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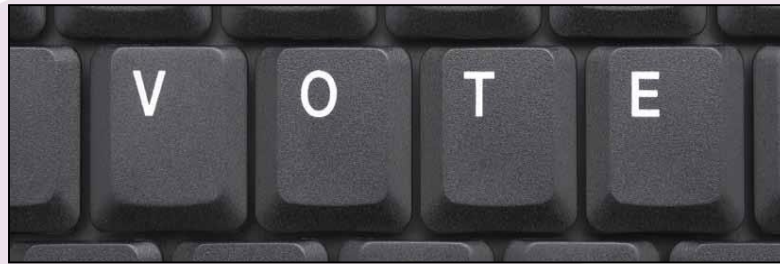
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Hooray for Holyrood?

Twelve years of research into the use of the Internet by political actors in Scotland



Graeme Baxter

**Department of Information Management, Aberdeen Business School,
Robert Gordon University**

Scottish Parliament, 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)

2003: Would those seeking to gain election to the Parliament also take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICTs?

Addressing an Empirical Gap: 'Peacetime' Use of ICTs

- **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)**

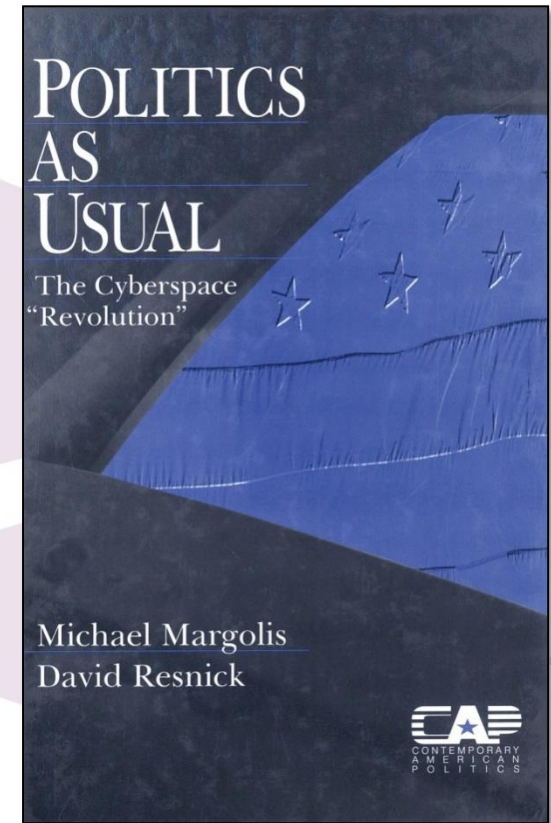


Image: Amazon

Scottish Independence Referendum, 18th September 2014

BALLOT PAPER	
Vote (X) ONLY ONCE	
Should Scotland be an independent country?	
YES	<input type="checkbox"/>
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>

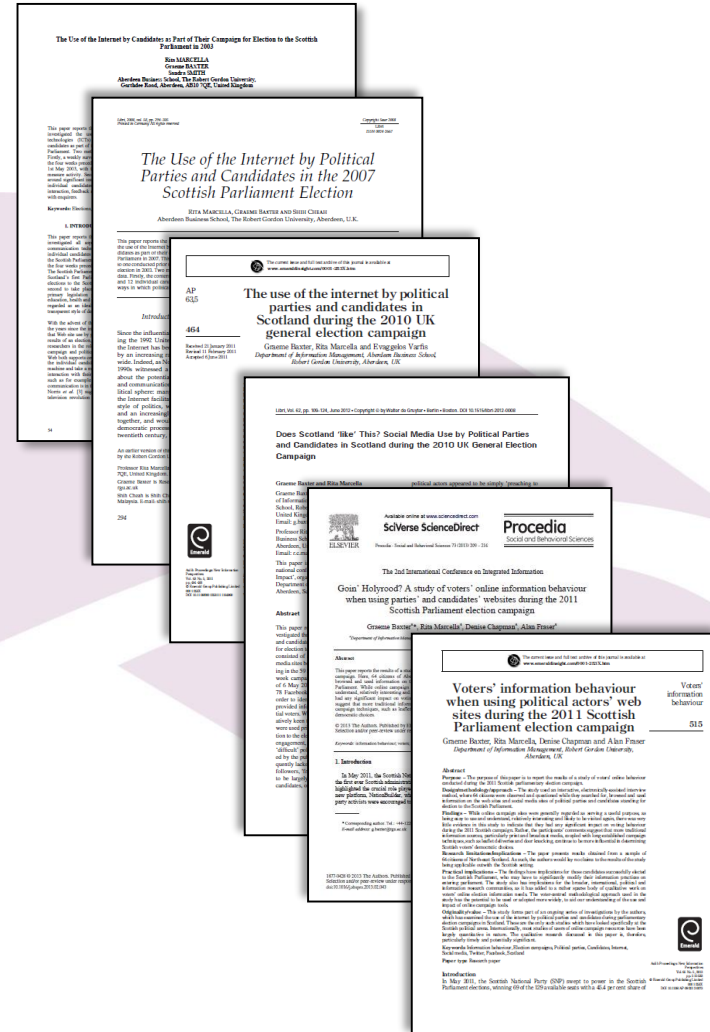


Images: Electoral Commission

Provided a rare (?) opportunity to explore political actors' use of the Internet in a completely different campaign setting

Studies conducted, 2003 to date

- **Scottish Parliament elections, 2003, 2007 and 2011**
- **UK Parliament election 2010 (Scottish constituencies only)**
- **MSPs on Twitter, in 'peacetime', early 2014**
- **Scottish independence referendum, Sep 2014**



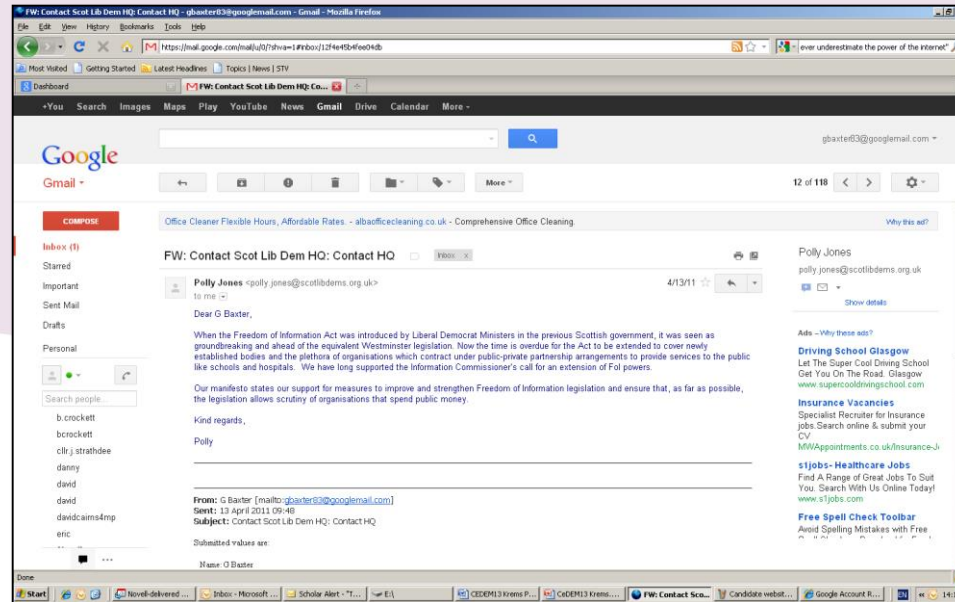
Methodologies (1)

- **Content analysis of all party websites**
- **Sample of 11-12 candidate websites**
- **Analysis usually during four weeks preceding polling day**
- **In IndyRef study, looked at websites of Better Together, Yes Scotland, major parties, and high-profile politicians**
- **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)											
	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 pose as potential voters or constituents**
- **Created special email accounts and (since 2010) social media accounts**



Methodologies (3)

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



twitter



Methodologies (4)

- **2011 Scottish Parliament campaign and 2014 IndyRef included studies of voters' online behaviour**
- **Hosted by two Aberdeen community centres, RGU's Library, and an Aberdeen church serving Commonwealth citizens**
- **Used laptop and mobile broadband 'dongle', iPad and smartphone**
- **Used the 'interactive, electronically-assisted interview' method**
- **2011 study: 64 participants; 2014 study: 54 participants**



Provision of 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



Recent Move Towards Increased Use of Infographics

all_adds_up.jpg [480x320, 1200x1312 pixels] - Mozilla Firefox

IT ALL ADDS UP TO YES
- WHY AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND WILL PROSPER -

Westminster isn't working for Scotland's economy. Our wealth is not shared fairly - a very few at the very top get most of the benefits. And a one-size-fits-all UK economic strategy isn't making the most of Scotland's strengths for the benefit of the Scottish people.

Yes
YesScotland

8th richest
An independent Scotland would be the eighth richest country in the world. Source: "OECD"

Strong economy
£39bn
As well as its oil, gas and renewable energy, Scotland has a strong food & drink industry, worth £10bn a year. Scotland's food and drink industry adds jobs which are worth more than £24 million a year.

Food & drink
£10bn industry
Our food & drink industry is worth £10 billion. Recent reports estimate it works £4 million - a quarter of the food and drink exports.

Even our opponents agree Huge green energy resources We pay more tax than the rest of the UK...

Scotland (20%)
Rest of Europe (70%)

£9,000 each
REST OF THE UK

£10,700 each
SCOTLAND

SCOTLAND IN NUMBERS

5.3 MILLION PEOPLE
16% OF THE POPULATION AGED UNDER 15
(850,000*)

83% OF THE SCOTTISH POPULATION FEEL THEY HAVE A SCOTTISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

20% OF THE POPULATION SHARE THEIR SCOTTISH CONNECTION WITH ANOTHER IDENTITY

SCOTLAND HAS **FIVE** UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD'S TOP 200*

INCLUDING ST ANDREWS THE **THIRD** OLDEST UNIVERSITY IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD IF SCOTLAND BECAME INDEPENDENT NOW

194TH INDEPENDENT COUNTRY TO JOIN THE UN

29TH MEMBER OF THE EU

54TH MEMBER OF THE COMMONWEALTH

53 OF THE SCOTTISH POPULATION FEEL THEY HAVE A SCOTTISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

194TH INDEPENDENT COUNTRY TO JOIN THE UN

29TH MEMBER OF THE EU

54TH MEMBER OF THE COMMONWEALTH

*SOURCE: THE HIGHER EDUCATION UNIVERSITY FINANCES

As part of the UK

the cost of transporting groceries are spread across

63 million consumers

rather than 5 million in Scotland



Our shopping bills are kept lower in the UK

Spread the word

bettertogether

As part of the UK

we benefit from

LOWER MORTGAGE REPAYMENTS



saving

£1300

for those with a 75% mortgage

Our finances are more secure in the UK

Spread the word

bettertogether

Provision of Candidate Information

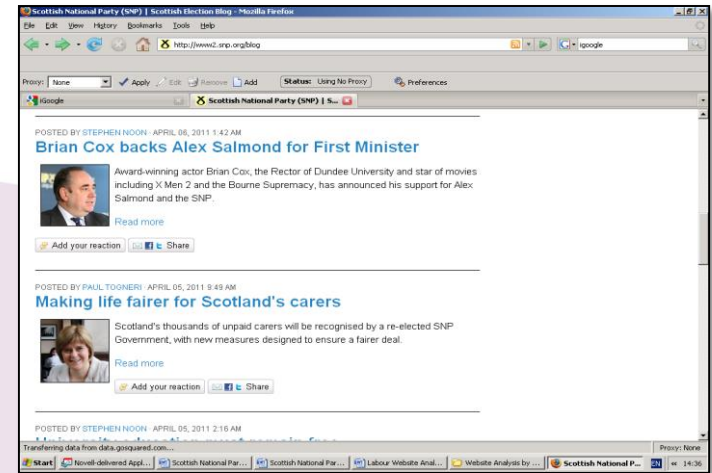
- Provision of candidate information on party websites inconsistent and illogical
- Lack of candidate contact details
- Lack of links to candidates' personal sites

The screenshot shows the 'Candidates 2011' page on the Scottish Labour Party website. The page is titled 'SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CANDIDATES 2011' and lists candidates for various constituencies and regional lists. The candidates are organized into two columns: 'CONSTITUENCY CANDIDATES' and 'REGIONAL LIST CANDIDATES'. The constituency candidates include Lewis Macdonald, Barney Crockett, Peter Stoth, Jean Morrison, Karen Whitefield, Lawrence Fitzpatrick, Kevin Hutchings, William Campbell, and Mick Rice. The regional list candidates are grouped by region: Highlands & Islands, North East Scotland, and Mid-Scotland & Fife. A sidebar on the right features a photo of a candidate and the slogan 'Fighting for what really matters', along with a 'HOW YOU CAN HELP' section with options to 'DONATE', 'JOIN', and 'VOLUNTEER'.

The screenshot shows the profile page for Dan Farthing on the Scottish Liberal Democrats website. The page is titled 'Dan Farthing' and includes a photo of the candidate. The text identifies him as a 'Candidate for Edinburgh Northern and Leith' and 'Candidate for Leithians'. A 'Contact' section provides his address (4 Clifton Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 2DR), phone number (07951 819307), email (dan@northandleithlibdems.org.uk), website (http://www.danfarthing.org.uk), and Twitter handle (@dfarthing). An 'About' section describes his role as Policy and Communications Manager for a national charity and his involvement in a school mock election. A sidebar on the right features a 'Latest News' section with a headline about the cost of the Forth Road Bridge and a 'Get involved' section with options to 'sign-up for email updates', 'find your local lib dems', 'join the lib dems', and 'donate'.

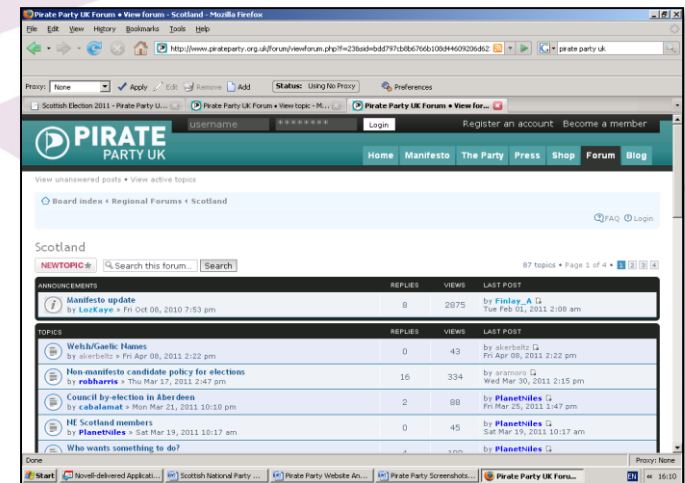
Provision of Campaign News

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



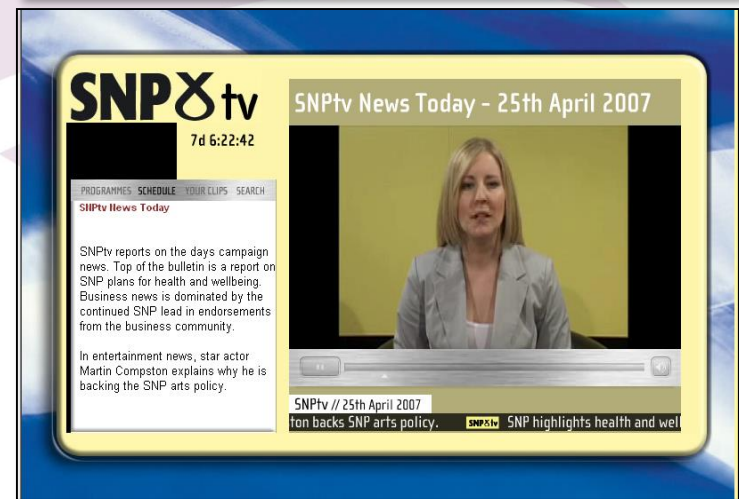
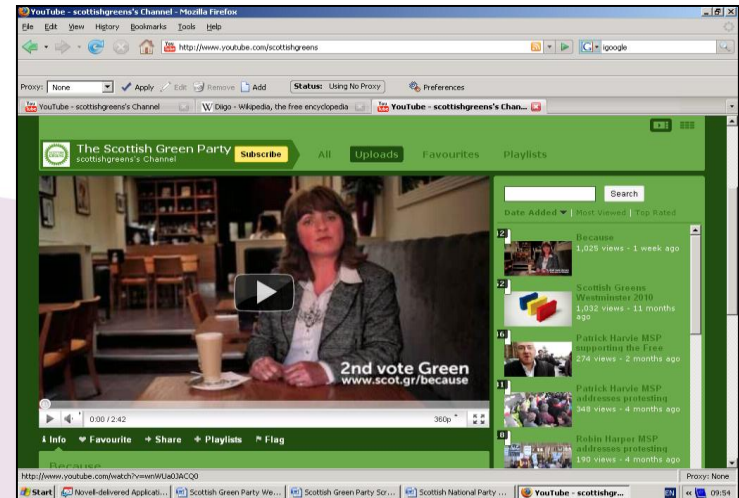
Opportunities for Communication and Engagement

- Vast majority of political actors have provided some method of online contact
- But other opportunities for online engagement have been limited



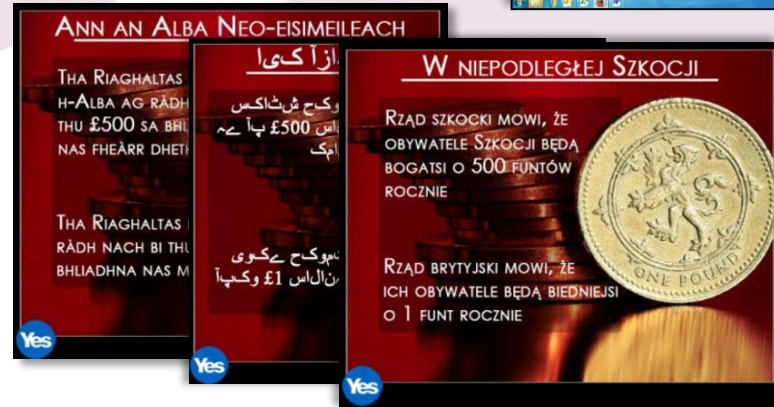
Audiovisual Features

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



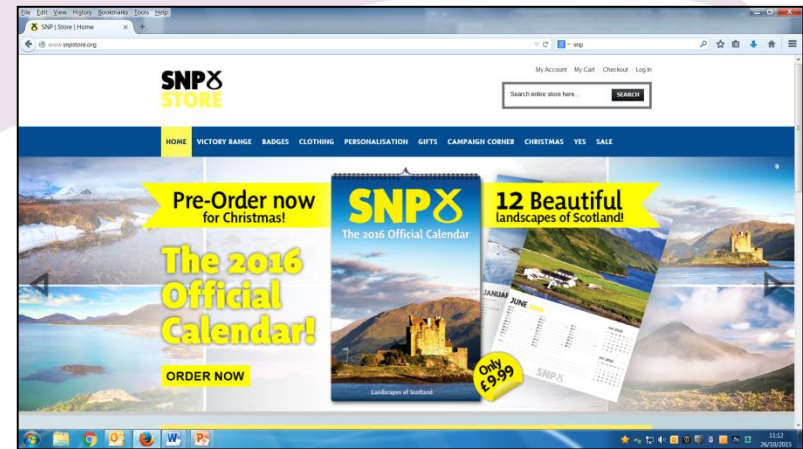
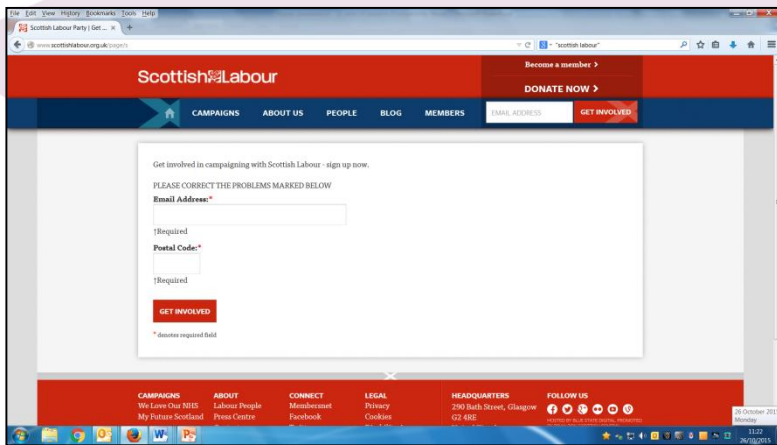
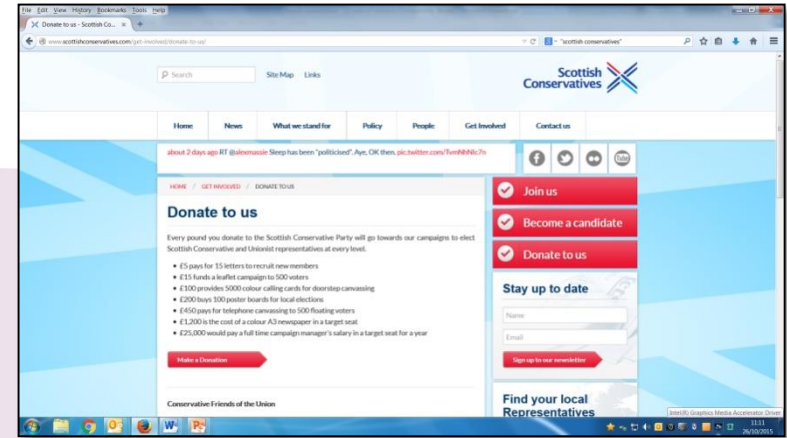
Information in Alternative Languages and Formats

- Since 2007, a decline in the provision of information in alternative formats or languages
- During 2011 campaign, criticism from disability charities
- Some material appeared online during IndyRef

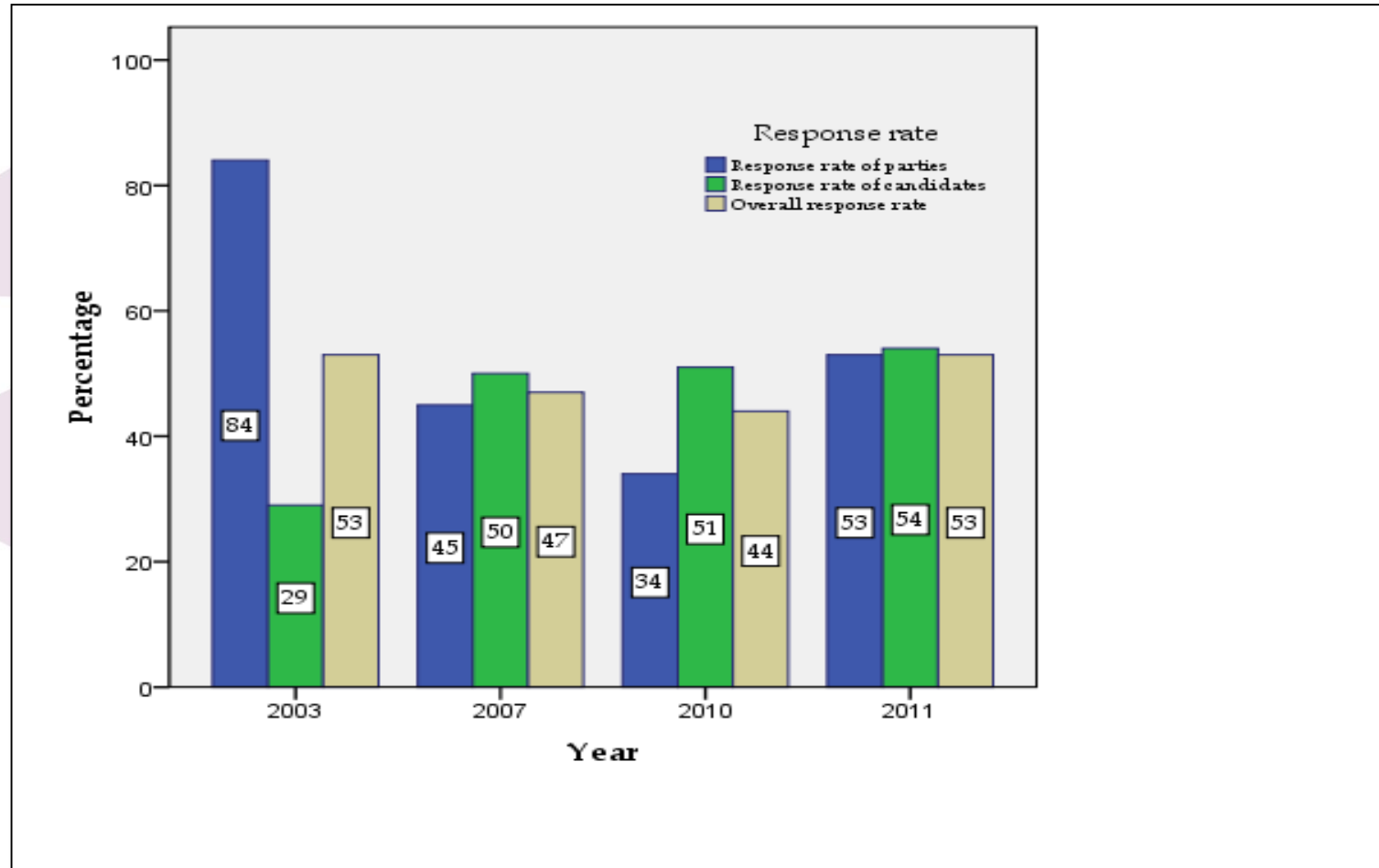


Resource Generation

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



E-mail Enquiry Response Rates



Social Media Enquiry Response Rates

Year	Facebook	Twitter
2010 (UK election)	50%	0%
2011 (SP election)	35%	30%
2014 (MSPs in 'peacetime')	n/a	0%
2014 (IndyRef)	0%	25%

Scottish Political Actors' Social Media Use, 2010 -

- Increasingly keen to be seen embracing new social media tools
- But lack of meaningful, personal, and/or local policy comment
- Except with high-profile politicians, most followers and 'friends' appear to be personal acquaintances or party activists
- Increasingly reluctant to interact with wider electorate
- Remains primarily the one-way 'broadcast' of information from politicians to electorate



MSPs' Twitter Sites: Nature of Information Exchange

6 Jan to 2 Feb 2014 ($n = 105$ MSPs; 10,404 tweets)

Primary Broadcast

14.8%

Secondary Broadcast

65.9%

Retweets &
Links

**Followers /
Constituents**

MSPs

Engagement & Dialogue

12.7%

'Unreciprocated' Engagement

6.5%



User Studies, 2011 & 2014 (1)

- Need for concise policy documents
- Positive about use of infographics
- Sceptical about impartiality and reliability of information presented
- Wish to identify *sources* of data presented
- Need for *local* policy commentary
- Cynical about imagery and about use of celebrity endorsements
- Wish to see more online dialogue
- Unimpressed with social media efforts:
“trivial”, “shallow”, “superficial”



User Studies, 2011 & 2014 (2)

Websites and social media sites examined were...	Scottish Parliament Election 2011 (<i>n</i> = 64)	Indep. Referendum 2014 (<i>n</i> = 54)
Useful way of providing information	77%	91%
Easy to use	97%	91%
Easy to understand	98%	93%
Interesting	77%	89%
Worth another look before polling day	69%	65%
Contained reliable information	n/a	37%
Influential in my voting intention	6%	25%

Use of the Internet by Political Actors in Scotland, 2003-2015: 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 electorate**
- **Dichotomy between provision and voters'/constituents' information needs**
- **Claims that they influence voting are questionable**



Photo: *Wolverhampton Express & Star*



Image: No Tosh

Thank you...

