The 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum

A study of voters' online information behaviour

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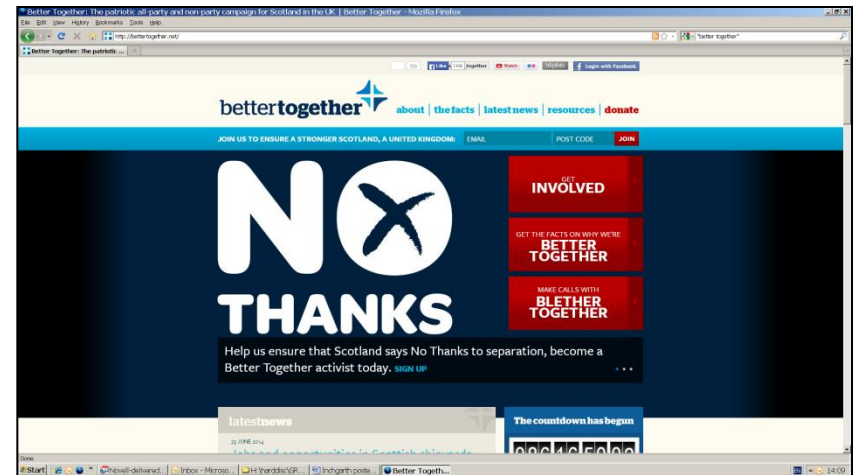
Dept. of Information Management, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK
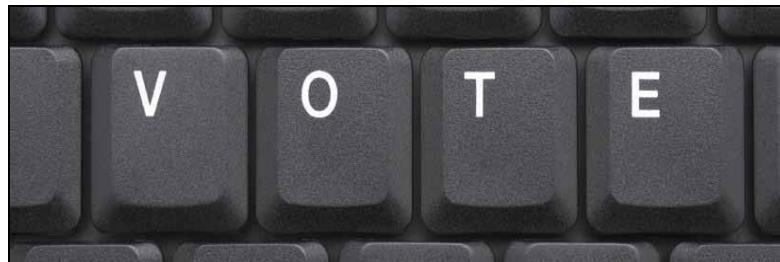
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Images: Electoral Commission

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Aims of User Study

- **Identify motivations for, and barriers to, public use of campaign sites**

- **Investigate the types of information, tools and technologies voters most value**

- **Assess the likelihood of campaign sites being visited again**

- **Explore the extent to which they influence voting behaviour**

User Study

- **Used the 'interactive, electronically-assisted interview' method**

- **So far, interviews conducted in:-**
  - Robert Gordon University library
  - Aberdeen's busiest community centre
  - a church serving Commonwealth citizens

- **Plans to conduct further interviews in:-**
  - a care home for older people
  - a sports centre

- **Used laptop with mobile broadband 'dongle'; iPad; and smartphone**

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Profile of Sample (to date)

- 54 interviews conducted so far

- 22 male, 32 female; from a range of age groups

- 29 in employment, 4 seeking work, 21 students

- 48 eligible to vote in referendum, 46 will definitely be voting

- Majority were regular and confident computer and Internet users

- Just 3 had never used social media

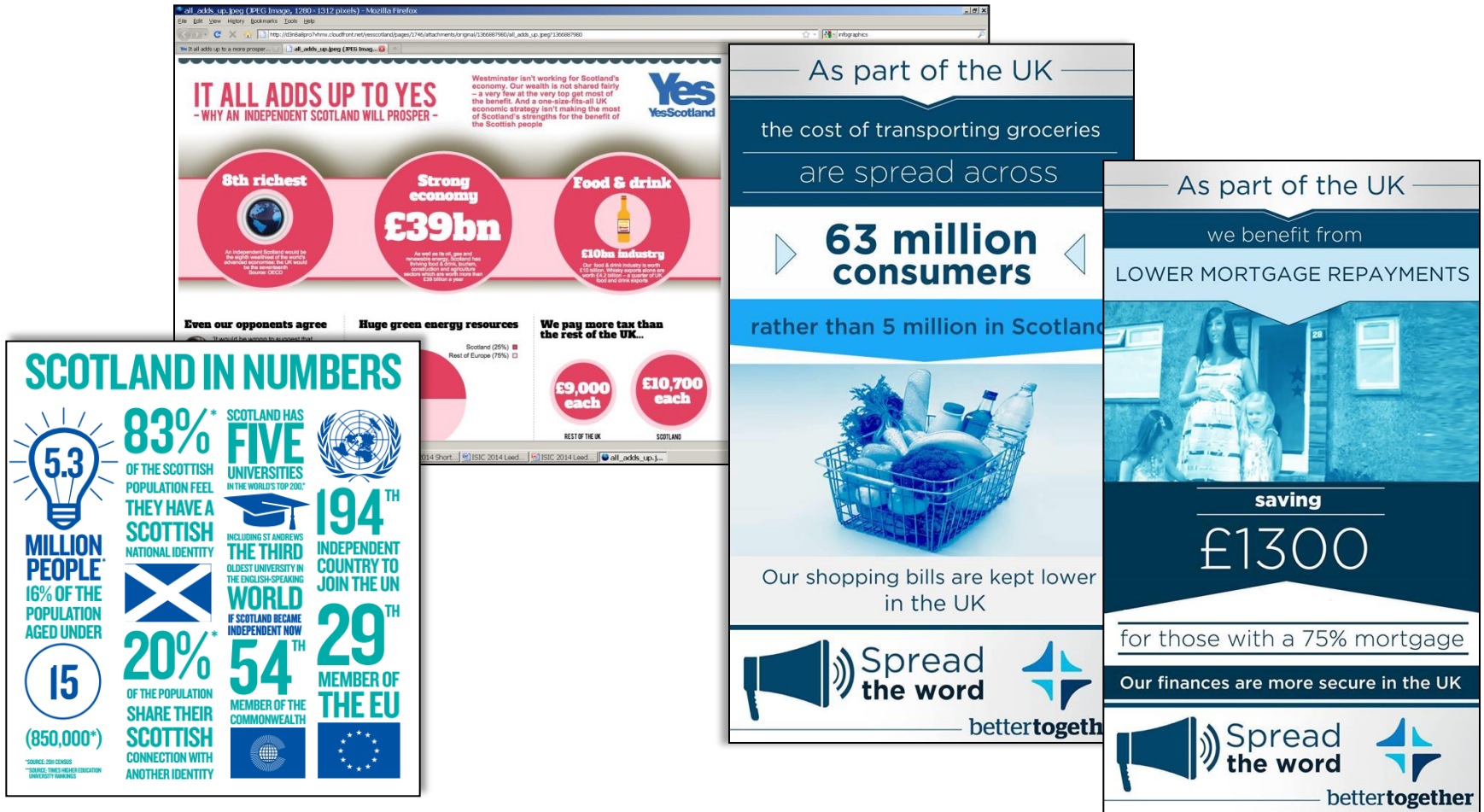# Need for Concise Policy Documents

- Reluctance to look at the Scottish Government's White Paper (670 pp) or other lengthy and wordy policy documents

- Preference for concise documents and statements (e.g. Better Together's 2- to 3-page factsheets)

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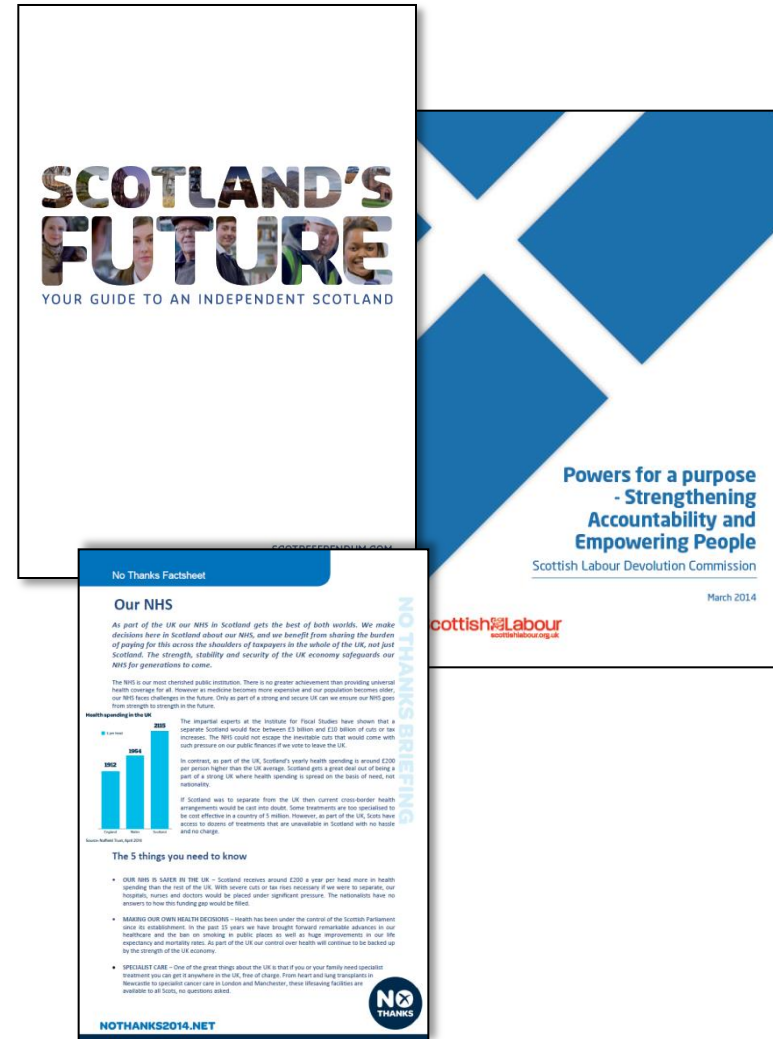
Positive About the Use of Infographics

- Unconvinced by over-reliance on opinions of 'ordinary people'

- Instead expressed a need for 'facts' about the impact of independence or of remaining in the UK

- **General acknowledgement of likely bias in information presented**

- **Need expressed for more information on *sources* of data/statistics presented**

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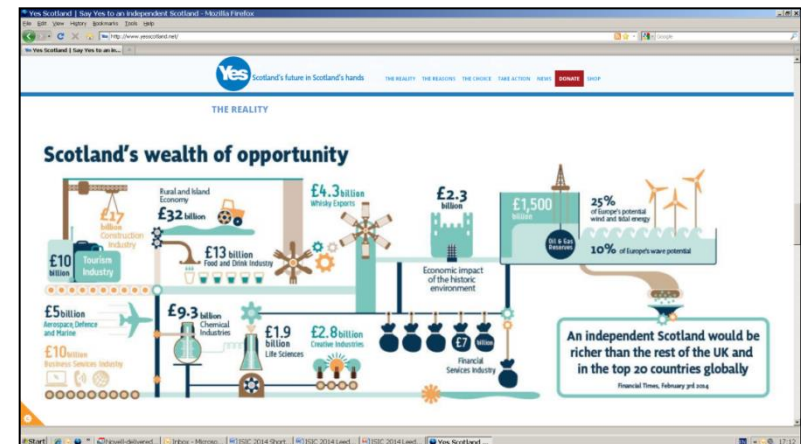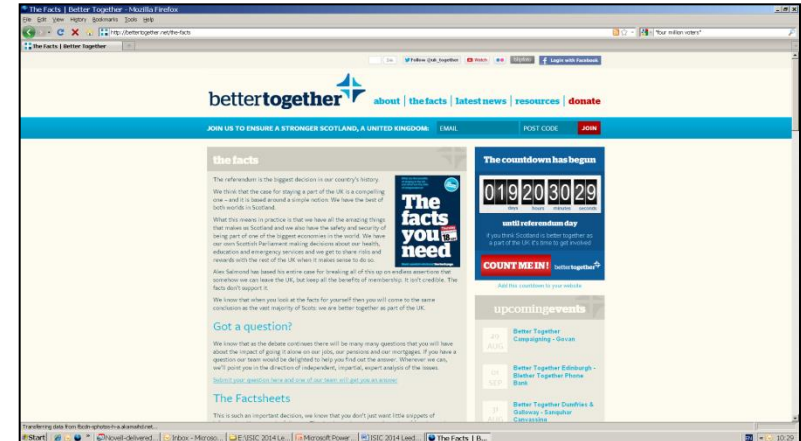
Further Levels of Cynicism

- Cynical about some of the imagery used

- Cynical about the use of celebrity endorsements

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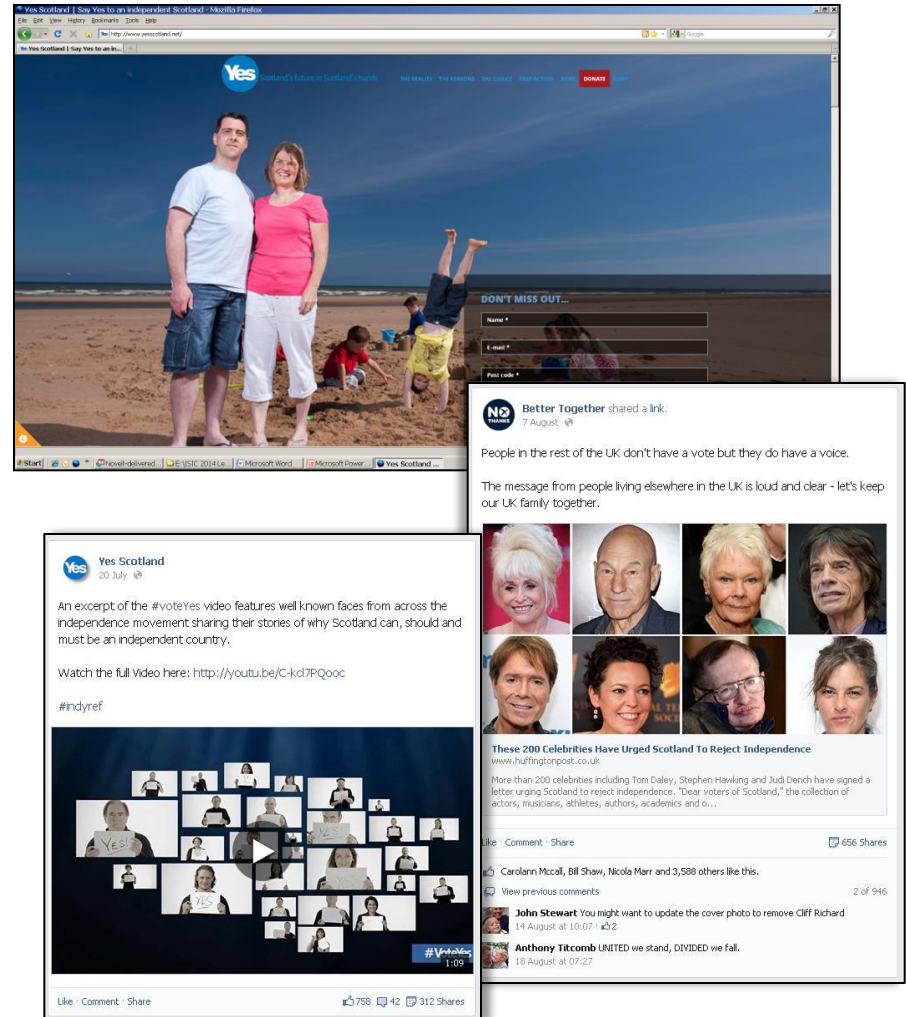
Post-Search Evaluative Questions

- **91% thought campaign sites are a useful way of providing information**

- **91% found them easy to use**

- **89% found the content interesting**

- **93% found the content easy to understand**

- **65% might look at campaign sites again before 18th September**

But…

- Just 37% described the information as 'very' or 'quite' reliable

- For 75% the campaign sites had no influence on their voting intentions

- Instead, a continued preference for 'traditional' information sources and campaign methods