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The use of the Internet by political parties and candidates as part of their campaign for election to the Scottish Parliament in 2007

Rita Marcella, Graeme Baxter and Shih Cheah

Background to the Study (1)

- **Scottish Parliament established 1999; 2007 election only the third to take place.**
- **Its devolved powers include: Health; Education; Housing; Agriculture and fishing; Police and fire services; Economic development; Transport; Environment.**
- **Growing political apathy amongst public – turnout at 2003 SP election was 49.4%, down 10 points from 1999.**
- **Electoral Commission poll after 2003 SP election found that around 40% of non-voters felt that they had received too little information on policies and candidates.**

Background to the Study (2)

- **Continued growth in Internet access**
 - **2003: 42% of households in Scotland**
 - **2005: 48% of households in Scotland**

(Source: Scottish Household Surveys)

- **35% of Scottish Internet users use or access government/official sites; a further 5% are likely to do so in the future. (*Scottish Household Survey, 2005*)**

Background to the Study (3)

- **A comparative, follow-up study to one conducted prior to the previous Scottish Parliament election in 2003, which found:-**
 - **considerable variation between parties and between candidates in their capacity and willingness to seize the potential of technology;**
 - **little evidence of a desire to engage with the electorate in a meaningful and visible online debate;**
 - **a tendency to ignore contentious or ‘difficult’ email enquiries; and**
 - **no real strategies designed to overcome voter apathy.**

Research Objectives

- **To log the content and special features of all political parties' websites and a sample of individual candidates' websites during the Scottish Parliamentary campaign;**
- **to analyse the content of the sites to identify ways in which public participation is encouraged, via information provision and opportunities for interaction and debate;**
- **to assess the value and relevance of the sites in terms of their contribution to the public's understanding of the campaign and the political agenda; and**
- **to compare the situation in 2007 with that encountered during the 2003 campaign.**

Methodology

- **Content analysis of websites of:-**
 - 27 political parties (of 31 parties fielding candidates)
 - 12 individual candidates (5 current MSPs; 7 new candidates)

- **Email enquiries on four key campaign issues:-**
 - 1) voter apathy, negative campaigning, and the ‘quality’ of the Parliament;
 - 2) street crime;
 - 3) the state of the National Health Service; and
 - 4) transport ‘versus’ environmental policies.

(Covert research using Hotmail addresses used here)

Party Website Analysis

The screenshot shows the Scottish Labour Party website. The main header features the slogan "BUILDING SCOTLAND" and the Scottish Labour logo. A navigation bar includes links for HOME, ASK JACK, OUR CAMPAIGN, ACHIEVEMENTS, MANIFESTO, GALLERY, and a search bar. Below the header, there are several sections: "YOU ARE HERE: HOME", a "GET INVOLVED" section with buttons for "Register for updates", "Volunteer to help", "Join us", and "Donate"; a "FORMED" section with "E-Jection newsletter" and "RSS - desktop news"; and a "News" section with headlines such as "Mother condemns SNP taxation policy as 'hater'" and "Labour will cut council tax bills by a quarter for pensioner households".

The screenshot shows the SNP website. The main header features the slogan "SNP It's time" and a photo of Alex Salmond. A navigation bar includes links for Home, Independence, Campaigns, News, Manifesto, People, SNP Members, Shop, and a search bar. Below the header, there are several sections: a "Vote to scrap the Council Tax" section; a "Count me in" section; a "Scotland's Big Party" section; and a "Donate Campaign" section. On the right side, there is a "IN YOUR AREA" section with a "Enter Postcode" field, and a "MEMBERSHIP" section with buttons for "DONATE", "JOIN IN", "MEMBERSHIP", and "E-TOOLS".

The screenshot shows the Scottish Conservatives website. The main header features the slogan "Scottish Conservatives" and a logo. A navigation bar includes links for Home, News & Press, People, Be Part Of It, Upcoming Events, Links, and Contact. Below the header, there are several sections: a "Video Archive" section; a "yourvoiceinparliament.com" section; a "Latest News" section with a headline "One truthful line shoots down the Nationalist spin"; and a "Member Log in" section with a "Submit" button. The website also features a "Watch" button and a "Contact" button.

The screenshot shows the Scottish Liberal Democrat website. The main header features the slogan "We think Scotland has a bright future." and a logo. A navigation bar includes links for Home, Our priorities, Our campaigns, Our news, Our people, In your area, Manifesto, and a search bar. Below the header, there are several sections: a "Video update" section; a "Hot topic" section with a headline "Nicola Sturgeon launches families manifesto"; a "Our priorities" section with icons for Young people, Economy, Environment, and Health; and a "Our campaigns" section with a headline "We think Scotland has a bright future".

Candidate Details (1)

- 73 constituency seats
- 56 regional seats (proportional representation)
- 18 of the 27 party websites had complete lists of their candidates

Details of 73 constituency candidates on major parties' websites

Candidates' details	Labour	SNP	Lib Dems	Conservative
Name	72	73	67	73
Biographical details	-	-	33	-
Photograph	-	-	66	-
Link to personal website	-	-	20	18
Email address	-	-	-	73
Postal address	-	-	-	-
Telephone number	-	-	58	-

Candidate Details (2)

- **Biographies and photos more common on the websites of:**
 - **Christian People's Alliance**
 - **Green Party**
 - **Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party**
 - **Scottish Voice**
 - **Socialist Equality Party**
 - **UK Independence Party**

- **But Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party and UK Independence Party were the only parties to provide candidates' email addresses as a matter of course.**

Information Provision (1)

- **Of the 27 party websites:-**
 - 17 contained an election manifesto;
 - 27 contained other policy information or statements;
 - 13 provided updated campaign news;
 - 6 provided a campaign agenda or calendar.

Who? What? When? Where?

SSCUP Candidates on the campaign trail

Scottish Action Against Council Tax

... Lothians

Just in from George Henderson, the covering e-mail attached to the most recent SAACT NEWSLETTER, displayed here to indicate our continued efforts to link to others sharing a common cause.

Dear All,

This issue essentially repeats the SAACT Website article on the Case for Replacing Council Tax, and urges readers to consider carefully how they will vote in the Scottish Parliamentary and Council Elections on Thursday 3rd May 2007. These elections may be our last chance of getting rid of Council Tax in Scotland for the next four years.

If you want rid of Council Tax, DON'T vote New Labour and DON'T vote Conservative. These are the only two major parties which want to retain this vile tax.

Please consider passing the Newsletter on to any friends on your e-mail address book who you think may be interested, and possibly suggest that they also pass it on.

BBC SCOTLAND INTERVIEW

Links
Home
Contact Me
Stats

Login

What's on?

Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office,
The Scottish Storytelling Centre,
43-45 High Street,
Edinburgh

27th. April Hustings Merchants House 10a.m.
4/27/2007

27th. April HUSTINGS St. Margaret's Church Glenrothes
4/27/2007

29th. April Local Election Fair 11a.m.-3p.m. St George's Church West, Shandwick Place
4/28/2007

26th. April Hustings Renfield St. Stephen's Church
7p.m.
4/26/2007

26th. April HUSTINGS St. Bryceland Church Kirkcaldy
4/26/2007

26th. April Meeting-Newburgh-2p.m.
4/26/2007

26th. April-McFarlane Old Parish Church Hustings PEBBLES 7.30p.m.
4/26/2007

See all >

On Air... Radio broadcasts and phone-ins

Information Provision (2)

- **Of the 27 party websites:-**
 - 7 claimed that they provided an e-news service;
 - 6 provided RSS feeds;
 - 5 contained blogs.

Small business rates blog

It's time to back small business

As well as abolishing business rates for 120,000 small firms across Scotland as part of the £150 million Small Business Bonus scheme, an SNP government will also reduce the application for the Small Business Bonus relief to once every five years instead of once every year under the current Scottish Executive Small Business Rate Relief Scheme.

The SNP believes that small business is hugely important to the Scottish economy and central to the SNP's vision of a more enterprising Scotland. Not only are they a source of entrepreneurship, innovation and jobs, but they are also a source of local economic vibrancy.

That's what we think. Now we want to hear what you think.

You can add your comments below and let us know if you think we have got it right on helping small business. Remember you need to be logged in before you can add your comment to the blog.

About

It's time to back Scotland's small businesses. The SNP want to help Scotland's wealth creators by abolishing business rates for 120,000 small businesses in Scotland and reducing them for 30,000 more.

Archive

- [October 2006 \(1 posts\)](#)

[8 Comments](#)

Grey Matters

The Blog of The Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party

Whatever happened to 'growing old gracefully'

If anyone has a mental picture of the elderly sitting at home knitting or reading the paper all day then think again, because even the more senior of our seniors are on the march!

I call myself a 'baby pensioner' having just gained my bus pass. I have worked with the elderly for most of my adult life and have for the most part always known them as a group who would always have their say and be game for anything. Politics on the other hand was one of these subjects you didn't talk about, a bit like religion! They had their views, always came out to vote accepting lifts from any party, but never revealing their intentions.

We now seem to have a different breed of pensioner- one that seems to have grown through the arrogance of politicians always taking them for granted. And they have had enough.No longer silent, they turn up in their droves and shout the would be politicians down in flames....It does your heart good just to watch them. Nor are they afraid to show their intentions when it comes to the vote. The knitting needles

Links
Home
Contact Me
Stats

Login

Joan McDowall

I'm the SSCUP Regional Organiser for West Scotland, and a list candidate, living on the Rosneath Peninsula. I believe that YOUR comments are important. Please feel free to comment on issues raised through the **Grey Matters** blog!

Information Provision (3)

- Of the 27 party websites:-
 - 8 provided 'How to vote' information;
 - 4 provided information in alternative formats/languages;
 - 11 had a search facility.

Election of the Scottish Parliament You have two votes		
Any Region Scotland Regional Member	Vote once only (X)	Anytown Central Constituency Member
Scottish Christian Party "Proclaiming Christ's Lordship"		Arnold Andrew Solidarity Party
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party		Bertram Barry Scottish Labour Party
Scottish Green Party		Clarke Christopher Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party
Scottish Labour Party		Dixon David Scottish National Party (SNP)
Scottish Liberal Democrats		Edwards Edwin Scottish Liberal Democrats
Scottish National Party (SNP)		Ferguson Francis Independent
Scottish Socialist Party		
Solidarity Party		

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.



Online communication

▪ Of the 27 party websites:-

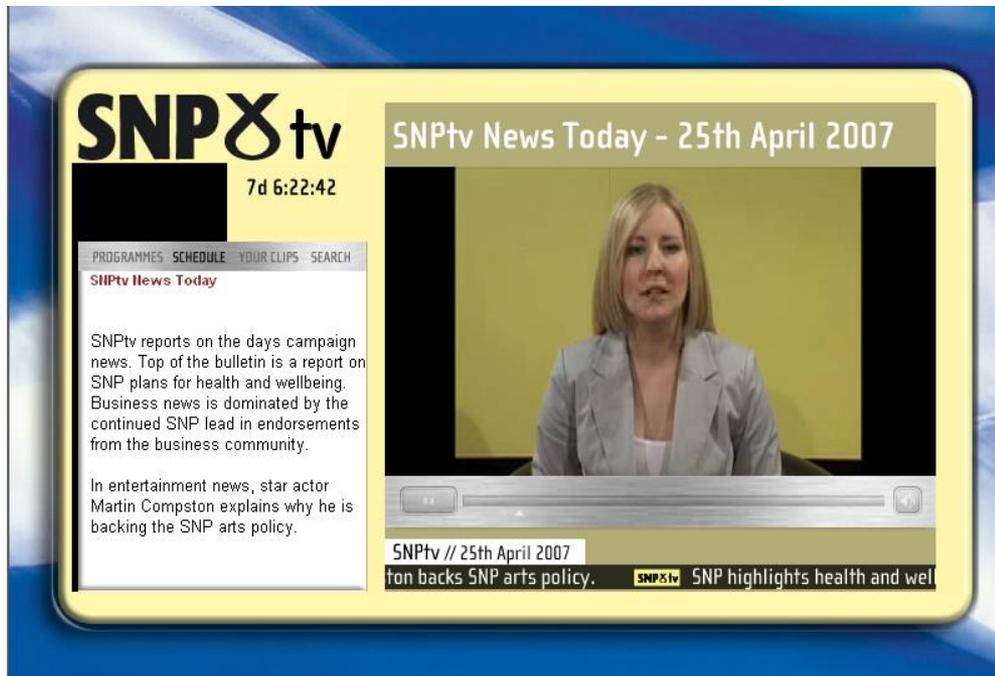
- 24 had contact email addresses or web enquiry forms;
- but none had an active, public online discussion forum.

Membership, Donations, etc.

- 12 had an online membership form;
- 4 had an online volunteering form;
- 5 had an online shop;
- 10 provided downloadable campaign materials;
- 12 provided for making donations online;

Audio-visual Features

- **Of the 27 party websites:-**
 - 12 provided video clips and podcasts;
 - 4 provided audio clips and podcasts;
 - 2 contained online TV stations.



Other Interactive Features

- **Of the 27 party websites:-**

- 3 contained online petitions;
- 1 contained an online survey/poll;
- 2 provided for postcode-based candidate searches.



Scotland Says NO To Road Tolls

You are here :: [Petition](#)

[Home](#) | [Gallery](#) | [Quotes From Politicians](#) | [Petition](#)

Please fill in the petition to pledge your support. We may use your details to contact you.

First Name*

Last Name*

Address 1*

Address 2

Town/City*

Postcode*

Phone No*

E-Mail*

Comments



Home » In your area

Details for postcode **AB24 5RW**

Your regional constituency is:

North East Scotland

The list candidates for North East Scotland in the upcoming elections are:

[Nicol Stephen](#)
Nicol Stephen

Mike Rumbles Alison McInnes John Stewart Matthew Duncan Steve Delaney Michael Charlton

Click the candidate's name for more information

Your local Scottish Parliament constituency is:

Aberdeen Central

Candidate: [John Stewart](#)





This is a satellite image produced from the Ordnance Survey Street-Map service. Image reproduced with kind permission of Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

Content Analysis of 12 Candidates' Websites

<u>Feature</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Feature</u>	<u>No.</u>
Biographical info	9	Blogs (updated)	1
Photo	12	Page change alert	1
Online contact	12	Personal video clips/podcasts	3
Link to party website	10	Download campaign materials	1
Personal policy statements	6	'How to vote' info	4
Personal campaign calendar	2	Alternative formats/languages	1
Updated campaign news	6	Online surveys/polls	2
Mailing list/e-newsletters	6	Search facility	5

E-mail Enquiries on Policy Issues (1)

- **128 enquiries sent, 82 to parties, 46 to individual candidates.**
- **60 replies received (47% response rate), 37 from parties (45%), 23 from candidates (50%).**
- **Parties: 86% of replies received within 2 days; longest response time was 7 days.**
- **Candidates: 78% of replies received within 2 days; longest response time was 8 days.**

E-mail Enquiries on Policy Issues (2): 'Hall of Shame'

- **Enquiries to Party email addresses**

No replies received from: Solidarity; Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party; Communist Party; Scottish Christian Party; Christian People's Alliance; 9% Growth Party; Socialist Equality Party.

- **Labour Party's 'Ask Jack' feature**

No replies to three enquiries, despite 'guarantee' that a response would be received on the Friday of the week in which an enquiry is made.

- **Enquiries to individual candidates**

Poorest response rates came from Conservatives (1 of 6), Liberal Democrats (2 of 6), Scottish National Party (2 of 6), and Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party (2 of 6)

E-mail Enquiries on Policy Issues (3): Extent and Content of Replies

- Ranged from the constructive, detailed and responsive, to 'cut and paste' standard replies from campaign manifestos, or simply URL links to the online manifesto.
- In general, the major parties adopted the 'copy and paste' approach.
- The UK Independence Party candidates appeared the most willing to initiate further engagement with the enquirer.
- Five candidates wanted to know where the enquirer lived before proceeding to answer the question.
- Most engagement arose from the question on voter apathy and negative campaigning.

Election Results 2007

- **Of 129 seats:-**

Scottish National Party	47	(+20)
Labour	46	(-4)
Conservative	17	(-1)
Liberal Democrats	16	(-1)
Others	3	(-14)

- **Turnout of 51.8%, up 2 points from 2003.**

- **But:-**

- Almost 142,000 spoilt ballots.
- Independent review of elections being conducted.

Conclusions

- Little progress made since 2003.
- Still little evidence of a real desire to engage with potential voters in a meaningful, visible online debate.
- Still a tendency for parties and candidates to ignore, or fail to answer fully, contentious or 'difficult' email enquiries.
- Still no obvious strategies designed to overcome voter apathy.