

Bravehearts or Tim'rous Beasties?

***A decade of research into online election campaigns
in Scotland***



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Scottish Parliament formed in 1999



Image: Scottish Parliament

“A new sort of democracy...an open, accessible Parliament”

(Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament, 1998)

“It should aspire to be an example of best practice in Parliamentary information systems”

(Expert Panel on ICTs, 1998)

“MSPs are intensive and competent users of ICTs... ICTs are embedded into their parliamentary activities...”

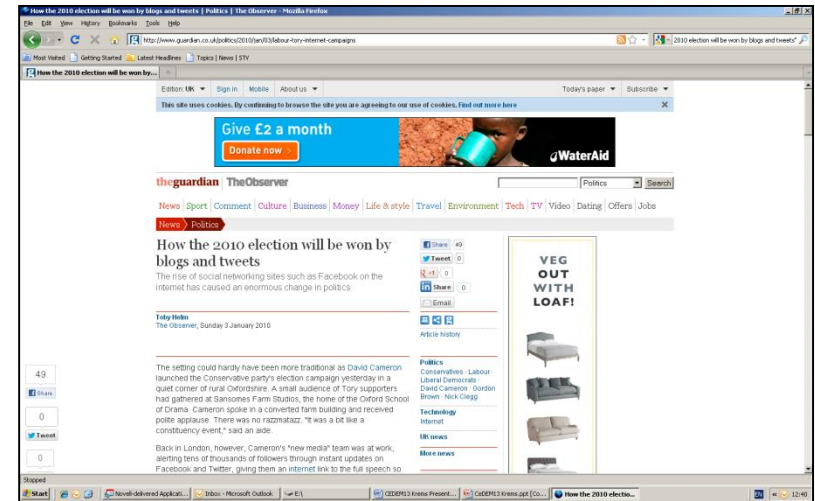
(Smith & Webster, 2004)

Would those seeking to gain election to the Parliament also take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICTs?



Four studies conducted, 2003 to date

- **Scottish Parliament elections, 2003, 2007 and 2011**
- **UK Parliament election 2010 (Scottish constituencies only)**



Methodologies (1)

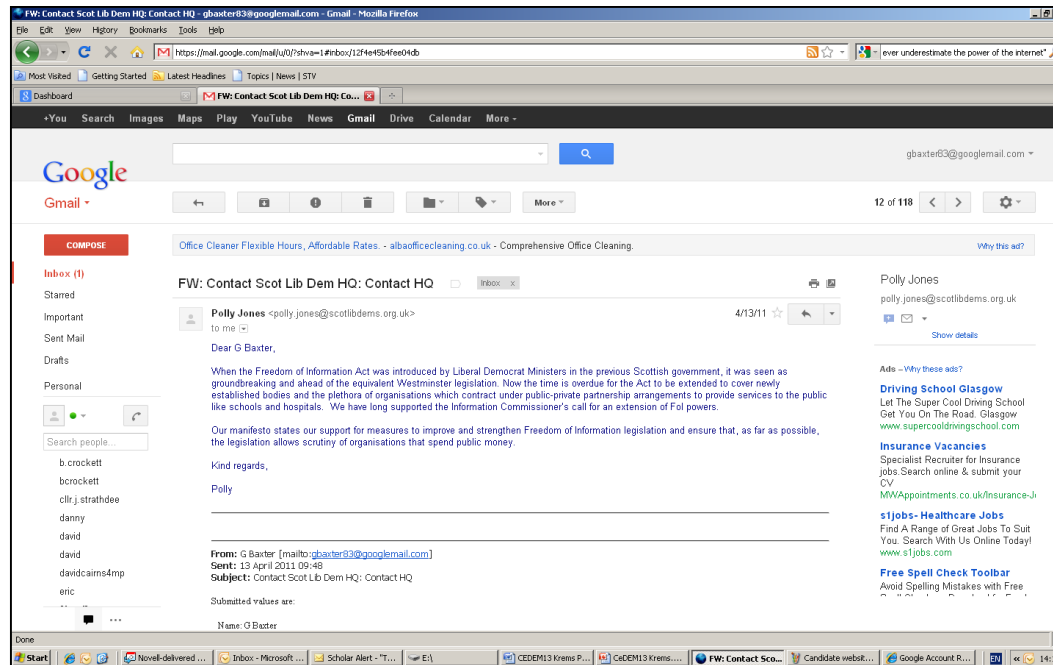
- **Content analysis of all party websites**
- **Sample of 11-12 candidate websites**
- **Analysis during four weeks preceding polling day**
- **Content analysed in terms of the ways in which the websites:**
 - **provided policy and candidate information;**
 - **provided up-to-date campaign news;**
 - **tried to engage the support of users; and**
 - **provided opportunities for interaction and debate.**

Feature	Candidate and Political Party (see key to party acronyms below)											
Information Provision	A LAB ¹	B LAB	C LD ¹	D LD	E SNP ¹	F SNP	G CON ¹	H CON	I GRN	J PIR	K SSP	L IND
Biographical details		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•
Personal policy statements/information		•		•		•	•			•	•	•
Party manifesto or policy statements		•										N/A
Personal campaign agenda/calendar				•			⊙		•		•	
Updated personal campaign news	•	⊙	•	⊙	⊙	•	•	⊙	⊙			
Mailing list/e-news service					•	•						
Download newsletters, press cuttings, etc.		•	•		•			•				
RSS feeds			•	•		•			•	•		•
Blogs	⊙					•		⊙	⊙		⊙	•
Link to personal social media sites	•	•	•	•		•		•	•			•
Real-time feeds from personal social media sites				•				•				
Link to party/constituency sites		•	•			•	•	•	•	•		N/A
Real-time feeds from other sites			•			•						
Social bookmarking		•		•		•					•	•
"How to vote" information	⊙	•	⊙	⊙			⊙	•				
Declaration of interests information							•					
Personal expenses information			•		•							
Information in alternative formats/languages			⊙									
Search facility	•		•	•				•		•		•
Word cloud tagging and links				•								
Communication and interactivity												
Online contact/questions	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Discussion fora												⊙
Skype "phone-in" facility									•			
Membership, Donations, etc.												
Online volunteer/pledge form				•								
Online donations		•	•	•							•	
Download campaign materials		•						•				•
Audiovisual features												
Photo galleries		•				•		•				
Personal video clips and podcasts	•		•			•	•	•			•	
Personal audio clips and podcasts			⊙									
Other video clips		•				•	•	•			•	
Google Map features							•	⊙				
Other interactive features												
Online surveys and polls	•	•	•					•				
Online petitions			•									



Methodologies (2)

- **Online enquiry responsiveness test, measuring speed and extent of response**
- **Covert research, where researchers posed as potential voters**
- **Created special email accounts and (in 2010 and 2011) social media accounts**



Methodologies (3)

- **In 2010 and 2011, content analysis of parties' and candidates' Twitter accounts, Facebook pages, and blogs**
- **Analysis of all posts made during four-week campaign period**
- **Posts analysed in terms of the topic(s) being discussed, and the nature of the communication taking place**



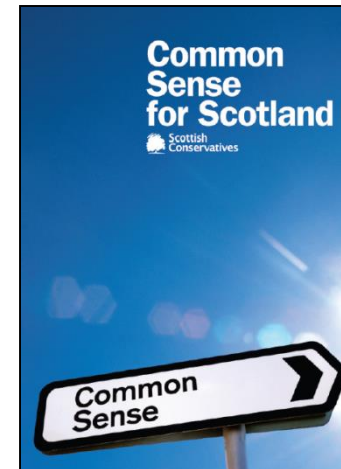
Methodologies (4)

- **2011 research included a study of voters' online information behaviour**
- **Hosted by Rosemount Community Centre, Aberdeen**
- **Recruited 64 participants, from a range of age groups and socio-economic classes**
- **Used laptop and mobile broadband 'dongle'**
- **Used the 'interactive, electronically-assisted interview' method**



Party Manifestos and Other Policy Statements

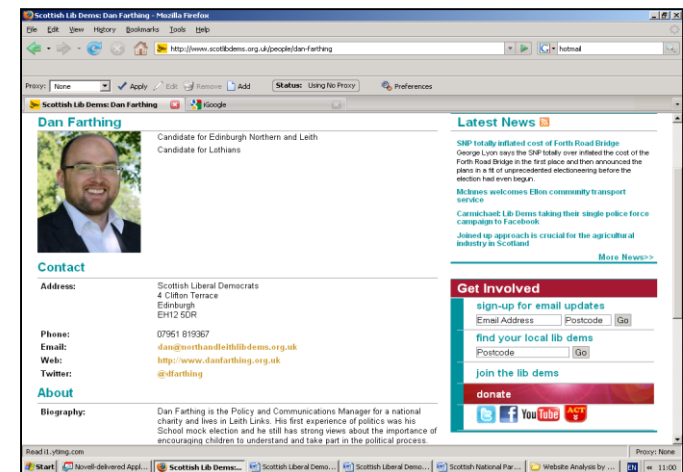
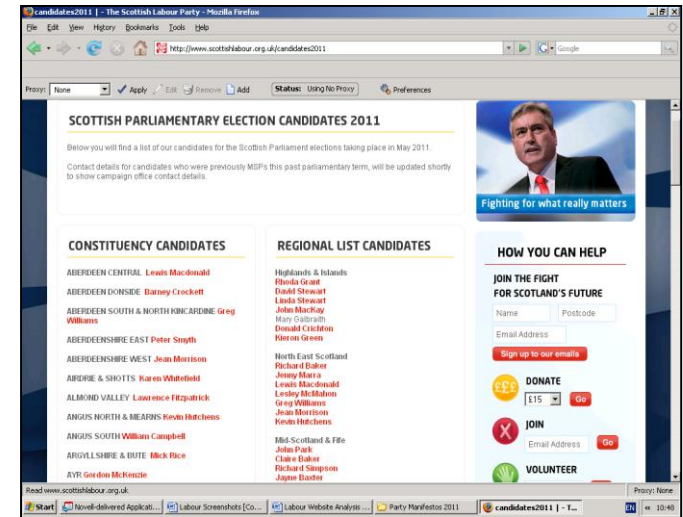
- Manifestos prominent on party websites
- Recent move towards providing additional, more concise policy documents
- Policy commentary less common on candidates' websites



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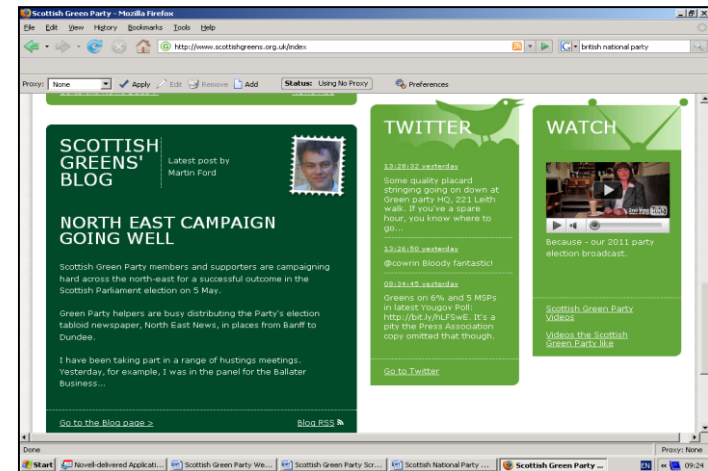
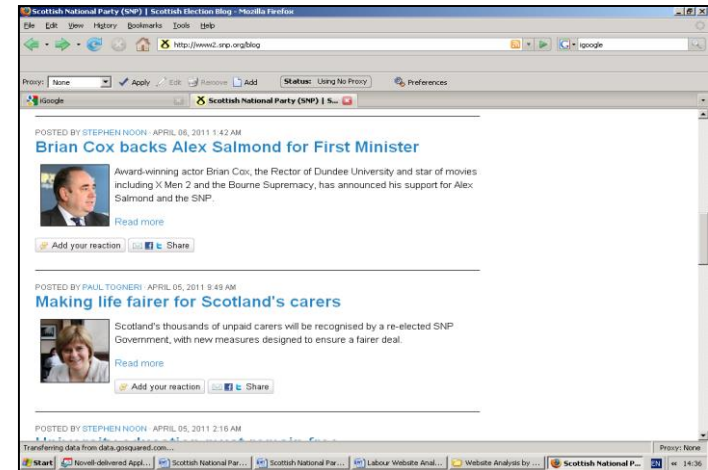
Candidate Information

- Provision of candidate information on party websites inconsistent and illogical
- Lack of candidate contact details
- Lack of links to candidates' personal sites



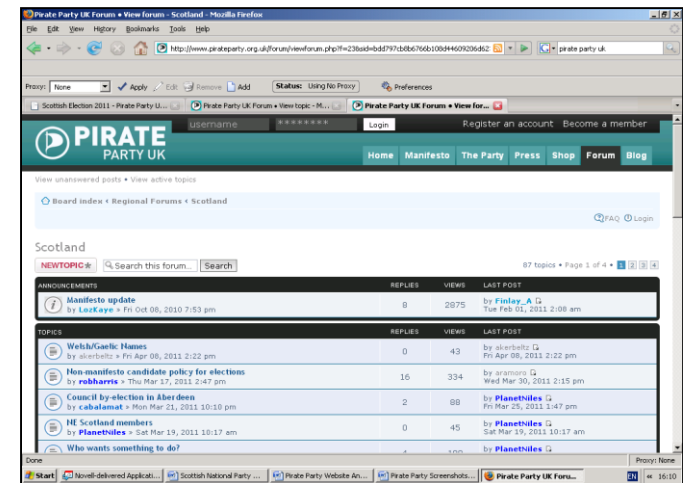
Campaign News

- **Larger parties better at providing regular, up-to-date news**
- **Slight move towards providing real-time feeds from social media sites**



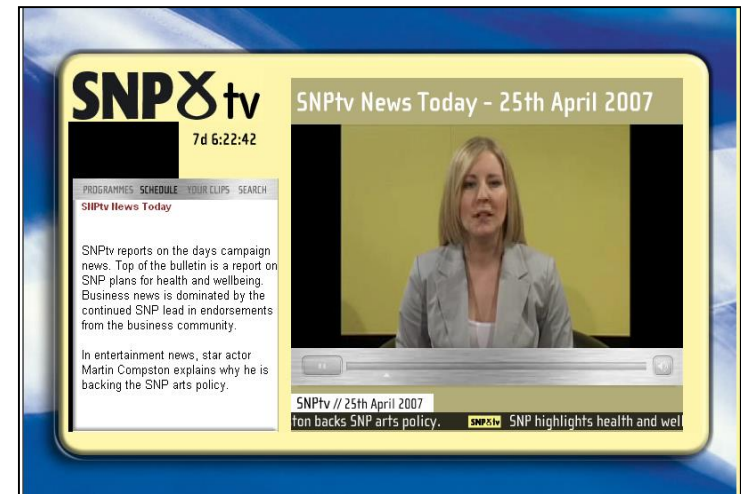
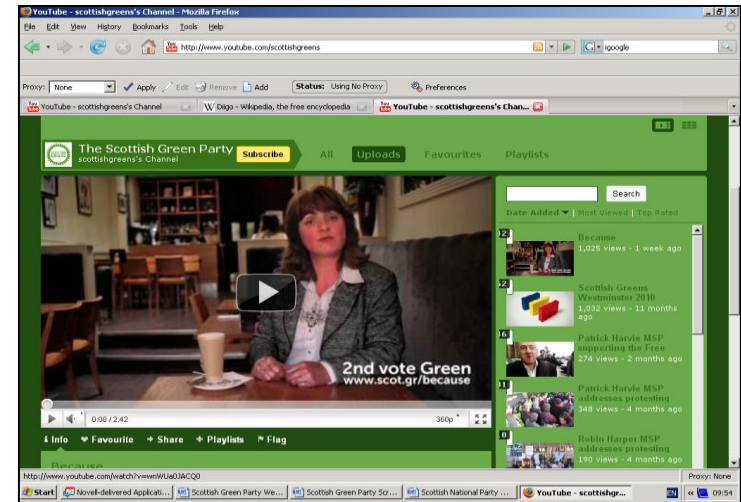
Communication and Engagement

- **Vast majority of parties and candidates have provided some method of online contact**
- **But other opportunities for online engagement have been limited**



Audiovisual Features

- **Video clips have become standard on websites of larger parties**
- **In 2007, some experiments with live online TV broadcasts, but never repeated**



Alternative Languages and Formats

- Since 2007, a decline in the provision of information in alternative formats or languages
- During 2011 campaign, criticism from disability charities

Videos

These are election videos by the Scottish Green Party with British Sign Language interpreting and subtitles.

Election Video with Robin Harper

Robin Harper outlines the reasons for voting Green, together with some specific information for the deaf and hard of hearing. View it here via YouTube, or download in MP4 or WMV formats.



Pàrtaidh Sòisealach na h-Alba

PÀRTAIDH SÒISEALACH NA H-ALBA

LORG

A' rannsachadh na
làraich seo

Lorg! Mapa

PSA

Tha an
Sinne
Naidheachd Comainn
an Guth
Toraidhean
Foillseachaidhean

COMARTEAN

Iomairtean Clàr-innse
Caisg an coagadh
Clàr-innse Toghadh
Bìadh-sgoile an
asgaidh
Cuir às don Chis-
Uisge

BPA PSA

Clàr-Innse BPA
Dealbhan 's
eachdraidhean-beatha
Clàr-Innse Toghadh
2003
Manifesto PSA
Toraidhean an
taghadh 2003

Fàilte

gun larch-lìn aig Pàrtaidh Sòisealach na h-Alba.



Tha PSA a' seasamh
airson: an comann-
sòisealta atharrachadh
a-rèir prionnsablan
sòisealach; a' cur às don
chalpachas agus a' cur an
àite siostam eaconamach
a tha steidhichte air
seilbh dheamocratach
agus smachd air prìomh
roinntean na h-
eacnamaidh; siostam a
tha steidhichte air
feumalachdan sòisealta
agus dìon na h-
àrainneachd an àite
prothaid phrìobhaideach
agus sgrìos an nadair.

Taghaidhean Eòrpaich 2004 -



Tha na taghaidhean don Phàrlamaid Eòrpaich air 10 Ògmhios nan còrram
buille a thoir air Tony Blair agus an luchd-brannachaidh cogaidh nan
Làbarach Ùra. Tro bhith a' bhòtadh do PSA faodaidh tu teachdaireachd a chur
don luchd-phoileistigs a tha a' cosg nam mìlteanan air a' chogadh ann an
Ira agus an t-sìneadh a' bhaile agus na luchd-teasairg coilltean agus

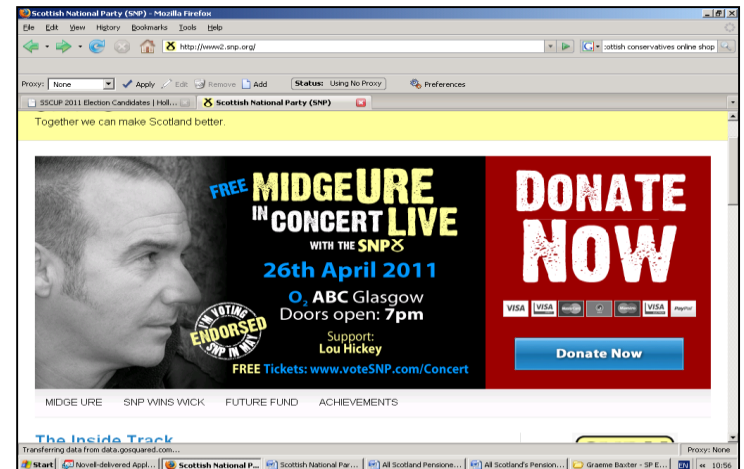
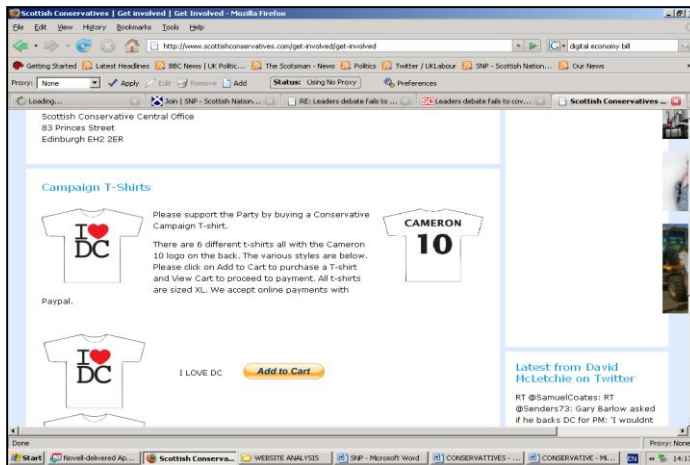


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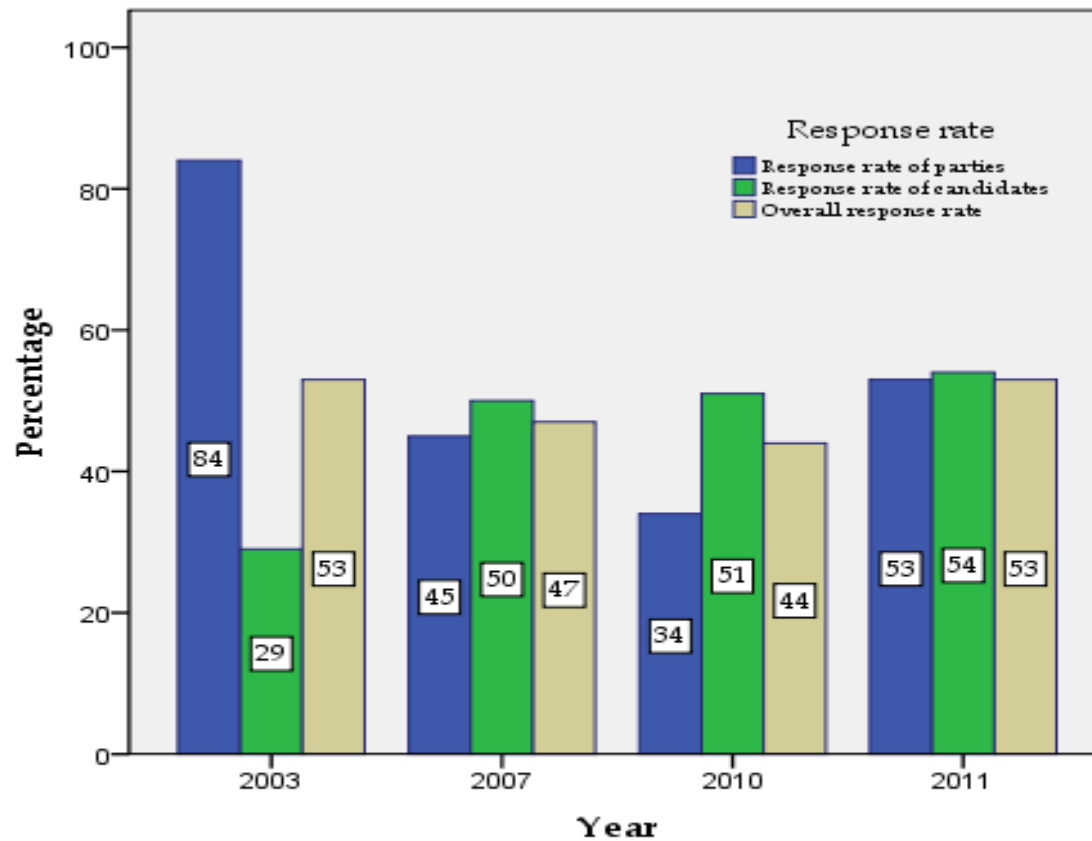
Membership and Donations

- Since 2003 campaign, a dramatic increase in the use of the Internet for resource generation

The screenshot shows the 'Join the Labour Party' website. The main heading is 'Join Labour'. Below it, there are three steps: Step 1 Personal Details, Step 2 Payment, and Step 3 Finished. The form is titled 'Membership rates explained'. It includes fields for Title, Forename(s), Surname, Date of birth, Type of Membership (Standard, Young Labour, Labour Students), Country, Postcode, and Address. There are also links for 'HOW YOU CAN HELP' (DONATE, JOIN, VOLUNTEER) and 'EVENTS NEAR ME'.



E-mail Enquiry Response Rates



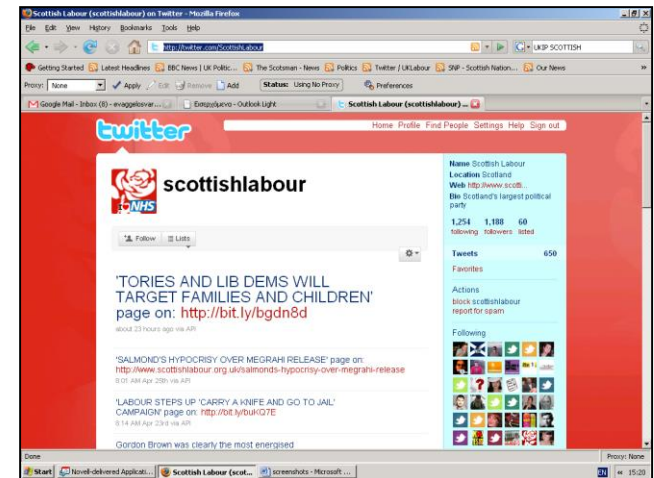
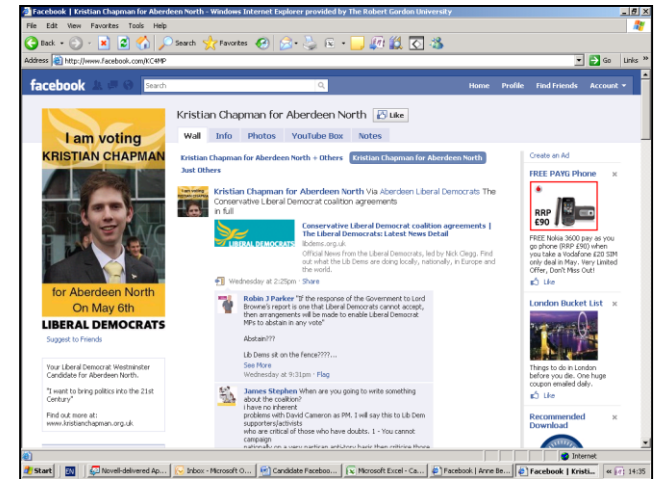
Social Media Enquiry Response Rates

Year	Facebook	Twitter
2010	50%	0%
2011	35%	30%

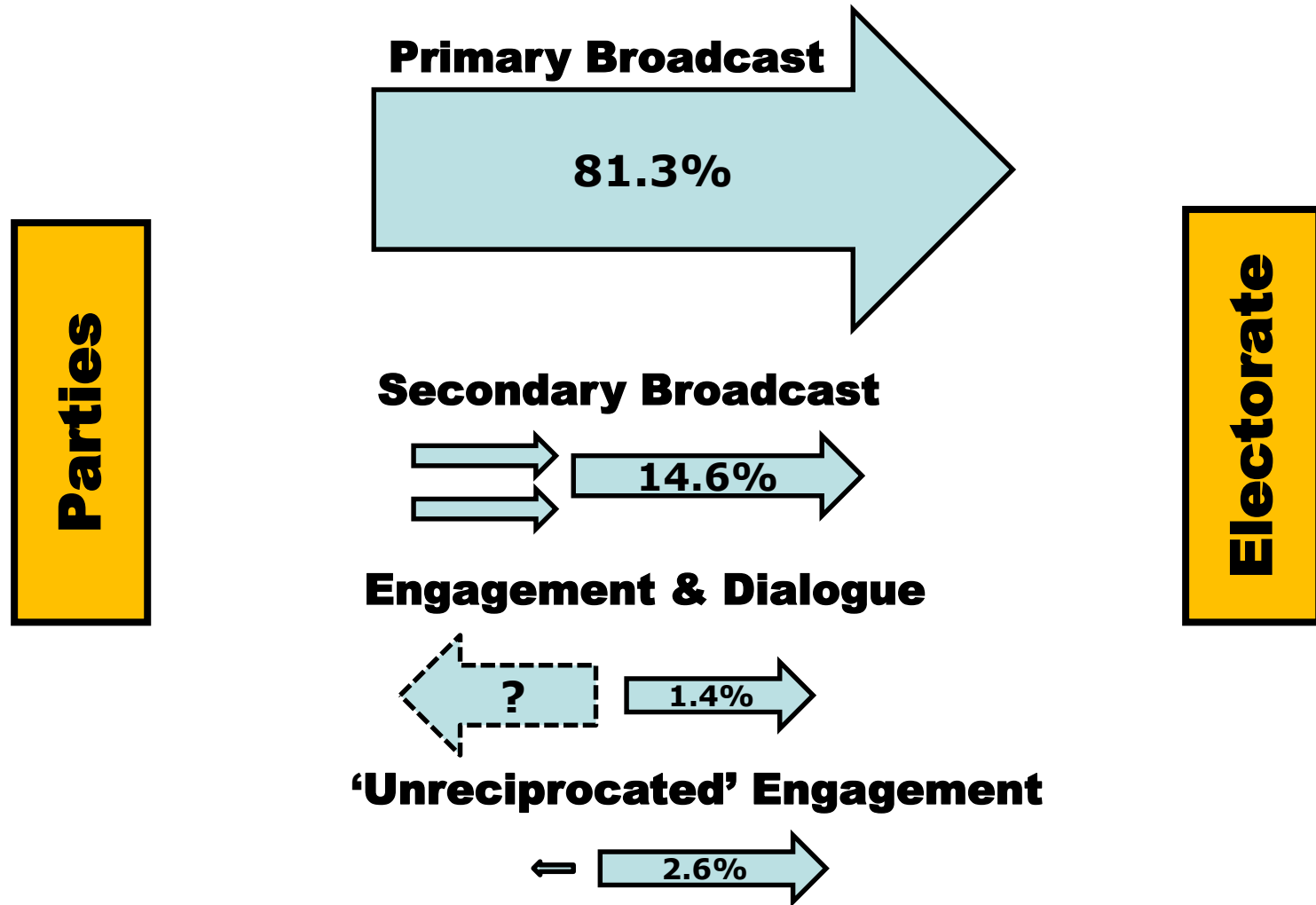


Scottish Politicians' Social Media Use, 2010 and 2011

- Keen to be seen embracing new social media tools
- But lack of meaningful policy comment
- Most followers and 'likers' appeared to be personal friends or party activists
- Reluctance to interact with wider electorate
- Primarily the one-way 'broadcast' of information



2010 UK Election: Scottish Party Twitter Sites (*n* = 857 posts)



User Study 2011

- **Need for concise policy documents**
- **Need for *local* policy commentary**
- **Wish to see more online dialogue**
- **Unimpressed with social media efforts:**
 - “trivial”, “shallow”, “superficial”*
- **Majority felt campaign sites served a useful purpose**
- **But, for 94%, they had no influence on their voting intentions**



Online Elections in Scotland, 2003-2013

Conclusions

- Incremental growth in use of Internet
- Technologies have changed, but nature of their use remains the same
- Primarily one-way broadcast
- Politicians unwilling to answer ‘difficult’ questions and engage with voters
- Dichotomy between provision and voters’ information needs
- SNP’s claim that “online swayed the vote” in 2011 is questionable

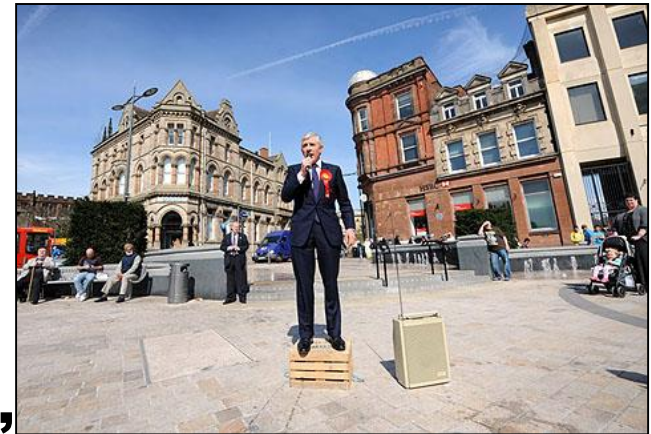


Photo: *Wolverhampton Express & Star*



Image: No Tosh

