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**Window Dressing 2.0: Constituency Level Web Campaigns in the 2010 UK
General Election**

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Abstract

This paper explores the adoption of Web 2.0 campaign tools by constituency level campaigns across the UK using data from a nationwide survey of election agents. It goes on to look in more depth at how interactively campaigns used those tools using content analysis data from the North West of England. Findings are triangulated using interview data from candidates and campaign workers. Results show that, whilst campaigns have been quick to take advantage of Web 2.0 sites, the majority have not used Web 2.0 to further interaction with voters, instead fitting it into existing, largely non-interactive, campaign forms.

Introduction

If they are not already in crisis, there is at least an argument that the role of political parties is shifting in the UK. Whilst the functional role of parties as vehicles for power remains unchallenged, in terms of representation and maintaining links between the rulers and the ruled, political parties are losing out to protest groups, interest groups and apathy. In part at least these developments can be seen as the result of the professionalisation of parties, in particular campaigns (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). As parties leave less room for the local party members and supporters then the incentive to participate in, and engage with, campaigns is diminished (Green & Smith, 2003). Into this mix however has been thrown a new suite of web technologies based on the idea of collaboration and interaction. Collectively these technologies are often referred to as Web 2.0. The arrival of these technologies in the toolbox of campaigns leads to the question: can Web 2.0 make parties more interactive and address the apparent gap between parties and voters?

This paper examines this question specifically at the level of constituency political campaigns. This is an under looked area of campaigns research, but arguably it contains as much, if not more, potential for disruptive behaviours by campaigns than the locked down and professional dominated national campaigns. To this end this paper measures two things. Firstly it measures the adoption of Web 2.0 tools by campaigns, based on self-reported use of tools such as Facebook and Twitter in the 2010 Electoral Agent Survey. Secondly it measures the adoption of specific interactive features within web campaign tools from content analysis data collected by the researcher in the final week of the 2010 campaign. The results of these analyses are confirmed through qualitative data collected through a series of semi-structured

interviews with candidates and campaigners. The overarching aim is to provide an initial assessment of the role of Web 2.0 in the 2010 election, not only measuring the extent to which parties used Web 2.0 tools, but also how interactively they did so. The hope is to begin to locate the role of Web 2.0 in contemporary constituency political campaigns and evaluate the capacity of Web 2.0 for supporting more interactive campaign forms

To begin with this paper sets out some of the theoretical background, establishing the context of political campaigning in the UK and the emergence of web campaigning in the UK. This follows a line from the emergence of the Web as a theoretically transformative medium to the more measured reception it received in later empirical work. The paper then goes on to look at levels of web adoption, as a baseline for considering the adoption of Web 2.0 services. A further measure is then developed based on content analysis data from the North West of England. These measures are then assessed in light of qualitative data collected through interviews. The concluding section highlights the disparities between these measures, suggesting that although campaigns in the UK have been quick to adopt the tools of Web 2.0 they have not exploited them as tools for greater interactivity.

Campaign Modernisation

Election campaigning is supposedly the nexus of political communication; the one point in every electoral cycle when parties are forced to engage with voters in return for votes. However, trends in national political campaigning have pointed towards less engaging campaigns, with campaigns becoming professionalised and relying on marketing driven techniques rather than developing local support networks to get their

point across and voters to the polls. After the expansion of the democratic franchise in the UK, Parliamentarians were forced to appeal directly to the electorate. In the beginning political campaigns were locally focussed and reliant on candidates developing their own local support networks in order to persuade and mobilise voters (Denver & Hands, 1997a, Norris, 2000). Elements of these highly local strategies were still evident in UK campaigns well into the 1960s, with campaigns still very much about face-to-face and public interaction. Campaigns were fought on the doorstep and the street corner (Holt & Turner, 1968). With the arrival of television news and the incorporation of techniques developed in the fields of advertising and marketing to political campaigns in the UK the situation changed dramatically, shifting the locus of campaigning from the constituency towards a unified national campaign. Descriptions of contemporary national level political campaigns vary: Packaged Politics (Franklin, 1994), Americanized (Scammell, 1995), Phase III (Farrell & Webb, 2000), Post-Modern (Norris, 2000), Professionalization (Gibson & Rommele, 2009). However most make reference towards the increasing importance of the central party in campaigns, and the role of the professional in supplanting that of the amateur campaigner. As one writer put it, campaigns increasingly resembled 'marketing exercises' (Farrell, 2006, p123).

With the shift in focus from the constituency to the national central campaign, both academic and public attention also waned. There have been a number of researchers who have maintained the study of constituency level campaigns in the UK, but usually with reference to the outcome of campaigns rather than as objects of study in themselves (Denver & Hands, 1992; Johnston & Pattie, 1995; Denver & Hands, 1997b; Johnston & Pattie, 1997; Fieldhouse & Cutts, 2008). Overall however the role

of the constituency campaign in the UK General Election has been eclipsed by the growth in both scale and sophistication of the national level campaign. The effect of this shift in focus has not been limited to academia, the emergence of single unified campaigns has impacted on both activists and voters perception of constituency campaigns. For activists, the arrival of ‘professionals’ and the centralisation of the campaign under the national party affects the incentive structures at work. From a collective action perspective, if their potential contribution makes little or no difference to the campaign, then why get involved at all (Olson, 1965; Green & Smith, 2003). This relationship is also self-reinforcing, with fewer activists available in the constituencies, the need for a strong national campaign increases (Fisher & Denver, 2008).

The professionalisation of campaigns at the expense of the role of the rank and file, is one of a host of explanations of overall party decline; the wider phenomenon in the UK and elsewhere of declining party memberships and identification (Katz & Mair, 1992; Mair & Bizen, 2001; Seyd & Whitely, 2004). For voters, party concentration on specific, target seats, may also be negatively affecting participation, with large numbers of voters virtually ignored by campaigns seeking to influence voters in a few key seats (Russell, 2005; Lilleker, 2003). Coming from this background it is not surprising that one of the key questions in political science has become how to reverse this apparent gap between the rulers and ruled. In particular at the local level, how can citizens become better connected and more involved with the campaigns that purport to represent them?

Web 2.0 as a Tool for More Interactive Campaigns

As long as the Web has existed it has been seen as having a political dimension. The earliest writers saw the expansion of digital communications as opening up new possibilities for political discourse. Rather than being subject to the authority of gatekeepers controlling the broadcasting of information, users were now free to find and upload their own content in a more two-way or interactive relationship (Rheingold, 1993; Negroponte, 1996). As thought expanded beyond broad futurist predictions and became more systematic, predictions of political disruption stemming from the web diminished. In some cases writers even saw the Web more as a tool for the status quo rather than radical change, entrenching the power of established actors over new upstarts (Margolis & Resnick, 2000).

In theory at least, the possibility of this kind of online interactivity is highly relevant to political campaigns. Many writers have seen the ability to interact online as a great boon to campaigns, opening up new channels of communication between campaigns and the most interested and connected citizens (Norris, 2003; Rommele, 2003; Ward & Gibson, 2003). In particular the web creates the potential for what Foot and Schneider (2006) term a transactional relationship, creating a clear bond between campaigns and their supporters. The ability to interact online offers the potential for campaigns to address the collective action problems that have dogged them as they have grown increasingly professionalised. The Web, and its promise of new levels of connectedness seemingly had the potential to reverse the apparent decline in linkage provided by contemporary political campaigning and so contribute in part to the wider reinvigoration of party politics.

Of course, not all are so optimistic about the potential for interaction online. In summing up the 2001 election Coleman (2001) dismissed online interactivity as a campaign tool, arguing that it was not surprising that campaigners avoided ‘chatting with the enemy,’ in other words why waste time and energy exchanging information with those who would never vote for you which could be better spent mobilising existing supporters (2001, p681)? And this has become a mainstay for those with a more pessimistic view for campaigns and interactivity, why should campaigns open themselves to the chaos and political risks that accompany allowing users to ‘have their say’? The most incisive explanation of this view comes from Stromer-Galley (2000) who argued that campaigns would avoid interactivity: firstly because it was burdensome, secondly because they had no control over what could be posted in such a space and finally, because allowing the public to directly question the campaign would challenge the deliberate ambiguity campaigns rely on. Her argument was that by making campaigns too accountable online interactivity would force them to reveal the often unpopular details of plans rather than sell a grand (but less detailed) vision.

At the constituency level in the UK only one study of interactivity at the constituency level has been conducted, concluding that only a tiny minority of campaigns were using two-way interactive features on their websites, with only 8% of campaigns using less interactive features such as guest books or forums (Ward & Gibson, 2003). There have been similar findings looking at the national level party sites in both the 2001 and 2005 elections (Coleman, 2001; Bartle 2005). Even more recent comparative studies including the UK have found interactive features to be underdeveloped (Gibson et al, 2008).

There is a case to say however that the 2010 election may be different. Since its inception as a new kind of information storage system in 1989 the web has been in an unceasing process of evolution (Berners-Lee, 1989). The period following 2005 was characterised by the emergence of a new series of services referred to collectively as Web 2.0. As a concept Web 2.0 is problematic to define as it has come to mean all things to all people. The publishers O'Reily coined the term Web 2.0, defining it as seven specific headings, only some of which are relevant in a political science context (O'Reily, 2005). O'Reily were unquestionably writing with a commercial aim, attempting to find out why some companies had collapsed in the dot-com crash and what made those who had survived different. A number of academic writers have tried to refine the concept (Anderson, 2007; Chadwick, 2009). The most interesting concept however to emerge from the definition of Web 2.0 has been the 'architecture of participation': the idea that where Web 1.0 was constructed mainly of static web pages designed to impart information, Web 2.0 relies on developing frameworks that encourage users to populate them with their own content. Archetypal Web 2.0 services such as Facebook and Twitter provide no content themselves but instead make it easy for users to post their own. Berners-Lee himself has criticised the idea that Web 2.0 represents anything new, arguing that Web 1.0 was always intended to be interactive, presumably through the use of hyperlinks (2007, quoted in Anderson 2007, p5). He is correct, but where there is a difference is the simplicity with which users of Web 2.0 can interact, without the need to lease their own web space or develop the requisite technical knowledge.

So what of political campaigns in the Web 2.0 era? Currently little is known beyond preliminary work conducted on national level sites. Jackson and Lilleker (2009) have

argued that at the national level Web 2.0 is in practice Web 1.5, with campaigns still doing their utmost to maintain control of their web presences. Work comparing the UK and Australia has also begun to take stock of the role of Web 2.0 at the national level from the perspective of both the party and the electorate (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011). Beyond this, Web 2.0 at the local level has yet to be evaluated in the UK in 'war time'. Certainly the perceived role of the Web in Obama's victory looms large with at least one party trying to actively emulate his digital campaign (Crabtree, 2010). In truth, the Obama victory may have had more to do with savvy campaigning than tapping into any kind of Web 2.0 ethos of coproduction. In particular the creation of bespoke networks such as MyBO smacks of campaigns trying to create their own social networks that they control rather than being forced to rely on 'civilian' spaces. Other than this there is little that may help us in predicting the use of interactive features in the 2010 UK General Election.

On the one hand, the rhetoric of Web 2.0 suggests that if campaigns adopt tools centred on the architecture of participation, then campaigns will by extension become more interactive. If this is the case then perhaps the use of Web 2.0 by campaigns will go some way to joining the gap between campaigns and their electorates. However, Web 2.0 has also been criticised strongly as a tool for surveillance, allowing institutions to collect unprecedented amounts of information about users who are only too willing to co-operate (Gehl, 2011). So rather than fostering interaction, Web 2.0 may actually diminish it as campaigns ignore the opportunities for interaction and instead treat Web 2.0 as a fresh source of campaign data. Initial reports from the 2012 Obama campaign seem to indicate that this is an area of interest (Pilkington & Michel, 2012). Whether local level UK campaigns have the financing or technical

skill to even begin to go down this road is far from clear. Long term however, as campaigns grow more sophisticated and online information cheaper and more abundant, there is a threat of campaigns becoming hyper-professionalised. With access to this amount of information campaigners would be able to ignore far-reaching mobilisation campaigns in favour of focussing in only on the most strategically relevant of voters, at ward, street or the individual level. This is almost inevitably the natural extension of the marketing led national campaign, which is why this paper focuses on the constituency level. It is at this level that the preferences and prejudices of individual candidates and campaigners matter, and so it is here we are most likely to see candidates attempting to break out of the professional form and do something different; to return to a more discursive local network focussed campaign, potentially enabled by Web 2.0. To this end, this paper is an exploratory analysis, measuring the adoption of Web 2.0 by constituency level campaigns.

Web 2.0 Adoption

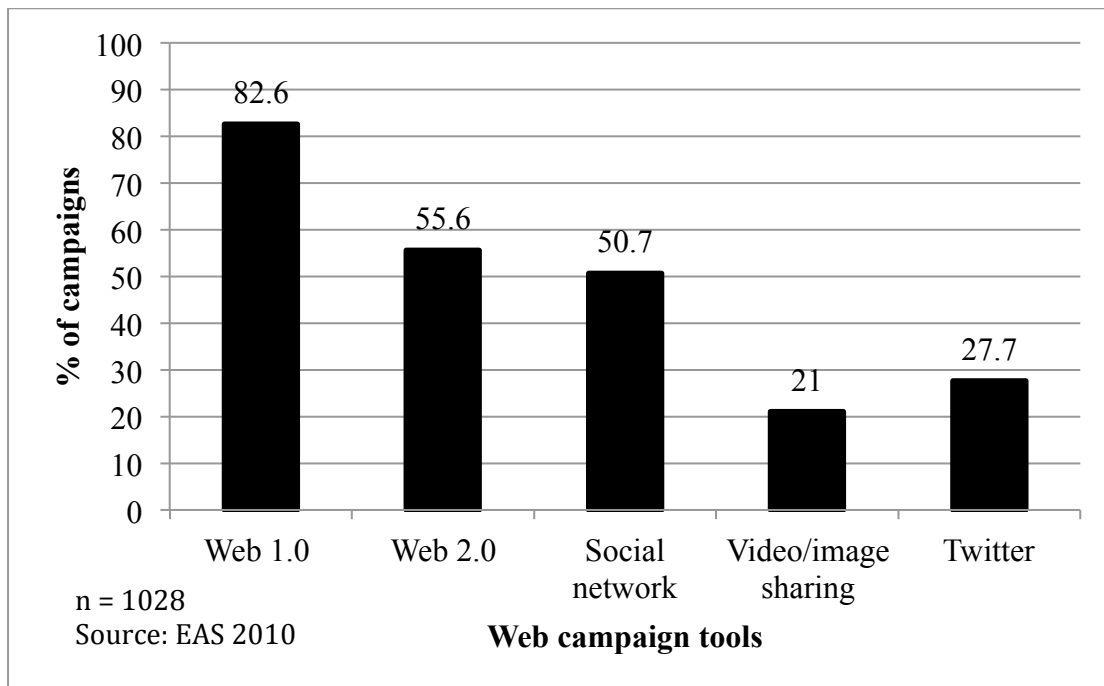
The first measure considered here is the adoption of Web 2.0 campaign tools; the creation of accounts on specific Web 2.0 services. Data to measure this comes from the 2010 Electoral Agent Survey (EAS) that is sent to election agents of the major parties in England, Scotland and Wales (not Northern Ireland) following the election. Responses were accepted both by post and over email. The EAS survey has a good pedigree, having been run following every general election since 1992, and forms the backbone of studies of campaigns at the constituency level in the UK (Denver & Hands, 1997a). For the 2010 campaign there were 1028 responses from the three major UK parties, a response rate of 54% (out of 1896 possible returns). Table 1 reports the adoption of both Web 1.0 (i.e. conventional html websites) and Web 2.0

tools including social networks - typically Facebook – video and image sharing services such as Flickr and YouTube and finally the use of Twitter by campaigns. A separate question was not asked about the use of blogs. Although blogs are often held up as being an example of Web 2.0, the nature of blogs and blogging has shifted to the extent that they are indistinguishable from conventional Web 1.0 sites and so they were not considered separately in this analysis.

Starting with Web 1.0, over four fifths of campaigns had a campaign site at the 2010 election. This was a broad category covering personal campaign sites, repurposed local party websites and local enclaves in national party domains. Based on the researcher's experience cataloguing websites for political parties nearly every campaign had some form of online representation, either controlled directly by the campaign, or on a third party site such as a page on the national party site. The self-reported figure seems likely to underestimate much of this. For all intents and purposes, the use of websites by constituency campaigns is nearly ubiquitous.

As an overall figure, the use of Web 2.0 by campaigns was also very common. Web 2.0 services such as Twitter and Facebook were not available to campaigners in 2005 and it is a testament to the rapid rise of social media sites that over half of the sample reported using Web 2.0 in some form. The overwhelming majority of this was down to the use of social networking sites, again based on the researcher's later experience this was most likely to mean the use of Facebook. Twitter was also quite common amongst campaigns, perhaps more than might be expected, whilst image and video sharing services were less so.

GRAPH 1: Campaigns using Web campaign tools as reported by agents (%)



Based on these results alone it is tempting to argue that constituency campaigns have successfully broken the brochure-ware format and embraced the interactivity afforded by Web 2.0. Based on the rhetoric of Web 2.0, the adoption of services based on the architecture of participation seems to suggest that campaigns are becoming more interactive. However, the Web is a flexible medium and there is no single way to use it. The next stage was to develop a more in-depth analysis of web use focussing on interactive features across the entirety of web presences (as far as they could be mapped).

Interactive Features

Measuring the adoption of specific features is far more challenging than measuring adoption of sites. Survey tools do not cover the specific detail required and so content

analysis was used. There is a rich history of seeking to understand websites through content analysis. This has consisted of researchers developing schema and ‘coding’ websites based on the presence or absence of features (Gibson et al, 2008; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Druckman et al, 2007; Schweitzer, 2005; Gibson & Ward, 2003; Norris, 2003; Carlson & Djupsund, 2001). One of the most sophisticated and recent schema, and one that incorporates Web 2.0, was Lilleker et al’s (2011) evaluation of national party sites across European countries in the run up to the 2009 European Elections which contained 214 features, divided between: information, engagement, mobilisation, interactivity and a general demonstration of technical sophistication, all divided between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. The circumstances of this analysis however, required a more pared down framework.

The aim of the schema was to concentrate on thickening the measurement of interactivity online, going to some extent beyond the categorisation of features. This framework embeds the distinction between media and human interactivity identified by Stromer-Galley (2000). In addition it also distinguishes between public dialogue and private dialogue.

Public dialogue - A key development of Web 2.0 is the ability of users to post information in public. This can take the form of Facebook walls or Twitter @ replies. However, this feature is also possible on Web 1.0 sites though the use of forums and comment sections. Previous studies have by and large concentrated on the presence or absence of features rather than whether or not there was any evidence of their use. The first category of features considered was public dialogue features, but they were only included if there was evidence of their use in the form of someone from the campaign actively

replying. ‘Empty rooms’ or what Lilleker & Jackson (2009) term ‘graffiti’ were not included in this category.

Potential dialogue - The second category considered was private dialogue features. These are features that allow dialogue in private between campaigns and voters and include tools such as email, feedback forms, Facebook messaging systems and private messages in Twitter. These features were opaque, unlike public dialogue features and evidence of use would be concealed from the researcher.

Site-based interactivity - The final category of features is site-based interactivity features that are akin to Stromer-Galley’s (2000) media interaction. These are features that allow engagement between users and systems such as email databases, following a user on a social network or submitting personal information to polls and petitions. Also included in this category are joining the party and downloading campaign material.

The features belonging to each of these categories across conventional sites, Facebook and Twitter are summarised in table 1.

Data was collected in the final week of the short election campaign (30 April – 6 May 2010). Although every effort was made to collect data as contemporaneously as possible, limited resources meant that data were not always collected on the same day. Where sites had a series of posts over time only the last seven days of posts were included in the analysis. Websites and profiles were identified using a series of

publically available tools including Google and native search functions in both Twitter and Facebook. Additionally, Tweetminster¹ had developed a curated list of Prospective Parliamentary Candidates’ (PPC) Twitter accounts that was also used. Identifying relevant sites and profiles was one of the biggest challenges in this analysis. For situations when the web presence was not clearly defined, as a rule of thumb, whatever an average user would take to be the campaign’s presence was included in the analysis.

TABLE 1 Content analysis schema for measuring interactive features in local campaign web presences

	Web 1.0	Facebook	Twitter
Public dialogue	Public dialogue	Public dialogue	Public dialogue
Private dialogue	Email Contact form	Private message	Private message
Site-based	Poster Leaflet Poll Petition Org. request Donate Join Email subscription	Poster Leaflet Poll Petition Org. request Donate Join ‘Friend’	Poster Leaflet Poll Petition Org. request Donate Join ‘Follow’

Results of this analysis are reported in graphs 2 and 3 (note differing scales). Of the 223 campaigns in the North West looked at, a web presence was identified for 204.

Public dialogue incorporates the most interactive features, examples of campaigns engaging directly with others in public. Examples of this kind of behaviour on Web 1.0 sites were extremely rare, as was, surprisingly, public dialogue over Facebook.

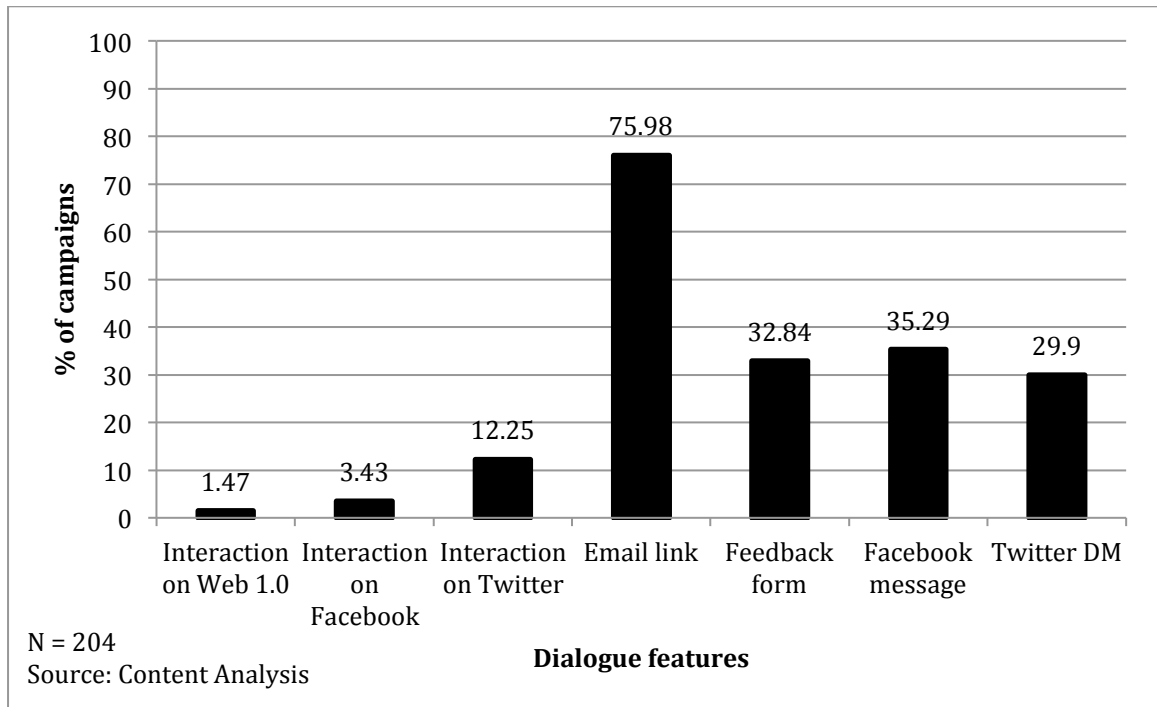
Campaigns were simply not engaging with voters in public using these tools. The exception to this was Twitter, where around 12% of online campaigns used public @ replies. As a proportion of campaigns actually on Twitter rather than online in general this figure is even higher (40%). Immediately the idea that the apparent adoption of Web 2.0 tools has led to some new kind of interactive, discursive campaign can be discounted. The constituency level offering in 2010 did not live up to the rhetoric of Web 2.0. For political campaigns the idea of public collaboration simply does not apply. Where campaigns are interacting online it is the minority using Twitter. The choice of Twitter over interactive spaces on conventional websites or Facebook is interesting; one might have expected campaigns to prefer media where they can control to some extent what goes on. The Twitter eco-system is far more open in as much as any user can reply to any other user's message. It may be the form of communication – famously limited to 140 characters – which may help to minimise the time and effort that goes in composing responses. Finally, Twitter might help campaigns to reach a different audience to other tools, one they are keener to interact with. The schema could not take into consideration who @ replies were addressed to, so campaigns may instead be trying to interact with party elites, journalists or other national figures rather than rank and file voters and supporters.

Private dialogue is an enigma. These features are those that are interactive, but are opaque, so knowing whether or not they were used is impossible for the external observer. Examples include the in-built messaging systems on both Facebook and Twitter as well as email and feedback forms on conventional websites. In-built systems were as common as the use of the sites themselves. Feedback forms were common, but the provision of an email address was extremely common. In terms of

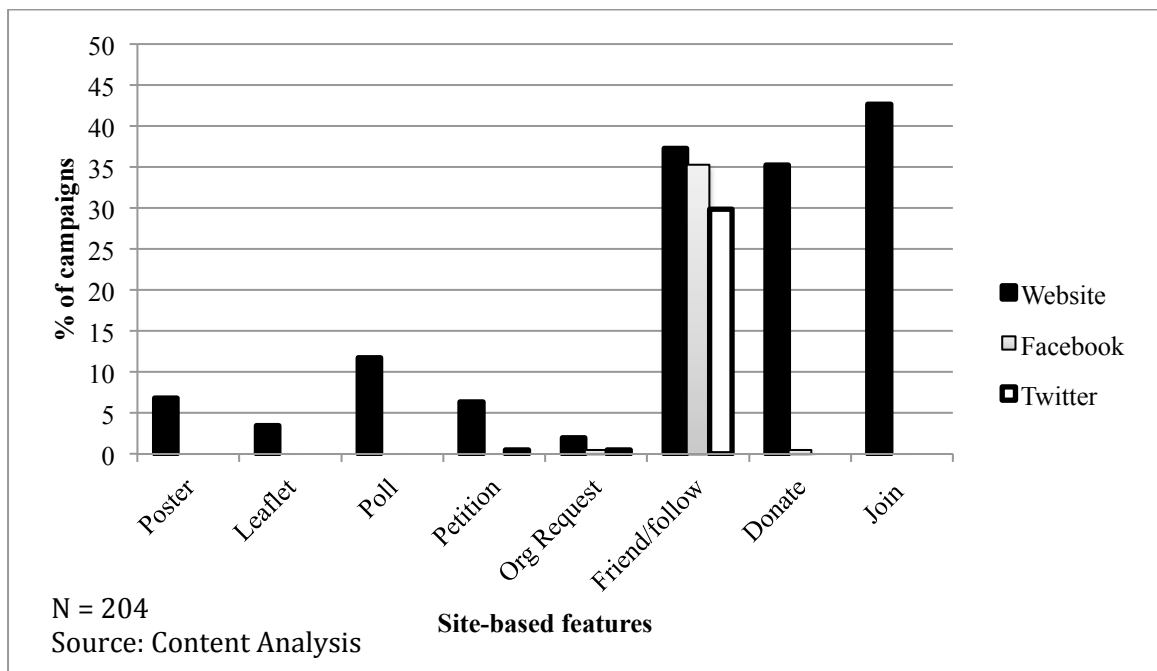
dialogue behaviours email was the single biggest connection between campaigns and users. Through interviews carried out with campaigns as part of wider research, the researcher understands that the use of email was extremely common throughout the campaign, with some candidates reporting hundreds of email a day and also lamenting the use of automated email tools by national campaign organisations. However, the researcher did not have access to the content of these emails and so no objective assessment of interactivity was possible.

Finally, the least interactive features were those where the user interacts with a system rather than another human: site-based interactivity. Examples of these features include downloading materials, participating in polls, following options on social networks and email sign up. These behaviours were also built into Web 2.0 sites in the form of following or 'friending' mechanisms. There is a good deal more variation in the distribution of these features over conventional websites, with donating and joining the party being the most popular features. Web 2.0 sites however were not used to host these features (with the exception of in built following mechanisms) and largely seem to be about information provision rather than attempts at site-based interactivity.

GRAPH 2: Public and private dialogue features (% of online campaigns)



GRAPH 3: Site-based interactivity features (% of online campaigns)



In Their Own Words...

As well as statistical measures, it is also possible to explore the use of Web 2.0 by campaigns through qualitative data. A series of interviews were conducted between September 2011 and March 2012 with representatives from campaigns in the 2010 election, including both candidates and campaign workers. Subjects were chosen on the basis of how well the offline campaign complied with measures of traditionalism and modernisation based on a variant of a schema set out by Fisher & Denver (2009)². In addition, interviews were limited to candidates who had made some use of Web 2.0 sites in their campaign. These interviews were designed to explain why candidates chose to campaign online in the way they did, however, they also offer considerable insight into the realities of the web campaign and attitudes to interactivity.

When questioned about interactivity there were mixed opinions from interview subjects. Many were sanguine about their online campaigns, in particular the extent to which Web 2.0 tools were useful for communicating with voters.

'It was very much a shop window as far as I was concerned. I didn't update all the time. I would put photographs up there, if anybody looked at it they would think [candidate name] looks like a normal [person] which I am.

Conservative Candidate 1

'[When asked how much interactivity they saw] Not much. I think there are a couple of things to be aware of. One is that there is a sense in which you've got to be either a celebrity or a notoriety to get a lot of people to decide to follow you.'

Labour Candidate 1

'A lot of people think [Twitter] it's engaging with the voter. Unless you are very small minority, most voters I am afraid are not on Twitter.'

Lib-Dem Campaign Manager

'Facebook I think is more useful as an organising tool than as a campaigning tool; although if you get it right it can be good. I used Facebook primarily to shuffle my supporters around and using things like Facebook events to get them in the right place'

Conservative Candidate 2

Despite this, Twitter in particular did seem to emerge as the candidate's favourite. In some instances campaigns saw Twitter as a way to engage in wider debate. One candidate thought they got good results from following up on public meetings through Twitter, developing an ongoing conversation with voters. Others found Twitter useful, but not necessarily for contacting voters. Instead candidates seemed keener on the idea of Twitter allowing them to engage with key elites such as local journalists.

'[I] would talk at a public meeting and we would get involved in a conversation over Twitter afterwards.'

'The Twitter, I get more of personal relationship going with someone, and you can respond instantaneously. So it has a different feel to it. So I think

you're able to engage more with the voters with Twitter than... Whereas the website is more about saying what you've done, where you're going.'

Lib-Dem Candidate 1

'Whilst lots of your constituents might not be on Twitter, a lot of – to use a local government speak – key stakeholders... I mean a horrible phrase I know but I have no better one. Terrible. But certainly you look no you will find pretty much every [local newspaper title] journalist is now on Twitter. All the ones who are involved in my area are following me and I'm following them.'

Conservative Candidate 2

The surprise that emerged from the interview data was the importance of email to candidates, not only as a tool of internal organisation and co-ordination between national and local campaigns, but as a tool for responding and engaging with voters. Many found the workload be onerous, however others maintained that they replied to every email they received.

'And there was an awful lot of email that goes on. As a candidate you get absolutely bombarded with questionnaires from people during an election campaign. Hundreds and hundreds of emails.'

'But email was the key one, so I found a lot of it... Yeah, email and dialogue with people. And it was a much bigger amount of traffic and conversation via email than the previous general election.'

Lib-Dem Candidate 1

'Although the postal address was there on the website, national campaigns would send me loads of bumph to this postal address, but I don't think any constituent sent me anything like that. Where I guess I got a good one hundred or possibly as many as two hundred emails from constituents. Quite a good chunk of which, I would say two thirds of which, were people putting their names to generic national campaigns.'

Labour Candidate 2

'I took the time to respond to individuals [by email], but I thought they are the people who want to know... They are the people who want to know what my views as a candidate are so I took a bit of time responding to individuals...'

Lib-Dem Candidate 2

Although this evidence cannot be considered representative of all campaigns, it suggests that the private dialogue features above are accounting for a significant amount of interaction between campaigns and voters and may well be worth further study. The wider picture however is one of campaigns, even those who use Web 2.0, as being sceptical of the value of interactivity for campaigning at the local level. This does not seem to be an outright rejection on the grounds of cost or control as Stromer-Galley (2000) suggests, but more in keeping with a lack of critical mass to campaign web presences. If they could attract a significant following then at least some campaigns may have sought to do more.

Conclusions

The two quantitative approaches to measuring campaign involvement with Web 2.0 have produced different results. Looking only at the adoption of Web 2.0 tools as reported by campaigns themselves it is clear that the use of Web 2.0 tools by campaigns is proliferating fast, with over half of the sample engaging with Web 2.0 on some level. What the survey information cannot show however is how campaigns are using these tools. Based on content analysis of campaigns in the North West the argument that Web 2.0 is going to somehow reinvigorate the connection between voters and their local campaigns is not supported; campaigns largely seem to avoid the use of public dialogue features. What public dialogue does occur is concentrated on Twitter. This in itself is interesting, but the limitations of the medium suggest that campaigns favour the kind of quick and simple conversation Twitter is designed for over formulating longer and more detailed responses in comment sections, although there are signs of some campaigns exploiting Twitter to a greater extent by using it to add an extra layer of narrative over other campaign events. What is less clear is the extent to which interaction is being carried on in private. The provision of an email address was almost a reflex behaviour for campaigns, but anecdotal evidence suggests that email supports a lot of interaction between voters and campaigns, although more systematic study is difficult without some kind of privileged access.

What this amounts to is a shortfall in the expected levels of interactivity. Campaigners have been quick to seize on Web 2.0 as a campaign tool, perhaps as a response to the apparent, high profile success of the Obama campaign in the US. However, beyond this, campaigns do not seem to have done a great deal with their web presences, choosing to use them as a way to provide information about the campaign without

using them as platforms for interactivity. This lack of imagination when dealing with Web 2.0 can perhaps be explained with reference to previous work. Stromer-Galley's (2000) argument that interactivity is simply a poor fit for political campaigns who are unwilling to relinquish control could well apply. Campaigns are apparently unwilling to risk public scrutiny of their attempts to engage with the electorate directly. It also apparently confirms Lilleker and Jackson's (2009) thesis that political parties were willing to put a toe in Web 2.0, but were reluctant to commit fully, engaging instead in what they called Web 1.5. For the moment at least, Web 2.0 is not a path to addressing the pathologies of the marketing based national campaign. Interview evidence, while not representative of a wider population of campaigns, offers some hope for future developments; several campaigns expressed their disappointment that their Web campaigns did not actively take off, but very few were openly hostile to the idea of interactivity online. The 2010 campaign may represent some first fumbling steps for at least a few campaigns on the road to a more open and interactive campaign model.

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NOTES:

¹ www.tweetminster.co.uk is a clearing-house for political Twitter accounts in the UK.

² A variant schema was required as the original schema suggested by Fisher and Denver no longer fitted the data