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Escaping from the straitjacket: UK MPs and their e-newsletters

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Politics, Internet, Electronic publishing, Communications, United Kingdom

Abstract

Members of Parliament (MPs) want to communicate their ideas, messages and activities to their constituents. Within the modern political campaigning era the central party organisation has dominated most political communication through its control of national media management. As a result many MPs have sought to reach constituents via their local media. The rise of the post-modern era has encouraged many MPs to consider unmediated communication via the internet. E-newsletters represent a mechanism by which MPs can reduce their reliance on party hierarchies and journalists to communicate with constituents. This article will look at the growth of e-newsletters, and whether certain factors make some MPs more likely than others to provide an e-newsletter. The findings suggest that e-newsletters are a slow-moving bandwagon, with MPs in marginal seats and certain parties more likely to hop on, but that MPs have not yet escaped from the straitjacket of the centrally controlled campaign.

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Introduction

The role that Members of Parliament (MPs) play in the delivery of political messages is contested. An increasing number of commentators since the 1980s have referred to a permanent campaign dominated by national party headquarters (Blumenthal, 1980; Ornstein and Mann, 2000; Thurber, 2002). Within this view MPs are sidelined and rarely mentioned within the political communication process. However, contrary to this view of centralisation there has also been a growing body of literature that points to the impact of local campaigning by MPs and candidates (Rush, 2001; Butler and Collins, 2001; Denver and Hands, 1998). Common to both perspectives is the importance of technology.

Most researchers have focused on the use and impact of MPs' web sites (Halstead, 2002; Painter and Wardle, 2001; Gibson *et al.*, 2003). In theory this enables MPs to bypass the twin gatekeepers of both their own party elite and journalists. However, in practice the standard of MPs' web sites has, on the whole, been poor (Ward, 2000; Ward and Gibson, 2003; Jackson, 2003a). Primarily web sites have been used by MPs as electronic brochures. E-newsletters have been successfully used in the commercial sector (Chaffey *et al.*, 2000), but so far they are largely unexplored in the political world.

E-newsletters should be attractive to MPs for two key reasons. First, e-newsletters are an unmediated communication channel enabling them to reach constituents directly without having to go through external gatekeepers. The party hierarchy should have limited impact on shaping the content of their e-newsletters. Second, they are cost-effective (Collin, 2000; Diffley, 2002; Katz, 2003) and, even for technophobes, fairly easy to produce. Once a mailing list has been created and maintained, the distribution of an e-newsletter is through the click of a button. Unlike printed publications they do not need costly plates, printing, nor is an army of deliverers required to put them through constituents' letterboxes. E-newsletters are a new mechanism by which MPs can enjoy direct and regular contact with their constituents.

This article will consider whether e-newsletters represent a mechanism by which individual MPs can reduce reliance on their party hierarchy and journalists to communicate with constituents.

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MPs and political communication – a short history

In what has been referred to as pre-modern political campaigning (Norris *et al.*, 1999, Norris, 2000) MPs played a major role in communicating with the electorate. This era existed from the mid-nineteenth century up to the 1950s where the dominant political communication technique was through direct communication with constituents, such as face-to-face meetings and public events (Maarek, 1995; Norris, 2000). Election campaigning was characterised by three features: a partisan press, reliance on local volunteers and a short national campaign (Norris *et al.*, 1999).

The second, or modern (Norris *et al.*, 1999; Norris, 2000), era has been dominated by television (Kavanagh, 1995; Denver and Hands, 1998). The coverage of the 1959 general election acted as a watershed from the pre-modern to the modern era of political campaigning. Although mass communication had existed for some years with a national print media and radio, it was television that gradually became the mass communication tool of choice for politicians. From the late 1950s/early 1960s political communication was essentially mediated (Swanson and Mancini, 1996).

In the modern era the role of individual MPs in message delivery was marginalised. There was a move away from local constituency activity organised essentially by amateurs through to national campaigns run by communication professionals (Norris *et al.*, 1999). Increasingly this placed a premium on securing favourable television coverage, and this necessitated a single agreed message that proven media performers would deliver. Ultimately, the dominance of television significantly increased the power of the central party organisation (Denver and Hands, 1998) at the expense of individual MPs, party activists and local constituency parties.

The dominance of television did not marginalise MPs just because so few of them were given access to it, but more importantly because it required techniques beyond the budget of the individual MP. From the 1980s, politicians became increasingly reliant on a range of marketing tools (Kavanagh, 1995; Wring, 1995; Lees-Marshment, 2001) such as market research, opinion polling, focus groups and advertising, which individual MPs could not afford to use (Kavanagh, 1995). For example, Scammell (1995) suggests that the use of political advertising by the Conservative Party in the 1980s further enhanced the power of a small party hierarchy. So, while individual MPs were experiencing a declining ability to get their

message across to citizens, that of party hierarchies was increasing.

If the modern era of political campaigning has been dominant since the 1950s, a number of commentators (Wring, 1996; Norris, 2000) have suggested that from the early 1990s it has been challenged by a third era, the post-modern. While not yet dominant, post-modern political campaigning has encouraged greater use of unmediated communication between citizen and politician. The post-modern campaign is characterised by increased reliance on professional advisers (Plasser, 2002), greater use of sophisticated marketing techniques to target key audiences (Wring, 1995) and a permanent campaign (Ornstein and Mann, 2000). This implies further strengthening of the central party machine, but it also suggests that resources can trickle down to the constituency level as well to supplement the national campaign.

The post-modern era has been driven by three factors. First, television has become more fragmented with significant increases in the number of terrestrial and satellite television stations (Norris *et al.*, 1999). Second, to maintain market share the national press has had to become less partisan in nature (Norris *et al.*, 1999), so political parties can no longer rely on communicating their messages through a few national newspapers. As a result party campaigners have to work harder to get their message out to key audiences (Franklin and Richardson, 2002a). The third factor, the introduction of information communication technologies (ICTs), such as the fax, the internet and text messaging, enables politicians to communicate directly with targeted groups of voters. Citizens can play a much more active role as these technologies enable them to provide feedback to politicians. However, access to such communication technology is not equal, and there may be the development of a “techno-élite” of both the sender and receiver of such electronic messages.

The rise of local campaigning

The post-modern era appears to have encouraged greater integration of national and local political campaigning. From the late 1950s through to early the 1990s the orthodox view, as exemplified by the Nuffield election studies (Butler and Rose, 1960; Butler and Kavanagh, 1974), suggested that local campaigning had little if any impact on elections. However, since the 1980s there has been a growing body of work (Denver and Hands, 1992; Pattie *et al.*, 1994; Denver and Hands, 1997; Denver

et al., 2002, 2004; Franklin and Richardson, 2002b) that suggests that the local campaign does indeed have an impact. The local campaign, by mobilising supporters actually to vote on election day, complements the national campaign. Denver and Hands (1997) suggest that two developments have driven the growth of local campaigning. First, there has been an increase in the number of undecided or floating voters resulting from class dealignment since the 1960s. Second, the introduction of the personal computer (PC) and desktop publishing (DTP) software enabled MPs to produce professional-looking campaign materials at a price they could afford. The internet has further enhanced an MP's ability to communicate directly with constituents. The new technology, which is dominating the post-modern era, is thus helping both central party organisations and individual politicians communicate more effectively to key audiences.

Most literature on communication techniques used by MPs has focused on their use of media relations (Franklin and Richardson, 2002b; Negrine and Lilleker, 2003; Jackson and Lilleker, 2003). Common to all of these commentators is the view that national coverage is generally denied to individual MPs. Research conducted by Franklin and Richardson (2002b) and Negrine and Lilleker (2003) found that in the past 30 years MPs have increased their local media relations to secure local coverage. Denied access to national coverage many MPs have turned to local coverage, however this is only part of the picture. Jackson and Lilleker (2003) suggest that MPs are media agents in that they employ all available mediated and unmediated communications. So far MPs have stressed the importance of local media relations, but the internet in general and e-newsletters in particular, opens up a new communication route to constituents.

The use of e-newsletters in political communication

Most existing literature (Coleman, 1999; Campbell *et al.*, 1999; Carter, 1999; Goldschmidt, 2002; Alperin and Schultz, 2003) has been concerned that individual representatives in both the UK and the USA might be overwhelmed by inbound e-mail. However, empirical research by Jackson (2003b) found that although e-mail has led to an increase in workload, MPs do not feel swamped by it. As a result there is an opportunity to use the outbound campaigning capacity of e-mail through regular e-newsletters to communicate to constituents.

At its very simplest an e-newsletter can help act as a "reminder facility" (Ollier, 1998) so that a small section of constituents regularly "hear from" their representative. A constituent who has never seen their MP in person might opine that "we never hear from you, so why should I vote for you?" The same constituent who is in regular receipt of a direct "personalised" communication in the form of an e-newsletter may find it more difficult to utter such a sentiment. E-newsletters also offer MPs tangible benefits such as attracting volunteer help and encouraging feedback (Chaffey *et al.*, 2000; Katz, 2003; Miller, 2003). Although e-newsletters are characterised as a "push" mechanism (Ollier, 1998) they need not be used just as a one-way route from sender to receiver. With the touch of the reply button the receiver can send back their solicited or unsolicited views. In theory, e-newsletters can enhance an MP's electoral prospects and facilitate their representative function. Indeed, it could be suggested that an e-newsletter might give an incumbent MP a significant electoral advantage.

Such benefits do not just automatically happen, MPs have to offer something in return, and the currency of e-newsletters is usually information not easily available elsewhere (Sterne, 2001; Chaffey, 2003). An MP who uses their e-newsletter merely to promote their own rhetoric, like an election handbill, will soon find that subscribers desert them in droves. E-newsletters are not a hard-sell (Goldsborough, 2002; Weil, 2004); rather they are a means of exchanging ideas, views and news over a period of time. An e-newsletter is a regular communication process (Miller, 2003; Klein, 2002) whereby both sender and receiver give something, whether it is information or feedback on that information. An e-newsletter should not exist just for the duration of an election campaign.

In a short space of time, best practice for using an e-newsletter has been developed by commercial e-marketers. Three factors, in particular, influence the success of any e-newsletter. First, there is a range of netiquette (Chaffey, 2003) to consider such as keeping e-newsletters short, making subscription and unsubscribing easy and providing links to your web site. Second, the quality of the mailing list: unlike postal direct mail buying in lists is frowned on by e-marketers and will result in spam, and politicians cannot afford to annoy their constituents. Rather, a list must be home-grown based ideally on permission marketing (Godin, 1999) whereby e-newsletter subscribers have given their consent by opting-in. Third, content is vital. An e-newsletter that follows the rules and has a large number of subscribers will have little impact if it has nothing to say. An effective e-newsletter,

therefore, requires a combination of time, skills and appropriate content.

Beyond the existing commercial advice from e-marketers politicians have access to limited guidance, which is specifically directed at their peculiar needs as representatives. Steinberg (2001) provided a "how to" guide for MPs so that they can create and manage e-newsletters. The Congress Online Project (2003) provides a similar function for US Members of Congress. Jackson (2003b) found that UK MPs appear to be put off from providing an e-newsletter because of the sheer amount of regular work entailed in updating e-mailing lists, writing copy and handling feedback. Apart from these sources above, there is little research of politicians' use of e-newsletters.

Methodology

This longitudinal research project aims to examine whether MPs are turning to e-newsletters as an unmediated communication tool. This article will cover three research questions:

- RQ1.* How many MPs provide an e-newsletter[1]?
RQ2. Are there particular factors that make some MPs more likely to provide an e-newsletter?
RQ3. Are MPs' e-newsletters only available to constituents?

RQ1 and *RQ2* were assessed by identifying which MPs provided an e-newsletter. On 1 April 2003, the 303 MPs' web sites accessible via www.parliament.uk were analysed for which ones offered an e-newsletter. Returning on 1 April 2004, the web sites of 414 MPs accessed via www.parliament.uk were analysed for those who provide an e-newsletter.

Table I outlines the characteristics assessed for *RQ2* including personal, political and constituency factors. Some of the features require further explanation. "When elected" means the Parliament when first elected which for most MPs will be the year of the general election, but those elected at a later by-election within the same Parliament are considered to have been elected with the same cohort. "Seniority" refers to whether

Table I Characteristics of MPs with an e-newsletter

Characteristics	Feature
Personal	Age
	Gender
Political	Party
	When elected
	Seniority
	Loyalty
Constituency	Marginality

the provider of an e-newsletter was either a government minister or official opposition frontbench spokesperson. This can only provide a rough and ready measure of seniority for two reasons. First, it is based only on those who are currently frontbenchers, but some senior figures may for a variety of reasons be on their party's backbenches. Second, such a classification covers only Labour and Conservative MPs and does not apply to MPs of other parties. Loyalty is an inexact measurement but is based on the assessment of both Roth's (2000) *Parliamentary Profiles* and Waller and Griddle (2002). MPs were categorised as either loyal, occasionally rebellious, rebel, or insufficient data were available to make a judgement. Marginality was based on Finer *et al.*'s (1961) measurement where a marginal seat had a majority of up to 5 per cent, near marginal 5.1 per cent to 10.9 per cent and safe 11 per cent and above.

RQ3 was determined by whether MPs limited their e-newsletter to just constituents or not. If subscription required a postal address within their constituency, then we might assume that the purpose of their e-newsletter was to either improve their electoral prospects and/or enhance their representative role. Those MPs who did not request a constituency postal address would be unable to assume that subscribers were constituents.

The growth of MPs' e-newsletters

It has not been recorded who was the first MP to produce a regular e-newsletter, nor when such an e-newsletter was created, but MPs have been slow to adopt this new communication tool. A survey conducted in June/July 2002 by Jackson (2003b) found that of 100 MPs who responded only four MPs claimed to have an e-newsletter. All four MPs were from the Labour Party, one was in a near-marginal seat and the other three in safe seats. If the results of this survey were extended to all MPs with a web site at the time then it would have amounted to at most ten to 12 MPs. E-newsletters were the preserve of a very small number of early adopters.

Within ten months (April 2003), the number of MPs offering visitors to their web site the opportunity of signing up to their e-newsletter increased to 19. In addition, the web site of 26 Labour MPs had a Local eNews subscription form on their web site, which enabled visitors to occasionally receive information about their local area. However, this facility appears to have been created and managed by Labour's central office, not by the individual MP, and so has been ignored for the purposes of this research.

Exactly a year later, April 2004, the number of MPs offering visitors to their web site an e-newsletter service had more than doubled to 39. Although it is interesting to note that five MPs (three Labour, one Conservative and one Liberal Democrat) who were listed in April 2003 as providing an e-newsletter no longer did so in 2004. In addition, the number of Labour MPs who provided the Local eNews function on their web site increased to 50.

MPs' adoption of web sites in the late 1990s was very slow (White, 1999) with initially only a few pioneers taking the plunge. Gradually a momentum was created and now the majority of MPs have a web site. The growth of e-newsletters may be at a similar stage to those of web sites in the early years. However, the management of e-newsletters probably requires more work from the MP and/or their staff than a web site. As a result by the next general election the number of MPs providing an e-newsletter will certainly have increased but it is likely to still be only a minority of the total.

Which MPs have an e-newsletter?

The numbers of MPs with an e-newsletter in 2003 are too small to make any meaningful analysis, but they set a benchmark against which to measure 2004, and any subsequent years. In April 2003 ten of the providers of e-newsletters were Labour MPs, five Liberal Democrat and four Conservative. Out of their total number of MPs, the Liberal Democrats were proportionately the most likely to have an e-newsletter.

Personal characteristics of MPs with an e-newsletter in April 2004

The first factors to be tested of why certain types of MP are more likely to have an e-newsletter are the personal characteristics of age and gender. Tables II and III suggest that these factors are of

Table II Age of MPs with an e-newsletter in April 2004

Age	Number	%
25-34	0	0
35-44	11	11.3
45-54	13	5.3
55-64	14	5.9
65 and over	1	1.6

Table III Gender of MPs offering an e-newsletter in April 2004

Feature	Number
Male	35
Female	4

limited impact. The younger and older age groups are least likely to have an e-newsletter. The age group in society most likely to have access to the internet (35-44) (McAuliff, 2001) is also the age group of MPs most likely to provide an e-newsletter. There is a slight gender bias. Women represent 18 per cent of all MPs but only 10 per cent of those with an e-newsletter in April 2004. However, overall these personal characteristics appear to have limited impact on why some MPs are motivated to have an e-newsletter.

The political characteristics of MPs with an e-newsletter in April 2004

Party allegiance does appear to be a factor. Although Labour was first off the mark (Jackson, 2003b) in 2002, it is now the Liberal Democrats who proportionately seem the most likely to provide e-newsletters. Table IV shows that the Labour Party has 62 per cent of all MPs but provides only 41 per cent of those with an e-newsletter. The Conservative Party matches its overall representation with 25 per cent of all seats and 25 per cent of those with e-newsletters. The most e-newsletter friendly party is the Liberal Democrats who have 8 per cent of total MPs but 31 per cent of those with an e-newsletter. This party bias to new technology is consistent with previous research, which has considered Liberal Democrat MPs to be most "web-savvy" and Conservatives the least (Halstead, 2002; Jackson, 2003a; Lusoli and Ward, 2004). If e-newsletters have any impact on voting behaviour at the next general election, it appears that Liberal Democrat MPs are currently in the best position to take advantage of this.

Norton and Wood (1990) suggest that each new cohort of MPs is motivated to build a personal vote, and those most recently elected appear more likely to view an e-newsletter as a means of achieving this. Table IV shows that the 2001 cohort comprises 16 per cent of MPs in Parliament but 25 per cent of those with an e-newsletter. The 1997 cohort represents 36 per cent of the total and 43 per cent of those with an e-newsletter. The high representation of the 2001 and 1997 cohort might be explained by the fact that most Liberal Democrat MPs were elected in those two elections (see Table V). Irrespective of age, it is the most recently elected MPs who are most likely to have

Table IV Party of MPs offering an e-newsletter in April 2004

Party	Number of MPs
Labour	16
Conservatives	10
Liberal Democrats	12
Plaid Cymru	1

Table V Cohort of MPs offering an e-newsletter in April 2004

Parliament when first elected	Number
2001	10
1997	17
1992	8
1983 and before	2

an e-newsletter. This trend is similar to that of web site provision (Lusoli and Ward, 2004) where most recently elected MPs, who are more likely to be in more marginal seats, view the internet as a means of building up a relationship with constituents.

Seniority is a factor motivating MPs who have web sites (Jackson, 2003a; Lusoli and Ward, 2004) with more senior MPs slightly more likely to have a web site. The situation with e-newsletters is more complex with party influencing whether seniority is a motive. Two Labour ministers have an e-newsletter representing 12.5 per cent of all Labour MPs with their own e-newsletter. The number of opposition frontbenchers with their own e-newsletter is six, representing 60 per cent of all Conservative MPs providing an e-newsletter. Although the sample is small, seniority might appear to be more relevant for Conservative MPs than Labour.

There is some evidence that rebellious MPs are slightly more likely to have a web site (Jackson, 2003c). This might be explained by the fact that denied access to the party communications machinery they seek direct communication with constituents to air their views. However, Table VI suggests that MPs who do not always toe the party line do not view their e-newsletter in a similar light. In fact, rebels appear the least likely to provide an e-newsletter. At present rebellious MPs are using other means of communicating with constituents.

Constituency characteristics of MPs with an e-newsletter in April 2004

Marginality of seat does appear to be a factor.

Those MPs facing a tight electoral contest are slightly more likely to have an e-newsletter.

Table VII shows that nearly 8 per cent of seats meet *Finer et al.*'s (1961) definition of a marginal seat and 12.8 per cent of those with an e-newsletter are in marginal seats. Near-marginals represent 15 per cent of total seats and 25.6 per cent of those with an e-newsletter. This might, in part, be explained

Table VI Loyalty of MPs offering an e-newsletter in April 2004

Loyalty	Number
Loyal	30
Occasional rebel	3
Rebel	2
Insufficient data	4

Table VII Marginality of seats of MPs offering an e-newsletter in April 2004

Marginality	Number
Marginal	5
Near-marginal	10
Safe	24

by the high number of the 1997 and 2001 cohort who might be expected to face closer electoral contests at the next election. This trend towards the importance of marginality is also consistent with the experience of MPs' provision of web sites (Jackson, 2003a; Lusoli and Ward, 2004). MPs seem to view the internet as a possible vote winner.

However, there appears to be differences between how MPs in marginals of different parties view e-newsletters. None of the MPs representing Labour's ten most marginal seats has an e-newsletter. Whereas, three of the Conservative's ten most marginal seats provide an e-newsletter, as do two of the Liberal Democrat's most marginal seats. Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs faced with close election contests are more likely to have an e-newsletter. This might reflect a deliberate policy from both parties' headquarters to encourage locally based e-newsletters in target seats.

Of the three characteristics, two might influence why an MP is more likely to have an e-newsletter. Personal characteristics, age and gender, do not appear to be major factors, but political and constituency characteristics are. Some political characteristics, namely party, cohort and, to some extent, seniority have some influence. Therefore, from admittedly a small sample Liberal Democrat MPs, more recently elected MPs and senior Conservative MPs might be more likely to have an e-newsletter. Moreover, those MPs whose seats are marginal also appear slightly more likely to have an e-newsletter. Those MPs who need to establish either their own or their party's credibility and/or need to shore up their core votes appear more likely to provide an e-newsletter.

E-newsletters and the link with constituents

Potentially, MPs' e-newsletters can help them build relationships with constituents, mobilise support and enhance their representative role. In order to achieve these we might assume that MPs would want to limit subscription to their own constituents. This would be very much akin to the principle that MPs deal with only their own constituent's casework. In fact, most MPs do not

insist that their e-newsletter is limited to constituents only.

The MP determines what information is required from subscribers. The potential subscriber has to complete an online form on the MP's web site, which asks for personal information, some of which may be compulsory, some of which may be optional. Typically, MPs only ask for name and e-mail address. Of the 19 MPs with an e-newsletter in April 2003, two (10.5 per cent) limited their e-newsletters to constituents only by asking for a valid constituency postal address or postcode. Of the 39 MPs with an e-newsletter in April 2004, five (12.8 per cent) request a constituency address as the basis for receiving their e-newsletter. Although in the 12-month period of this study the number of MPs with an e-newsletter has doubled, the percentage of those who limit their e-newsletter to constituents has increased only slightly from 10.5 per cent to 12.8 per cent. The majority of MPs are not providing a service targeted solely at constituents, rather there appears to be a "scattergun" approach. This can either be a deliberate or accidental strategy.

By just asking for an e-mail address some MPs may have taken a deliberate decision not to limit their e-newsletter to constituents because they want to raise their profile as wide as possible. However, the fact that none of these MPs asks for further personal information (such as where the subscriber lives, policy interests or why they are subscribing) suggests that these MPs simply do not know who has registered for their e-newsletter. The "scattergun" approach appears to be accidental due to limited understanding by MPs of how best to use the technology. While a subscriber may indeed be of voting age residing in their constituency, they could equally be a 16-year-old student from Mombassa. This lack of knowledge about subscribers can dilute the impact of any e-newsletter and suggests that the MP is not in total control of the communication process.

Conclusion

Currently, providing an e-newsletter is the preserve of a small number of pioneers. Although the number of MPs who provide an e-newsletter has grown over a 12-month period, and we might expect this growth to continue, e-newsletters are a minority sport for MPs. This very much mirrors the development of web sites by MPs in the late 1990s. However, in the run-up to the next general election campaign (which must be held no later than June 2006) we might expect many more MPs

to consider providing an e-newsletter as their minds concentrate on electoral campaigning.

Of the three characteristics tested for why some MPs might be more likely to provide an e-newsletter than others, two may have an impact. First, some political characteristics such as party allegiance, cohort and seniority may have an impact. Second, constituencies whose characteristic is shaped by a close electoral contest are also slightly more likely to be represented by an MP with an e-newsletter. The number of MPs who belong to any (or more than one) of these categories is quite large. Therefore, the potential for expansion in the number of MPs providing an e-newsletter is quite high. However, the skills, resources and time required to regularly produce an e-newsletter are demanding. As a result the provision of e-newsletters by MPs is likely to be a slow-moving bandwagon.

E-newsletters potentially enable MPs to develop their representative function through greater contact with their constituents. Such contact can help build long-term relationships, which might have electoral benefits, as well as help MPs carry out their job more effectively. However, the evidence suggests that MPs are not necessarily using their e-newsletters as a means of solely building up a rapport with constituents. Rather, the majority of MPs by not limiting their e-newsletter to constituents are diluting its effect.

This research project was an introductory study to find out the use of e-newsletters by MPs. With such a small sample the conclusions can only be indicative, and the research highlights the fact that further investigation is required to gain a more complete understanding of how MPs see their e-newsletters. First, although personal characteristics such as age and gender appear not to be of impact, other personal characteristics may well be, and these will require more qualitative research. For example, are MPs who have a personal interest in information technology (IT), or who have staff who are interested and skilled in IT, more likely to have an e-newsletter? Second, what does the content of MPs' e-newsletters tell us about how and why they use them? Third, what is the impact on the receiver of these e-newsletters? Researchers have significant understanding of the use of web sites in political communication, but not yet e-newsletters.

As part of the growth of the permanent campaign the literature suggests that new technologies have increased the opportunity for MPs to have a greater impact on local campaigning. As a consequence e-newsletters represent a new unmediated mechanism by which MPs can have greater control over their communication. However, the very small number

of MPs with an e-newsletter, and the fact that most MPs do not know who is receiving their e-newsletter suggests that they have not yet escaped from the straitjacket of the centrally-controlled campaign.

Note

- 1 Statistics will be based on the number of MPs who claim on their Web site to provide an e-newsletter, not whether they actually do.

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