



DIGITAL CITIZENS AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

**An analysis of how citizens participate online and connect
with MPs and Parliament**

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Acknowledgements

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CONTENTS

- Executive Summary ii
- Introduction..... 1
 - Background to this Report..... 1
- General Online Sample 2
 - Demographic Profile..... 2
 - Civic and Political Participation..... 3
 - Motivation to Get Involved..... 5
 - Using the Internet to Get Involved 6
 - Contacting an Elected Representative 7
 - Summary 9
- Digital Leaders 10
 - Summary 14
- Conclusion..... 15
 - Recommendations 16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The internet has made considerable inroads into everyday life in the UK with over two-thirds of the British population now online. Britain is starting to mature as a digital nation and so it is timely to explore how digital Britons use the internet to connect with their elected representatives and, more broadly, the trends in online digital engagement across civic and political life.

This report draws on two samples, the first is a national survey of individuals who are already online and the second a group of 'digital leaders'; individuals with a strong interest in social media and politics. The first group is representative of digital Britain and the second group are the 'early adopters' of social media and digital technologies.

For those who are already online, the internet has made it easier to take part in the civic and political activities around them. Half of them prefer to use the internet to take part in democratic life. This research paints a picture of an online population who are actively involved in civic and political life and who see the internet as beneficial for this.

This research suggests that citizens do not want passive, broadcast-only relationships with their MPs – the sort that has existed until now. They want to communicate and to engage, to track and to contribute to the democratic debate and the tools that they want MPs to use are 'those that engage them directly with people'.

Citizens want Parliament and MPs to make sure that data is open, shared and up-to-date.

What this research suggests is that higher levels of engagement and wider participation in the democratic process can happen when citizens feel that they are a central part of it. However, this presents a challenge for Parliament and MPs in that increased use of more deliberative digital media takes time, costs more and cannot – as yet, at least – become a complete replacement for traditional offline methods of communication and engagement.

INTRODUCTION

This report describes two data samples, the first a general, national survey of individuals who are already online and, second, a smaller sample of 'digital leaders'; individuals with a strong interest in social media and politics. The sample choices are intentional; the first sample provides a representative sample of digital Britain and, therefore, allows us to create a picture of how digital Britain engages in civic and political life and the role that the internet plays in this. This sample also gives us some broad ideas about engagement with elected representatives.

The second sample, the 'digital leaders', can best be described as not only 'early adopters' of social media and other digital technologies but also a group (coincidentally) more likely to have an interest in politics. Whereas the general sample looks at digital participation more broadly, this sample is focused on connecting and communicating with MPs and Parliament. What this sample provides is an insight into how digital leaders see online political engagement, the media that they use and their suggestions for how this can be improved.

The first part of the report describes the 'general online sample', with the first section describing the overall sample and their civic and political activity, regardless of whether this occurs online or offline. The second section discusses how the participants use the internet to participate in civic and political life and the third section looks at the barriers to increased participation identified by respondents. The second section of the report describes the 'digital leaders' sample.

Background to this Report

This is a parallel publication to our *MPs Online: Connecting with constituents* report. Published in February 2009, that report looked at how MPs are using digital media to communicate and engage with constituents. What it revealed is that MPs are almost all using email (93%), most have a web presence (83% have a personal website) and that a quarter are using social networking tools. However, it also revealed that the typical digital MP remains in broadcast mode, using the internet as a 'digital newsletter' rather than as a tool to enhance engagement or democratic participation. It is in the context of this report, that the Hansard Society has now sought to find out:

- How the online public use the internet to participate in civic and democratic life. We do this broadly as we recognise that individual interest in politics goes beyond Westminster and the party-political, indeed it is much more likely to be issues-based; and
- How digital leaders are finding out about politics and democracy and how they are taking part in it.

This has been done with a view to developing recommendations for how Parliament and individual MPs can improve their use of digital media by privileging the methods, tools and techniques that a digital public most values and wants to use.

GENERAL ONLINE SAMPLE

This analysis is based on a sample of 2,003 online users and was gathered through a quantitative study conducted by Opinion Leader¹ during December 2008 and has a significance level of 95%.

Demographic Profile

The sample (n=2,003) is 48% male and 52% female, 81% live in England, 9% in Scotland and 5% each from Wales and Northern Ireland. Ninety-seven percent of respondents use the internet at home and 35% access it at work (27% also access the internet from another location, such as a library or internet cafe) and 93% have broadband internet access at home. Since this is an internet-only sample, 100% of respondents were online and within the sample 96% are confident in finding information online and 67% state that they are also confident creating information online (a further 25% of the sample are interested in creating information online but lack the confidence to do so).

As Figure 1 shows, 40% of the sample are in full-time employment and 16% part-time, however, this figure varies by gender: 51% of males are in full-time employment versus 31% of females and women are more likely to be in part-time work (10% of males versus 22% of females) or at home (2% versus 14%).

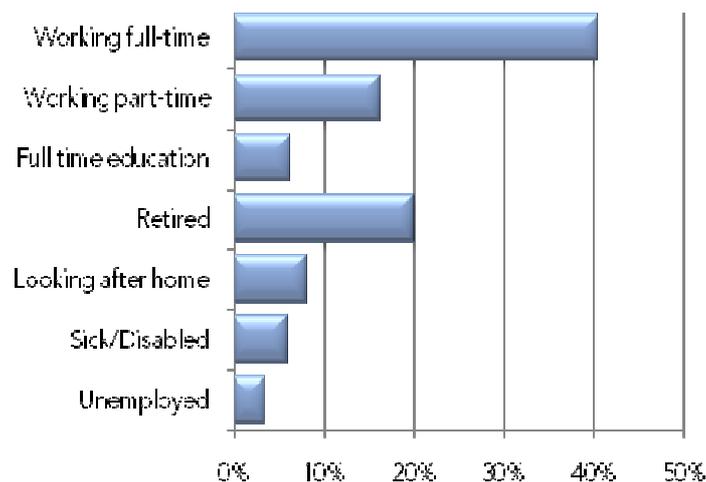


Figure 1 - Working status

Social grade of respondents was well distributed (36% AB, 35% C1C2 and 29% DE). In terms of highest educational achievement, 32% hold GCSEs or equivalent, 27% have A-levels, 20% an under-graduate tertiary qualification and 18% a post-graduate qualification. Only 3% did not complete school and have no formal qualifications (see Table 1).

¹ The data was collected on behalf of Ofcom as part of their research into media literacy and digital participation.

Not completed school	3%
GCSEs	32%
A-Levels	27%
Under-graduate	20%
Post-graduate	18%

Table 1- Educational achievement

Civic and Political Participation

Before looking specifically at who contacts their MPs and how the internet features in this, the next section will look at the sample's broader civic and political participation in more detail in order to build up a picture of how this group engages in civic life. Eighty-nine percent of respondents have undertaken at least one community or voluntary activity during the last year and 96% at some time in the past. Participation in the last year was affected by social grade, as the table below shows:

AB	93%
C1/C2	88%
DE	86%
All	89%

Table 2- Participation in the last 12 months by social grade

Thirty percent of the sample has been involved in multiple activities in the last year. Interestingly, this figure remains reasonably constant regardless of the level of activity: where 28% of respondents have taken part in no more than two civic activities in the last year, 31% have taken part in five or more. Seventy-five percent say that they have participated in political activities (this could include voting). Of those respondents who participated in at least one civic activity (n=1,791):

- 82% were involved in 'any community-based activity';
- 73% were involved in 'campaigning';
- 16% of active participants considered that their level of involvement had increased in the last year;
- 7% of active participants considered that they were more involved now than in the past; and
- 38% describe their involvement as either 'basic' or 'very basic'.

Overall, women were marginally more likely than men to be participating in civic activities and, as Figure 2 suggests, age is also a factor, with civic participation increasing with age.

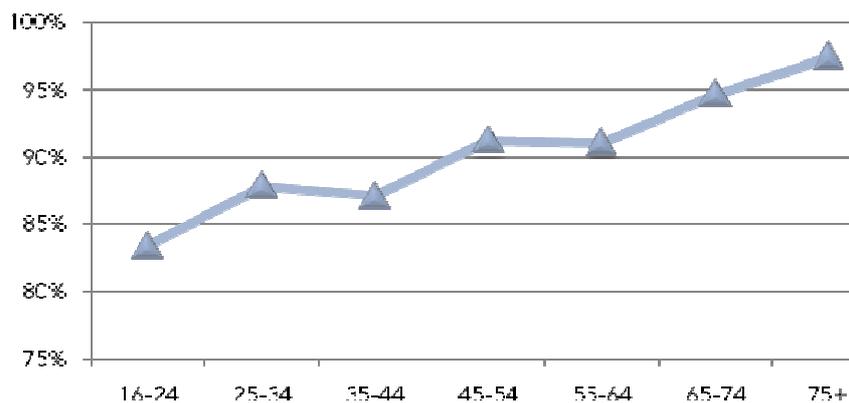


Figure 2 – Civic participation by age

The next section will look at the different ways in which participants get involved in their community and how they choose to have a say on the social or political issues that concern them.

Registered to vote	78%
Got in touch with a government department or local council	46%
Took part in a government survey or consultation	39%
Got in contact with your MP or MEP	35%

Table 3- Political engagement

In terms of political engagement, 46% of respondents had contacted either a government department or their local council (see Table 3), this compares to 78% who had registered to vote in the last 12 months. As Table 4 shows, the same number actually voted in an election in the last year. Further, 39% of respondents had taken part in a government consultation or completed an official survey of some kind in the last year, whereas only 35% had got in contact with an MP or MEP (or MSP, AM or MLA if in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland) and 18% had done so in the last year. In terms of other activities that might be classified as political participation that occurred in the last year (Table 4), by far the most popular activity was to sign a petition, done by 76% of respondents – only 2% fewer than those who had voted. Forty-five percent of those who had signed a petition had done so online, compared to the 73% who had signed a written petition. There is then a significant drop in terms of participation in other political activities, with only 37% of respondents making a donation to a campaigning organisation, fewer than half those who had voted or signed a petition. The activities least likely to have been done by respondents relate to political parties; 11% joined (or rejoined) a political party in the last year and 9% donated money to one.

Voted in an election	78%
Signed a petition	76%
Donated money to a campaigning organisation	37%
Took part in a protest or demonstration	15%
Joined a campaigning organisation	14%
Joined a political party	11%
Donated money to a political party	9%

Table 4- Political participation

As highlighted earlier, social grade has an impact on political participation. Whilst 13% of the overall sample was 'most involved' in the activities they engaged with, this represents 17% of ABs and only 10% of DEs. Likewise, 28% of the overall sample considered their participation to be 'basic', rising to 30% for ABs and falling to 24% for DEs. Notably, 11% of DEs identified their level and nature of participation as 'very basic' as opposed to only 5% of ABs. C1/C2 respondents fall between the two outlying groups.

	All	AB	DE
Most involved	13%	17%	10%
Basic or very basic involvement	28%	30%	20%

Table 5- Level of involvement by social class

There is a minor correlation between confidence online and civic and political participation; those in the sample who engage in only very basic participation activities are less likely to be interested in finding information online – 26% are uninterested as opposed to 18% of the sample who are confident finding information online and 20% with no interest in creating information online versus 15% who are confident doing so. However, these figures level out as participation levels increase, showing little or no difference in participation rates for different levels of confidence, suggesting that lacking online confidence does not create a barrier to civic participation (motivations to be involved in political life are discussed later).

Motivation to Get Involved

The factors which motivated individuals to get involved in civic and political life varied considerably, as Table 6 shows. Duty was a primary factor in terms of voting (60%), although it was felt more strongly in the AB group (68%) than amongst DEs (50%). Duty was more of a factor for those in the North West of England (75%) and much less for those in Scotland (47%). The motivation switches dramatically when participants are asked what motivates them to contact a government department, with 68% now stating that it was because they felt strongly about an issue and this becomes an even greater motivating factor for those contacting an elected representative, being the reason given by 81% of the sample.

	Vote in an election	Contact a government department	Contact an elected representative
Invited	17%	9%	11%
Felt strongly	18%	68%	81%
Duty	60%	26%	11%
Like to get involved	17%	8%	8%
Like to have my say	24%	11%	9%

Table 6- Motivation to participate in various activities

Barriers to getting more involved were primarily related to time, with 'lack of time' being the most prevalent reason (37%) and work commitments second (13%). 'Apathy' was suggested as a reason by 9% of respondents.

Using the Internet to Get Involved

Seventy percent of respondents agreed that the internet makes it easier for them to participate in civic and political activities and only 6% disagreed, the remainder being neutral. Location made little difference to this perception; however, working status did, with those in employment more likely to agree that the internet made a difference (74%) as opposed to those respondents who were at home looking after a family (59%) or unemployed (50%). The respondents' highest educational achievement also made a difference, with 80% of those holding a postgraduate qualification agreeing that the internet made a difference, falling to 57% of those with no formal qualifications. The group least likely to agree was those uninterested in using the internet (28%), however, only 9% of this group disagreed that the internet made it easier and the majority (61%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Forty-nine percent of respondents stated that they would generally prefer to use the internet to participate in civic and political activities, with only 17% disagreeing (see Figure 3).

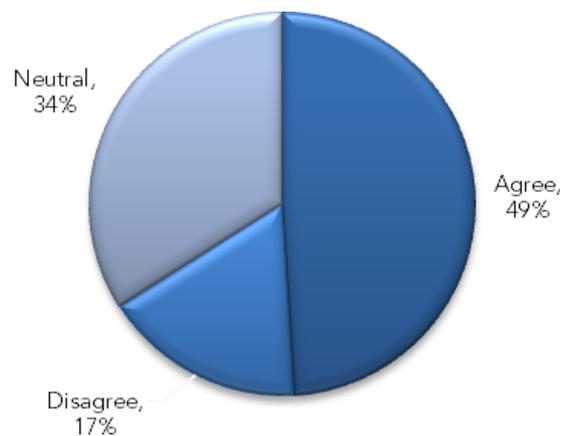


Figure 3 – Would prefer to use the internet for civic or political activities

Overall, 70% of respondents felt that the internet made it easier to participate, with 40% saying that they now participate more because of the internet and 42% that they have switched to participating online now they have the internet whereas, in the past, they would have done the same things offline.

Confidence was not a factor for most of this online sample, 64% considering themselves confident enough online to participate and, as Table 7 shows, many more are confident carrying out information gathering and transactional activities online. Confidence levels fall as the activity becomes more personal and publishing oriented, such as posting comments or setting up a blog, which 65% of the sample were not interested in doing.

	Interested, but not confident	Can do with confidence	Not interested
Buying things over the internet	6%	91%	3%
Finding out about local services	7%	89%	5%
Banking over the internet	7%	76%	16%
Joining in debates through posting comments on websites	15%	48%	37%
Setting up a personal profile on a social media site	8%	47%	45%
Setting up your own blog	12%	23%	65%

Table 7- Confidence levels with various online activities

Contacting an Elected Representative

This section identifies that part of the sample who have got in contact with their MP or MEP (or MSP, AM or MLA if from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland). This accounts for 35% of the overall sample who have contacted an elected representative at some time in the past and 18% who have done so in the past 12 months. Because of the relative newness of the internet, contacts made in the last year (n=354) are cited below unless otherwise stated.

Gender was a minor factor in determining how respondents contacted their elected representatives, with women more likely than men to use the internet (46% versus 40%) and men more likely to make contact in writing (47% versus 41%). Although the 18-34 age group was still more likely to make contact offline (such as, in writing, by telephone or in person), they were less likely to do so in writing than other age groups and slightly more likely to get in contact online. As Table 8 shows, age is not a barrier to digital engagement when it comes to contacting one's elected representative. Indeed, whilst the age group least likely to have used the internet to contact an elected representative was 75+ (29%), the group most likely to have done so was aged 55-64, where the majority (54%) of respondents did so (58% of this age group also made contact in writing or in person). The traditionally dominant internet age-group (25-34) is in fact also far more likely to use the telephone (including mobiles and texting) than any other age group (21%).

	18-34	35-54	55+
Offline	56%	67%	64%
Telephone	17%	12%	13%
Internet	45%	44%	42%

Table 8- Contact medium by age group

Two other factors are of greater significance when it comes to predicting how citizens prefer to contact their elected representatives, first their social grade (and therefore socioeconomic and educational background) and, second, where they live.

	AB	C1/C2	DE
Got in contact with government department or your local council	50%	47%	40%
Got in contact with your MP or MEP	40%	34%	30%

Table 9 – Ever contacted by social grade

As Table 9 shows, AB respondents were 20% more likely to have contacted a government department or their local council and 25% more likely to have contacted their elected representative than those in the DE social grade. Re-enforcing the implication that those in the higher social grades are more politically engaged, 39% of ABs also agreed that they had 'given [their] views or advice on a community, social or political issue to people outside [their] immediate circle', whereas the equivalent figure for DEs was 22%. Overall, those who indicated that they had given their views in the last year were more likely to have done so online (59%) than offline (57%)

Summarising the method of contact by social grade (see Figure 4 and Table 10):

- DEs are as likely to write as to make contact online (each 39%) and more likely than others to make contact in person (28%) or via the telephone (17%);
- C1C2s are most likely to make contact offline (65%) and as likely as ABs to write (45%); and
- ABs are most likely to make contact online (46%), with 45% doing so in writing.

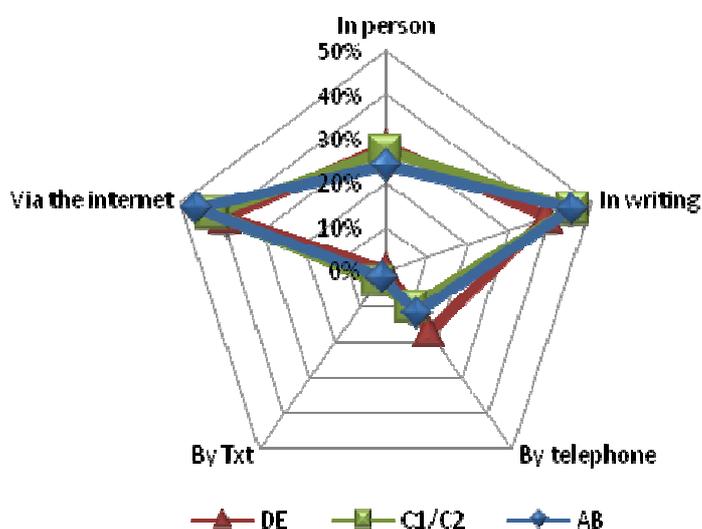


Figure 4 – Contact method in the last year by medium and social grade

	AB	C1/C2	DE
In person	24%	27%	28%
In writing	45%	45%	39%
By telephone	12%	10%	17%
By Txt	2%	3%	0%
Via the internet	46%	42%	39%

Table 10 – Contact method in the last year by medium and social grade

Location also appears to play a part in determining the medium of choice. Writing or face-to-face contact methods are significantly preferred by respondents in Wales (78%) and Northern Ireland (75%) but are in the minority for those in the North East (45%). Scotland (19%), Greater London and the North East (both 18%) see the highest use of telephone and texting. Three areas stand out as having the majority of contact made via online methods, these are the East of England (57%), Yorkshire and Humberside (55%) and Greater London (52%). Significantly more people in Northern Ireland have made contact in person (40%) than in any other area (the North East is the lowest with 9%) and this directly correlates to the area least likely to have made contact online (25%).

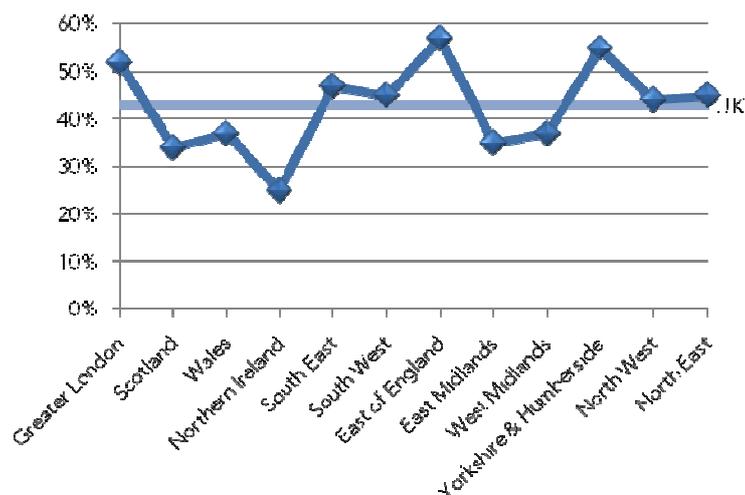


Figure 5 – Contacted MP online in the last year by region

Thirteen percent of all respondents were not aware that it was possible to contact their MP or other elected representatives via the internet.

Summary

The internet makes it easy for those already online to participate in civic and political activities (70% agree) and half (49%) would prefer to use the internet to do this as opposed to some offline method. Whilst this sample is actively participating in the civic and political life around them, only a minority have ever been in contact with an elected representative (35% in total and 18% in the last year) and, again, just over one-third of respondents (39%) have taken part in a government survey or consultation exercise. Whilst this sample is more likely to vote because of a sense of duty, they will contact their MP because they feel strongly about an issue.

The group demonstrates relatively high levels of participation overall. Those in the higher social grades are more likely to participate, as are those who are older and with higher educational qualifications. Whilst it is true to argue that the younger age groups are more likely to participate online than offline, age is no barrier to digital engagement; the highest users of online engagement are in the 55-64 age bracket.

There is still a need to promote access to online engagement with 13% of the sample still unaware that they can contact their MP online.

DIGITAL LEADERS

Data for the second part of this research was collected from an online survey in May 2009. The survey was distributed via social media (Facebook and Twitter) and recruitment involved snowball sampling. The targeting of the distribution meant that the respondents are skewed towards those who are active users of social media and have an interest in politics. This survey has a sample size of 58.

The respondents (n=58) were interested in politics (71% rated their interest as 'high' and a further 27% as 'medium'), 53% said their knowledge of politics was 'high' and only 4% 'low' and 92% rated their confidence in using the internet as 'high', with none rating their online confidence as 'low'. This reflects higher online confidence levels than the general sample, of which 68% were confident enough to participate in online fora. The digital leaders sample was 63% male, younger than the general online sample above and more likely to live in London or the South East (24%).

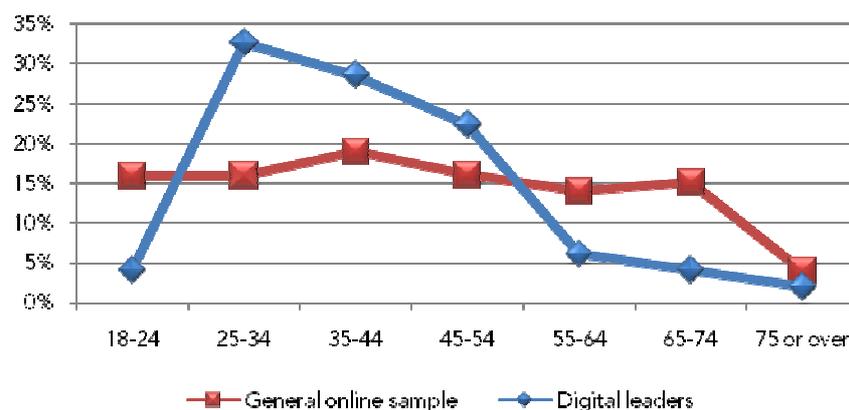


Figure 6 – Age of respondents (general and digital leader's samples)

In the general sample discussed above, 18% of respondents had contacted an elected representative in the last year, amongst the digital leaders this rose to 71%. By far the most popular method of contact was online (including email), which was used by 69% of respondents. There was a simultaneous drop in those writing to their MPs, accounting for only 13% of respondents.

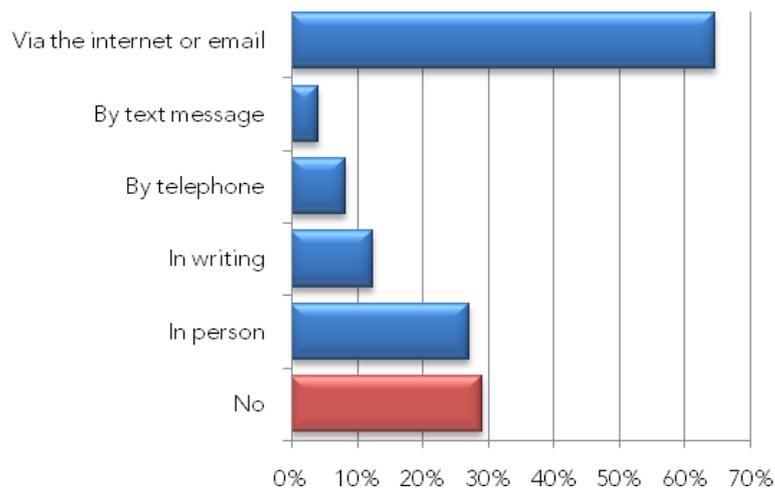


Figure 7 – Have you contacted an MP in the last year?

Given the significance of the internet as an information and communication tool for this group, it is useful to look at which web-based tools were used to contact, find out about or follow MPs. As might be expected, websites were the most popular (used by 82% of the sample, see Table 11). Blogs were also a popular source of information (57%) but more respondents used Twitter (59%)². Facebook was used by 21% of respondents for this purpose but none used either MySpace or Bebo, re-enforcing the pre-eminence of Facebook in this niche area. Specific websites that were mentioned in relation to this question include ‘writetothem’ and ‘theyworkforyou’.

Website	82%
Twitter	59%
Blog	57%
Facebook	21%
YouTube	14%
Flickr	2%
MySpace	0%
Bebo	0%
Friendfeed	0%

Table 11 – Which web-based channels have you used to contact, follow or find out about an MP?

When asked specifically about the UK Parliament’s web presence, again the website proved the most widely used (78%). As Table 12 shows, Parliament’s Twitter feed also rates very highly (63%) and 27% of respondents have used the Parliamentary YouTube site. It is perhaps surprising and somewhat disappointing that, given the numbers visiting the parliament.uk website, only 20% of respondents have ever visited the parliamentlive.tv website, slightly fewer than have used YouTube for this purpose. This suggests that the sample is text-led and, therefore, interested in the detail. It might be assumed from this that, as digital engagement increases amongst the wider public, the use of video content will increase to support the more detailed textual data that is also available.

² Care has to be taken in drawing conclusions from this as Twitter was used to promote the survey and therefore its prominence is likely to have been skewed upwards. Nonetheless this finding is still significant given the relative newness of the tool.

Parliament.uk Website	78%
Twitter	63%
YouTube	27%
Parliamentlive.tv website	20%
RSS feed	20%
Facebook	17%
Flickr	5%
Friendfeed	0%

Table 12 – Which Parliamentary web service have you used?

Respondents were asked what digital tools they would like to see MPs using in order to improve communication. The overwhelming response to this question was for tools that lead to direct engagement and communication with citizens and less ‘broadcasting’ from the centre out.

Too much communications one way - from us to them.

What is important is that MPs recognise the need for transparency and accountability these days, right now that means a regularly, personally updated blog and a Twitter feed are mandatory.

MPs need to make more effective use of the existing tools that they have for this purpose too and it was suggested that many need to update their websites more often. Whilst many respondents were keen not to single out particular tools or technologies given the rate of change in this area, those that did overwhelmingly suggested that MPs need to make better use of email and that Twitter was a valuable tool for instant conversations.

Increased use of tools that allow direct engagement, such as Twitter. Needs to be flexible to fast-changing social media environment/proliferation of services.

Twitter and email and more frequent updating of individual MPs' websites.

But, as another respondent cautioned,

It may be too much to ask for email replies since few if any bother.

The feelings of the respondents are summed up well by this comment:

More ways to engage and create conversations, not just transmissions.

There were also suggestions relating to the publication of material from Parliament, particularly comments relating to the publication of transcripts and submissions using open data standards and RSS feeds.

Select Committees and consultations to publish submissions and evidence transcripts using RSS feeds for updates.

Properly marked-up content to link debates, bill, amendments to topics etc.

The final question asked respondents to consider what online engagement tools they had used and, if they had not used them, whether they would consider using them in the future. Given that 76% of the wider online sample has signed a petition at some time or other, making it by far the most popular civic or political activity other than voting, it is not surprising that the digital leaders sample were significantly more likely to have signed an e-petition than other forms of digital engagement. As Table 13 and Figure 8 show, 63% of respondents have signed an e-petition and a further 31% have not done so but would consider it in the future. It is worth noting too that an overwhelming 94% of respondents have either taken part in a government consultation exercise online (47%) or would consider doing so (again, 47%). Other online engagement activities have been used by far fewer respondents but it is clear that the majority are willing to try them; whilst only 16% of respondents had given evidence online to a parliamentary committee, a further 76% said that they would consider doing so. Again, only 11% had taken part in a 'virtual surgery' with an MP yet a further 77% would consider doing so in the future.

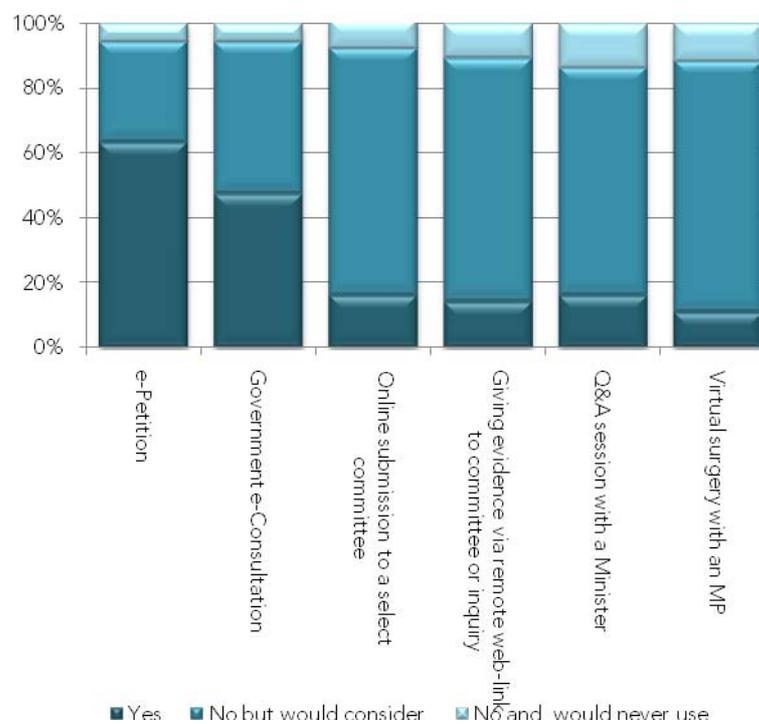


Figure 8 – Online engagement activities

	Yes	No but would consider	No and would never use
e-Petition	63%	31%	6%
Government e-Consultation	47%	47%	6%
Online submission to a select committee	16%	76%	9%
Giving evidence via remote web-link to committee or inquiry	14%	75%	11%
Q&A session with a Minister	16%	70%	14%
Virtual surgery with an MP	11%	77%	12%

Table 13 – Online engagement activities

Summary

For the digital leaders, websites remain an important source of information and are the most widely used internet-based resource. Whilst websites are most widely used, it is tools that engage and allow for conversations to happen that are the most sought after. Reinforcing this point, email featured significantly but so too did comments that its use was too one-way and that it was usual to receive no response.

Twitter was rated highly as an important tool for quick and timely conversations and a recent example of this is its use by Lord Drayson, Minister for Science in his exchanges with the science community (emphasis added):

lorddrayson: @joergheber Please explain specifically what it is you are worried about. I'm listening... @rowanNS @skyponderer @PD_Smith

PD_Smith: **@lorddrayson** 1. why does Science not deserve its own minister? 2. Are there not ethical issues re unifying sci + military under 1 minister?

skyponderer: **@lorddrayson** Justify why we need a shared role Don't we have enough talent to go round that we need to spread it thinly @ science's expense?

lorddrayson: @PD_Smith In my view the more the sci minister is connected to wider roles in govt the more influence science has to the whole agenda

2020science: @skyponderer One up to **@lorddrayson** I think 😊 Round two...

PD_Smith: **@lorddrayson** The logic of that is that you'll soon be taking on more portfolios? Sounds to me like a reduction in the import of sci.

lorddrayson: @PD_Smith Science deserves a minister at the cabinet table. Thats key. Tick. Sci deserves a cabinet committee. Thats key too. Tick.

lorddrayson: @PD_Smith But, many ministers have dual roles.. it really helps departments work together better. Silos in whitehall are not helpful.

lorddrayson: @PD_Smith Many science issues are cross-departmental. Take GMES as an example. MOD / DECC / BERR / DIUS all had a view on earth observation

Figure 9 – Example of a Ministerial conversation on Twitter

Communication is not just person-to-person; it involves making the work of Parliament open, visible and transparent. This group wants to see open data standards making data

accessible not just via websites and RSS feeds but also through third-party sites and 'mashups'³.

This sample provides a glimpse into how digital communications will increasingly become not just an accepted part of democratic engagement but a mainstay. Many amongst the digital leaders have already taken advantage of tools for digital engagement where they exist; 63% have already signed an e-petition. An overwhelming majority would consider other such tools that are currently still in their infancy, should the opportunity arise.

CONCLUSION

For those already online, the internet makes it easier to take part in democracy and half of the general online sample would prefer to use the internet to do so. The digital leaders sample provides a glimpse into digital engagement tomorrow; this is a group of early adopters with an interest in politics who value and engage with new digital media as a tool to discover, converse and act. What this group is doing today, we can expect to see migrate across to the wider online public tomorrow.

This research paints a picture of an online population who are actively involved in civic and political life and who see the internet as beneficial to this. The research suggests that citizens do not want the passive, broadcast-only relationship with their MPs that has existed until now, they wish to communicate and engage, to track and contribute to the democratic debate. The tools that they want MPs to use are

those that engage them directly with people.

Information is important. It needs to be up-to-date and updated regularly and when information is provided it should be in a variety of different ways – particularly ways that allow other third parties to re-present and re-distribute digital content, such as the way that 'theyworkforyou' currently functions.

What this research suggests is that higher levels of engagement and wider participation in the democratic process will happen when citizens feel that they are a central part of it. This presents a challenge for Parliament – both for MPs and the House authorities, as our *MPs Online* research shows, many MPs lack the skills and all the resources to manage significant growth in the increasingly deliberative tools that digital media provide and which the public clearly has an appetite for.

³ A 'mashup' is a website that recombines and modifies existing digital works, for example it might draw on data fed from a range of sources to create an interactive map (such as police crime statistics and Google maps).

Recommendations

For Parliament:

1. Wherever systems are being updated:
 - a. implement open data standards;
 - b. ensure that public-facing APIs are made available for publicly accessible data; and
 - c. ensure data is freely available and not restricted by copyright or other restrictive forms of licensing.
2. Continue to develop multiple social media and other delivery platforms in recognition that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' platform or tool and that the public increasingly expects data to be pushed to the services they use, not pulled from a central website or repository.
3. Ensure that opportunities are taken for digital media to be used as tools for transparency, outreach and public engagement and not simply for broadcast.
4. Review the resourcing requirements for effective social media use amongst Members.
5. Ensure that there is timely and appropriate training available and clear guidelines on social media usage.

For MPs:

6. MPs must listen and respond as well as publish. Citizens want to engage in dialogue about the issues that concern them so communication with them has to be two-way.
7. Social media allows MPs to keep a closer eye on the issues that are important for their constituents, these are vital tools in the rich democratic milieu and all MPs should be using them.

For citizens:

8. Demand two-way digital interaction with your MP and insist that they communicate digitally and proactively.
9. Use email, websites and social media to draw MPs' attention to important issues and use the power of social media to insist that MPs come to the debate on citizen's terms.

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