

Online Campaigning in the UK: The Public Respond?

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Abstract

This paper presents an indepth analysis of the effects of the Internet on individual political behaviour in the UK with a specific focus on the effects of organisational campaigning and contacting online. Using data from an NOP survey of 1,972 adults during May 2002 we provide a current overview of the size and basic political characteristics of the Internet audience in the UK. The study then examines the extent to which political organisations such as parties, pressure groups and protest networks are using the Web and email to promote themselves and mobilise support. The major findings to emerge are that although those engaging in online politics tend to be well educated and drawn from a higher socio-economic class, there is also a 'radical potential' underneath these figures that shows the Internet is reach previously disengaged groups.

Introduction

The effect of the Internet on political participation has become the subject of considerable debate. In the early days of intellectual exploration of the effects of Internet-related technology on society highly optimistic scenarios of their mobilising effects were promoted. Many scholars greeted the Internet as something of a holy grail, offering the possibility to engage citizens more directly in their own governing, either in a plebiscitary sense or in a more ambitiously communitarian manner. These utopian visions were challenged, however, by critics who saw the Internet as heralding passivity and 'push-button' democracy, the fragmentation and fracturing of the public interest, and at worst the establishment of an Orwellian state. While differing radically in their projected outcomes, both forms of theorising were based primarily on a determinist understanding of the possibilities inherent in the technology rather than any empirical evidence.

Once empirical work on the topic began a third viewpoint – the 'normalisation' thesis - began to emerge between these two polarities. Popularised largely by political scientists, this largely inductive thesis argued that rather than transforming society, the Internet would at best produce little or 'no change' to existing patterns of participation. At worst, it would actually reinforce the existing participatory biases toward elite socioeconomic groups in society. These arguments were based largely upon the skewed patterns of access to net technology that emerged across democratic societies. In addition to these aggregate findings, much of the individual level analysis revealed that those engaging in participation online were those who were already politically active (Norris, 2001). Although such findings are not supportive of the worst fears of the dystopians they are certainly do not lend credence to the idea that the net contains some radical potential to mobilise citizens.

The goal of this paper is to re-examine the normalisation hypothesis in the context of the UK public and particularly organisational campaigning on the net, using newly gathered data on the topic. While we do not seek to return to the full-blown democratic idealism of the past we do argue that the internet's possibilities for mobilisation have not been fully explored using existing data sets, particularly outside of the US and that more attention needs to be paid to the new and innovative ways it can be used to kick start spirals of participation.

The Internet and Political Participation

Optimists vs. Pessimists

In the beginning much of the literature on e-democracy or cyberdemocracy focused on the possibilities for direct democracy and closer connection of individuals to government and policy making. Work by Rheingold (1993), Negroponte (1995), Grossman (1996) Rash (1997) extolled the seemingly limitless possibilities of the Internet for forging new and stronger form of political engagement by citizens. Driven by libertarian impulses these scholars saw the Internet as a leading the way toward true government by the people and the ultimate erosion of state power and intermediary bodies. The representative institutions of democracy such as parties and parliaments were seeing a gradual delegitimisation and new information and communication technologies (ICTs) could fill that gap, creating a leaner and more transparent system of governance (Mulgan, 1994; Heilemann, 1996; Poster, 1997). Translating these ideals into practice proved something of a more difficult task with

basically two strands of thought emerging. There was the plebiscitary option whereby democracy would take place largely through a series of online referenda (Shenk, 1997; Birdsell *et al*, 1998; Morris, 2000). Alternatively there was the communitarian version whereby cyberspace would become a new public space for exchange of ideas and building a more participatory culture (Katz, 1997; Rheingold, 1995; Abramson *et al*, 1988).

Contrary to these ideas, merchants of doom also emerged prophesying the end of democracy as a result of the harnessing of these new technologies. Lipow and Seyd (1996) weighed into the debate arguing that the new modes of participation, especially under the plebiscitary model would reduce any meaning citizens attached to political engagement to even lower levels than already existed (Street, 1992). More communitarian models of involvement could not work since the anonymity and impersonal nature of most online discussion meant that it could not build true bonds of commitment and often degenerated into abuse (Streck, 1999). Moreover, Sunstein (2001) warns of the fragmentation of information and suggests that although the Internet may, in theory, bring more choice, it also allows people to insulate themselves from competing views, argument or deliberation – the lifeblood of democracy.

Empirical studies and the emergence of the “normalisation” thesis

Following this rather impassioned theoretical debate, the empirical work into Internet users’ patterns of political participation began. Political communication scholars were particularly quick to enter the debate. The idea of the media acting as a mobilising force rather than as a malign or enervating influence on public interest in politics challenged the current orthodoxy. Television in particular stood accused or simplifying and personalising politics to voters, focusing on the horserace aspect of who was winning and the moral failings of the candidates while contributing little to individuals’ knowledge base (Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Graber, 1988). In addition, the rise of more direct electronic communication strategies for campaigning, such as telephone banks and mass mailing was seen as threatening greater disconnection between voters and the political system (Bimber, 2001; Rommele, 2002).

Some of the earliest data gathering and analysis on the topic was done by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press in the US in 1996. The evidence revealed that despite the techno-optimists hopes, there was little cyberdemocracy taking hold online. Access was far from universal with usage being highly skewed toward those of higher socio-economic status. Despite the better resourced status of Internet users, less than a quarter were reported looking for information about the election (Marlin, 1999; Pew, 1996). Bimber (1998) using 1996 NES data presented equally non-inspiring findings showing that cyberspace was dominated by white affluent, educated and younger males and political activity. “The relationships are all in the intuitive direction: greater education and income are associated with greater likelihood of access, having full-time employment increases the likelihood and increasing age decreases it”.

Even though access has widened since then and the so-called ‘digital divide’ has begun to be bridged, particularly in regard to gender and income, Internet effects on engagement in politics have singularly refused to offer much cause for celebration.

Bimber's update (2001) of his earlier work using 1998 and 1999 data confirmed the lack of any strong relationship between a wide range of traditional forms of participation and Internet use. Schuefele and Nisbet (2002) offer a similarly uninspiring conclusion from their telephone survey of New York residents which examined the effects of different types of Internet use on a range of political behaviours and levels of factual knowledge. None of the modes of Internet use, including political information seeking was found to have any significant effect on individuals proclivity to engage in politics, either in a conventional sense (i.e. voting, contacting) or in more participatory forums.

The empirical studies of Internet effects on various measures of social capital proved even more depressing in their conclusions. A number of studies reported that individuals levels of sociability actually dropped and their feelings of alienation and disconnection to society increased with higher net use (Nie and Ebring, 2000; Kraut et al, 2000). Other studies took a more ambivalent line. Putnam (2000) using data from a DDB Needham Lifestyle survey maintained that after demographic controls were applied, Internet users and non-users did not differ significantly in their levels of civic engagement. Uslander (2001) in his analysis of data from 1998 and 2000 Pew Center survey and the 1996 American NES also argued for a largely 'nil' effect of Internet use on social capital. While the heaviest users of the Internet did have wider social circles, however, those engaging in online chat were more mistrustful of others. Overall, he concludes "there is little evidence that the Internet will create new communities to make up for the decline in civic engagement that has occurred over the past four decades in the United States..." (ibid). Using data from the 1998 National Geographic Web Survey, Wellman et al (2001) present a similarly mixed set of findings. While a positive association does exist between online and offline participation, online interaction largely supplements face-to-face and telephone communication and higher levels of Internet use are actually associated with decreased commitment to online community.

In general, then the existing empirical work would seem to suggest that we cannot talk about any single Internet 'effect' within democracy. However, if there are any mobilising effects they appear to be confined to those who are already active, pulling them further into an upward spiral or 'virtuous' circle of participation. As Norris (2001: 228) has argued from her analysis of survey data from the US and Europe up until 2000:

the rise of the virtual political system seems most likely to facilitate further knowledge, interest, and activism of those who are already most predisposed toward civic engagement, reinforcing patterns of political participation.

One small but consistent caveat that has been noted in at least some of these studies, however, are the findings regarding youth participation. Despite being one of the more inert groups in regard to political involvement, data reported by Norris (1999) and Hill and Hughes (1998) has revealed that this group is actually more likely to engage in information gathering and contacting online than they would be using traditional methods. A Pew Center internet survey of online communities in 2001

confirmed this, showing that more likely to be in contact with political organisations online than other age groups, a reversal of offline contact rates¹.

UK Findings

Much of the above research has concentrated on the US population although there some comparative data gathering projects have emerged since the late 1990s such as Survey2000 and Eurobarometers have carried questions on internet use since 1997. Within the UK specifically, there has not been a great deal of empirical work on participation and the net at the individual level. That which has been done has produced somewhat mixed findings. Early work by Brown and Svennevig (1999) found a similarly skewed distribution of Internet access as in the US and a lack of any pronounced political effects. Data from the 2001 General Election survey by the Work Foundation (formerly the Industrial Society) concluded that voters were largely uninterested in using the Internet for political purposes with only 15% of those online expressing interest in using the medium for campaign information. Less than one in ten planned to e-mail a politician, candidate or party, although about a third said they might contact a friend or family member about the election. As such, the UK compares unfavourably with figures the authors quote from the US 2000 Presidential election which showed that about a third of voters going online for election news.²

Striking a more positive note, however, a 2001 Hansard Society/MORI survey shows that almost four in five UK non-Internet users would engage in online interaction with their MP and online surgery to raise problems with MPs via the internet as well an e-mail address so that constituents can contact him/her a consultation forum where/he she can read constituents' views. Equally promising, the study finds that "the younger the respondents were, the more enthusiastic they were for these features to be introduced" (Coleman, 2001). A more recent Hansard survey confirms this point, finding that younger voters (18-24 year olds) were significantly more likely to have visited the Westminster website (34%) and were much more likely to do this than writing to their MP (Coleman, 2002). Broader reports on youth participation following the 2001 election from the Electoral Commission (2002), Demos (2002) and the Government's Children and Young Peoples Unit (2002) have also indicated the usefulness of technology in engaging younger voters. Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that technology itself is not the answer and that young people are suspicious of technological gimmicks from political organisations and parties.

Challenging the normalisation thesis

In general, therefore, the political science literature provides quite compelling evidence in favour of the normalisation thesis. At present the Internet is undeniably an exclusionary medium - those using it tend to be from the more elite sectors of society. Thus, it reinforces barriers to participation among the less advantaged groups in society. Further, those who do appear to be stimulated to participate after using the Internet are those who are already engaged in the process. To conclude from these studies, however, that the Internet lacks any radical potential we would argue can be questioned on three main grounds.

¹ The figures presented here were elaborated from the 2001 Pew Internet and Community Survey. The questionnaire, data set and basic cross-tabs are publicly available for academic research at <http://www.pewinternet.org> from February, 8 2002.

² 'Youth Vote Influenced By Online Information' Pew Internet & American Life Project. December 2000. http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PRC_Politics_Report.pdf

First, most of the studies of online participation have been focused on the US population. While other countries may follow a similar pattern there are clearly cultural differences across nations in terms of their openness to new technology and levels of engagement in politics that might interact to produce more positive findings. Second, the empirical analyses cited above centre almost exclusively on conventional 'real world' political activity such as news gathering, contacting of politicians, engaging in discussion, donating money to, or joining a political group (as a dependent variable) and regress that against access to the Internet or (as the independent variable). This ignores the new forms of political activity that available online such as e-mailing politicians, viewing websites or signing and sending on e-mail petitions. While these activities may be electronic versions of more traditional types of activity they also offer a significantly different experience to individuals in terms of the extent of user control over information accessed and immediacy of contact, as well as the opportunities for reaching a much wider, potentially global audience. The recent data that are available on this topic from the US do in fact provide the basis for a more reassuring picture of the internet's impact on participation.³

A third and possibly more significant question that can be raised about the validity of these studies lies in the implicit assumptions that they make about the linkage between internet use and participation. Why should we expect that access to the Internet would make people more likely to engage in real-world politics? Bimber (2001) offers one of the explicit statements of the rationale at work here, arguing that having access to the Internet means that people have a greater volume of information available at reduced costs. This, in turn, implies that political participation is somehow regulated by information flows. If this is true then the fact that the Internet is not linked to increased participation means it has negligible effects. If it is not the case, however, then such a conclusion does not follow.

Our paper seeks to tackle some of these deficiencies in three main ways. First by examining data from the UK population we shift the focus from America to Europe. We then identify a range of forms of online participation and, controlling for socio-economic characteristics examine the population that engage in them. The main question being asked here is to what extent online politics attracts a different crowd from those engaging in the real-world version and whether this provides stronger evidence for the Internet as a stimulant to participation? Finally, we analyse the specific case of online contacting of organisations by Internet users. This type of online participation is considered to be particularly likely to mobilise less politically engaged groups given the way in which the Internet can be used by organisations to

³ A recent survey of e-government in US by the Pew Research Center showed that Americans were happy to use the Internet to interact with and get services online. The survey, conducted in Jan 2002 found that 58% of Internet users or 68 million Americans had visited at least one govt. web site. Of those visiting 41% visit several times per month. Almost two thirds have sought info. on public policy issues and one in three has contacted an official through a government site, 19% say that they have become part of an online lobbying campaign. According to previous Pew Center data from February 2000 on (The Tough Job of Communicating with Voters) offline participation, 41% of American adults confess to ever having contacted an elected official. And looking just within the past year 19% say that they have contacted an elected official. Overall 60% of govt. web site users say such sites had improved their interactions with at least one level of government.

increase awareness and interest with targeted e-mails, either directly or via friends. Although receipt of such stimuli is clearly expected to be linked with the usual background variables prompting participation in the first place, such as socioeconomic resources and political interest, it is not wholly dependent on them. Such techniques do open up the possibility that organisations can reach a potentially very wide range of citizens, including the more politically disinterested or alienated. Thus, we might expect individuals of higher socioeconomic status to receive organisational contact via the net, the more significant question here is whether it also reaches some of those who are basically inactive – and does it make them more like to become involved in politics?

Data and Methodology

The data were gathered from an NOP face-to-face interview with a random sample of the British population aged 15 years and older conducted in May 2002 (n= 1972). In order to investigate the questions outlined above a series of questions about general Internet use were asked including how long an individual had been online and how frequently they used the net per week. Basic demographics including gender, age, class and education level were also collected.

For offline political participation we asked a series of yes/no questions regarding whether respondents had voted, discussed politics with friends/family, contacted an elected official, engaged in strike activity, donated money to a political cause, attended a rally, joined a political organisation, or actively campaigned for a political organisation. For online political participation, again we asked a series of yes/no questions about a wide range of online political activity that included looking for political information on the web, visiting a political organisations' website, signing an online petition, sending an e-mail to a politician, sending an e-mail postcard, signing up for an e-news bulletin.

To examine organisational contacting in particular we asked a series of yes/no questions about whether an individual had ever visited the website of a range of political organisations or contacted them via e-mail. This included single issue protest campaigns, charity or pressure groups, political parties, anti-capitalist groups, independent media organisations and mainstream news organisation). We also asked whether individuals had ever received any political messages from organisations while on online, either directly or via friends. This included items such as news bulletins, postcards or news articles.

To analyse these data according to the questions posed above we first compared the basic demographics of those engaging in online and offline participation in a cross-table to see if there were any obvious differences between them. We then entered these variables into a logistic regression to more systematically compare the demographic factors prompting the offline and online participation in general, and also the specific case of organisational contacting by individuals. Finally, we examined the impact of e-stimuli on online participation in general and online organisational contacting specifically.

Findings

General characteristics

Overall, almost half (49%) of the British population reported being online. This figure matches that from the most recently released Government data on Internet adoption in Britain⁴. Our findings show that although there is variance regarding when people first started to use the technology, the bulk of current users are relatively 'mature' in terms of their Internet age having begun 3-5 years ago.

Started using the Internet:

- in the last few months 5%
- between 6 months and one year 18%
- 1-2 years 25%
- 3-5 years 38%
- six years or more 14%

Most people who go online tend to become heavy users with almost half (48%) spending three or more hours per week online. More intensive use of the net, however, is found in those with a longer experience of being online, with 52% of those who have been online for at least three years being classified as heavy users compared with 34% of those having started to use the Internet in the last year.

Political characteristics of the Internet audience

If we examine the incidence of offline political activities among respondents we find that the proportion that reported voting in the General Election of 2001 is precisely equal to the actual turnout at the 2001 General Election - 59.4 %. Engagement in more active forms of political behaviour such as discussing politics with friends is slightly less common (41%) and contacting an elected official the third most common activity (14%). Confirming previous studies, Internet users are found to be more politically active than non-users, especially in terms of the extent to which they engage in political discussion (+22%), and contacting of political figures (+8%).

Given that just over half of our sample did not use the Internet, the numbers engaging in online political activities were far more limited. However, within the population of users, 17% or 162 respondents reported engaging in any one of the behaviours that were specified. The most common forms of activity are also the most passive, with most people having either looked for political information or visited an organisations website. More active types of engagement are also quite popular with about a quarter of those taking part in online politics doing so through signing an online petition or sending an email to a politician.

- Looked for political information in general 8 %
- Visited the site of any political organisation 5 %
- Signed an online petition 4 %
- Sent an e-mail to an elected politician 4 %
- Sent an e-mail postcard / newspaper article to a friend, colleague 4 %
- Sent an e-mail to a public service 3 %
- Signed-up for e-news bulletin 3 %

⁴ For instance the authoritative OFTEL Residential survey of Internet use, see the April, 29 2002 release <http://www.oftel.co.uk/publications/research/2002/q8intr0402.htm>. See also the July 2002 report from National Statistics, found at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/intacc0702.pdf>.

Notably people tended to engage in online politics in a non-cumulative manner, engaging in one particular activity rather than a series. When pressed as to why they did not get involved in politics online, the main reason is simply a lack of interest in the subject (44 %) while a further one in six respondents say that they get enough politics offline. Not all of the reluctance stems from boredom with or a surfeit of politics in general, however, with one in ten users advancing the belief that politics is a face-to-face activity for which the Net provides no substitute.

Links between online and offline political activity

In table1 below we compare the basic demographics of those who reported engaging in any of the forms of online politics and those reporting any offline political activity (including voting). As it can be seen offline politics is a more inclusive form of participation, Those engaging in offline or more traditional forms of politics such as voting, discussing politics, attending a rally or canvassing for a party are much more representative of the general population. Online participants are far more likely to be male, highly educated and of high socioeconomic status.

Table 1 about here

Thus, it does seem from first glance that not only is normalisation taking hold, but that a reinforcement of existing inequalities in participation is taking place. Rather than widening the participation base, cyberspace actually seems to be shrinking it. However, these difference are of course largely explained by the digital divide in Internet access that is still in evidence in the UK. As the table also shows, internet users in general are more likely to be male, high TEA and AB or C1 social class. However, a more positive story also clearly emerges from the table with regard to younger citizens and students. Young people's rates of participation online far outstrip their inclination to engage in more traditional forms of politics. While only 10% of those aged 15-24 years of age have engaged in any form of offline political activity, three times that proportion have done something political on the Internet. Even more significant perhaps (although not reported in the table) is the finding that there is a small subset of people (n=25) who engage only in online politics, eschewing entirely the offline version. Although few in number, further analysis of these individuals reveals that tend to come from younger age groups and are of lower social class, with a 43% of them classified of DE status. Also, they are more likely to be recent recruits to the Internet.

Online political stimuli and reactions

Before moving to a more systematic regression analysis of offline and online participation, we also need to profile some of the basic findings regarding the specific case of online contacting. As well as asking respondents about whether they had engaged in specific types of political activities we also asked about contact with a range of organisations that included political parties, charities and mainstream news services such as the BBC or newspapers. Almost one third of online users report having visited one of these organisations' websites' or contacted them via e-mail with news services proving by far the most popular destination.

Table 2 about here

Going the other way we also asked respondents about whether they had received any political messages from these organisations during their time online. Only about one in ten Internet users report receiving any such political stimuli. The items that are received tend to be subscription-based items such as political e-news (8%) with requests for financial donations and e-postcards (5%) being the next most common. Further, given that those receiving these items are generally subject to at least two such stimuli there is also evidence that the use of targeted messaging is remaining concentrated in a small pool of users, with no observable ‘ripple’ effect to the wider population.

Regression Analysis

Having gathered these basic descriptives about the population engaging in online and offline politics and the incidence of organisational contact among Internet users we then proceeded to analyse the relationships between these variables more systematically to establish a clearer idea of the causal relationships that exist. In table 3 we report those results.

Table 3 about here

In this table we present the results from eight logistic regression models of various types of political participation. The first four columns present the results for four basic types of political activity – voting, discussing politics, contacting and involvement in a political organisation – as predicted by our basic demographic characteristics. The last four columns present the results for engagement in general online participation (ONPA) and more specifically for contacting an organisation (Contact). Each of these models is tested with demographic variables alone as predictors (SS model) and then also with a range of offline political activity variables as well as whether or not the individual received any e-stimuli, and length of internet use.

What these results reveal is that traditional offline politics, particularly more activist forms such as discussing politics and contacting politicians is more likely to be done by males, those who are older, and those of higher socioeconomic class and education. Online participation in general does follow a similar pattern in terms of gender bias, however, it is far less influenced by class and education and in fact it is younger people that are more likely to engage in it. A similar picture emerges regarding online contacting of organisations although higher social status does play a stronger role here. When pre-existing levels of political interest and engagement offline are added to the picture in the complete models it is clear they do provide a significant amount of explanatory power for both online participation in general and organisational contacting – a finding that is supportive of the normalisation thesis. Those who discuss politics offline and those who are engaged in organisational activities respectively display a 346% and a 431% increase in the odds to contact political organisations online, regardless of their social condition. However, it is also clear that even when taking these factors into account there remains an important role for online stimuli such as receiving an e-mail news bulletin or election related material.⁵ Furthermore, length of internet use is positively related to engagement in online activities. In other words, the longer one uses the Net, the more she is likely to engage in online political activities.

⁵ Of the e-stimuli here considered, only receiving an e-mail postcard (not reported in the table) has no relation with online participation of the two different sorts. As well, having voted in the past does not make citizens more likely to engage in online politics.

Conclusions

The discussion above confirms the idea that those who engage in online participation are significantly different from citizens engaging in traditional activities, such as contacting politicians and officials, discussing politics and being involved in organisational activities. While looking at the aggregate picture suggests that net-based participation is largely the playground of well educated and wealthy men, further analysis has revealed that the online world is offering a new space for political engagement among those who might not have been otherwise have been active, particularly the young. In addition, while female citizens are less likely to do more activist politics offline or contact organisations online they are equally likely to engage in online participation in general as men. In addition, while pre-existing interest is clearly an important factor in motivating online political activity, receiving e-stimuli does significantly augment the likelihood that one will engage in organisational contacting and online participation in general

Of course one should be cautious in interpreting these results since it is highly possible that we have uncovered another virtuous circle between contacting organisations online and receiving political material by e-mail. That is, the causal relationship runs in both directions. When a citizen visits the organisation site, he or she might opt to receive an e-news update bulletin, or log in his contact details for navigation profiling. This probability that the two factors are linked is thus very high. In addition, an e-stimulus out of the blue from an organisation via its membership database or from a friend could well lead to a subsequent visit to the site or e-mail contact with the organisation. This is increasingly more frequent, as political e-news and party bulletins tend to embed links in e-mail text, prompting users to visit the organisations' site. Further statistical analysis, therefore, is required to untangle the causal relationship here.⁶

From a methodological perspective this research opens up the field for more in depth investigation of the link between being online and being politically active, beyond naive SES modelling. Our results provide a promising basis for further investigation of the Internet as a tool of political socialisation, as well as the importance of networking and external stimulants to political participation. Following these findings up more fully would require more than the survey tools used here. The first obvious way is that of the panel survey data, where people are followed up to see whether their internet political habits have changed over time and observations. To our knowledge, this has not been tried.⁷ Second, one can go the way of the experiment, or the quasi experiment, as Iyengar (2001) advocates, and Norris and Sanders (2001) have tried at

⁶ A few tests were run in this direction. Removing the e-stimuli from the model does not change any of the reported the coefficients dramatically, nor does it brings to the foreground formerly non-significant predictors. The only noticeable effect is an inflation in the log odds of traditional political activities, mainly organisational involvement This can be interpreted as a further indication of the 'traditional' nature of online contacting, following offline rather than online dynamics. ON the other hand, if we limit the analysis of e-stimuli to those received by friends or others, not the organisation itself, the resulting Exp(B) is a considerable 3.02. In this case, we might postulate the existence of more general 'political network' effects, which includes both the organisation and the circle of friends and acquaintances which gravitate around a political organisation. Yet even this would not entirely dismiss the e-stimulus - effect component of the circle (it shall be remembered that the logistic regressions presented are conducted under *ceteris paribus* conditions).

⁷ While Bimber has done repeated cross-sectionals this is of course not really the same thing

the last election. Finally, one can examine case histories, ex post facto, of activists in ICTs and politics, and attempt to establish the mediating role of political organisation and information received. The latter avenue is to be explored by the authors using data from UK party members during late 2002.

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Table 1

		Sample demographics	Internet users	Engaged in online political activity	Engaged in offline political activity
Gender	<i>Male</i>	49%	56%	66%	49%
	<i>Female</i>	51%	44%	34%	51%
Age	<i>15-24</i>	15%	22%	30%	10%
	<i>25-34</i>	18%	25%	28%	18%
	<i>35-44</i>	19%	23%	23%	20%
	<i>45-54</i>	16%	17%	11%	18%
	<i>55-64</i>	13%	8%	7%	14%
	<i>65 +</i>	19%	4%	1%	20%
Standard class	<i>AB</i>	18%	27%	30%	20%
	<i>C1</i>	29%	37%	43%	32%
	<i>C2</i>	21%	19%	11%	20%
	<i>DE</i>	32%	17%	16%	28%
Yrs in education	<i>Lowest</i>	11%	1%	1%	11%
		49%	36%	21%	47%
		16%	21%	21%	17%
	<i>Highest</i>	17%	28%	37%	20%
	<i>Students</i>	7%	13%	21%	5%
Totals		N = 1972	N = 959	N = 162	N = 1298

Table 2

	% of Internet users
Charity or pressure group	7
Political party	4
Alternative / independent media organization	3
Single issue protest campaign	2
Anti-capitalist group / network	1

Table 3

	Vote	Discuss	Contact	Org activities	Contact SS model	Contact complete	ONPA SS model	ONPA complete
N	N = 1972				N = 922			
Correctly classified	67.4 %	62.7 %	86.3 %	89.5 %	88.0 %	90.4 %	83.2 %	86.3 %
Sex (Female)	1.20	* 0.79	0.81	** 0.63	** .51	* 0.59	** .60	.78
Age (15-25)	*** 0.19	0.68	** 0.23	*** 0.20			* 5.16	* 9.14
Age (26-35)	0.73		0.60				* 4.89	* 6.31
Age (36-45)							* 4.61	* 5.32
Age (46-55)			1.42					3.09
Age (56-65)			** 2.09	1.53			3.209	
Class (AB)	** 1.66	*** 2.24	*** 2.50	* 1.71	** 3.42			
Class (C1)	*** 2.03	*** 1.78	* 1.62		* 2.21			
Class (C2)	1.30	** 1.45	* 1.59				.582	* 0.44
TEA (17-18) ^a		* 1.65						
TEA (19 +)		** 1.91	1.85	** 2.73				
TEA (Student status)				* 3.20				
Constant	1.29	*** 0.45	*** 0.10	*** 0.88	0.00	0.00	* .040	** 0.01
Length of Internet use (five steps)						1.18		** 1.33
Vote (Yes)								
Discuss politics (Yes)						*** 3.46		*** 2.34
Contact (Yes)						1.60		** 2.17
Organisational (0 - 4)						*** 4.31		*** 2.76
Received newspaper article by e-mail (Yes)								* 2.71
Received e-mail petition (Yes)						** 3.60		* 2.66
Received e-news update / information bulletin (Yes)						*** 4.39		
Received election related material by e-mail (Yes)								* 3.13
Received requests of financial donations to worthy causes (Yes)								1.825

Figures reported are Exp(B). Only coefficients significant at $p < 0.20$ are reported (excluding constant).

* = sig. $p < 0.05$, ** = sig. $p < 0.01$, *** = sig. $p < 0.001$

a. TEA refers to educational achievement measured in years of full time education, and includes five categories. The bottom category (13-14 yrs) was set as the reference term; the first intermediate category (15-16 yrs) yielded non significant results and was omitted.