Email and political campaigning: the experience of MPs in Westminster

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally individual politicians communicated directly with their constituents, but the arrival of the mass media, especially television, eroded the role of direct communication. The development of new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) is now re-opening the use of direct communication as part of post-modern campaigning (Norris 2000), with the Internet providing an alternative to media relations. The World Wide Web has attracted great interest from political commentators, but so far email has been largely ignored. Yet the Web is a pull technique, whereas the push nature of email opens up new campaigning possibilities. Downes and Mui (2000) suggest that email represents potentially a 'killer app' which might revolutionize the way MPs approach re-election. A survey of Members of Parliament (MPs) Assembly Members (AMs) of the Welsh Assembly and Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) examines whether they have grasped the opportunities email represents. The research suggests that the outbound use of email for campaigning purposes is limited to a small number of pioneers. Resources, parliamentary culture and party affiliation all shape the use of email campaigning.

Key words: politics, political campaigning, Internet, email, MPs.

Email and political campaigning: the experience of MPs in Westminster, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

"*An MP in the new parliament who cannot use email will seem to at least half the population as anachronistic as one that cannot use the telephone.*" (Steinberg 2001)

The first use of email in political campaigning was by Jerry Brown in 1992 (Johnson 2001) when it was seen as more of a novelty than a vote winner. Since then email has slowly increased in importance as a campaigning tool. By 1998 the Internet in general, both email and the Web, was considered to have played its first vital role during an election campaign. Email helped the former professional wrestler Jesse Ventura identify and mobilise support during his successful campaign to win the Governorship of Minnesota in 1998 (Sheffer 2003). In America the importance of email during election campaigns at all levels has increased, with ultimately the unsuccessful presidential nomination campaign by Howard Dean providing the highest-profile example so far.

Where the US has led, the UK has slowly followed, but email here has so far played a very minor part in election campaigns. The 1997 general election was the first in the UK at which the Internet played a role (Ward & Gibson 1998) but there is no mention of the use of email. By the 2001 general election email makes an appearance as a minor campaign tool. Each of the three largest parties (Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat) sent out e-newsletters to both members and non-members (McCarthy & Saxton 2001, Jackson 2001). The Labour Party in particular appears to have invested most time using email (Coleman & Hall 2001), although this was focused more on communicating with members rather than voters. However, in comparison with the wide range of activities and methods required to run a nationally organised election campaign, the impact of email barely registered. Nor did individual candidates appear to use email, rather if they did use the Internet at all it was a website, not email (Ward & Gibson 2003). However, despite the very limited use and impact, so far, of email in the US and the UK it is clear that email as a campaigning tool is on an upward curve.

Email makes it much easier and cheaper for constituents to contact their MP, but email is not restricted to making casework easier for the constituent. Perhaps the biggest potential impact is on the campaigning ability of MPs. If email addresses are known and regularly kept up to date, it is possible for an MP to quickly and cheaply contact a wide number of their target votes whenever they want. Email, potentially can alter how MPs seek re-election.

Recent constitutional changes in the UK have increased attention on the ability of individual politicians, and political parties, to conduct election campaigns. The introduction of devolution in 1999 by the Labour Government has increased the number of elections involving 'MPs'. In addition to MPs sitting in Westminster, we now also have MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) who sit in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh and AMs (Members of the Welsh Assembly) sitting in the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff (1). Although MPs in Edinburgh and Cardiff have less status and influence than their Westminster cousins, their elections every four years still generate significant interest. Email campaigning is not a quick fix, it takes time to build up, and manage, the necessary data, and then convert this into effective relationships with individual voters. In what was a mid-term period for all three elected chambers, research on the use of email by elected representatives outwith of an election campaign may help to identify how important MPs consider email is to their re-election.

Online Political Campaigning

The traditional (Maarek 1995) or pre-modern (Norris 2000) approach to campaigning was based on direct communication. Individual politicians communicated with individual voters through public meetings, door-to-door canvassing and written election addresses. Although a third party, the print media did exist and was a source of information, the electorate could still expect to receive personal contact with the candidates. The rise of mass communications, particularly television undermined this form of direct contact, and the 1959 election campaign was the first milestone in this process. As a result the individual politician lost control of his or her communication with their electors. During the age of mass communication, or modern campaigning (Norris 2000), party headquarters increasingly sought to control the messages, images and ideas that the electorate received through an emphasis on media relations and national advertising. The individual politician played a secondary role in communicating the party's message to voters. Mass communications is still dominant but has been facing a challenge from a new form of direct communication approach.

The widespread introduction of television gave party leaders, national politicians and their advisers control of their party's election campaigns. But, what technology gives, technology can take away. As Denver and Hands (1997) point out by the 1980s the growing availability of computers and desktop programmes (DTP) gave local campaigners the ability to cheaply produce high-quality campaign materials to targeted audiences. The Internet, and particularly email, takes this potential one stage further and as a result we are now moving into the post-modern (Norris 2000) political campaigning era where Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) play an ever-increasing role. Individual politicians now have the ability through technology to communicate electronically with voters. Instead of messages being broadcast they can now also be tailored through narrowcasting to target groups or individuals.

As a result of these technological changes a number of commentators have suggested that the nature of political communication is changing. Direct marking (Maarek 1995, Newman 1999) is increasingly becoming a key campaigning tool which potentially returns more control to the individual politician. Looking at the US Sherman and Schiffman (2002), suggest that direct marketing has changed the election campaign environment. In the UK, with a stronger party system it has been the central party headquarters which were first to experiment with direct mail. The SDP as completely new Party turned to computer databases and direct mail to build up its membership in the early 1980s (Scammell 1995). From the mid-1980s the Conservative Party also started to use direct mail to communicate with key target voters (Scammell 1995). Some fifteen years later in the UK we have a potential conflict between a centralised party system, and a technology which encourages greater decentralised campaigning.

Most research on the campaigning impact of the Internet in the UK has concentrated on the Web (Ward & Gibson 2003, Bowers-Brown 2003, Jackson 2003), with email largely ignored. The Web is a pull technique whereby visitors have to be attracted to the website, however email is a push technique opening up new campaigning opportunities. Individual politicians and political parties can send their messages to those voters who have given their permission to receive it. Email is both an inbound and outbound channel (Tapp 2000) and consequently some MPs (Coleman 1999, Campbell et al 1999) have expressed a fear that they could overloaded by this new technology. The sheer number of inbound emails may actually deter individual politicians from using electronic direct communication.

There has been some debate as to whether email is just another technology, or it signifies something of wider importance. Designers of any new technology seek the Holy Grail of a creating a 'killer app'. Such a technology not only dominates its market by killing off all competition, more importantly it has a long-lasting impact upon on society, the economy and political life. Downes and Mui (2000) explain the concept of a 'killer app' by pointing out that such an invention has an impact far beyond that which the inventor intended. In essence such inventions wreak 'havoc' on social, political and economic systems. Downes and Mui (2000) quote as historical examples of a 'killer app' the longbow which ended the Feudal System, the light bulb and the atomic bomb. Looking at the potential of email in the political arena Cain et al's (2001) 'how to' guide for MPs suggests that email may indeed shortly achieve this status because it offers not just improved communication, but actually completely new forms of communication. The debate about MPs use of email, therefore, is not just restricted to deciding whether it helps them get re-elected.

MPs obviously want to be re-elected, but direct communication with constituents is not motivated only by this desire, otherwise why would those in safe seats bother? The simple fact is that as elected representatives MPs believe is their role to listen to their constituents' problems, and when appropriate act on their behalf. This has lead a number of commentators (Norton & Wood 1990, Searing 1994 and Power 1998) to suggest that the constituency role is a key part of an MPs job. This constituency role can enhance the reputation of MPs both individually and collectively. Jackson & Lilleker (2003) suggest that by carrying out, and being seen to carry out, constituency work each MPs role is legitimised. At the same time the very act of deliberately seeking to encourage casework from individual constituents is slowly leading to the development of a new electoral force, 'constituency service' (Barker & Rush 1970, Butler & Collins 2001). The logic of this concept is that a relatively small number of electors will vote for an MP based on their experience on the handling of casework.

Email can help speeding up the process of handling constituency casework.

Methodology

This article aims to answer the following two questions:
1) How do MPs use email as an outbound campaigning tool?
2) Are some MPs more likely than others to use email as an outbound campaigning tool?

This article is based on the survey responses of 100 Members of Parliament (MPs), 30 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and 20 Assembly Members (AMs) from the Welsh Assembly, plus follow up interviews. The questionnaire was conducted in June/July 2002. Although all Westminster-based MPs have had access to email since 1995 (House of Commons 2003) the survey was sent to only those politicians whose email address was publicly available on their respective parliament's website, as it was assumed that these had decided to encourage email from constituents. All MSPs and AMs have a publicly available email address, but only 412 out of 658 MPs which suggests that a third of Westminster MPs do not want to encourage inbound email contact with constituents. The response rates were 25% for MPs, 20% for MSPs and 33% for AMs. MPs are notoriously poor questionnaire responders but the response rates were considered sufficient to allow meaningful statistical analysis.

Analysis is based on frequency and cross-tabulation of the fourteen questions (thirteen for MSPs and AMs) using SPSS11. The responses of MPs, MSPs and AMs were compared to identify any differences between the elected bodies. The number of UK MPs also allowed for further detailed analysis which considered when an MP was elected, their party and marginality of seat. This last category was based on Finer's model of marginal, near marginal and safe seat (Finer et al 1961).

There are institutional differences between the Scottish Parliament/Welsh Assembly and Westminster which may have an impact on their elected representatives use of email. UK citizens are served by MPs who are the only elected representative of that constituency, but the electors of the devolved assemblies have access to a constituency MP and a number of regional members. This means that in Scotland, for example, theoretically a single constituent could contact 8 MSPs who represent them, one constituency MP and seven regional MPs. Moreover, the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly were only created in 1999 so their founders started with a blank canvass to which they were highly committed to using new technology to best effect (Smith & Grey 1999). Perhaps most significantly representatives of the devolved assemblies have to develop their (and their assembly's) legitimacy amongst their electorate, so encouraging more direct contact.

Fieldwork

The impact on political campaigning of inbound email
Although this article will focus on the outbound use of email by politicians, the amount of inbound email traffic to MPs provides the context within which their campaigning activity exists. MPs have, generally, been reluctant to embrace email because of a concern that it might open the floodgates of communication from organised pressure groups. Certainly, the House of Commons Information Committee commented "The ease with which constituents and others can send email is seen by Members as both an opportunity…and as a threat, in that it could generate a demand that Members cannot meet with existing structures and resources." (HC Information Committee July 2002: 18). However, Table 1 shows that the number of emails MPs receive from their constituents is not excessive compared with the number of letters they receive. Westminster based MPs appear to receive slightly less emails than their Edinburgh and Cardiff colleagues. This difference could be due to two related facts. First, not all UK MPs seek to encourage email. Second, the devolved assemblies, starting from scratch, have all made a more deliberate decision to utilise new technologies. Time spent on managing inbound email leaves less time available for sending out campaigning email.

Table 1 Average number of emails received per week from constituents

Number	MPs	AMs	MSPs
Less than 100	86%	80%	75.8%
101-200	10%	10%	12.1%
201-300	4%	5%	6.1%
301-400	0%	0%	0%
Over 400	0%	5%	6.1%

That the number of emails from constituents is manageable is not the complete picture. Table 2 identifies the serious problem of spam from non-constituents. This may take three forms: directly from a pressure group itself; from individuals that the pressure group has mobilised; or individuals who just independently decided to lobby an MP electronically. Some of this inbound communication will be ad hoc and individual in nature, but much is organised by pressure groups. Some 91% of MPs have received co-ordinated campaign materials via email from pressure groups, and similar figures of 90.9% and 85% respectively, are recorded for MSPs and AMs. For a clear majority, 55%, over half of emails they receive come from non-constituents. The fact that MSPs and AMs are slightly more likely, at 63.6% and 60%, than MPs to receive more than half of their email from non-constituents may be the result of a perception that in certain policy areas they may have greater influence. For example, the Scottish Parliament had the power to introduce a discrete funding policy for students' which was different from the rest of the UK. The fact that the Scottish Parliament is perceived to have more powers than the Welsh Assembly might explain why slightly more organised pressure groups contact MSPs.

The impact of spam on MPs is on their finite resources, particularly staffing. When snail mail (traditional posted mail) is delivered to an MPs office it is easy to tell whether letters have been sent from the constituency and so given higher priority. This is much more difficult with email, and so rather than being a revolutionary campaigning tool, MPs staff may spend too much time opening irrelevant emails, and not enough building up a relationship with constituents. Moreover, there remains the question as to whether MPs, and their staff have the necessary skills, equipment, time and desire to use email as an outbound communication channel.

Table 2 Average percentage of emails from non-constituents Amount MPs AMs MSPs

Amount	MPs	AMs	MSPs
Less than 10%	15%	20%	6.1%
11-20%	6%	5%	0%
21-30%	10%	5%	6.1%
31-40%	4%	10%	9.1%
41-50%	10%	0%	15.2%
51+%	55 %	60%	63.6%

Despite the concerns outlined by Coleman (1999) and Campbell et al (1999), MPs do not yet appear to believe that they are being swamped by inbound email from both constituents and non-constituents. Table 3 shows that only a small number, 12%, of MPs appear not to be coping, though in Wales and Scotland the numbers are slightly higher which might reflect that MSPs and AMs are slightly more likely to receive a greater number of emails. The amount of incoming email is not yet excessive, but this may well change, and certainly research in the US (Goldschmidt 2002) suggests that email overload is becoming an issue of serious concern to elected representatives.

Table 3 How well are MPs coping with the volume of email?

How well	MPs	AMs	MSPs
Very well	26%	45%	30.3%
Reasonably well	35%	25%	36.4%
Adequately	27 %	15%	12.1%
Not very well	5%	10%	18.2%
Badly	7%	5%	3%

Email and political campaigning
Inbound email has the potential to overwhelm MPs but so far it does not appear to have done so. However, this does not mean that MPs have the resources, inclination and skills to use email as an effective campaigning tool. In fact the evidence suggests that for all three sets of respondents email is at best a marginal campaigning tool used by only a small number of pioneers.

As a push mechanism email enables MPs to promote their views, activities and ideas to constituents. At the same time it provides a mechanism whereby they can also seek feedback from constituents on their communications. Email provides a number of ways in which MPs can promote their campaigns, this article divides these into three categories. First, the use of signature files, second data management and third the actual use of that data.

Signature Files
One of the easiest ways in which an MP can use email for promotional purposes are signature files at the bottom of every email they send out. A signature file can be easily and quickly set up to allow an MP to reinforce their key messages, for example to remind the receiver of their latest campaign or the url of their website. Such messages are included in every email the MP sends out. Signature files will not have a dramatic impact, but they are part of a drip-drip communication approach over a long period of time.

Despite being easy to set up and update, and fairly standard commercial practice (Haig 2001), elected representatives have not been quick to grasp this marketing technique. Only three factors partially encourage use of this promotional technique. First, party is a factor with Labour being the most likely, with 15.3% using a signature file. Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are below the average at 8.7% and 6.6% respectively in Westminster. Second, marginality of seat for Westminster seats is a factor, with 21% of near marginal and marginal seats as opposed to 10.3% of safe seats using signature files. Third, MSPs and AMs are slightly more likely to use signature files at 15.2% and 15% respectively as opposed to 12% at Westminster. Either MPs have made the judgement that such signature files have little impact, or more likely they are not aware of how they can be used.

Data Collection
Email opens up the possibility of an electronic direct mail campaign from individual MPs to targeted groups of constituents. The key to this is gaining the permission (Chaffey 2003) of the respondents rather than just buying in lists of email addresses. Email sent out from bought-in lists of constituents addresses (assuming they exist) would be considered spam, and would have the opposite affect to that desired.
Therefore, the first stage in any successful email direct mail campaign is to ask for the necessary email addresses of constituents. A significant minority of elected representatives have recognised this. Of Westminster MPs 33% collect email addresses, as opposed to 24.2% of MSPs and 10% of AMs. But this still means that two thirds of Westminster MPs have not taken this first step and even greater numbers in Edinburgh and Cardiff.

Given the larger sample of Westminster MPs it was possible to conduct further crosstabulations to identify which MPs were more likely to collect data. Party affiliation does appear to be a factor with 53.3% of Liberal Democrats collecting email addresses as opposed to 13% of Conservatives. Labour respondents were very close to the overall average of 36%. In addition, it is perhaps no surprise that recently elected MPs are more likely to collect constituents' email addresses. Only one MP elected prior to 1987 collects email addresses, as opposed to 38.1% of those from the class of 1997 and 43.5% of those from 2001. This could, in part, be explained by the fact that a number of Liberal Democrat MPs were elected in the last two elections. Marginality has some impact with those in the closest electoral contests more likely to collect email addresses with 40% of marginal and near-marginal MPs doing so as opposed to 32.5% of safe seats following suit. If e-campaigning plays a significant role at the next election, then recently elected Liberal Democrats in marginal

seats appear to be the most likely to have already started collecting email addresses.

The Use of email addresses collected by MPs
If a number of MPs recognise the importance of collecting constituents email addresses, Table 4 shows that only a small number of pioneers seem to be actually doing something with them. It is almost as if MPs are aware that the very act of data collection is important but they cannot yet figure out what to actually do with email addresses. There are two main reasons for the disparity between the numbers of MPs who collect email addresses and the number who do something with them currently. First, the sheer amount of time and effort it takes to collect and then use the data regularly puts off many MPs. The only MPs motivated to allocate the necessary resources are those who either believe that ICTs enhance the democractic process, or that email campaigning could assist them get re-elected in a close electoral contest. Second, many MPs or their staff lack the necessary skills to make best use of email. For example, a database once started needs regular updating and management (Chaffey et al 2000, McDonald & Wilson 2002, Haig 2001), yet one Conservative MP (Interview 2003) displayed no knowledge of netiquette when he said he might use email addresses collected several years ago during an election campaign in 2005/6. Apart from the fact that a large number of addresses likely to be out of date, this would come across to many receivers as spam.

Table 4 Use of emails proactively to constituents

Activity	MPs	AMs	MSPs
Changes to website	7%	10%	6.1%
Details of speeches/press releases	5%	25%	15.2%
Details of your campaigns	8%	10%	9.1%
A regular newsletter	4%	15%	15.2%
Party policies	2%	5%	3%
Election campaigns	8%	5%	3%
Appeals for help	10%	10%	3%

Details of speeches and press releases
MPs with a means of explaining to constituents what they are saying on issues of interest. Therefore, email provides MPs with an alternative to the local media which might either ignore what they are saying altogether, or only report a small proportion of their views. There are two main factors which increase the likelihood of speeches and press releases being sent out proactively by email. First, party affiliation for Westminster MPs. The Conservatives, at 8.7%, are the most likely to use this communication channel, whereas not one Liberal Democrat records using email for this purpose. Second, the devolved assemblies are significantly more likely to utilise this approach. AMs and MSPs are five and three times respectively more likely to record the use of speeches and press releases. Marginality does not appear to be a factor as not one of the marginals or near marginals proactively send constituents emails with their press releases and speeches.

Details of MPs campaigns
Along with the reminder capacity of signature files MPs can directly explain to constituents what campaigns they are involved in. The level of MPs from all three parliaments who proactively send out details of their campaigns is fairly equal. It would be logical to expect that those Westminster MPs in the closest fights would want to publicise their campaigning activity. The reality is the opposite. Not one of the marginal seat MPs uses proactive emails to tell their constituents of their campaigns, and only 9% of near marginals as opposed to 12% of safe seats. This suggests that this aspect of email is not yet considered by MPs a vote winner.

A regular e-newsletter
A regular e-newsletter is considered to be one of the most effective ways politicians and political parties can use email (Steinberg 2001, Congress Online Project 2003). Enewsletters provide a flexible

approach that in the commercial sector is used to promote products, tailor messages and encourage visitors to a website (Chaffey et al 2000, McManus 2001). MPs, therefore, can outline policies, target specific constituency audiences and link their online communications. At the very least newsletters remind 'customers' of your existence (Ollier 1998). When some citizens complain they "only hear from politicians during elections" this 'reminder' faculty may be of significant political value to MPs.

Emailed newsletters may help develop long-term relationships between MPs and their constituents. They are not just one-way as they can be made interactive (Haig 2000) to encourage feedback. Such newsletters are not a hard sell like a hand-delivered leaflet during an election, rather their aim is to build relationships. Yet the numbers, especially for Westminster MPs at 4%, are very low. Representatives of the two devolved assemblies appear more likely to be convinced of their value with nearly four times as many providing a regular e-newsletter. This could in part be explained by two factors. First, the fact that the next election was nearer (May 2003) for the MSPs and AMs, whereas for Westminster MPs the next election could be as late as June 2006. Second, the devolved MPs are trying to carve out a niche both for themselves and their assemblies and view this direct contact as a means of educating their constituents of their role. So far MPs have not used a technique which has been successfully and widely adopted by commercial marketers (Chaffey 2003).

Election campaigns
Email can be used as part of the communication process during an election campaign, be it a local election, by-election or in the run up to a national election campaign. As this survey was conducted a year after the 2001 general election and three years after the devolved assembly elections, it is of little surprise that the Westminster MPs are more likely to have used email during election campaigns. A smaller political party might be expected to use all available communication avenues to reach voters: yet not one Liberal Democrat MP uses proactive email for election campaigning purposes. Whereas, it is Labour MPs, at 11.9% who are most likely to use email during elections for campaigning purposes. However, the figures are far too small to be explained by the Labour Government's desire to daily win the public debate through permanent campaigning (Blumethal 1982). There is, however, a slight link with marginality, with marginals being the most likely to use email for electioneering purposes at 12.5%, followed by near marginals, 9.1% and then safe seats 7.6%. So far email has played a very limited role in elections campaigns, a fact likely to change at the next general election.

Appeals for help
Email can be used not just to push a message but also to ask the respondent to do something as a result. One of the easiest requests a politician can make is to ask for help from a constituent for his or her campaigns. From admittedly a very small sample, this is indeed the most popular proactive use of email by Westminster based MPs. There is no logical pattern to explain why one MP rather than another uses email to appeal for help. The Conservatives, who overall are the least likely to use emails proactively to contact constituents, are actually the most likely to ask for help. The Liberal Democrats, as the smallest major Party, might be expected to have the greatest need for more volunteers, but are in fact the least likely to make such an appeal. While, it might be expected that those MPs in the closest electoral contests have greatest need for new volunteer helpers, it is in safe seats that appeals are made. Not one marginal made such an appeal, with only 9.1% of near marginals as opposed to 11.5% of safe seats. Perhaps the reason for this is that in such target seats the central party helps to encourage volunteers from non-target seats to focus their attention in the nearest target seat.

How to improve the situation for MPs?
In order to identify what would help MPs make better use of email as an outbound communication channel respondents were asked what assistance they required. The options provided were divided into improved resources such as equipment, staff and skills and techniques

such as online surgeries and the use of regular emailing. Table 5 shows that there were differences in approach between the different parliaments. MSPs and AMs viewed training as the single most popular means of improving how they used email, whereas UK MPs selected improved filtering software (which for the devolved representatives was the least important factor). Overall MPs of all three parliaments viewed improvements to resources as to be key, rather than encouraging more direct communication. The fact that UK MPs were much more likely to be in favour of online surgeries is the fact that they have a much long tradition of dealing with constituency casework than the two devolved assemblies.

Table 5 What would help you better serve your constituents

What would help	MPs	AMs	MSPs
Training	27%	45%	36.4%
Better equipment	11%	25%	21.2%
Filtering software	46%	5%	15.2%
Specialist staff	23%	10%	33.3%
Online surgeries	11%	10%	24.2%
Sending out regular mailings	33%	15%	21.2%

Conclusion – an untapped campaigning tool?

The research shows that there are some clear differences between whether email is an inbound or outbound medium. The impact of the former has been far greater than that of the latter, thereby severely limiting the campaigning use of email. MPs have only limited resources and the significant amount of inbound email from constituents and non-constituents takes up a considerable tranche of their resources. As a result there is clearly a communication imbalance. However, this is not just a case of resources, but also of knowledge, skills and inclination.

In contrast to the potential, what we can say is that email has not, on the whole, been used by MPs as a deliberate campaigning tool. Rather, it is constituents and pressure groups whom appear to be driving the increased use of email, as a result most MPs are reacting to pressure from others. Overall there appears to be a perception among MPs that email is not a vote-winner. However, the fact that MPs do respond to inbound email suggests that email has helped develop their constituency role.

Of the four factors assessed, only two appear to encourage email campaigning by MPs. First, the elected chamber in which the MP sits with AMs and MSPs more likely to use email as an outbound channel. Starting from scratch the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament do appear to have a different, and more strategic approach to email in order to help build the overall legitimacy of both assemblies. This reflects a different cultural approach to new technology. Second, party with Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs slightly more likely to make proactive use of email than the Conservatives. Email may be slowly evolving as a direct communication channel which does appear to support the post-modern hypotheses that ICTs will play a greater role in political campaigns. However, email usage by MPs of all three representative bodies is clearly not indicative of email being a 'killer app'. The further evolution of email usage will depend on three factors: increased resources; a more open approach to the use of new technology within Westminster; and a greater recognition that of the difference email can make. The experience of the MPs of all three elected bodies demonstrates is that only a few pioneers are actually using email for political campaigning.

Footnotes

1) A Northern Ireland Assembly was created at the same time as the Scottish
Parliament and Welsh Assembly. Given the particular political issues this assembly was dealing with during the period of this research it was decided to omit the NIA from the scope of the research.

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