MEPs online: Understanding communication strategies for remote representatives

Karolina Koc Michalska (Science-Po, Paris)

&

Darren G. Lilleker (Bournemouth, UK)

Abstract

This article explores the use of the Internet by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), assessing the adoption of online communication as well as its strategic uses. In particular we analysed the websites, weblogs and social networking site profiles of all MEPs who linked to an online presence from the European parliament homepage, a total of 440[1] MEPs representing all 27 member nations. Through a thorough analysis of the content using a scheme designed to record the presence and functionality of 103 specific features and tools and recency of updates, we assess how MEPs use the Internet to connect with a range of audiences; from journalists to loyal supporters. We find ~~overall~~ MEPs embracing a range of features which would be appealing to a wide range of different visitors. There is a minor generational divide among MEPs based both on their age and the length of time their country has been a member of the European Union. However overall we suggest there is an ebb and flow of innovation within the online political communication of these parliamentarians. ~~predominantly provide basic information and use their websites as a press office. Those providing weblogs focus on politically engaged but issue-specific audiences, while those who use social networking sites employ a relational strategy seeking to encourage greater support and loyalty from their online networks. Thus, we find that mobilising and interacting with supporters and activists is emerging as a strategic practice though adoption is currently sporadic evidencing some interesting relationships with individual, nation, party, and grouping variables.~~

---

[1] There were 447 links (out of 736) from official EP web site to MEPs' personal web sites however 7 were not active.

MEPs online: Understanding communication strategies for remote representatives

Introduction

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are rarely a subject of study, and when studied it is normally during elections (Jankowski, et al, 2005; Jackson & Lilleker, 2010; ~~Micheletti~~ Maier et al, ~~2010~~2011) or studies examine their adoption of innovations in communication (Elvebakk, 2004) and specific aspects of usage (Tomkova, 2010). Consistent with trends in the study of the role of electronic and digital political communication, this study not only analyses adoption but focuses on determining the strategic function of the websites and social networking profiles of online MEPs elected in 2009. MEPs are unique in that they are all equally resourced, thus the typically highlighted reasons for differentials in communication strategy should not apply; hence we seek to discover the extent to which national or personal variables act as key differentiators in strategy. We therefore focus on explaining adoption and strategic usage, focusing discussion around the extent to which there are clear explanatory factors beyond the normalisation or equalisation debate or whether, within parliaments we find an ebb and flow of innovation which cuts across personal and political variables.

MEPs Online: from remote to connected

MEPs are an interesting group of representatives, and their political communication fertile ground for academic study. They are remote politically from their home parliaments and parties, and geographically from their constituents (Lusoli 2005). The challenge for an MEP is~~, therefore,~~ that they simultaneously represent their constituents, areas and/or nations and their parties within European parliamentary groupings as well as representing the European parliament within their nation. It is suggested that parliamentarians should engage more with wider audiences and that the World Wide Web facilitates this connectivity (Coleman, 2005; Lusoli et al, 2006; Coleman & Blumler, 2009). The remoteness of the MEP, the multiplicity of their roles and audiences, suggests that an online communication strategy could be integral for enabling them to perform their multiple roles and maintain contact with constituents, party activists, supporters, voters and journalists. Thus we suggest that for MEPs using the Internet to enhance their ability to connect with those they

represent, developing a model of e-representation, would be highly efficacious. The~~It is argued that an~~ e-representation strategy we propose most appropriate for MEPs relates to the ~~enables parliamentarians to~~ building ~~of a~~ networks that include~~s physical~~ constituents, party activists, and those interested in specific areas of their work as parliamentarians~~supporters of their political programmes and stances~~ (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009a). This we would expect to be supplemented by a media management strategy, enabling them to talk directly to online audiences as well as gain coverage in mass media.

The impetus which might drive an e-representation and e-communication strategy would not just be a personal decision based on a desire to connect, build a network ~~and~~ or gain support or voter loyalty; the traditional motivations of elected representatives to enhance their communication strategies (Lilleker & Negrine, 2003; Williamson, 2009). The European Commission (EC) and European Parliament (EP) are keen to reduce ~~a~~ the democratic deficit which is at the heart of critiques of politics at the European level. The EP is described as "a failure as a representative body" (Farrell & Scully, 2007) with elections "plagued… by dismal turnout rates, scant media coverage, and low profile political campaigning" (Lusoli & Ward, 2005, p. 74; see also de Vreese, 2003). EC reports have raised these questions at the institutional level, promoting greater levels of interaction between the various institutions of the EU and citizens of member nations. Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate specifically aimed to "strengthen and stimulate dialogue, public debate and citizen's participation" (EC, 2005). While this and related reports (EC, 2001; 2005; 2008) focus at the institutional level, such initiatives will place ~~a certain~~ pressure upon MEPs to enhance their communication alongside party and personal-vote driven motivations. The EC reports emphasise greater use of the Internet alongside the mainstream media, suggesting that MEPs should contribute to EC initiatives to enhance the reputation and embeddedness of the EU in European political life.

There is a hint of ~~Without reiterating the arguments of~~ cyber optimis~~m~~ about the case for MEPs harnessing the Internet to a greater extent. In particular, the potential the online communication environment offers for legitimizing the European Parliament as a democratic institution The aim of our paper is to put this into strategic context. ~~ts regarding the potential of using the online communication environment to legitimize~~

~~the European Parliament as a democratic institution,~~ We firstly focus on levels of uptake, and attempt to discover underlying explanations, to explore the extent to which an e-communication strategy is developing. We then explore the extent of usage, differentiating features of websites and auxiliary presences in terms of their capacity to inform, engage visitors or permit interaction. We then assess whether we can detect targeting strategies, in particular whether MEPs design their online presences to attract specific audiences.

E-communication and parliamentarians: understanding the drivers of usage
~~it is worth considering how MEPs may use the World Wide Web to engage with audiences.~~ There is a rich literature on~~Studies of~~ the online communication of elected representatives ~~have tended to focus on~~and the extent of adoption of tools, features and platforms within digital environments, ~~or the extent to which they employ~~and whether they ~~-inform~~ative, engag~~e~~ing or interact with visitors~~ive features within their online presences~~ (de Landtsheer et al, 2005; Gibson & Ward, 2000). Studies of MEPs follow a similar approach (Elvebakk, 2004; Jankowski et al, 2005; Lusoli, 2005) though largely focusing on information provision (Jankowski et al, 2005; Lusoli, 2005). ~~However, while a~~Adoption of online communication tools ~~in itself~~ remains an interesting question for scholars of political communication, particularly due to the communicative possibilities this offers, however we also recognise the importance of going beyond simple questions of technological adoption~~with adoption becoming mainstream studies must go beyond basic level questions~~.

~~Alongside questions regarding adoption and feature use, t~~There is also a tendency to suggest a set of normative standards for behaviour online. Foot and Schneider (2006) offer a hierarchy for evaluating website features, placing features into groupings which supply information, involvement or engagement. A number of contiguous studies have used variances on this approach including either or both of interactivity and mobilisation as further categorisations (se Landtsheer et al, 2005; Druckman et al, 2009; Lilleker et al, 2011). This approach has laid solid groundwork for the understanding ~~of~~ uses of the World Wide Web; however we propose that normative frameworks tend towards categorising practice as good or bad endogenous to the social and political context, the drivers of behaviour, and considerations of what audiences may require. We suggest that by focusing on the strategic purposes of a

website, social networking profile or related site we can gain a better understanding of how features embedded on online presences combine to provide information, while engaging visitors as well as permitting interaction. The latter aspect has become particularly important with the development of technologies which collectively are termed Web 2.0. Separating the development of Internet technologies into eras, we find politicians largely locked within a Web 1.0 of informational communication, often reproducing offline material within a brochureware format. with a range of potential visitors. As both the technology and its use within politics has become more sophisticated, Sstudies of the use of the Internet for election campaigning havenow explored not only adoption but also the strategic uses of online tools and features (Rohrschneider, 2002) and more recently how campaigns design sites to appeal to key target audiences (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011).
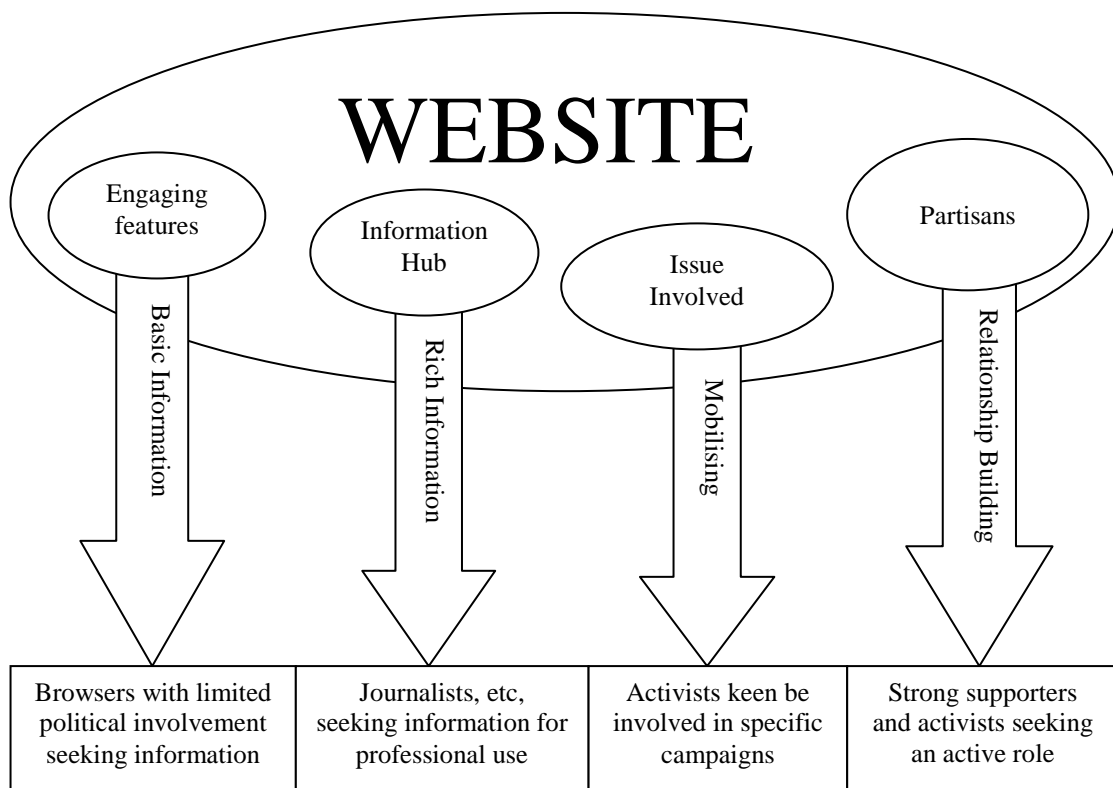
Interactivity is not a new concept but is increasingly focused upon with studies of online communication. Conversational interaction can be facilitatedmanaged in a number of ways. Within a website bBespoke discussion areas can be created, or the site can use a weblog or weblog tools to allow discussion and comment to take place on items the MEP has created. Normally these will be policy related discussions and reflect a strategy of building an online constituency. Social networking sites (SNS) allow a range of less formal interactions to take place with both the host and other users. Facebook has become the most popular among politicians (Williamson, 2009), and the use of the wall feature as a place to post items and allow commentary and sharing develops relationships with users of the platform (Utz, 2009). Similarly, YouTube and Flickr, the two most popular for sharing videos and photographs respectively, allow fellow users to comment. The use of social networking platforms, it is argued, can play an essential role in politics broadly by attaching visitors to these online presences to the host and their political campaigns. Santer (2005), discussing the case of Meetup.com in US political campaigns, links the site directly with connecting with and involving individuals and the lessons apply as much to the case of MEPs as candidates in presidential races. It is argued that providing networking opportunities That they offers a win-win proposition based on minimal investment that engages individuals with those who represent them (Sander, 2005, p. 31). Arguably it can also increase traffic towards an individual, usually across multiple

platforms and, if content and features are targeted at audiences, can allow some degree of community building by parliamentarians.

Targeting and e-communication: online strategy and parliamentarians

Arguably online browsers will seek out and visit websites for specific ~~but different~~ reasons and site designers are required to cater for the needs of browsers (Davis & Phillips, 2009). Therefore, it is a logical corollary that there will be specific reasons for visiting an MEPs online presence, and that MEPs may supply specific features tailored to their demands. ~~Here we adapt the~~ Lilleker & Jackson identified six potential audiences that may visit a party or candidate website within the context of an election, ~~schematic~~ (Figure 1) ~~which identified six potential audiences~~ we adapt this for the online communication of MEPs (Figure 1 ~~(~~Adapted from Lilleker & Jackson, 2011, p. 150), in order to~~which we then~~ link better to specific ~~functions relating to their~~ representative roles ~~as identified earlier~~they play.

Figure 1: Potential Audiences for political websites

WEBSITE

Engaging features — Basic Information → Browsers with limited political involvement seeking information

Information Hub — Rich Information → Journalists, etc, seeking information for professional use

Issue Involved — Mobilising → Activists keen be involved in specific campaigns

Partisans — Relationship Building → Strong supporters and activists seeking an active role

~~Communication is argued to encourage deepening relationships between individuals, particularly in online environments (Baym, 2010). Christopher et al (1991)~~

conceptualise this as a loyalty ladder, and in the context of a relationship between an elected representative and visitors to their online presences, we suggest a browser may be encouraged to become more supportive towards the representative and connect cognitively with them. By providing potential supporters with ways of learning and interacting it may be possible to convert these visitors into issue specific or electoral supporters, or both, and activists

We suggest that there will be up to four interlinking strategies which attempt to draw specific types of visitor to an MEP's website. Browsers seek to easily locate the information they want (Loiseau, 2003; Setala & Gronlund, 2006), however they can be drawn to stay within a site and browse further pages if they have an engaging experience (Xinran Y Lehto & Dae-Young Kim, 2006; Metzger, 2007). Therefore, we here focus on items that make a website attractive, or sticky (Jackson, 2003). Consideration is also needed as to the type of browser an MEP's website might attract. The likelihood is that the underlying behaviour is information seeking. Therefore the MEP should seek information can assist in the education of browsers about the parliament as well as on specific policy debates, the work of their grouping in the EP, and may include links to an MEPs' working agenda, supply documents for on or offline examination or hyperlinks to non-partisan organisations. It is argued that this can develop connections across an electronic, web-based, constituency or policy network within which an MEP plays a role as representative (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009a) as well as enhancing perceptions of both the individual and the organisations of which they are members (Cober et al, 2004).

Additionally there would be a more-involved group of professional information seekers, particularly journalists, students, academics or weblog authors who are increasingly crucial within the modern media environment (Panagopoulos, 2009, pp. 7-8). Alongside information on their day-to-day work, their political ideas and long-term objectives, these visitors are likely to be looking for , those with interests in specific policy areas, MEPs may provide detailed information on their MEPs' policy stances and, their interventions in debates, and a range of information that would be useful to those seeking information on parliamentary activities, and those of the MEP, which is of an in-depth and up-to-date nature. This . They would also be likely to seek this information in easy to access formats, including podcasts or downloads.

information can assist in the education of browsers about the parliament as well as on specific policy debates, the work of their grouping in the EP, and may include links to an MEPs' working agenda, supply documents for on or offline examination or hyperlinks to non-partisan organisations. It is argued that this can develop connections across an electronic, web-based, constituency or policy network within which an MEP plays a role as representative (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009a).

A Two key groups MEPs mayto connect arewith as an MEP may be partisan or political activists or political supporters. Activists may be mobilised through specific campaign related features, downloads or engagement tools, some with an overt campaign message, such as donations, may encourage promoting or sharing material with friends via email or social networking sites, others more related to linking the work of the MEP back to that of their national party and locally based political organisations. This is a campaign innovation the power of which was demonstrated clearly by Barack Obama (Harfoush, 2008; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011) and has shaped some elements of campaigning elsewhere. Such activities, however, are most associated with periods of vote seeking, specifically elections, but can also be used to further other political objectives. Using polls, for example, to gain support for political policies; allowing and encouraging sharing to develop campaign networks; or by providing visitors with elements they can take away and encouraging promotion beyond the online presences of the MEP. This involves harnessing the power of the online network and crowdsourcing endorsements and promotion of the work of an elected representative which contributes to the e-representational function.

Political activists are more likely to be mobilised around issues (Gerodimos, 2010). They will seek a level of In order to connect with activists in more profound ways, providing some form of empowerment (Galusky, 2003; Stutzer & Frey, 2006), and perhaps seek spaces foris to allow some form of interaction in order to exert influence over decision makers (Tedesco, 2007)take place. While features that allow some form of interaction among visitors within websites is becoming more prevalent (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009b; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011) little of this discussion feeds into the process of decision making (Vedel, 2003). However, the increased granularity of the use of engagement tools which allow a range of interactions to take place (Chadwick, 2009) is enhancing the visitor experience potentiated within the websites of political

parties, candidates and elected representatives. Interactivity presents site hosts and visitors with a potential win-win zone (Jackson, 2006). The host is perceived positively by visitors (Stromer-Galley & Foot, 2002; Sundar et al, 2003) while visitors gain a sense of efficacy and involvement (Min, 2007). This permits for relationships between the host and visitors to be established and managed through an ongoing discursive process. However such a strategy is not without risk (Stromer Galley, 2000), hence it is largely avoided during elections (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011, p. 162). However, consistent with the roles of communicating to multiple audiences and connecting to the disparate communities MEPs represent, there are clear benefits to MEPs of developing some form of interactive strategy within their online presences.

Interactivity can be managed in a number of ways. Within a website bespoke discussion areas can be created, or the site can use a weblog or weblog tools to allow discussion and comment to take place on items the MEP has created. Normally these will be policy related discussions and reflect a strategy of building an online constituency. Social networking sites (SNS) allow a range of less formal interactions to take place with both the host and other users. Facebook has become the most popular among politicians (Williamson, 2009), and the use of the wall feature as a place to post items and allow commentary and sharing develops relationships with users of the platform (Utz, 2009). Similarly, YouTube and Flickr, the two most popular for sharing videos and photographs respectively, allow fellow users to comment. The use of social networking platforms, it is argued, can play an essential role in politics broadly by attaching visitors to these online presences to the host and their political campaigns. Santer (2005), discussing the case of Meetup.com in US political campaigns, links the site directly with connecting with and involving individuals and the lessons apply as much to the case of MEPs as candidates in presidential races. That they offer a win-win proposition based on minimal investment that engages individuals with those who represent them (Sander, 2005, p. 31).

The extent to which MEPs are not only utilising spaces on the world wide web but are offering specific material to engage with casual, professional, involved or active browsers could be crucial for them to be perceived as less remote and become more embedded within local and national political life (Schudson, 1999). While few may access their online presences there is potentially a dissemination process through

individuals and their online and offline networks and the mass media which will enable them to communicate to broader national, European and global audiences. After outlining our method for evaluating their use of the world wide web we present our data and discuss the key findings in light of the potential offered by new media technologies for MEPs.

Research Method

To ascertain the strategies we analysed the content of the websites of 440 MEPs, all with links from the European Parliament homepage, and all linked social networking site profiles; MEPs represent all 27 member states. The full coding scheme involved 103 items pertaining to feature presence or absence and the functionality of the site and its architecture. We also measured frequency and recency of updates on websites, social networking sites and microblogs, provision of news and newsletters, to assess the extent to which they catered for involved information seekers (newsletters). All coders passed inter-coder reliability tests (the final score was 91%), any irregularities were checked and corrected. Websites were coded online and offline from the archived[2] version of campaign websites.

Features are categorised as belonging mainly within either the Web 1.0 or Web 2.0 era, this enables us to assess the extent to which national and individual variables among our population impact upon providing innovative online presences, as well as assessing how these variables influence developing an online presence of some form at all. Features are additionally classified as providing for and potentiating specific target audiences. No features are discrete in being assigned to any single audience, however we classify a package of features as appropriate for providing the core set of experiences each audience would demand. Following agreement of these between the authors a proof of concept study was carried out among a group of web designers, including strategists working with political parties on web development. The table presented as appendix 1 lists the features listed under both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, those defined as adhering to providing an informational, engaging or interactive experience, and those we define as most attractive to each of our four audience groupings.

---

[2] The data archives were downloaded to local computer at Sciences-Po, Paris. It was performed by TelePort Ultra provided by Tennyson Maxwell Information Systems, Inc.

Regression was used to determine national and individual variables which can explain the creation of online presences and the extent of innovation. In order to analyse the extent to which we can identify the strategic targeting of audiences, and what variables determine these strategies we employ.

Results

In terms of the types of main presence used 334 are websites, eleven use a weblog template (Blogger or Wordpress) as a main presence and there are 95 we classify as hybrid sites, independently hosted presences (with domain name etc) where the front page is structured in the same way as a weblog but with areas further linked which supply a range of other materials. 76% of these web presences are updated frequently, with the average being around ten updates per month though a few provide updates up to three times per day. 104 (24%) permit visitors to comment on items on the website. 174 MEPs provide an additional weblog alongside their website, though these are less frequently updated (twice a month being the mode average for the 54 MEPs who updated their weblog during the month of analysis). Only 60 allow comments on their blogs and most lack sophistication or innovation. Only 18 use a videoblog format and 33 provide a blogroll. Given the time taken to create blogposts this is expected, and it is noted that these are in addition to rolling news feeds and weblog style forms of communication embedded within websites. The relatively low levels of MEPs providing these additional sites suggests that they view their website as a central 'one-stop shop' for all elements and many are more interested in gaining subscribers to their communication than providing online information tools which visitors may visit once. This is reinforced by the fact that e-newsletters are becoming widespread features, 41% provide a subscription service and 27% have an archived newsletter area which can be read and downloaded by visitors without the necessity for leaving data. For those with a subscription service out of the 182, only 53 sent any newsletters during November 2010 with most being monthly, though a small number produce an almost daily e-newsletter. While not a low number, it is still surprising that only 40% provide an RSS feed; we considered this may be due to the provision of a subscription however statistical analysis shows a very small and not statistically significant correlation of 0.026. [is there an inverse correlation between allowing subscriptions and providing an RSS feed?]

In terms of providing information tailored towards specific groups, journalists and information seeking browsers are served well. 285 websites have an area devoted to the media work of the MEP, usually housing press releases. 219 show their appearances from television (mainly grabs from European Parliament TV), 215 have an archive of their press coverage and 108 have podcasts from radio appearances. 201 provide a schedule of work (Agenda) within the EP and constituency hours. Only 33 (8%) provide an FAQ section regarding their work as an MEP. Only 10% have a special contact email or telephone number for journalists, 48% provide easy downloading of documents and 29% provide a print facility. A large majority (89%) provided an area dedicated to highlighting their work within the EP, though a small number (31%) have an area which links this work directly to their home nation or region which they represent. 25% provide areas dedicated to specific policy areas of interest, suggesting they wish to be seen as experts and/or advocates within key areas of policy.

Virtually all, though this is not universal, provide a personal profile detailing their political careers to date (95%). Additionally many advertise their education and qualifications (73%), family information features strongly (41%), Interests and hobbies less so (26% and 21% respectively). This suggests personalisation does not go beyond promoting themselves as professionals and they either see no interest in their private lives and interests or wish to keep this information private. Family information, where provided, is normally simplistic information regarding whether the MEP is married and whether there are children only.

Engaging methods for delivering information have become almost standard. Video is widely used within websites (70%) of MEPs, yet usage is controlled and few comparatively (40%) use YouTube as a free distribution channel. Only eight provide video using a webcam. Animated graphics are not as widely used as could be expected (36%), despite the attractiveness of such features; rather 78% provide photo galleries with the main audience being journalists. Only 18% use a social sharing site (such as Flickr) for graphics. Games, seen by some as an attractive element, feature only on three MEP's websites.

Navigation aids are equally widespread. Hyperlinking is widespread, 93% have links from their website to outside online sites. Mostly these go to their national party affiliation (85%), the EP grouping (74%) then other political organisations to whom they wish to advertise an affiliation (55%); only a small number (18%) link to independent NGO. Search engines are widely used (61%). In terms of Accessibility, only 20% have a language change facility and 10% allow text to be resized.

In terms of permitting contact a surprisingly high number do not advertise an email address on their site (18%), though these are all available from the EP official profile so perhaps are not always needed. Also 18% provide no postal address. Online contact forms, which are very popular for a variety of individuals and organisations, are only used by 38%.

Social networking is increasingly used within parliaments and the EP is no exception. 46% provide links to at least one social networking profile. Out of the 201 social networkers, 198 use Facebook, and 39 have more than one profile often using those popular in their home countries such as the German StudiVZ or Dutch Hives. However, inconsistent with social networking usage by wider society, only 140 have open profiles which allow friends to publicly interact with the host, and updating is low (115 showing updates within November 2010) and the modal average number of updates would be around four per month, though this does vary with the most prolific networker posting 396 updates. Sharing is encouraged by 159 social networkers. Personal information is low, 83 post details of their education, 69 their private interests (often amounting to their favourite books), 43 their hobbies (often those who enjoy sports) and 42 show family details. Again, these data suggest a less than expected use of the internet for a personal promotional strategy. Surprisingly, given the hype and widespread uptake, Twitter is only used by 111 MEPs. Tweeting is sporadic ranging from one to 678 within the month of study, but only 28 tweeted more than thirty times, 38 more than twenty times and 59 more than ten times demonstrating most use is less than ten times within an average thirty day period. Overall 53% demonstrate their activities within other sites through enmeshing items from Facebook, Twitter or their weblogs into the home pages of their main online presence,

Interactive features such as polls have very low use, offered by 44 (10%) of MEPs. Any forms of discussion board, chat facility or online forum are equally rare, provided by only 55 MEPs (13%). 31% do encourage sharing features and material from their websites via social networking or bookmarking sites. 13% have a tag cloud to allow easy linking to areas relating to special interests of the visitor. In terms of mobilising visitors, only 21 websites allow registration into a members' area, 13% provide information and contact details to apply for visits to Brussels or Strasbourg, 22 do offer links to join their national party, four seek donations and twenty volunteers.

In terms of the wider architecture there is widespread use of both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 features, though Web 1.0 predominates. Information and Engagement functions are well served but Interactivity is no longer marginal. Table 3 shows the overall average online performance (AOP)s, as, for features classified as falling into providing Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 experiences as well as figures for the number of features classified as providing Information, Engaging visitors in some way or allowing Interaction between visitors and the hosts, along a vertical axis, or horizontal communication between visitors.

Table 3: Mean averages for feature use

	Web 1.0	Web 2.0	Information	Engagement	Interactivity
Number of features within category	26	14	29	23	12
Mean average across MEPs websites	15.5	4.5	13.4	10.7	5.0
Standard deviation	4.1	3.3	4.0	3.7	2.6
Average as percentage	59.6	32.1	46.2	46.5	41.7

	Web 1.0 (26)	Web 2.0 (14)	Information (29)	Engagement (23)	Interactivity (12)
AOP	.60	.32	.46	.47	.42

A visitor browsing the websites of MEP is therefore likely to find that 42% of features allow some element of interactivity, either asymmetrical forms such as sending an email or symmetrical communication tools such as allowing feedback through commenting which can result in discussion between visitors and the MEP. 34% of the average site is informational, though this is expected, but increasingly a lot of information is delivered in engaging ways and 35% of features on MEPs websites, on average, encourage the visitor to become engaged and have an experiential dimension to their use.

Table 4 shows the data for features we categorised as which are deemed to be specifically targeting one single audience or would be mostly attractive to that audience. As would be expected there are a range of features used that are attractive to browsers and make a website sticky, so drawing them to access further pages. MEPs also focus on supplying information of interest to those with specific political interests. These are usually in the form of pages dedicated to work in specific areas (immigration or environmental policy for example). Partisan tools are the least used despite there being a broad range available. MEPs tend to link to the party but are not partisan animals and few seek to build a personalised support base and seek votes. As expected professional information seekers such as Journalists are a key target audience;. A on average a significant proportionlmost a third of all MEPs websites link with their provide information to aid journalists and so are largely covered under a MEPs media management strategy.

Table 4: Audiences Targeted: overall means

	Total number of features	Mean average on MEPs websites	Standard deviation	Average Percentage within websites	Percentage for the average website

Browsers (6	6	3.4	1.2	56.7	28.6
Info Seekers	16	9.8	2.4	61.3	31.0
Issue involved	11	5.1	1.9	46.4	23.4
Partisans	14	4.7	2.9	33.6	16.0

	Browsers (6)	Info Seekers (16)	Issue involved (11)	Partisans (14)
Mean average on MEPs websites	3.4	9.8	5.1	4.7
AOP	.57	.61	.46	.34
Percentage for the average website	.29	.31	.23	.16

Analysis: testing for national, political and personal variables

Table 5 shows the results of statistical analysis for overall web performance, which is a non-normative measure of overall number of features, the use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 and the extent to which the sites are informative, engaging or interactive. What is interesting is that there is a generational divide small digital divide within the European Parliament in that minor parties remain within a Web 1.0 mode of communication. Equally, and far more pronounced, is the generational divide. Older MEPs offer much less sophisticated web presences as a group. Interestingly, electoral size also has an impact upon the extent to which MEPs focus on providing Web 1.0, informational online experiences for their visitors. This may be explained by the fact that they believe they talk to a larger community so need to concentrate on informing and may not be able to devote resources to interacting. MEPs representing what we classify as older Europe, nations who have been members for longer, are also less likely to use Web 2.0, conversely MEPs representing the newer members offer more engaging experiences. Overall, however, the ebb and flow hypothesis (Gibson & Ward, 2000) is the best explanatory theory. In that innovation is sporadic and perhaps related to the individual interests of the MEP, or their staff, in new technologies.

While age and length of tenure, by both individual and nation, show some explanatory power differences in reality are fairly marginal.

Table 5: Regression analysis of feature use

	Web 1.0	Web 2.0	Info	Eng	Inter
Personal characteristic					
Gender	.043*	-.014	-.009	.025	-.001
Age	-.001	-.016***	-.004**	-.005**	-.008**
Party size in national parliament (reference group: fringe)					
Major parties	.045	-.181	-.006	-.020	-.054
Minor parties	.114*	-.038	.089	.084	.073
Country characteristics					
Preferential voting system	.018	.048	.020	.056	.075
GDP 2009	.062	.245	.149	.195	.164
Electorate size	.070**	-.047	.073*	.022	-.066
% of population using internet	-.008	-.211	-.071	-.152	-.080
EP characteristics					
EP party ideology scale	-.008	-.061**	-.014	-.019	-.013
Membership in EP commissions	.009	.024	.018	.025	.011
Terms-old in EP	.014	-.072**	.004	-.025	-.029
Terms-new in EP	-.001	-.022	-.000	-.049	-.006
'new EU'	.142	-.098	.162	.220*	-.044

Note: Models are results of Poisson regression, robust. Dependent variables are continuous Web performance (0-52), WEB 1.0 (0-34), WEB 2.0 (0-18), Information (0-32), Engagement (0-31) and Interaction (0-15). Independent variables: gender (dummy, 1=women, 0=men); age (in years); preferential voting system (dummy, preferential = 1, otherwise = 0); GDP 2009 (ln natural logarithm) GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards ((PPS) (EU-27 = 100), Source: Eurostat); electorate size (ln natural logarithm) – nb of population in country/nb of seats in EP per country; % of population using internet per country (ln natural logarithm); membership in EP commissions (scale, 1=7); EP party ideology scale (from left to right on 1-7 scale, GUE(1), Greens, S&D, ALDE, EPP, EFD, ECR(7); Terms-old in EP – number of terms in EP for countries in EU before 2004 (15) (scale, 0-7); Terms-new in EP - number of terms in EP for countries joining EU after 2004 (12) (scale, 0-2); 'new EU' - countries joined EU after 2004 (12) (dummy, joined after 2004 = 1, otherwise = 0)
Statistical significance *p<.10. **p<.05, ***p<.001

Table 6 shows the results of regression analysis for the targeting of the different audiences: browsers, journalists, special issue activists and personal or partisan supporters. When focusing on community building, we found female MEPs focused more on adhering to an e-representational communication model (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2011 [PSA]; 2012 [JCMC]). This is equally shown in these data, female MEPs are more likely to focus on building communities around specific political interests. The generational divide is also demonstrated; again younger MEPs are more likely to be more strategic communicators. There is evidence of an equalisation strategy among MEPs representing minor parties. The thesis suggests they will try to overcome imbalances in media coverage by talking directly to voters online. We suggest that actually they attempt to engage information seekers, particularly journalists or political bloggers online, so recognising the importance of having their messages transmitted by recognised mediators ~~the two-step flow model of political~~

~~communication~~ but using technology to reach out to ~~journalists~~ information transmitters rather than assuming their newsworthiness. There is also evidence of strategy in targeting browsers among MEPs elected within preferential voting systems, who also target their supporters online, also MEPs representing nations with higher GDPs appear to see online communication as a viable way of attracting attention; this is also true for those representing the newer member nations. The ideological divide between left and right is also highlighted, this is mainly the result of Green party and grouping MEPs building communities around their work on environmental policy across the European Union.

Table 6: Regression analysis ~~of~~ for ~~targeted~~ audiences targeted

	Browsers	Info seekers	Issue involved	Partisans
Personal characteristic				
Gender	.016	.013	.079**	-.031
Age	-.006**	-.001	-.002	-.011**
Party size in national parliament (reference group: fringe)				
Major parties	.010	.087	.014	-.078
Minor parties	.037	.133**	.021	.137
Country characteristics				
Preferential voting system	.077**	-.005	-.026	.118*
GDP 2009	.220*	.009	.046	.349
Electorate size	.056	.032	.027	-.037
% of population using internet	-.156	.033	.002	-.152
EP characteristics				
EP party ideology scale	-.001	-.007	-.031**	-.047**
Membership in EP commissions	.033*	.016	.024	.012
Terms-old in EP	-.015	.013	-.035*	-.025
Terms-new in EP	.030	-.044	-.020	.0103
'new EU'	.215*	.109	-.051	-.039

Note: Models are results of Poisson regression, robust. Dependent variables are continuous Browsers Audience (0-7), Info seekers (0-18), Issues involved Audience (0-13) and Partisan Audience (0-20). Independent variables: gender (dummy, 1=women, 0=men); age (in years); preferential voting system (dummy, preferential = 1, otherwise = 0); GDP 2009 (ln natural logarithm) GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards ((PPS) (EU-27 = 100), Source: Eurostat); electorate size (ln natural logarithm) – nb of population in country/nb of seats in EP per country; % of population using internet per country (ln natural logarithm); membership in EP commissions (scale, 1=7); EP party ideology scale (from left to right on 1-7 scale, GUE (1), Greens, S&D, ALDE, EPP, EFD, ECR (7); Terms-old in EP – number of terms in EP for countries in EU before 2004 (15) (scale, 0-7); Terms-new in EP - number of terms in EP for countries joining EU after 2004 (12) (scale, 0-2); 'new EU' - countries joined EU after 2004 (12) (dummy, joined after 2004 = 1, otherwise = 0)
Statistical significance *p<.10. **p<.05, ***p<.001

Discussion and Conclusions

If we take these data as broadly representative of the development in the use of the Internet by parliamentarians, we find broadly that the era of the brochureware website is over. Parliamentarian's websites offer a range of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 features and increasingly provide engaging and interactive experiences for visitors. These are

combined with areas which provide a variety of rich information, these are important for ensuring there is understanding of the workings of the institutions and individual representative to build a sense of legitimacy for the European parliament and similar legislatures. We also note a greater strategic usage of online environments. Some MEPs provide interactive news feeds which allow engagement with journalists, issue-specific activists and supporters. The hybridisation of websites is reflected with a use of a range of features which produces a complex balance between providing information and offering opportunities for interaction. Many MEPs are happy to not only provide an information feed in a weblog format embedded on their front page, but they also allow visitors to offer comments on these and a minority at points within discussions will respond. The other key element to note is the embeddedness of the use of social networking sites and platforms. Facebook emerges as the space where MEPs are building profiles and building interactive communities with a range of individuals. Alongside this the use of Twitter, YouTube and Flickr are becoming widespread, each encourage a more interactive mode of communication to emerge. The fact that there is a generational divide, with younger MEPs as well as those representing the newer members of the EU pioneering online communication, suggests that the online environment will become even more embedded within the communication strategy of MEPs and parliamentarians more generally. However, the resources question may well be key to whether we find Web 2.0 becoming a key driver of changes within political communication. Interaction requires monitoring and reciprocity, the parliamentarian must be both creator of content and participant in co-creation. There is little sense of real reciprocity taking place in conversations but for interactivity to be anything more than a gimmick, contributing to democratic representation, it must be both symmetrical and asymmetrical with a clear sense that someone is listening and prepared to respond. Currently it is unclear if this is the case across the online presences of many MEPs, the question is whether the new generation of European parliamentarians lead the way in encouraging a more interactive mode of political communication to become embedded within the strategic use of the online environment.

Appendix 1: Feature classifications used within the analysis

WEB 1.0: Information about last update (date of last entry); Newsletter on the web; Possibility to subscribe for newsletter; MEP profile; Agenda; Special section for/with media; Media: newspaper articles; Media: TV programs; Podcast; SECTION with EP work; SECTION with regional or country work; SECTION with special issues (other than EP work); FAQ section; Section with videos; Animated photos; Photo gallery (on web site); LINKS to other web sites; LINKS to political party; LINKS to NGO; LINKS to political organisations; LINKS to EP web sites; CONTACT by e-mail; CONTACT by post address;
CONTACT by online form; CONTACT special for journalist only; Public opinion polls; Search engine; Translation to other languages; Help for disable audience; Downloads (any); Possibility to print web site; Possibility to visit Brussels; Possibility to register on the web site; Possibility to join the party

WEB 2.0: Additional blog; Possibility to leave comment on the web site; Possibility to leave comment on the blog; Blogroll; Online chat or forum; Possibility to send web site content to others; Video blog; LINK to any video sharing web site; Online web camera; LINK to any photo sharing web site; LINK to own profile on Facebook; LINK to own profile on any other social network site; Possibility to comment on Facebook; Possibility to share Facebook profile with others; LINK to own Twitter profile; RSS; Possibility to Tag the web site; Emneshing features

INFORMATION: Information about last update (date of last entry); Additional blog; Newsletter on the web; Possibility to subscribe for newsletter; Newsletter received in November; Special section for/with media; Media: newspaper articles; Media: TV programs; Podcast; MEP profile; Agenda; FAQ section; SECTION with EP work; SECTION with regional or country work; SECTION with special issues (non EP or national work); INFORMATION about political career; INFORMATION about family; INFORMATION about hobby; INFORMATION about education; INFORMATION about interests; Section with videos; Photo gallery (on web site); Search engine; Facebook: information about family; Facebook: information about hobby; Facebook: information about education; Facebook: information about interests; RSS; Possibility to Tag the web site; Downloads (any); Possibility to print web site; Contact for journalists

ENGAGEMENT: Information about last update (date of last entry); update in November; Update on the blog in November; Blogroll; Public opinion polls; INFORMATION about family; INFORMATION about hobby; INFORMATION about interests; Video blog; Section with videos; LINK to any video sharing web site; Online web camera; Animated photos; Photo gallery (on web site); LINK to any photo sharing web site; LINKS to other web sites; LINKS to political party; LINKS to NGO; LINKS to political organisations;
LINKS to EP web sites; Facebook update in November; LINK to own Twitter profile; Twitter update in November; Possibility to send web site content to others; Translation to other languages; Help for disable audience; Possibility to Tag the web site; Emneshing features; Possibility to visit Brussels; Possibility to register on the web site; Possibility to join the party

INTERACTION: Possibility to leave comment on the web site; Possibility to leave comment on the blog; LINK to any video sharing web site; LINK to any photo sharing web site; Public opinion polls; Online chat or forum; Possibility to send web site content to others; CONTACT by e-mail; CONTACT by post address; CONTACT by online form; LINK to own profile on Facebook; LINK to own profile on any other social network site; Possibility to comment on Facebook; Possibility to share Facebook profile with others; LINK to own Twitter profile

AUDIENCE browsers: MEP profile; Video blog; Section with videos; Animated photos; Photo gallery (on web site); Enmeshing features; Online games

AUDIENCE journalists: update in November; Newsletter on the web; Special section for media; MEP profile; INFORMATION about political career; SECTION with EP work; Agenda; FAQ section; Photo gallery (on web site); LINKS to political party; LINKS to political organisations; CONTACT by e-mail; CONTACT by online form; CONTACT for journalists; LINK to own Twitter profile; RSS; Translation to other languages; Downloads (any)

AUDIENCE special issue: Update in November; Additional blog; Possibility to leave comment on the web site; Possibility to leave comment on the blog; Newsletter on the web; Agenda; SECTION with regional or country work; SECTION with special issues (other than EP work); LINKS to NGO; LINKS to EP web sites; CONTACT by e-mail; CONTACT by online form; Possibility to Tag the web site

AUDIENCE active supporters: Additional blog; Possibility to subscribe for newsletter; Possibility to leave comment on the web site; Possibility to leave comment on the blog; Online chat or forum; Possibility to send web site content to others; LINK to any video sharing web site; Online web camera; LINK to any photo sharing web site; Public opinion polls; Profile on any social network site; Possibility to comment on Facebook; Possibility to share Facebook profile with others; LINK to own Twitter profile; Downloads (any); Possibility to visit Brussels; Possibility to register on the web site; Possibility to join the party; Online money donations; Possibility to become volunteer

Bibliography

Baym, N. (2010) *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, Oxford: Polity.

Chadwick, A. (2009) 'Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of Informational Exuberance', *I/S: Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society,* 5 (1): 9-41

Christopher, M., Payne, A. and Ballantyne, D. (1991) *Relationship Marketing*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Cober, R. T., Brown, D. J., Keeping, L. M., and Levy P. E. (2004) Recruitment on the Net: How Do Organizational Web Site Characteristics Influence, Journal of Management October 2004, vol. 30 no. 5, 623-646

Coleman, 2005;

Coleman S., and Blumler, J. (2009) *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davis & Phillips, 2009

de Landtsheer, C., Krasnoboka, N. and Neuner, C. (2005) 'Participation Friendliness of Political Websites in Eastern and Western Europe' in R. F. Farnen, H. Dekker, C. de Landtsheer, H. Sunker, D.B. German, W. Ehlert, G. Szell (eds) *Democratization. Europeanization and Globalization Trends,* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang: 325-360.

de Vreese, C. H. (2003) Television Reporting of Second-Order Elections, *Journalism Studies*, 4 (2), pp. 183-98.

Druckman, J. N., Kifer, M. J., and Parkin, M. (2009) 'The Technological Development of Candidate Web Sites: How and Why Candidates use Web Innovations' in C. Panagopoulos (Ed) *Politicking Online: The Transformation of Election Campaign Communication*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, pp. 1-18.

European Commission, (2001) *European Governance: A White Paper*, COMM 428, Brussels.

European Commission, (2005) *The Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate,* COMM 494, Brussels

European Commission, (2008) *Debate Europe: Building on the experience of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*, COMM 158/4, Brussels.

Elvebakk, B. (2004) Virtually competent? Competence and experience with Internet-based technologies among European parliamentarians, *Information Polity*, 9, pp. 41-53.

Farrell, D. M., and Scully, R. (2007) *Representing Europe's Citizens?: Electoral Institutions and the failure of Parliamentary Representation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foot, K. A. and Schneider, S. M. (2006) *Web Campaigning*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Galusky, W. (2003) Identifying with Information: Citizen Empowerment, the Internet and the Environmental Anti-Toxins Movement, in M. McCaughey & M. D. Ayers

(Eds) Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice, London: Routledge, pp. 185-208

Gerodimos, R. (2010), New media, new citizens: the terms and conditions of online youth civic engagement. PhD Thesis. Bournemouth University

Gibson, R. and Ward, S. (2000) 'A Proposed Methodology for Measuring the Function and Effectiveness of Political Web-Sites', *Social Science Computer Review*, 18 (3): 301-319.

Harfoush, R., (2008) *Yes We Did: an inside look at how social media built the Obama brand*, Berkeley, CA: New Riders

Jackson, N. (2006) 'Banking Online: the use of the Internet by political parties to build relationships with voters', in D. G. Lilleker, N. Jackson, R. Scullion (Eds) *The Marketing of British Politics: political marketing at the 2005 General Election*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Jackson, N., and Lilleker, D. G. (2009a) 'MPs and E-representation: Me, MySpace and I,' *British Politics,* 4 (2): 236–264

Jackson, N., and Lilleker, D. G. (2009b) 'Building an Architecture of Participation?: political parties and Web 2.0 in Britain', *Journal of Information Technology and Politics,* 6 (3/4): 232-250.

Jackson, N., and Lilleker, D. G. (2010) Tentative steps towards interaction: the use of the Internet in the British European Parliament Election 2009, *Internet Research*, 20 (5), pp. 527-544.

Jankowski, N. W., Foot, K. Kluver, R., and Schneider, S. (2005) 'The Web and the 2004 EP election: comparing political actor Web sites in 11 EU Member States', *Information Polity: The International Journal of Government & Democracy in the Information Age*, 10 (3/4): 165-176

Lilleker, D. G., and Jackson, N. (2011) *Political Campaigning, Elections and the Internet in U.S., UK, Germany and France*, London: Routledge.

Lilleker, D. G., and Negrine, R. (2003)

Loiseau, 2003.

Lusoli, W. (2005) The Internet and the European Parliament Elections: Theoretical perspectives, empirical investigations and proposals for research, *Information Polity*, 10, pp. 153-163.

Lusoli, W., and Ward, J. (2005) Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows: The Internet and the 2004 European Parliament Election in Britain, *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10 (4), pp. 71-97.

Lusoli, W., Ward, S., and Gibson, R. (2006) (Re)connecting Politics? Parliament, the Public and the Internet, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 59 (1), pp. 24-42.

Metzger, M. J. (2007), Making sense of credibility on the Web: Models for evaluating online information and recommendations for future research. Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 58: 2078–2091.

Micheletti Maier, M., Stromback, J., and Kaid, L. L. (2011)2010 *Political Communication in European Parliamentary Elections*, Farnham: Ashgate.

Min, S. (2007) Online vs Face-to-Face Deliberation: Effects on Civic Engagement, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, pp. 1369-1387.

Rohrschneider, R. (2002) 'Mobilising Versus Chasing: how do you parties target voters in election campaigns?', *Electoral Studies,* 21 (3): 367-382

Sander, T. H. (2005) E-associations? Using Technology to Connect Citizens: The Case of Meetup.com, Paper delivered to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, Sept 4.

Setala & Gronlund, 2006

Schudson, M. (1999). Good citizens and bad history: today's political ideals in historical perspective [online]. Paper presented at conference on "The Transformation of Civic Life," Nashville and Murfreesboro, Tennessee, November l2-l3. Available: http://communication.ucsd.edu/people/f_schudson_nashville.html).

Spink, A., Wilson, T., Ford, N., Foster, A. and Ellis, D. (2002), Information-seeking and mediated searching. Part 1. Theoretical framework and research design. Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 53: 695–703.

Stutzer, A., and Frey, B. S. (2006) Political participation and procedural utility: An empirical study, European Journal of Political Research 45: 391–418

Tedesco 2007, Examining Internet Interactivity Effects on Young Adult Political Information Efficacy American Behavioral Scientist 2007; 50; 1183-1197.

Stromer-Galley, J. (2000) 'Online interaction and why candidates avoid it', *Journal of Communication,* 50 (4): 111–132.

Stromer-Galley, L., and Foot, K. (2002) Citizen Perceptions of Online Interactivity and Implications for Political Campaign Communication, *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 8 (1) online.

Sundar, S. S., Kalyanaraman, S., and Brown, J. (2003) Explicating Web Site Interactivity: Impression Formation Effects in Political Campaign Sites, *Communication Research*, 30 (1), pp. 30-59.

Sander, T. H. (2005) E-associations? Using Technology to Connect Citizens: The Case of Meetup.com, Paper delivered to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, Sept 4.

Tomkova, J. (2010)

Utz, S. (2009) The (Potential) Benefits of Campaigning via Social Networking Sites, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, pp. 221-243.

Vedel, T. (2003).

Williamson, A. (2009) MPs on Facebook, *Digital Papers*, 1 (June), London: Hansard Society.

Xinran Y Lehto & Dae-Young Kim, 2006 The effect of prior destination experience on online information search behaviour, Tourism and Hospitality Research, Volume 6, Number 2, February 2006 , pp. 160-178.