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Does Scotland  **this?**

***The use of social media by political parties
and candidates in Scotland during the 2010
UK General Election campaign***

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**Department of Information Management
Aberdeen Business School**



**ROBERT GORDON
UNIVERSITY • ABERDEEN**

Background to 2010 General Election Study

- **Continued a series of studies examining the use of the Internet during election campaigns by political actors in Scotland**
- **Previous studies conducted during 2003 and 2007 *Scottish Parliamentary* election campaigns**
- **Content analysis of parties' and candidates' websites, plus covert research examining responsiveness to email enquiries**



‘Politics as Usual?’

- **Previous studies found parties and candidates in ‘broadcast’ mode**
- **General reluctance to engage in open, interactive debate with the electorate online**

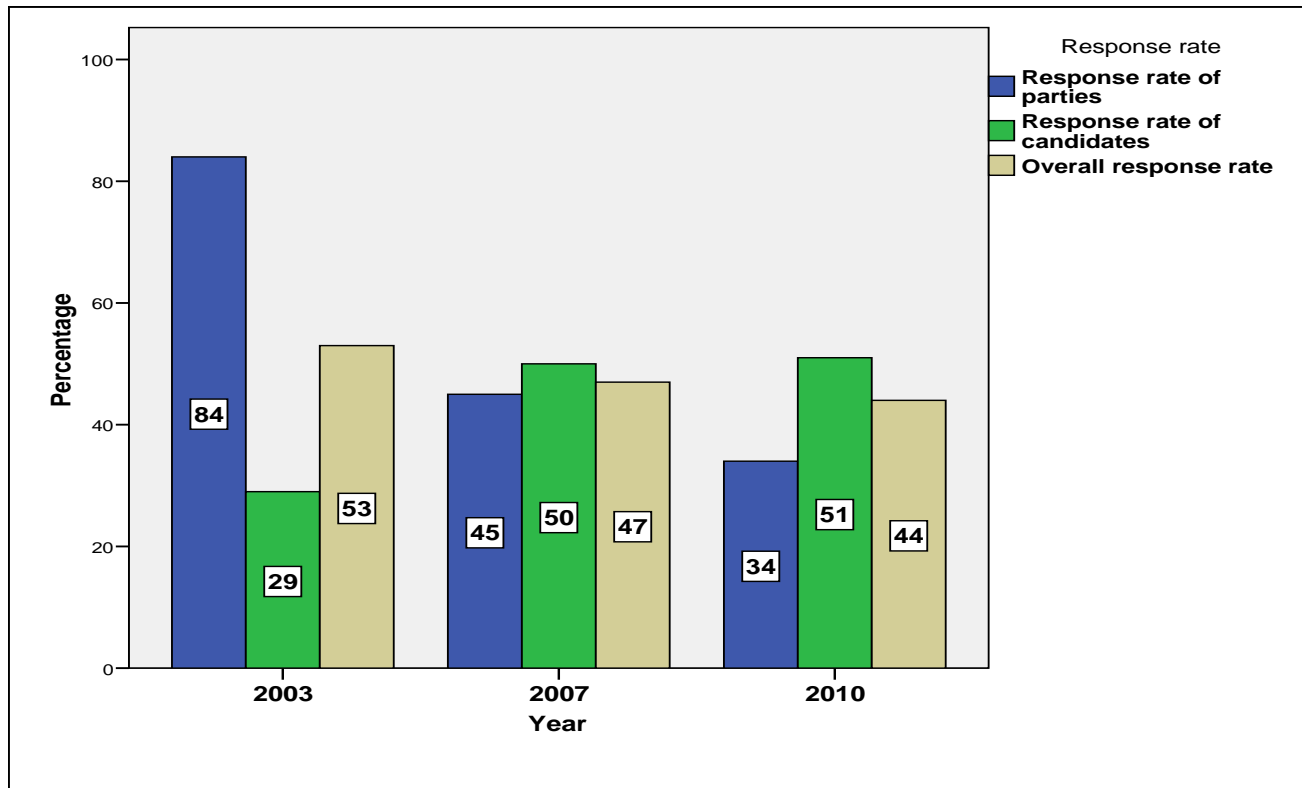


Photo source: Channel 4



“You might very well think that; I couldn’t possibly comment”

- Previous studies also revealed an increasing reluctance to answer ‘difficult’ policy questions online



2010: finally *the* Internet election?

How the 2010 election will be won by blogs and tweets | Politics | The Observer - Windows Internet Explorer provided by The Rob

http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/jan/03/labour-tory-internet-campaigns

guardian.co.uk | TheObserver

News Sport Comment Culture Business Money Life & Times

News Politics

How the 2010 election will be won by blogs and tweets

The rise of social networking sites such as Facebook on the internet has caused an enormous change in politics

Toby Helm
The Observer, Sunday 3 January 2010
Article history

The setting could hardly have been more traditional as David Cameron launched the Conservative party's election campaign yesterday in a quiet corner of rural Oxfordshire. A small audience of Tory supporters had gathered at Sansomes Farm Studios, the home of the Oxford School of Drama. Cameron spoke in a converted farm building and received polite applause. There was no razzmatazz. "It was a bit like a constituency event," said an aide.

Back in London, however, Cameron's "new media" team was at work alerting tens of thousands of followers through instant updates on

Done

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General election 2010: Facebook and Twitter to have unprecedented impact - Telegraph - Windows Internet Explorer provided by Th

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/election-2010/7558703/General-election-2010-Facebook-and-Twitter-to-have-unprecedented-impact

The Telegraph

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General Election 2010

SEATS HELD BY PARTIES

Party	Seats
Con	307
Lab	257
LD	57

SHARE OF THE VOTE

The number of seats each party has after all 650 have been declared.

With all seats declared, what was the parties' share of the vote?

General election 2010: Facebook and Twitter unprecedented impact

Facebook, Twitter and other social media will have an unprecedented general election campaign.

By Jon Swaine 9:47AM BST 06 Apr 2010
Follow Jon Swaine on Twitter

New Labour came to power in 1997 via the slick management of traditional media by Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's communications chief.

Newspapers, television and radio continue to set the agenda for this election and remain crucial for leaders delivering a message to the electorate.

But political parties know today more and more voters – especially in the

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BBC News - Today - A 'new media election'? - Windows Internet Explorer provided by The Robert Gordon University

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/today/newsid_8606000/8606909.stm

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BBC TODAY

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Page last updated at 07:07 GMT, Thursday, 8 April 2010 08:07 UK

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A 'new media election'?

How much of the forthcoming political battle will be played out in cyberspace?

By Steve Hewlett
Presenter of Radio 4's Media Show

Its only just started and we've already heard plenty about the role of so-called "new media" in this election campaign. All the parties and many of the candidates have switched on to Facebook, Twitter and email.

BEST OF TODAY

FEATURES AND COMMENT

- Spoti-dying art**
Is the fat lady singing for classical music?
- Inside Broadmoor**
Unprecedented access to the infamous hospital
- Sea gangsters**
Why Somali pirates are allowed to escape justice

- Best general
- The unholy Bible
- Abstract Pakistan
- Cash 'scramble'?
- Marriage mirth
- Boho or no?

Done

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2010 General Election Study

- **Comparative paper on website analysis and email enquiry responsiveness to appear in *Aslib Proceedings***
- **This paper will focus on the extent and nature of social media use by parties and candidates**



Identifying Candidates' Social Media Sites

- **Party websites not helpful in directing users to candidates' social media sites, so reliance on:-**
 - **Google**
 - **Facebook and Twitter search engines**
 - **Lists of 'members' or 'followers' on parties' social media sites**



Once bitten, twice shy?



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Stuart MacLennan: Labour Candidate for Moray



Photo source: *The Guardian*



**ROBERT GORDON
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'Political suicide by Twitter': an early victim



Photo source:
The Sun



Parties and Candidates Using Social Media

- **In 2010 election, 347 candidates from 20 parties contested 59 constituency seats in Scotland**
- **Seven of the 20 parties used some form of social media**
- **129 (37.2%) of the 347 candidates had some form of active social media presence**



Parties' Use of Social Media

Application No. parties

YouTube **6**

Facebook **5**

Twitter **5**

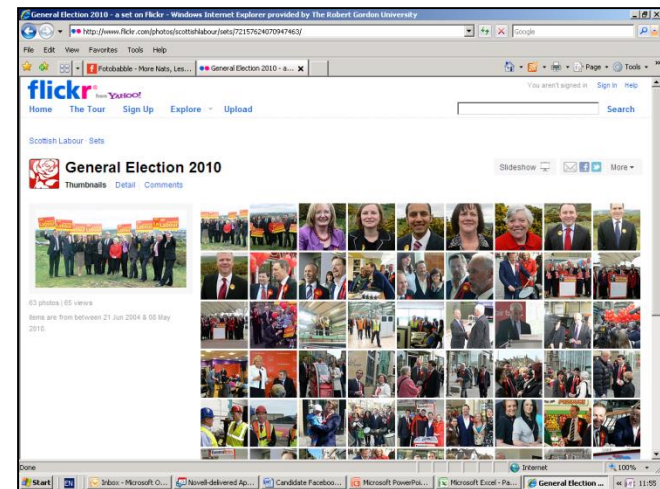
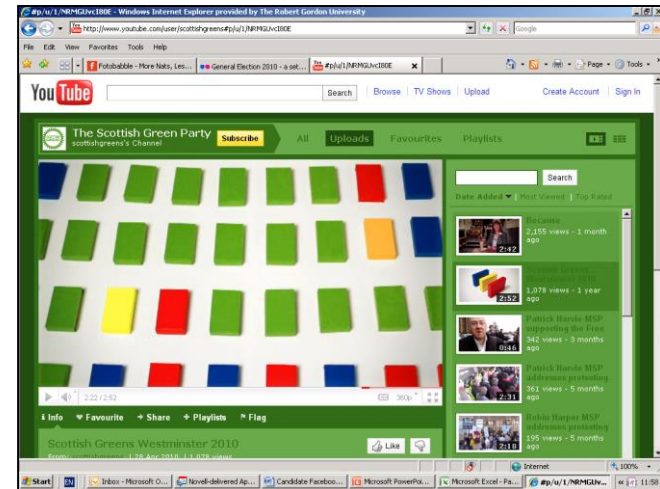
Bebo **1**

Flickr **1**

fotobabble **1**

Plixi **1**

Twitpic **1**



Number of Candidates Using Social Media

Party (and no. of candidates standing)	One app.	Two apps.	Three or more apps.	Total
Liberal Democrat (59)	17	6	9	32
SNP (59)	15	6	7	28
Labour (59)	14	6	6	26
Conservative (58)	5	5	6	16
Green (20)	4	3	1	8
UKIP (27)	4	2	-	6
SSP (10)	4	-	-	4
BNP (13)	3	-	-	3
Others (42)	4	2	-	6
Totals (347)	70	30	29	129

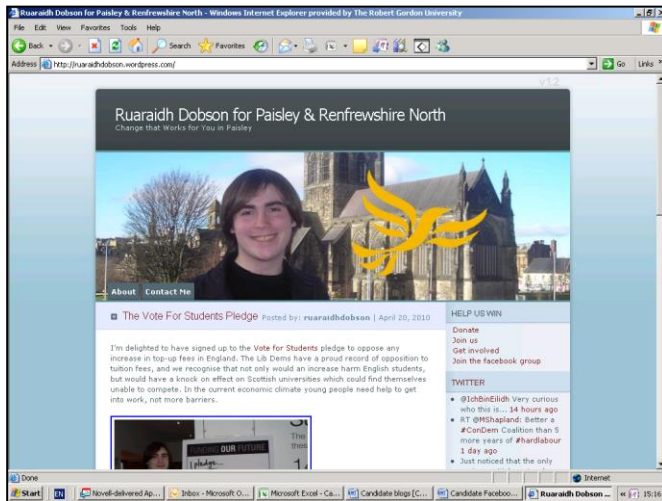


Types of Applications Used by Candidates

Party (and no. of cand. using soc. media)	Twitter	Facebook	Blog	YouTube	Others	Totals
Lib Dem (32)	24	19	7	2	8	60
SNP (28)	13	18	12	3	2	48
Labour (26)	15	16	7	3	6	47
Conservative (16)	13	10	5	2	6	36
Green (8)	6	3	2	-	2	13
UKIP (6)	4	1	3	-	-	8
SSP (4)	-	2	2	-	-	4
BNP (3)	-	-	3	-	-	3
Others (6)	1	4	3	-	-	8
Totals (129)	76	73	44	10	24	227



Candidate Blogs ($n = 43$)



- **Content analysed during five-week campaign period to 6 May 2010**

- **Average of 7.2 blog posts per candidate**

- **Nine candidates made no posts whatsoever**



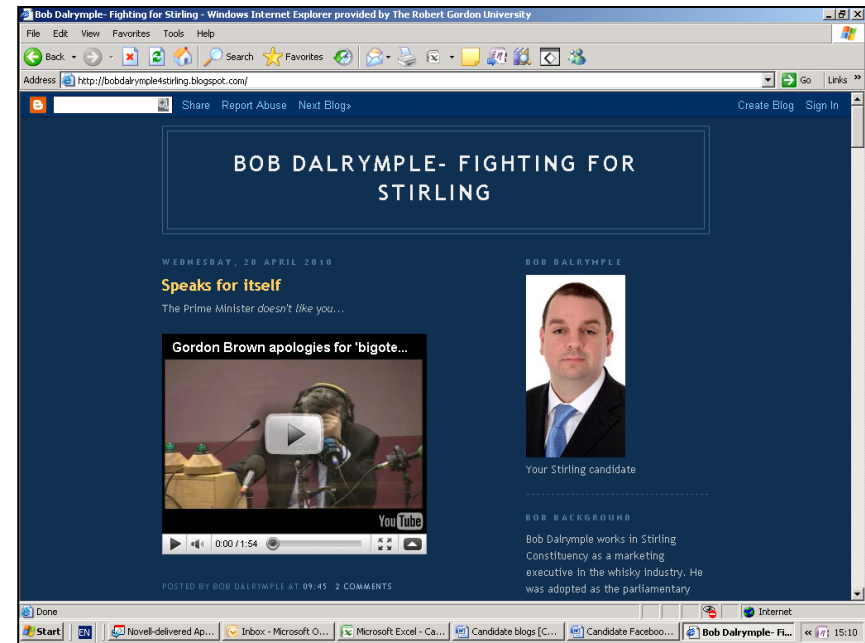
- **Of the main parties' candidates, Lib Dems were most active (13 posts on average), and Conservatives least active (2.8 posts)**

- **Most posts were on national policy issues (16.4%) or on the candidates' personal campaign activities (15.5%)**

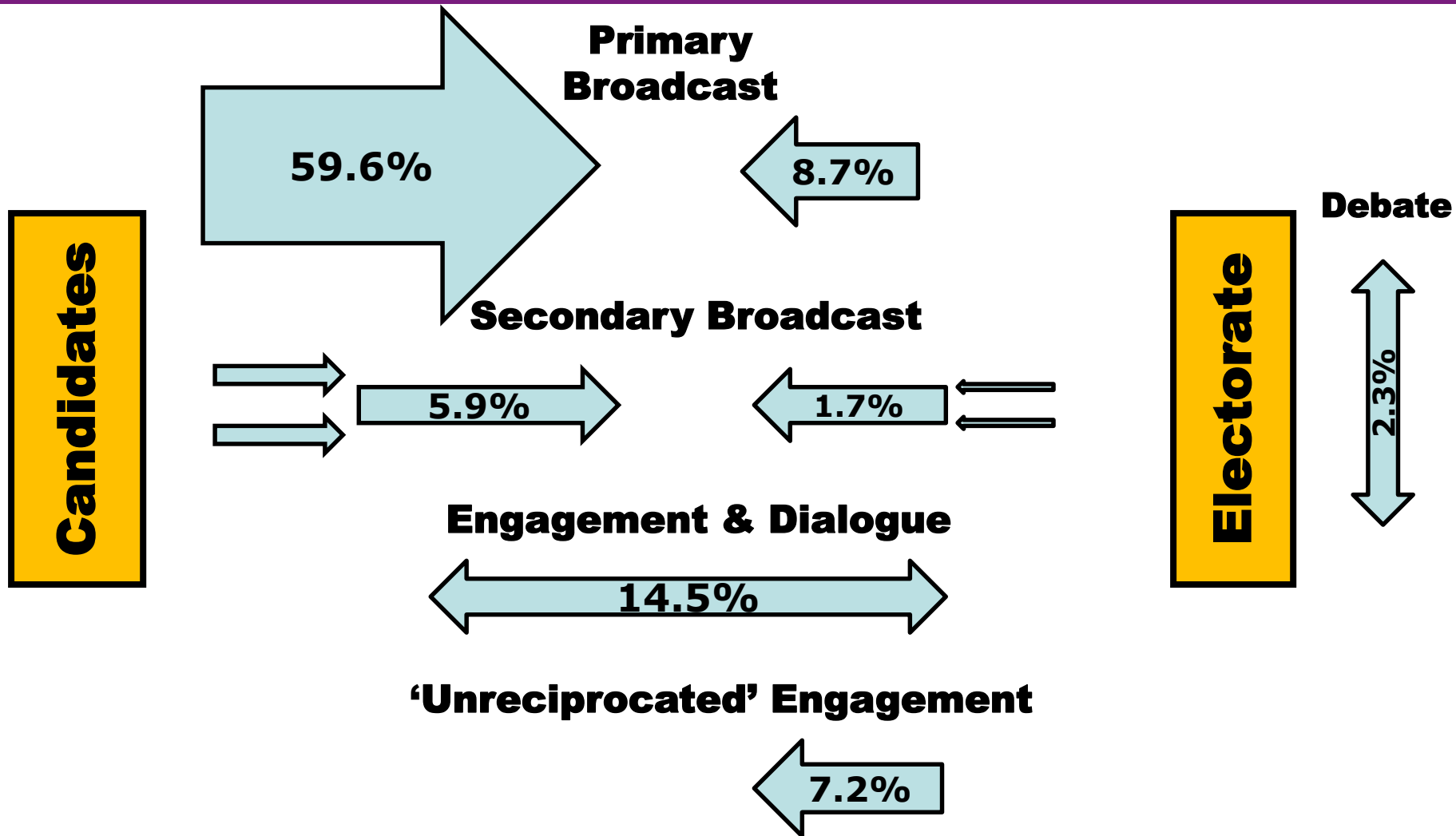


Electorate's Comments on Candidate Blogs

- **Ten of the 43 blogs did not allow public comment**
- **Average number of public comments per blog post was just 0.6**
- **Most public comments (26.6%) were messages of support for the candidate or their party**
- **Relatively little response from candidates to electorate's comments and questions**



Candidate Blogs: Information Exchange ($n = 470$ posts)



cf. Francoli & Ward's '21st Century Soapboxes' (2008)



Photo source: *Wolverhampton Express & Star*



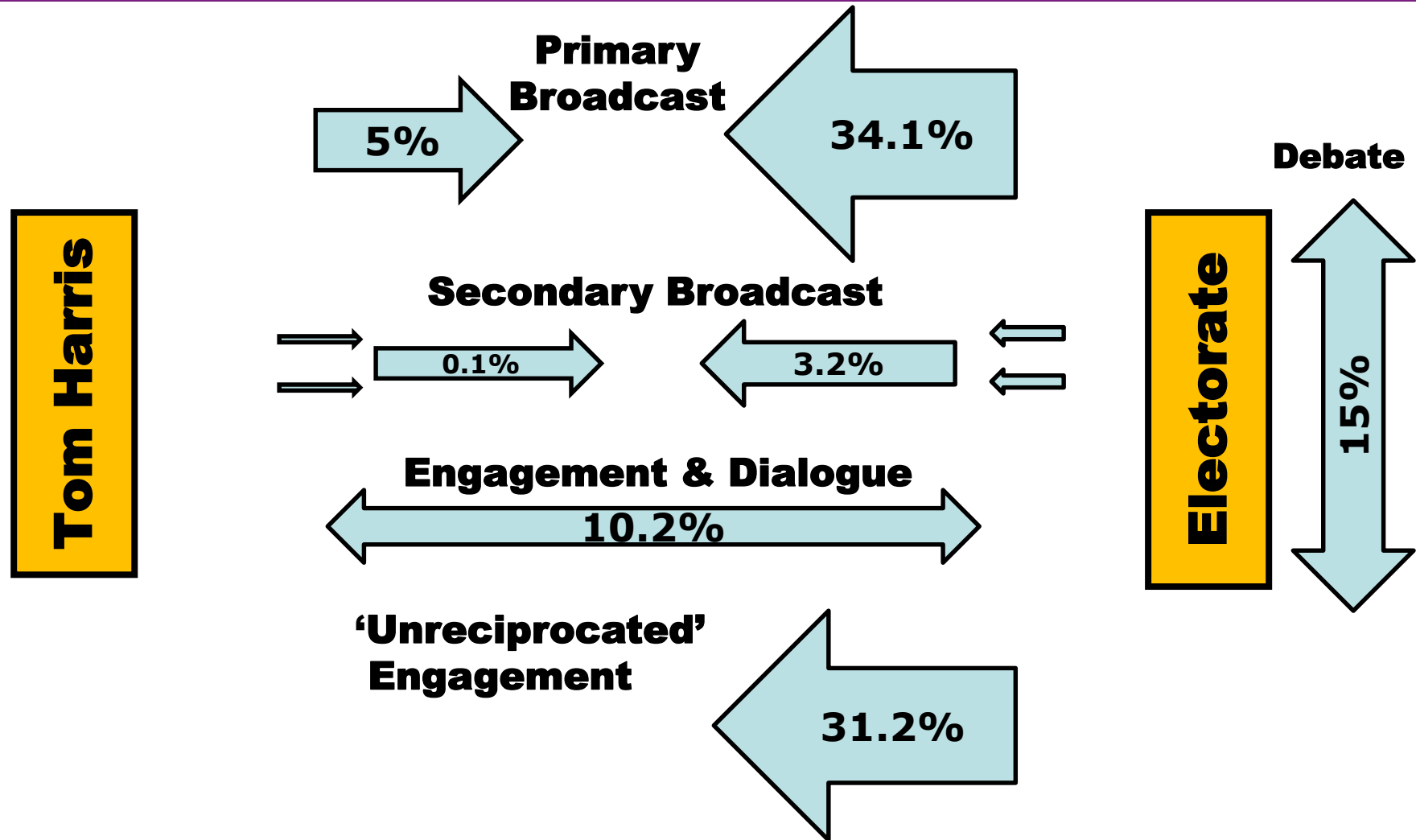
Tom Harris: Labour Candidate for Glasgow South



- **57 blog posts during campaign, the largest number (19) criticising national opponents and their policies**
- **Plus another 57 posts responding to public comments**
- **On average, 17.6 public comments made per blog post**
- **Public comments were a mix of criticism and support**
- **Posts frequently led to online debate amongst blog followers**



Tom Harris Blog: Information Exchange ($n = 1,116$ posts)



Tom Harris Blog: Exemplar or Risk?



- **Stopped blogging in November 2010**
- **Described his blog as having become a “burden”**
- **Denied suggestions that he had been ‘instructed’ to give up by senior party figures**
- **A ‘serious’ politician?**
- **But, about to start writing for a new ‘group blog’ created by Iain Dale**



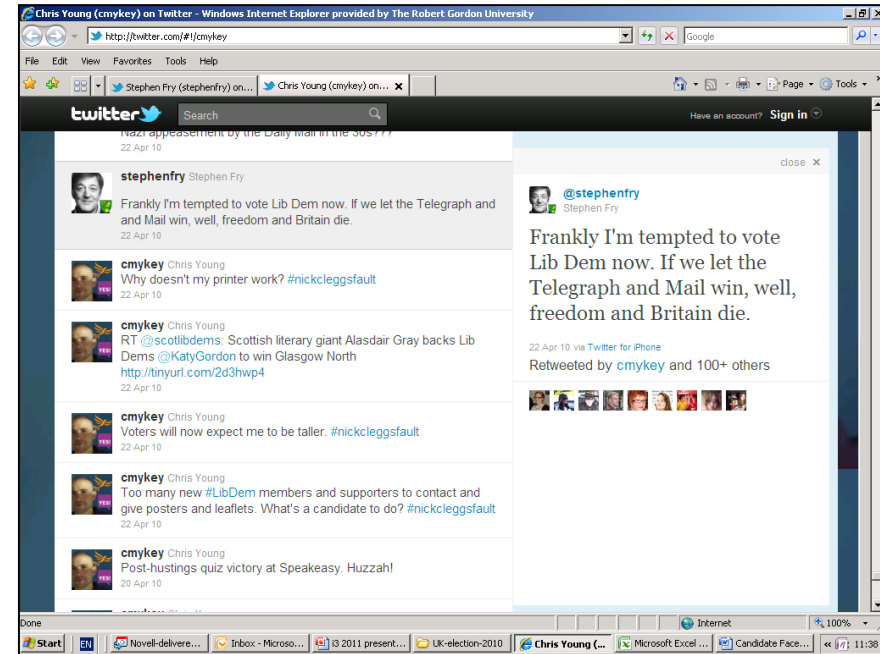
Candidate Twitter Sites ($n = 76$)

Party (and no. of candidates)	Followers at 6 May 2010			Campaign Tweets		
	Min.	Max.	Ave.	Min.	Max.	Ave.
Conservative (13)	7	858	195	0	95	18
Labour (15)	8	3,528	743	0	562	133
Liberal Democrat (24)	9	3,329	506	0	722	108
SNP (13)	9	572	155	0	116	35
Others (11)	10	735	120	2	564	90
Totals (76)	7	3,528	383	0	722	81



Candidate Twitter Posts (or 'Tweets') ($n = 6,181$)

- **Largest proportion (15.7%) were 'retweets' of others' comments**
- **Closely followed by posts about candidates' personal campaign activities (15.2%)**
- **Relatively little comment on and criticism of national (6.6%) or constituency (0.7%) opponents**
- **Some evidence of responding to questions (6.3%) or personal criticisms (1.4%)**

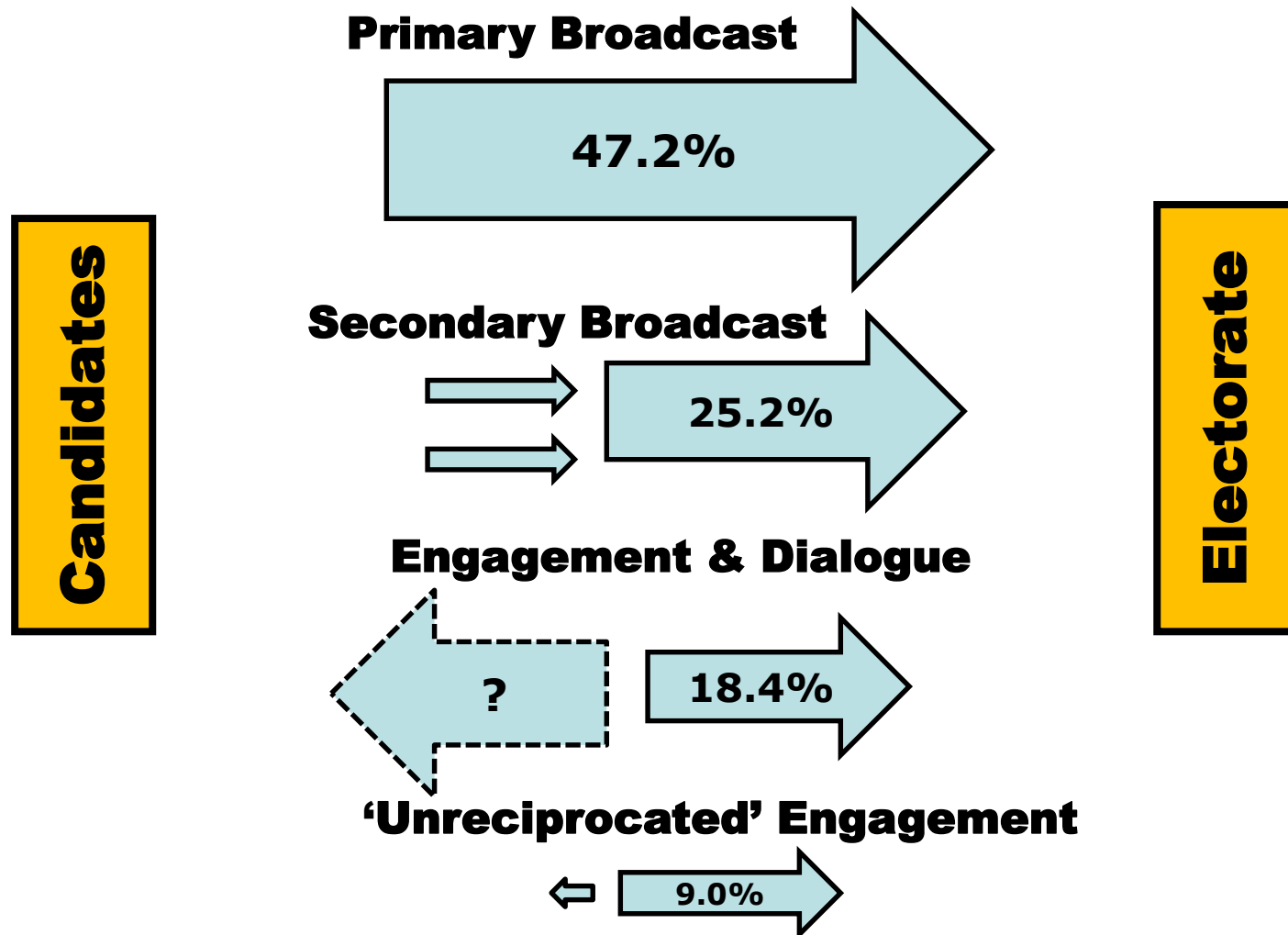


Candidates on Twitter: Cock-Eyed Optimists?

- ‘A cracking day in Montrose, good response on the high street’ (Cons **L**)
- ‘Fantastic hustings at Kinning Park Community Council last night’ (Cons **L**)
- ‘Voters loving our door to door grassroots campaign’ (Lab **W**)
- ‘Great day door knocking in Nairn & leafleting in Culloden’ (Lab **L**)
- ‘The sun is shining, the posters are up and there's a smile on Dunfermline's face’ (Lib Dem **L**)
- ‘Great debate at Gala sheltered housing this afternoon’ (Lib Dem **W**)
- ‘We've had a wonderful sunny day campaigning in Inverclyde’ (SNP **L**)
- ‘Fantastic response on the doorsteps of Larkhall last night’ (SNP **L**)
- **But just 0.7% of candidate tweets gave details of what local policy issues were discussed**

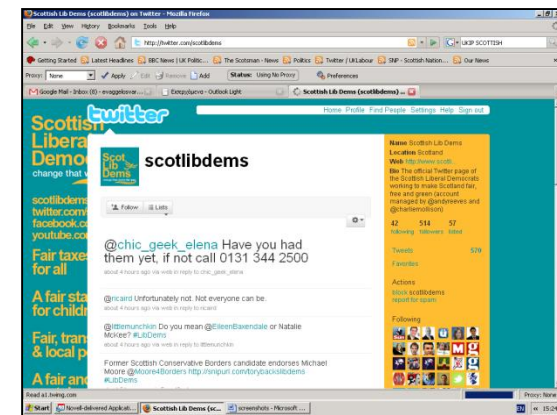


Candidate Twitter Sites: Information Exchange ($n = 6,181$ posts)



Party Twitter Sites

Party	Followers at 6 May 2010	Campaign Tweets
Conservative (David McLetchie)	223	220
Green	Not known	21
Labour	1,224	65
Lib Dem	562	119
SNP	1,006	432

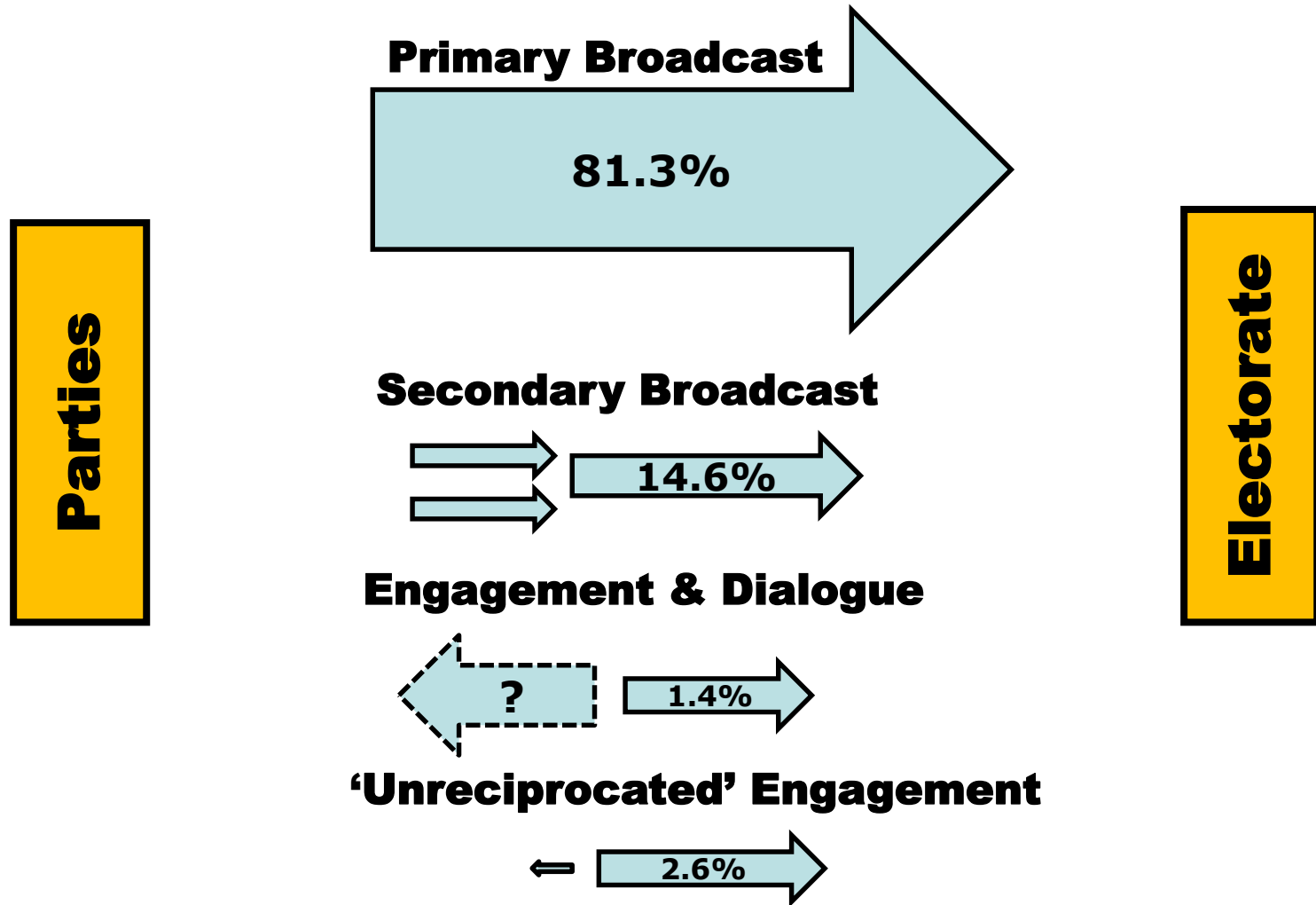


Party Twitter Posts ($n = 857$ posts)

- **Most posts (25%) were on campaign events throughout Scotland**
- **Closely followed by links to stories on party websites (20.9%)**
- **Then by comments on and criticisms of opponents (18.4%)**
- **Just 1.4% of tweets were responses to questions or criticisms**



Party Twitter Sites: Information Exchange (*n* = 857 posts)



Impact of TV Debates on Twitter Traffic

- **18.8% of parties' tweets and 11.7% of candidates' tweets were sent during the three UK leaders' debates**
- **13.1% of parties' tweets and 0.6% of candidates' tweets were sent during the three Scottish leaders' debates**



Photo source: *The Guardian*



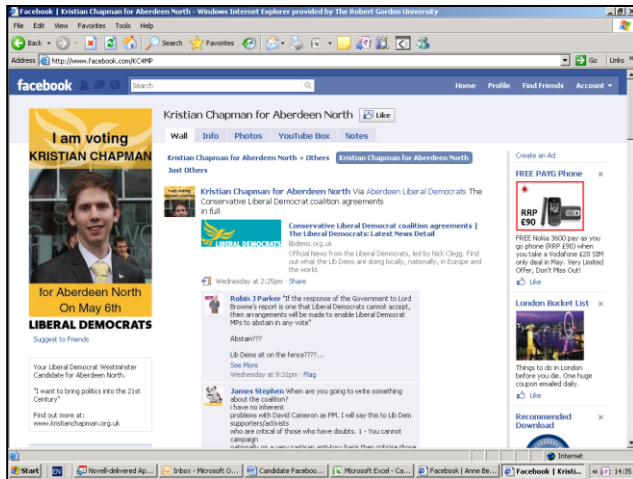
Candidate Facebook Sites ($n = 73$)

Party (and no. of candidates)	Friends, 'likers', etc at 6 May 2010			Campaign Posts		
	Min.	Max.	Ave.	Min.	Max.	Ave.
Conservative (10)	2	1,056	222	0	32	5.4
Labour (16)	13	648	244	0	69	13.8
Liberal Democrat (19)	36	4,358	638	0	115	31.8
SNP (18)	37	551	170	0	60	18.5
Others (10)	38	347	117	0	80	22.9
Totals (73)	2	4,358	310	0	115	19.9

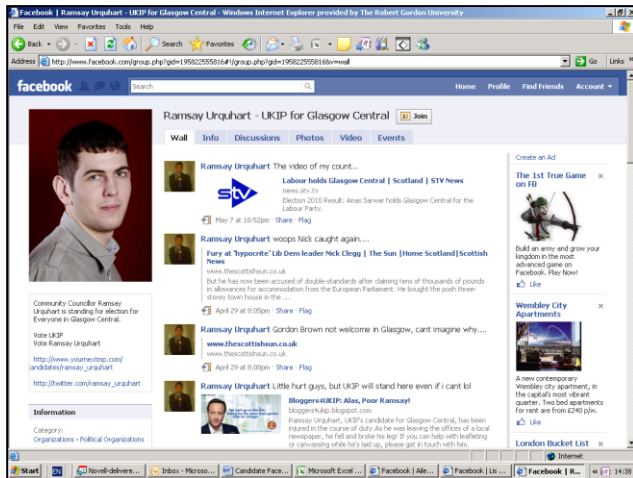
- ***None*** allowed visitors to make any public comment without first joining or 'liking' site
- **Just 13** allowed visitors to send a private message to candidate



Candidate Facebook Wall Posts ($n = 1,391$)

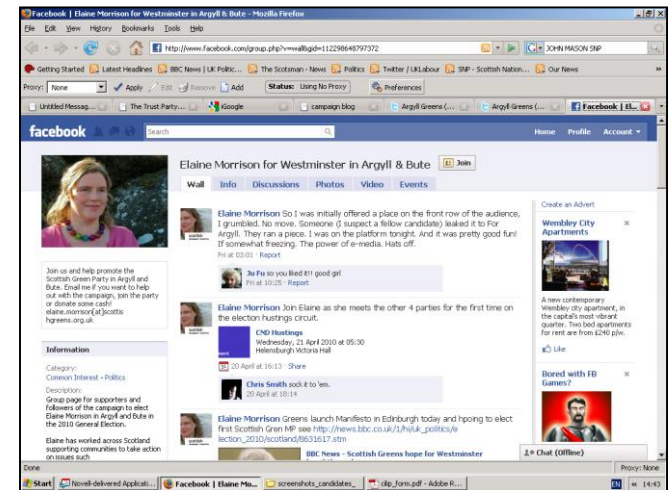
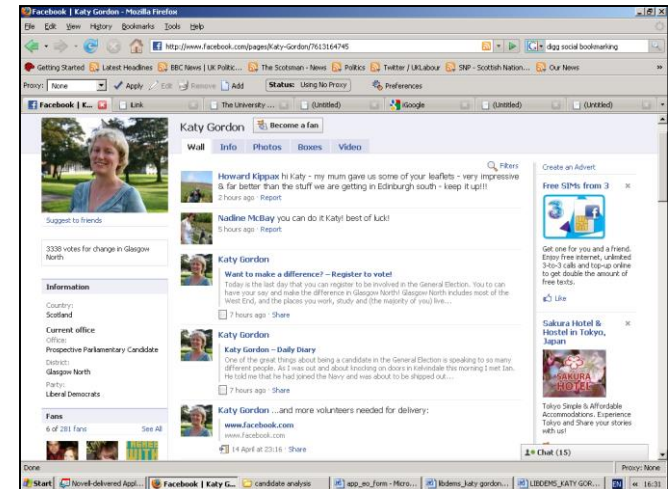


- Most candidate posts (29.6%) discussed their personal campaign activities
- 23.6% of posts were links to, or feeds from, candidates' websites, Twitter pages, etc.
- 14.9% of posts were links to other political or news websites
- Comments on and criticisms of national opponents (1.2%) or constituency opponents (0.1%) were very rare

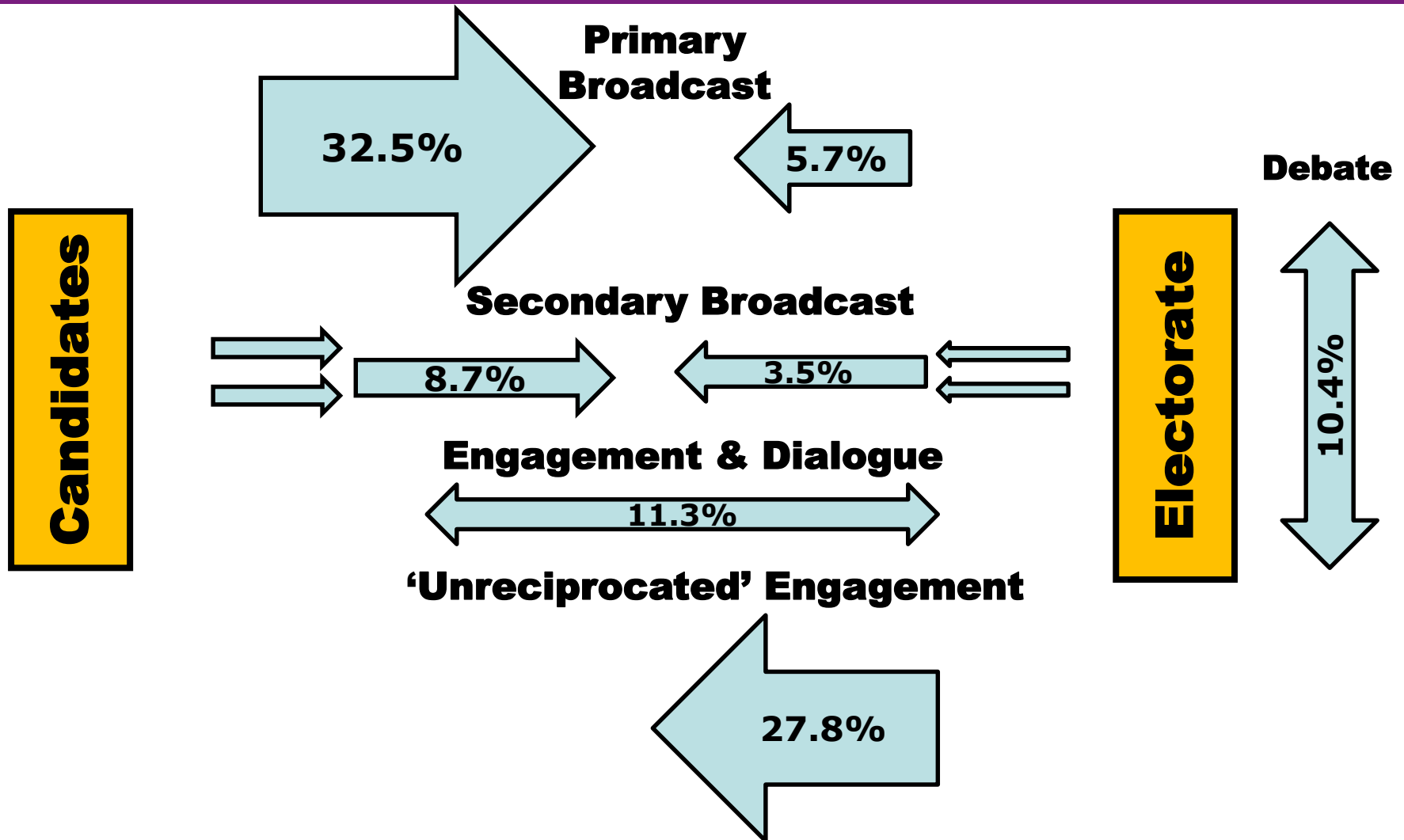


Electorate's Comments on Candidate Facebook Walls ($n = 1,575$ posts)

- Average number of public comments per candidate wall was 22.5
- Over half (54.9%) were messages of support for the candidate or their party
- Some evidence of 'trolls', posting criticisms of the candidate or their party (4.8%)
- Candidates generally unwilling to respond to criticisms or questions, but more willing to respond to supportive posts
- Some debate amongst electorate, but mostly on walls of two specific candidates

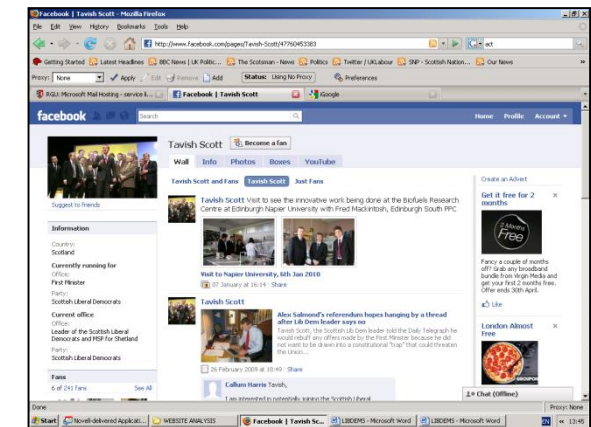


Candidate Facebook Sites: Information Exchange (*n* = 2,966 posts)

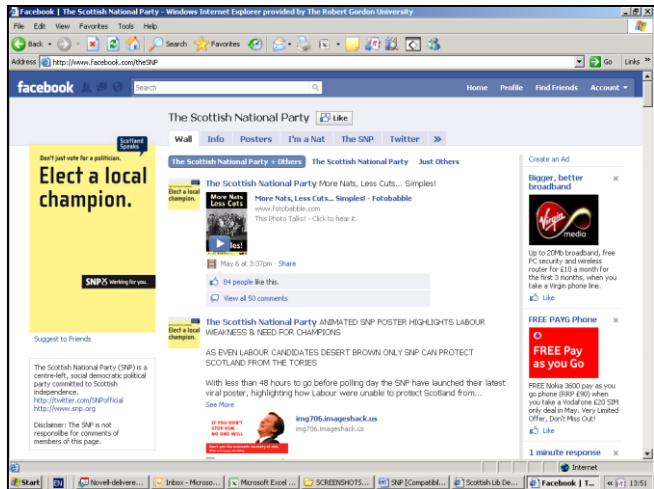


Party Facebook Sites

Party	Followers at 6 May 2010	Campaign Wall Posts
Conservative (Annabel Goldie)	343	6
Liberal Democrats (Tavish Scott)	270	1
Scottish Jacobite	96	56
SNP	3,305	16
SSP	525	9



Party Facebook Wall Posts



- **Little activity: 88 party posts and 62 electorate posts throughout the five party sites**

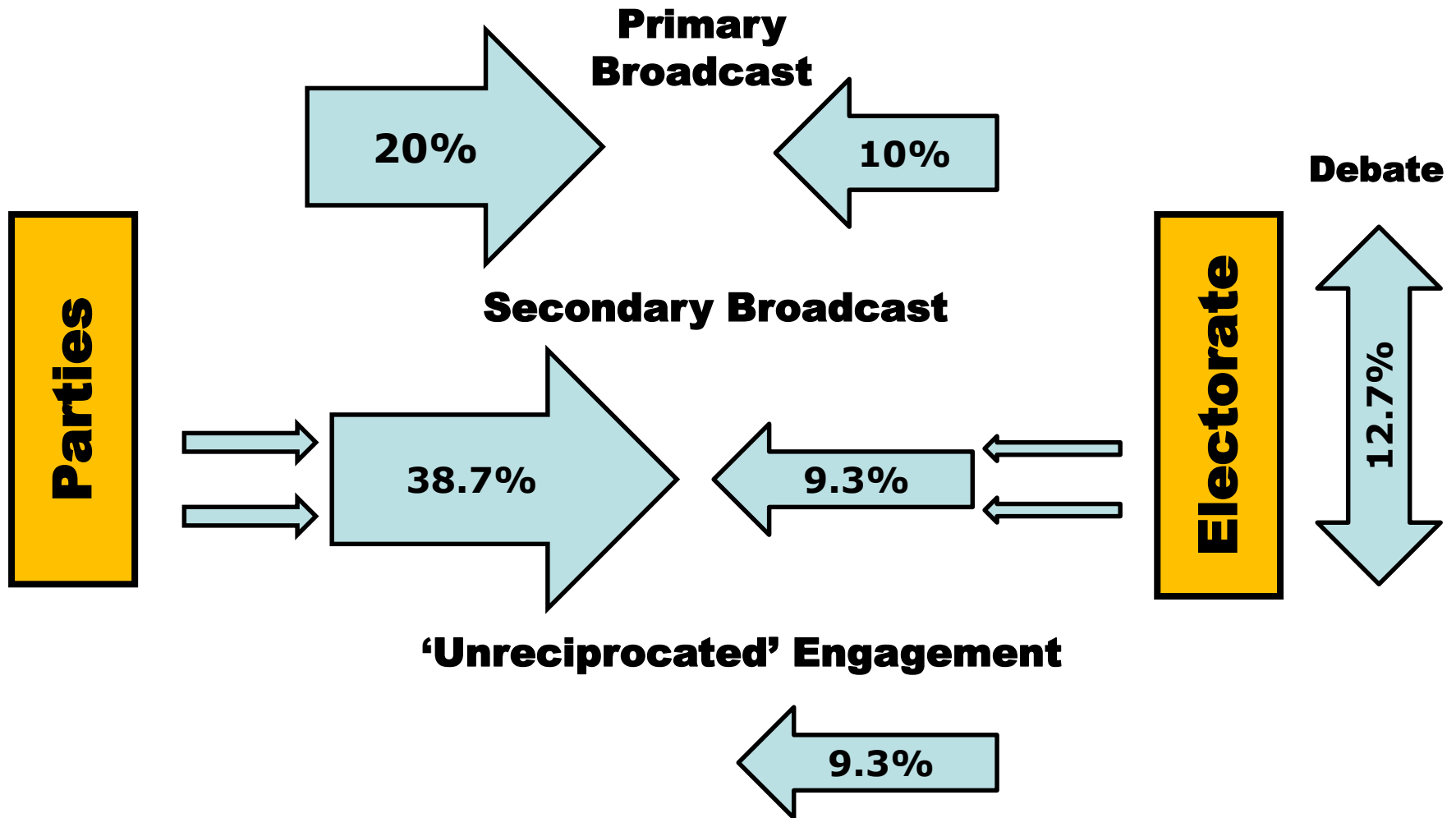
- **Most party posts were links to other party sites (30%), links to other political or news sites (28%), or uploaded campaign photos (24%)**



- **Most posts by the electorate discussed national campaign events (27%)**

- **No party responses to questions and criticisms from electorate**

Party Facebook Sites: Information Exchange ($n = 150$ posts)



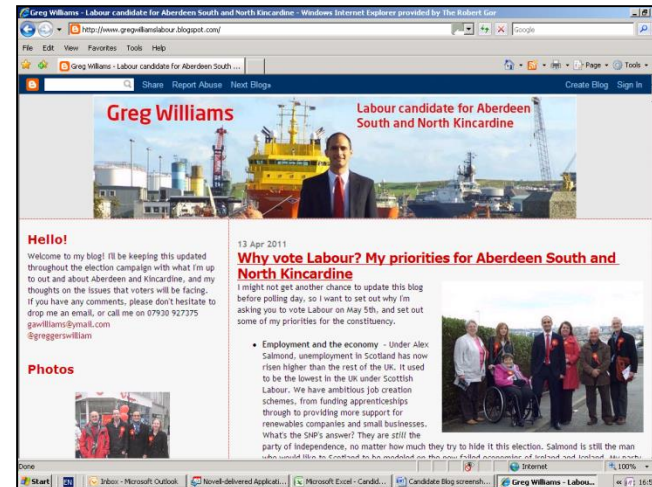
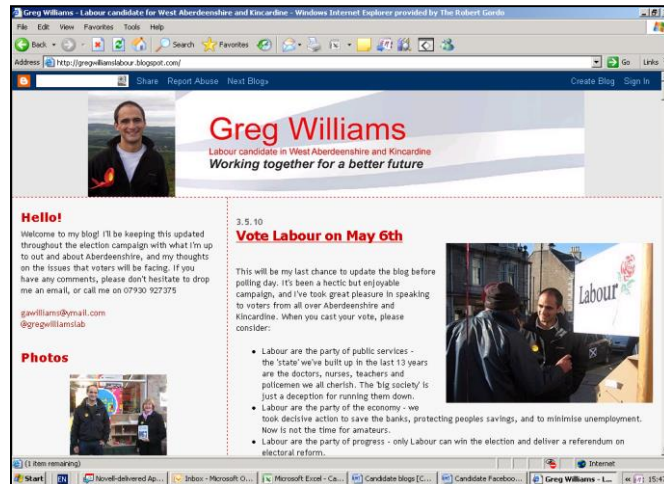
Conclusions: Preaching to the Converted?

- **Scottish political actors seemed keen to be seen embracing new social media tools**
- **Of the four main parties, the Conservatives were least active**
- **Social media used primarily for the one-way provision of information**
- **General lack of meaningful policy opinion**
- **Parties and candidates seemed nervous about using social media to respond to questions or to allow two-way interaction with the electorate**
- **Many ‘followers’ or ‘likers’ appeared to be personal friends of the candidates, or party members and activists**
- **Thus, the parties and candidates were largely ‘preaching to the converted’**



Further Research

- **Series of studies continued during the recent Scottish Parliamentary campaign (4 April – 5 May 2011)**
- **Will examine if election failure in 2010 affected parties' and candidates' online efforts in 2011 (145 unsuccessful 2010 candidates stood again in 2011)**



- **Incorporated a new element – a user information behaviour study, where 64 Aberdeen citizens were observed and questioned while using campaign websites and social media sites**

