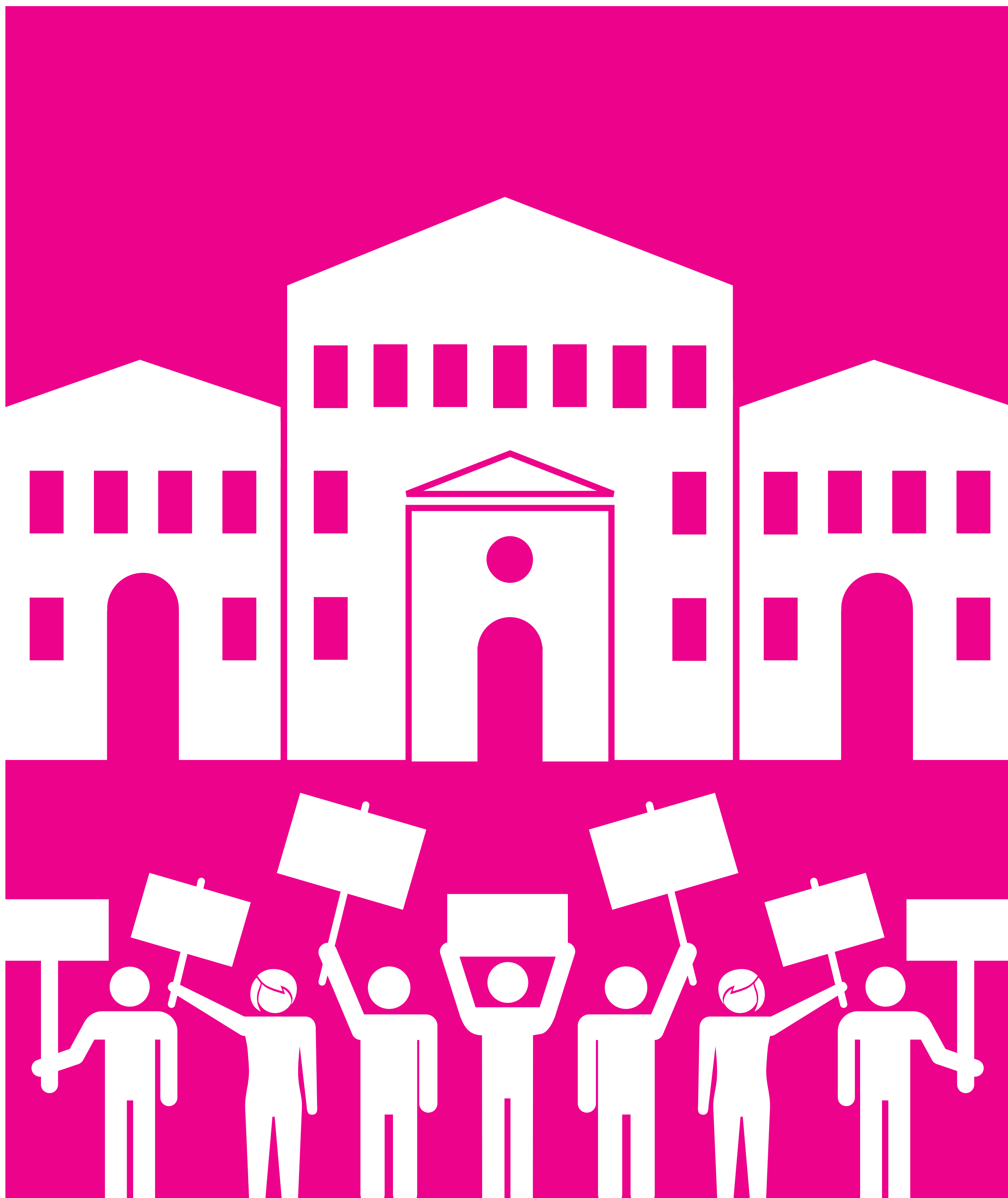
the social change agency

WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

Shouting Down the House

Esther Foreman | Winston Churchill Fellow 2013

2015



Foreword 1

Democracy is effectively an ongoing experiment and in a constantly changing world it could not be anything else.

A state of any size attempting to govern itself by somehow involving everyone directly in the minutiae of every single decision is simply implausible and, therefore, is rarely attempted - instead systems of elected representation are the preferred Western method of ensuring that power is democratically exercised.

In the course of her research Esther has benefitted from being able to compare the Westminster system to three others that are effectively evolutions of it. The supporting 'ecosystems' that sit around these systems have also evolved differently over time.

The main source of continued democratic experimentation and evolution is around honing and updating the 'systems' in place to ensure that they can effectively represent their electorates and make decisions, or govern, by tacit consent.

Doing this in the context of an ever changing world is a challenge, one that also faces the wider ecosystems that sit around these systems - campaigning organisations, the news media and the civil service are all part of this ecosystem and are all to a greater extent institutions and systems in and of themselves.

Esther highlights the key issues that historic institutions responding to modern day communication methods face in ensuring that social media can become a useful part of the ecosystem that supports a population to 'speak truth unto power'.

Firstly, that institutions, both those that are part of the system and those that sit in the ecosystem around it, are challenged by social media as a medium - as the Liberal Senator from Canada highlighted people *"don't need unions or other institutions to speak for them."*

That may well be a fashionable idea, but there is a danger that in using mass social media in this way part of the value that intermediary organisations offer is lost. That value is their ability to translate mass communication, interrogate it and present it in a way that speaks to representatives effectively - as Esther puts it, the risk is that *"The social media noise levels created by mass digital email campaigns have hidden the legitimate voices who are speaking that truth to power."*

Secondly, allied to that first concern, both representatives and intermediary organisations do need to be aware of, and seek out, truly representative 'legitimate voices' - the challenge of distilling down mass social media communications to hear the right stories at the right volume, as well as hear those that are not communicated by social media, is a tricky one - balancing the issue of representatives not seeing views expressed on social media as *"legitimate"* with the need for them to maintain their awareness that those mediums *"aren't representative of everyone"* is key.

Esther's recommendations that governments should invest in technology to manage these new communications streams and support parliamentarians to understand and engage with them have considerable appeal. As do her recommendations regarding the use of better analysis to ensure that a genuinely representative understanding of an issue can be achieved.

For me, the recommendations that organisations cannot expect to influence decisions makers without being able to present an in-depth understanding of issues and that their quality of comment is more important than the quantity of traffic are of the utmost importance.

The UK government continues its drive to be the most open and transparent government in the world, putting huge amounts of data and information into the public domain with a desire that this increases democratic engagement at all levels. However, a greater emphasis on deeper engagement and analytics will surely be demanded as a result - both in understanding issues and in campaigning on them - for those who wish to be heard when attempting to speak truth unto power.

Social media and digital technology provide exciting opportunities, the internet has *"changed the way in which people interact with democracy"* and is a tool that should be harnessed effectively to support the best possible representation.

Anyone who operates in the ecosystem of democratic representation and government needs to continue to update themselves and their systems to keep up with those that they seek to represent - if they do not, they risk falling quickly into redundancy.

Ryan Letheren
Cabinet Office, Government Innovation Group

Foreword 2

Numbers matter. They get attention. In this report Esther starkly reminds us that taking a quantity over quality approach can ultimately be self-defeating and counter-productive. Far too often digital campaigning has taken the easy option and focused on raising the volume, not the quality of the debate. This alienates the politicians we need to connect with and silences the voices of the very people campaigners are trying to support. Like it or not, this numbers game puts elected representatives off and seldom achieves substantive change.

Digital has not fixed this. It's just not fixing the relationship between citizens and our elected representatives. That's because it's just a tool and what matters is how we use it. And all too often it's not being used that well. The future isn't about rendering failing analogue models into shiny digital apps, real change requires us to ask some hard questions and to harness the true transformational potential of people and technology. Ultimately this was always about culture change – on both sides. Despite digital making serious in-roads into government, parliament and democracy, the sector clearly lags behind others. This just means that there's an opportunity to do more and to do it better, so this research should give all of us interested in democratic innovation food for thought.

What this research emphasises is the gap between formal systems of governance and the rapidly emergent viral campaigns of the internet age. A gap in both expectations and practice. It highlights that, all too often, campaigners are using digital tools because they can, not because they're the right thing to do or the most effective method. It highlights that parliaments and parliamentarians often struggle to understand and embed digital into their processes. And it reminds us that it falls to no one to nurture deeper political literacy and longer-term engagement. And that this is a problem for both sides.

Campaign organisations can do better. So can parliaments. They have faced a steep learning curve and in many instances struggled to understand the potential and impact of digital tools. My own experience tells me this is certainly true of the three parliaments described in this report, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Tradition, protocol, an inherent aversion to risk and a culture of managerialism have long strangled innovation but change is at hand. As the UK Parliament's Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy[1] makes clear, change is happening and will continue to happen and parliaments need to become part of the digital landscape – in the way they work and in the way that they engage with the public.

Social media is now a default tool for politicians as much as it is for the public. Though many still use it to broadcast or seek re-election, many others see new digital tools creating a level of intimacy and engagement that was never previously possible.

Parliaments can reach out beyond the 'usual suspects' through social media and email campaigns that draw out the stories behind the statistics and highlight people's lived experiences. But this has implications for resourcing and budgets and we shouldn't be naïve in believing it will be easy to extend parliament's reach. Campaigners can better understand how to influence and effect real change in the committees and plenaries of their parliaments. Part of this will involve rigorous interventions that are backed by authentic narratives – the stories behind the policy or injustice. As Esther's research makes clear, campaigners are only going to be effective when they get past the noise.

And it would be better for democracy if campaigners and parliaments worked together. This is a time for collaboration, not conflict. As Martin Sande and I argued in our recent book[2], we need to rebalance democracy and resolve the old power struggles by establishing trust in a shared process.

More will be achieved by pooling our collective resources, people and ideas. Parliament and campaign organisations together can open up the channels of democracy and ensure that members get to hear from the broadest set of voices. Campaigners and democratic innovators can act as conduits in both directions. But this is going to require a different approach to democratic innovation, one where egos are set aside and collaborative models are developed. We need new collective models for reframing engagement and, above all, to embrace new democratic spaces where innovation and ideas are shared.

Dr Andy Williamson, FRSA
Founder, Democratise & DemocracySpace

[1] See: www.parliament.uk/business/commons/the-speaker/speakers-commission-on-digital-democracy/ddc-news/digital-democracy-commission-report-publication/
[2] A. Williamson & M. Sande. (2014). From arrogance to intimacy: A handbook for active democracy. See: activedemocraci.es

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge the efforts for all those who dream and fight for a better world; all the politicians and the activists in Australia, New Zealand and Canada who opened their very busy schedules to me in the name of achieving social change.

About the Author

Esther Foreman
After a long career directing award-winning campaigns in the not for profit sector for organisations such as Shelter, Help the Aged and Mencap, Esther set up the Social Change Agency believing effective social change can only be achieved if people work and grow together. She recently founded People's Republic, a crowdfunding platform for campaigners. Esther is a 2011 Clore Fellow, Winston Churchill Fellow 2012, a SSE Fellow, 2013 and a Young Foundation Fellow 2015. She is a Trustee of the National MS Society and a Non-Executive Director of Do-it.org.

01
Introduction

1a. Brief Description to the Background of the Project
1b. Aims, Objectives and Purpose of the Project
1c. Approach, Methods
1d. Report Overview
1e. Introduction to the Parliaments
1f. A Week is a Long Time in Politics

Introduction

1a. Brief Description to the Background of the Project

I have spent 15 years working within civil society, not-for-profit and social enterprise sectors. Throughout my time I have worked alongside people striving to transform society, communities who are driven to achieve a better world and leaders who work to create social change. These people have come from different worlds: technological, political, economic, musical, the arts and charitable. They have arisen from all sides of the political spectrum. Yet, the one thing that unites them is their desire to speak truth to power in the quest to address the deep-seated issues around social injustice.

The power of the internet has enabled us to mobilise individuals to do this through digital activism - the actions of using social media to lobby those in power. However, the idea of digital 'active citizens' has been contested for a number of years[1]. Some have considered it to hold the potential to reverse the decline of political participation[2], while others have argued that either it does little to make citizens active[3], or that it encourages activity that is meaningless, and only serves to make the individuals feel good about themselves[4]. The birth of web 2.0 and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have brought these arguments to the fore, particularly with the emergence of campaign groups that focus almost exclusively online.

Online activism covers a variety of activities, including signing e-petitions, raising awareness of a cause by posting – or liking or reposting somebody else's – status updates, online donations, blogging and lobbying a politician online. Online activism typically requires significantly less time, effort and therefore motivation than offline activism. This has made possible some significant awareness raising and lobbying campaigns, but for its detractors this is part of the problem: online activism leads people, they would argue, to engage superficially with a cause and feel that they have contributed, whilst ultimately achieving little[5].

This has led to the creation of pejorative terms such as "clicktivism" – defined by the Urban Dictionary as: 'The act or habit of using the internet as a primary means of influencing public opinion on matters of politics, religion or other social concerns. Methods may include websites, online petitions and mass email campaigns' – or worse still, "slacktivism" – defined by the Urban Dictionary as: 'The act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem' – to describe online activism.

The question of activism versus clicktivism continues to rumble through civil society. At the heart of it is the key question - Does online activism work? Can it achieve change?

In 2011 I conducted a piece of research in the House of Lords, 'Peering In'[6]. I wanted to see if and how the advent of social media had changed the way people 'spoke truth to power' in the UK. Was it an effective tool for creating change? I wanted to look at this from the perspective of those in power, rather than those who were doing the 'speaking'. I chose to look at the House of Lords, as it was an unelected chamber of Parliament and the pressure of appeasing the electorate was entirely absent as a lever of change. I aimed to find out how Peers felt about being the target of such campaigns and whether they considered it to be an effective method of campaigning. In some respects the research was also about how a historic institution responds to modern day communication methods and whether or not a member of the public can actually influence law making in the House of Lords.

My research revealed many themes around issue-based campaigning and party politics but the strongest one by far was the strong discordance between online campaigning, third-sector organisations and policy change. Simply put, the high volume of mass emails tended to dominate the channels and drown out individual voices and case studies. The result of my research was clear: mass online campaigns will not alter the opinions of Peers, in much the same way that traditional postcard campaigns did not previously.

The dynamic of online communications is dependent on drawing attention to key policy asks, amendments to Bills and coherent and well-presented positions. Yet high volumes of similar emails achieve very little of this. Despite this, online campaigning remains a permanent feature of political discourse and engagement and is set to continue to be increasingly used by online campaigning groups and NGOs.

In speaking to Peers, it was evident that mass email campaigning had done more to damage than support the voices that 'speak truth to power' in the UK. The golden nugget in all communication and advocacy is the story of the lived experience and in many cases, it is this vital story that was being drowned out by the thousands of emails. This was partly due to the inability of Peers to get a proper grasp on email and social media as forms of communication and partly due to the sector being stuck in a cycle of repeating actions that were not effective. In many respects, it felt like a huge communication breakdown on a societal level. The risks of this trajectory over the next decade are huge.

Introduction

Parliamentarians and law-makers have as much responsibility to innovate, adapt and change as those who lobby it. If Parliaments around the world were living dysfunctional relationships with those who lobby them, then I wanted to know what else was being done about it. I wanted to see if this was an experience that was unique to the British House of Lords or whether there was a similarity within other Parliaments. If it was the latter I wanted to see what kind of reactions it had stimulated, any innovation around the issue, and what learnings we could bring back from here for the UK to make a leap forwards in communications.

1b. Aims, Objectives and Purpose of the Project

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust gave me a unique opportunity to go and talk to Senators around the world in different parliaments to see if they felt differently, or similarly about this issue. I decided to visit English-speaking countries that had Parliaments based on the Westminster System, a fairly established civil society, and strong digital activism presence. I wanted to focus my research primarily on Politicians who had a lower amount of electoral accountability but a high amount of legislative responsibility. As a result I was fortunate enough to visit the Australian Senate, the New Zealand House of Representatives and the Canadian Senate. I also wanted to get a sense of where, if at all, the innovation around activism and democracy was happening and how it was being experienced by the same Politicians.

At the heart of my research was the question: ‘What is the impact of social media on your decision making process as a political leader?’

1c. Approach, Methods

This report is based on desk research around civil society and face to face interviews with Politicians and organisations in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In total I interviewed 28 Politicians across 3 countries and across the political spectrum. A full list of Politicians is in Appendix 1. However, for the purpose of this report, I have kept all my quotes anonymous.

I also took the opportunity to meet with a range of charities, lobbying organisations, pollsters, community activist groups and digital campaigning groups in different countries. This gave me a flavour of their activity and what kind of activism they were using. Though I have not made reference directly to them in this report, I used this to give context to the questions I asked Senators and NZ MPs.

My interviews focused on understanding the conversation between those who speak to power and those who are in power through exploring how that conversation took place through social media and how it was experienced and perceived by those in power. Twitter, Facebook, emails, petitions, digital reform, democracy and representation, communication, legitimacy, responsibility and accountability were recurring themes in my interviews.

1d. Report Overview

This report is a summary of conversations across three countries. It is arranged into three parts.

- Part 1. The role of social media
- Part 2. The impact of social media and perceptions of legitimacy
- Part 3. Recommendations

Introduction

1e. Introduction to the Parliaments

Australian Senate

The powers of the two houses of the Commonwealth Parliament, the Senate and the House of Representatives, are defined by the Australian Constitution. All proposed laws (bills) must be passed by both houses. The Senate's law-making powers are equal to those of the House of Representatives except that it cannot introduce or amend proposed laws that authorise expenditure for the ordinary annual services of the government or that impose taxation. The Senate can, however, request that the House of Representatives make amendments to financial legislation and it can refuse to pass any bill.

Under the Constitution, each state of the Australian federation, regardless of its population, has an equal number of senators. The Senate currently consists of 76 senators. Twelve senators represent each of the six states, elected for a period of six years. A system of rotation, however, ensures that half the Senate retires every three years. The four senators who represent the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory are elected concurrently with members of the House of Representatives and the duration of their terms of office coincide with those for that House (a maximum of three years).

Australian Senate

The Senate is elected by a system of proportional representation which ensures that the composition of the Senate more accurately reflects the votes of the electors than the method used to elect members of the House of Representatives.

The Senate is a house of review and a powerful check on the government of the day. The proportional representation system of voting used to elect senators makes it easier for independents and the candidates of the smaller parties to be elected. In recent decades this has meant that the government party usually does not have a majority of votes in the Senate and the non–government senators are able to use their combined voting power to reject or amend government legislation. The Senate's large and active committee system also enables senators to inquire into policy issues in depth and to scrutinise the way laws and policies are administered by ministers and public servants.

(See Appendices 4. Composition of the Australian Senate by Party)

Introduction

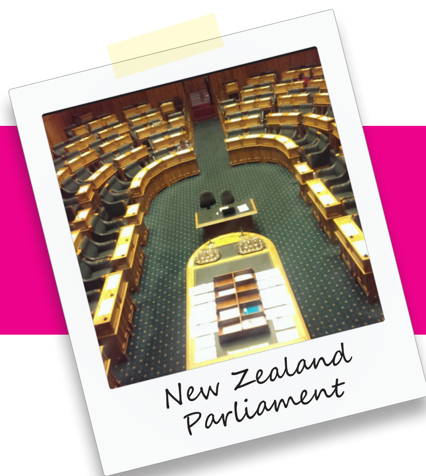
New Zealand Parliament

New Zealand's Parliament is unicameral. The New Zealand House of Representatives has been the New Zealand Parliament's sole chamber since 1951 and there is no upper house such as a senate.

The House of Representatives consists of members of Parliament who are elected as the people's representatives for a term of up to 3 years. The usual number of members of Parliament is 120, but there are electoral circumstances when this could vary. Seventy MPs are elected directly in electorate seats and the remainder are filled by list MPs based on each party's share of the party vote.

There are eighteen select committees to scrutinise legislation.

(See Appendices 5 for Summary of New Zealand House of Representatives Election Results Nov. 2011)



New Zealand Parliament

Canadian Senate

The Canadian Parliament The Senate is the upper house in Canada's bicameral parliamentary democracy. It has 105 appointed members.

The Senate was created to counterbalance representation by population in the House of Commons. In recent years, the Senate has come to bolster representation of groups often underrepresented in Parliament, such as Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities and women. The Senate was also intended to provide Parliament with a second chance to consider bills before they are passed. Senators may pass bills, propose amendments to them or vote to defeat them.

Senators are usually affiliated with a political party. The Government caucus is formed by the senators affiliated with the governing party in the House of Commons. The Opposition caucus is formed by the non-government party with the most seats in the Senate. (This means that the Official Opposition in the House of Commons and the Senate may be different parties.) Senators may also choose to sit as independents.

Like most other upper-houses worldwide, the Canadian formula does not use representation by population as a primary criterion for member selection, since this is already done for the lower house. Rather, the intent when the formula was struck was to achieve a balance of regional interests and to provide a house of "sober second thought" to check the power of the lower house when necessary. Under the constitution, each province or territory is entitled to a specific number of Senate seats.

Although originally named for life, senators now serve until the age of 75.

(See Appendices 6 Breakdown of Senators by party in the House of the Senate of Canada Dec. 2015)

Canadian Senate

Introduction

1f. A Week is a Long Time in Politics

It must be acknowledged here that even though the Parliaments I had chosen to visit are based on the Westminster system, each one is unique and were all in different stages of election cycle and in Canada's case, unusual external events.

Australia had recently had an election in Senate and Senators were conscious that they were either leaving or staying in the House when the new political term started on the 4th of Sept 2014.

New Zealand's House of Representatives was facing an election later on in the year.

The Canadian Senate was undergoing an internal audit and had just suffered a series of scandals that had rocked the Senate. It was also recovering from an attack by an armed gunman who had made his way into Parliament after killing a Corporal, just a week before I had arrived.

I have no doubt that each of these circumstances shaped the way I entered into my project and conducted my conversations in each country.

02
Findings

2a. **The Use of Social Media**

2b. **Social Media Communication OUT of the Houses**

2c. **Social Media Communication INTO the Houses**

Findings

2a. The Use of Social Media

Social media is here to stay. Parliaments all over the world know that in order to engage their citizens they must go where their citizens are. In 2014, over one billion people were using social media across the world. The increase in the use of smartphones, especially in the global south, means more people than ever before are connected.

Data from the World e-Parliament Report 2012[8] shows that one-third of parliaments were already present on social media and another third are planning to join them. These parliaments have recognized the need to keep pace with changes in society; they also see the potential for revitalizing public engagement in political discussion and decision-making.

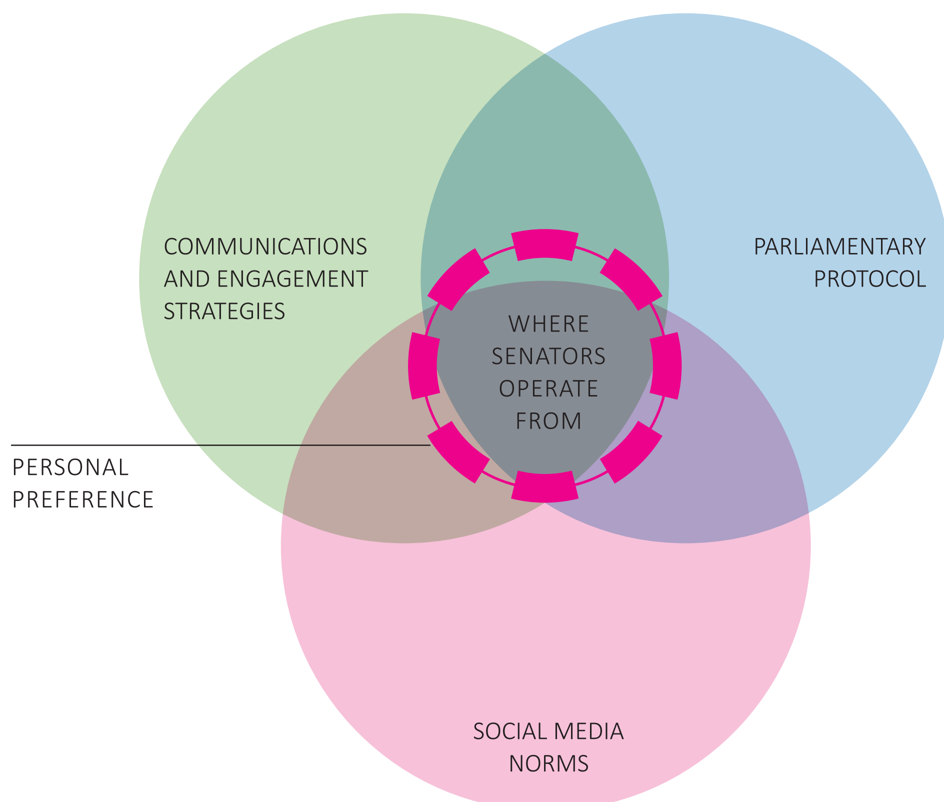
However as the General Secretary of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Anders B. Johnsson, said *'we should not fool ourselves. Parliaments are still exploring how to use social media effectively. Finding an engaging, non-partisan manner to use interactive online tools is a major challenge for all institutions, but perhaps particularly for parliaments'*[9].

The use of social media is not just an institutional challenge. My research showed that its presence and use went beyond the institutional and into the realms of personal preference around using it and receiving it. There may be Parliamentary guidelines for the institutional use of social media, but these cannot, and indeed do not, dictate how Senators and MP use it. In fact, the way politicians use social media in all three countries is influenced by a whole variety of off and online factors, upbringing, age, skills and the type of communicator they are: (see figure 1).

The fact that the way Senators and NZ MPs communicate using social media contributes to the way democracy is experienced by citizens, makes these lines very messy. Simply put, the rise of social media has taken digital communication with the public right into the heart of both Senates and New Zealand House of Representatives.

As one Canadian Senator put it *'Although I am the most engaged online in Parliament, I believe we can and should do a lot more. The day of the printed word is gone. We need to do more to get across the work and image of the Senate. I don't see that as my job. It is the job of the Leadership, the Speaker and the Institution and we have been very slow on the uptake.'*

Figure 1 *- Intersection of social media norms with traditional communications, engagement, protocol and personal preference.*



Findings

2b. Social Media Communication OUT of the Houses

So how do Senators and NZ MPs use Social Media Themselves?

It might be interesting to note here that the answer to this comes in part from the methodology of this study. I originally contacted over 150 Canadian and Australian Senators and NZ MPs with request for interview by email. When that wasn't very successful in terms of a response rate – which at best was 1 in 10, I took to contacting them by Twitter. Where that failed – I only had one positive response, I took to phoning. In Canada in particular, the best response rate was gained by phoning offices individually. This is in part due to the business of office, and getting noticed over and beyond the volume of communication which passes through their doors. So in a sense, those who I interviewed initially, were self-selecting sample - ones that I assume, understood the credibility of social media as a communication tool or at least had well trained staff to help.

In all three countries many Senators and NZ MPs have personal Twitter feeds, Facebook pages and professional blogs and/or website related to their interests and/or in the case of being elected, their constituency.

Their use of it broadly falls into four categories

1. **Personal Preference**
2. **Broadcasting Party Lines**
3. **Democratic Engagement**
4. **Political Tactics**

1. Personal Preference.

Like the rest of the world who use social media – Senator's' relationship with it, and therefore use, really varied according to personal preferences (i.e. they enjoyed and understood it) rather than according to professional commitments (i.e. they need to do it for their job).

'I really hate social media but I have to use it' – NZ Labour MP.

'I do all my own Facebook and twitter, 2435 followers at my last count [said with a smile]' – NZ Labour MP

'I still receive phone calls from constituents, but prefer to receive electronic communication so I can assure a proper follow through and understanding of the case' – Liberal Senator, Canada

'I tweet myself but I get my assistant to do all my announcements on social media, website and facebook pages'. – Labour MP, NZ
'300 followers and rising' [said proudly and in reference to twitter usage] Liberal Senator, Australia

'I have a Facebook account as a Senator that my staff organise and I have a private one that doesn't have any political content' – Liberal Senator, Canada

'I rarely converse with constituents. I don't think it really represents people as much, and I don't use twitter or facebook. I appreciate its value but I am just not into it.' – Liberal Senator, Canada

'I don't use social media much but I don't know how. Senators aren't taught technology, only their staff' – Conservative Senator, Canada

'Time and effort are huge constraints' – Labour Senator, Australia

'I use the same facebook account in office as I did while I was at University - it made the transition with me' – Green Party MP, NZ.

2. Using Social Media for Broadcasting

There is a strong bias for Senators using social media for telling people what they are doing, and what their party line is on issues. In this respect, it is seen, consumed and used as a channel for broadcasting communication.

'I find twitter very accessible and use it to make announcements about what I am doing and share observations about issues' – NZ Green MP

'I follow Question Time in the Chamber from twitter and I use it to get lines out to the Media' – NZ Labour MP

'I use twitter to talk about what I am doing and to give the Government line information on my portfolio' – NZ National MP

'Commenting as a individual on twitter is easy but only when you are representing yourself, when you are discussing Your committee or Your Parliament you have to take a moderate and measured approach which is boring, and defeats the supposed spontaneity of social media' – Liberal Senator, Canada

'I use Facebook to post items that are relevant to my constituents in my area – things which I know that they would be interested in'. – Liberal Senator, Australia

'I use twitter to give my area the Government line on my portfolio… I find it better and more professional to present information in ways other than Facebook'. – Labour MP, NZ

Findings

3. Using Social Media for Democratic Engagement

There is a diverse range in attitudes to whether social media is a legitimate tool for democratic engagement. There are some Senators and NZ MPs who embrace its immediacy and reach, and some who are mistrustful of its usage and impact. The digital divide line mainly falls down the age line as opposed to a political line - with a few exceptional cases, i.e The Greens in New Zealand. On average however, more Senators and NZ MPs will use it as a channel to canvas opinion and debate policy than not.

'I do use Facebook and Twitter to debate about policy, but only to develop a dialogue – I am not interested in arguing with people'. – Labour MP, NZ

'I use social media to reach out to people when appropriate, i.e. when I need to research around a bill – but I will combine that with face to face work as well'. – Liberal Senator, Canada

'I use Facebook posts about the issue of the day to generate debate that I read and respond to – I use it to gauge where people are with an issue' – Labour MP, NZ

'I'm nervous about using Twitter as a Tell me what you think device – I am a conversationalist and would want to retain a dialogue, although I have done a radio show for weeks now and no-one has rung up!' – Labour MP, NZ

'I was a Lead MP on a particular issue with no advisor or caucus support and was intensely lobbied by the industry this bill affected. I had lots of conversations on twitter and I was genuinely swayed by the arguments I heard through that and other digital channels.' – Green MP, NZ

'I use it as a good way to see what some people in my constituency – not all people mind - think about a particular issue. Obviously people on Facebook and twitter aren't representative of everyone, especially not my parents' generation, so I have to be mindful that I don't assume the view of social media is taken as a whole' – Labour Senator, Australia

'Once a month I send letters to my database telling them what I am up to, and how to get involved' – Liberal Senator, Canada
'The leader of our Party does an online Q&A once a month and gets instant mass participation from all over the country' – MP NZ First

4. Using Social Media for Political Tactics

Where the relationship between Politicians and social media starts to get more dynamic is where Senators and especially in the case of the NZ MPs, use social media for political means and party lobbying tactics. Of course, this depends heavily on the digital skills available and therefore lends itself more to the younger generation of politicians. In New Zealand and Australia where the Green Party MPs tend to be younger and more social media savvy, and where some have developed digital campaigning skills from previous job roles in Greenpeace or Oxfam, there is a high tendency to use digital campaign methods for party agendas. However, one or two Labour Senators in Australia seemed to utilise these techniques to run rudimental campaigns against other parties.

'I use it to pick up new members by finding those who 'like' my posts on my wall'. – NZ Labour MP

'I follow the tweets from the Chamber' – Labour Senator, Australia

'We are both users and receivers of a range of electronic campaign techniques and we use it mainly to lobby the Government' – Green MP, NZ

'I use it to run my own campaigns against Government policy - which can be really useful or a total waste of time depending on our objectives' – Green MP, NZ

'I use it to mobilise other supporters to lobby other parties'. – Green Senator, Australia

'Once we had worked out that we could email all the people that had emailed us over an issue and ask them if they wanted to be added to our database, we tripled our mailing list. We now use them to do digital campaigning on our behalf.' – Labour Senator, Australia

Social networks are less formal, less controlled, less rigid and more open. They are less respectful of position and tradition and conversations evolve much more quickly than in the traditional media. This can be challenging for formal institutions like parliaments. What is clear from the range of answers from Senators and NZ MPs is that many of them are struggling to use it effectively both in terms of their own skills, and understanding of its role in democracy. The recognition that social media skills are an important part of communicating Parliament and democracy is left to individual offices in Parliament in each country.

Findings

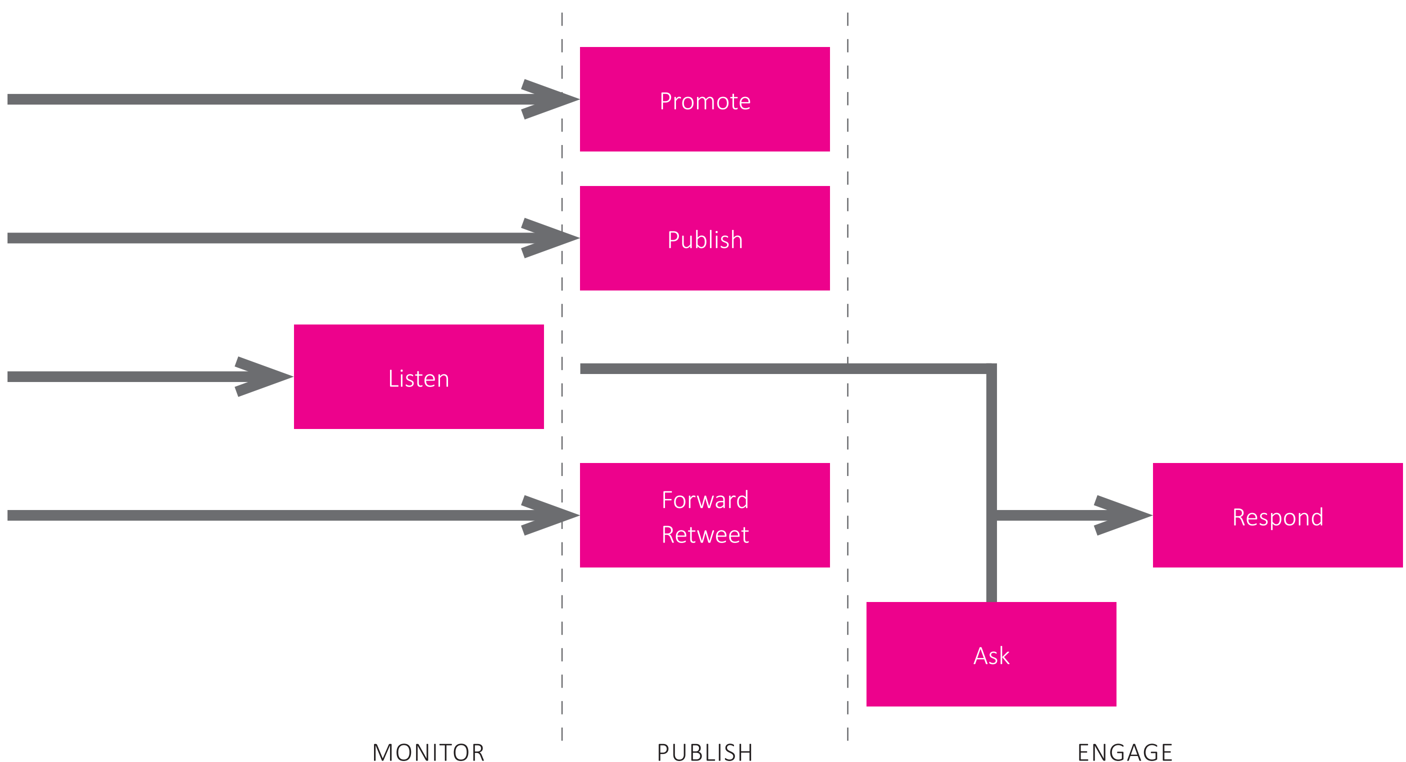
The Social Media Guidelines for Parliaments suggests that Parliaments adopt the following processes to Social Media

Good social media practice means listening, responding, asking and sharing; it's about being an active participant in the network. It can be helpful to consider engagement as a set of sequential stages.

These stages can cover the entire exercise or, for larger engagement projects, there might be numerous smaller iterations of them:

- Conception and ideas;
- Preparing information and educational resources to support the engagement;
- Engaging in deliberation with the public and generating recommendations;
- Deciding on a course of action (which can include extending the deliberation stage); Implementation and follow-up; and
- Evaluation and analysis

Figure 2: *Social Media Guidelines for Parliament. Modes of use. Taken from Social Media Guidelines for Parliament.*



Findings

2c. Social Media Communication INTO the Houses

This research asks the specific question around whether online activism works and what this means when people use It. I spent the majority of my conversations with Senators and NZ MPs discussing the rise of digital activism, how it felt to be a target, where did it sit in amongst their use of digital communication? What happens when Senators and NZ MPs themselves become the targets of social media as opposed to using it to communicate outwards?

Every single Senator and NZ MP I spoke to had been the target of multiple email campaigns. They had come from digital advocacy organisations such as Get-Up (Australia), Oxfam (Australia,) Greenpeace (New Zealand, Australia, Canada), Generation Zero (New Zealand), Change.org (New Zealand, Australia and Canada) and charities such as WWF and World Vision. But a lot of them had also come from local community groups who were using email software to help generate emails from individuals.

We also have to acknowledge that each Parliament slightly differed in terms of partisan politics, the role of the caucus in policy development and the impact of this on the legislative cycle. In each country, this affected the way lobbying was received by politicians and its subsequent impact. In some cases, the further along the legislative process a politician received an email, the less likely it was to be perceived as positively impactful or where it called for a Senator to act against the Whip (in Australia, this means an automatic expulsion from the Party).

There was a unanimous position, from across all three countries, from across the entire political spectrum, across ages and houses that e-campaigning was despised and generally ignored, deleted or filed away.

I was repeatedly struck by the animosity felt towards receiving emails in particular. In many interviews their reactions were emotional rather than rational or intellectual. As we have seen, social media occupies both the personal and professional spheres, so in retrospect this was not especially surprising.

'Now I think if you can't take the time to write to me what you think, I don't care that you went to a website and pressed a button and it took you 5 seconds. It doesn't tell me you understand the issue and it doesn't tell me why you think things and sometimes the generated emails are not even factually correct'. – Labour MP, NZ

'I have 100s and thousands of emails every day, and each email takes ½ a second to delete so now as soon as I see more than two emails with the same heading I just get my office manager to set up a rule to file them elsewhere so I don't see them'. – Senator Labour, Australia

'Mass emails - it's a waste of their effort and mine' – Liberal Senator, Canada

'They may be full of passion but they have limited perspective... no intellectual value so I give them little attention' – Liberal Senator, Australia

'Online campaigning dumbs down the conversation. It makes things black and white when they are not. It's meant to be part of democracy but it actually stops dialogue and forces simplistic stances to be taken on complex issues'. – Labour MP, NZ

On a superficial level it appears that these emails do more to turn their intended targets off, than engage them with the issue.

'I look within the mass emails I receive, to find my own constituents and make sure that I respond to them only'. – Labour Senator, Australia

'If anything is ever going to undermine a message that goes online, it is when every single word is the same as the last' – Green Party MP, NZ

'I got 2000 identical emails in 24 hrs in the lead up to the Rivers bill. I put up a rule and sent them to a slot box, I felt harassed. It wasn't the best way to go around the democratic process'. Small Party MP, NZ

'Mass emails are annoying if you are not able to access it and engage in the debate' - Labour Senator, Australia.

'I feel harassed by mass email. Its cyber bombardment. An Animal welfare campaign generated a deluge when there was a bill on sealing. 15,000-20,000 of identical working emails... when mass emails are all the same they are no use. You just don't feel like you are communicating with a real person'. – Liberal Senator, Canada

Findings

However, when probed more deeply, some acknowledge that despite any inconvenience and aggravation caused by email campaigns, they do sometimes serve a useful purpose in bringing issues to their attention. In this respect, the value of a campaign email serves as a 'nudge'.

"Letters carry weight because they are so rare and we tend to find that older people write more letters. Emails are easy to send and we get so many of them - although they do give us an indication of the size of the issue' – Labour Senator, Australia

'When the Fishery reform bill proposals brought over 50,000 emails flooding into our inbox, the volume of the communications did bring it to our attention so we made a comment on it' – National MP, NZ

In this crowded noisy space, how does this campaign technique become more than just an effective nudge?

From these interviews and in my experience, there are four key aspects that make an email stand out as an effective lobbying tool.

1. The emails are timed to effect change in the right stage of the policy or political cycle.
2. Clear, well written, thoughtful and timely communication.
3. A personal link between the person sending the email, the issue and their recipient target.
4. When it is combined with or pointing to expert opinion, evidence based policy position, or personal stories/case studies.

'On-line lobbying has to be factual. And we need a personal response in order to have a conversation. Mass emails are counter-productive to that'. – Labour MP, NZ

'Just pressing two buttons and writing your name isn't enough, tell me about something you have seen that tells ME why you feel so strongly about this. If you feel that strongly, it will trigger me to go and find out some more' – Labour Party MP, NZ
'I will proactively go and look for the issues and the proper civic voices in my emails' – Liberal Senator, Australia

'Geographical ties do make a difference. If someone writes to me about something they care about, and in my geographic area I will respond but if it is a bulk email that is irrelevant then I won't bother responding.' – Labour Senator, Australia

Based on my interviews alone and like the UK, it appears that most of the correspondence that is received by Senators and NZ MPs do not meet this criteria. Two things immediately jump out.

Firstly, that the emails sent in all three countries seem to underestimate both the role of the House of the Senate (in the case of Canada and Australia) and the party discipline and the whips office. Most of them also demonstrate a complete lack of understanding of when and how policy is formed in the political cycle. And in some cases, like in Canada, the House of the Senate has such a bad reputation with the public that they won't bother to lobby it with any conviction that it will have a positive effect.

Secondly, in many respects, this shouldn't matter as members of the public shouldn't have to be lobbying experts to express their concerns to those in power. This is why the digital advocacy platforms started. It was to help transfer power back out of the hands of institutional and organizational lobbying, and into the hands of the concerned and interested public.

'When does an individual become a lobbyist? I am pulling a comparison between individuals who think they have the capacity to lobby and the genuine professional lobbyists. What we are seeing is a genuine empowerment of individuals. They don't need unions or other institutions to speak for them. People are evolving in their belief in their own ability to communicate their own problems, concerns and interests. The internet has changed the way people interact with democracy.' – Liberal Senator, Canada

However, while some Senators understand the power of the internet to democratise democracy, they appreciate they also have a long way to go to convince their peers and their houses to embrace the technological revolution and all that it means for communication and democracy.

"The average voter expects a lot. Why should they have to wait for information from a Senate meeting? They want instantaneous access. They should open themselves up for 'real time' democracy, they shouldn't have to try and get into a closed and secret process - but our social media coming out is not a dialogue'. – Cross-bench Senator, Canada

'People can be validated as a political participant through social media and people on 'the hill' don't understand that, some believe it is a valid voice and some don't perceive it as legitimate'. – Labour Senator, Australia

Findings

However, it appears in Canada, New Zealand and Australia, much like in the UK, it has become a victim of its own success. This success has damaged the one thing that actually has the most powerful impact in achieving change amongst Senators and NZ MPs: the personal stories around the lived experience.

The social media noise levels created by mass digital email campaigns have hidden the legitimate voices who are speaking that truth to power. They are making Senators and NZ MPs work really hard to hear them. The end result is that mass emails do not represent any value for Senators and NZ MPs who find it too easy to dismiss them.

03
Conclusions

3a. Conclusions

Conclusions

3a. Conclusions

I had gone to Canada, New Zealand and Australia, hoping to find something different that would help the UK Parliament, Third Sector organisations and digital advocacy groups to progress in our search for digital democracy and social change. But as I completed my research I realised how far ahead the UK is in its own digital democracy journey. Despite this, we are still miles away from where the technological progress is being made. The technology revolution hasn't waited for Parliaments and organisations to debate what democracy and representation means, it has simply continued to innovate, to transform and to grow. It has just done it in different areas. For example finance, gaming and healthcare are just three sectors that have been revolutionised by technology and benefitted from the peer-to-peer participation it has generated.

The technology and social sector disrupted democracy and participation 15 years ago, when they took petitions and postcards and made them digital. It enabled every person who had access to email to set up and run petitions, or to contact Peers and Senators and NZ MPs immediately and intimately. It appears that in doing so, we created waves of noise that has all but drowned the other true voices of legitimacy: Those with the lived experience that have a story to tell. My research shows that there are two key things that are experienced by those who are on the receiving end of the campaigns: the volume of communications and the storytelling/lived experience. The former tends to devalue the latter but it is not without its worth as a method of drawing attention to this issue overall.

The response to this dynamic is not to delete e-activism. The challenge is in fact to innovate faster, so that we find a way to speak to power and be heard by those who are democratically accountable without losing the power of our numbers or our voice. There are better ways of gathering data, statistics and stories around e-campaigns that can deliver value to those who are the target of them and in doing so, not lose the impact of the campaign. Some of these are listed in the recommendations.

As a campaigning sector, we have not innovated significantly since around 2000. We are simply repeating the same actions and expecting different results (something Albert Einstein would describe as insanity). My main concern is that by the time Australia, New Zealand and Canada get to the same level of understanding of digital democracy in the UK, mass email campaigns could have killed it.

Our role as a sector, as activists, as organisations and as leaders is to invest time, money and resources in innovation and new forms of participation and campaigning. While I was in New Zealand, I also interviewed Loomio – a new tech start up involved in democratic participation (see appendices 3 for the case study). The venture, created by a collection of activists who met through the Occupy movement, not only represents a new method of digital participation but also a new way of innovating. It was designed by coders, web designers and those passionate about developing a new form of participation. It was funded to scale through crowdfunding and has been supported by businesses, local authorities and political parties.

Perhaps this represents one future model for creating a solution to raise the voices of those speaking truth to power?

However, the technology itself won't save us. It increases the nuances around campaigning which is crucial to improving its impact, but without a proper policy analysis and strategy around a campaign it will exacerbate its weaknesses. The fact that there continues to be so many emails sent on an almost daily basis shows that NGOs are not thinking strategically around the change they are aiming for. More thought needs to be put into understanding the strategic use and deployment of digital tools. Email should be used as part of an appropriate strategy, not as an end in itself. I would challenge NGOs, Think Tanks, Technology Firms and Political parties to think very carefully about this and invest in the future generations of campaigners, not just the here and now.

These challenges and more are listed as recommendations in the next section. The recommendations are split into three areas of responsibility; Peers, Parliaments, Parties and Civil Servants/ Campaigning Organisations/ and finally the sector itself. Recommendations 1-17 have been written for use in any country that uses digital campaigning and are designed to help any organisation, campaigner and civil servant when thinking about how to create more effective campaigns. Here in the UK, we have a remarkably well developed and experienced campaigning sector and Parliament, but more work needs to be done to innovate and evolve.

This will involve harnessing all of our energy and experience across the sectors. For this reason recommendations 18-20 have been written explicitly for the UK. Crucially those in power will still need to engage; willingly, or not to make these changes. Parliaments and Parties have their role to play in helping their leaders skill up so they are not dismissing new channels of communication because they don't understand them. What they cannot do and we cannot do is ignore the future. We do so at democracy's peril.

04
Recommendations

4a. **Recommendations for Peers, Parliaments, Parties and Civil Servants**
4b: **Recommendations for Campaign Organisations**
4c: **Recommendations, Sector Wide for Parliaments and Organisations**

Recommendations

4a. Recommendations for Peers, Parliaments, Parties and Civil Servants

1. Parliaments to offer Senators social media and information management skills training and resources to help skill up Senators.

2. Invest in technology that helps draw out the key insights and messages from campaigns without feeling bombarded or flooded. This technology should focus around a proactive approach to monitoring keywords and hashtags, and rather than simply filtering emails out into a separate folder once they reach a certain volume, it should be careful to draw insights from mass campaigns. Social data mining and language analysis tools commonly used for brand marketing and advertising could be used to explore this such as Enrich, http://files.hubbub.net/HubbubEnrich.pdf, or Relative Insight https://relativeinsight.com/.

3. Use data analysis to inform decision making. When many emails on the same topic are received from many different email addresses, use big data and social mining to analyse the profile of those sending in communications. This will be able to give them the numbers, key messages, location, insights and contextual information about the campaigners (age, gender etc) from the campaign. This can be used in speeches and reports etc in Parliament to demonstrate the size and nature of support. The breakdown of profiles around who sent the emails should also help to develop the policy stance for the decision maker.

4. Use the email campaigns to crowdsource the stories of the lived experience. Set up auto-responders dynamically to mass emails (those with the same subject line), directing those who emailed to a simple web or mobile form that facilitates the collection of the personal stories behind the engagement. By encouraging conversation and storytelling around lived experience, we can grow a better understanding about the level of care behind the voices in the campaign, and determine what is a real issue from one which is simply a passing fad.

5. Engage directly with the organisations creating mass e-petitions to get better analytics and data around campaigns. This could be a simple platform for decision makers to log in to explore information around a campaign to see at a glance all the digital activity associated with it.

6. Start the conversation yourself. Consider running political engagement tests and campaigns directly through these platforms to gauge public opinion- proactively starting conversations around emotive or controversial issues demonstrates a level of individual respect which is then likely to be reflected in the response. Use platforms like http://illvotegreenifyoudo.com/ to test out ideas with members of the public.

Recommendations

4b. Recommendations for Campaign Organisations

7. Emails as a digital tool for campaigning should only be used as an appropriate response or as part of a strategy not as an end in itself.

8. Organisations need to develop a more sophisticated policy analysis. They cannot expect to influence decision makers without an in-depth understanding of the context and subject matter, which links directly to statements on the Bill they are trying to change.

9. There should be a safe space in the sector for activists and lobbyists to come together to develop strategic skills not just technology or communication skills. There is a distinct lack of the understanding of strategic insight on how to achieve change using campaigning methods.

10. Quality of comment is more important than quantity of traffic.

11. Recognise that there are two key messages that reach those who are on the receiving end of the campaigns: the volume of communications and the storytelling/ lived experience. There are better ways of gathering data, statistics and stories around e-campaigns that can deliver value to those who are the target of them than simply the feeling of being bombarded.

12. Encourage deeper engagement and analytics around those participating in the campaigns, attempting to capture better demographic information and cross-correlating engagement with other campaigns to build better profiles of the digital engagement. This should then be shared with the campaign target throughout the campaign.

13. All the digital platforms should give each participant an (optional) voice to express who they are and why the issue matters to them- and make it really clear. Crowdsourcing stories from audiences of tens of thousands of people will produce potentially hundreds of lived experiences that can move the hearts and minds of the recipient far more than millions of identical communications.

14. Consider batching communications in aggregate, so that rather than receiving thousands of identical emails, targets of campaigns receive regular updates on campaign progress along with analytics and demographic data around the participants. Campaigners are more likely to get a better impact with one email with 100,000 signatures, than 100,000 emails each with one signature.

15. Encourage opt-in/opt-out behaviour on the platform for the targets of the campaign- for example, notifying them that they are the target of a campaign and giving them ways to engage directly with the campaign data and analytics whilst it is ongoing, rather than simply sending thousands of identical communications over a period of time. One way or another, the target will receive the communication, but they are going to receive the communication in way that is more palatable and likely to be listened to.

16. Organisations need to consider the target as part of the campaign and start a dialogue with them as early as possible. They need to view the change process as a two-sided rather than one-sided problem. For campaigns to be effective, they need to deliver a voice to the participant and valuable data to the target to help them to act. Failure on either side will lead to frustration on both.

17. Campaigning organisations should create ring-fenced allocated budgets to go towards building and testing new innovations so that they stay ahead of the curve in terms of new products.

Recommendations

4c. Recommendations, Sector Wide for Parliaments and Organisations

18. There needs to be a space where ideas are grown and tested by stakeholders such as a lab, or regular hack days. To get this established, organisations, technology companies and Parliaments should collaborate around funding, resources and space.

19. Stimulate the space by running competitions, funding and support for innovators working on this outside of the system and organisations- ie in the technology or consultancy space. This should be considered by organisations who specialise in cross-sector innovation and funding such as Nesta, The Cabinet Office and UnLtd.

20. Proper consideration should be given to creating a strategic space in the NGO and campaigning sector to tackle the more systemic issues raised in this report. This could be done in collaboration with a strategic funder who would be willing to commission a series of debates and facilitated sessions.

05
Appendices

1. Bibliography
2. List of Senators and Organisations Interviewed by Country
3. Case Study - Loomio
4. Composition of Australian Senate by Party, 2015
5. Summary of New Zealand House of Representatives Election Results, Nov. 2011
6. Breakdown of Senators by party in the House of the Senate of Canada, Dec. 2015
7. Footnotes

Appendices

5a. Bibliography

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Appendices

2. List of Senators and Organisations Interviewed by Country

Australia

Sen. Mark Bishop – Labour
Sen. Ursula Stephen – Labour
Sen. C Milne – Green Leader
David Parris – Digital organiser Green
Sen. Doug Cameron – Labour
Sen. Kate Lundy – Labour
Sen Fawcett – Liberal
Malcom Turnbillls Office – Liberal
Sen. Ludlam – Green

Organisations

National Disability Services
Opus RockCorps
Ntergity.com
MS Society

New Zealand

Andrew Little MP – Labour
Andrew Williams MP – New Zealand First
Holly Walker MP – Green
Moana Mackey MP – Labour
Right Hon. Minster Jo Goodhew MP – National
Gareth Huges – Green
Craig Foss – National Party
Ian Futchter, Private Secretary to Jo Goodhew – National
Meka Whaitiri MP – Labour
Louise Upton MP – National

Organisations

350.org
Generation Zero
Just Speak
Loomio
Enspiral
Hikurangi Foundation
Rekindle

Canada

Sen. Joan Fraser – Liberal
Sen. Denis Paterson – Liberal
Sen. Mobina Jaffer – Liberal
Sen. Paul Massicotte – Liberal
Sen. Nancy Ruth – Conservative
Sen. Don Meredith – Conservative
Sen. Elaine McCoy – Cross-Bench
Sen. Celine Hervieux-Payette – Liberal

Organisations

Simon Doyle, Chief Editor, The Lobbying Monitor, The Hill Times-Canada
Nik Nanos, Chairman, Nanos Research and Research Associate Professor, The State University of New York.
Jaimie Gardener – The Do Trust

Appendices

3. Case Study - Loomio

On May 15, 2011, outraged Spaniards occupied Madrid's Puerta del Sol public square in protest over the country's crumbling economy and rampant state corruption. During their encampment, '15M' activists developed a form of consensus decision making that built on the non-hierarchical traditions of many activist groups involved in the global justice/anti-globalisation movement a decade earlier, adjusting the specifics for crowds of thousands in a noisy public space. And they made it work.

This was an achievement in itself, but the process didn't stop there. Through the whispers of globetrotting activists and a translated pamphlet produced in Puerta del Sol, the process found itself being used – and refined – in New York's Zuccotti Park during the birth of Occupy Wall Street in September 2011.

By October, Occupy had gone global, quickly exporting the 'jazz hands' of Puerta del Sol consensus process to over 1,000 urban encampments around the world. One of the spinoffs was the Occupy site in Wellington, New Zealand's capital city, where a relatively small number of new activists experienced consensus process together for the first time.

Inspired by their ability to make decisions without creating winners and losers, some of the group's more tech-savvy participants began building an online consensus decision making platform that would become known as Loomio. Since its beta phase, Loomio has been adopted by a vast array of groups and institutions around the world, from local councils, to NGOs; activist networks to worker cooperatives.

As Liam Barrington-Bush writes in his blog 'Among the site's users are the Spanish political party, Podemos, an offshoot of the 15M movement using Loomio as one part of their attempt to bring the directly-democratic methods found in Puerta del Sol into parliamentary politics. In ways that none of the Spanish activists could have predicted in 2011, a grandchild of their experiment had found its way home again and supported the fringe elements of a major new – if still untested and contested – force in the country's political landscape[10]'.

Appendices

4. Composition of Australian Senate by Party, 2015

There are seventy-six senators—twelve for each state and two each for the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Senators are elected by a system of proportional representation for a period of six years. A system of rotation, however, ensures that half the Senate retires every three years. The four senators who represent the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory are elected concurrently with members of the House of Representatives and the duration of their terms of office coincide with those for that House (a maximum of three years)

PARTY	NUMBERS IN THE SENATE
Coalition	33
Australian Labor Party	25
Greens	10
Palmer United Party	1
Independents	4
Liberal Democratic Party	1
Family First	1
Australian Motoring Enthusiasts Party	1
TOTAL	**76**

5. Summary of New Zealand House of Representatives Election Results Nov. 2011

PARTY	SEATS		
	Electorate	List	Total
National	42	17	59
Labour	22	12	34
Green	0	14	14
NZ First	0	8	8
Māori	3	0	3
Mana	1	0	1
ACT	1	0	1
United Future	1	0	1
Other Parties	0	0	0
TOTAL	**70**	**51**	**121**

Appendices

6. Breakdown of Senators by Party in the House of the Senate of Canada Dec.2015.

AFFILIATION	SENATORS
Conservative	47
Independent Liberal[1]	29
Independent	6
Independent PC	1
Vacant	22
TOTAL	**105**

7. Footnotes

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For more information or to discuss the report please contact:

Esther Foreman
Director
The Social Change Agency
esther@thesocialchangeagency.org
+44 (0)7956 808 555

www.thesocialchangeagency.org
@estherforeman

the social change agency

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