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British Members of Parliament

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Institutional Communication Within British Members of Parliament

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Twitter has been used by many politicians, including the MPs of the UK. The question is, how is this new form of communication utilized in institutional relations? How does the communication work between MPs and their constituents? To address these questions, six MPs of the Labour Party in the UK were chosen as samples.

First, the MPs from the Labour Party in the UK were selected based on the highest number of followers. This set of data could be found in tweetminster.com. Then, the top six MPs who have the most followers were reviewed through their personal page on Twitter. In their personal page, the most recent 100 messages were examined and contents of the messages were summarized. To study the messages from their followers, the search engine the archivist was utilized. The most recent 100 messages from their followers were examined.

Edward Miliband, who had 37602 followers by the time this research was conducted, was the MP with the highest number of followers. He was recently elected as the new leader of the Labour Party. He mostly sent thank-you notes to his followers and the volunteers because they had supported him during the last election. Before the election, he actively sent messages to his followers to support him and the Labour Party. The next five MPs didn't have as many followers as Edward Miliband. There was a huge gap; they only had 6,000 to 8,000 followers. Sadiq Khan, who had 6,536 followers, generally informed his followers about his recent activities, for instance Diwali, an important Hindu celebration. As a response to his status update, his followers talked about his recent activities and his policies. Tom Harris, who had 6,295 followers, responded to the questions addressed by his followers regarding the legitimacy of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Andy Burnham had a total of 8008 followers on Twitter and is relatively dedicated to this form of social media to communicate with his constituents. Burnham averaged sending 3-4 messages per day within the span of the research. His communication was mainly about education and the importance of a strong education system overall and the more specific need to keep “school sport” i.e. physical education and extracurricular sporting activities alive. Burnham was also very critical of other politicians, routinely referring to conlibs, a conjunction of conservatives and liberal democrats, the two other prevalent political parties in British Parliament. When looking at the tweets of constituents regarding Burnham the type of communication was very similar. Most focused on the importance of education and many focused specifically on his stance on “free schools” which was both praised and critiqued.

Ben Bradshaw was similar to Andy Burnham in his number of followers, 7385, and his average number of tweets per day, 3. Bradshaw’s messages were mainly about the problems in the housing market and job cuts, sentiments Americans can easily identify with. Messages from constituents about Bradshaw were overwhelmingly positive and tended to focus on the same topics as the MP.

Kerry McCarthy had a similar number of followers, 7153, but had a much higher volume of tweets per day with roughly 40, sometimes even tweeting on a minute by minute basis. Because of this, specific topics did not dominate the tweets as in the previous MPs but McCarthy seemed to use Twitter as a direct route to communicate with her constituents. This is also reflected in constituents messages as most of the 100 were directed to McCarthy herself rather than simply being about her. McCarthy uses this social media to be a sort of insider for her constituents into the political processes. Also, McCarthy commonly used the term ConDems to refer to conservatives and democrats, a combination that leads to easy wordplay, again showing herself as one of the people.

The political arena can get ugly, and because of this we wanted to see if any of the tweets from the constituents were at all offensive or obscene. Surprisingly, the tweets were all very tame and there was not much in the way of inappropriate speech with regard to British parliament. Also, we did not notice any “robot messages” or messages sent via a program to multiple MP’s from the same party.

Based on our research it seems that MP’s in British parliament use twitter fairly regularly and effectively to communicate with their constituents. Based on the regularity of use and the common themes seen between MP’s and constituents social media is becoming an important tool in political life. As citizens often feel alienated and disenfranchised from large institutions, it seems that this may be a way for individuals to become more involved in the political process.

MPs	Following	Tweets by Constituents
Andy Burnham	8008	457
Ben Bradshaw	7385	191
Kerry McCarthy	7153	970
Edward Miliband	37602	894
Sadiq Khan	6536	42
Tom Harris	6295	907

