



The Impact of Facebook on Local News in the UK

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Foreword: Lessons from Govanhill

Working together to build healthier information ecosystems

By Rhiannon Davies, Founder & Editor of [Greater Govanhill](#)

Before I launched Greater Govanhill community magazine in 2020, I spent about a year going out and listening to local people. I did this in community groups, cafes and bus shelters, but I also spent a lot of time in local Facebook groups. There were at least five general groups connected to the neighbourhood, plus many more focused on special interests – from heritage to bartering to language-specific communities.

I saw how different groups could create very different impressions of the same neighbourhood. Some were relentlessly positive, boosting pride and celebrating culture. Others leaned heavily negative, allowing unchecked racist comments and amplifying fear.

I saw how, when groups lack strong admin, misinformation spread quickly, fuelling othering and widening the gulf between those who shout the loudest and those whose voices go unheard. At an event held in Govanhill, many of the local Roma community were shocked to see how their neighbourhood was described online.

Govanhill, one of the most ethnically diverse but economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Scotland, has long been maligned. Much of social media and tabloid coverage paints it as unsafe to even visit. But when I moved here, I found a vibrant, warm and welcoming community. It's not without its challenges, but it's not deserving of its online reputation – much of which appears to be fuelled by racism, xenophobia and political motivations.

I created a solutions-focused magazine to provide a more balanced, nuanced alternative to what people read online. One of the first readers who got in touch was Arthur, a 90-year-old man who had grown up locally but since moved away. In a handwritten letter, he told me how glad he was to read positive stories about Govanhill again. For years, the only things he had seen on social media were negative. This and other early feedback showed the need for a platform rooted in local voices and pride of place.

From the outset, we tried to build on the work already being done by community activists and Facebook group admins. Marian, who runs Govanhill Go!, was one of the first people I sat down with in the local pub before even announcing the idea publicly. Building those relationships was vital – to ensure I wasn't stepping on toes and to get her insight into the neighbourhood. I'm still struck by how much local knowledge group admins hold. They're usually the first to hear the local news, and they often get in touch to share it with us.

Facebook can connect and inform – I still find plenty of useful local information there – but it can just as easily be divisive. Much depends on the people running the groups, who act like curators of content. But there's also a heavy burden put upon admins. As Marian recently told us in an interview: "People expect

fairness, balance, transparency – all the stuff you’d expect from an institution. But at the end of the day, I’m one person.”

For Greater Govanhill, Facebook was a key way to build an audience in our early days, and we still use groups to share stories and learn information – we find it works better to meet people where they are, rather than expect them to come to our page – particularly as the algorithms seems to push groups more.

But we are not solely a digital publication, and revenue from digital advertising only forms a small part of our income generation. That means we don’t need to sensationalise to drive clicks, and we aren’t so vulnerable to the whims of Big Tech when algorithms shift. I have seen other amazing publications badly affected by the deprioritisation of news on Facebook – a stark reminder of how fragile reliance on one platform can be.

That’s why a healthy information ecosystem matters. Facebook groups are valuable, but they should not be the only source of local news. When there is no local media serving an area, Facebook often tends to serve as the public square, but the nature of discourse in comment threads can also increase polarisation and foster division, particularly in un- or under-moderated groups.

We need locally owned media that is focused on serving a community’s information or connection needs and can bring journalistic standards of verification and fairness; media that embraces the complexity of our communities, rather than painting things in black and white.

Executive summary and key results

Traditional forms of local news, especially print journalism, have sharply declined in the UK, driven by economic pressures and the dominance of digital platforms like Google and Facebook, which now capture around 80% of digital advertising revenue. Severe newsroom cutbacks, closures, and consolidation have significantly weakened community-level journalism. Consequently, residents increasingly rely on social media, particularly Facebook groups, for access to local news. This change has eroded the traditional role of local newspapers as community glue, diminishing both shared community identity and reliable local information.

This decline has created “news deserts”, areas entirely lacking dedicated local journalism, leaving around 4.7 million people without regular local reporting. Independent hyperlocal websites and public or charitable initiatives, such as the BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service, have attempted to fill these gaps, but their reach and financial viability remain limited. Thus, large areas still depend heavily on social media for news, increasing vulnerability to exploitation by bad actors who may abuse the absence of professional journalism to spread misinformation and cause confusion, division, and democratic disengagement.

Facebook occupies a complex position in this local news crisis. Initially, the platform supported journalism through projects like the Community News Project and Facebook News tab, temporarily benefiting local newsrooms. However, these initiatives were modest, short-lived, and overshadowed by Facebook's larger impact: dominating digital ad revenue and algorithmically controlling news visibility, thereby undermining local publishers' financial stability. Critics argue Facebook has a parasitic relationship with local journalism, benefiting from content without adequately compensating content providers, highlighting calls for more equitable arrangements or regulatory intervention.

Against this backdrop, we examined the role of Facebook groups in the UK's local news ecosystem, focusing on marginal constituencies. We asked: To what extent are Facebook groups effectively replacing traditional local journalism? What type of content are these groups sharing, and is it genuinely local in nature? Furthermore, how do engagement levels and sentiments toward local news on Facebook compare with those towards national news?

Our findings are:

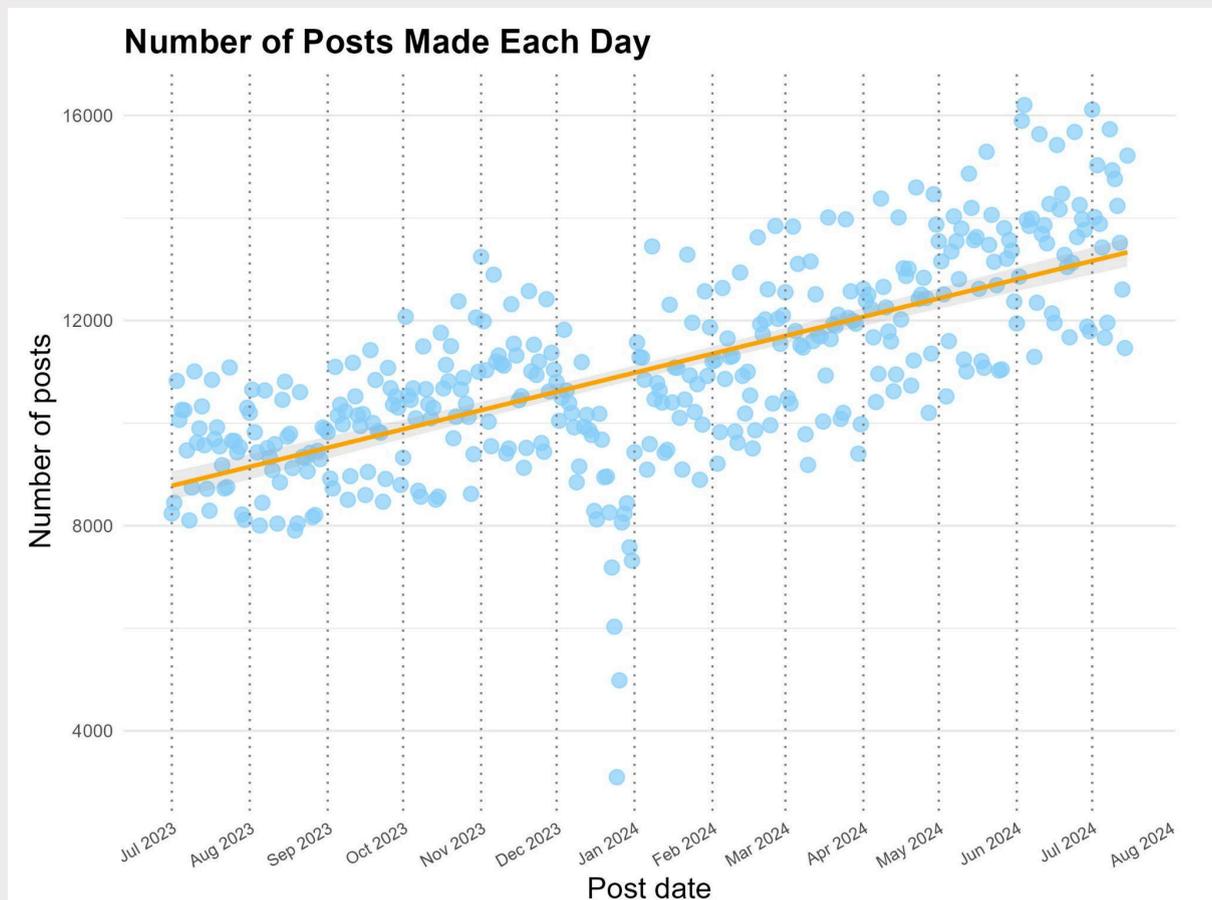
- **Facebook activity in local groups increased significantly**, rising by approximately one-third over the course of a year, highlighting growing engagement within online community spaces.

- **Local Facebook groups primarily support local interests**, effectively sharing community news, services, events, and charitable initiatives.
- **Local news is significantly more common than national news** in these Facebook groups, suggesting a strong preference for locally-relevant content.
- **Comments on local news are generally less negative** compared to comments on national news stories.
- **No evidence of disinformation was identified** within the local Facebook groups analysed, indicating a reliable community resource for local information.
- **Some districts (Bolsover, North East Derbyshire, South Derbyshire, Hyndburn, Broadland, and Crawley) face exceptionally low local news coverage on Facebook and news media**, indicating these areas are in the biggest need of attention.
- **Current measures of local news deserts may not accurately capture local news availability on social media**, suggesting the need for broader indicators that account for online community engagement.

Our study of Facebook posts

In our analysis, we examined Facebook groups based in 112 marginal constituencies identified by researchers (full list available in Appendix). The study encompassed 1,378 distinct Facebook groups, collectively generating 10.5 million posts. We focus on a year of posts, covering the period from July 2023 to July 2024.

Looking at the number of posts alone, we have identified the growing centrality of Facebook groups in people’s lives. Over the course of one year, there was a notable and steady increase in the daily number of posts across these local Facebook groups, rising by approximately one third, apart from a drop in activity during the Christmas holiday period.



What Was Being Shared and How Often?

Quantifying the types of content that posters share from other websites and Facebook groups, be it local news, national news, or other types of content, can shed light on the interests of the posters

and readers. To do this, we employed a large language model (LLM) to categorise the domains mentioned in the posts. Our analysis covered a total of 6,080 domains, each cited at least 50 times across these posts. Titles and descriptions for each domain were systematically downloaded and utilised to create a domain categorisation system. Additionally, Facebook groups functioning as community pages were also catalogued. The accuracy of this categorisation system was tested through a human assessment of 100 sampled domains, revealing that over 90% were categorised accurately or perfectly.

We further validated our “local news” category against an independent list of local news sources from the Public Interest News Foundation¹. Our categorisation showed an almost perfect match with the independent list, with only one discrepancy, while correctly excluding national domains and identifying additional local outlets not on the list, such as Wiltshire Live.

Local news dominates national news

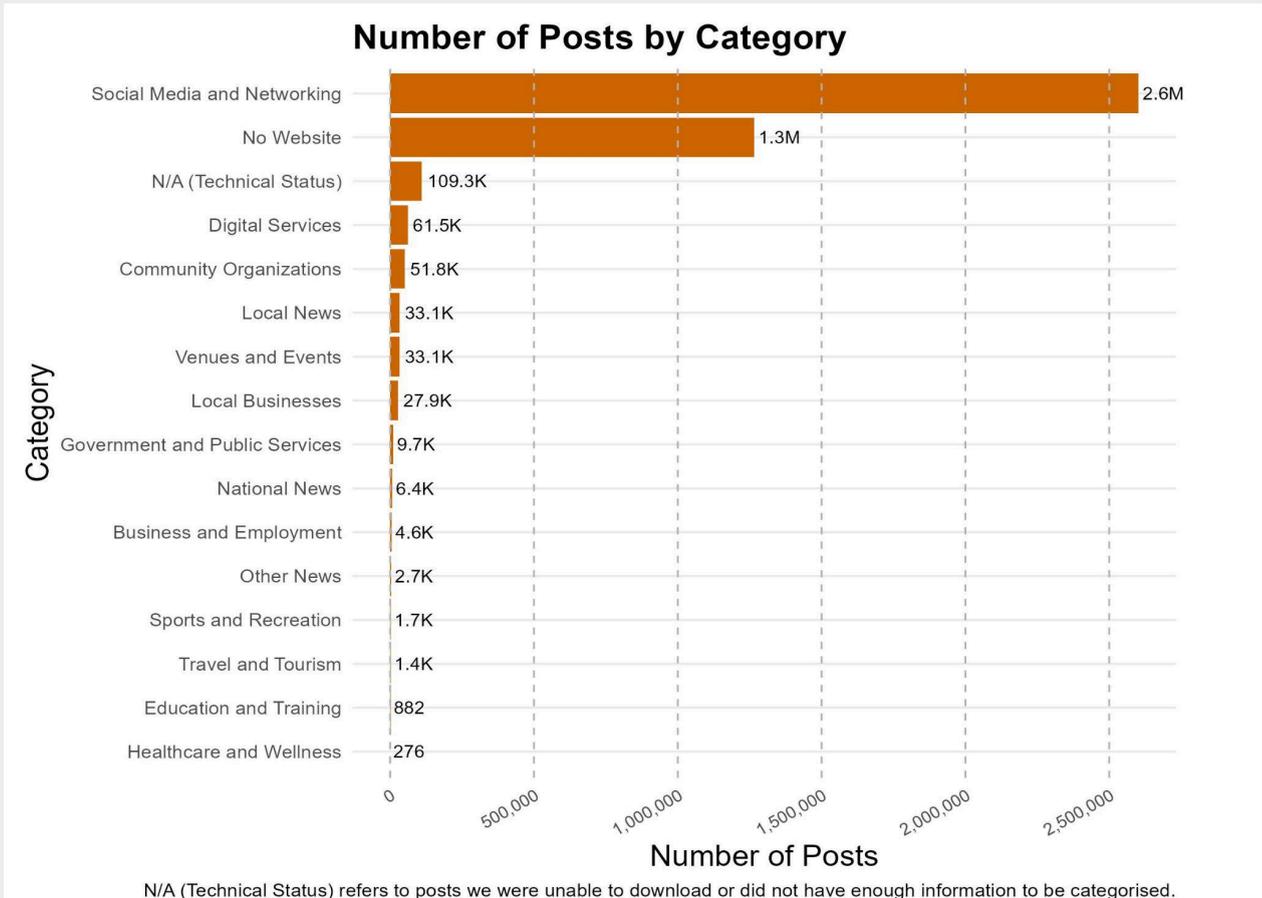
The majority of posts analysed either did not link to external domains or linked internally within Facebook. However, among those linking externally, local news posts (33K) significantly outnumbered national news posts (6.4K), by a factor of five. Despite this disparity, national news posts garnered slightly higher engagement metrics, including likes, shares, and comments per post. A deeper LLM-assisted review of 1,000 randomly selected national news articles indicated that approximately a further 40% also covered local issues.

Category	Number of Posts	Likes per Post	Shares per Post	Comments per Post
Local News	33088	4.3	1.02	3.03
National News	6443	5.3	1.17	4.17

Local groups are local

A comprehensive review of all URL categories revealed that Facebook groups, aside from serving general social media functions, primarily support local interests, including community organisations, local news, local services, events, and charitable initiatives.

¹ Public Interest News Foundation. “Local News Database April 2024.” *Google Docs*, 2024, docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WGcDIYan4tO0ADr7pG_jhTlySFczYYv9Pbea4Rtk94/edit?gid=924397209#gid=924397209



The majority of posts analysed were either linked internally within Facebook, or did not link to external domains. Most of these internal Facebook posts (approximately 82%) linked to images, which are challenging to analyse systematically. However, a visual inspection suggested they were predominantly advertisements for local events or businesses. Around 5% of internal links directed users to other Facebook groups, and 0.8% pointed to Facebook pages.

To specifically address the issue of disinformation, we cross-checked all referenced sources against the IFFY+ list of misinformation sites². Our analysis identified only one such site (rumble.com) with a relatively minor presence, accounting for just 55 posts. This low incidence likely reflects Facebook’s active moderation policies during the sample period and the moderation of the group administrators, although it is important to note that Facebook’s moderation policies were withdrawn in 2025.

² IFFY. “Ify Index of Unreliable Sources.”, 2020, <https://iffy.news/index/>

Local news has a positive outlook

Given the prominence of local news content, we explored whether local news elicited more positive sentiment than national news. Using the LLM, sentiment analysis was conducted on 5,000 comments, assigning scores ranging from -2 (very negative) to +2 (very positive). Local news comments had an average sentiment score of -0.195, whereas national news comments averaged -0.342. To ensure statistical reliability, a sample underwent human validation, confirming the accuracy of the LLM assessment.

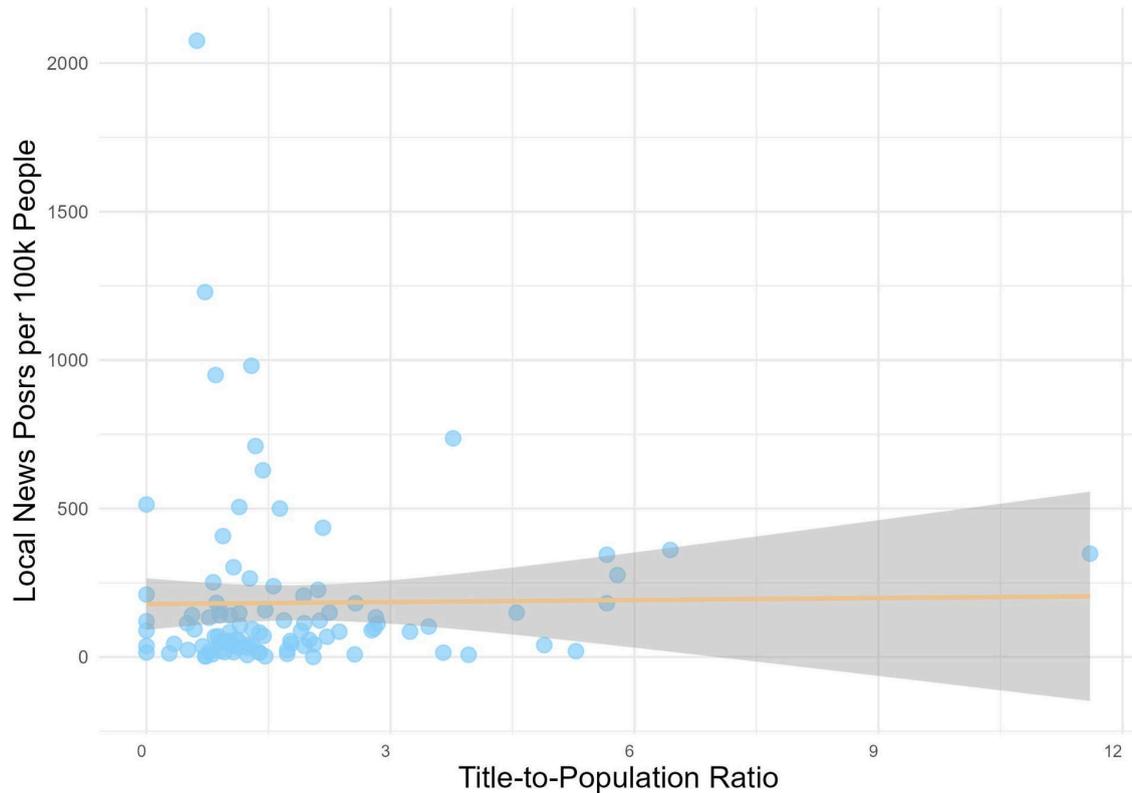
Local news may fill in the gaps of news deserts

Recent research by the Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) mapped local news provision across UK local authority districts, resulting in the creation of the Local News Database³. This includes a Title-to-Population ratio for each district and identifies 38 news deserts (areas with no dedicated local news outlet). We compared this with our data on local news engagement across 99 local authorities, examining the frequency of local news posts and the number of print newspaper titles. Interestingly, we found no statistical evidence of a relationship between our engagement metrics and either the Title-to-Population ratio or the news desert classifications in the PINF Local News Database.

³ Public Interest News Foundation. "Local News Database April 2024." *Google Docs*, 2024, docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WGcDIYan4tO0ADr7pG_jhTlySFczYYYv9Pbea4Rtk94/edit?gid=924397209#gid=924397209

Local News Posts vs Local News Titles

The wide spread of the predicted trend line (see grey area around the orange trend line) indicates no evidence of any relationship.



While we didn't find a relationship between sparsity of local news sources and lower levels of local Facebook posts, we did identify a few specific districts classified as PINF news deserts that also showed notably low local news coverage within Facebook groups (fewer than 250 posts per 100K people that were linked to local news). These districts were Bolsover, North East Derbyshire, South Derbyshire, Hyndburn, Broadland, and Crawley. It appears these areas are underserved by both traditional local news sources and local news content on Facebook. We note that, since we only covered 99 local authorities, this list may not be comprehensive.

Framing the Findings

Decline of Local News and the Rise of Social Media

As of 2019, Google and Facebook had captured roughly 80% of the £14 billion UK digital advertising market, leaving all other publishers to compete for the remainder⁴. Online platforms leverage vast user data to dominate advertising, a capability local publishers cannot match. This collapse of the traditional ad-funded model has led to newspaper closures, consolidation, and severe newsroom cutbacks. Years of corporate acquisitions and cost-cutting have drastically reduced staffing in local newsrooms, weakening their capacity to cover communities. As a result, many towns have seen long-established papers reduce coverage or shut down entirely⁵.

With legacy local media in retreat, social media platforms now serve as primary sources of local news and information in many communities. In particular, Facebook plays an outsized role as a *de facto* local news source - through its news feed, community pages, and groups - often replacing the function of the local paper. Studies of UK towns find residents now primarily turn to Facebook groups/pages for updates about their area⁶. Local newspapers are no longer the “community glue” they once were, and their diminished presence has weakened the collective sense of belonging and the flow of trustworthy local information. This shift toward social platforms for news has raised concerns about what is being lost in the process, from investigative oversight to social cohesion, but also about what new dynamics are surfacing.

Gaps in Coverage and Emerging Alternatives

The contraction of local journalism has left significant gaps in print news coverage at the community level. In extreme cases, entire areas have become “*news deserts*” - places with no dedicated local news outlet such as a newspaper or local news site. Research by the Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) identified 38 local authority districts in the UK with no dedicated local news provider. This amounts to roughly 4.7 million people (7% of the population) living in areas where no local newspaper or website is regularly reporting on local affairs. These news deserts range from rural districts to parts of cities (for example, Lewisham in London is among the most

⁴ Competition and Markets Authority. “New Regime Needed to Take on Tech Giants.” *GOV.UK*, 2020, www.gov.uk/government/news/new-regime-needed-to-take-on-tech-giants.

⁵ Lines, Chris. “UK Towns Have Become “News Deserts” as People Get Their News from Facebook rather than Local Papers.” *Phys.org*, 2022, phys.org/news/2022-06-uk-towns-news-people-facebook.html.

⁶ Charitable Journalism Project. “Local News Deserts in the UK.” *Charitable Journalism Project*, 2021, ciproject.org/research-projects/.

populous news deserts). Beyond these absolute deserts, many other communities are considered “drylands”, also having very limited coverage⁷. The absence of local reporting means local government, courts, schools, and community events often go unscrutinised and undocumented at the local level.

Who or what is filling these gaps? In some places, new initiatives are emerging - though these are not yet at the scale needed to fully replace what has been lost. Key developments include:

- *Independent hyperlocal news sites*: A growing number of small digital news outlets and community publishers have sprung up to serve local areas. PINF estimates there are around 300 - 400 independent news publishers now operating across the UK. Many are tiny operations (some run by a single reporter or volunteers) focusing on town or neighborhood-level coverage. These independents are beginning to rebuild coverage in underserved communities, and their audiences are growing. However, they face severe financial constraints - collectively they generate only around £19 million to 25 million in annual revenue⁸. This is a fraction of legacy publishers’ revenues, indicating that while independents are helping, the scale of journalism they can support remains limited.
- *Public and charitable initiatives*: The gap in local reporting has prompted interventions from larger institutions. For example, the BBC’s Local Democracy Reporting Service now funds reporters to cover local council meetings and public services, syndicating these stories to local outlets. Similarly, charitable efforts (like those by PINF and other nonprofits) are aimed at supporting “public interest” journalism at the local level. These initiatives have provided some relief by ensuring important civic stories get covered even in areas where commercial media have withdrawn. Still, such measures cover only parts of the UK and are not a comprehensive solution.

Despite these budding alternatives, large swathes of the country remain under-served by local news. PINF’s analysis notes that the overall number of news deserts in 2024 remains about the same as a year prior - new launches have offset some closures, but the fundamental geographic gaps persist. In many communities, Facebook groups or word-of-mouth networks have effectively become the default source for local updates, simply because no professional news outlet is consistently on the ground. The emergence of independent local media is encouraging, but the void left by traditional local newspapers is still far from filled.

⁷ Public Interest News Foundation . “UK Local News Mapping .” *PINF*, 2024, www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/local-news-map-report-2024.

⁸ Public Interest News Foundation. “Index of Independent News Publishing in the UK” . *PINF*, 2024, https://www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/files/uqdcde0e9_2e89deefda354ccd868ab2c0b45b1b04.pdf

Misinformation and Exploitation of News Deserts

One of the most troubling consequences of local news decline is the vulnerability of communities to misinformation and bad actors. When professional journalism recedes, an *information vacuum* is created and less reliable sources rush to fill it. Studies have found that when communities lose dedicated local coverage, residents often rely on social media for news, leaving them exposed to rumours, misinformation, and even disinformation campaigns⁹. In the UK's nascent news deserts, Facebook community pages and neighbourhood groups now serve as primary information hubs, but these forums typically lack the editorial oversight and fact-checking that news outlets provide. Local Facebook groups have indeed become hotbeds of unverified claims. For example, a recent study noted that community advisors in one town spend considerable time “fighting off Facebook rumours”, as residents frequently encounter and believe unfounded claims seen on local social media¹⁰. In the absence of a trusted local reporter, anyone can post “news” on these platforms and, if it goes viral in the community, it may become the de facto truth.

Beyond spreading everyday rumours, these gaps open the door for malicious actors to exploit communities. Misinformation peddlers, extremist groups, or fraudsters can target areas with no independent local media, knowing there are fewer watchdogs to challenge false narratives. Locals in some news-poor towns perceive social media as sowing division and conflict, as contentious posts and false stories circulate unchecked. The decline of a neutral, verifiable news source - the role local papers used to play - means there is less “community glue” holding people together around a shared set of facts. Focus group research in affected UK communities found that many residents see local discourse splintering: issues go unreported or are filtered through partisan chatter, leading to confusion about what to believe¹¹. Crucial local matters (from council decisions to public health updates) may be drowned out by the louder voices on Facebook or WhatsApp, some of whom spread misleading information either unintentionally or for their own agendas. This environment of fragmented information can breed cynicism and democratic disengagement, respondents in news-scarce areas often feeling apathetic and uninformed about local governance.

Overall, the lack of robust local journalism is not just a media industry problem, but a community risk. It means there is no trusted referee to verify facts, call out falsehoods, or provide nuanced context on local controversies. Bad information can thrive in the dark, leading to increased

⁹ Ardia, David, et al. “Addressing the Decline of Local News, Rise of Platforms, and Spread of Mis- and Disinformation Online | the Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life (CITAP).” *Unc.edu*, 2020, citap.unc.edu/news/local-news-platforms-mis-disinformation/.

¹⁰ Hazard Owen, Laura . “New Study Finds That U.K. Residents Are Turning to Facebook for Local News.” *International Journalists’ Network*, 2022, ijn.net.org/en/story/new-study-finds-uk-residents-are-turning-facebook-local-news

¹¹ Barclay, Steven. ““News Deserts” in the UK” *CAMRI*, 2023, camri.ac.uk/blog/articles/news-deserts-in-the-uk/.

polarisation and distrust. This highlights the public interest importance of addressing news deserts, not only to inform citizens, but to safeguard the quality of public discourse and community cohesion at the local level.

Facebook's Role in the Local News Ecosystem: Supporter or Exploiter?

Facebook plays a complicated, central role in the new local news ecosystem, often described as a double-edged sword for publishers. On the one hand, Facebook (and its parent company Meta) provides a vast distribution channel that local news outlets can use to reach audiences. Many people discover local news stories via Facebook sharing, and publishers benefit from the referral traffic. Facebook has also made high-profile efforts to support journalism in recent years. For instance, in the UK, it launched a dedicated *Facebook News* tab in 2021, which involved paying major news publishers for content usage. Around the same time, Facebook invested in a Community News Project that funded placements for local reporters in underserved areas - over 100 journalists were hired and stationed in communities that had lost local newspapers. These initiatives acknowledged Facebook's influence in the news landscape and provided a financial lifeline (albeit temporary) to some newsrooms. For a few years, Facebook's funding boosted local reporting capacity and gave publishers a new stream of income for their content. Such moves were welcomed as steps in the right direction, showing that platforms can contribute to the news ecosystem they impact.

On the other hand, critics argue that Facebook's contributions are relatively minor when compared to the damage done by the shift of advertising revenue. Facebook's UK initiatives were relatively modest and short-lived: by late 2023, Meta announced it would shut down the Facebook News tab in the UK (along with France and Germany) and cease payments to publishers, as well as end the Community News Project funding when contracts expire. In other words, the voluntary support is being withdrawn. Meanwhile, the underlying disparity, where Facebook captures audience attention and ad dollars that once went to news outlets, remains an ongoing issue. In 2022–23, publishers saw just how vulnerable they were to Facebook's decisions: the UK's largest regional newspaper group, Reach plc, blamed a 14.5% drop in digital revenue in part on Facebook's algorithm changes that reduced news visibility, cutting into article page-views. This highlights the power imbalance: Facebook's platform can dictate how much exposure local journalism gets, yet news organisations have little control or compensation in that exchange.

The central question is whether Facebook is ultimately helping sustain local journalism or exploiting it. Many in the industry feel that while Facebook derives value from news content (which keeps users engaged on the platform), it returns very little value to the content creators. Media analysts note that the tens of billions in advertising that shifted to Facebook and Google far exceed the millions those companies have offered in news grants. The term “platform dependency” is often used - local outlets depend on Facebook for audience reach, but this dependency can be

risky and costly. Even Facebook’s own representatives have suggested that publishers mostly benefit from the traffic Facebook provides rather than any direct payments, underscoring a view that news is just another form of user content to be monetised on the platform. Going forward, the trend appears to be that Facebook is pulling back on news partnerships (partly due to regulatory pressures and strategic shifts), which could leave local publishers worse off than before those programs existed. In sum, Facebook’s relationship with local news can seem symbiotic on the surface - it drives readers to local stories - but parasitic underneath, as it captures advertising revenue and data from those very interactions. The net impact, it is argued, has been to undermine the financial foundation of local news, even as the platform professed to help, raising calls for a more equitable arrangement or policy intervention.^{12,13}

¹² Maher, Bron. “Meta to Wind down Facebook News Tab and Stop Funding Community News Project.” *Press Gazette*, 2023, pressgazette.co.uk/platforms/meta-to-end-facebook-news-tab-stop-funding-community-news-project/.

¹³ Coster, Helen. “Insight: Google, Facebook Pledged Millions for Local News. Was It Enough?” *Reuters*, 2021, www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/google-facebook-pledged-millions-local-news-was-it-enough-2021-06-10/.

Recommendations

The findings of this report underscore the vital and growing role that Facebook groups play in local information ecosystems, especially in areas where traditional journalism has receded. While these online spaces can help fill gaps left by declining local media, they also present risks if left unmanaged or unsupported. Below, we outline some steps that should be taken to strengthen the quality, resilience, and accountability of local information systems:

In the longer term, the most important task is to challenge the assumption that Facebook should or will remain systemically important for local news provision, and to prepare for, and build towards, a more plural ecosystem to meet public information needs.

- 1. Break the monopoly — build plural provision of online spaces for local groups, accountable to local groups.** Relying on one of the world's largest corporations, headquartered 5,000 miles from the UK, whose goal is to maximise shareholder value, to fill critical information gaps in local information ecosystems from Accrington to Zennor is an extremely risky approach to local news provision. Even before concerns about the lack of moderation or accountability, we have seen that Meta has switched off all news content from the Facebook experience in entire countries¹⁴. Experiments in creating digital public infrastructure that is accountable to local people — such as via local or public ownership — and that genuinely seeks to serve the information needs of communities are possible: platforms like Mastodon offer the opportunity for locally run social platforms. Organisations like New_Public in the USA are researching and experimenting with new models.

The above goal is ambitious and will take time. There are also steps that can be taken to improve things in the short and medium term:

- 2. Proactive monitoring and moderation of Facebook groups to prevent misuse:** While no significant evidence of disinformation was found in our sample, this may reflect past moderation efforts by Facebook, which have since been withdrawn. There is a real risk that local Facebook groups could be exploited by malicious actors in the future - particularly in areas already underserved by trusted news sources. Local authorities, civil society organisations, and platform providers should collaborate to develop transparent

¹⁴ E.g. Re Canada, see Stevis-Gridneff, Matina & Thompson, Stuart A.. "News is blocked on Meta's feeds in Canada. Here's what fills the void." *New York Times*, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/21/technology/canada-election-facebook-instagram-meta.html>, or Harb, Ali. "Stupid and dangerous: Meta's news ban fuels anger amid Canada wildfires." *Al-Jazeera*, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/29/stupid-and-dangerous-metas-news-ban-fuels-anger-amid-canada-wildfires>.

monitoring systems that flag harmful content while protecting open discussion. Stronger relationships could also be made between voluntary group admins and local newsrooms, when they share goals of quality fact-based information and community cohesion. None of this takes away from the importance of Facebook itself rebuilding its moderation efforts.

- 3. Encourage a greater presence of trusted local actors within Facebook groups:** To ensure the integrity and usefulness of local information online, local news outlets, councillors, community leaders, and public service providers should be encouraged to participate more actively in local Facebook groups. Their regular presence can help act as “eyes and ears”, correcting misinformation, amplifying key updates, and reconnecting residents with democratic institutions. Councils and local partnerships may consider official engagement policies for online community spaces, similar to how they attend town hall meetings or run local newsletters. Policies should recognise the importance of a plural information ecosystem and ensure there is no over-reliance on a single online intermediary.
- 4. Expand support for independent and hyperlocal journalism:** Independent local outlets and public interest journalism initiatives are essential to rebuilding robust local news ecosystems. However, they remain underfunded and vulnerable. PINF’s Local News Commission made recommendations that should be carried forward, including fairer access to public (or statutory) notices (e.g. those adverts placed by local government to inform about road closures), a fair deal between big tech and local news providers, and a Local News Stimulation Fund of at least £150m over the next ten years to regenerate local news.¹⁵ Grants, loans and social investment should all be considered, along with measures to boost local support, such as local ownership and membership models. Support should ensure that professional reporting reaches all areas, including those identified as local news deserts or “drylands”. This support should extend to digital-first outlets.
- 5. Develop new indicators for monitoring local news availability:** Current measures of “news deserts” focus primarily on professional provision via print, website and radio and may overlook the role of social media in distributing local news. Policymakers and researchers should adopt more holistic indicators that capture community-level engagement with local information online, including through platforms like Facebook. The platforms should collaborate to ensure this information is not hidden or impossible for researchers to access. This will allow for more accurate mapping of information gaps and more targeted interventions. For example, a diary-style survey of citizens, especially those in areas identified as deserts, could provide a citizen-centric, rather than provider-centric, view of local news.

¹⁵ Public Interest News Foundation . “Regenerating Local News in the UK: The Report of the Local News Commission.” *Public Interest News Foundation*, 2025, www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/local-news-commission.

- 6. Explore policy options to support local journalism through social media regulation:** The UK Government should investigate policy mechanisms to compel or incentivise social media platforms to support local journalism. Options include a levy on platform revenues, direct funding agreements between platforms and news publishers, tax incentives for local media investment, algorithmic transparency for users and group admins, and algorithmic priority rules to boost local news visibility on the platform (journalism support organisations should be prepared to provide platforms with lists of regulated, trustworthy local news sources). A combined approach may offer the most effective and balanced solution.

Taken together, these steps can help strengthen local information environments, reduce vulnerability to misinformation, and rebuild the civic infrastructure that underpins community identity and democratic engagement.

About

Campaign Lab conducted this research with input from the Public Interest News Foundation (PINF), which provided access to its database of local news providers across the UK and reviewed Campaign Lab's preliminary findings and recommendations.

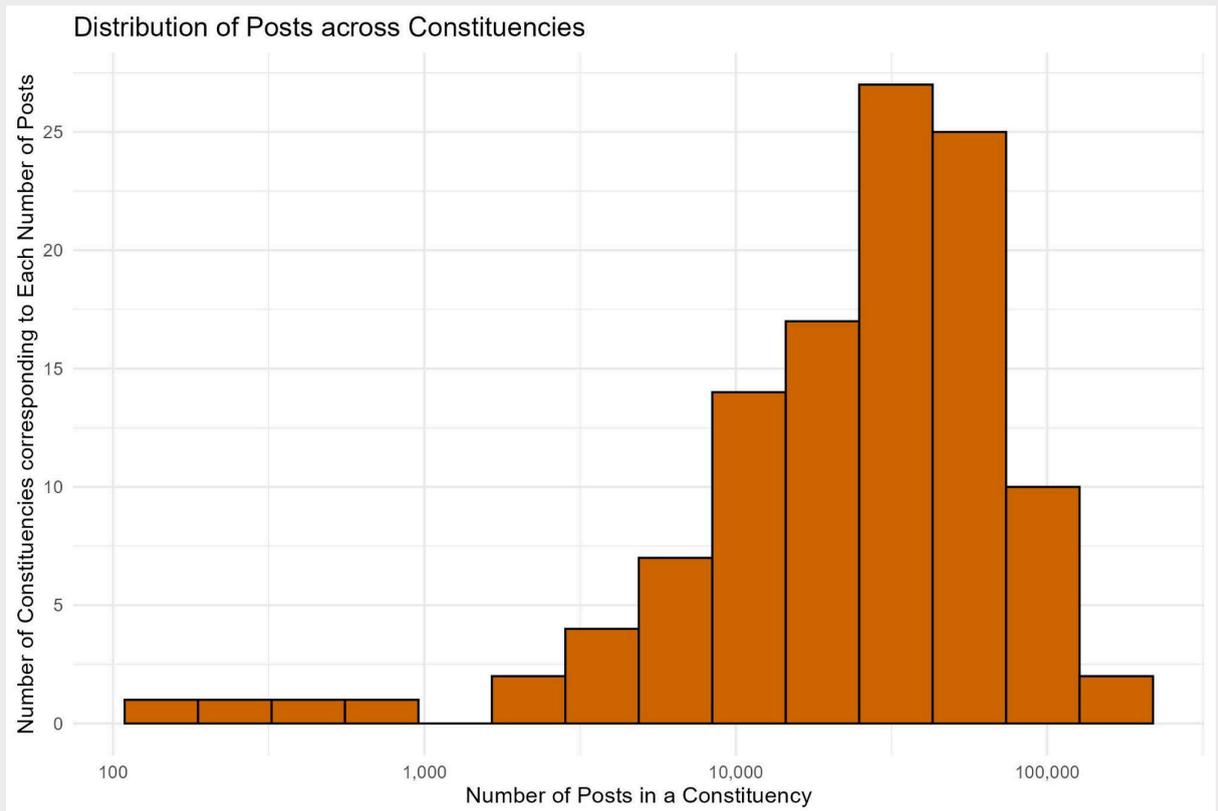
Campaign Lab is a progressive community of politically-minded progressive data scientists, researchers and campaigners who are working together to develop innovative campaign tools and improve the way the public analyses and understands campaigning. <https://campaignlab.uk/>

The **Public Interest News Foundation** is the UK's first charity to support public interest news – ethical and impartial journalism that informs and empowers the public about the things that matter to all of us. <https://publicinterestnews.org.uk>

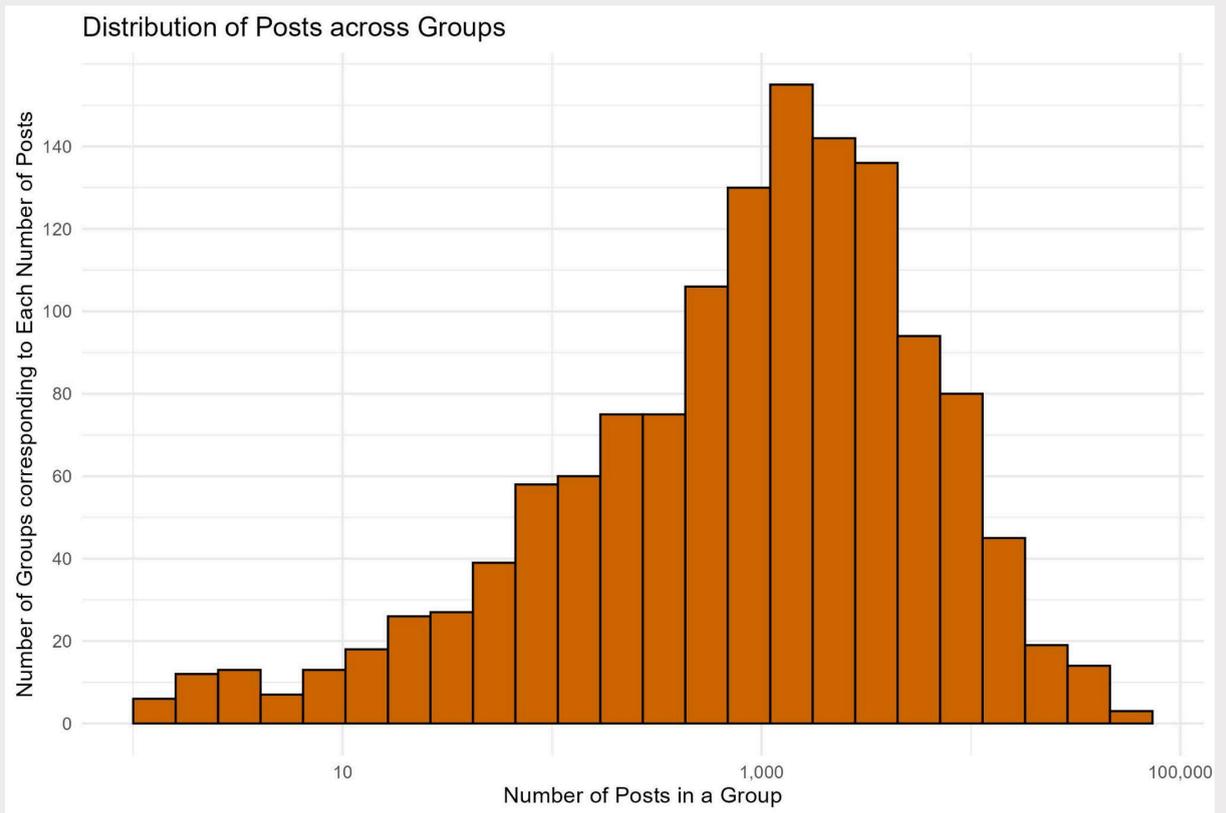
Appendix - other figures

Sample

- We analysed the period from July 2023 until July 2024
- The analysis focused on posts on Facebook from groups identified in 112 marginal constituencies in the 2024 election



There were 1,378 groups with an average of 7K posts per group.



There are 10,593,531 posts in total, and 6,799,045 posts with text.

Categorisation schema

All domains were classified using the following scheme:

News and Media

- Local News
- Local TV and Radio
- National News
- Online-only News
- Niche News

Social Media and Networking

- Social Networking Platforms
- Professional Networking

Government and Public Services

- Local Government
- National Services

Healthcare and Wellness

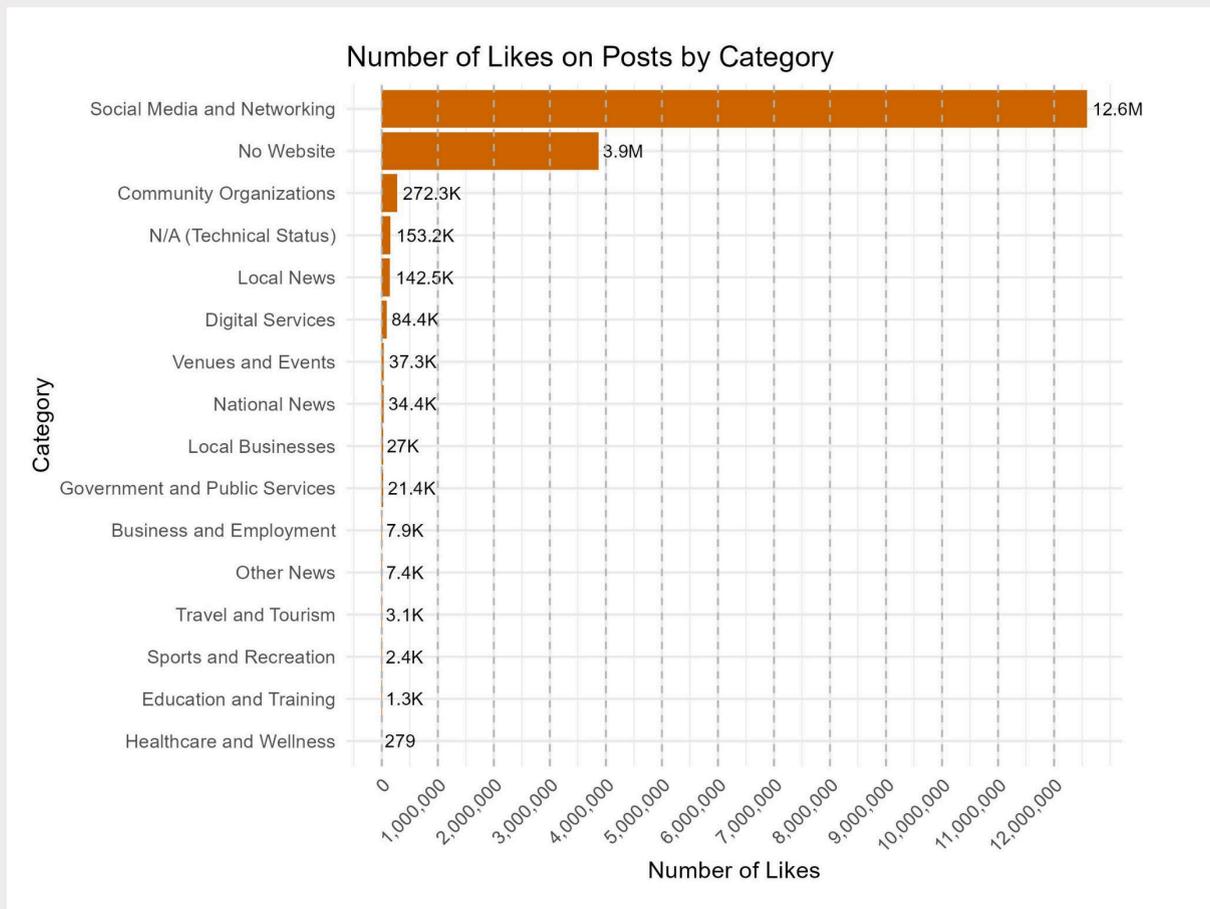
- Medical Information
- Fitness and Wellness

Education and Training

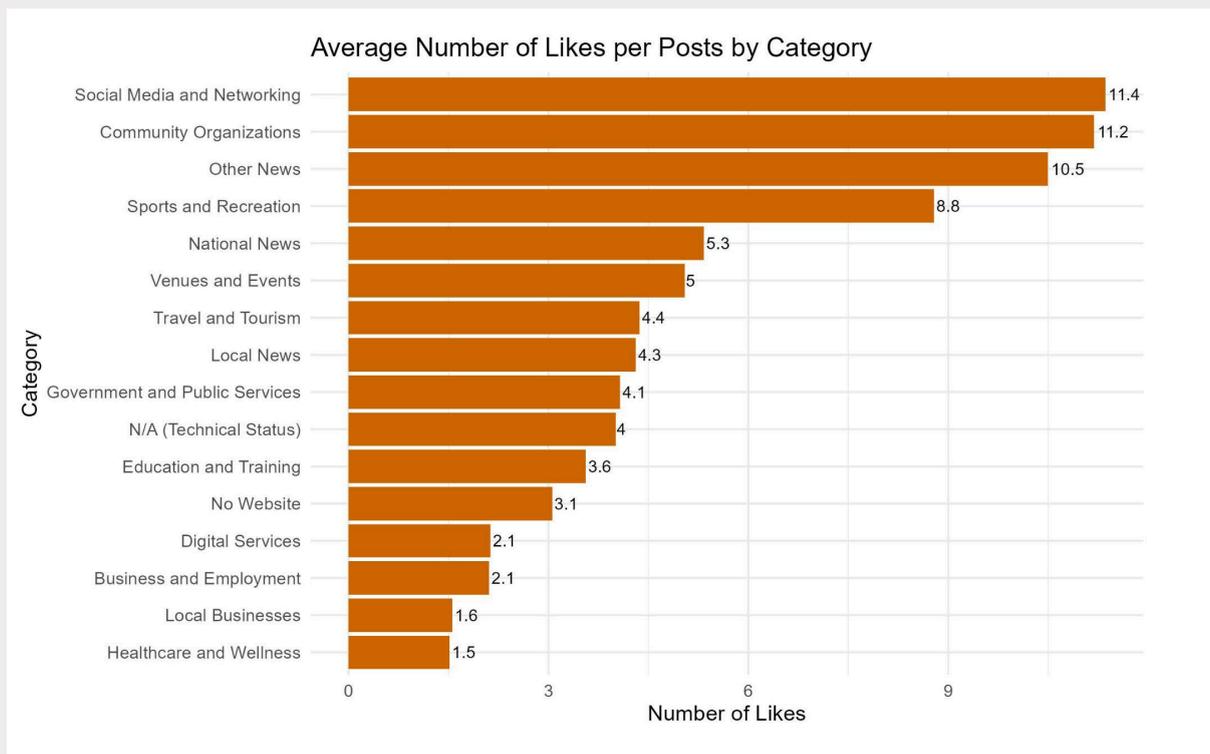
- Schools and Universities

	Skills and Tutoring
Venues and Events	Entertainment Venues
	Sports Venues
	Event Ticketing
	Event Information
Sports and Recreation	Sports Information
	Community Sports
	Commercial Sports
Business and Employment	Job Boards
	Business Services
	Business Networks
Digital Services	Online Platforms
	E-commerce
Local Businesses	Physical Retail
	Local Services
Community Organizations	Local Groups
	Charities
	Cultural Organizations
Travel and Tourism	Local Tourism
	Travel Services
Technical Status	Inaccessible
	Insufficient Information

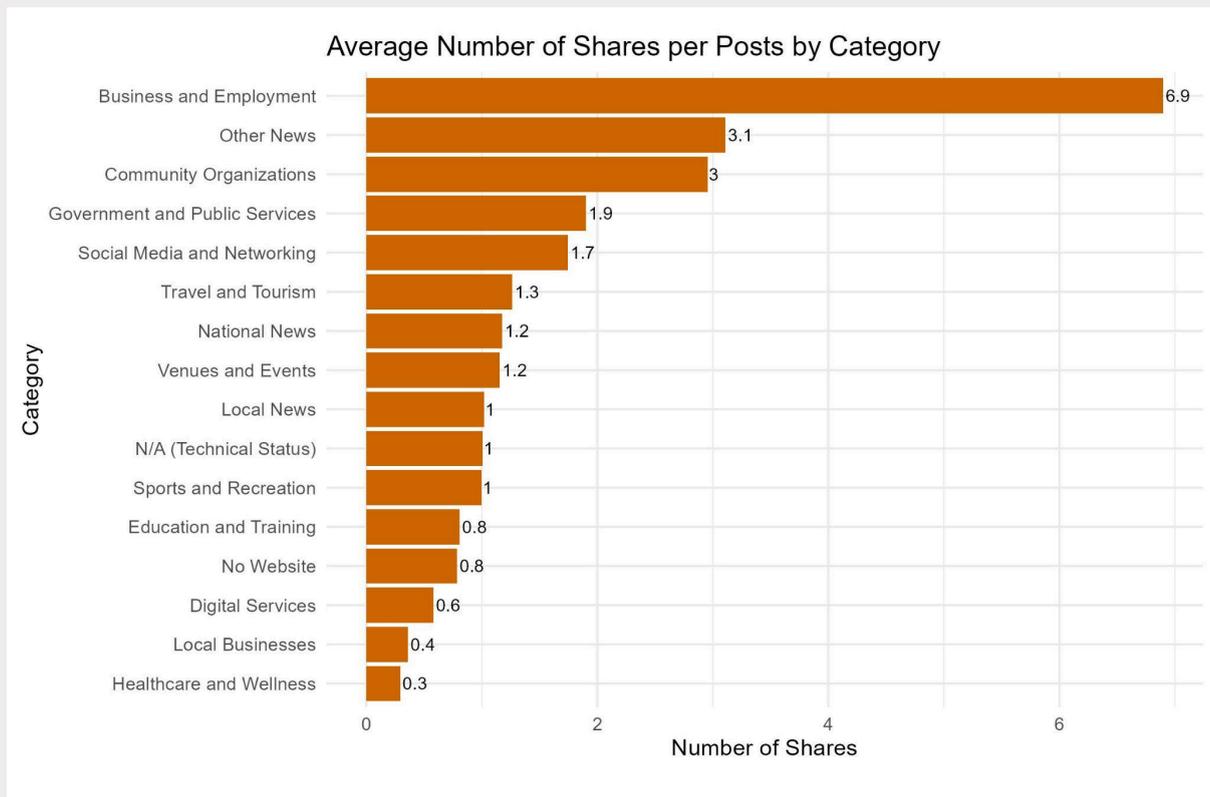
Graph: the number of likes for posts in each category



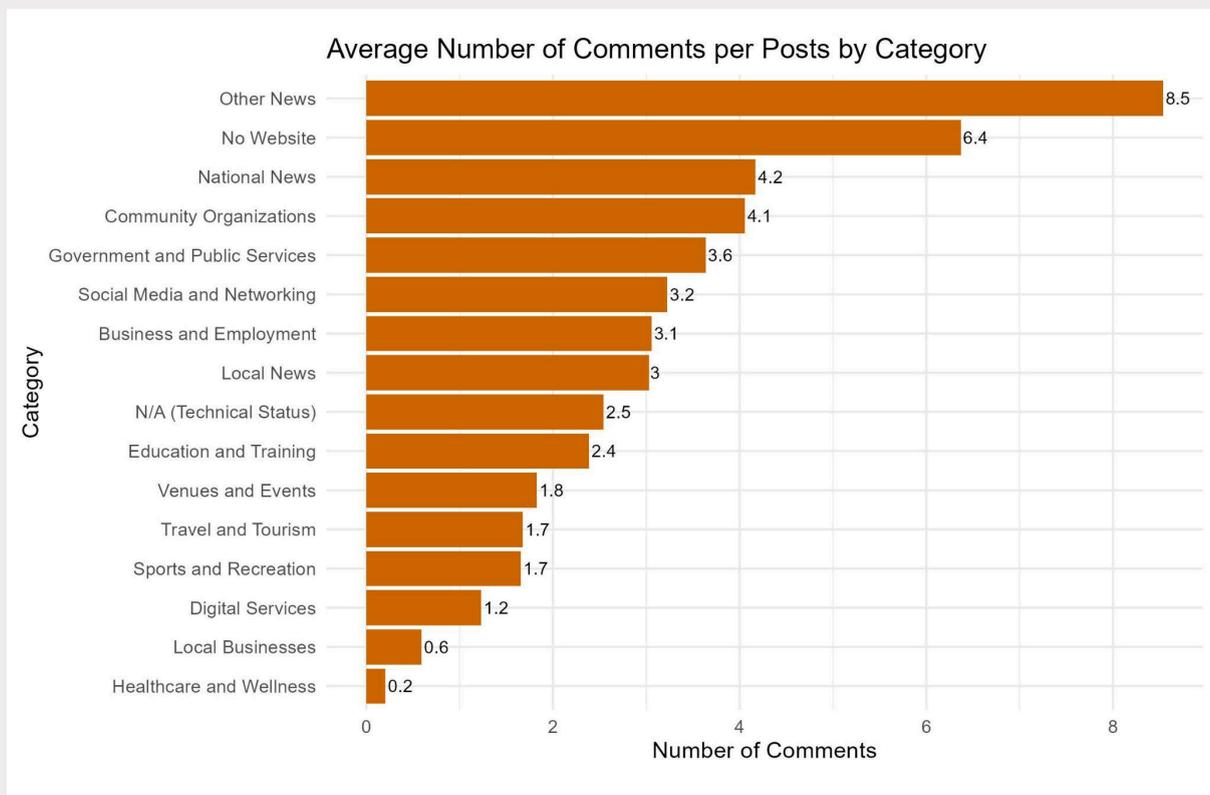
Graph: average number of likes per posts by category



Graph: the number of shares per post



Graph: the number of comments per post



List of constituencies

Earley and Woodley, Loughborough, Stroud, Sheffield, Hexham, Scunthorpe, Ceredigion Preseli, Plymouth Moor View, Harrow East, Vale of Glamorgan, Carlisle, Dover and Deal, Bury North, North East Derbyshire, Colchester, Erewash, Airdrie and Shotts, Finchley and Golders Green, NewcastleUnderLyme, Mid Bedfordshire, Warrington South, Bassetlaw, Milton Keynes North, Blackpool North & Fleetwood, Colne Valley, Bolton NE, Swindon, Camborne Redruth, Monmouthshire, Edinburgh East & Musselburgh, Broxtowe, Shrewsbury, South Ribble, Gedling, Washington and Sunderland West, Stoke organic, Glasgow East, Hyndburn, Leeds North West, Local Southampton, Lincoln, Heywood & Middleton, Northfield, Rochester & Strood, Gloucester, Bournemouth, Croydon, Ossett and Denby Dale, Halesowen, Sidra Chingford & Woodford Green, Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes, Rutherglen & Hamilton West, Rother Valley, Hendon, Crawley, Filton and Bradley Stoke, Clwyd East, Alyn & Deeside, Edinburgh North and Leith, Keighley, Bolsover, Thurrock, Eltham and Chislehurst, Aldershot and Farnborough, South Derbyshire, Welwyn Hatfield, Harlow, Southport, Worcester, Aldershot, Hull West and Haltemprice, Barrow and Furness, York Outer, West Brom, Chelsea & Fulham, Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, Wolverhampton South, Banbury, Cities of London and Westminster, Worthing West, Basingstoke, Kensington and Bayswater, Wolverhampton North East, Truro and Falmouth, Norwich North, Bishop Auckland, Brighton, Ipswich, Waveney, Calderdale, East Lothian, Wycombe Community, Mid and South Pembrokeshire, Gravesham, Blackpool, Doncaster Central, Milton Keynes Central, Leeds West and Pudsey, North West Leics, Mansfield, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West, Stockton North, Scarborough and Whitby, Rainham and Gillingham, Darwen Rossendale, Brighton Pavilion, Paisley and Renfrewshire North, Peterborough, Glasgow North, Leeds SW and Morley, Sedgefield, Glasgow South West

Sample posts

Local news

LLANBLOGGER.BLOGSPOT.COM

A483 traffic to be diverted through Llangollen next week

Next week stretches of the trunk road are to be closed in both directions for two nights, and in...

 15

20 comments 13 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/220715008050894/posts/6547765478679117>

Do you think they should resign?



THEARGUS.CO.UK

Councillors subject of formal complaints over allegations over residence

A councillor who has faced claims that she does not live in the city is now subject to a formal s...

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/313872252071826/posts/6883366635122322>

BUCKSFREEPRESS.CO.UK

New cinema set to open in Bucks town THIS week

A new 'high quality' cinema chain will arrive in Buckinghamshire this week following an £22.5 ...

13

7 comments 3 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2220980057/posts/10168418510580058>

BANBURYGUARDIAN.CO.UK

Banbury MP voices concerns over a blanket 20mph speed limit across Banbury town

2

8 comments

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/861339880664336/posts/2956036587861311>

Yorkshire post article regarding the search for investors /operators



TWITTER.COM

The Yorkshire Post on Twitter

"Doncaster Council have begun searching for an operator to re-open and run Doncaster Sheffield Airport on a lease <https://t.co/llrvoQ8f9w>"

71

22 comments 6 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/6215776988448627/posts/7338646416161673>

National news categories

Around 40% of national news articles were classified as local when we downloaded their titles and summaries.

To look at what kinds of topics were posted from national news articles, we asked ChatGPT to extract 10 categories from a sample of 200 national news articles. The answers were...

Politics & Government

(e.g. election debates, policy announcements, parliamentary inquiries)

Crime & Law Enforcement

(e.g. arrests, fraud, violent incidents)

Business & Economy

(e.g. retail news, market updates, corporate deals)

Health & Medicine

(e.g. Covid inquiries, NHS issues, medical studies)

Environment & Climate

(e.g. weather events, renewable energy, climate policy)

Transportation & Infrastructure

(e.g. rail, airports, roadworks, urban redevelopment)

Entertainment & Culture

(e.g. awards, film/TV, art and music events)

Social Issues & Community

(e.g. housing challenges, protests, community initiatives)

Technology & Innovation

(e.g. digital services, AI in government, new app launches)

International & Global Affairs

(e.g. conflicts, cross-border policies, international summits)

Average waiting time for first outpatient appointment at this hospital for this specialty	23 weeks
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 23

67 comments 4 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/326797228992135/posts/7150047255117933>

Pensioner living in “appalling” mouldy house helped out by community



BBC Bristol 

21 November 2023 · 

This is why community matters ❤️

A disabled pensioner has been living in this mould-covered home - but now people are doing what they can to help bbc.in/46prXqf



 213

29 comments 25 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1632817370120905/posts/6729605147108743>

MSN.COM

Russells Hall Hospital declares critical incident as it runs out of beds for patients

An NHS hospital has declared a critical incident due to a shortage of beds as staff confirmed 's...



 6

17 comments 8 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/273209267025428/posts/1082726139407066>

We're in the news again 😊 Happy St George's Day everyone



BBC.COM

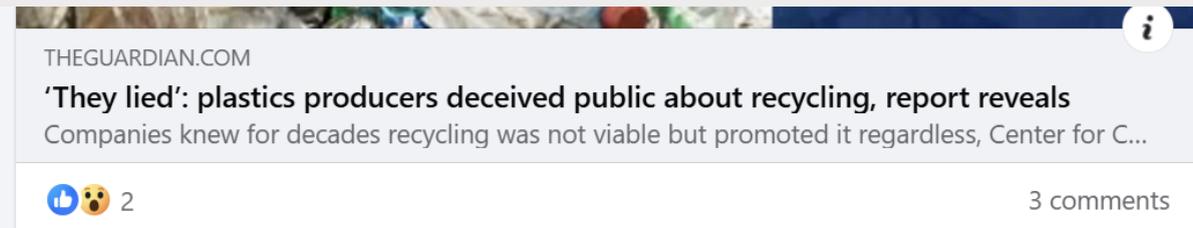
St George and the dragon come to Carnon Downs

The saint and legendary opponent are the latest creations to appear in the Cornwall village.

👍❤️ 129

16 comments 10 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1537042213254128/posts/3395223770769287>



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/539749669534702/posts/2667480360094945>

Niche news

The RSPB has no reason to apologise of the government's nutrient neutrality reversal which seems to be geared only to give house developers bigger profits

The Tories DID lie to give builders bigger profits. Don't buy their houses!



VOXPOLITICALONLINE.COM

The Tories DID lie to give builders bigger profits. Don't buy their houses!

EXTRA: Is it true that Michael Gove took two £50,000 donations from a property developer last...

👍 3

1 comment 3 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1383066011992881/posts/2624743991158404>

More land gone and more unaffordable homes to be built!



PLACENORTHWEST.CO.UK

Bury primed to approve 131 homes - Place North West

Hive Homes wants to build 90 houses on the former Riverside High School site, while Morris H...

🙄🙄 15

55 comments

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1019910754804441/posts/6273030732825724>

There's news that Rochdale Exchange has been sold for more than 3.5million



PLACENORTHWEST.CO.UK

Adhan Group acquires 284,000 sq ft Rochdale retail - Place North West

The Blackburn-based investor has added to its growing portfolio of shopping centres, snappin...

 32

45 comments 8 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2321259874849245/posts/3201055066869717>

Interesting article - does anybody else hear the low frequency droning, whirring vibration, across the Holme Valley?

Heard more so at night ?

Please get in touch if you can 😊

<https://www.ft.com/.../69d94162-8580-4001-96ea...>



FT.COM

The international mystery of 'the Hum'

In places where the unnatural droning sound is said to occur, those who hear it suffer. Is it eve...

  11

39 comments 3 shares

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4982970131769548/posts/7791130324286834>

PLACENORTHWEST.CO.UK

Rochdale greenlights Station Square - Place North West

A series of public realm improvements form the core of the project, which aims to enhance th...

 9

26 comments

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/483867151712178/posts/6248560675242768>