CREATOR(S):

TITLE:

YEAR:

Original citation:

OpenAIR citation:

Constituency Champions or Party Animals?

Graeme Baxter, Rita Marcella and Mary O'Shea
Department of Information Management
Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK

Scottish Parliament (1999 —)

- The Scottish Parliament should "aspire to be an example of best practice in parliamentary information systems" **(Expert Panel on ICTs, 1998)**

- **2002:** MSPs are "intensive and competent users" of ICTs **(Smith & Webster, 2004)**

- **2006:** "New ICTs have become a cultural norm of contemporary parliamentary life" **(Smith & Webster, 2008)**

- Social media "can increase the accessibility of MSPs and offer new ways in which to engage constituents, stakeholders and the wider public" **(Scottish Parliament Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, 2012)**

Image: Scottish Parliament

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Addressing an Empirical Gap

- **Significant body of literature on the use of ICTs by political parties and politicians has emerged since mid-1990s**

- **But has largely focused on:**

    1) their use for internal party operations; or

    2) their use during election campaigns

- **Research has rarely concentrated on "peacetime developments" or on the "long campaign" (Gibson & Ward, 2009)**

POLITICS AS USUAL

The Cyberspace "Revolution"

Michael Margolis
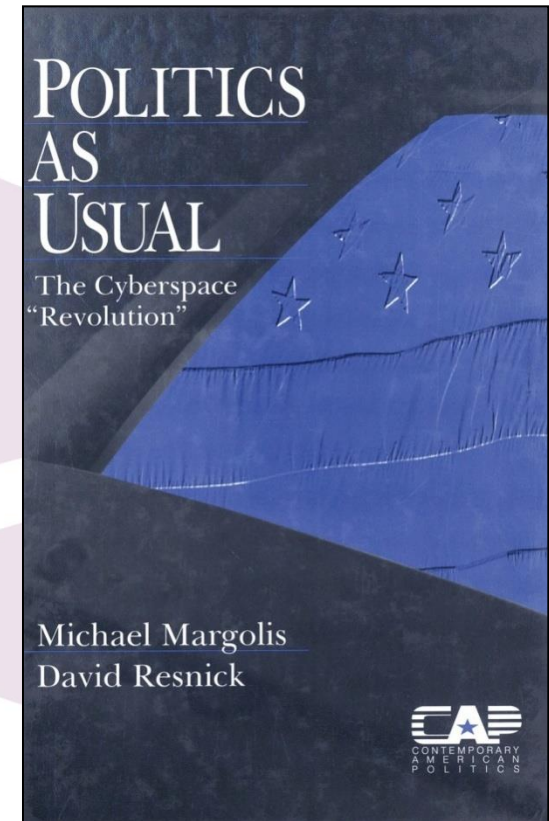David Resnick

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POLITICS

Image: Amazon

Part of a Longitudinal Series of Studies

- **Conducting studies of Scottish political actors' use of the Internet since 2003**

- **Previous research had focused solely on use during parliamentary election campaigns**

- **2011 Scottish Parliament election research included a voters' information behaviour study**

- **Revealed a dichotomy between political actors' information provision and voters' information needs**

- **Lack of information relating to local constituency issues**

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- To identify the extent, if any, to which the nature of MSPs' Twitter use differed from that identified during their 2011 candidacies

- To explore the extent and nature of MSPs' use of Twitter for constituency-related purposes
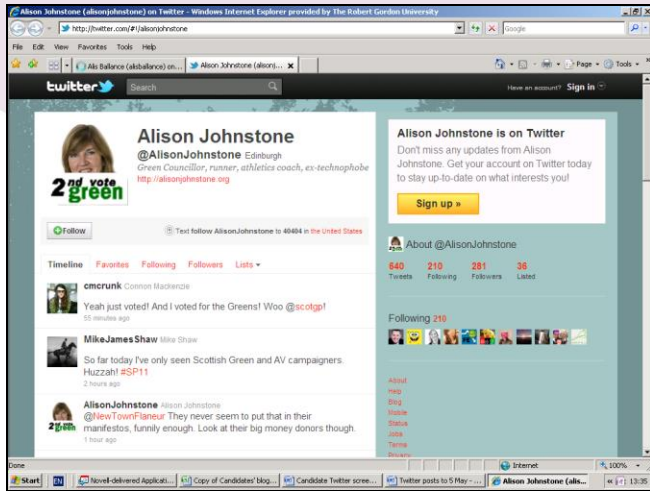
Methodology (1)

- **MSPs' Twitter accounts identified via Scottish Parliament website, plus Google and Twitter searches**

- **Using *twitonomy* software, captured all MSPs' tweets for four-week period 6 January to 2 February 2014 (Data captured in April 2014)**

- **Sample period in "peacetime" between last Scottish Parliament election (May 2011) and next election (May 2016)**

- **In "long campaign" period before Scottish Independence Referendum on 18 Sep 2014**

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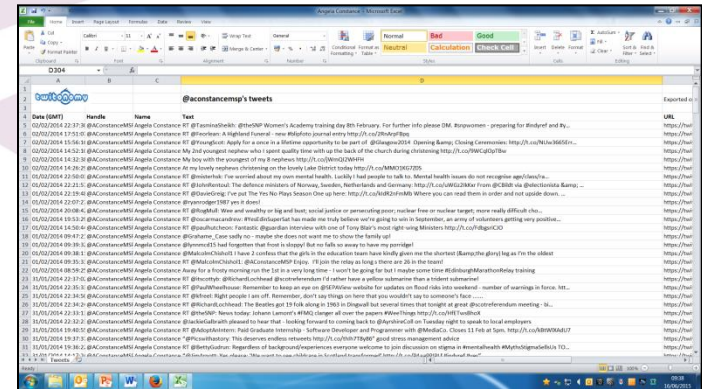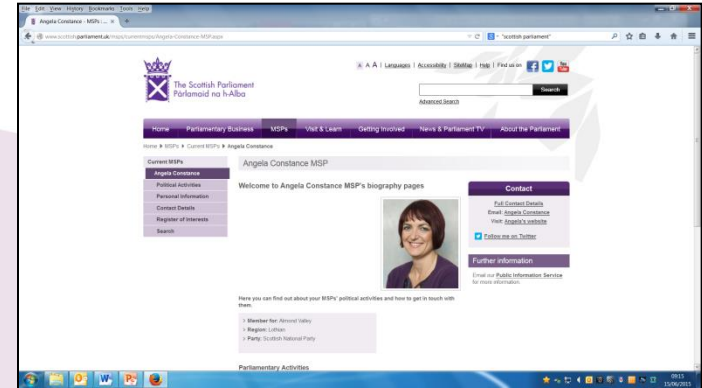
- **Each tweet read systematically and coded using framework developed by researchers**

- **Coding based both on subject content and the nature of communication taking place (e.g. one-way broadcast, two-way dialogue)**

- **Coded content enumerated manually, then input to SPSS for analysis**

Theoretical Influences

Jackson & Lilleker (2011), exploring UK MPs' use of Twitter, drew on two interrelated theories:

1) **Impression Management** (Jones & Pittman, 1982)

2) **Constituency Service** (Searing, 1985)

But they dismissed information provision as a key constituency role.

So this study drew on an alternative constituency service model (Norton, 2013). Seven key roles, including:

– **Information provider** (to constituents seeking information and advice)

– **Promoter of constituency interests** (i.e. local economic, civil society, cultural interests, etc.)

Image: Google Books

MSPs' Twitter Accounts (at Feb 2014)

Party	No. of MSPs	No. on Twitter	% on Twitter
SNP	65	55	85%
Labour	38	33	87%
Conservative	15	9	60%
Lib Dem	5	3	60%
Green	2	2	100%
Indep. etc.	4	3	75%
Totals	**129***	**105****	**81%**

*73 constituency MSPs, 56 regional MSPs
**42 had used Twitter as candidates in 2011; 63 had adopted Twitter since becoming MSPs

MSPs' Followers and Tweets

Party (and no. of MSPs)	Followers at Apr 2014			No. Tweets (6 Jan – 2 Feb 2014)		
	Min.	Max.	Ave.	Min.	Max.	Ave.
SNP (55)	264	58,186	5,214	0	564	110
Labour (33)	106	6,858	1,965	0	540	78
Conservative (9)	169	6,694	1,898	0	184	59
Lib Dem (3)	1,381	4,360	3,009	0	61	28
Green (2)	3,320	13,672	8,496	76	249	163
Indep. etc. (3)	2,195	4,001	3,051	0	795	282
All parties (105)	106	58,186	3,833	0	795	99
	Median = 2,350			Median = 60 Total Tweets = 10,404		

MSPs' Twitter Sites: Nature of Information Exchange
(*n* = 10,404 posts)

Primary Broadcast — 14.8%

Secondary Broadcast — 65.9%

MSPs — Retweets & Links — Followers / Constituents

Engagement & Dialogue — ? — 12.7%

'Unreciprocated' Engagement — 6.5%

Nature of MSPs' Information Exchange:
Comparison with their 2011 Candidacies (n = 42 individuals)
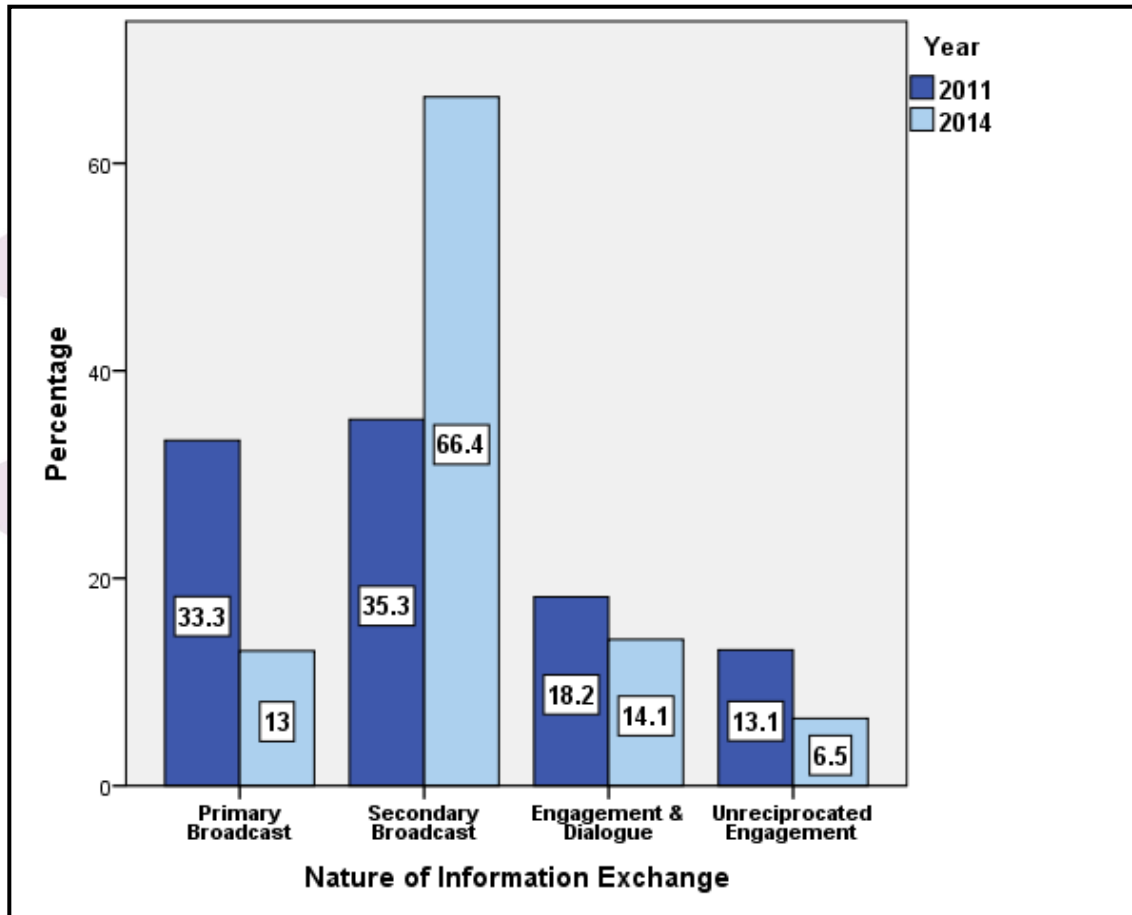
2011: 3,304 posts (Ave. = 79 per person over 4 weeks)

2014: 5,167 posts (Ave. = 123 per person over 4 weeks)

MSPs' Constituency-Related Primary Broadcast Posts Excluded From Our Analysis

Sports Results

George Adam
@GeorgeAdam

Currently Paisley Pirates1-2 to Dundee Comets.

11:11 am - 26 Jan 2014

Mark McDonald
@markmcdsnp

It has been a long time in coming (14 years to be exact) but finally @aberdeenfc are back in a cup final. Great result. Great atmosphere!

9:18 am - 1 Feb 2014

5 RETWEETS   7 FAVOURITES

Referendum and By-election Campaigning in Constituency

Kevin Stewart MSP
@KevinStewartMSP

Amazing turnout @YesAberdeen get together on a wet and windy Sunday.

7:09 am - 19 Jan 2014

1 RETWEET   2 FAVOURITES

Jayne Baxter MSP
@jayniebax

Knocking doors in Lochgelly till the sun went down #cowdenbeath @Scottish Labour

11:50 am - 6 Jan 2014

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Constituency-Related Primary Broadcast Posts

The 105 MSPs made just 122 constituency-related Primary Broadcast posts (i.e. 1.2% of overall posts; 7.9% of Primary Broadcast posts)

Angela Constance ✔
@AConstanceMSP

First surgery of 2014 today at Fauldhouse Partnership Centre at Noon also constituency office re-opens tel no 01506 460403

John Mason MSP
@JohnMasonMSP

I have written to Glasgow Life this week to ask them to reconsider plans to cut all our local library hours.

Jim Eadie MSP
@JimEadie_msp

Advice surgeries today
10am Fountainbridge Library   11am Marchmont St Giles
Church and   12.15 pm Inch Park Community Centre.

John Pentland
@JohnPentlandMSP

Great to see real progress on sewage issues @ Morningside,Wishaw. Grateful to @betthomes,@SMilneHomes& @scottish_water for working together!

Mark McDonald
@markmcdsnp

I will be at Asda Middleton Park today at 2pm for a surgery. Feel free to come and speak to me if you would like to raise any issues.

12:33 am - 31 Jan 2014

Sandra White
@SandraWhiteSNP

Busy day today meeting SPT re bus routes in constituency very informative then surgeries tonight

1:48 pm - 27 Jan 2014

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MSPs Just as Likely to Tweet About...

...sport or popular culture (1.2% of posts)... or their domestic lives (1.4%)
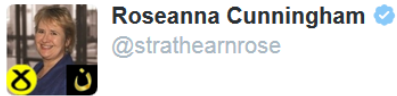
Roseanna Cunningham ✔
@strathearnrose

Two minutes in to #sherlock and already I'm irritated. I dislike the written on screen commentary.

12:3

Jackson Carlaw MSP
@JacksonMSP

12 Years a Slave: far from comfortable viewing but rather an unflinching look at one man's fight for freedom/retaining his dignity/morality.

7:00 am

Malcolm Chisholm Msp
@MalcolmChishol1

Grandchildren sleeping over then at film Frozen with grandaughter.Enjoyed the variations on the traditional story but music pretty awful!

7:31 am - 12 Jan 2014

George Adam
@GeorgeAdam

Had a bowl of soup and Haggis next. Still cold from the St Mirren game. In the house with heating on and 4 layers still on. #gettinauld

10:25 am - 25

Angela Constance ✔
@AConstanceMSP

Another view from the Empire State

9:25 am - 14 Jan 2014

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Constituency-Related Secondary Broadcast Posts (1)

The 105 MSPs made 741 constituency-related Secondary Broadcast posts (i.e. 7.1% of overall posts; 10.8% of Secondary Broadcast posts). Including...

Travel and Weather: News Bulletins and Warnings

Inverclyde Now
@inverclyde_now

A8 at Pottery Street, heading to Greenock, restricted by flooding but still passable.

3:36

Traffic Scotland
@trafficscotland

High Winds - Take care as you pass #Haddington on the #A1 and also on the @forthroadbridge due to the winds. FRB has a 40mph limit in place.

3:32 am - 25 Jan 2014

Argyll&Bute Council
@argyllandbute

There is a band of extreme weather about to hit the west coast again today with consequences for Argyll and Bute....
fb.me/2VtSk9lmU

Severe Weather Warning Service

Telling the public and emergency services of severe or hazardous weather which has the potential to cause danger to life or widespread disruption through our Na...

NorthAyrshirePolice
@AyrshireNPolice

High winds, heavy rain & temperatures dropping - watch how you go - take care when out & about! #StaySafe

4:13 am - 31 Jan 2014

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Constituency-Related Secondary Broadcast Posts (2)

Crime: Appeals and Warnings

Edinburgh Reporter
@EdinReporter

Witness appeal following Currie newsagent robbery goo.gl/fb/kt5WZ

Witness appeal following Currie newsagent robbery

Police
robbery
happen
Road

View

Northern Times
@NTnewspaper

Police want witnesses to Aberdeen-Inverness train incident bit.ly/1f0I9yF

MidLothPolice
@MidLothPolice

After dark - as the nights get darker earlier Police Scotland is reminding you to review your home security #OpRAC ow.ly/i/4bo

MorayPolice
@MorayPolice

The public are urged to be cautious after a card skimming device was found on an ATM at @Tesco on Blackfriars Road: scotland.police.uk/whats-happenin…

12:44 am - 7 Jan 2014

New or Threatened Public Services

North Ayrshire ✓
@North_Ayrshire

Council launches older people's housing fit for the 21st Century north-a

9:03 am - 22 Jan 2

South West Team
@southwest_team

Are you an unpaid carer? Find out more info about the Carer's support payment scheme here: edinburgh.gov.uk/carersupportpa…

East Dun Council ✓
@EDCouncil

Read all about it - terrific range of free eBooks available to 'borrow' from East Dunbartonshire libraries' website owl.li/sQ77h

8:42 a

DG Labour
@DGLabour

You can watch @ElaineMurrayMSP question the Justice Secretary over the closure of Dumfries police control room here: itv.com/news/border/up…

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Constituency-Related Secondary Broadcast Posts (3)

Third Sector & Voluntary Orgs.

Lesley Laird
@LesleyLaird

Productive mtg Steering Group @TrussellTrust Inverkeithing foodbank. Premises - yes! Next steps - yes!Opening day...just a little bit closer.

2:44 pr

Inverclyde DofE
@InverclydeDofE

SIGN Language And Healthy Cooking Classes -- NEW sign language courses are starting at Craigend Resource Centre,...
fb.me/3oR6xvu3O

FifeVoluntaryAction
@FifeVolAction

@FifeGingerbread seeks volunteer Buddies to offer practical and emotional support to lone parents. Contact Michelle on 01333 303

3:30 am - 30

Dogs Trust Glasgow
@DT_Glasgow

We are in need of bedding to help keep our dogs cosy. Do you have any old towels/blankets/sheets you could donate?

5:29 am - 28 Jan 2014

19 RETWEETS   **1** FAVOURITE

Business & Economic Development

heart and home
@heARThomeBiggar

Sale is still on and with 15% OFF all Christmas stock you can fill your draws for next yer and save a fortune.

Scotsman
@TheScotsman

Plans to develop Speyside's whisky tourism potential have been announced : ow.ly/sKAjk cc @moraymp @richardlochhead

9:37 am - 17 Jan

Place To Be
@NAyrshire_Biz

Are you looking to expand your #business in #NorthAyrshire this year? Speak to your dedicated #AccountManager on 01294 449944

4:07 am - 6 Jan 2014

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Constituency-Related Secondary Broadcast Posts (4)

Employment Opportunities

Loch Leven's Larder
@LochLevenLarder

SITUATIONS VACANT

Full-Time Pastry Chef

Required to join our dynamic team in our award winning restaurant and... fb.me/2US9YbsdF

1:46 am

The Moray Council ✓
@TheMorayCouncil

Teacher of Art and Design (0.5 FTE job-share) - Elgin Academy: Closing date Friday 21st February 2014 bit.ly/1fmTHxL #jobs

Citizens Advice Scot
@CitAdviceScot

Fancy working in Shetland as a Welfare Rights Adviser? cas.org.uk/vacancies/welf… #Shetland #Advice

2:31 am - 13 Jan 2014

Planning Applications

Edinburgh Greens
@EdinburghGreens

Green Cllr @nigelbagshaw opposed but #Caltongate APPROVED. Big split in the decision of the committee, with 8 for and 6 against."

4:48 am

Alison Munro
@AlisonMunro19

@GMacdonaldMSP 1st public meet about Murray Estates' plan to build on prime agricultural land. @OurGreenBelt 7pm; 4/2/; G

6:50 am

Lizzie Rynne
@CityCycling

#craighouse countdown. Only 2 days left to make your views known. Heres how: friendsofcraighouse.com/2012/11/22/how … @savecraighouse

8:35 am - 14 Jan 2014

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Local 'Human Interest' Stories

Greenock Telegraph
@greenocktele

A PORT Glasgow teenager who weighed less than a bag of sugar when she was born has made the mark for the Army.
fb.me/6UHNKhfn1

11:52

Dundee Libraries
@dundeelibraries

15 yr old #Dundee author @AuthorCallum talking about writing his first novel tinyurl.com/nhxsexq @thecourieruk @STVDundee @dundeecity

1:28 am - 28 Jan 2014

Alison Thewliss
@alisonthewliss

"@PeterKGeoghegan: Found this little fella on Queen Margaret Dr, Glasgow. If he's yours get in touch. pic.twitter.com/YalMMoRCoN" @LostboxSCOT

7:16 am - 25 Jan 2014

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Secondary Broadcast Posts Dominated by Independence Referendum and Scotland-Wide Policy Issues

Yes Scotland @YesScotland

Poll shows Yes is gathering pace and momentum - ow.ly/sXhu2 #indyref #Scotland

Better Together @UK_Together

Devolution remains "the settled will of the Scottish people", new poll confirms better.tg/1hqc3Bd #indyref

Ed Balls @edballs

Alex Salmond can't promise that an independent Scotland will keep the pound - my interview in #Cowdenbeath heraldscotland.com/news/home-news...

8:16 am - 20 Ja

sunday herald @newsundayherald

Our splash tomorrow is a fascinating must read exclusive: Cameron's plea to Putin: help me stop Salmond and beat the Scottish #indyref

1:48 pm - 11 Jan 2014

Dave Watson @UnisonDave

Welcome free school meals but don't forget the current service unisondave.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/welcom...

8:18 am

Peter MacMahon @petermacmahon

Serious concern from teaching unions over Scotland's new exams scotsman.com/news/education...

12:05 am - 29 Jan 2014

Douglas Fraser @BBCDouglasF

Positive outlook from Scottish Chambers of Commerce survey, notably construction + hotels. Cashflow concerns though. bbc.in/1m8rewH

BBC News (UK)

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Constituency-Related Dialogue Was Rare

Hoopy1888 @sjh1888 · 20 Jan 14
@magmsp Can you tell me the immediate and latest plans for Lindsayfield area with regards to BT fibre broadband ?
View conversation

Margaret McCulloch @magmsp · 21 Jan 14
@sjh1888 have requested info from BT. Glad to see investment announced last year but roll out just not delivering to expectations
View conversation

Hoopy1888 @sjh1888 · 21 Jan 14
@magmsp Thanks M'ret. Spoke to BT today and they say its "installed and waiting for a safety cert. From the council " Should b up in 2 wks
View conversation

Margaret McCulloch @magmsp · 21 Jan 14
@sjh1888 let me know if there are any more problems. It's been an ongoing issue for me since I was elected and that was in 2011
View conversation

Hoopy1888 @sjh1888 · 21 Jan 14
@magmsp Will do Margaret. Thanks.
View conversation

Hoopy1888 @sjh1888 · 28 Jan 14
@magmsp Took a phone call from BT today. Nothing planned now or in the near future to connect up to fibre BB. Poor show I think.
View conversation

Margaret McCulloch @magmsp · 19 Feb 14
@sjh1888 I'm meeting BT next month. Drop me an e-mail if you want me to raise your experience with them. Happy for neighbours to do the same
View conversation

Malcolm Chisholm Msp @MalcolmChishol1 · 30 Nov 2013
@carer_research @Constitution_St @LAHinds Certainly taking that up with the Council. Hope it will be sorted soon.

James Dear @JamesDear · 30 Nov 2013
@MalcolmChishol1 @Constitution_St @LAHinds rubbish on Queen Charlotte St next to nursery. There's no votes in this!
pic.twitter.com/ltMPFOwpIK

Lesley Hinds @LAHinds · 30 Nov 2013
@JamesDear @MalcolmChishol1 @Constitution_St I have reported this issue to manager for Leith

Constitution Street @Constitution_St · 1 Dec 2013
@LAHinds @JamesDear @MalcolmChishol1 thanks for this. It's a persistent problem that would be really great to get sorted.

James Dear @JamesDear · 22 Dec 2013
@Constitution_St @LAHinds @MalcolmChishol1 rubbish on Queen Charlotte St. Clear before xmas! Every week, bigger bin?
pic.twitter.com/Lh8xm7RbOR

Malcolm Chisholm Msp @MalcolmChishol1 · 22 Dec 2013
@JamesDear @Constitution_St @LAHinds Certainly a recurring problem so a bigger bin or another bin. Will take up thanks

James Dear @JamesDear · 7 Jan 2014
@MalcolmChishol1 @Constitution_St @LAHinds Again, this is my doorstep. Only this time after the bin was emptied!
pic.twitter.com/D47eeZ7GzC

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Covert Research: the Red Road Flats

- Question: "Was safety the real reason for the Red Road u-turn?"

- Sent to seven Glasgow MSPs on 15 April 2014

- No responses received

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Kezia Dugdale, Labour MSP for Lothian

Kezia Dugdale ✔
@kdugdalemsp

Went on a phone call and came off to 40+ twitter notifications. Sorry folks cant keep up tonight - other stuff to do. Geniune qs? Email me

1:16 pm - 6 Jan 2014 from Ci...

Kezia Dugdale ✔
@kdugdalemsp

Interesting feature in Daily Mail on cybernats - i've blocked at least 4 of those featured for relentless abuse

CYBERNATS UNMASKED

8:53 am - 25 Jan 2014 from City of Edinburgh, Scotland

44 RETWEETS   15 FAVOURITES

Kezia Dugdale ✔
@kdugdalemsp

Due to a barrage of twitter notifications, 600 + in the last few days, I can no longer read & respond. Feel sorry for folk with genuine Qs

8:19 am - 26 Jan 2014

2 FAVOURITES

2011: 75 tweets over 4 weeks; 1,602 followers

2014: 346 tweets over 4 weeks; 6,185 followers

June 2015: 16,722 followers

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MSPs on Twitter: Conclusions and Further Research

Conclusions

- **MSPs have become more frequent users of Twitter since becoming elected**

- **But an even greater emphasis on one-way broadcast of information**

- **Some evidence of constituency service posts**

- **But Twitter traffic dominated by Independence Referendum and the wider political agenda**

Further Research

- **Explore MSPs' use of Facebook (in progress)**

- **Explore "peacetime", post-2016 Scottish Parliament elections**

- **Explore MSPs' motivations for using social media**

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Thank you...