

Political Science

G. R. Boynton's New Media and Politics

University of Iowa

11-19-2010

Communication between Members of
Parliament and their Constituents

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Question:

How are members of Parliament using Twitter to communicate with constituents?

Broader Implications:

Recently, new forms of communication in institutional relations have begun to be used more often and taken more seriously. In the past, members of Parliament and other professional organizations would never use social media such as Twitter or Facebook, to reach their supporters because it was viewed as unprofessional and silly. Most institutions used TV, newspapers, and magazines. However, in the past few years professional groups have tried to reach their supporters on a new, more personal dimension. Instead of standard broadcast messages that have come across as uncivil or robotic, institutions have begun to use Twitter, Facebook and MySpace on a frequent basis to maintain constant contact with their followers. Additionally, their followers have come to expect continual updates.

Procedure:

1. Search Engine

First, we used http://tweetminster.co.uk/mps/party/liberal_democrat to find the twitter of Liberal Democrat members of Parliament. Then, we searched from <http://archivist.visitmix.com/> to find each tweet from the public about each member.

2. Language of search

The language used during our search was English.

3. Timing of search

We started our search from 'Tweetminster' in November 12, 2010 and looked for tweets from 'Archivist' from November 15 through 18th.

Our group narrowed down the Liberal Democrats to the top 9 by the number of followers they had. Next, we divided those 9 into groups of 3 for each of our group members. Then, each group member researched what each LD tweeted about and what their constituents tweeted about them. Finally, we compared the common themes from each of the 9 LD's.

Answer:

When our group researched tweets by Liberal Democrats (LD's) of Parliament, we found that there were common topics that they addressed. Additionally, we researched tweets made about the Liberal Democrats by their constituents and found that these also contained common topics.

LD's tweeted about their campaign trails, where they were traveling to or visiting, and upcoming conferences or events. For example, Norman Lamb gave an update about his campaign trail when he tweeted, "All gathered together for PMQs and Spending Review. Crowded chamber. Most significant Parliamentary day in shaping UK's" at 5:05 AM on October 20th. They also posted responses to questions posed by their constituents. In this way, the LD's kept their supporters up to date with their everyday activities and also showed their responsiveness and how they cared about their supporter's opinions.

The constituents tweeted in a different manner than the LD's. They tweeted more about their feelings concerning the LD's and their campaigns. Many times the tweets by constituents were made in a joking manner about serious issues that they wanted addressed. The members of Parliament are able to view and keep track of the tweets made by constituents. In this way, the LD's are able to respond to constituents concerns using media and other means, specifically their own Twitter page.

Conclusion:

As described in from the results of our research, the way that the LD's from Parliament and their constituents are communicating shows that the use of social media is increasing and allowing formal institution members to be more accessible than ever. Without this communication, people would only be able to rely on the TV and newspapers. These standard forms of media provide only a small fraction of time for the organizations or representatives to express their views and campaigns. When representatives use Twitter, Facebook or MySpace, they open up a dialogue with the constituents or supporters and allow feedback. Because of this representatives are able to develop a closer relationship with their supporters and supporters feel that they are able to make a difference in their representative's campaign.