

Online Campaigning

A case study of candidates' web campaigns and their effects in The Labour Party's
Deputy Leadership Election of 2007

06/05/2008

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Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	10
Results	15
Conclusion	37
Bibliography	39

Abstract

The use and impact of the internet with regards to political elections has been a topic of academic debate since the technology's conception. This research seeks to contribute to the emerging literature on two key facets of online campaigns. Firstly, it attempts to determine and use a methodology for evaluating candidates' online campaigns. Secondly it seeks to establish whether, in elections, there is a causal connection between online strategies and votes gained.

The Labour Party Deputy Leadership election, which concluded in June 2007, is used as a case study for the investigation. Candidates' online strategies are empirically analysed, compared and evaluated. Subsequently survey data is used to assess whether or not the online campaigns had an effect on the overall result.

John Cruddas was found to have conducted the best online campaign; this supports theory that suggests that less well-known, 'minority' candidates are more likely to place more emphasis on their online campaign than 'major' or traditionally successful candidates. This research also found that whilst e-campaigns do have an effect on voter preferences, there is no evidence to suggest that a strong online campaign can mobilize support without the contribution of offline efforts.

Introduction

Every election in the UK since as early as 1997 has been heralded as ‘the first e-election’¹. Such predictions have, broadly, thus far have been premature. However, as more of the population become able to access the internet and levels of online media consumption increase, the impact and effect of the worldwide web on politics and elections will continue to become more important. There is a burgeoning amount of literature that investigates consequences of the internet on various aspects of politics in the UK, however, relatively little is written about the strategies and effects of online campaigns in elections. It is this area of research that this article seeks to contribute.

One of the most important contributions to the literature surrounding this research is the book ‘Web Campaigning: Acting with Technology’ by Foot and Schneider. The central aim of the title was to investigate the ways in which candidates’ electoral campaigns, based in the United States of America, used different online strategies and the effectiveness of these techniques and approaches.

Foot and Schneider believe there to be four key areas for analysis of web campaigning effectiveness: Informing, involving, connecting and mobilizing². Whilst there are techniques that are common to all four areas, each one has a distinct aim and effect which needs to be managed.

The significance of defining these areas for analysis is that it provides a methodology, which other researchers can use, to quantify how well an online campaign performs in each aspect. The book provides examples of good and bad practice, as well as the opportunities and threats, of each element of the online campaign. In one section of the book Foot and Schneider code different candidates’ websites in the same campaign and compare them as to how well they performed in each respective area.

¹ Bloxham M and Mayer A, Measuring Digital Campaigns, in Painter A and Wardle B (Eds), ‘Viral Politics: The Power of E-campaigning’, Politico's Publishing Ltd, London, 2001, p50

² Foot K and Schneider S, ‘Web Campaigning: Acting with Technology’, MIT Press, 2006, p22

The book is uncompromising in its conviction that web campaigning is one of the most important factors in whether or not a candidate is elected. The authors pay reference to works that claim that the arrival of the internet is ‘politics as usual’ but deride it as ignorant to the facts. Foot and Schneider do not hold that online campaigning has revolutionised the whole democratic process but do insist that it has fundamentally changed the priorities and requirements of a modern campaign. The following quotation sums up neatly how Foot and Schneider believe the importance has changed:

“In just the few years since the turn of the 21st Century, the archetypal campaign webmaster has morphed from the candidate’s nephew... to a key strategic player in the upper hierarchy of the campaign management team.”³

Such statements, however, do little to actually compare the relative importance of online campaigning with other aspects of an election. What this research project seeks to assert is, not only how good an online campaign is but also, at what level of the ‘upper hierarchy’ the campaign webmaster should sit. In other words, whilst the book is very useful to this paper, in the respect of giving a blueprint to quantify and compare candidates’ online campaigns, it does not attempt to investigate their relative weight in the wider campaign.

Stephen Ward and Rachel Gibson in their article ‘Online and one message? Candidate websites in the 2001 General Election’⁴ mapped the existence, pattern and techniques used by parties and candidates in the British 2001 general election. As this article was written substantially earlier and the UK is comparatively far less developed with regards to online campaigning than the USA, Ward and Gibson’s article does not set out as useful a blueprint for enquiry as that of Foot and Schneider.

The article focuses largely on whether websites exist in various parts of the country – largely irrelevant to this research paper – however, there is a small amount devoted to content analysis with emphasis placed on whether there was a concentration on local

³ Ibid., p194

⁴ Ward S and Gibson R, ‘On-line and on message? Candidates websites in the 2001 General Election’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vol. 5, No. 2, May 2003, pp. 188-205

or national issues, use of interactive features and how regularly the site was updated⁵. All of the content analysis methods were dealt with at least equally well by the Foot and Schneider blueprint, except for the variable of how regularly web content was updated. Ward and Gibson highlight this as an important dependent variable in web content therefore it has been built into the methodology used in this research for content analysis.

Ward and Gibson, unlike Foot and Schneider, try to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of online campaigns to the wider campaign but are not particularly rigorous in their attempts, simply stating: “the direct impact of the Internet is difficult to measure”⁶. They conclude that, as over half the population were not online at the time of the election and such small numbers visited campaign sites (less than 2% of overall population⁷), the internet had minimal affect on the outcome of any parliamentary seats. The context of the election used as a case study in this research paper is wildly different to that of the General Election 2001 and therefore such conclusions as to the impact of online campaigning are not of any use.

Wainer, Ward and Gibson, in their research entitled ‘Political Organisations and Online Mobilisation: Different Media – Same Outcomes?’ were more rigorous in their attempts to understand the effects of the internet. They found that the internet was useful for giving information to already politicised and interested groups such as students and journalists, but had little impact on the general population. Parties, trade unions and other political organisations were either ineffectual or hesitant to use the internet as a mobilizing tool; the only exception to this was in reaching a ‘youth’ audience⁸.

The article, written in 2001, highlighted 3 barriers to the internet realising its’ full potential as: audience, organisational and technological barriers. Audience barriers referring to the lack of widespread access outside of the middle class⁹; organisation barriers refer to lack of conviction (and therefore resource) from senior levels of a

⁵ Ibid., p194

⁶ Ibid., p200

⁷ Ibid., p200

⁸ Wainer L, Ward S and Gibson R, Political Organisations and Online Mobilisation: Different Media – Same Outcomes?, University of Salford, 2001, p20

⁹ Ibid., p17

political organisation, a lack of expertise within the organisation or a reluctance to adopt the new technology for fear of losing ‘message control’¹⁰; technological barriers refer to fear of security breaches to their sites and the ability to effectively target an audience due to the ability of users to choose which content they view¹¹.

Some of the barriers, such as web page security and lack of conviction from senior levels of political organisation, have been largely overcome. However, issues such as the demographics of those using the internet (especially as a civic tool) and the reluctance to release a degree of control over message remain as relevant today as they were 7 years ago.

Margolis, Resnick and Levy’s contribution to this field of research was the finding that minority candidates believe that “the internet could help level the playing field”¹² and parity with more established candidates could be achieved if they increased their efforts online. As the internet is a relatively cheap and easily accessible media to utilise, lesser-known candidates felt they could “challenge the dominance of established political-interest groups”¹³. This evidence was drawn from interviews with minority party officials and candidates. The research concluded that despite the increased efforts online, minority parties and candidates were not able to reach parity – either online or in the polls – with more established candidates.

Interactivity is hailed by the likes of Abramson (et al)¹⁴ as the single most important way in which the internet can have an impact on elections. Interactivity online has become encompassed by the web 2.0 phenomenon (which refers to websites such as MySpace.com, Facebook.com and YouTube.com). In ‘Person-to-Person-Person: Harnessing the political power of social networks and user-generated content’¹⁵ Julie Barko Germany compiles a variety of works on effects of web 2.0 and social

¹⁰ Ibid., p18

¹¹ Ibid., p19

¹² Margolis M, Resnick D, Levy J, Major parties dominate, minor parties struggle: US elections and the internet, in Gibson R, Nixon P and Ward S (Eds), *Political Parties and the Internet*, Routledge, London, 2003, p 58

¹³ Ibid., p53

¹⁴ Abramson J, Aterton C and Orren G, *The Electronic Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988

¹⁵ Barko Germany J (Ed), ‘Person-to-Person-to-Person: Harnessing the Political Power of Social Networks and User-Generated Content’, Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet (IPDI). <http://www.ipdi.org/uploadedfiles/PtPtPCcompositeNov07.pdf>

networking sites on online political campaigns. The compilation of essays focuses heavily on the utility of such websites to appeal to youth and student demographics. As well as this, taken as a whole, the article gives an outline as to what features create a successful campaign using web 2.0 sites.

The core themes that run throughout the essays are that simply creating profiles on social networking sites (although absolutely essential in a modern campaign) is not enough. Regularly updates, frequent interaction with the online community, personalisation and convergence with the offline campaign are vital. Whilst the aims behind using web 2.0 remain identical to that of the rest of the campaign “higher turnout, volunteer and donation rates”¹⁶ the format means that the likelihood of being successful is greatly increased as “people feel closer to you, and they become less susceptible to being seduced by other messages”¹⁷.

Whilst all the research outlined above relates to the field within which this article sits, there exists little recent¹⁸ research which seeks explicitly to understand both the online behaviours and preferences of the electorate as well as the e-strategies of candidates campaigning for election in the UK. This research will carry out such an investigation, using an appropriate case study.

The election chosen as a case study for this investigation is the election of the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party in 2007. This election was suitable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was an election with a national constituency, therefore local level factors effecting preferences could be broadly ruled out. Secondly, as the number of people eligible to vote – only Labour Party members – is currently relatively few, surveying a representative opinion of the electorate would be made significantly easier. Thirdly, there was no significant ideological schism between the candidates (though there was a degree of policy division between candidates¹⁹, which is discussed later) which meant that the ability of candidates to deliver their message effectively was all the more important as there existed no assumed philosophical

¹⁶Ibid., p14

¹⁷ Ibid., p14

¹⁸ Such is the speed of innovation with regards to the internet, it is justifiable to refer to ‘recent’ as within the last 2 years.

¹⁹ Denham A and Dorey P, ‘Just the Ticket? The Labour Party’s Deputy Leadership Election of 2007’, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No.4, 2007, p527

loyalties. Finally, as all the candidates had significant web presences, the election provided fruitful grounds for comparative research of the e-campaigns.

The specific research questions which this article will seek to answer are, in the election of the Labour Party Deputy Leader in 2007:

1. Which candidate conducted the best online campaign?
2. Did candidates' online campaigns have an impact on their share of the vote?

The methodology used to answer these questions will first be outlined. This will be followed by the results and a discussion of the findings. Finally, in the conclusion to this article there will be a summary as to the contribution and success of the project, including ideas for further research.

Methodology

Measuring candidates' online campaigns

The basis of my methodology is that outlined by Foot and Schneider, but includes elements of that employed by the likes of Gibson and Slater.

Firstly I identified the web sphere which I would use as the basis for my analysis. A web sphere refers to:

“A set of dynamically defined digital resources spanning multiple websites deemed relevant or related to a central event, concept or theme.”²⁰

In this case, the web sphere was focused around the Deputy Leadership election of the Labour Party. Because of the nature of elections and campaigns, web spheres are constantly changing, be that because of one finding new websites that relate to the web sphere or because of the constant updating of content on websites already known about within the web sphere. A key decision that I had to make was whether to define a universe of websites that I would use for analysis, or allow for websites to be included at any time throughout the election²¹.

I decided to give the web sphere fixed boundaries, that is to say, define at that start of the research project which websites I would analyse and which I would ignore and keep this stable throughout the investigation. The alternative was to use a dynamic process of analysis where the web sites which I would include in my analysis would change over the course of the election.

The benefits of having a flexible web sphere are clear. It would enable sites that emerge throughout the campaign to be included in the analysis; if there were a scandal or surge in activity in a part of the web sphere that could not have been foreseen, it would be possible to include it; the method also reflects more closely how web users act whilst online, they don't simply go back to the same site over and again.

²⁰ Op Cit., Foot K and Schneider S, p20

²¹ Ibid., p32

However, the difficulties that emerge out of replicating the findings of the research that uses such an unstructured technique, the extra time that would be required to constantly search for fresh content and the desire to be able compare candidates' online presence as fairly as possible meant that I settled on a fixed boundary web sphere.

When researching the web sphere I considered including sites such as the politics section of BBC online (and other news sites), LabourHome.co.uk, Facebook and YouTube.com, amongst others. Such sites had a wealth of information on candidates, however, the overwhelming majority of it was user or journalist generated content. Whilst a successful online campaign would seek to encourage the maximisation of both²², to include such sites and content would significantly broaden the scope of the research and make comparing the candidates ('official') online campaign less possible. Therefore, the only sites considered in the web sphere were the official candidate websites. By limiting the web sphere to just websites where candidates had (as far is possible) control over their message, it made it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of techniques used.

Having decided on what sites would be included in the research, it was important to come up with a method for evaluating these web sites. There are two key pieces of research that shaped the methodology used for this investigation. The first of which is 'Web Campaigning' by Foot and Schneider.

Foot and Schneider believe there to be four key areas for analysis of web campaigning effectiveness: Informing, involving, connecting and mobilizing²³. Whilst there are techniques that are common to all four areas, each one has a distinct aim and affect which needs to be managed.

Informing relates simply to the creation of "online structures to present information to site visitors"²⁴; this could be through a candidate's biographical information or policy platform. 'Involving' refers to "provision of online structures facilitating interaction

²² Indeed, as will be seen below, one of the criterion measured on campaign websites were how well candidates facilitated this process.

²³ Op Cit., Foot K and Schneider S, p22

²⁴ Ibid., p46

between site visitors and the campaign organisation”²⁵; examples of this in action are sited as enabling visitors to subscribe to an email list, donate to a campaign or volunteer help. The aim of ‘connecting’ is to “facilitate site visitor’s interaction with other political actors”²⁶; this could be through a candidate’s statements of affiliation with organisations or provision of links to other related websites. ‘Mobilizing’ is defined as the use of the web to “persuade and equip campaign supporters to promote the candidate to others, both online and offline”²⁷; examples of mobilizing in action is the provision of model letters for visitors to send to media editors.

Stephen Ward and Rachel Gibson’s article ‘Online and one message? Candidate websites in the 2001 General Election’²⁸ does not set out as useful a blueprint for enquiry as that of Foot and Schneider. They do, however, emphasize the importance of updating websites. In order for the four functions advocated above to be effective, there is undoubtedly a need for fresh content. While this is implicit in the work of Foot and Schneider’s methodology, they do not explicitly measure it.

Having synthesised the methods used by both Foot and Schneider and Ward and Gibson, the areas for analysis of candidates’ official websites are the extent to which the websites *inform*, *involve*, *connect*, and *mobilize* and the regularity with which they are *updated*.

For each aspect under analysis (except for ‘updating’, which is explained below), I decided on four web structures – defined as “a set of features...that provides users opportunities to associate and to act”²⁹ – that would constitute fulfilling the objective. Each web structure was worth 25% (of an overall score out of 100). For example, when evaluating ‘informing’ I was looking for the provision of the following web structures: candidate biography, issue positions, campaign news and speeches or articles by the candidate. A candidate that included all of the aforementioned web structures would score 100%.

²⁵ Ibid., p70

²⁶ Ibid., p103

²⁷ Ibid., p131

²⁸ Op Cit., Ward S and Gibson R

²⁹ Op Cit., Foot and Schneider, p18

For measuring how well candidates updated their websites, my methodology is based on that used by Cunha, Martin, Newell and Ramiro in their comparison of Southern European political parties' use of the internet³⁰. In measuring how well a candidate kept their website updated, for every new feature on the homepage of their website – for example a fresh news story, new endorsement, video upload – one point was awarded. The candidates' websites were checked weekly. I recorded the number of points candidates' scored each week, worked out the average number of updates over the campaign which then related to a percentage score. Below is a table explaining how the average number of updates per week will relate to an overall percentage:

Average Number of updates per week	Percentage score
Below 3	0%
3 – 5.9	25%
6 – 8.9	50%
9 – 11.9	75%
12+	100%

Once candidates websites had been evaluated for how well they informed, involved, connected, mobilized and updated it was possible to decide empirically which candidate had the best online campaign.

Measuring the effect of online campaigns

In order to measure the effectiveness of the campaign I conducted a survey of Labour Party members³¹. There were 12 questions, including demographics. I used the

³⁰ Cunha C, Martin I, Newell J and Ramiro L, Southern European Parties and Party Systems and the new ICT's, in Gibson R, Nixon P and Ward S (Eds), Political Parties and the Internet, Routledge, London, 2003, p89

³¹ One of the questions in the survey required respondents to tick a 'yes / no' box as to whether or not they were a member. Whilst this is not a rigorous check of party membership it was the only method available to me

online survey software surveymonkey.com to gather respondents and publicised it using LabourHome.co.uk, Facebook.com and various political message boards and blogs. Respondents could only complete the survey once from a given computer and all respondents were anonymous.

Question 6 was the most explicit in ascertaining the salience of online campaigns, asking: 'Has a candidate's e-campaign had an impact, positively or negatively, on the way you will vote in the Labour Party Deputy Leadership election'. However, other questions tried to assess their possible impact, for example 'what media or format do you get most information about candidates?', as well as two questions designed to gauge whether there was a correspondence between respondents' favourite online campaign and the candidate which they intended to vote for.

To view the survey in full, copy the following link into a web browser:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=x6hxZby3pcM_2be5jhBKyuOw_3d_3d

Results

Measuring candidates' online campaigns

The empirical evaluation of how conclusively candidates' campaign websites performed at informing, involving, connecting, mobilizing and updating will be published in separate sections. The table of results in each section will be followed by a brief explanation of the importance of the e-campaign technique and subsequently detailing in what different ways, and possible reasons why, candidates did or did not fulfil the relevant criterion. As well as this, the benefits, pitfalls and possibilities for the future of a given technique will be examined.

Informing

	Benn	Blears	Cruddas	Hain	Harman	Johnson
Candidate Biography	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issue Positions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Campaign News	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Candidate Speeches / Articles	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Total Informing	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The importance of informing cannot be understated, Foot and Schneider, believe that informing is “foundational to and part of all other web practices”³². Survey data collected from web producers of candidate websites in congressional elections in the USA in 2002 listed “informing web site visitors, increasing public awareness of issues

³² Op Cit., Foot and Schneider, p47

and persuading undecided voters” as the top 3 reasons to for a candidate website, all of which can be classified as ‘informing’.

As further evidence for the importance of informing, according to the survey conducted for this research, a candidate’s policy platform (undoubtedly the practice of informing) was rated as the most important feature of a candidate’s online material³³.

Considering the importance of informing as a web practice in election campaigns, it is unsurprising that every candidate scored top marks in this category. As can be seen from the above table, every candidate provided a biography, issue position, campaign news, speeches and articles.

That having been said, candidates didn’t use the possibilities of the web to inform in any particularly new or innovate ways. Video was imbedded in the Cruddas, Blears Hain and Johnson websites but Harman and Benn failed to use even this most basic form of new media. No candidates offered the opportunity to download ‘podcasts’, screensavers, mobile phone wallpapers or take part in an interactive game – all common techniques used in online advertising campaigns to impart information surrounding a brand.

A further example – specific to a political campaign - of how candidates might have used technology to set themselves apart with regards to informing can be found the concept of ‘e-buttal’³⁴. E-buttal refers to candidates’ campaign teams, whilst live television debates such as that featured on Newsnight and Question Time are in progress, posting up to the minute comment and rebuttal on candidates’ websites. Candidates could then refer viewers to the website during debate and have an advantage over their opposition. This convergence of offline and online media is a powerful tool to inform voters who are already engaged in the election over and above traditional mechanisms.

³³ 82 Labour Party members out of the 229 surveyed (35.8%) placed ‘Policy Platform’ as a first preference – out of a possible 7 - in rating their ‘most important aspect to a candidate’s online campaign’

³⁴ Op Cit., Foot and Schneider, p53

Another aspect of informing which has become of increasing significance since the election (and indeed has led to the resignation of Hain from the front bench and placed Harman's position under question), is that of campaign finance and sponsorship. Whilst I did not include it as a factor to compare candidates' sites, it is worth mentioning that not one candidate provided any information as to their financial backers. Such information will undoubtedly become more important in future elections and as such it is certainly a criterion of informing that I would test for in any future research on this topic.

Involving

	Benn	Blears	Cruddas	Hain	Harman	Johnson
Donate to Campaign	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Opportunity to Comment / Discussion Forum	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Ability to Volunteer / Campaign Calendar	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Possibility of receiving emails	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Total Involving	75%	100%	100%	25%	75%	100%

There are two aspects to involving under analysis in the above table – (i) interactivity and (ii) offering further involvement in the campaign – and whilst the two are obviously linked, as interactivity is such a huge aspect to online activity I will deal with it separately.

Interactivity is constantly sited as the aspect of the internet that will revolutionise and reinvigorate politics; the vision is that citizens and party members will be able to publicly and easily debate the issues and policies of the day with those holding the power.³⁵ The following quotation written on Hazel Blears' Facebook 'Profile Wall' during the campaign sums up the possibilities perfectly:

“Hallo Mrs Blears,

Just would like to say it interests for a Hong Kong student like me to see how British politicians are trying to get close to the people. Using Facebook is especially a good idea. Some politicians in Hong Kong have blogs but there always seems to be an air of elitism about them.

Good luck with your campaign! ☺”³⁶

Given the obvious electoral opportunities provided by such interactivity, one might reasonably expect that candidates would offer visitors the opportunity to post questions and discuss policy on their websites. This was not the case in this election. Only three of the candidates, Blears, Cruddas and Johnson allowed any form of comment on their material; even in the cases of those that did allow comments, it was only in the form of 'comment on my blog', which, as the above quotation illustrates falls far short of the mark. Not a single candidate campaign site hosted a discussion forum or message board.

This is, however, unsurprising in many respects. Whilst the benefits of having a dialogue with supporters and potential supporters are tempting, there is a constant concern in electoral campaigns of losing 'message control'. By allowing visitors to comment it leaves candidates open to attack. Dedicating time of a member of one's campaign team to rebutting or deleting comments which are contradictory, offensive or damaging from message boards is a heavy cost. On a similar but different note, if

³⁵ Wring D and Horrocks I, *Virtual Hype? The Transformation of Political Parties?*, in Axford B and Huggins R (Eds), *New Media and Politics*, Sage, London, 2001, p191

³⁶ Lui L, <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=721220340>, 08:11, 08/06/2007

visitors are frequently asking questions and posting discussion topics and the candidate or campaign team do not have the time or resource to respond, one could lose support too.

However, with the meteoric rise in social networking sites it is now almost impossible to have a complete online campaign without having to relinquish a degree of control in an area of the electoral web sphere. Every candidate had a ‘Facebook Group’ dedicated to their campaign, which enabled members of the site to comment and contribute.³⁷ However, as Facebook is not within my defined web sphere further comment must be curtailed.

For all candidates, the benefits of having discussion, debate and interaction with the electorate on their own campaign website were not big enough to risk losing control of one’s campaign message or to dedicate time and resource to managing it. It will be interesting to see if this remains the case in future elections.

Moving on to candidates’ offering an invitation of further involvement in the campaign, recruiting advocates and trying to grow one’s activist base is a well known tactic in political elections. All candidates, except for Hain who performed particularly poorly in this aspect of his online campaign, offered opportunities to join in the campaign, donate and be part of an email list. Hazel Blears and John Cruddas took great pride in their support base listing ‘75 young members’ and ‘100 activists’ respectively that supported their campaign.

Connecting

	Benn	Blears	Cruddas	Hain	Harman	Johnson
Endorsements	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Issue Position Comparison /	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

³⁷ Facebook, particularly at the time of this election, was dominated by the 18-24 demographic (according to Facebook over 1/3 of users were in the 18-24 demographic in June 2007). Using Facebook as the only method of online interaction with the Labour Party membership is not therefore a justifiable reason for not including interactive features on campaign websites.

Linking to competitors						
Link to Civic and Advocacy Sites	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Links to Press Sites	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Total Connecting	25%	25%	50%	50%	50%	50%

The main aim behind the technique of connecting is to build cognitive bridges between the candidate and other political actors or institutions³⁸. If a candidate is associated with other actors it helps to give a more rounded picture of a candidate's identity (political or otherwise). So, for example, if a candidate has a link to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a quote from Tony Benn and picture of the candidate with the Bolton Wanderers Football Club the candidate is trying to build a particular profile that they believe will be salient (or perhaps, simply accurate).

Another aspect of connecting is placing one's campaign in the context of other candidates' campaigns and the wider political commentary on the election as a whole. Comparing one's stance on a particular policy with that of other candidate – and providing a link to that candidate's issue position – one can create an indisputable point of difference and, hopefully, advantage. Or, if an influential journalist has written or broadcasted favourably about one's candidature, providing the link to the positive independent coverage can be immensely powerful.

Essentially, if a candidate is successful in connecting it can give the impression of the existence of a broad community of support³⁹, a more detailed picture of the candidate's interests and influences and how they are different (and hopefully better) than other candidates in the field.

³⁸ Ibid., p103

³⁹ Ibid., p122

Candidates in this election did not connect particularly effectively, with no candidate fulfilling more than two criteria. The main area on which candidates fell short was comparison of issue positions and linking to other candidates' sites; indeed only Hazel Blears provided links to other candidates' websites and even then did not give any indication of differences on issues.

One might try and explain this by claiming that all the candidates, except Cruddas, had been members of the Cabinet therefore differences on policy were virtually impossible and even Cruddas had strong ties to the Blair administration (having worked in 10 Downing street from 1997 – 2001). Any attempt to distance oneself from Blair's legacy or present them as heavily divergent on policy would have been treated with suspicion.

Whilst there is a degree of merit to this argument, it does fall short of the mark. As Denham and Dorey point out, whilst there was "broad agreement"⁴⁰ over many matters, there also existed "clear disagreement over a few key policy issues"⁴¹ between the candidates.

Candidates' positions on Iraq each had their own flavour from unapologetic (Johnson), accepting of mistakes (Blears, Benn, Hain) and calling for acknowledgment of a serious error or apologising (Harman and Cruddas respectively).⁴² On education policy, there was also some discrepancy with Blears and Johnson cheerleading the 'city academies' programme, whilst Hain, Benn and Cruddas expressed clear reservations⁴³ and Harman "sought to sidestep the issue by insisting that 'standards are more important than structures'"⁴⁴. There was also consistent debate over the nature of the position of the Labour Party Deputy Leader. There was disagreement over whether it should be a full time party post, whether they should sit in the Cabinet and indeed whether the eventual winner should also entail a ministerial department.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Op Cit., Denham A and Dorey P, p529

⁴¹ Ibid., p529

⁴² Ibid., p529

⁴³ Ibid., p530

⁴⁴ Ibid., p530

⁴⁵ Ibid., p531

The fact that these divisions existed but no candidate drew explicit attention to them via their web campaigns is intriguing. It could have been a strategic decision to not highlight a difference in policy outlook, with a preference to making the campaign based more on personality. If this was the case, however, one would expect the candidates to go to great lengths to express their personality in their online campaigns through connecting to other organisations; however, again, this was something that no candidate did effectively (only Hain provided links to other advocacy sites but that was only a list of trade union urls).

Whilst candidates did ‘connect’, using endorsements from other political actors (such as MP’s and Trade Unions) and the majority linked to related press articles, the websites did not take advantage of the possibility of instant comparison and opportunity to build one’s image using links. Again, the e-campaigns only used the most basic and obvious tools to connect and did not capitalise on the potential offered.

Mobilizing

	Benn	Blears	Cruddas	Hain	Harman	Johnson
Support for sending letters to editors / friends	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Listing of links to other sites / blogs relating to the election	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Availability of online material for offline distribution	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Downloadable	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

/ replicable online paraphernalia						
Total Mobilization	25%	50%	75%	0%	50%	25%

Mobilizing refers to using the web to persuade and equip campaign supporters to promote one’s candidacy to other voters and political actors, both online and offline.⁴⁶ The aim is to garner both advocates who will support you online and those who will download materials online for offline distribution. Recruiting online advocates requires different structures to that of getting someone to support one’s candidature offline, therefore I will deal with them separately.

Recruiting, online, someone who will promote one’s candidacy offline, in for example a Constituency Labour Party or writing to a local paper, can be extremely helpful in gaining votes.

A central campaign will struggle to get coverage in a local media, even if there is a high number of Labour Party members in the area intended for broadcasting or distribution. However, having a local activist contacting their local media gives journalists an angle for coverage; therefore providing model letters or press releases for supporters to use, facilitates this process.

As well as this, having members in a Constituency Labour Party contacting friends of theirs in the Party with direct, personalised mail is much more likely to engender support than a central campaign sending broad, unspecific campaign messages which may bare no relation to local issues. It is for that reason the criteria of ‘support for sending letters to editors / friends’ and ‘availability of online material for offline distribution’ were included in the analysis.

Cruddas’ campaign site was highly effective in gathering this sort of offline support. It provided a letter which Cruddas’ had written and forwarded to his potential

⁴⁶ Op Cit., Foot and Schneider, p131

supporters at the beginning of the campaign with statements about his vision for the future of the party. The site encouraged supporters to forward this letter to fellow members and gather signatories. As well as this, along with Benn and Harman, he provided flyers and leaflets which supporters could print off and disseminate at branch meetings and campaign days. Johnson and Hain provided nothing which supporters could use to pass on to potential supporters, and whilst Blears created a campaign shop where one could purchase paraphernalia⁴⁷ nothing was provided free for distribution.

Online advocates, according to the Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet, are “internet-oriented and politically energized”⁴⁸ and help campaigns as:

“...they support their candidates by visiting their Web sites, joining Internet discussion groups, reading political Web logs and making political contributions over the Internet.”⁴⁹

Considering the size of the internet, having as many advocates as possible fighting one’s campaign in areas of the web sphere, perhaps unknown to the campaign team, is invaluable. Providing a list of links which are relevant to the election facilitates site visitors who are initially supporters to become advocates. Similarly, many online advocates will have their own blogs and websites; providing downloadable or replicable material which supporters can use to advertise a campaign is vital to covering as much as the web sphere as possible.

Benn’s campaign explicitly recognises the importance of having online advocates. It states clearly in the ‘Campaign Centre’ section of the website:

“This is the first Labour Deputy Leadership Campaign in which the internet will be crucial. If you see anything on the web – from ideas about our future to problems that

⁴⁷ For example, ‘Go Nuts for Hazel’ T-shirts and coffee mugs.

⁴⁸ Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet, Political Influentials Online in the 2004 Presidential Campaign, Washington DC, The George Washington University, 2004, p6

⁴⁹ Ibid., p6

need Labour politics to solve them – that you think Hilary ought to take a look at, please use the [WebWatch](#) page to report it”⁵⁰

Despite the Benn campaign’s obvious desire for online advocates, they did nothing with their campaign site to facilitate their creation. There were no links to prominent blogs, no material which advocates could easily copy and embed into their own website or blog and no mechanism for inviting friends to view the website (the same can be said of Hain’s campaign site). Johnson, Cruddas and Harman did provide some html which supporters could include in their own website, but they didn’t go any further. Whilst Blears hesitantly embraced mobilizing activists online; as well as making available html to use, the site provided links to prominent Labour bloggers which supporters could follow. However, the campaign didn’t encourage visitors to then contribute and advocate on behalf of the campaign.

Candidates’ campaign sites were, apart from Cruddas, fairly weak at mobilizing supporters. It is unsurprising that Cruddas placed such a strong emphasis on advocacy, as the central message and strategy of his campaign was one of ‘grass roots’ and ‘activism’.

It may also have been a strategic decision of the other candidates to deliberately not try to enlist too many advocates; whilst a good advocate might win you a few votes, having the local CLP loon advocating for you may damage you a great deal more. Again the issue of concern over ‘message control’ arises. Many campaign managers would be reluctant to allow an unknown supporter to fire off press releases to local media, give interviews and tailor their candidate’s messages.

With regards to online advocacy, given the fact that “Google now estimates that the average blog is read by one person”⁵¹ and a small number of blogs get the majority of hits, spending time and energy designing html for supporters to use on their sites with almost zero traffic would be pointless. A justifiable and possibly more effective

⁵⁰ www.benn4deputy.org

⁵¹ Nagourney A, The Gov hears from Google, New York Times Political Blog, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2006/11/30/the-govs-hear-from-google/>

strategy could be for a small number of informed activists on the official campaign team to monitor and contribute to heavy traffic blogs.

However, one could conclude that the lack of engagement with party members and activists from the ‘Cabinet candidates’ in the e-campaigns is symptomatic of a wider problem of disengagement of the Labour government with the membership of the party. If candidates can’t trust and don’t see the value in garnering activists for their own election, it is not a positive sign that they would trust or be interested in anything the wider membership has to say about anything.

Updating

Candidate	Average number of homepage updates per week	Percentage score ⁵²
Benn	1.75	0%
Blears	5	25%
Cruddas	8.75	50%
Hain	2.75	0%
Harman	6.75	50%
Johnson	3	25%

Updating one’s campaign homepage regularly is fundamental to a successful online strategy. Part of a campaign teams aims will be to constantly drive traffic to their candidate’s website, keeping it constantly updated is one way to encourage people to return. If a candidate’s website is stale, has no fresh content or out of date irrelevant messages it shows a lack of energy and interest from the candidate. Conducting a successful political campaign means responding and reacting to the constantly changing electoral landscape. As a website can be updated almost instantly it enables a candidate to do this easily, cheaply and effectively. As evidence as to the

⁵² See methodology section as to how a candidate’s percentage score was calculated.

importance of updating, Labour Party members rated it as the second most important aspect of an online campaign⁵³.

Candidates performed particularly badly in this respect of the election, with half the candidates putting 3 or less new pieces of information on their homepage per week. It is a challenge for the campaign to come up with new and innovative content to post on the website; however, it is no different to coming up with novel ways of engaging with an electorate offline. One reason that many websites allow users to post content themselves is that those hosting the websites do not need to be completely responsible for driving interest and writing information.

The best online campaign:

Technique Measured	Benn	Blears	Cruddas	Hain	Harman	Johnson
Informing	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Involving	75%	100%	100%	25%	75%	100%
Connecting	25%	25%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Mobilizing	25%	50%	75%	0%	50%	25%
Updating	0%	25%	50%	0%	50%	25%
Average	45%	60%	75%	35%	65%	60%
Position overall	5 th	3 rd	1 st	6 th	2 nd	3 rd

In order to ascertain which candidate completed the best online campaign, a total average of all the aspects of a candidate’s website under analysis – informing, involving, connecting, mobilizing and updating – was calculated. As can be seen above, Cruddas’ campaign website was the best. It is now important to explore possible reasons for why the Cruddas campaign team might have put more emphasis on the online aspect of the campaign than the other candidates and what that says about the nature of online campaigning.

⁵³ 73 from 229 (31.9%) Labour Party members rated ‘updated regularly’ as first preference – out of a possible 7 - in rating their ‘most important aspect to a candidate’s online campaign’

Margolis, Resnick and Levy conducted research that surveyed party officials of a wide range of political parties at both a regional and state level in the USA in order to find out whether “the internet could help level the electoral playing field”⁵⁴. The hypothesis was that smaller parties and lesser known candidates would put more time and energy into online campaigns than that of larger, better known candidates. The reason that the researchers believed that this would be the case was that:

“The relative low cost of creating a website meant that minor political movements could establish a platform for their views more easily than in the mainstream media and could reach a considerably larger audience”⁵⁵

The results found that “minor candidates”⁵⁶ rated online activity as significantly more important than “major candidates”⁵⁷. Cruddas was undoubtedly the most minor candidate in this election. The fact that Cruddas’ campaign updated his site the most number of times throughout the campaign as well as included the most number of features adds to the evidence that more minor candidates are more likely to attempt to reap the most benefits out of the internet.

Measuring the effect of candidates’ online campaigns

Measuring and proving the effect of an online campaign on the share of votes received by a given candidate is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to do with any degree of accuracy. This is because of the sheer number of variables that relate to how a person might vote in an election. Even if only one of the candidates had an online campaign and that candidate went on to win the election, it would still be very difficult to prove a causal link. Other variables, amongst many others, might include a particular policy outlook, amount of experience or the candidate’s personal charisma and likeability; all of which are very difficult to control for.

⁵⁴ Op Cit., Margolis M, Resnick D and Levy J, p58

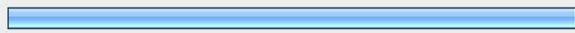
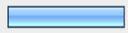
⁵⁵ Ibid., p58

⁵⁶ Ibid., p63

⁵⁷ Ibid., p63

There is by no means a consensus, in the political or commercial sphere, on whether an online campaign has a tangible affect on individuals' preferences. Bimber and Davis “found that citizens viewing of candidates web sites had no impact on their decisions about whether to vote or their vote preference”⁵⁸, whilst Gibson and McAllister assert that “online campaigning can have a positive impact on a candidate’s share of the vote”⁵⁹.

To contribute to this wider literature on the effect of web campaigns and indeed to try and understand whether the online campaigns effected Labour Party members in this election, as explained in the methodology, I conducted a survey which recorded the opinions of 229 Labour Party members. Of these 176 were men and 50 were women⁶⁰; below are tables indicating the age and ideological range of respondents:

11. which age range do you fit in to			
		Response Percent	Response Count
0-17		2.6%	6
18-24		73.4%	168
25-30		14.8%	34
31-40		6.1%	14
41-50		2.2%	5
51-60		0.9%	2
61-		0.0%	0
		<i>answered question</i>	229
		<i>skipped question</i>	0

⁵⁸ Williams C and Gulati G, Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections, American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2007, p10

⁵⁹ Ibid., p10

⁶⁰ 3 respondents preferred not to say

1. It is typical in UK politics to rate your self ideologically on a sliding scale from left to right. If 1 is very left wing and 10 is very right wing, where would you place yourself?

	Response Percent	Response Count
1	3.1%	7
2	9.6%	22
3	38.9%	89
4	34.1%	78
5	7.4%	17
6	3.5%	8
7	0.9%	2
8	1.7%	4
9	0.0%	0
10	0.0%	0
view Other (please specify)	0.9%	2
<i>answered question</i>		229
<i>skipped question</i>		0

As can be seen from the demographic charts above, the significant majority of respondents were slightly left of centre men between the age of 18 and 24. The reason for the young age demographic of respondents can be explained through the methods used for advertising the survey. Links to the survey were sent out over Facebook Groups of Labour Party supporters (1/3 of users of Facebook were aged between 18 to 24 years old in June 2007⁶¹). Left of centre message boards, which are evidently dominated by young people and students, were also used to publicise the poll.

Below are results for questions that try to ascertain how extensively respondents used the internet as an information gathering media format and how much exposure respondents had to candidates' online campaign.

⁶¹ As mentioned earlier, I would have liked to include Facebook in my web sphere of analysis however to have done so would have expanded the scope of the research too significantly.

3. If you have encountered candidates online, which online for a was it? (tick as many boxes as you wish)				
			Response Percent	Response Count
campaign website		78.0%	174	
facebook		80.3%	179	
myspace		9.4%	21	
YouTube		27.8%	62	
I have not come across any candidates campaigns online		5.8%	13	
Other (please specify)		12.1%	27	
			<i>answered question</i>	223
			<i>skipped question</i>	6

5. What media or format do you get most information about candidates? (tick one box)				
			Response Percent	Response Count
newspapers		16.2%	37	
magazines		0.9%	2	
hustings		14.9%	34	
radio		2.6%	6	
internet		50.4%	115	
word of mouth		8.8%	20	
Other (please specify)		6.1%	14	
			<i>answered question</i>	228
			<i>skipped question</i>	1

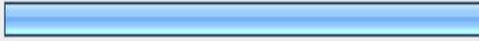
Only 5.8% of respondents who answered the question had not encountered any candidates online and of the 94.2% who had encountered candidates' campaigns, it was candidates' websites and Facebook that were the dominant forums. The massive proportion of respondents who had encountered candidates through their use of Facebook can be explained via the demographics of respondents and the method used

to advertise the survey (as outlined above). However, it also highlights the importance of the internet in reaching younger demographics.

It is also heartening that so many (78%) respondents had visited candidates' websites, underlining the importance of the above analysis of candidates' campaign sites.

With regards to question 4 ('What media or format do you get most information about candidates? Tick one box') I sincerely regret not including 'Television' as an option, as the dominant media of the time it was a ridiculous oversight; that having been said in the 'other' option only 4 people indicated that it would have been their preference. With the caveat, of having not included television as an option, the majority of respondents (50.4%) used the internet to get most of their information about candidates with newspapers getting the next highest score (16.2%). Again, this may be explained by the relative youth of the majority of respondents and to get a better picture of media consumption habits of Labour Party members, one would need a more representative sample.

Now that the amounts of contact, media consumption habits and demographics of respondents have been considered, the more important data relating to the effect of the online campaigns can be dealt with. The graph below shows respondents' answers to the simple yet significant questions of 'Has a candidate's e-campaign had an impact, positively or negatively, on the way you will vote in the Labour Party Deputy Leadership election':

6. Has a candidates e-campaign had an impact, positively or negatively, on the way you will vote in the Labour Party Deputy Leadership election?			Response Percent	Response Count
Yes			62.8%	142
No			37.2%	84
		<i>answered question</i>		226
		<i>skipped question</i>		3

A significant majority of respondents felt that e-campaigns had an impact on their vote. This question is far too simplistic and blunt to then conclude that the better one's online campaign the more votes one will achieve. However, it is an important piece of data. One can deduce, at the very least, that in order to be successful in a Labour Party Deputy Leadership election amongst the younger, male members of the electorate one needs to have a well managed online campaign.

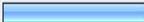
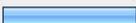
In order to make more noteworthy inferences about the impact of online campaigns, one needs more detailed questions about which online campaigns respondents were privy to, which online campaign was the most salient and which candidate they would subsequently vote for.

2. Have you encountered any of the candidates for the deputy leadership of the labour party online? Please tick the boxes by the name of each candidate which you have come across.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Hilary Benn	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	78.9%	165
Hazel Blears	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	76.6%	160
Jon Cruddas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	66.0%	138
Peter Hain	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	67.9%	142
Harriet Harman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	58.9%	123
Alan Johnson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	70.8%	148
		<i>answered question</i>	209
		<i>skipped question</i>	20

8. In your opinion, which candidate has conducted the best online campaign? (tick one box)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Hilary Benn	<input type="checkbox"/>	17.8%	40
Hazel Blears	<input type="checkbox"/>	19.6%	44
Jon Cruddas	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.4%	37
Peter Hain	<input type="checkbox"/>	8.0%	18
Harriet Harman	<input type="checkbox"/>	4.0%	9
Alan Johnson	<input type="checkbox"/>	6.2%	14
Undecided	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	28.0%	63
		<i>answered question</i>	225
		<i>skipped question</i>	4

9. Which candidate do you intend to vote for in the Labour Party Deputy Leadership election?			Response Percent	Response Count
Hilary Benn			26.2%	60
Hazel Blears			16.2%	37
Jon Cruddas			18.8%	43
Peter Hain			5.7%	13
Harriet Harman			6.6%	15
Alan Johnson			17.5%	40
Undecided			9.2%	21
			<i>answered question</i>	229
			<i>skipped question</i>	0

62

The above three charts are more damning of the effect of online campaigns. The ‘undecided’ option received the largest amount of votes (28%) when respondents were asked which candidate had the best online campaign. When one considers that only 9.2% of respondents were undecided about whom they would vote for, it shows that respondents do not have strong preferences about internet campaigns.

Another example of the lack of power of online campaigns can be found in the fact that 70.8% of respondents had encountered Johnson’s e-campaign, with only 6.2% of people rating it as their favourite, yet 17.5% intended to vote for him. Similarly, Blears is rated as having the best online campaign by 19.6% of respondents and yet only 16.2% intend on voting for her.

I would have liked to cross-tabulate the responses of question 8 and question 9 in order to able to see clearly the number of people who said they liked a candidate’s web campaign and then intended to vote for that candidate. However the online survey software that I was using did not allow for such analysis.

⁶² If I was to do this survey again, I would state ‘which candidate do you intend to give your 1st preference to’. Because the electoral system used was single-transferable vote, the question used in this survey makes a false assumption.

The main thing that can be taken from this data is that whilst an online campaign will have an effect on the way in which an electorate will vote, there are certainly still many other significant factors. Even if respondents like a particular candidate's campaign there is no evidence to suggest that this leads to respondents then voting for that candidate.

The results of the survey also could be seen to undermine the method used to measure candidates' websites. There was no correlation whatsoever between those e-campaigns rated as best by respondents and the websites that this research found to be best.

One could simply conclude that the aspects of the online campaign that were measured by this research are not the aspects which respondents are most attracted to. Further research as to what an electorate are looking for in a campaign website could be conducted to improve the accuracy of elements under scrutiny; one way of doing this could be to conduct focus group analysis, guiding participants through websites and asking for opinions and ratings of importance of various facets of different sites.

As well as this, respondents were asked to evaluate a candidate's whole 'online campaign' and this research constricted the web sphere of analysis to only a candidate's official website. Broadening the scope of the web sphere of analysis would undoubtedly be more representative of a candidate's campaign as a whole and increase the chance of seeing a correlation between empirical web sphere analysis and survey respondents' preferences. Unfortunately the resources available for this research did not allow for a project of that size.

Another way of explaining the lack of correlation might be to argue that the sample size is simply too small. This argument could be used legitimately against the whole survey as only 229 Labour Party members were surveyed of a possible (approximate) 200 000⁶³. That having been said, the fact that the respondents of the survey are from such a concentrated demographic means that it is more representative of a segment of the membership – the youth segment – than if the demographics were more diverse.

⁶³ Wintour P and Hall S, Labour Membership Halved, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/aug/03/uk.labour>

Conclusion

This research makes two significant contributions to academic debate surrounding online campaigning in elections.

Firstly, the finding that John Cruddas had conducted the best online campaign was significant. It adds further evidence to theories, like those advocated by Margolis (et al.)⁶⁴ that suggests that less well known candidates are more likely to place a greater amount of emphasis on the internet aspect of the campaign.

Cruddas himself made clear from the outset of his campaign, long before the official opening of nominations, that he felt that the internet facet of the campaign would be very important and that his campaign team would place significant emphasis on that aspect of the contest, stating:

“It is the future. It allows for real time mobilisation and campaigning, the rapid dissemination of information, two-way and lateral communication.”⁶⁵

No other candidate in this election was as explicit as to their reliance upon the internet in order to gain votes⁶⁶. This research gives quantitative data that backs up the qualitative evidence used by the likes of Margolis (et al).

Secondly, this research finds no evidence to suggest that an internet campaign can generate or mobilize support without the contribution of offline efforts. This research found no correlation between a candidate that is deemed, by survey respondents, to have conducted a good online campaign and an intention to vote for that candidate. This adds weight to the arguments of Wainer, Ward and Gibson⁶⁷ that the internet is used largely as a resource for finding out information.

⁶⁴ Op Cit., Margolis M, Resnick D and Levy J

⁶⁵ ePolitix.com, Interview with John Cruddas Labour Deputy Leadership Candidate, 2006, <http://www.epolitix.com/EN/Interviews/200612/594e6fd0-1811-4e34-9c33-702b2d4d9eaf.htm>

⁶⁶ The fact that the Cruddas team publicly stated that internet would be a priority, unlike other candidates', also gives the methodology used to measure websites in this research a degree of credibility. Had Cruddas been found to have performed poorly by this research, when it is known that his campaign team contained experts in the field of internet campaigns, it might spark cause for concern about the methodology.

⁶⁷ Op Cit., Wainer L, Ward S and Gibson R

The data showing that the majority of survey respondents believed that online campaigns had affected their vote in some way means that e-campaigns are undoubtedly a factor in how people voted. But, as outlined above, no causal connection between a candidate's online strategy and votes gained has been uncovered.

With regards to further research, undoubtedly web 2.0, and specifically Facebook.com, played a significant role in the online campaign of this election and had it been possible I would have liked to include it within the web sphere of analysis. The meteoric increase in the popularity of social networking sites means that their importance in the political realm will continue to grow and, thus far, there is no academic contribution as to its effects on UK politics. Given the opportunity I would conduct research on the effects of social networking sites on elections, popular opinion and UK politics generally.

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