Love Thy Neighbourhood

An assessment of Nextdoor’s impact in UK neighbourhoods

Professor Eddie Kane, Harvey Redgrave and Niall Blake-Knox
Foreword by Dame Louise Casey

The last few weeks and months have shown so clearly to all of us the power of human kindness. The response of local people to the four terrorist attacks in London and Manchester and the Grenfell Tower fire disaster in West London show how powerful the public are and how people pull together united in the common good and purpose to protect and care for each other.

So, in my mind, anything that helps connect people so that bonds form, friendships bloom and resilience in communities is fostered, is a good thing. In the UK, Nextdoor is a new project with big ambitions but even at this stage it is clear from the evidence in this Crest report that it might be one way of helping communities connect in faster, easier and more efficient ways than they have previously been able to.

The appeal of a locally-focused app like Nextdoor is that it allows those using it to shape what and how and when they come together. It allows people not only to be aware of what’s happening but to participate when they have an interest, when they think they can help or when it is something they feel strongly about.

For example, people use Nextdoor to recruit volunteers at local nursing homes, organise litter picks or put on social events in their neighbourhoods. It uses social media to give a much greater group of people the chance to become involved when and how it suits them. It complements and enhances more traditional community organising such as Neighbourhood Watch; friends of the local park or a campaign to save a building.

As a country, we have been trying to fix the issues of community cohesion and social capital for a long time. From ‘City Challenge’ onwards, there have been several large scale programmes to renew neighbourhoods, designed to build a sense of ‘community’, as well as to regenerate the physical and social infrastructure of an area.

Government and public services will always have a role in this but it is the public - residents and families - first and foremost who are in the best position to knit that social fabric together and improve the quality of our interactions, which ultimately is what matters.

Nextdoor is a potentially powerful way - though not the only way – to create a new form of community development that incorporates the digital environment with the real-world neighbourhood but firmly rooted in the hands of those who inhabit both – the public and the community.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS

Dame Louise Casey
Dame Louise Casey is unparalleled in her experience of leading large scale public reviews and inquiries, particular on the subject of communities and neighbourhoods. She is currently Director General of the Casey Review Team investigating opportunity and integration in some of our most isolated communities. She also served as the Director of the Home Office’s Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, Director General in the Home Office heading up the Neighbourhood Crime and Justice Group and Director General of the Troubled Families Team.

Professor Nick Manning
Professor Manning is currently based at the Department of Social Science, Health and Medicine at King’s College London and his work explores mental health, community and social change. He has published widely on the sociology of therapeutic communities, the social construction of social problems, social and green movements, and mental health diagnoses and policies. For the last decade, his work has focussed on the development of the biggest multi-disciplinary Institute of Mental Health in the UK, particularly its Centre for Social Futures.
1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a time of rising concern about the negative effects of social media and globalisation, the purpose of this report is to explore whether a new social networking platform can actually strengthen real-world ties and genuinely make communities more cohesive.

The report assesses the extent to which the social network ‘Nextdoor’ helps to increase and facilitate social capital in its members and their neighbourhoods. Nextdoor describes itself as a social network for neighbourhoods, which launched in the UK in September 2016.

The research design for this project was carried out in consultation between Crest Advisory, Professor Eddie Kane, David Halpern and the Behavioural Insights Team. As a result of this research design process Crest surveyed 2,800 Nextdoor members in 400 randomly selected neighbourhoods across the UK and commissioned a representative poll of 2,000 members of the public, using pre-validated and tested measures for social capital. The goal was to examine the extent to which Nextdoor is achieving its mission statement - building stronger and happier neighbourhoods all over the world. These surveys were complemented by desk research on the major themes around social capital in the UK and case studies to illustrate the tangible human benefits of the behaviours encouraged and facilitated by using Nextdoor.

Throughout this process, Crest consulted an expert advisory panel including Dame Louise Casey and Professor Nick Manning of King’s College London. The advisory panel gave regular, invaluable and informed feedback; reviewing research methodology, academic literature, research findings and conclusions.

Our research found that Nextdoor members have significantly higher levels of social capital and propensity to engage with neighbours and neighbourhood activities, than the general public. We found that:

- While only 17% of the general public stop and talk to their neighbours everyday, 28% of Nextdoor members do so
- While only 38% of the general public borrow things or exchange favours with their neighbours at least once a month, 65% of Nextdoor members do so
- While only 60% of the general public generally trust the people in their neighbourhood, 82% of Nextdoor members do so
- While only 56% of the general public have two or more neighbours they can rely on in a time of need, 78% of Nextdoor members have
- While only 33% of the general public feel “very safe” when walking in their neighbourhood after dark, 44% of Nextdoor members do so
- While only 47% of the general public report high levels of life satisfaction (scored 3 and above on a scale of 0-5), 73% of Nextdoor members do so.
- While only 86% of the general public report high levels of neighbourhood satisfaction (scored 3 and above on a scale of 0-5), 94% of Nextdoor members do so.
- Nextdoor members are significantly more likely to engage in a range of civically orientated activities – such as volunteering – than members of the general public.

This needs to be caveated: it is possible that the Nextdoor network attracts members who are more likely to be predisposed to neighbourliness than members of the public. However, the difference in the levels of social capital between Nextdoor members and the general public is significant enough to suggest that these findings cannot be explained solely by ‘selection bias’. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of Nextdoor users who responded to the survey reported interacting with their neighbours more and contributing more to their community as a direct result of using Nextdoor. This suggests that the high levels of social capital found in Nextdoor members is, in part directly related to their use of the platform. Nextdoor members in both urban and rural communities had higher levels of social capital and this remained constant over time, showing no sign of a time-lag effect.

Finally, our report highlights a number of clear opportunities for further research and potential opportunities for Nextdoor and others to have an even greater impact at the neighbourhood level.
2.0 INTRODUCTION

Robert Inglehart\(^1\) first coined the term ‘post-materialism’ in describing the late 20th century character of our society; one that values autonomy and self-expression above all else. Post-materialism has coincided with the shift towards globalisation, itself facilitated by the unstoppable rise of the internet and online social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Not only has digital technology removed geographical barriers allowing us to connect with people and services anywhere in the world, it has also fuelled post-materialism by removing our reliance on our neighbours for goods, services and information, thus making us more independent of them. Globalisation and the internet therefore have a very real impact on our social relationships, on our networks and on our sense of belonging in our neighbourhoods. With the rise of Facebook and ecommerce, it would not be unusual for many of us to be in more regular contact with people living in another country than on our own street or to buy goods from another continent rather than the shop on the corner.

In light of these dramatic changes, it is easy to forget just how reliant we are as individuals on the collective; whether that be family, friends, neighbours or society. We need only to look at the resilient responses of communities to recent tragic events to recognise and appreciate the value of these social groups. In London, neighbours opened their doors to the dispossessed of Grenfell Tower and the supply of food and clothing and other donations swiftly outstripped demand. Within minutes of the Manchester Arena bombing, taxi drivers set off from Liverpool to pick up the stranded free of charge and residents offered rooms for the night. What this tells us is that in times of need, there is often no shortage of social capital and generosity in the UK; part of the challenge is simply providing it with an outlet for continual expression. It is in identifying these everyday opportunities for helping others where technology can play an important role.

Historically, the UK has been at the forefront of efforts to link academic theory and evidence on social capital to public policy\(^2\). The Casey Review\(^3\) on social integration published in 2016 (and led by Dame Louise Casey) highlighted the fundamental importance of strong neighbourhoods as a bulwark against marginalisation. In recognition of this and the other potential benefits strong, connected communities bring, the government has made various attempts to facilitate social capital, from the ‘New Deal for Communities’ programme, through to the establishment of new institutions, like the National Citizens’ Service.

A key question for the future is how does globalisation brought about by the internet and online social networks fit with the reinvigorated importance of the neighbourhood? This report looks at the potential of one such social network, Nextdoor, to facilitate and create social capital and other related positive social outcomes at the local level.


3.0 THEORY

3.1 What is social capital and how is it measured?

Robert Putnam, for many the principal author on the subject, defines social capital simply as the “features of social life - networks, norms, and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives”\(^4\). Broadly, there is a consensus that social capital can contribute to economic and health outcomes. Putnam along with John Helliwell\(^5\) are in no doubt that “people who have close friends and confidants, friendly neighbours and supportive co-workers are less likely to experience sadness, loneliness, low self-esteem and problems with eating and sleeping”.

The difficulty as with many social phenomenon lies in how we actually measure social capital. In its most simple incarnation, social capital is measured by the aggregation of individual actions; voting in elections, being part of voluntary groups and talking to neighbours, for example. These indicators remain a valid way of measuring social capital and remain popular with development organisations like the OECD and World Bank, but they do not wholly account for the more dynamic social context in which social interactions take place in today’s electronically networked social environment. Specifically, they often fail to fully capture the significance of the relationships. As such, this study complements these measures with additional data analysis and case studies.

3.2 Bonding versus bridging

Most social scientists and policymakers alike distinguish between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ capital. Put simply, bonding social capital refers to the connections within a homogenous network reinforcing feelings of solidarity and belonging. Bridging social capital, by contrast, refers to the connections between people from different networks and is much more utilitarian in that it can facilitate links to otherwise unavailable goods and information. It is important to bear in mind that bonding and bridging are not ‘either/or’ categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but ‘more or less’. Such a binary approach is clearly insufficient to be able to comment on the complexities of modern society’s structures and networks - online or otherwise.

3.3 Modernising social capital - taking account of the changing role of technology

There is a need to marry the traditional concept of social capital with more relevant frameworks such as ‘interaction ritual chains’\(^6\). Interaction ritual chains look at social cohesion through the lens of context rather than agency, concluding it is the quality of the interaction that matters more than the aggregate volume. This more nuanced approach has

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the potential to be more practical when examining the interactions of individuals within and across physical and online networks and communities.

This report examines the extent to which Nextdoor supports and improves the traditional static measures of social capital such as the number of neighbours people have that they can rely on, voting in elections and local volunteering etc. It also pays attention to the quality of such behaviours by looking at the frequency and type of human contact they encourage and pays closer attention to the outcomes they engender. This ensures the context within which individuals and neighbourhoods now operate is taken account of; dynamic, complex and diverse physical neighbourhoods and online communities shaped by new working, communication and relationship patterns.

4.0 CONTEXT

4.1 Social network proliferation

The UK is a modern, thriving technological nation with the internet and online social networks already a feature of most people’s everyday lives. According to a March 2017 ONS release, 89% of the population are now internet users\(^7\) (had used within the last 3 months) amounting to over 59 million people, with 82% using it daily or almost daily\(^8\). Since 2011 all age groups have experienced a rise in usage - particularly older generations (figure 1).

Figure 1: Recent internet use in 2011 and 2017 by age group, UK

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\(^7\) [https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2017](https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2017)

\(^8\) [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage)
And when it comes to online life, it is social networks and finding information about goods and services that seem to dominate our attention (figure 2). With so many people using social networks and seeking utility, apps like Nextdoor clearly have the potential to enhance individual and community relationships.

Figure 2: Internet activities by age group, 2016, Great Britain

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9 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2016#activities-completed-on-the-internet
4.2 Mobile use and declining use of desktop computers

The other key element of internet user behaviour to consider is how people in the UK get online and access applications such as Nextdoor. More people than ever before are accessing the internet exclusively via smartphone; now the device most used for accessing social media in the UK\(^\text{10}\), with a clear preference for accessing content via apps.

As with many features of modern life, there is a noticeable difference in how different socioeconomic groups access the internet. Using the NRS social grading system, research indicates that members of the DE social grouping (semi-skilled & unskilled manual workers, the unemployed and lowest grade occupations) are nearly four times as likely to only use alternative devices such as smartphones or tablets to get online. This group has also experienced the highest rise in smartphone use since 2014. Nextdoor, which is frequently used by a mobile app on iOS or Android, thus holds the potential to bring together a diverse range of users.

4.3 Positive effects of online social networks

Social network sites from Facebook and Twitter to Instagram and YouTube make exciting claims that they can create a more connected, information rich world. They reduce physical and geographical barriers, allowing individuals to instantly and easily connect with their friends, family, recent acquaintances and even strangers, the world over.

Recent studies point to the potential of online social networks to improve people’s access to other individuals experiences of mental health and expert information\textsuperscript{11}. There is also evidence to suggest that online social networks are uniquely useful tools for enhancing bridging communications and broadening the social networks of marginalised groups\textsuperscript{12}; one of the most frequently cited benefits of the internet. As relationships and social networks move online, it is important that we attempt to observe the migration of these benefits with them.

4.4 Negative effects of online social networks

A larger social network does not however, necessarily mean a more diverse one. Much has been made recently of the theory of online ‘echo chambers’. This is the idea that instead of aiding social capital and forming new and more heterogenous networks, social network sites tend to merely coalesce like-minded people, sharing information and opinions that fit only their particular world view. This is relevant to any assessment of Nextdoor’s impact as diversity across socioeconomic groups and ties to new networks is absolutely essential in order to grow social capital. And it is relevant that Nextdoor’s stated purpose is to connect people who don’t already know each other, unlike many other social networks.

Concerns about the proliferation of online social networks and the link to increased levels of anxiety and depression, particularly among young people\textsuperscript{13,14} are also beginning to gain traction. The Royal Society for Public Health recently found that four out of the five most used social networking sites made feelings of anxiety worse for young people under the age of 25. This is put down to the negative control mechanisms they often indirectly subject users to - feelings that they are missing out, unrealistic expectations of how they should look or live and the negative comparisons this can foster.

A significant irony lies behind the promise of a more connected world. Internet use, in contrast to the overriding narrative of being a connecting force, has contributed to a broader social movement called “networked individualism”\textsuperscript{15}, a new type of relating in which local networks lose their prominence in favour of global networks. Social network sites have even been found to be positively correlated to increased levels of loneliness and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{11} https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/social-media-and-young-people-s-mental-health-and-wellbeing.html
\item \textsuperscript{14} https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/social-media-and-young-people-s-mental-health-and-wellbeing.html
\item \textsuperscript{15} Haythornthwaite, Caroline, & Wellman, Barry., 2002. An introduction. In Barry Wellman & Caroline Haythornthwaite (Eds.), The Internet in everyday life (pp. 1–41). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
\end{itemize}
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isolation and negatively correlated to life satisfaction\textsuperscript{16}. The theory that they lead to increased levels of what could be called ‘proximal isolation’ - cutting people off from their immediate communities and neighbours is clearly on the rise.

In summary, research to date paints a complex and intriguing picture of the links between overall social capital, mental health, belonging and loneliness. Whilst the benefits of online social platforms and the attraction to use them make them a powerful and exciting tool for positivity, the potential risks of their use cannot be underestimated.

4.5 Changing patterns in society

The rise in online life has also coincided with some drastic changes to societal norms. Both parents now work full time in 48\% of all couple households\textsuperscript{17}; a figure that rises to 52\% for millenial couple households. Meanwhile people are generally working longer hours, with the 2017 Modern Family Index\textsuperscript{18} showing that only a third of parents manage to leave work on time every day. Moreover, 20\% of parents working full time, work five extra weeks a year in unpaid work. Add to this the fact that people are also commuting longer distances\textsuperscript{19} to get to work, rising from an average of 13.4km in 2001 to 15km in 2011, the result is that people are now spending less time at home and by extension less time in their neighbourhoods and local communities.

4.6 Belonging and control

Feelings of embeddedness or belonging and external control are the final influential factors on neighbourhood relations to consider. Despite being a concept initially proposed by the social scientist Ronald Frankenberg in 1966\textsuperscript{20}, it still helps us understand some of the complex influences on urban and rural communities in the UK today. At its core is the supposition that individuals in rural communities tend to have a greater sense of purpose and belonging but suffer from a high degree of visibility and control from those around them. The converse is true in more urban communities, where people have worse support systems and feelings of belonging, but experience lower levels of control or invasion of privacy.

Through this study of Nextdoor’s impact, the question becomes less either/or, but instead can you have the best of both?

\textsuperscript{16}https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220495830_Time_on_the_Internet_at_home_loneliness_and_life_satisfaction_Evidence_from_panel_time-diary_data
\textsuperscript{17}https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Modern-Families-Index_Full-Report.pdf
\textsuperscript{19}http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_357812.pdf
5.0 WHAT IS NEXTDOOR AND CAN IT MAKE REALLY MAKE NEIGHBOURHOODS STRONGER AND HAPPIER?

Nextdoor describes itself as a “free and private social network for neighbourhoods”. Unusually for a social network, it is designed to connect people who were previously unknown to each other. Once users verify their address, they can join their neighbourhood network and are introduced to their neighbours. The platform is designed to help neighbours “ask questions, get to know one another, and exchange local advice and recommendations”. In essence it is a local neighbourhood landing site for interacting with those in your immediate vicinity across a wide range of issues, needs or concerns.

The cross over from the cyberworld to the real world is its ultimate goal - facilitating exchanges of goods, organising neighbourhood meetings or passing on recommendations. These all impact individuals lives in a meaningful way, but aren’t necessarily new neighbourhood activities; they have existed for as long as the neighbourhood has. Nextdoor is encouraging their return by making them more visible and more readily available again.
Nextdoor is now active in 11,500 neighbourhoods in the UK – almost half of all neighbourhoods in the UK \(^{21}\). As Nextdoor is a new service, the neighbourhoods have varying levels of ‘maturity’ and are currently made up of anywhere between 10 and 1000 members. The average size of a Nextdoor neighbourhood area is 1,300 households and does not necessarily match the local borough or electoral ward.

Each neighbourhood has been specifically bounded based on local context, history and infrastructure, rather than applying a standard rule across the whole of the UK. This has meant that much greater attention to detail can be made in places like Belfast for example, where boundary sensitivities can be greater than other similarly sized cities.

As a result of this, what we see when mapping the Nextdoor neighbourhoods against levels of multiple deprivation at the ward level across Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales is that the neighbourhood boundaries bring together a diverse range of wards with vastly different levels of deprivation. This is hugely promising in itself; it holds the potential to increase the quantity and quality of interactions between people from different backgrounds. In London alone, 94% (1,400) of all neighbourhoods have a Nextdoor neighbourhood up and running.

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\(^{21}\) As of August 2017
In a world in which mobile technology is changing our everyday interactions, Nextdoor is positioning itself as the mobile app that encourages contact among diverse groups of neighbours and provides a healthy balance of feelings of belonging and control. Nextdoor’s mission statement is to bring neighbours together to build stronger and safer neighbourhoods, all over the world. Our research assesses the extent to which this has occurred in the nine months Nextdoor has been in use in the UK.
6.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

To test Nextdoor’s impact, we commissioned surveys of:

- A representative sample (2,000) of members of the general public
- A random sample (2,800) of Nextdoor members (spanning 400 neighbourhoods with a minimum of 100 neighbours using Nextdoor)

The analysis below compares the findings from both these surveys.

6.1 Interaction with neighbours

Polling for this report suggests that Nextdoor increases neighbourliness. According to our survey, 17% of the general population actually stop and talk to their neighbours everyday, compared to 28% of Nextdoor members surveyed. In contrast, 13% of the general public never talk to their neighbours, a figure that drops to just 5% for Nextdoor members.

Figure 3: How often do you stop and talk to your neighbours?

The number of people who actually stop and talk to their neighbours is generally thought to be a more powerful indicator of positive relationships than perceptions of neighbourliness. David Halpern, in particular, has argued that the quality of social relationships with our neighbours has a greater impact on neighbourhood satisfaction than the actual physical conditions. In the following section we mapped levels of multiple deprivation against the results of our Nextdoor member survey. It is encouraging that these case studies appear to support this hypothesis by showing that the levels of neighbourhood satisfaction remain high among Nextdoor users in deprived areas with higher levels of social capital.
The increased interaction by Nextdoor users with their neighbours is evidenced further by the fact that they are almost twice as likely to borrow things or exchange favours with their neighbours than the general public (figure 4). This is a good example of the platform facilitating an interaction ritual chain which is an important aspect of community life. Enabling people to ask their neighbours for favours has the potential to enhance people’s lives in a very practical way. Furthermore, the size or value of the specific actions matter less than their frequency and the consequent result of knowing a neighbour’s name or the reciprocity the action encourages.

**Figure 4: How often do you borrow thing or exchange favours with your neighbours?**

![Graph showing how often Nextdoor users and public borrow or exchange favours with neighbours.]

6.2 Case study: Nextdoor usage in economically diverse neighbourhoods

As part of this research, the 400 Nextdoor neighbourhoods surveyed for this study were mapped against indices of multiple deprivation at the electoral ward level. This analysis reveals some evidence that Nextdoor can improve social capital in neighbourhoods that are more economically diverse.

Oatlands, (figure 5) in central Glasgow, for example, is made up of wards in the top two quartiles of multiply deprived areas in Scotland. All Nextdoor users in this neighbourhood who responded to the survey reported feeling safe or very safe when walking home at night, spoke to their neighbours either everyday or 2-3 times a week - compared to 49% of the public. In addition, 79% of Nextdoor users in this neighbourhood reported they were encouraged to engage with their neighbours or some form of civic activity as a result of using Nextdoor.
A second example is Austin Village, near Birmingham (figure 6), made up of two electoral wards in the two most multiply deprived quartiles in England and Wales. All Nextdoor users who responded to the survey reported stopping to talk to their neighbours at least once a month - compared to 87% of the public. In addition 89% of Nextdoor users who responded to the survey reported high levels of satisfaction with Austin Village (despite two thirds reporting low levels of trust of their neighbours, compared to 85% of the public.

Furthermore, two thirds of the Nextdoor respondents in Austin Village said that they had two or more neighbours to rely on in a time of need, compared to 56% of the public. These findings are reflective of a broader and striking trend: even where there was a greater degree of variation in the levels of trust and feelings of safety in more deprived areas, Nextdoor users still reported greater levels of satisfaction, more neighbourly interactions and more civic engagement than the general public. This directly supports David Halpern’s theory that the presence or absence of positive social relationships with neighbours has a greater impact on overall neighbourhood satisfaction than physical condition of the neighbourhood. This underlines the potential Nextdoor and other technologies hold to effect positive social change in different types of communities.
Similarly, in Ladbroke Grove (figure 7), 75% of Nextdoor respondents reported stopping to talk to their neighbours either everyday or 2-3 times a week compared to 49% of the general public. All respondents reported that Nextdoor had encouraged them to increase their neighbourhood interactions and civic engagement. In addition all Nextdoor respondents from Ladbroke Grove indicated they were satisfied with their neighbourhood compared to 86% of the public while 67% of them had more than two neighbours they could rely on compared to 56% of the general public. These results underline the significant differences in social capital and neighbourly interaction that exist between Nextdoor members and the general public. The evidence from these communities would suggest that Nextdoor can succeed in building the stronger neighbourhoods it wishes to see.
These findings need to be caveated: they clearly represent only three small neighbourhoods out of 400, with small sample sizes. Nevertheless, they appear to be representative of the broader set of results and suggest that Nextdoor can improve and facilitate social capital in neighbourhoods which are deprived and diverse as well as those which are more homogenous and affluent. Furthermore, there is legitimate cause to be excited by the potential of the platform, given its newness and the scope to increase its capabilities and reach over time.

6.3 Belonging and control

At the outset, this report highlighted belonging and control as two key themes to frame any assessment and articulated how they often compete in a mutually exclusive manner. The report posed the question, does this have to be the case? In trying to answer this, it is possible to look to two key indicators; the number of neighbours people have that they can rely on and feelings of safety. On reflection, the results offer promising signs for the ability of Nextdoor to mitigate against some of the more negative aspects of community life and to encourage more positive aspects such as building closer and stronger personal networks.

Nextdoor users interact with their neighbours more frequently and across a broader range of activities than the general population. This potentially reduces their chances of proximal isolation and loneliness. This is best illustrated in the difference between rural and urban responders on the question of how many neighbours they can rely on in a time of need. The representative poll of the public showed that 74% of people living in an urban setting had at least one neighbour they could rely on in a time of need. Among urban Nextdoor users this figure rose to 89%. In parallel, 80% of the public living in a rural setting reported having at least one neighbour they could rely on with the figure among Nextdoor users rising to 92%. Given that urban communities often struggle more than rural communities to build this sense of community, Nextdoor’s ability to engender a greater sense of belonging is particularly encouraging.

Figure 8: % of respondents who have at least one neighbour they can rely on in a time of need
At the other end of this spectrum is the concept of control. While too much control can be a negative characteristic in neighbourhoods; leading to concerns over lack of privacy or overly demanding neighbours, some control does help to contribute to feelings of safety for example. Again, on this measure we see that Nextdoor users in urban and rural settings report significantly improved feelings of safety when walking home at night. However, it is important to note that feelings of safety remain relatively constant for Nextdoor members, regardless of how long they have been members.

Figure 9: % of respondents who reported feeling very safe or fairly safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark

6.4 Case Study: The Human Impact of Nextdoor

The question remains however, what do these results actually mean for Nextdoor members’ lives? When we say Nextdoor members have higher levels of social capital, what does that actually look like and how does it affect their lives?

The most common activities on the Nextdoor platform vary from organising coffee mornings, local volunteering opportunities and responses, to urgent alerts when something has gone wrong or someone needs help; as well as simply sharing information about local goods and services, recommending tradesmen and exchanging goods and favours.

One practical example is that of Lynsey Sampson in King’s Park in Glasgow. Lynsey noticed that the frequency of trains was much lower in King’s Park than her last neighbourhood. Lynsey posted a message on the King’s Park Nextdoor news feed to ask her neighbours what they thought of the train service. In the discussion that followed, it became apparent that many of her neighbours agreed that the service was poor and
highlighted other issues such as accessibility for people with prams or wheelchairs. Lynsey and a group of neighbours went to see their MSP, James Dornan. James suggested that she put together a survey to help strengthen her campaign to improve the train service. Lynsey has now used Nextdoor to survey over 100 residents, and has involved her local MP, Stuart McDonald, who is connecting her with others to help to turn her efforts into a proper campaign. There is the very real possibility here that through Nextdoor Lynsey will greatly enhance the lives of many of her neighbours and displays the practical implications of what Nextdoor allows its members to actually achieve.

Nextdoor helps in other ways, such as reducing social isolation. An example of this is the difference Claire Annett-Davids made to her neighbourhood in Banbridge, County Down, in Northern Ireland. Claire had been struggling to find playdates for her children, aged 3 and 5 months. After using Nextdoor to reach out to other mums living nearby she was inundated with responses and a dozen mums arranged to meet to a local soft play area. The group has arranged further play dates since with some of the mothers planning a fitness group and now meeting socially as adults too.

In Glasgow Harbour, Lucy Jamieson was acutely aware that almost none of the young workers and students living in the new development knew each other. At the same time, many tenants were having issues poor maintenance, unnecessary contractor work and unexpected bills. Using Nextdoor, Lucy has been able to get people talking to each other and helping each other to resolve problems and avoid being over-charged. There are now plans to form a Residents Committee to cement the progress to date.

Even in neighbourhoods where people do know each other, Nextdoor can facilitate meaningful improvements by harnessing their community spirit more effectively. Kensal Rise in Brent, north London, is a national fly-tipping hotspot. Residents had repeatedly complained before mattresses, rugs, fridges and washing machines were found on their pavement one morning. Nextdoor members came together to make a collective complaint to the council which responded by mounting a regular CCTV van patrol and instituting community clean-ups to remove junk from streets.

All of these examples may have been more difficult without the means to connect people around the thing they share in common – their neighbourhood.

6.5 Civic engagement

Civic engagement is an integral part of any measure of community cohesion and active citizenship, and is central to much of what takes place on Nextdoor networks. As such Nextdoor members actively participate in more civic engagement than members of the general public, and it appears to be especially useful as a means of encouraging traditional means of interaction, for example coffee mornings and neighbourhood watches. Responses to the survey of Nextdoor members support this; the most popular activities that members reporting being encouraged to participate in as a result of using Nextdoor were to “attend a neighbourhood event” and “alert neighbours to important issues or concerns”.
Figure 10: Civic engagement in the last 12 months

Figure 11: Civic engagement as a direct result of using Nextdoor
7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Technology has been one of the most significant agents of change of our time but not all change is good. This report has argued how in some respects technology has been a catalyst for the declining sense of belonging and closeness many of us have in our neighbourhoods. At the same time, Nextdoor proves that technology can be part of the remedy to this ailment. The survey results and further analysis in this report indicate that Nextdoor can improve the levels of social capital found in our neighbourhoods and, as a result, can bring people closer together, create new networks of community engagement and provide practical and positive benefits to people's everyday lives. While some of this may be put down to 'selection bias', the differences are large enough to indicate something more is going on.

Why is this the case? Put simply; services such as Nextdoor can fulfil our needs. People want greater local utility. They want information on local goods and services, they want to exchange favours and they want to raise important concerns with their neighbours. And it appears they want to do so in a trusted environments where members' addresses and identities are verified. As a utility network, it is clear that Nextdoor is more oriented towards bridging social capital; connecting us to the stranger two doors down as opposed to the friend two time zones away.

As a result of this focus on utility rather than on self-expression, Nextdoor is less likely to encounter many of the negative consequences of other online social networks. In addition, it is striking from the case studies how the platform can act as a “force multiplier” for people willing to take up a local cause and to give their time to support it. As a result, Nextdoor should actively consider how to tap into these reservoirs of goodwill and drive volunteering through the platform.

While we have been able to draw a number of very positive conclusions from this research, it also highlights the need for a number of areas of further research, both on the Nextdoor platform specifically and on other social networking sites. It would, for example, be interesting to map the growth of a Nextdoor neighbourhood over time and the level of crime that neighbourhood experiences, to see if it was able to genuinely make communities safer rather than just feel safer. On a broader level, more research is needed on interaction between different age groups on all social networking platforms. Much is already known about how millennials tend to behave on social media and how they are affected by it in various ways, and the same is also true for older generations. Little appears to be known about different age groups engaging with each other; what issues, events or subjects tend to bring people of different age groups together and which drive the most positive outcomes? This would be particularly interesting for Nextdoor given that young people tend to have the worst relations with their (likely older) neighbours (figure 12). As the intergenerational divide becomes a defining issue in public debate, a multi-dimensional study of a number of leading social networking sites, analysing incidents of cross age
category communication and engagement, would help us to obtain a better understanding of how we can use technology to bridge this divide.

**Figure 12: Quality of relationships with neighbours by age range**

![Quality of relationships with neighbours by age range](image)

The final question that this report raises is ‘does there really need to be a trade-off between being connected locally and globally? Are the two mutually exclusive?’ As Louise Casey indicated in her foreword, we must remember that we can inhabit both the online and physical world at the same time; in fact it is essential if we are to build real community spirit and cohesion. Similarly, we must be able to inhabit both the local and the global in order to realise the unique benefits of both. Nextdoor is helping to achieve just this, and still has further to go. It is important to remember that many Nextdoor neighbourhoods are still in their infancy; while local communities and neighbourhood cohesion have arguably been in decline for 50 years, this platform has only been in existence in this country for nine months. It needs more time and, critically, more members in order to realise its full potential and allow us to say truly that the neighbourhood is back.
**ANNEX A: FULL RESULTS**

How often do you stop and talk to your neighbours?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nextdoor users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times a week</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Bar chart showing how often Nextdoor users and the general public stop and talk to their neighbours.](chart.png)
How often do you borrow things or exchange favours with your neighbours?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nextdoor users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times a week</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often do you borrow things or exchange favours with your neighbours?

![Bar chart showing the frequency of borrowing or exchanging favours between Nextdoor users and the general public.](chart_image)
Generally speaking, would you say that most people in your neighbourhood can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nextdoor users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can be</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't be</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Bar chart showing the percentage of Nextdoor users and general public who think people can be trusted or not.](chart.png)
How many neighbours do you have that you can rely on in a time of need?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nextdoor users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Bar chart showing the percentage of Nextdoor users and the general public who have 0, 1, 2-4, and 5+ neighbours they can rely on in a time of need.]
How safe would you feel walking alone in your neighbourhood after dark?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nextdoor users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very safe</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly safe</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bit unsafe</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unsafe</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How safe would you feel walking alone in your neighbourhood after dark?

![Bar chart showing the percentage of Nextdoor users and the general public feeling very safe, fairly safe, a bit unsafe, and very unsafe.](chart.png)
How would you rate your satisfaction with your neighbourhood? (0 = not at all satisfied, 5 = completely satisfied)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nextdoor users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How would you rate your satisfaction with your neighbourhood?
How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? (0 = not at all satisfied, 5 = completely satisfied)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nextdoor users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

![Bar chart showing satisfaction levels for Nextdoor users and the general public.](chart.png)
How often do you use online social networks (e.g. Facebook)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nextdoor Users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times a week</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often do you use online social networks?

![Bar chart showing the frequency of social network use for Nextdoor users and the general public.]

- **Never**: 21% (Nextdoor) vs. 20% (General public)
- **Once a month**: 5% (Nextdoor) vs. 7% (General public)
- **Once a week**: 6% (Nextdoor) vs. 7% (General public)
- **2-3 times a week**: 11% (Nextdoor) vs. 15% (General public)
- **Everyday**: 56% (Nextdoor) vs. 51% (General public)
Which of the following have you engaged in, in the last 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Nextdoor users</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local volunteering</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting in political elections</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informing your neighbours of neighbourhood events</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alerting your neighbours to important issues or concerns</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you think using Nextdoor has encouraged you to do any of the following?

- Borrow things and exchange favours with your neighbours
- Increase the number of neighbours you have that you feel you can rely on in a time of need
- Volunteer locally
- Vote in local or national elections
- Attend a neighbourhood event
- Alert your neighbours to important issues or concerns
- Feel safer in your neighbourhood
- Talk to your neighbours in the street
- None of the above

Do you think that using Nextdoor will encourage you to do any of the following?

- Borrow things and exchange favours with your neighbours
- Increase the number of neighbours you have that you feel you can rely on in a time of need
- Volunteer locally
- Vote in local or national elections
- Attend a neighbourhood event
- Alert your neighbours to important issues or concerns
- Feel safer in your neighbourhood
- Talk to your neighbours in the street
- None of the above
ANNEX B: ADDITIONAL POLLING

Data collected in a study of more than 2,000 people across the UK, conducted by One Poll.

- The overwhelming majority of British people (69%) clearly crave a sense of community, believing that it would make where they live friendlier and increase property values, but also help neighbours feel safer and reduce crime
- One third of Brits don’t know any of their neighbours, and less than half believe there is a still sense of community spirit in their neighbourhood
- Only 10% of Brits – or families living in roughly 2.6 million households – can’t even name their next door neighbour
- Only 34% of Brits feel their neighbourhood is community-minded, despite most (57%) saying where they live is friendly
- Less than half (41%) would currently feel comfortable knocking next door to borrow a cup of sugar, while only 38% would be happy to give a next door neighbour a spare key

Post-Brexit

- A fifth of people think knowing our neighbours better could heal any discord in the UK post-Brexit
- Any post-Brexit fallout within neighbourhoods is most keenly felt by 18-34 year olds – three times as many younger people would be put off getting to know their neighbours if they voted differently to them, compared to those aged 55 plus
- Feeling safer and more secure would be a key benefit of a closer neighbourhoods said 69% of those surveyed. Most people said the neighbourhoods of their childhoods felt safer than the those in 2016
- A third of respondents said they wish there was more community spirit where they live, while a quarter said they just don’t know how to get more involved

Sense of community

- Scotland is revealed as the UK country with those keenest to get to know their neighbours better, while Wales has the most neighbours who are already considered friends by the people next door
- Northern Irish people are the most likely to say the community they grew up in felt friendlier and more connected than where they live now, despite the region’s troubles
• The Blitz spirit of togetherness is missed by more than half of those who lived through it as children
• The majority (60%) say when compared to the relationships their parents and grandparents had with their neighbours, their own community is just not as close
• Britons are nearly twice as likely to ask a neighbour to look after a pet than they are their children
• A fifth of us are too shy to start a relationship with a neighbour, with only slightly less (19%) worried they’d be seen as nosy if they struck up conversations
• Just under half of people would be prepared to pay more for a home in a strong neighbourhood – and 95% of them say they’d be willing to pay up to 10% extra… adding more than £20,000 to the current cost of the average UK home
• Strong community spirit comes in fourth place behind good open spaces, good transport links and good schools on people’s ideal wish lists for where they live across the UK – although it’s nudged into fifth place in England, behind having a good shopping centre close by

Crime and safety
• The majority of people (83%) think it is important for communities to pull together to fight crime
• A perceived lack of police presence forced by spending cuts is seen as a reason for feeling less safe for nearly a third of people, while slightly less (30%) say that getting involved if they spot criminal activity is just too risky
• For a fifth of people, the more transient nature of society with people coming and going all the time, impacts on their sense of security where they live

Social isolation
• Just 12% of Brits feel strongly connected to their community
• Feeling lonely where you live is not an issue just for the elderly. 28% of 18-24 year olds and 29% of 25-34 year olds admit to feeling isolated, compared to just 14% of people aged over 55
• Liverpool is the place where least people feel lonely (9%), while Glasgow scores the highest (23%)