Goin' Holyrood?

A study of voters' online behaviour when using political parties' and candidates' websites and social media sites during the 2011 Scottish Parliament election campaign

Image: Scottish Parliament

Graeme Baxter, Rita Marcella, Denise Chapman & Alan Fraser
Dept. of Information Management, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK

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Image: No Tosh

"...the first European election where online has swayed the vote"

"...a model for political parties all over the world"

Aims of User Study

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

- Investigate the types of information, tools and technologies the public most values

- Assess the likelihood of campaign sites being visited again

- Explore the extent to which they influence voting behaviour

User Study

- **Hosted by Rosemount Community Centre, Aberdeen**

- **Recruited 64 participants, from a range of age groups and socio-economic classes**

- **63 were Internet users; 35 were social media users**

- **Used laptop and mobile broadband 'dongle'**

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

Candidate Information

- **26 participants looked for information on their local candidates**

- **Mixed opinions on need for candidate biographies**

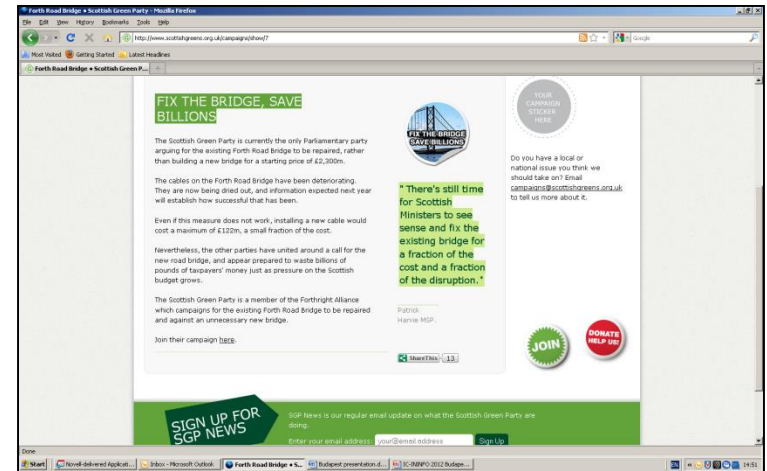- **Disappointment at lack of personal policy statements, particularly on local issues**
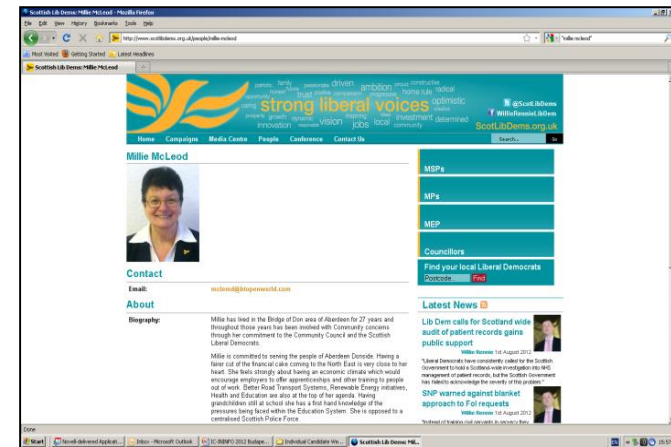
- 35 participants looked for party policy statements

- Reluctant to read lengthy manifestos

- Need for concise policy commentary

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- **Need for *local* policy commentary**

- **Frustration at lack of information relating to Aberdeen area**

- We will replace the Forth Road Crossing.

- We will take forward the Edinburgh/Glasgow Rail Improvement Project, including Crossrail and more commuting opportunities from Ayrshire and Renfrewshire; and from rural Lanarkshire to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

- We will make the Road Equivalent Tariff permanent in the Western Isles.

- We will provide a direct rail link to Glasgow Airport and we will contribute to the modernisation of Glasgow's subway.

(Labour Party manifesto)

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Use of Social Media (1)

- **40 participants looked at social media sites, mostly Facebook**

- **Vast majority were unimpressed with politicians' offerings**

- **Perceived lack of substance to posts:**

    "trivial"   *"puerile"*
    "shallow"   *"superficial"*

- **Too many photos of campaign activities:**

    "boring"   *"rubbish"*

- **Disappointed at lack of dialogue between politicians and voters**

- ***But* unwilling to publicly ask questions or make critical comments themselves**

- **Also reluctant to publicly show support for a party or candidate**
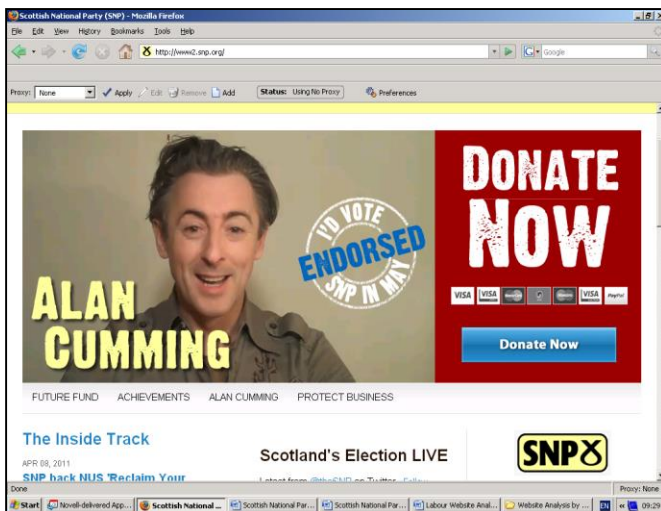
Other Issues Raised (1)

- **Concerns about lack of currency on candidate sites**

- **Concerns about lack of information in alternative formats and languages**

- **Uncomfortable with imagery used by parties at extreme ends of political spectrum**
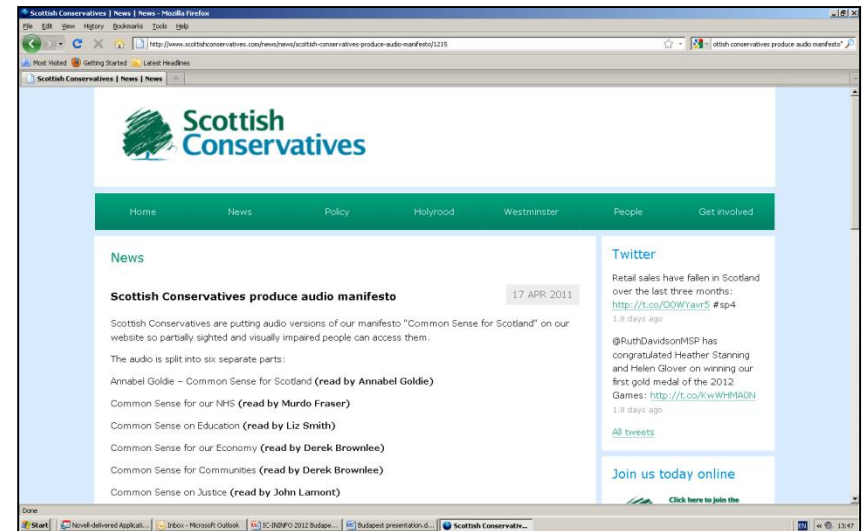
Other Issues Raised (2)

- **Preference for positive campaigning**

- **Cynical about celebrity endorsements**

Post-search Evaluative Questions

- 77% thought campaign sites are a useful way of providing information

- 97% found them easy to use

- 77% found the content interesting

- 69% might look at campaign sites again

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2011: an Internet Election?

- For 94% the campaign sites had no influence on their voting intentions

- Little evidence of "online swaying the vote"

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