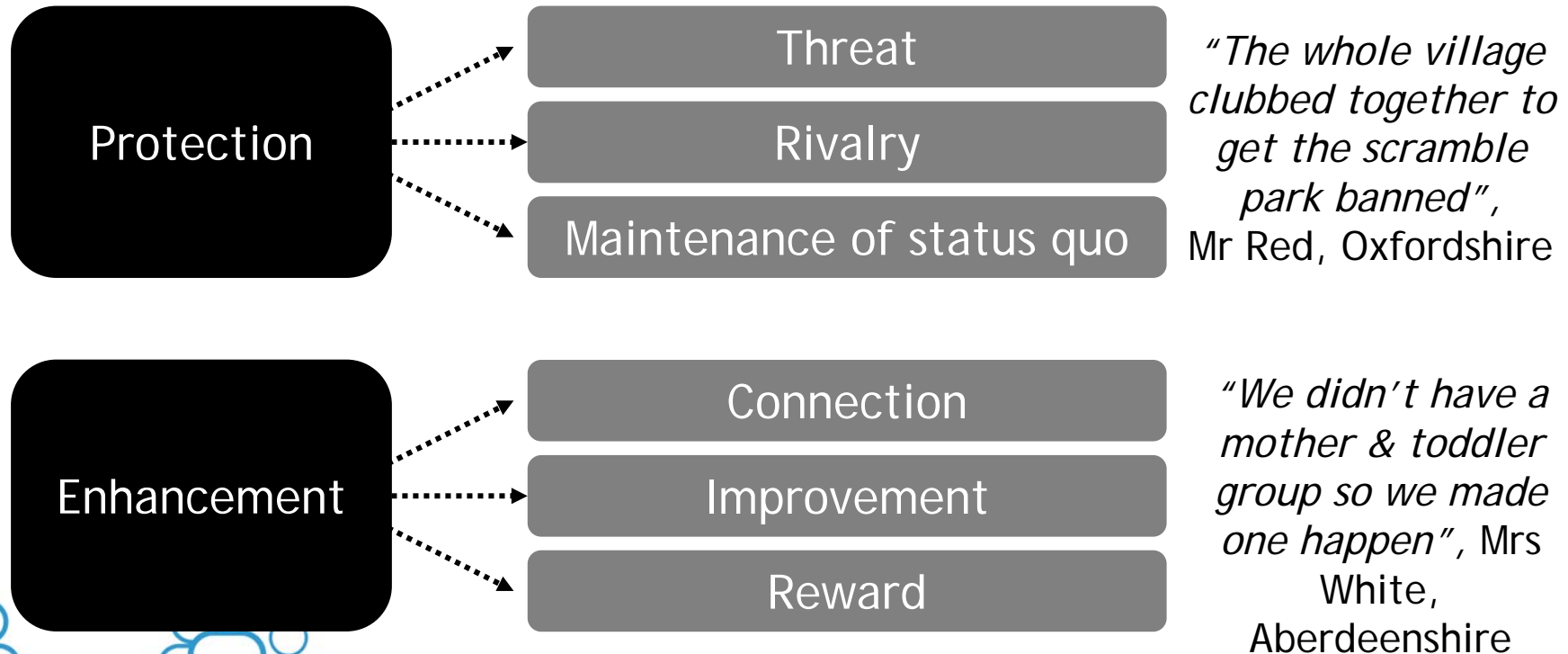


Mr Orange petitioned the local hospital against closure to protect his kids & elderly parents



# Protection & enhancement motivate micro communities

- There are two main motivators of micro communities...



# In summary, people take precedence in mass participation

1. People

2. Cause



# What are the implications of this for the stakeholders?

- Whilst people participate in a huge variety of activities
- It is a common desire to assert one's role in a community that drives participation
- Although the cause gets people off the sofa...
- ... the real energy is amongst people who already know each other well
- For participation to go mass the host/cause needs to find ways to plug into these micro communities motivate them



### 3. The impact of location



# How scope of Location interacts with Mass Participation

**Global:** NASA UFO watch,  
Tsunami appeal  
[www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

**National:** Springwatch  
Countryside Alliance  
UK's Favourite Poem  
X-Factor

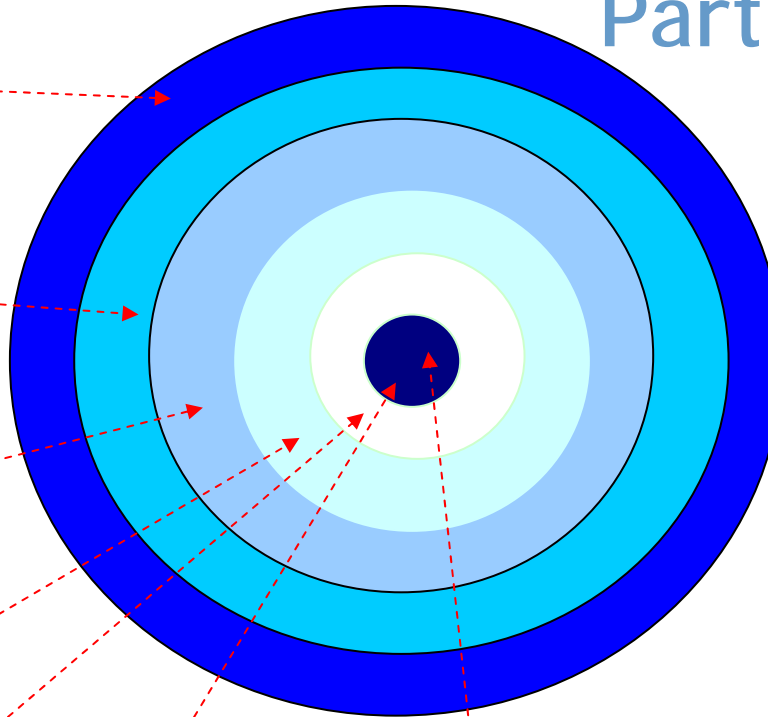
**Regional:** Preserve  
Constable Country,  
Kernow Campaign

**Local:** Save our  
Theatre.  
Talking Books

**Ultra-Local:**  
Neighbourhood  
Watch, Rat on a Rat

**Individual:**  
Coast, Google Earth

**GPS:**  
Right here, right now.  
Traffic & weather.  
[www.wardenwatch.com](http://www.wardenwatch.com)



# We were tasked with looking at the impact of location

- Your brief to us had a specific focus on insight from location based communities
- With our split of rural, suburban and urban communities, we have explored the impact of geography on each
- And examined how this relates to participation on a local, national and global level



# Geography still plays a role for the majority

*“Technology has changed the nature of (my) job, but it’s not changed one iota (my sense of) community”  
Mr Blue, Stockport*

- For most respondents, their sense of community was clearly linked to where they lived
- Technology had begun to liberate some people from these geographical ties
- Particularly the under 30s
- But for the majority, geography was still a critical factor



# Attitudes to the 'local' differed according to location

## Rural



Mr Orange has lived in Inverurie his whole life. The majority of his friends and family live within a few miles. It can feel a bit suffocating

## Suburban



Mr Blue has family and friends around Glasgow, but also spread across Britain and the world. Where his local community ends isn't really clear

## Urban



Miss Orange lives in Hackney, but grew up in Northumberland. It was tough to start afresh with no family or friends nearby, but she's worked to create a new circle



# It's the same story with attitudes to national & global

## Rural



Being so small and remote, no one takes notice of Inverurie nationally, let alone globally. Local issues are much more compelling

## Suburban



Much of Mr Blue's day to day world relates to central Glasgow, but national and global issues still feel very important

## Urban



The inner city feels like the centre of the universe. Fast paced and exciting, it's the global and national issues that feel closest to home



# Ultimately, where you live affects your perspective

	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Local	Genuine, yet problematic Clearly defined	Indistinct/ blurred boundaries	Existent & non existent Real & idealised
National	Feel insignificant to	Feel significant to	Feels highly significant to
Global	Dislocated from Irrelevant to	Dislocated from Relevant to	Engaged with Excited by



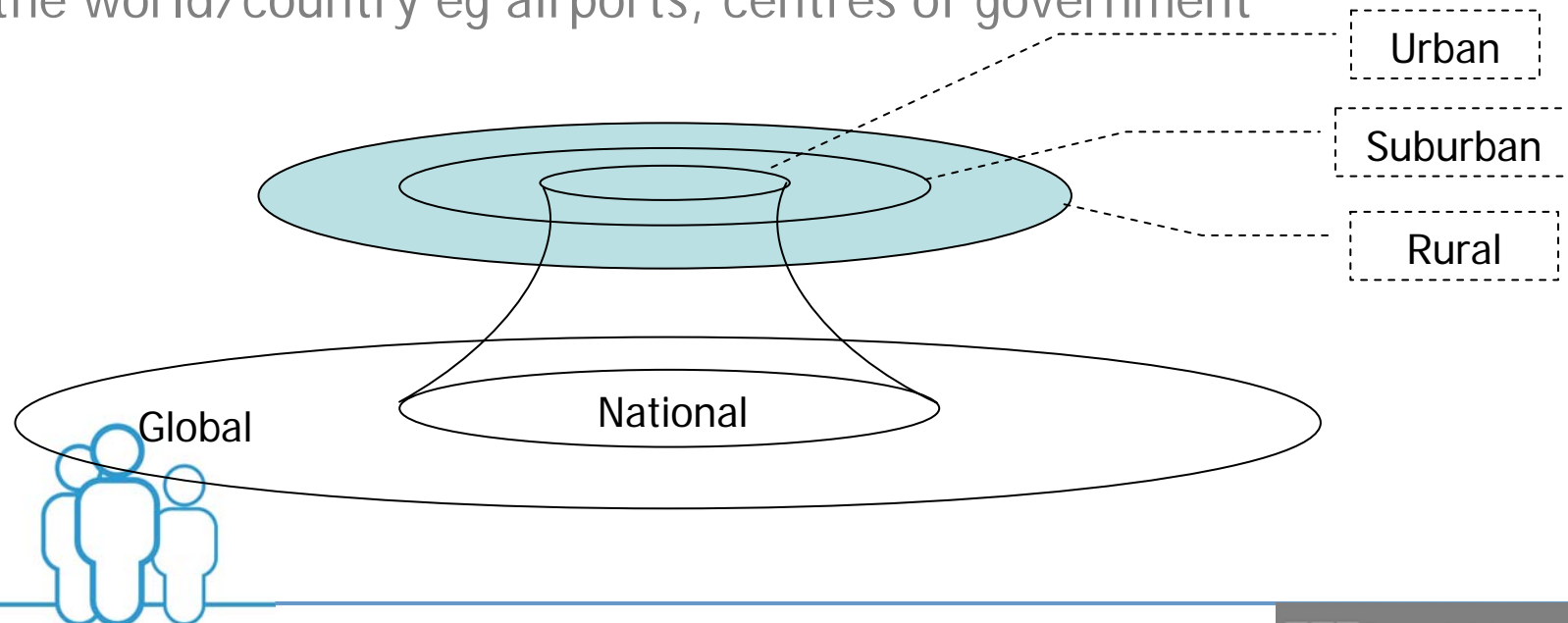
## But local is big for everyone

- Although attitudes did vary, everyone felt deeply connected to & motivated by local issues
- A rational concern for what might affect them and those immediately around them
- And often an emotional concern based on ties and attachment to an area
- People need to understand the localised impact of global issues

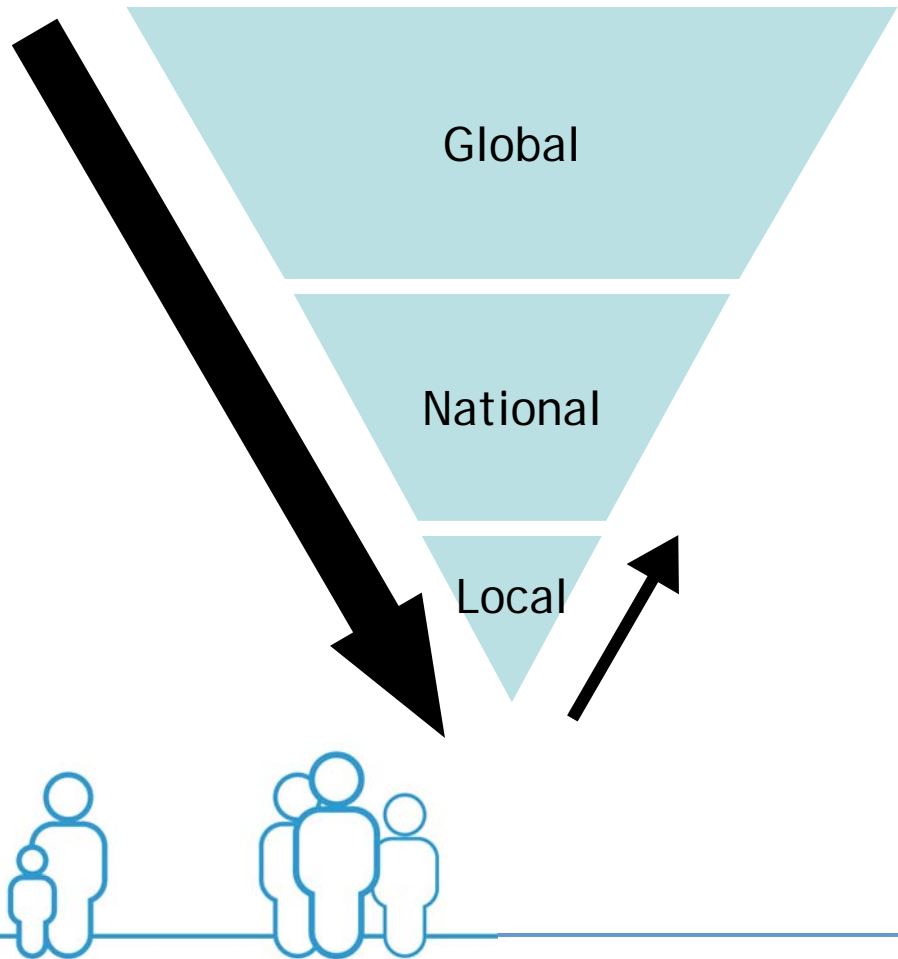


# People in cities find it easier to 'reach' global issues

- The national and global feel closer to people living in urban settings
- Those in rural locations feel more distant to global issues
- Perhaps the insulation of the village environment causes this, or perhaps it's because cities genuinely have stronger links to the rest of the world/country eg airports, centres of government



# Global issues are more likely to go local, than vice versa



- It was hard for even the most far-sighted urbanite to imagine a specific local issue having relevance more widely
- It was easier for everyone to imagine a more global or national issue being related to a local context

# What are the implications of this for the stakeholders?

- People in rural locations feel less connected to global issues, & even some national issues, than those in urban areas
- Things can seem a long way away
- Hosts need to work hard to demonstrate relevancy of global/national issues...
  - ... both in that a cause impacts on them
  - ... & that they can make a difference
- However, the 'local' can appeal to all & can have mass impact if a global-'local' issue



## 4. Hierarchy of Involvement



# We came across lots of different forms of participation



*"(Test the nation was) a bit of competition in the house" Mr Yellow, Oxfordshire*



*"I didn't have that good a time at school, I was bullied quite a lot. So for me it was a bit of an up yours... 'I'm doing quite well, look at me'" Miss Red, Oxfordshire*



*"My partner, her mum had breast cancer... so I click on that" Mr White, Stockport*

# We came across lots of different forms of participation



*"(Saving Horton hospital) You're proud of what you've achieved" Mr Orange, Oxfordshire*



*"Even if i'm not in a play, I go down to watch rehearsals & things like that, just to be involved" (Mrs Blue, Stockport)*



*"It's so easy, you don't have to spend any more" Mrs Blue, Oxfordshire*



# We came across lots of different forms of participation



*"With the Tsunami, I can assuage my guilt by giving money" (Mr Orange, Stockport)*



*"My son did Video Nation... (he) sent in a video of my car to Top Gear" Mrs White, Oxfordshire*



*"I used to go to a mums and toddler group with my son, and they started fundraising, and there was a friend of mine that ran it, so I helped" Mrs Orange Stockport*



# They covered all suggested forms of participation

Springwatch (Miss Green, Oxfordshire)



'CAPTURE'

'My car' video diary submitted to Top Gear (Mrs White, Oxfordshire)



'CREATE'

Adding family tree research to the genes reunited database (Mr Orange, Stockport)



'ANNOTATE'

Hotel review (Miss Red, Oxfordshire)



'EVALUATE'

Marching against the second Manchester runway (Mr Yellow, Stockport)



'PRESENCE'

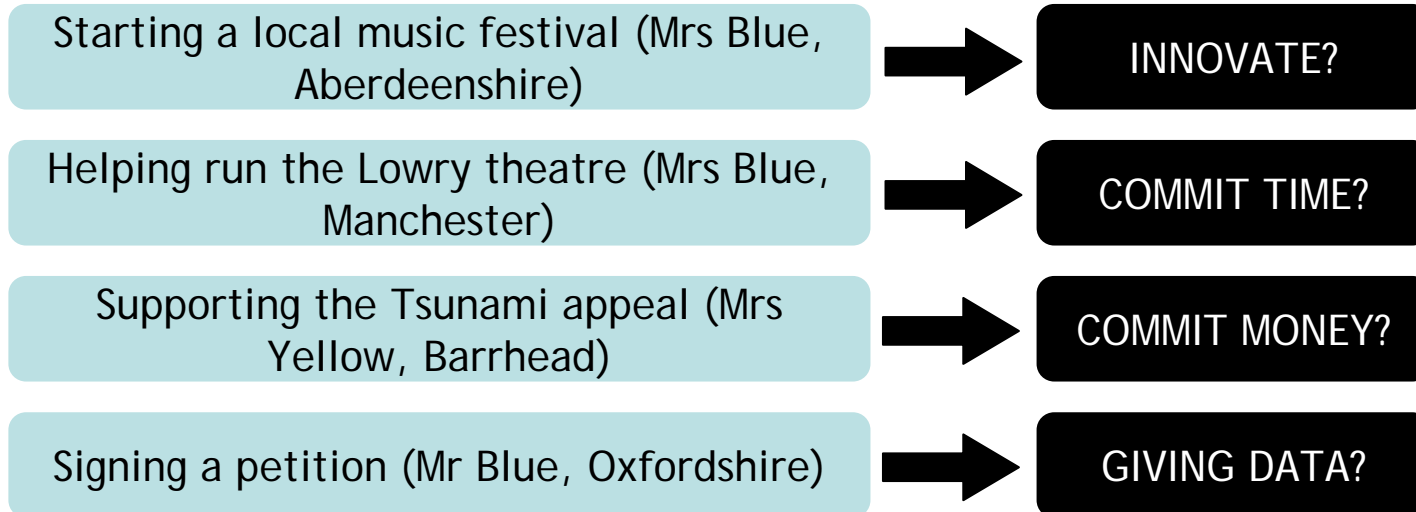
Watching with concern the situation in Iraq (Mrs Red, Aberdeenshire)



'SPECTATE'



## As well as some additional forms...



# It might be simpler to describe these differently

Participation could mean...

Listening

Eg being aware of an event

Watching

Eg watching Children in Need on TV

Giving money

Eg donating to the Asian Tsunami fund

Giving time

Eg helping run a youth club

Being there

Eg taking part in a political march

Starting something

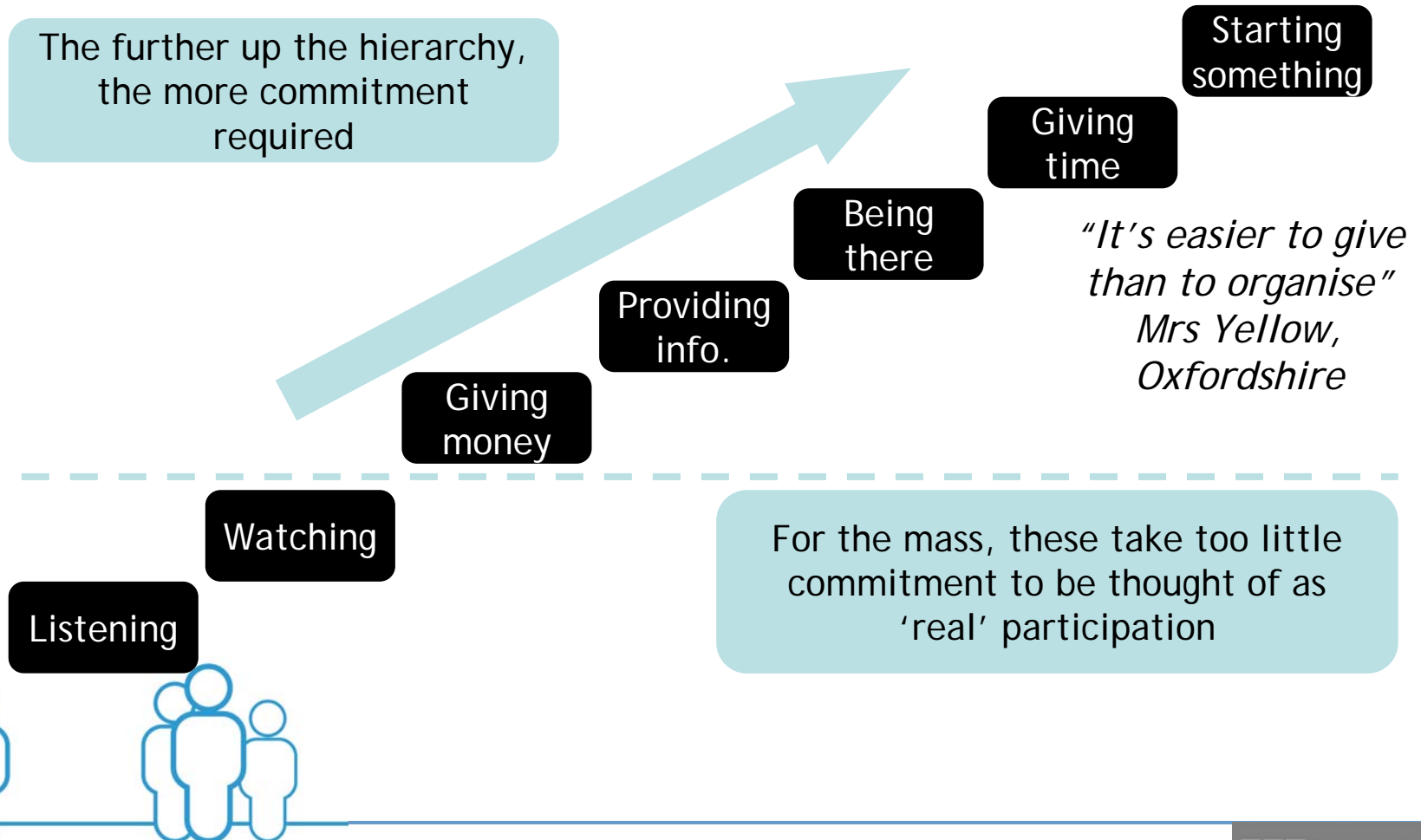
Eg organising a sponsored walk

Providing information

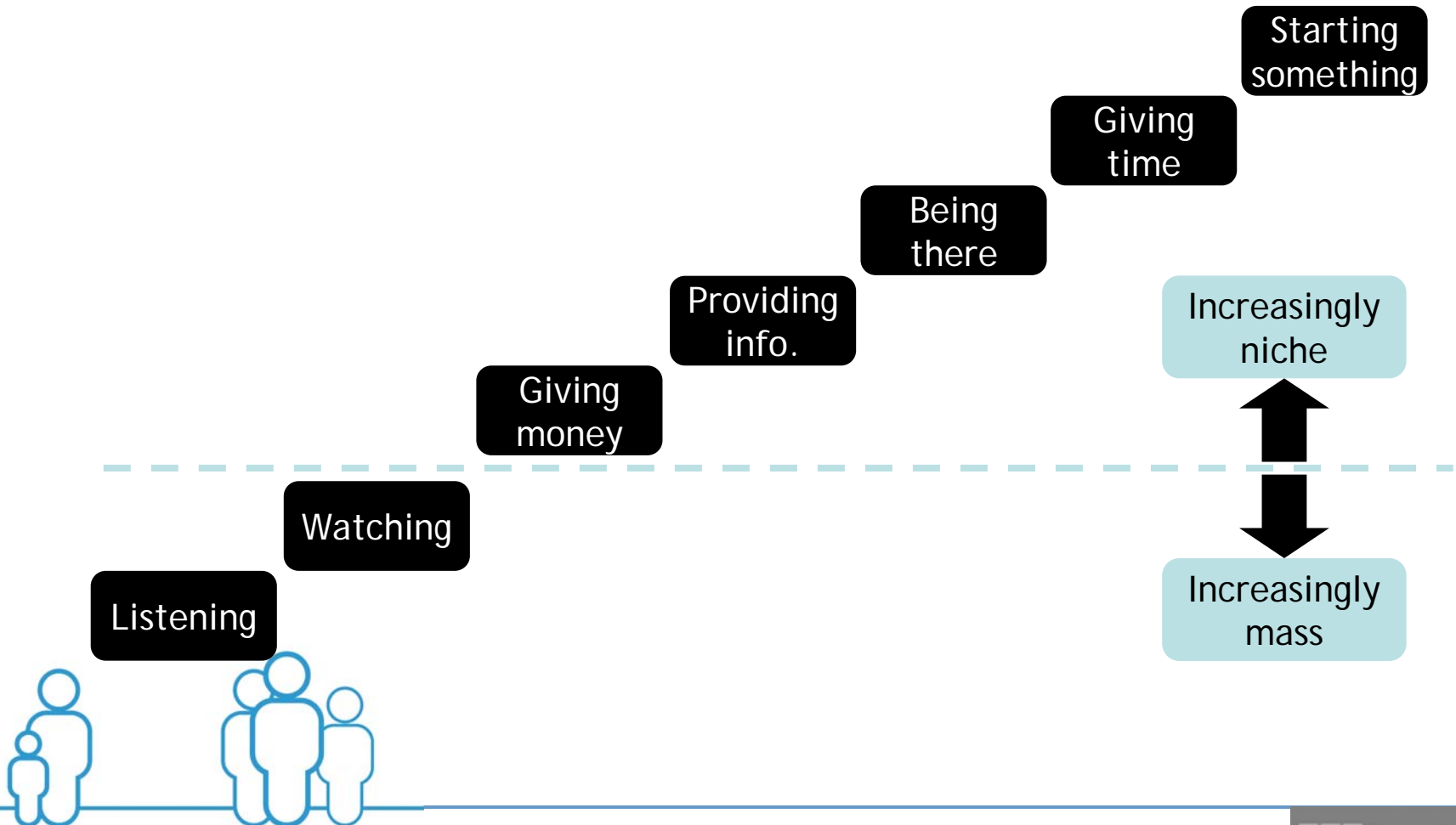
Eg signing a petition



# There is a hierarchy of involvement



But the majority of participation occurs below the line



# There are key barriers & triggers to the ascent of the hierarchy

## Barriers to participation

- Apathy
- Cynicism
- Pointlessness
- Triviality
- Lack of time
- Lack of personal interest
- Laziness
- Routine
- Too many additional commitments

## Triggers to participation

- Children
- Peers
- The cause (emotionally &/or rationally compelling)
- Ease
- Media visibility/spectacle
- Reward
- Impact
- Novelty



## But bigger emotional rewards towards the top

- People talk about enjoying the 'camaraderie', & a sense of 'satisfaction' in getting physically involved

*"You're proud to see what you've achieved"*, Mr Red Edinburgh

*"A moment in history where something could change"*, Miss White Edinburgh

- But, even just being part of a community has its rewards
- Personal contact brings mental health, which in turn brings physical health
- Communities make healthier, happier people



# What are the implications of this for the stakeholders?

- Perhaps stating the obvious but, more people will get involved with things that are simple & easy to do
- There will be fewer who will commit time & money
- & even fewer who will take the initiative to start a movement
- Different people will get involved at different levels
- But micro communities can pull people up the hierarchy



## 5. Participatory Journeys & Typologies



# Participation takes on a journey-like form

- Whilst there are many different kinds of participation
- There did seem to be a common pattern...
- ... a clear(ish) chain of events
- People enjoy this 'narrative'



## 'Events' can play an important role

- Of course, not every participatory journey requires an event
- But, events can play an important role
- They provide a visual, tangible focal point
- They're physical & real
- They mark a point in time & are memory making



# Why do communities continue?

- Events provide a rationale for a community to exist
- After the event the community could easily disband
- But, it could continue...
- If the community was goal orientated & that specific goal is achieved then of course the community disbands
- But, if a new motivation evolves, that can potentially be maintained
- Either through setting a new goal & starting a new narrative
- Or, through acknowledgement of the new rules ie that there is no narrative

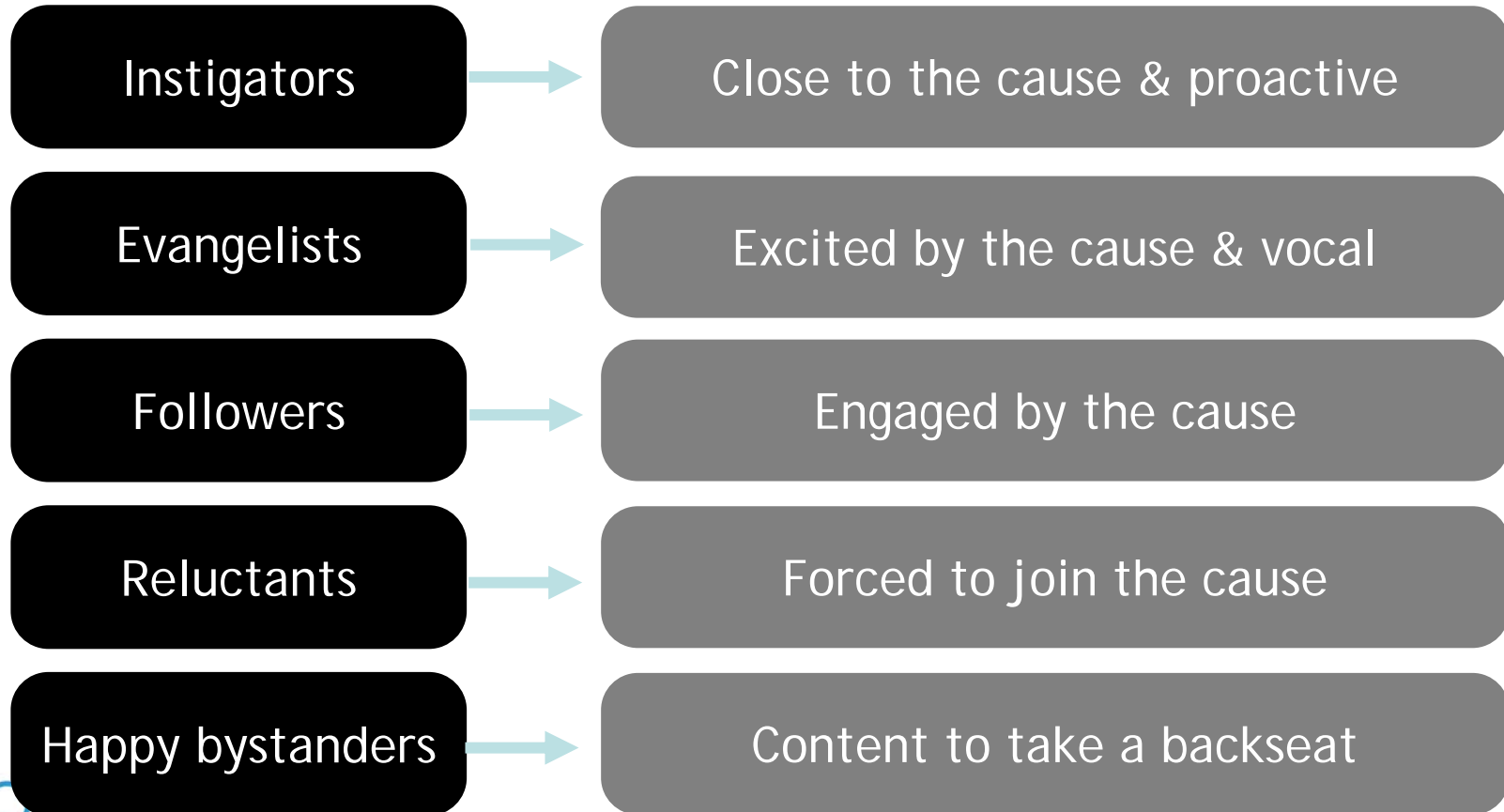


# As we've already highlighted people are a key trigger

- For participation to occur, it is dependent on a least one individual taking up the 'cause'
- & communicating this to others
- Who may or may not be as actively involved
- Within each micro community, there will be a number of participant types
- Each on their own rung of the hierarchy of involvement

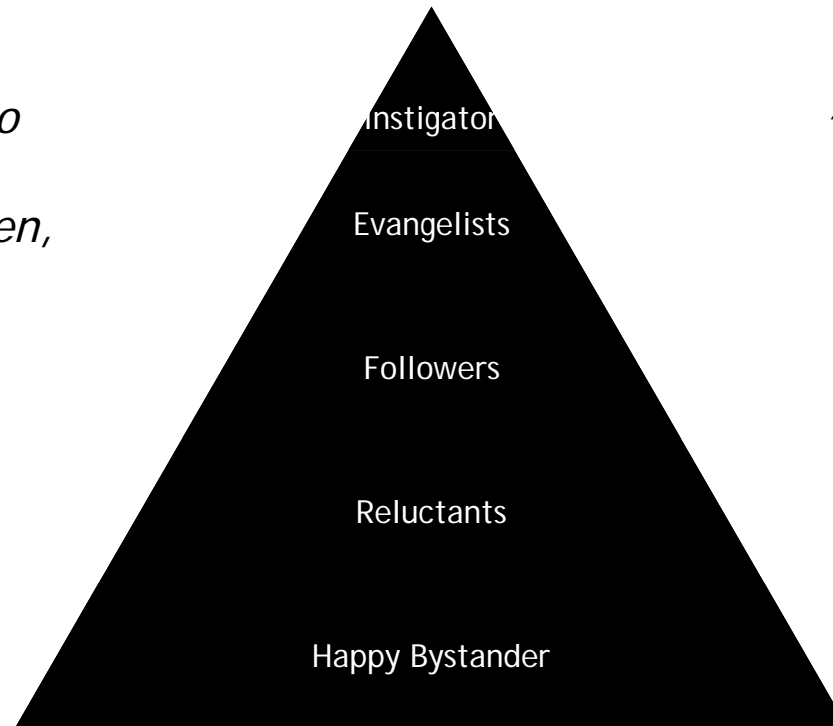


# We came across a number of different participator types



# There are more happy bystanders than instigators

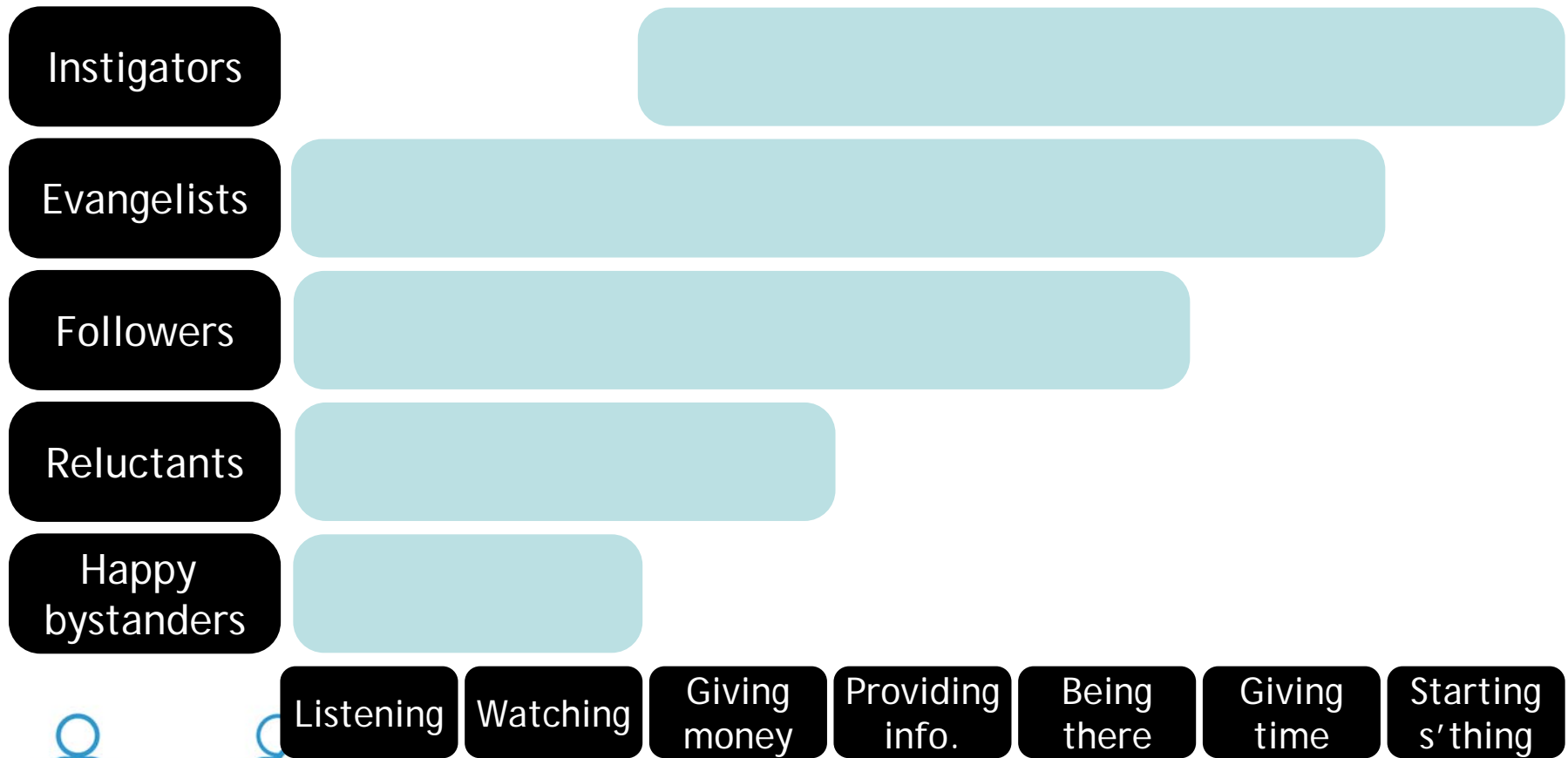
*"I was roped into Neighbourhood Watch" Mrs Green, Edinburgh*



*"If everyone's giving something, I'll give something" Mrs Yellow, Edinburgh*



# Mapping likely action against the hierarchy

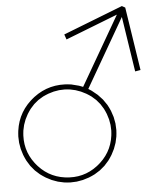
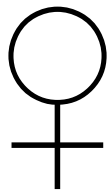


# There is a slight gender divide within participation

Enhance  
(proactive)



Protect  
(reactive)



# Kids are a critical factor in participation too

- Children seemed to be a participatory catalyst on a number of levels
- People want to spend time with their kids, & 'participation' offers a way to do this
- Kids are idealistic & active, & like to get involved in these sorts of things
- The sheer act of having children makes many people less solipsistic, & more aware of other's needs
- In other words, there are strong emotional & rational reasons to get involved



# What are the implications of this for the stakeholders?

- To generate mass participation in an event/movement the host must take account of the different types of people who will get involved
- ... and find ways of enrolling/involving each
- Allowing each to find their own fulfilment
- At whatever level this might be
- Media-tech organisations have the capacity to create & facilitate the narrative of participation



## 6. The Role of Media & Technology



# Media-tech plays a backstage role in mass participation

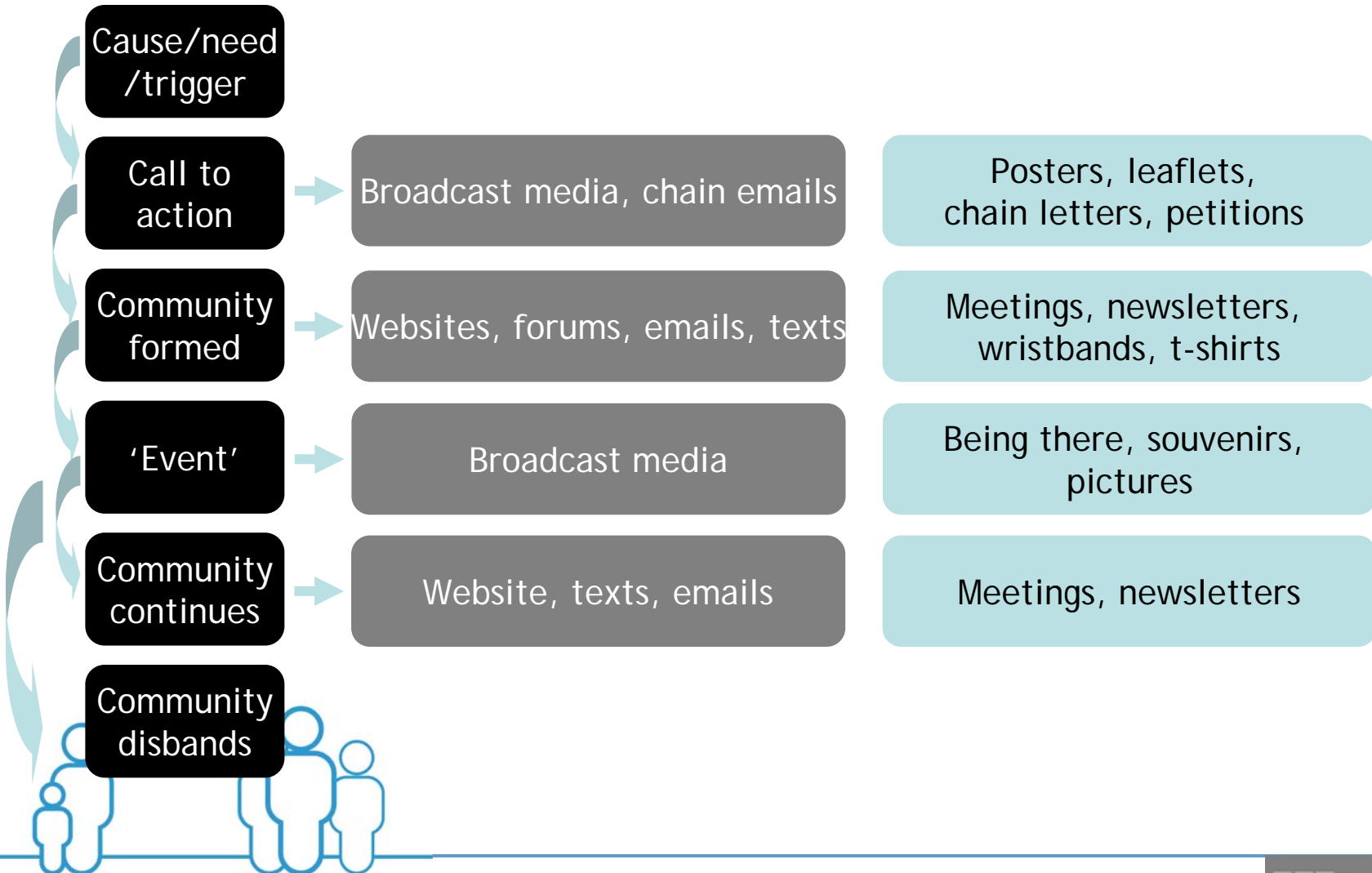
1. People

2. Cause

3. Media-tech



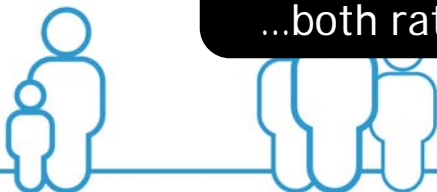
# Media-tech eases the participatory journey



# Broadcast media can act as a catalyst to mass participation



Broadcast media places a cause at the top of the agenda,  
& persuades people of its importance/relevance...  
...both rational & emotional cf images of Ethiopian mothers/children



## But also has a role in capturing the moment & showing the impact

- Broadcast media also plays a role in 'capturing' an event
- Logging its importance, committing it to the archive...
- ... the promise of which is wrapped up in the call to action
- People want to see the impact of mass participation... their own personal impact, & the collaborative impact
- ... in the instant, & in the long term
- Feedback is absolutely critical - Without it the whole affair seems pointless
- Broadcast & narrowcast can work together here

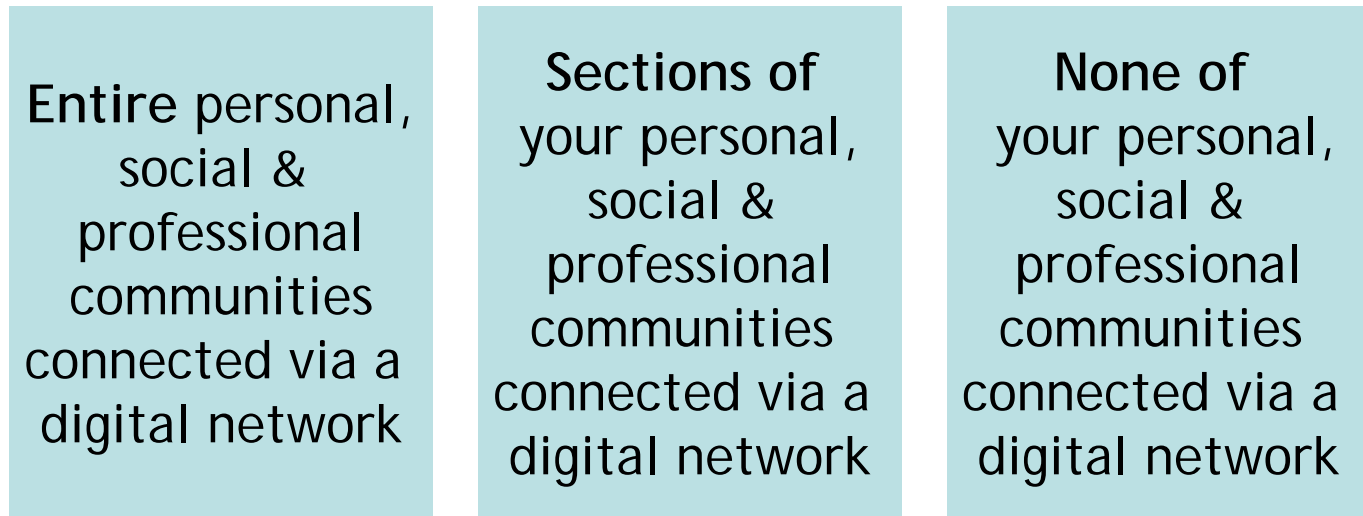


# Participation is of course dependent on people though

- Mass participation will not take off without the mobilisation of micro communities
- Digital can play a role here, facilitating the creation of communities & providing a forum for communication
- Particularly geographically stretched communities
- But analogue still plays a big role & has an emotional charge
- Digital it is by no means integral, nor necessary to every type of 'mass participation' & within many participatory events it plays no role at all



# The 'mass' is not very far along the adoption curve



We are currently here



# Analogue still plays a big role

- We came across many instances of analogue media being used, rather than digital

Eg recipe chain letter

- This is partly because of where we are on the adoption curve
- But also because analogue is often seen as a more active, & involved way of participating
- Because it involves 'time'
- & because it is tangible
- The ease of digital media can undermine 'participation'



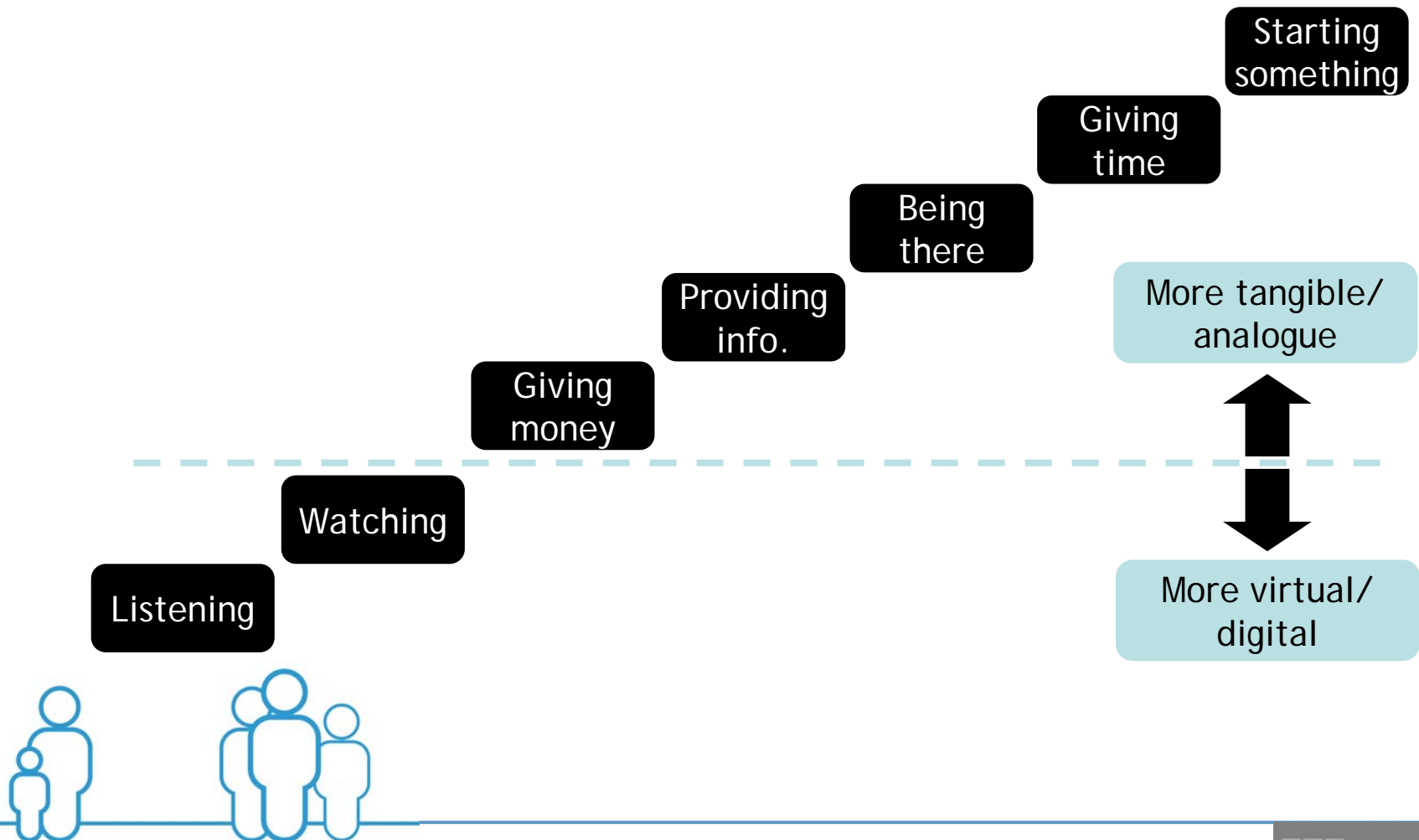
# Analogue plays to the top of the hierarchy of involvement...

Analogue	Digital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Time</li><li>• Effort</li><li>• Tangibility</li><li>• High cost</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speed</li><li>• Effortless</li><li>• Virtuality</li><li>• Low cost</li></ul>

... whilst digital, currently, sits nearer the bottom



This is the current situation, but there's room for change



# Digital technology does have its benefits though

- Global or national communities simply wouldn't be able to exist in the way they do without digital technology
- Digital technology effectively collapses geography
- It can provide both a focal point & the communication infrastructure for the community
- However, tangibility is still preferable to the majority
- (Although there are some differences developing between those who've never known life without the web & those who have)



## It plays less of a role on a local level

- Whilst digital technology plays an important role in global & national communities
- It is currently less prominent in local communities
- The village shop/school/post office is the focal point
- Rather than a website
- Even in the most technically advanced local communities (Hackney) analogue media acted as a prompt to go digital
- Leaflets through doors advertising the cause + website

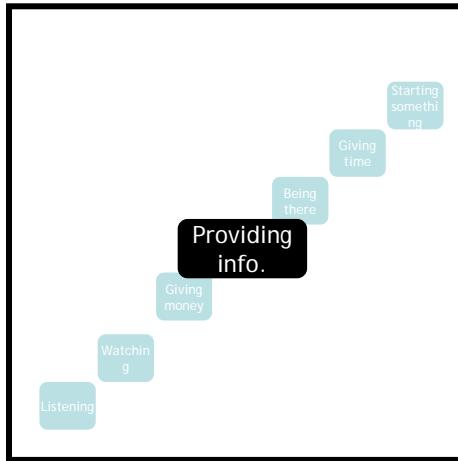


# Digital is currently most prevalent at a global level

	Rural location	Suburban location	Urban location
Local community	Analogue	Analogue	Analogue/digital
National community	Analogue/digital	Analogue/digital	Analogue/digital
Global community	Digital	Digital	Digital



# Digital is changing the shape of 'providing info'



- Whilst 'providing info' could be as simple as signing a petition
- Digital is now opening up a whole new world of data-exchange participation
- This type of participation can exist without a specific 'event'
- For example, myspace, flickr, tripadvisor, friendsreunited etc

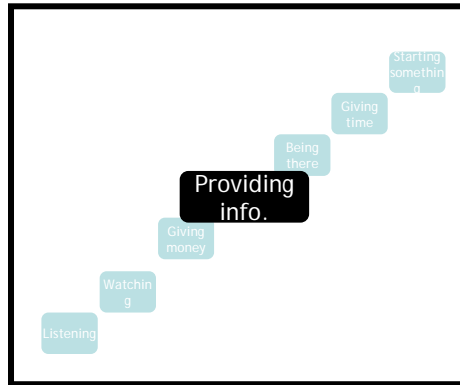


# Micro communities promote a sense of security

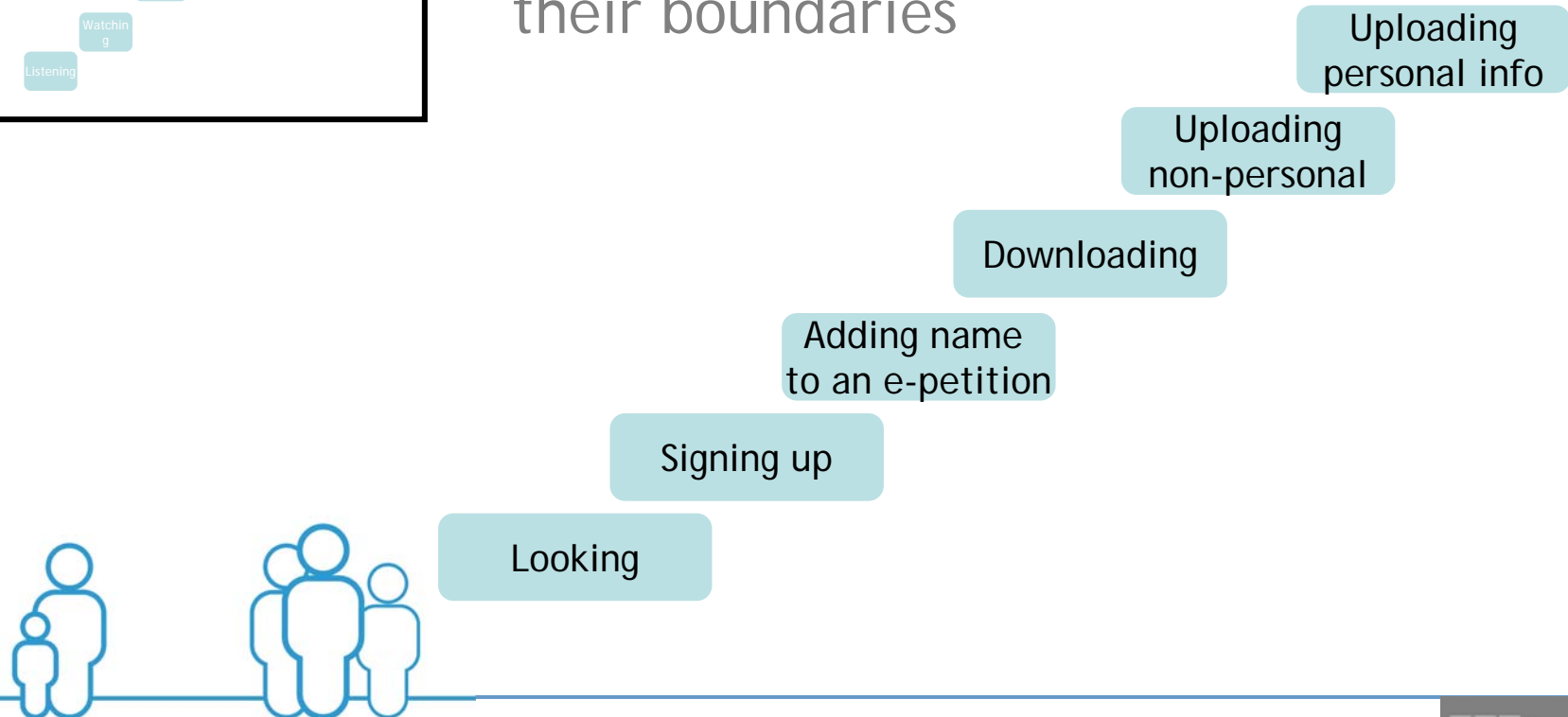
- The sense of being around 'like-minded' people creates a cocoon of confidence
- Whilst people might be nervous of 'publishing' anything about themselves in an analogue world
- The digital micro community feels safe & secure
- Plus provides a shield of anonymity, if needed
- People are much happier to post up information about themselves, they don't think twice about it
- The sheer ease of sharing information compounds this



# Within 'providing info' there is a secondary hierarchy



- Though digital data-exchange participation does feel easier & safer (less exposing) than analogue publishing, people still have their boundaries



# However, the ideal participation is still physical

*"If it's a local issue, it's got to be face to face"*  
Mr White,  
Oxfordshire

- As we've discussed, participation is underpinned by the desire to be part of a community
- & the ideal is to feel physically connected, on a face to face level
- Even for those at the top of the adoption curve, enjoying digital participation

Myspace = good



My mates on a night out = better

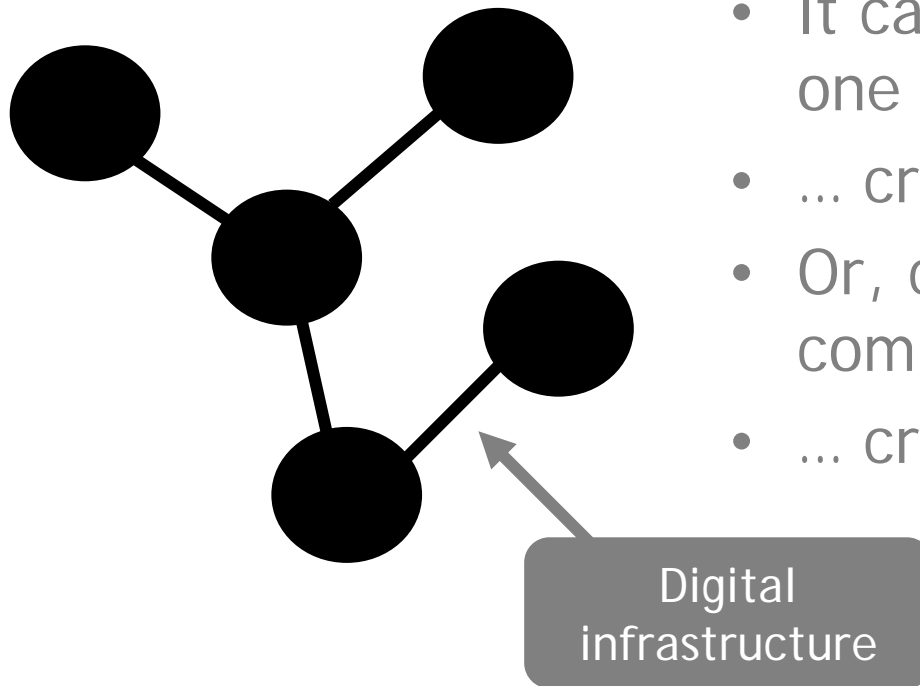
Flickr = good



Day out with Flickr mates taking pictures = better



# Digital facilitates physical connectivity



- It can quickly & easily connect one individual to another...
- ... creating a micro community
- Or, can connect one micro community with another...
- ... creating a macro community



# Myspace Personal Value Chopstick

Host name: my space.com .

Value 1: Ability to keep in touch with people in my life - Communication

Value 2: Loneliness .



# What are the implications of this for the stakeholders?

- For media-tech organisations the biggest question is over digital
- How can digital + participation work together?
- There are several ways forward
  1. Getting everyone digitally networked, so the mass move up the adoption curve
  2. Developing rewarding, fulfilling digital tangibility
  3. Or, simply acknowledging that digital & analogue must work together ie events, participation packs etc

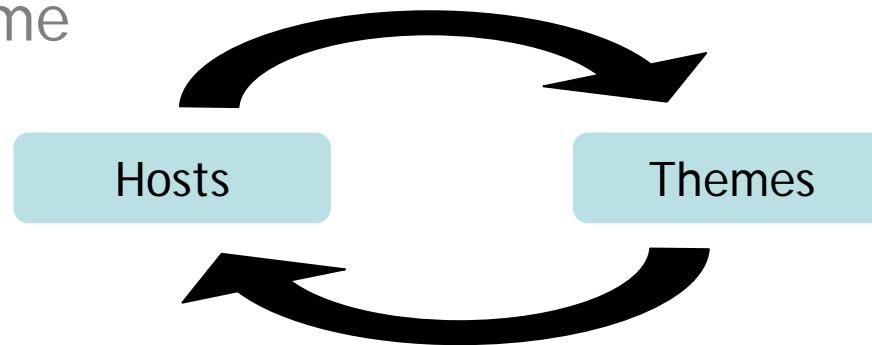


## 7. The Role of the Host/Theme

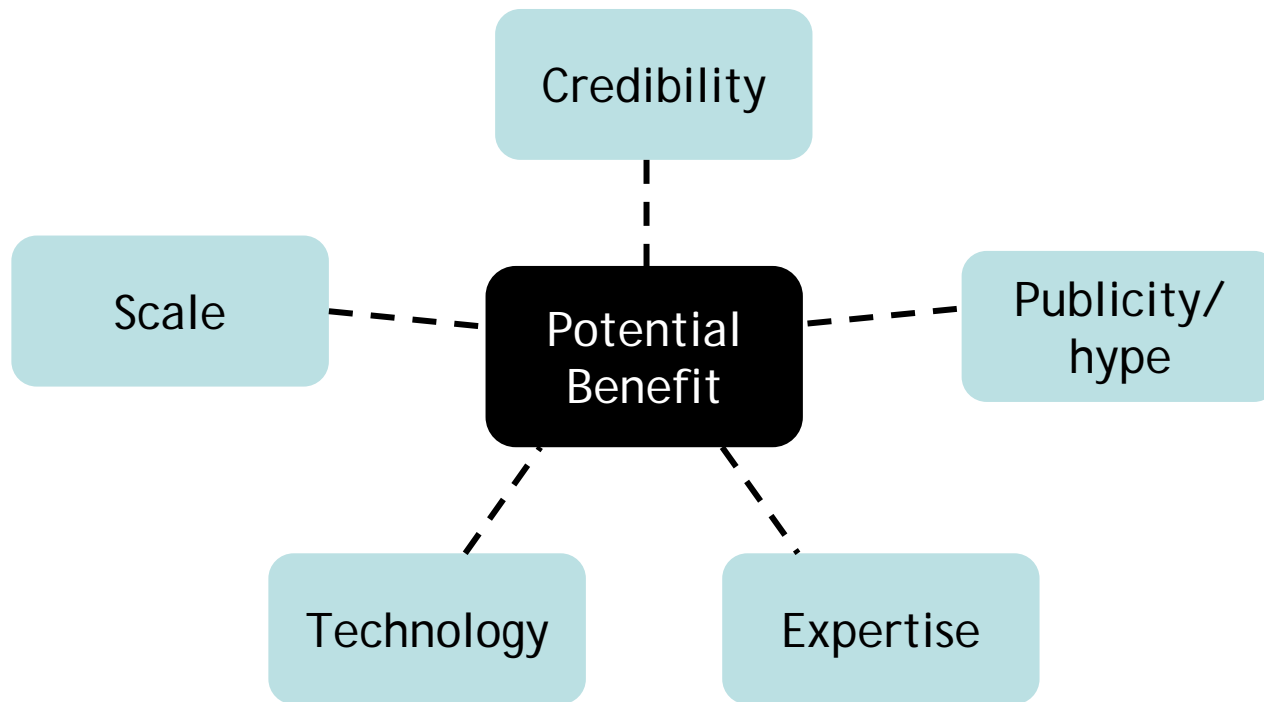


# Hosts and themes have a dynamic relationship

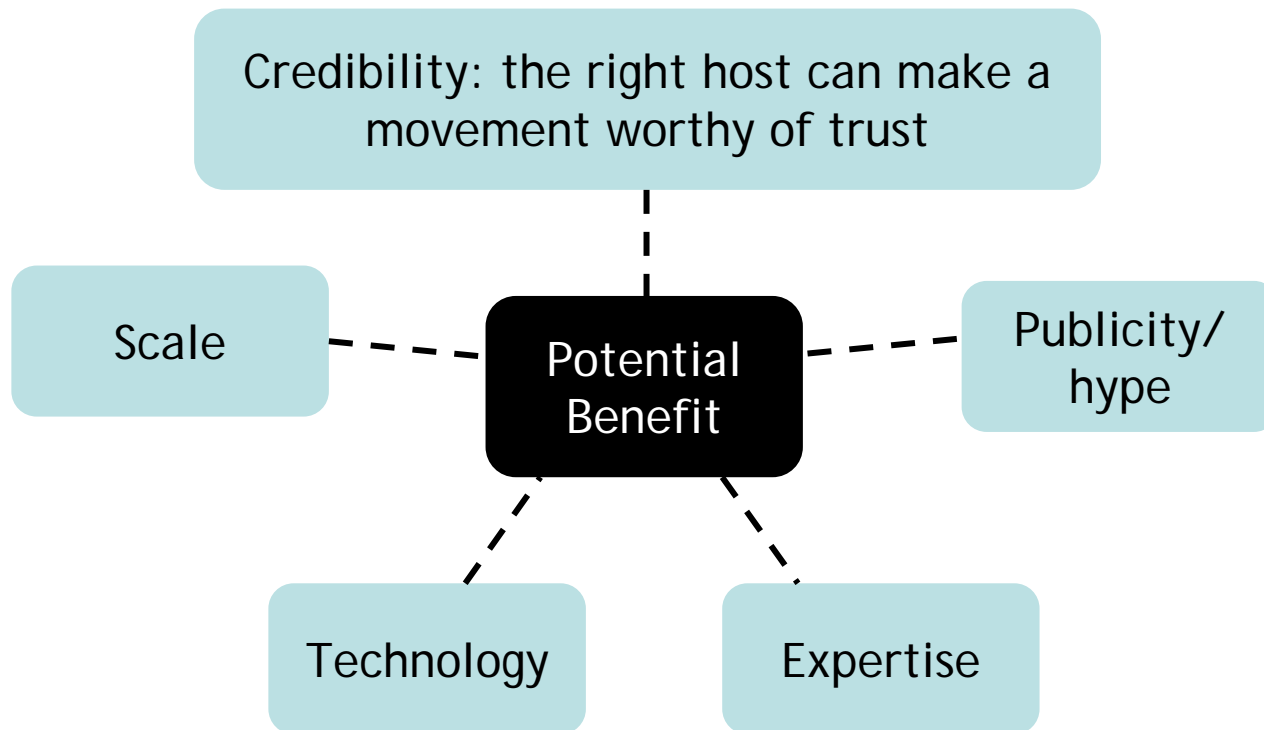
- Respondents were clear that some hosts fitted better with certain themes over others, and vice versa
- A positively regarded host can add to the appeal of a theme



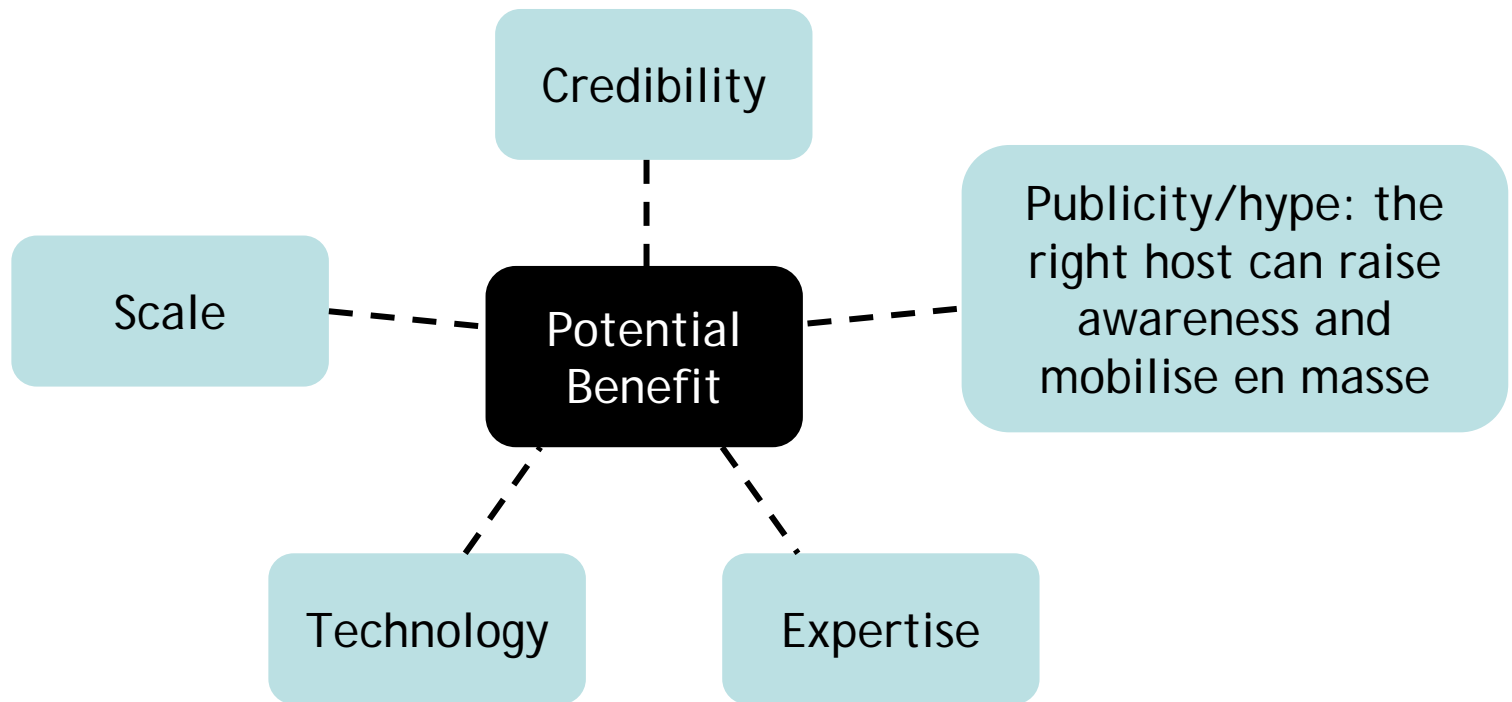
# What can hosts add?



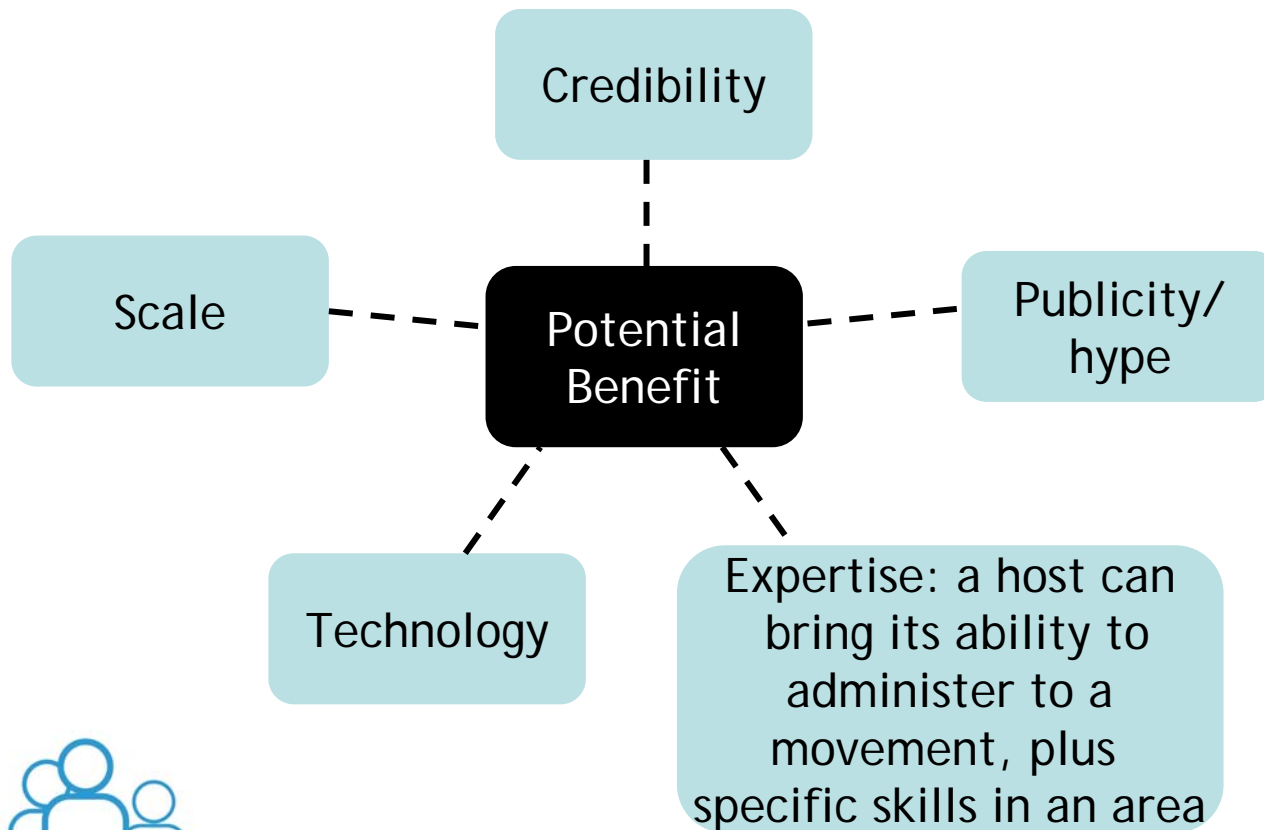
# What can hosts add?



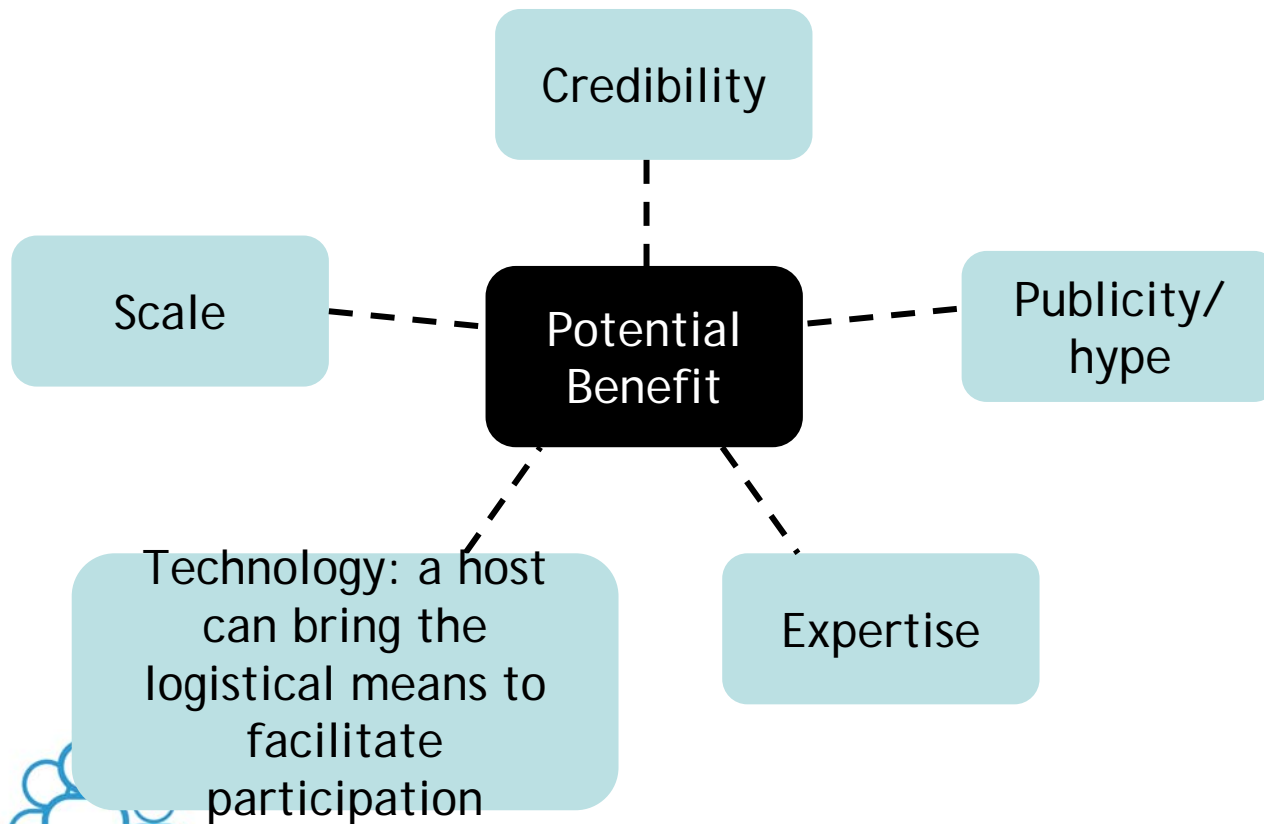
# What can hosts add?



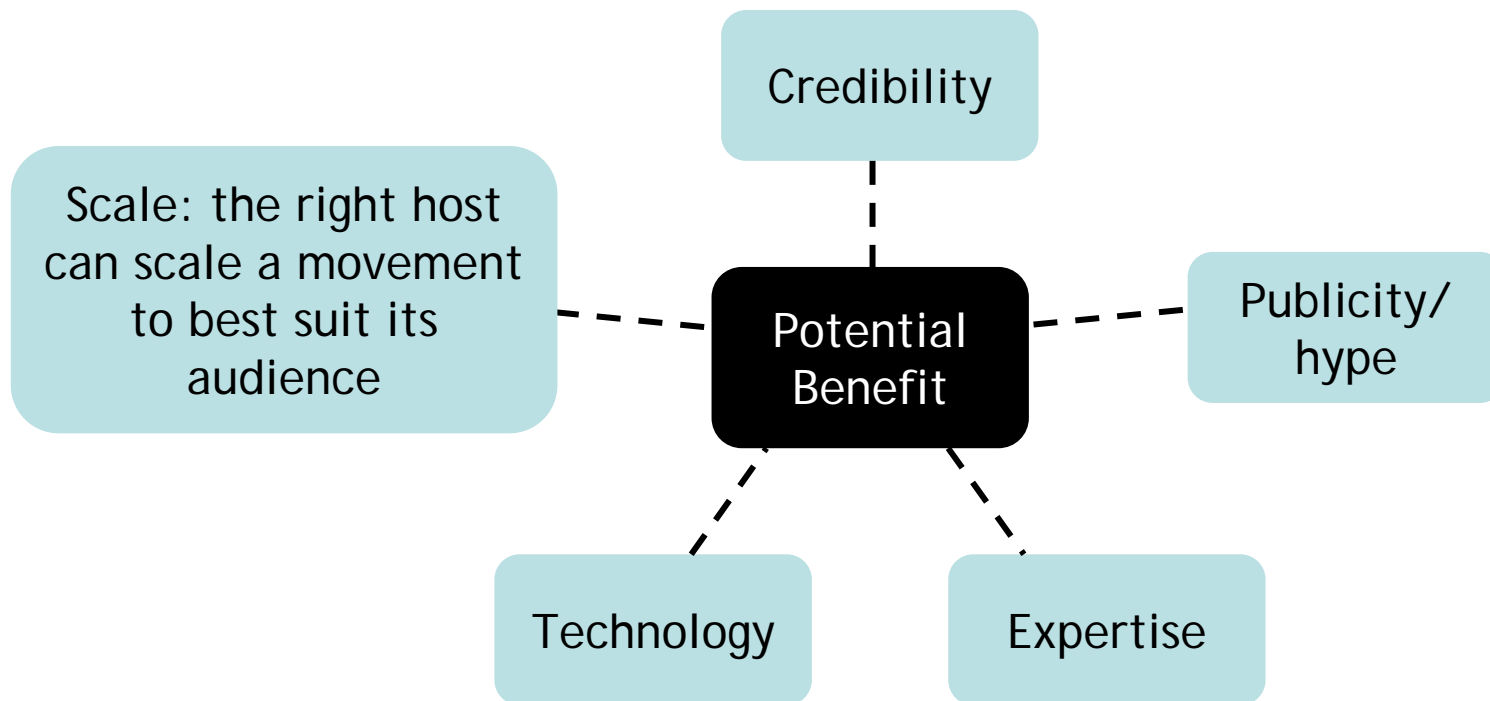
# What can hosts add?



# What can hosts add?



# What can hosts add?



## But hosts may not always be positive

- Trustworthiness was key to any host
- No respondent would submit time, information or money to anyone they weren't sure of
- Commerciality was a big problem for many hosts - respondents were quick to assume ulterior motivations
- Respondents were cynical about potential self interest and profiteering

An untrustworthy host can undermine a participation movement



# Perceptions of key hosts

BBC



+ve:

Familiar and  
trustworthy

Already seen to  
be active in  
participation eg  
Restoration

Breadth of  
interest and  
expertise

Both far reaching  
& local

-ve:

For some, only a  
broadcaster.. So  
beyond core  
competency

Suspicion of a  
kickback

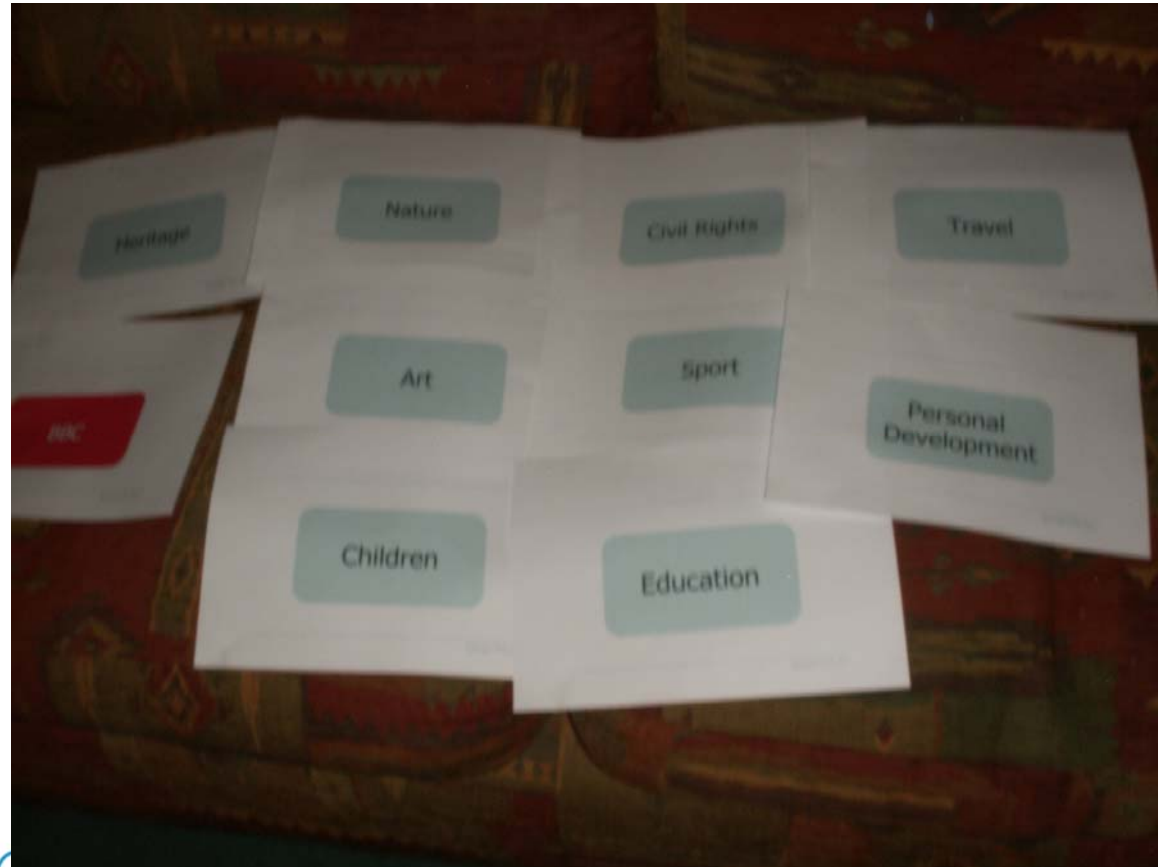
Old fashioned  
"woolly hatted"

BT

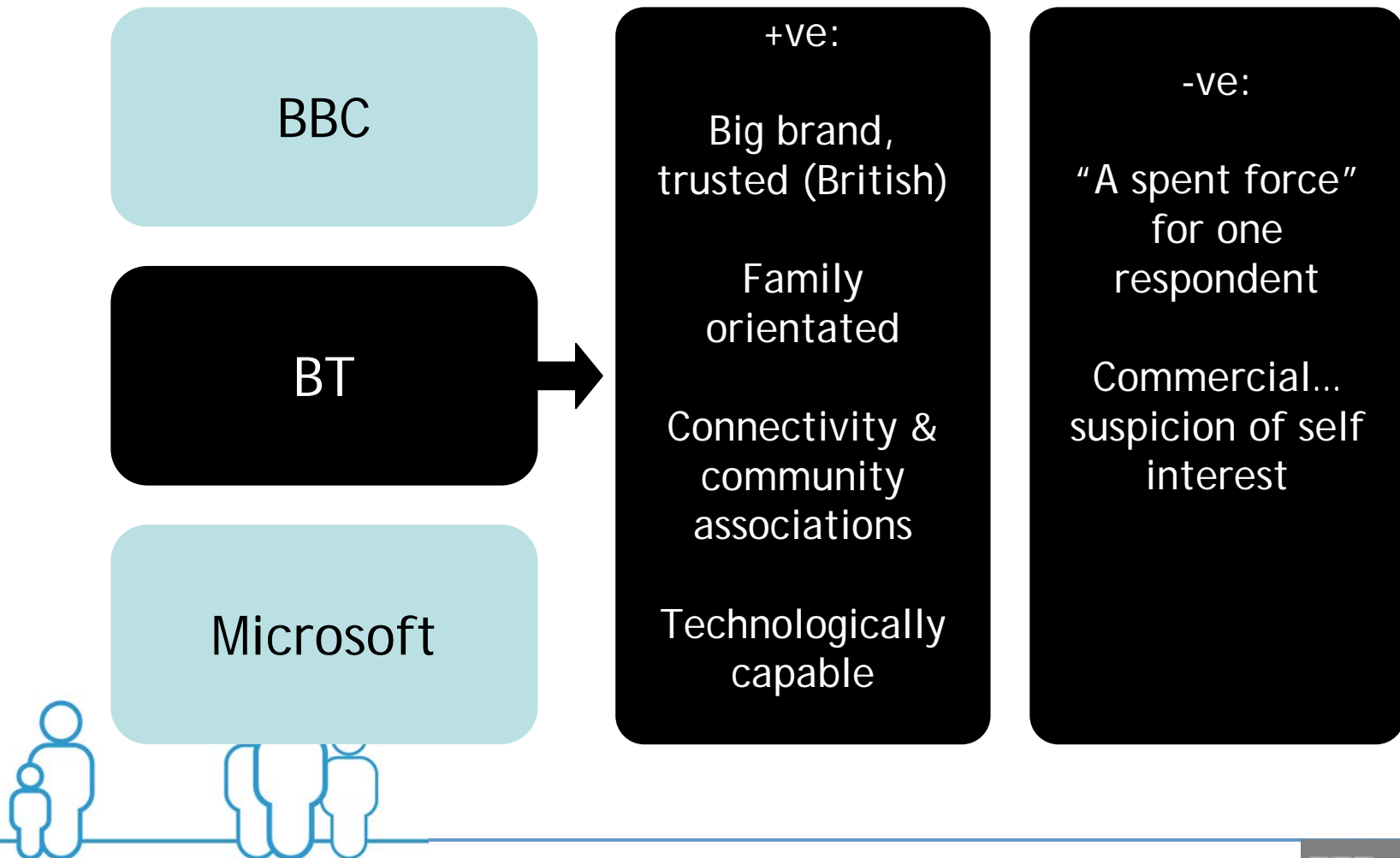
Microsoft



# Themes that fit well with the BBC



# Perceptions of key hosts



# Perceptions of key hosts

BBC

BT

Microsoft



+ve:

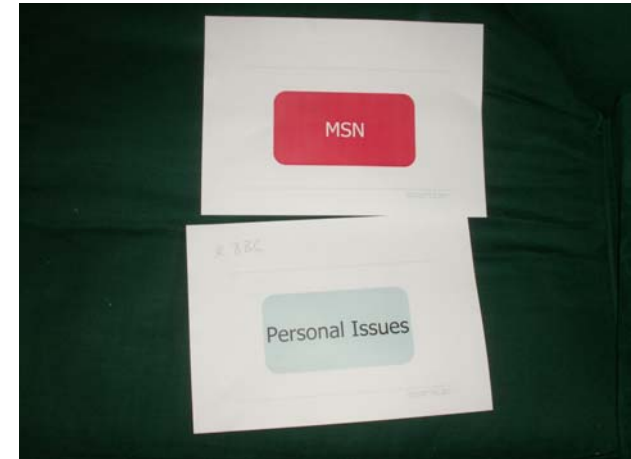
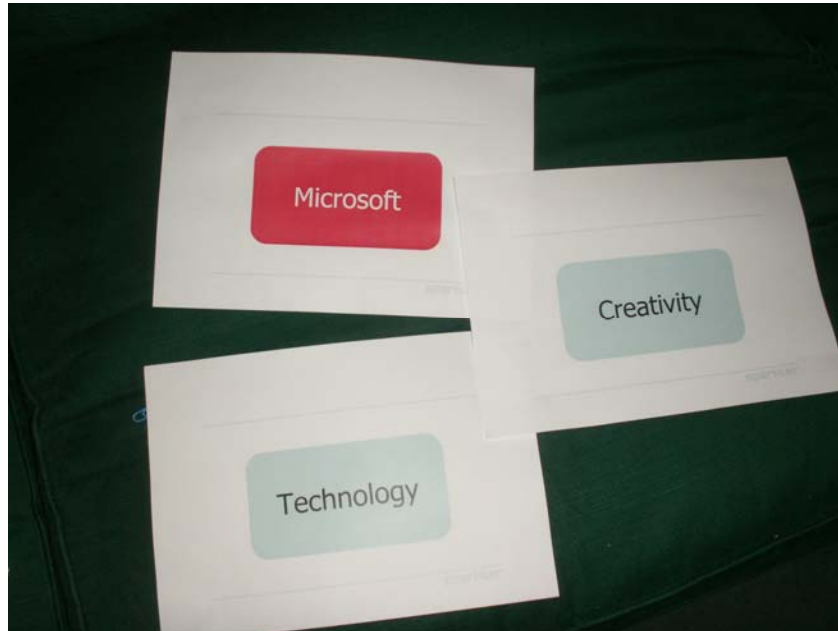
- Bigger than anyone... salient
- Technical expertise
- Associated with innovation
- Some acknowledgement of corporate altruism

-ve:

- Connotations of commerciality and monopoly
- Suspicion of self interest
- American & distant



# Themes that fit well with Microsoft



# Themes with personal or emotional saliency win through

*“Me, to get me motivated, it’s got to be doing me harm, affecting me or my kids”  
Mrs Green,  
Barrhead*

- Perhaps stating the obvious, but the themes that people are most likely to respond to are the ones closest to them
- So, for example... children (for parents), local issues (for all)
- Also issues that have an emotional charge... charities & good causes, but also fun & entertainment



## 'Hot' themes from the research

Children

Environment

Personal  
Issues

Family

Charity

Local  
issues

Sport

Friends

Fun

Career  
progression

Health



# A closer look at 'hot' topics within Environment

Most motivating

Energy saving

Litter

Recycling

Local green spaces

Local wildlife

Global warming

*"The rainforests are getting knocked down, ok it's not right, but you can't see it everyday. If you're walking down to the local park and there's rubbish all over it, you do see it everyday." Mrs Yellow, Oxfordshire*



# The BBC had the greatest thematic flexibility

- The BBC consistently came up as the host that could fit with the greatest number of themes
- Because of the sheer breadth of its output (TV, radio & online)
- Plus associations to charities like Children in Need
- It can bridge the frivolity-altruism divide



# What are the implications of this for the stakeholders?

- Different hosts have different palettes of themes to work with
- Based on the realities & perceptions of their brand
- Working within this palette is less of a stretch for consumers
- Working outside of it is harder for the brand & potentially raises question about the brand's intentions... issues of self interest/trust etc
- Therefore, where possible... stick to the palette



# Summary & Conclusions



# What could the future of participation look like?

- We are clearly in a technological transitional period
- With digital and analogue technologies co-existing
- What is difficult to predict is whether digital will ever supersede the old predominance of analogue...
- ...in the world of participation at least
- Participation's intrinsic link to physicality/tangibility raises the issue of how far this can ever be achieved
- Certainly there is a generation emerging who are finding fulfilment through virtual connection (myspace)
- We can imagine several scenarios of what the future might bring



# What could the future of participation look like?

## Participation Scenario: 1.0

Analogue dominates

Digital support medium only... connecting geographically distant micro communities

## Participation Scenario: 2.0

Hosts invent means for digital participation as rewarding/fulfilling as analogue

Host as editor

Digital supersedes analogue

## Participation Scenario: 2.1

Hosts have no lead role in participation

- Infrastructure only

Largely self generated & sustaining (UGC)

Using any available digital network, all P2P

## Participation Scenario: 2.2

Total digital adoption

Participators live in virtual 'second life'

Hosts live here too

Location based community nullified



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