

Engagement:

- How effective has the Government's e-petitions system been in enabling the public to engage with parliamentarians and the democratic process?
  - I think this would require a formal study, not just of numbers signing petitions and what petitions but also in terms of how citizens feel about the process and whether or not they believe it is worth their engagement. It is also worth looking at tracking the e-petitions through their lifetime to ascertain whether or not they actually achieve anything in terms of legislative change or other outcome measures.
- How best can video and webcasting be used to encourage greater engagement?
  - Video and webcasting could be enormously influential. One only has to look at the power of social media in revolutions in Iran (Twitter), Tunisia and Egypt (Facebook), and the London Riots (facebook and peer-to-peer messenger services). Some viral videos also illustrate its potential, for example, Kony 2012 on YouTube, the video raising awareness of the Lord's Resistance Army leader, Joseph Kony and the plight of African children enslaved in his army. Where party election and party political broadcasts have a more limited reach, especially with young people (though still some, see: Baines, P.; McDonald, E.; Wilson, H.; and Blades, F. (2011), "The relative importance of channel experiences and their impact on voting intention", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol.27, No.7/8, pp.691-717), social media has a much greater reach. Examples of its successful use include in recent social marketing campaigns, particularly the MPS' Operation Trident's Anti-guns and Anti-knife campaigns in London. Older people are increasingly taking up a Facebook presence, where video and webcasting are possible. Important speeches should be made available on YouTube and via Twitter to generate more debate. Quite how comments generated can then be fed back into the House is more difficult to ascertain but it could be the basis of a political intelligence system for parliamentary researchers to use for all parties in drafting their policies.
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- How should MPs and Parliament ensure digital inclusiveness?

By making as much material of the workings of parliament available on digital and social media as possible. However, this in itself is not sufficient. It needs packaging appropriately and in a timely way for different target audiences. Since most people own mobile phones, mobile digital content delivery and the use of smartphone applications makes a lot of sense. The parlquiz app looks like a good initiative. However, this could be extended to something providing details of Parliamentary business on a real-time basis. This would be useful for everyone from government and politics scholars, to journalists, to public affairs practitioners, to MPs, to specialist interest groups to interested citizens. However, the potential for crowdsourcing provides the most exciting opportunities. Just as ideas for cost-cutting were crowdsourced by the treasury in 2010 when the Coalition came to power, so too could parliamentary issues. If the crowdsourcing mechanism was linked particularly to mobile phone use, I think it would have the best chance of being useful.

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- What are the downsides of technology for MPs and how can they be overcome? These might include the additional overheads of using digital and traditional working methods side by side, online abuse, etc.

The downside of crowdsourcing for example is that you might get too many ideas to allow easy analysis so you will need to devise a programme to quantitatively analyse material coming in (but this is where 'big data' analysis techniques come to the fore and are incredibly important). You might also get inappropriate input also of course from members of the public. If so much political intelligence is available to researchers, they will need to find ways of analysing it so will need training in appropriate analysis, processing and presentation techniques.

Facilitating dialogue amongst citizens:

- Should Parliament (or Government) have a role in facilitating dialogue amongst citizens?

Yes, definitely. I would like to see parliament become much stronger in this regard. Clearly it needs to be party apolitical in this regard so it would focus on mechanisms of informing citizens of ways of getting involved in and engaging in politics, without providing policy content per se.

- Is it important for citizens to have an online platform or other medium for discussing political issues and the work of Government and Parliament? If so, who should be responsible for providing it – Government, Parliament, or the private sector?

An online platform would be excellent. The crowdsourcing mechanism is one possibility. What you might do is look to build up a Parliamentary Community site, akin to the communities built by commercial brand owners. Critical here though is the development of the infrastructure for the site without overly prescribing or writing content. Most communities (e.g. Mumsnet or the P&G's Pampers community) tend to be driven by user-generated content. So the trick is to facilitate the community (citizens and other stakeholders) in this case to interact within itself. I would have thought Parliament should set up such a platform but its role might be more limited to driving political engagement and strengthening the representativeness of Britain's democratic traditions. Clearly such a platform can and should also facilitate MP's interactions with their constituents.

- Will future tools make it easier to facilitate dialogue, and if so how?

The design and development of a suitable 'engage parliament' smartphone app would be good, where citizens could, among other services, submit comments to their MP. This would make the process of political letter-writing fairly painless and allow the keeping of a formal record of correspondence between the citizen and their MP. Petitions, speeches, research and lots more could be provided through such a system.

I have undertaken work on online communications for other government departments and some of the insights gained here might be of use in this initiative.

If you wish to come back to me for a deeper discussion of any of the above, I would be delighted to discuss further.

Regards, Paul

Paul Baines  
Professor of Political Marketing  
Cranfield University