FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Discursive community construction through collaborative digital neighborhood storytelling

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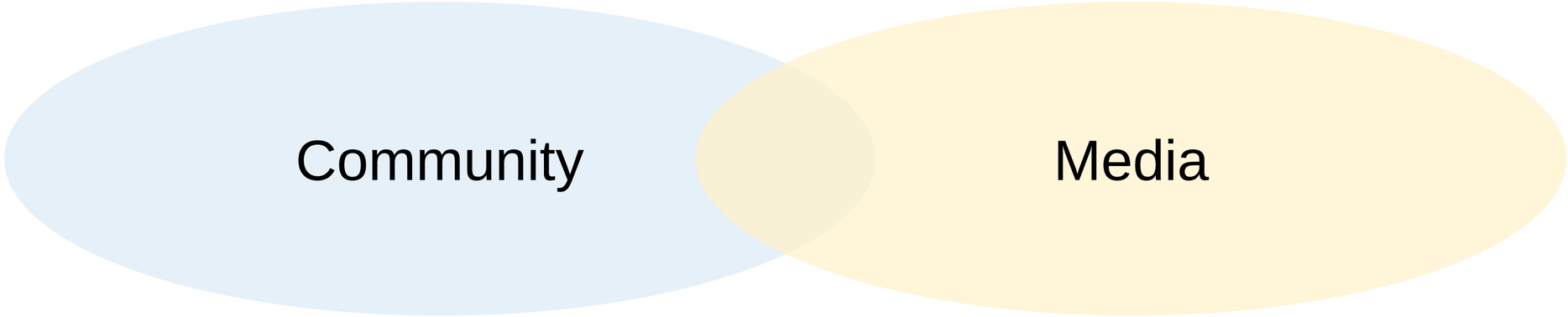
COMMUNICATIEWETENSCHAPPEN

I would like you to think about your own neighborhood…

… your personal relation with it

Part of a community?



Urbanization

Densely and diversely populated neighborhoods

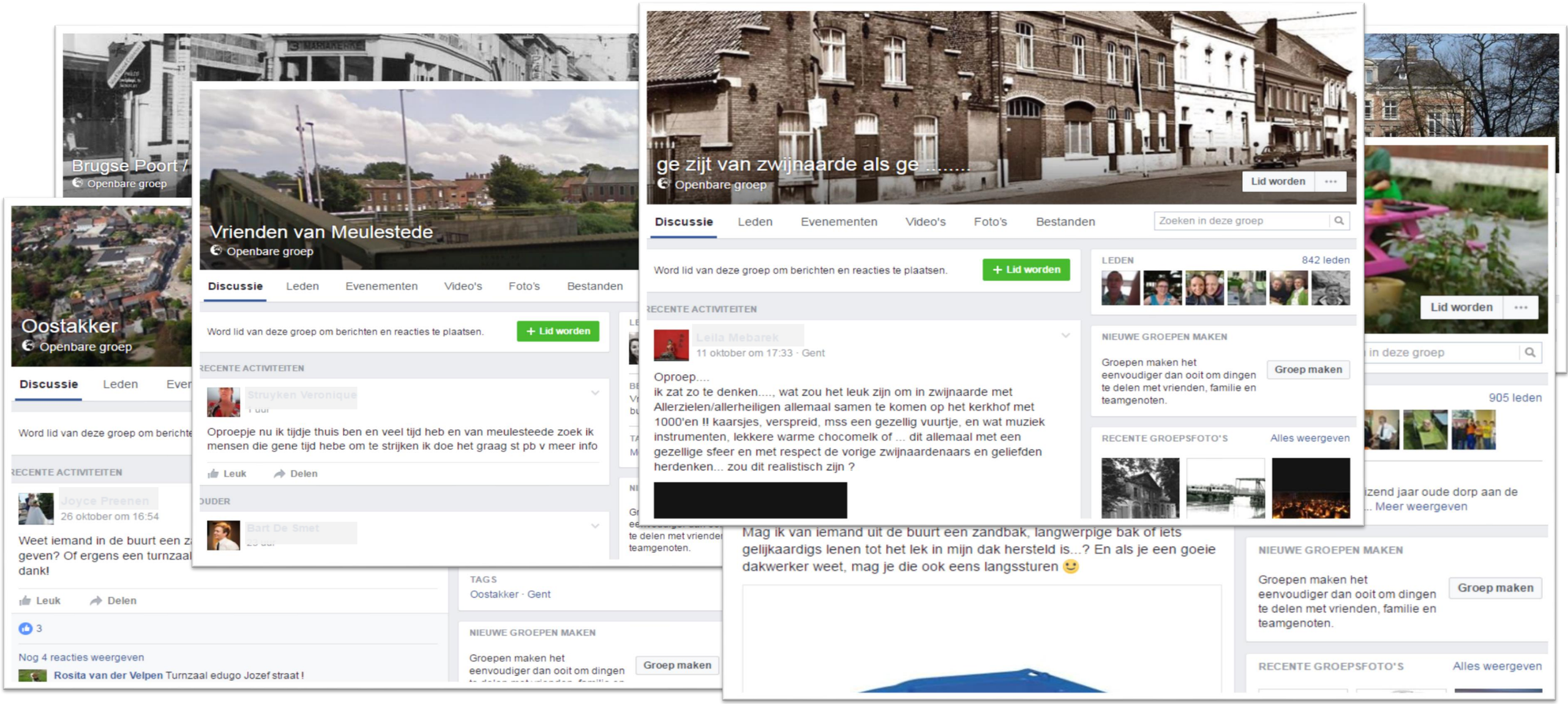
High prevalence of Social media & social network sites

daily, widely

diversely

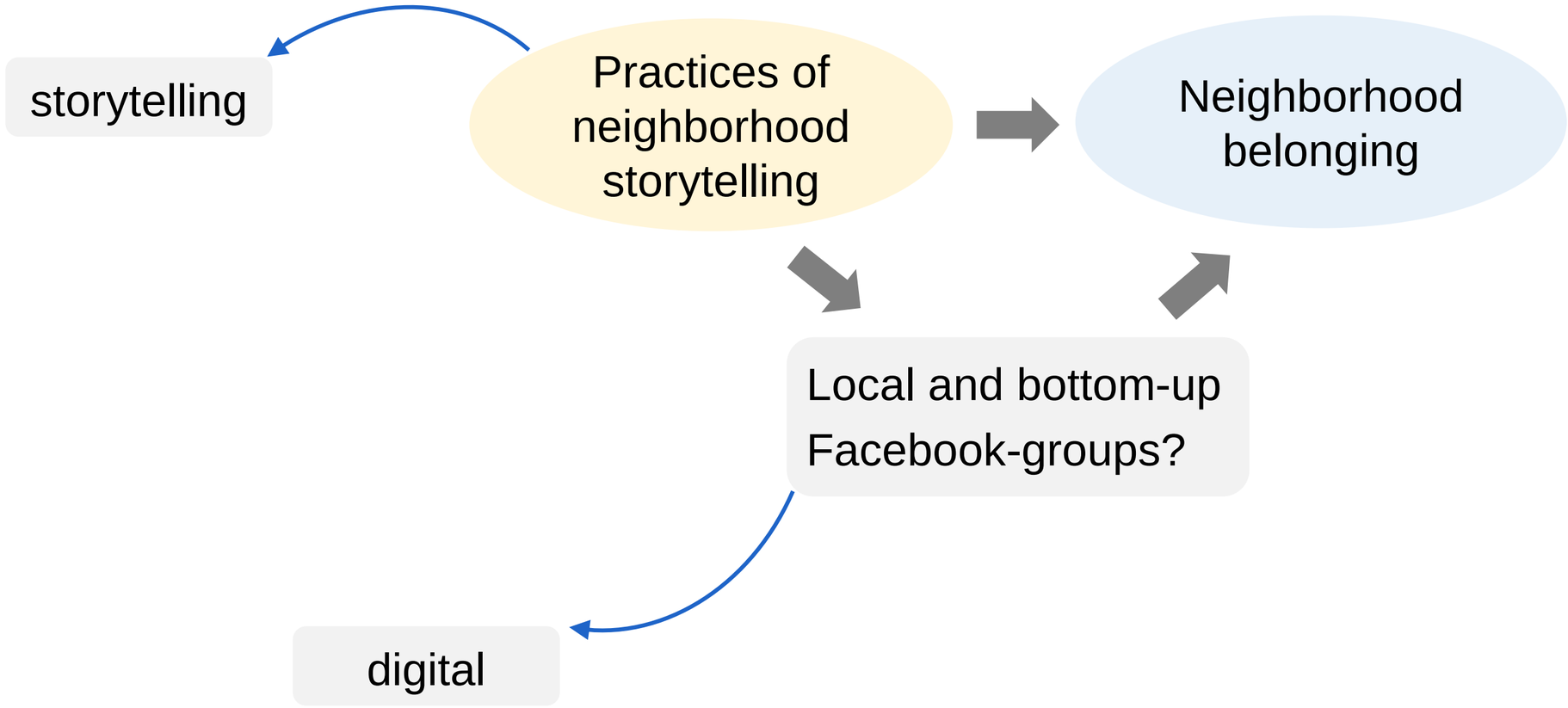
Locally situated social media usage
And local communities

Bottom-up Facebook-groups representing local communities



How and to what extent can locally anchored and bottom-up Facebook-groups contribute to community building?

Communication Infrastructure Theory as starting point



(Cf. Ball-Rokeach et al, 2001; and colleagues)

How and to what extent can locally anchored and bottom-up Facebook-groups contribute to community building?

How and to what extent can locally anchored and bottom-up Facebook-groups contribute to community building

through practices of **digital storytelling**?

Sub-research questions

1. To what extent does neighborhood storytelling take place in these Facebook-groups?

2. What kind of digital environments are these Facebook-groups?

3. To what extent do these Facebook-groups contribute to local community building?

Mixed method design to address these research questions

Quantitative Content Analysis

6 Facebook-groups

Representing 6 neighborhoods in Ghent, Belgium

Last 100 posts (05/07/'16)
Last 100 posts (14/04/'17)

In-depth Interviews

6 government affiliates
(completed)

13 Facebook –group members
(+ ≥5 extra planned)

What I found was that…

… by digitally engaging in neighborhood storytelling practices on an interpersonal level,

a neighborhood news stream is created that functions as a neighborhood awareness system

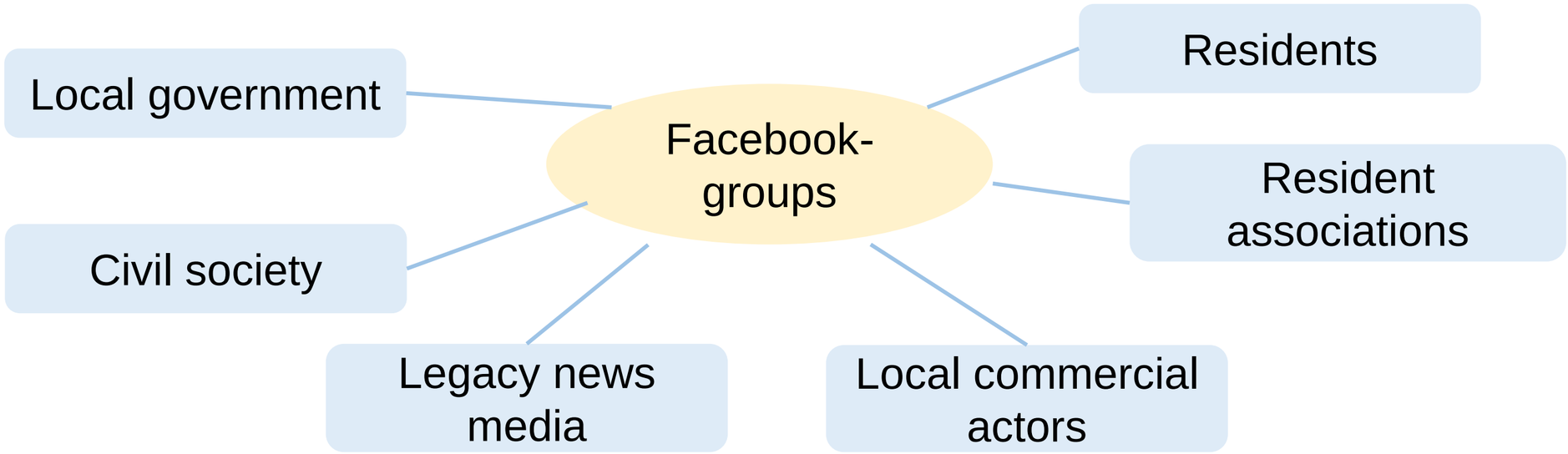
and contributes to local community building for those that can subscribe to the discursively constructed group identity.

1. To what extent does neighborhood storytelling take place in these Facebook-groups?

2. What kind of digital environments are these Facebook-groups?

3. To what extent do these Facebook-groups contribute to local community building?

These Facebook-groups are used to talk about the neighborhood by a variety of local stakeholders



Individually motivated

Mobilization requests

Observations or interpretations

Collectively relevant

“testing the water”

Because these Facebook-groups are...

1. … used by residents and other local stakeholders to meet and engage in neighborhood storytelling.

2. What kind of digital environments are these Facebook-groups?

3. To what extent do these Facebook-groups contribute to local community building?

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Residents form a networked public by talking through Facebook-groups, with particular consequences

Affordances of digitally networked environments (cf. boyd, 2011)

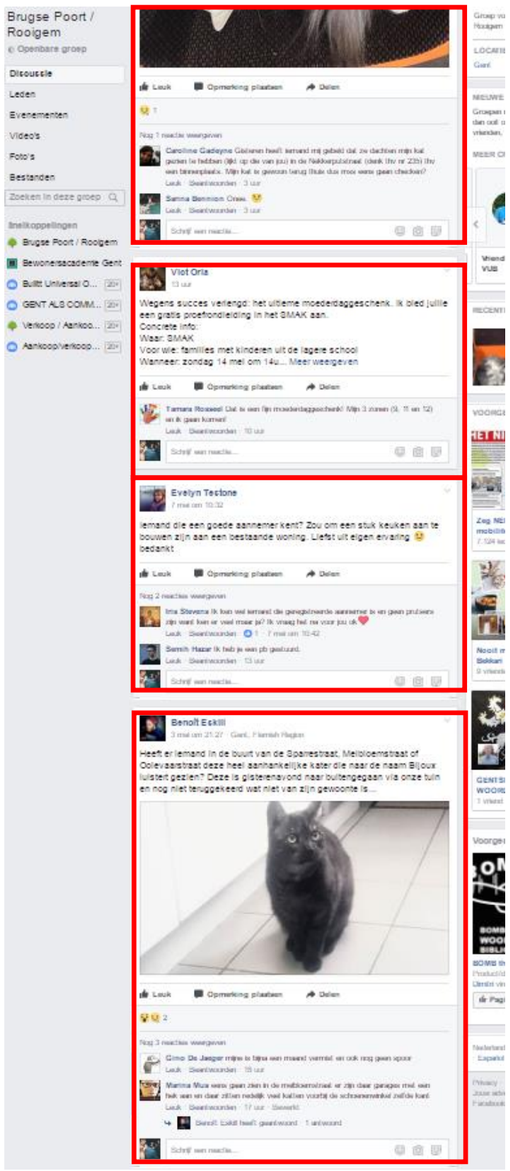
- Persistence
- Replicability
- Scalability
- Searchability

News streams

Ambient awareness systems

(cf. Papacharissi, 2015; Hermida, 2010)

The constant and collective updating of the stream of posts is what makes these FB-groups relevant



Ambient

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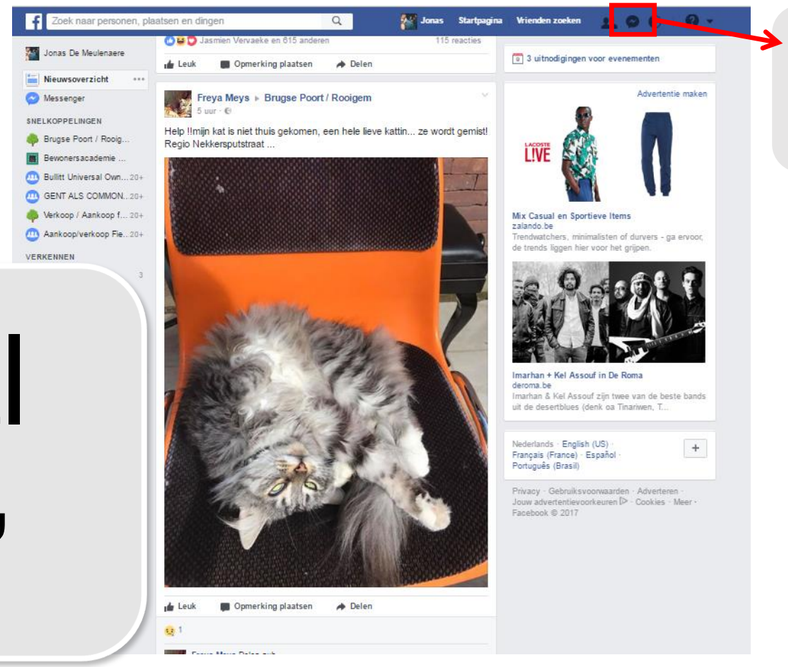
Neighb

News s

“Mental image”



Facebook notifications

“you are much more aware of the other, what they are doing, where the problems are… […] I belief we know this better now.”

(S, male, 45)

Because these Facebook-groups are...

1. … used by residents and other local stakeholders to meet and engage in neighborhood storytelling.

2. … collaboratively created neighborhood news streams that function as local ambient awareness systems.

3. To what extent do these Facebook-groups contribute to local community building?

1. … used by residents and other local stakeholders to meet and engage in neighborhood storytelling.

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3. To what extent do these Facebook-groups contribute to local community building?

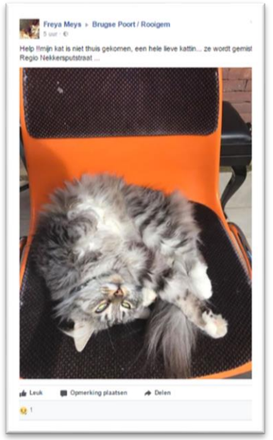
These awareness systems produce opportunities for talk

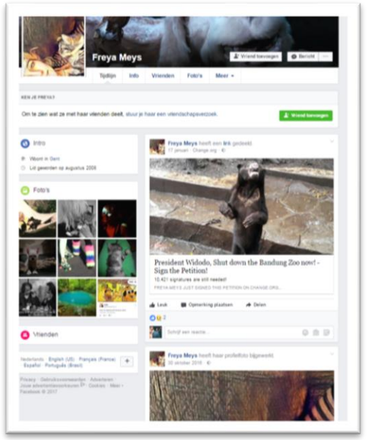
Digital neighborhood storytelling → Neighborhood belonging

Talk online

→ within the groups and through private messages

post to profile





Talk offline

→ with people you know

→ with people you know from the group

“Facebook is quite transparent, in that sense that if someone posts something, you can see it, you can read other people’s reactions… even if you don’t know them. After a while… those names become familiar and… if you’re having an event and you get to know those others, than there’s already a history… It’s not like ‘who’s that?’ but more like ‘that’s that guy who posted this and that…”

(K, male, 35)

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(K, male, 35)

These awareness systems produce manifest conditions for talk

Common language: Dutch

- Superdiversity

Internet and Facebook access and skills and uses

- Low SES
- Elderly

Interest in the neighborhood

- Volatile housing situations
- Mobile population: work – life – residence

These awareness systems produce latent conditions for talk

Online discursive actions

Posting, commenting, sharing…

Online discussion dynamics

"You're from [X] *if you…"*

- Liberal
- Communautarian
- Deliberative

Freelon (2010)

Interview data

Dominant Bakfiets-discourse

A Facebook-group of gentrifiers

Feeling like an intruder

"Well, I feel that they don't really talk about things that are… let's say, societal visions… that's just not discussed. I really feel like an alien intruder if I share posts in that group concerning [my action group]."

(J, male, 65)

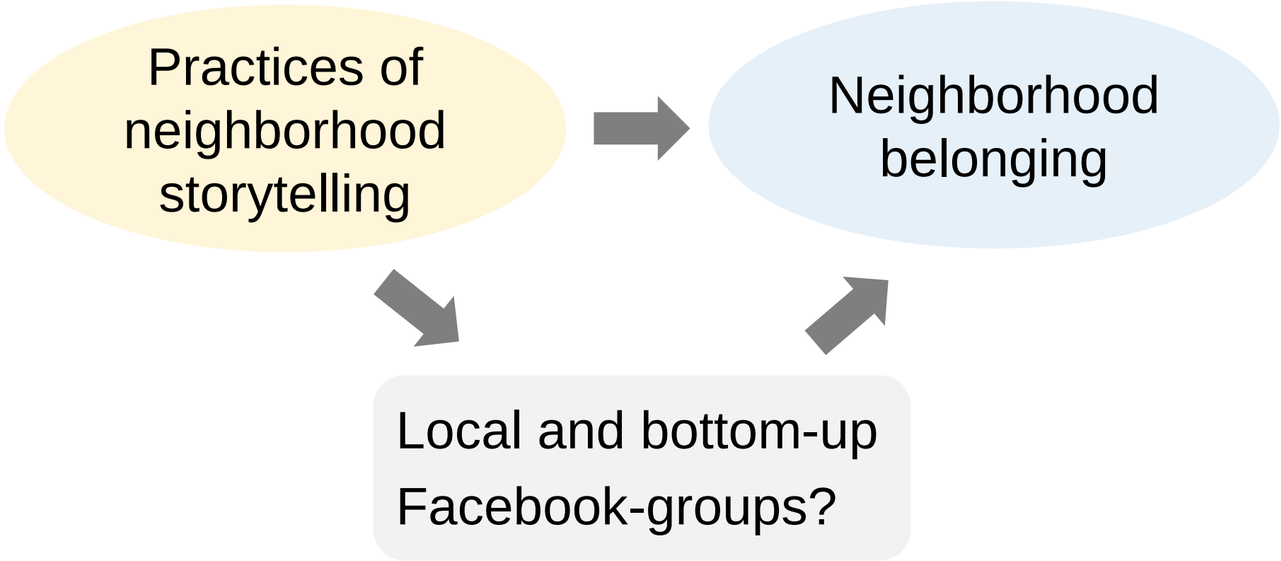
Because these Facebook-groups are...

1. … used by residents and other local stakeholders to meet and engage in neighborhood storytelling.

2. … collaboratively created neighborhood news streams that function as local ambient awareness systems.

3. … raising the feelings of belonging for those people that can identify themselves with the group.

How and to what extent can locally anchored and bottom-up Facebook-groups contribute to community building through practices of **digital storytelling**?



(Cf. Ball-Rokeach et al, 2001; and colleagues)

By digitally engaging in neighborhood storytelling practices on an interpersonal level,

a neighborhood news stream is created that functions as a neighborhood awareness system

and contributes to local community building for those that can subscribe to the discursively constructed group identity.

If you think about you’re own neighborhood…

Would such a Facebook-group be something for you?

Would you contribute?

Would it bring you closer to your neighborhood?

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Communication Infrastructure Theory as starting point

Practices of neighborhood storytelling → Neighborhood belonging

Macro
- Government
- Legacy media

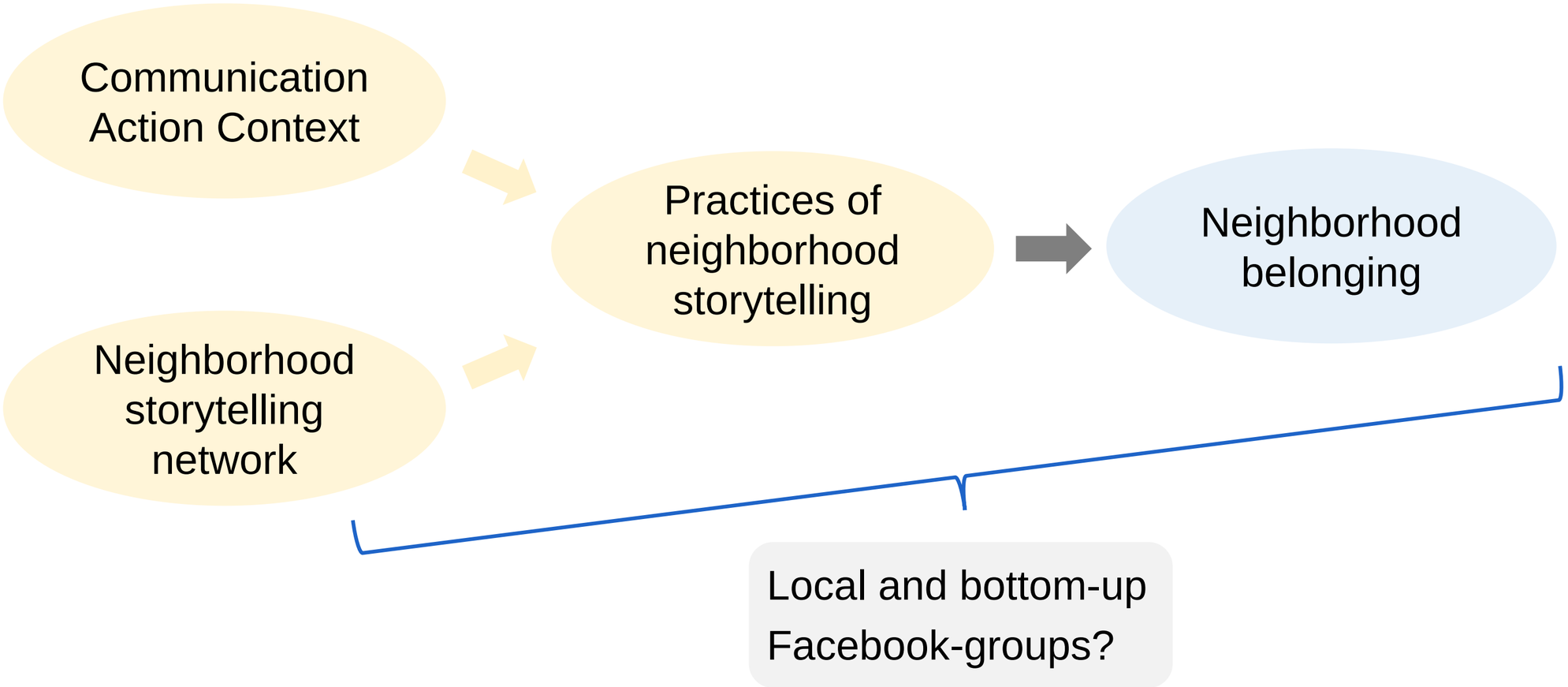
Mezzo
- (hyper)local media
- Resident associations

Micro
- Face-to-face interactions

Local and bottom-up
Facebook-groups?

(Cf. Ball-Rokeach, 2001; and colleagues)

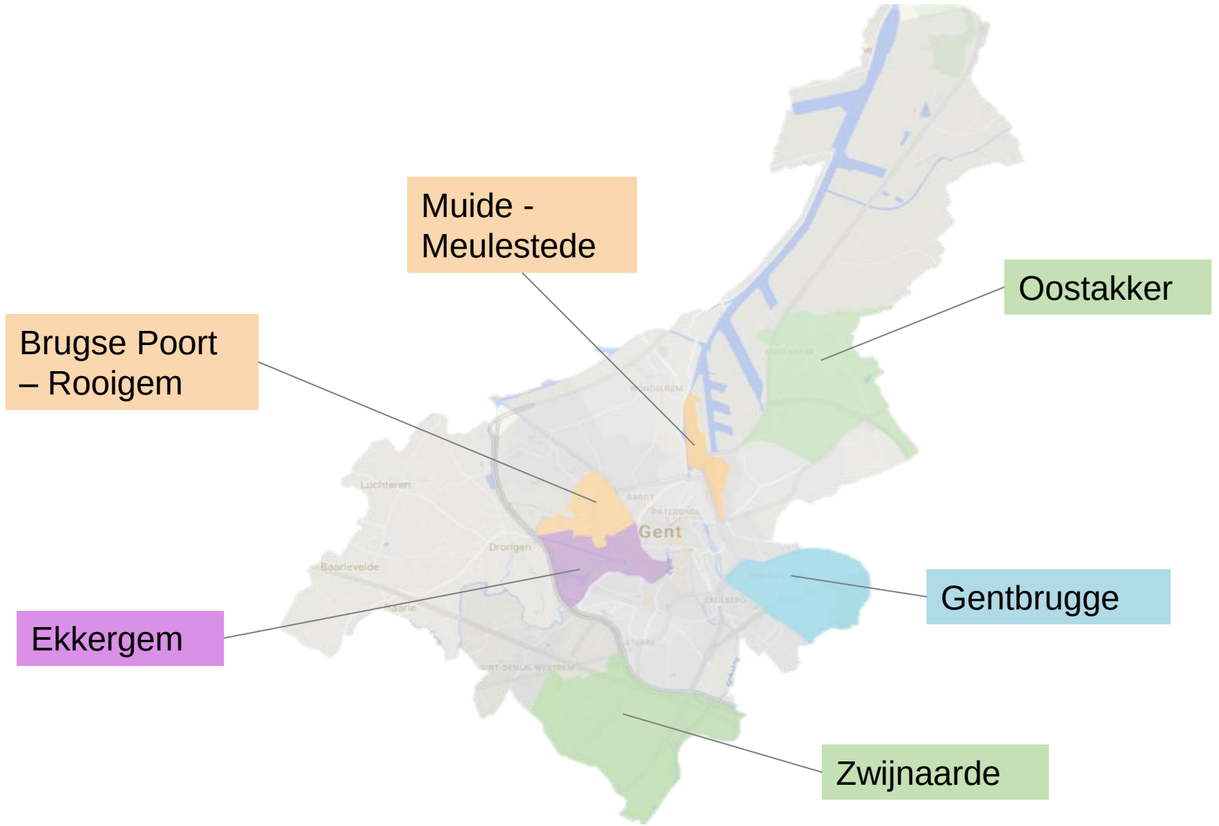
Communication Infrastructure Theory as starting point



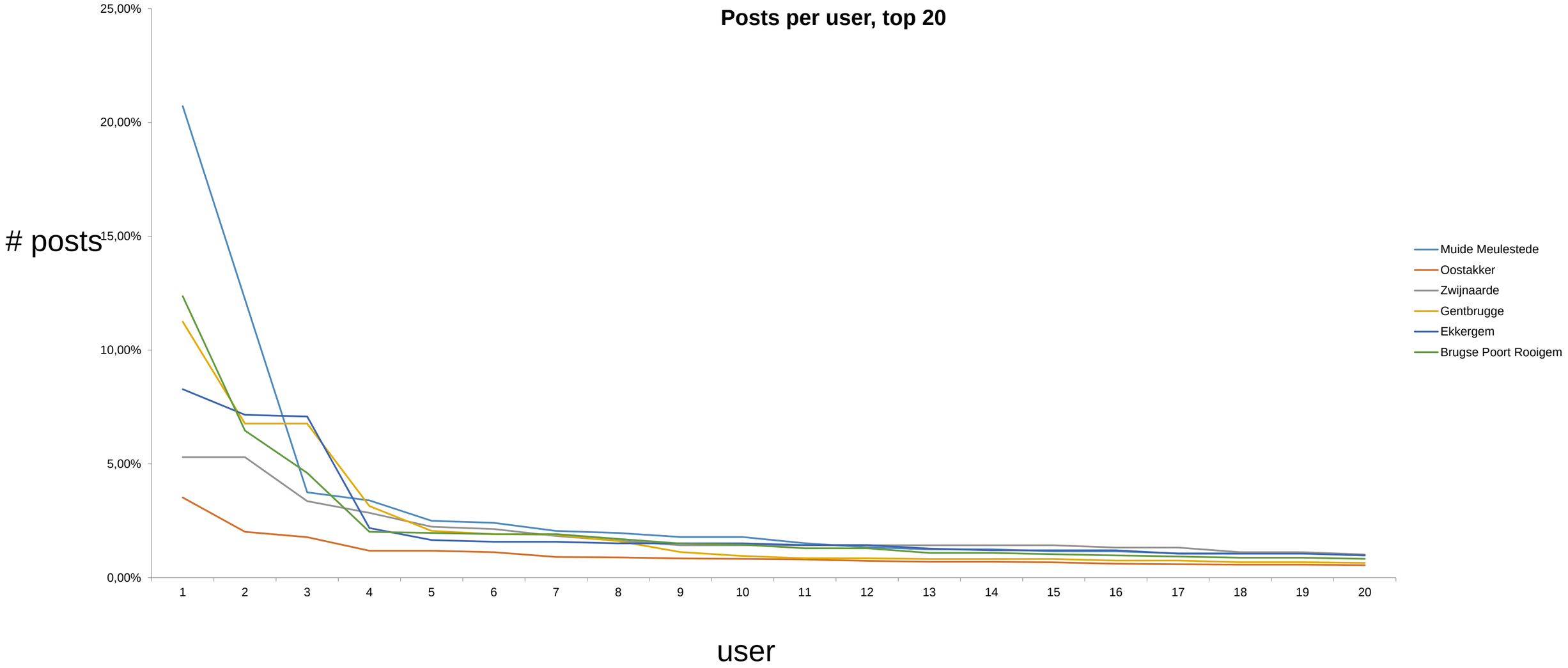
(Cf. Ball-Rokeach et al, 2001; and colleagues)

Six Ghent neighborhoods were included in the sample

- 2 suburbs
- 2 poor and multi-cultural neighborhoods
- 1 central residential neighborhood
- 1 mixed suburb / multicultural neighborhood



Participation in online discussion shows a longtail



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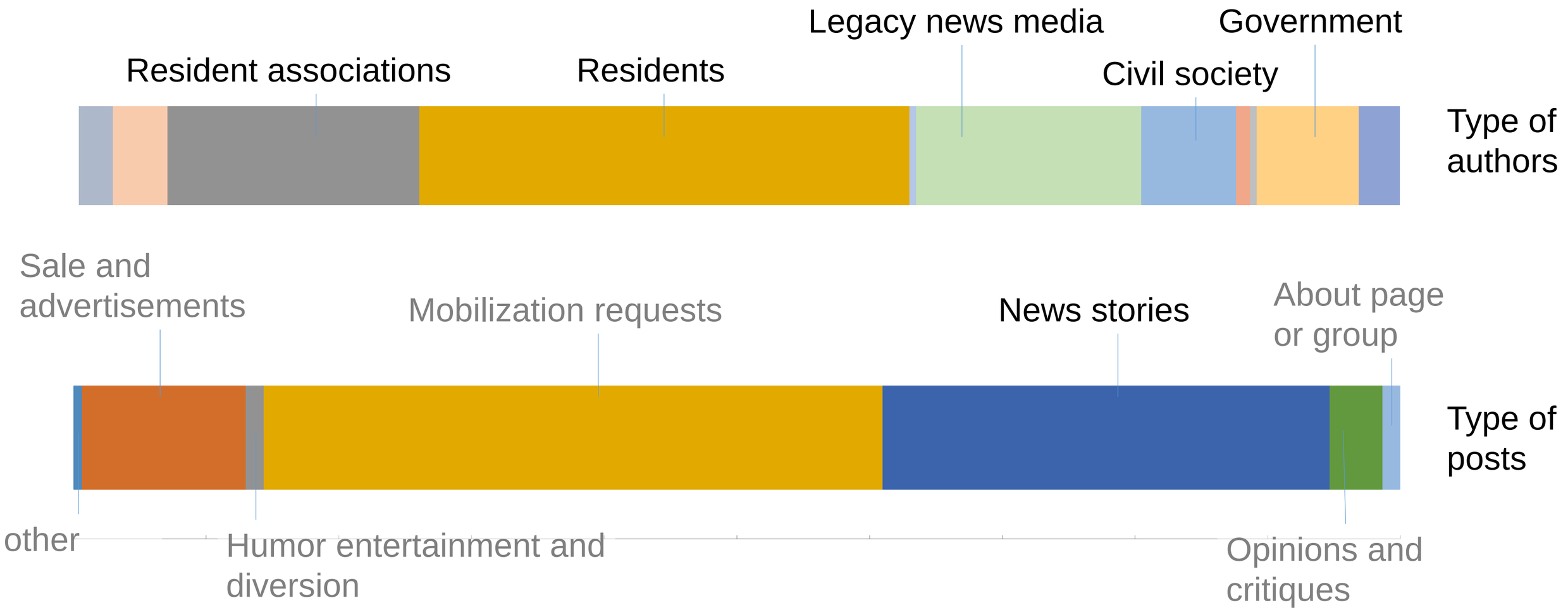
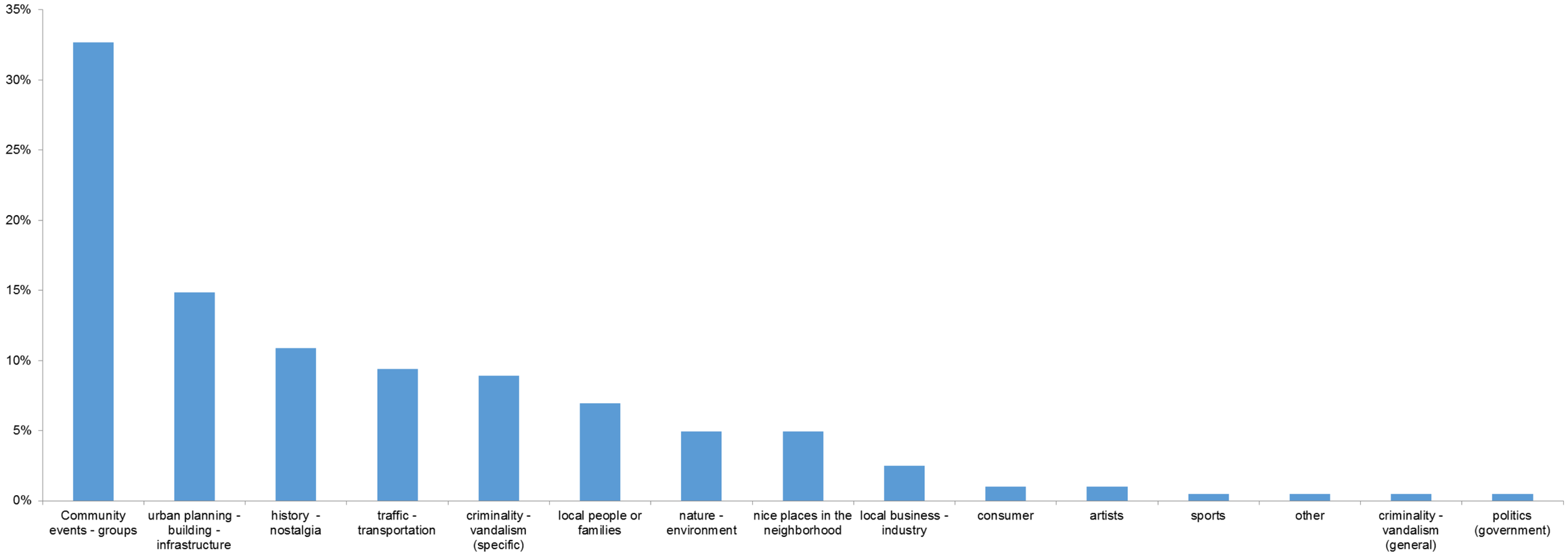
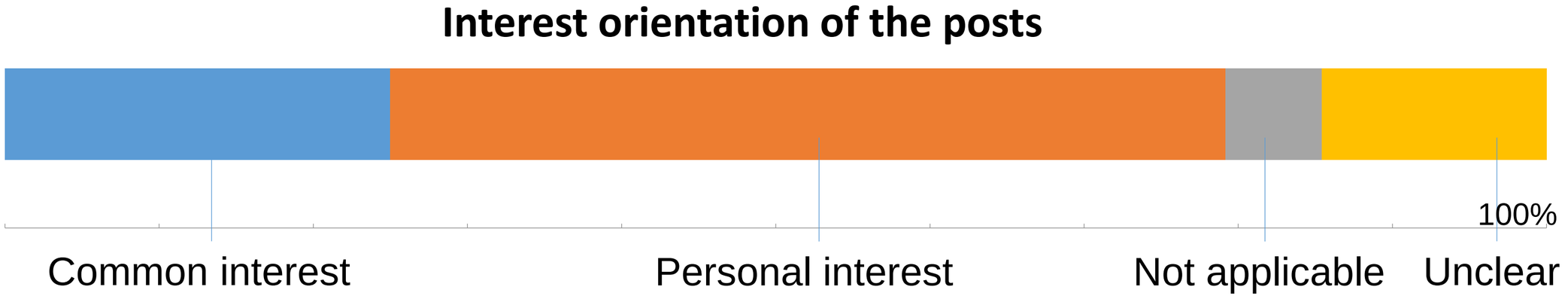


Stories in the Facebook-groups broken down per topic



Posts can be both personally motivated and collectively relevant



"Then there are these posts of people complaining about the speeding in their street, with the question if we, as a group, can do something about it… if we can ask the City to do more controls, guard the speed limits… that kind of things"

(I, female, 35)

Using the Facebook-group to test the water

The persistence of the online conversations allows for multiple forms of engaging with the content

Primary engagement

Post
Comment
Share

Secondary engagement

Consume
Neighborhood agenda
Unusual perceptions

"This week for instance, we kept on hearing fire trucks passing by, so you know something must have happened somewhere close… just one after the other… So, then you just look on [the local FB-group] to see what's happened… a fire or something."

(P, female, 45)