Of Iron Laws and Digital Networks: A Look at Digital Campaigning in the 2010 UK General Election

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One of the enduring theoretical propositions within political science is the "iron law of oligarchy." According to Michels (1915/1999), the structure of political competition and organization necessarily gives rise to top-down, vertically structured political organizations. As Michels famously put it, "who says organization, says oligarchy" (365). However relatively recent developments in the study of organizational behaviour and digital politics have brought this law into question. Through separate bodies of literature their arguments contend that the structure of modern society renders obsolete the model of vertically-integrated organizations as high levels of organizational complexity, role differentiation, and the integration of ubiquitous digital communications into organizational processes give rise to organizational dynamics favouring heterarchy rather than hierarchy (Luhmann 1982; Kallinikos 2006). Indeed some have gone so far as to suggest that organizational use of digitally-networked communications can effectively negate the iron law of oligarchy entirely by enabling the creation of horizontal networks between leaders and supporters (Green et al 2003; Konieczny 2009). This paper is an investigation of the use of horizontal communications online by the major political parties during the 2010 United Kingdom general election.

Increasingly politics is conducted through media spaces, especially in countries such as the United Kingdom, were internet access and adoption is approaching saturation point (Castells 2009; Strömbäck 2008). These spaces constitute the channels through which political authorities can conduct their business, sending messages directed to other political authorities, the media and citizens. Under these circumstances, it becomes pertinent to ask whether campaigns and other political organizations are undergoing structural transformations, in response to these shifts. In particular, Rasmus Kleis Nielson argues campaigns today are constituted by a "the use of partially overlapping infrastructures and exostructures to communicate and coordinate," bounded by a common goal however limited it may be (2009, 269).

Today it has become common to speak of the formation of horizontal digital networks as supplanting hierarchical forms of political organization – in effect declaring an end to the iron law of oligarchy. In the movement from a society constituted "under the conditions of pre-electronic communication" to a society with ubiquitous digital communication networks, Castells argues that "networks became the most efficient organizational form" (2009: 22-3). If the widespread diffusion and integration of digital networks enables the effective use of more horizontal political campaign structures, this presents a serious challenge to Michels' theory of organization. However, little work has elucidated the empirical organizational forms manifested online that constitute campaign networks between political party leaders and supporters.

Digital communication technologies do not define the structure of political organization. Rather they are a series of techniques for communicating with particular properties that structure the message communicated. When McLuhan (1994) declared that, "the medium is the message," he meant that any message is rendered in a medium

(voice, Tweet, pamphlet, post, etc.) which have unique properties in structuring the message. But as Burke (1966, 410-18) notes, the range of communicative operations cannot be properly conceptualized if we limit ourselves to a vocabulary of media operations. Like an artist chooses a particular material to convey a particular message or sentiment, Burke argues that a message takes shape through the contents communicated via a particular medium. Furthermore, these messages are not the docile transportation of information, but shape the political situation and position receivers in relation to the party (Burke 1969; Edelman 1988).

This paper is an inquiry into the different organizational structures that developed in the 2010 British general election online, comparing communications at the national and local level. While network society sublates geographic space, rendering it as a "space of flows," this is not to say that political geography dissolves into informational currents (Castells 1999). In particular, the British general election is institutionalised through a geographic structure organized around 650 territorially-defined constituencies with individual results aggregated into a national electoral outcome. Given the range of psephological circumstances in each constituency, the unique sets of issues in play, and local histories as well as the independent campaign activities of each of the candidates, there is potentially a high degree of differentiation in the communicative strategies in operation at the national level and across the local level races. The structure of these campaign information flows gives shape to each level of campaign organizations.

In this paper, we study the nine constituencies[1] in Birmingham, England as a case study, as well communications from the three main parties and their leaders to compare the practices of e-campaigning at both the local and national level. The paper analyses the role differentiation Michels argues inevitably inheres in all manner of political organization. This research connects the rhetorical form of campaign communications with structural relationship campaigns forge with supporters. Our aim is to identify the types of messages disseminated at the national and local levels. We find there are variations in the organizational networks between political authorities and electorates at the national and local levels of electoral campaigns. Most notably, while a predominantly command and control structure of the campaign operates at the national level, as Michels predicts, we find communications at the local level are more horizontal and personal in nature. This research shows that networks have a rich topography, though it is important to differentiate the networks that emerge during campaigns from party institutions which appear to retain a traditional command and control mode of organization.

Campaign Organizations and Digital Communications

Michels regarded as inevitable the functional differentiation between political leaders and supporters. He writes, "Every party organization represents an oligarchical power grounded on a democratic basis. We find everywhere electors and elected" (p. 365). Both the structural demands of organization as well as the psychological transformations wrought by leadership roles give rise to differences in behaviour and attitudes between party leaders and supporters. To the extent supporters are unable to challenge leaders, party leaders secure their estrangement. This section outlines Michels argument and the

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[1] For the purposes of this study, the following constituencies are included: Edgbaston,Erdington, Hall Green, Hodge Hill, Ladywood, Northfield, Perry Bar, Sellyoak and Yardley.

terms on which this study engages his claims. We confine our analysis to the operation of parties within the electorate. Michels argued that party leaders are distinguished from lay members on account of their access to information, their control of the means of communication within the party, and their superior political skill.[2] He further held that decentralization did not attenuate the tendency towards oligarchy. We will examine each one of these claims advanced by Michels in light of the response it engenders from within the literature on network societies and modern campaigning. While Michels work may lack conceptual precision (Leach 2005), there is sufficiently clear claims with which to contrast our empirical observations.

Information Access
Michels held that the masses were incapable of self-government because they lack both the knowledge to govern and the inclination to seek it out. As a result, most major decisions are taken within parties by a small minority. He writes, "the majority of the members are as indifferent to the organization as the majority of the electors are to parliament" (86). Over time, this assumption of superior knowledge has justified the systematic exclusion of the mass from party decision making (165). The professionalization of politics had even in Michels' time rendered political campaigning beyond the purview of amateurs.

Over time, the informational environment of modern politics has become increasingly complex. The information "abundance" (Bimber 2003) of earlier campaign politics has given way to information "exuberance" (Chadwick 2009). Both are symptomatic of the informatization of politics whereby citizens and political authorities experience politics primarily through strategically communicated information flows (Crozier 2007) that transform the "cognitive landscape" of political life, rendering it as "permutable and recombinable information" (Kallinikos 2006, 6). The informatization of politics is not simply a quantitative change in the volume of information transmitted but a qualitative shift in the rendering of political activity. Citizens are delineated with respect to their propensity to vote (and which way) and the identification of electoral and geographic that need to be targeted with tailored messages (Howard 2006; Kallinikos 2009). The rise of the twenty-four hour news cycle, in part a product of online news reporting (Delli Carpini and Williams 2001: 164-5), improved polling techniques, the nationalization of campaigning, and the rise of interest group participation in elections has resulted in a highly professionalized, information-intensive mode of campaigning (Lilleker 2006: 145).

On the one hand, this image of the modern campaign is consistent with Michels' view of politics as an activity best left to professionals – particularly given that rank and file party members cannot be bothered to contribute their free time and ideas to the party (85-7). On the other hand, the digital communication technologies may change the participatory calculus as online participation requires significantly lower temporal and cognitive investments in comparison to its offline counterparts (Shulman 2009). Additionally, the collective intelligence distributed throughout populations can at times exceed the professional brain trust of parties. Clay Shirky writes, "the wiring of humanity lets us treat free time as a shared global resource, and lets us design new kinds of

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[2] Michels of course further distinguishes party leaders along a number of other dimensions which we do not have to concern ourselves with here.

participation and sharing that can take advantage of that resource" (2010: Kindle location 389). Hence, though individual contributions from a party's professional membership may dwarf individual contributions from lay members, the collective contributions of party supporters are potentially significant. The question for Michels is the extent to which contemporary campaigns maintain a monopoly on actionable information versus that which is crowd-sourced by the party.

Campaigning and Communications
Political campaigns, first and foremost are a communicative process (Bimber and Davis 2003). Public opinion researchers have documented the role of campaign information flows in shifting political opinions (Converse 1962), or indirectly via the circulation of campaign information through networks of opinion leaders and social groups (Beck et al. 2004; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1986). Additionally, campaign communications have been shown to be effective informing individuals about politics and in mobilizing participation via these messages (Norris 1999, 2000). Even outside of electoral periods, political parties are a focal point for feedback from members of a political system (Easton 1965: 418-19) – and all the more so when they are attempting to solicit votes. Michels identified two chief communication advantages leaders had over other party members: their control over the formal channels of communication and their superior rhetorical skills.

First, in Michels' day, the party press was a key communication channel (Michels 1999: 149-52). Today, candidates make widespread use of independent media channels – print, radio, television – as well as direct communications through online platforms, party electoral broadcasts, advertising, and mailers. Of the online platforms, Twitter and Facebook – both widely used by candidates and parties – have woven into their architectures channels of rejoinder. This provides party members and others the ability to respond to leaders with relatively equal access to the channels of communication. Digitally-networked media play a central role in this transformation of political campaigning. No longer are members of an electorate broadcast media passive audiences (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995), but receivers and (re)broadcasters of direct communications.

Second, Michels regards rhetorical skill as indispensable for political leaders. He argues, "The prestige acquired by the orator in the minds of of the crowd is almost unlimited. What the masses appreciate above all are oratorical gifts as such, beauty and strength of voice, suppleness of mind, badinage; whilst the content of the speech is of secondary importance" (99). Different combinations rhetorical operations can raise to the fore depending on the specific forms of communication. However, the success of these posts often turns on the degree to which they can maintain a socially-mediated notion of authenticity (Henderson and Bowley 2010; Lawson-Borders and Kirk 2005).

This points to a greater perlocutionary range in campaign communications than information directed at potential voters: communications relate speakers and audiences. Campaign communications do not seek to only adjust their speeches to specific audiences, but to call into being certain audiences (Burke 1969; Biesecker 2000). In the 2008 US election, for example, Barack Obama's online strategy was targeted not at individuals as potential voters for the candidate, but as active contributors of money, time, or efforts. Digital media can play a significant role in this process as they provide

the infrastructure to create direct relationships between campaigns and citizens. In addition to the unidirectional and vertical communications that provide information and denounce the opposition, campaign communications can invite supporters to participate in a "two-way, non-hierarchical and mutually conditioning authority relationship," bound together by common political objectives (Bang 2009, 118).

Regarding the passive roles, there are different identities which a campaign may seek to cue. First, in the British system where parliamentary majorities, and thus governments, are formed out of localised constituency elections. Voters may be persuaded to conceive of themselves as voting for a representative of their interests, a party platform or a Prime Minister. Thus their voting preferences and campaign's communications may reflect either national or local concerns – a theme we will return to later. Second, campaigns may figure voters as "rational" actors who select candidates on the basis of proximity to one's ideal point in policy space. This approach may depend on the hand a candidate or party is dealt with respect to its incumbency status, traction with its policy agenda, and proposed policy alternatives. Third, campaign appeals may also include metacampaigning where campaigns indicate a measure of "success" by pointing to polls or, more generally, their propensity to win, seeking to strike the fine balance of demonstrating their viability as potential winners, but also ensure that those who might support them do not become complacent. Such appeals tend to dominate television reporting in America and increasingly in the UK; however, many voters have reported dissatisfaction with the focus on the political "horse race" and turned to online media sources for supplementary information about candidate policy positions (Bimber and Davis 2003, 114-116).

The foregoing suggests that the range of rhetorical operations extends beyond Michels's categories of persuasion. Given the direct connections that party leaders can potentially forge with members of the electorate, digital media channels can become a potent pathway through which leaders and supporters form connections.

Mastery of the Art of Politics
Even if the above challenges to Michels's views on the informational and communication environments of contemporary campaigning hold, it may still be the case that political leaders possess a superior grasp on the art of politics. Michels writes, "technical competence ...definitely elevates the leaders above the mass" (110). Leaders are more likely possess aptitude "in the art of controlling meetings, of applying and interpreting rules, of proposing motions at opportune moments; in a word, they are skilled in the use of artifices of all kinds" (110).

There is an extensive literature on professionalized campaigning, often pointing to increasing role specialization within parties (Gibson and Rommele 2009; Strömbäck 2007; Farrell and Webb 2002; Gibson and Rommele 2001). There is considerable debate over the significance of the term and whether professionalization is a new phenomenon or an evolutionary concept with contingent manifestations (Lilleker and Negrine 2002). In this regard, Michels observed professionalization in his own time: "At the outset, leaders arise SPONTANEOUSLY; their functions are ACCESSORY and GRATUITOUS. Soon, however, they become PROFESSIONAL leaders, and in this second stage of development they are STABLE and IRREMOVABLE" (364).[3] On the one hand, political

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[3]   Capitalization in original.

leaders come to view their position in the party or parliament as a career. On the other hand, he notes that "the PSYCHOLOGY OF ORGANIZATION ITSELF" gives rise to the functional differentiation of professional roles within the party (365).

The integration of digital technologies into campaigning practices is often seen as an extension of these practices for two reasons. First, as Philip Howard (2006) has argued, the age of digital campaigning has given rise to the "managed citizen," an object of study for campaigns, rendered in terms of informational attributes and subject to sophisticated marketing campaigns. Matthew Hindman argues that behind even the seemingly most participatory campaigns lurks a cadre of political operatives. He writes, "All of the most celebrated examples of online politics have relied on political elites to persuade, coordinate, and organize" (2009, 140-1). Second, even technologies such as Iphone applications which enabled users to prioritize their contact lists with respect to swing states or to share party manifesto and voter propaganda simply provide an array of tools through which individuals can carry out predefined campaign operations (Crozier 2010; Kallinikos 2006; Lessig 2006).

However, some critics claim that these accounts present a rather narrow representation of digital political practice. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (2011) argues, "Citizen engagement in electoral politics is not simply the product of campaign staffers and the specialized tools at their disposal, but also of the willing involvement of volunteers who connect with political organizations using a much wider range of internet tools" (forthcoming). In the process, individuals often define their roles within the campaign. Additionally, as Bang notes, while not a determined consequence of the use of digital media, the technology may support non-hierarchical communications between parties and supporters. That is, technology facilitates control of discrete processes within organizations and networks, for example, rendering participatory opportunities in terms of highly "granular," fine-grained activities of limited time and resource requirements (Chadwick 2009; Kallinikos 2006, 88-9). This enables "managed decentralization" in political campaigns and other forms of organization (Anstead 2009). In place of spatial boundaries of organizations, technological structures can create coherent and effective organizations, which have looser and more varied configurations than their forbears.

There are significant questions regarding whether parties and other organizations empirically operate in a decentralized manner or if they default to traditional hierarchical modes of organization. Previous research on this front suggests the empirical record is at best mixed as party organizations tend to dominate the flow of communications (Ward and Gibson 2009). Efforts to effectively characterize e-campaigning have lagged in part because they have failed to relate the communicative extension of campaign channels via digital platforms with the content communicated. This research addresses this gap by considering the types of "horizontal" communications from campaigns to supporters. If campaigns consist, in large measure, in outward communications from organizations, an analysis of the online, direct communications from these campaigns should provide a reasonable basis for characterising the party in the electorate.

Local and National-level Campaigning
The Westminster model of government is party-centred. Historically, campaigns were fought at the local level, and this is where the vast proportion of communicative effort and resources went (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1981). However, as a country-wide print media,

national rail network and finally electronic communications developed, campaigning became increasingly nationalised in tone, with far greater focus on parties and leaders. This shift in emphasis was so great that a slew of research published in the years around the millennium, arguing that constituency campaigns still retained some relevance to electoral outcomes, were considered to be revisionist (Denver & Hands, 1997; Denver, Hands, & Fisher, 2002; Denver, Hands, & MacAllister, 2004; Pattie, Johnston, & Fieldhouse, 1995).

However, it is now widely accepted that modern British elections function on two levels: a national level campaign between leaders and party platforms, in which the ultimate goal is control of Parliament, and then local campaigns between individual candidates seeking to be representatives of the residents within a district. These campaign environments are far from wholly autonomous: local candidates run on the national party manifesto, although still have some degree of policy autonomy, while national parties have also targeted resources at particular constituencies and candidates (the most notable example of this latter development was Conservative Vice Chairman Lord Ashcroft's decision to direct resources at marginal seats in the two years prior to 2010). Rhetorically, the duality is often reflected in the simultaneous invocation of national campaign themes within the context of the local election as candidates make claims regarding what a national victory by one party or the other will mean for the local area. However, despite these links, these levels are often segmented and functionally differentiated within the context of an electoral campaign, both in content and outcome. Indeed, one of our sample constituencies provides the best example of the latter in the 2010: the Labour MP for Birmingham Edgbaston, Gisela Stuart, retained her seat. This was despite the election resulting in Labour's second worst performance since 1918 and the seat's high ranking on the Conservative target list.

The local and national campaigns can be functionally differentiated in four senses. First, contingent factors of each constituency may give rise to unique sets of issues which the campaigns may contest, revolving around substantive policy or personality issues. Second, local candidates, in contrast to the national campaign, only need to appeal to a limited segment of citizens while national campaigns must resonate with a larger cross-section of the electorate. Hence, different issues may be stressed depending on the constituency. Third, independent of national trends, localities may have an affinity for a particular individual, independent of party, forcing challengers to adopt a posture notably different from other candidates from the same party. Fourth, while resources and media attention are significantly directed at the national level of campaigns, the local level is often dependent on labour intensive volunteer work to distribute fliers and knock on doors.

The decentralization of the campaign and the focus of energies at the local level does not necessarily indicate any less of an oligarchical tendency in political organization. Michels notes, "the decentralizing movement which manifests itself in the various national socialist parties does not conflict with the essential principle of oligarchy" (199). In Michels view, this tendency, particularly pronounced amongst minority parties and parties that are not in government, results in the creation of dispersed authorities with a local-level concentration of power. On the other hand, often lacking the national-level infrastructure and permanent staff, local-level campaigns may depend more heavily on the assistance of volunteers. In that regard, candidates with local rather than

national political profiles, may have increased incentives to take advantage of the creativity and entrepreneurialism of supporters.

Methods

We selected Birmingham, England as a comparative case study. Birmingham is the second largest city in England, with an ethnically diverse population of over one million inhabitants.[4] Additionally, the city has been undergoing a significant amount of de-industrialization and is in the process of a transition to a postindustrial economy (Marsh, O'Toole, and Jones 2007, 67-8). Birmingham was also particularly suitable in terms of the electoral picture as Birmingham had a mix of safe and marginal seats. For this reason, it figured prominently in the national campaigns, with party leaders and senior MPs making important addresses in the city. Additionally, Birmingham University also hosted the final televised debate[5]. Birmingham, therefore, is a city with both significant local campaign issues as well as national-level political attention. Candidates were called upon to address particular concerns raised by the loss of factory work and a highly heterogeneous population and party leaders regarded several of the seats as key battlegrounds in the fight for a parliamentary majority.

The data are a sample of the direct digital communications from the campaigns of the three major parties and party leaders at the national level and a sample of Tweets and Facebook posts produced over the course of the campaign between April 6, 2010 when the election was officially called and May 6, 2010 when the election was held. These posts represent the primary body of ongoing direct communications between parties, candidates, and supporters as their fans and followers. Campaign supporters must opt-in to receive these communications. The data collection was limited to public pages and profiles used for campaign purposes. Facebook and Twitter provide a unique insight into the communication flows from parties and candidates as they are direct communications which individuals must opt in to receive by becoming a Facebook fan or Twitter follower. Hence followers and fans have created a communication channel between themselves and the party or candidate.

Every post and Tweet from the public Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of the three major parties, their leaders, and their candidates in the Birmingham districts were collected. Facebook posts were parsed directed from .html copies of their pages collected twice daily.[6] The resulting sample contained 652 Facebook posts with 70 missing observations.[7] The Twitter sample contained 1657 observations, of which, 457 were randomly selected based on a stochastic selection algorithm.

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[4] Office for Neighbourhood Statistics. 2007. "Table View." Available at: http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do;jsessionid=ac1f930d30d88207028aa2f942ceaa38f4748c170251?a=3&b=276800&c=birmingham&d=13&e=13&g=373272&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1282632693019&enc=1&dsFamilyId=1812&nsjs=true&nsck=true&nssvg=false&nswid=1024 [Accessed August 24, 2010].

[5] "The Battle for No. 10 on Your Doorstep." *Birmingham Post*. April 8, 2010, p. 20.

[6] Regular inspection shows that this was sufficient to capture all of the posts. Parsing of the .html was conducted using software written in the Python language. The program may be obtained from: http://rotterdam.ics.uci.edu/drupal/?q=node/151.

[7] The parsing script only captured the actual text placed on the Facebook wall; however, there were 70 cases in which only a link was appended and these were not captured given that they are not stored within the page .html.

Each post is coded according to its author, the date of the post, and eighteen different parameters categorizing its content. The first set of coding parameters identifies each communication regarding its unidirectional and vertically-communicated content. These categories include whether the post reflects policy content (and which policy area), metacampaigning (polling or other statements on the "horse race" of the campaign), positive or negative appeals, whether the item provides a personal or behind the scenes insight into the campaign or candidates, references supporters or opponents, links to other media, provides campaign information, forwards a message sent by supporters, and whether it focuses on the local or national election.

In this paper, however, we are focused on a second set of coding parameters regarding the degree of horizontality in Facebook and Twitter posts operationalized in terms of whether they "invite" participation or conversation with supporters (Foss and Griffin 1995, 5): that is, the extent to which the message is an appeal to understand supporters or other members of the political community on their own terms and forge a relationship with them rooted in equality and mutual recognition. This is juxtaposed with vertical communications which we take to be the remainder of the communications which criticize opponents, instruct supporters to participate but not as equals, instruct supporters how to interpret the flow of the campaign, or engage in various forms of metacampaigning such as touting poll numbers or declaring victory in a debate. Horizontal communications are unique in that they contrast with the authority relations depicted in Michels account. We operationalize horizontal communications in terms of an invitation for individuals to provide a personal account of their reasons for supporting a party or campaign, invites persons to participate in some aspect of the campaign, invitations for individuals take part in community activities, invites individuals to take part in policy implementation, and whether it addresses the audience on a personal level.

We operationalize horizontality as an additive index composed of five items: whether individuals are invited to voice their support or questions for the candidates or party, whether they are invited to participate in some way in the campaign, whether they are invited to take a role in politics or governance, whether they are invited to take a role in community action, and whether the post is creates a personal relationship by articulating personal or behind-the-scenes information about the candidate or campaign.

Finally, the national and local campaigns are discursively segmented based on the targets of their production. Local leaders regularly pledge that they will be effective champions for local interests while national leaders often stress what their national plans will mean for local areas and stage campaign appearances with local candidates in order to bring local media attention and interest to their PPC. Local campaigns manifest themselves in Tweets and posts via references to local campaign events, metacampaigning, and discussion of local issues or the local impact of the national policy. The national campaign comes into being via references to aspects of the campaign, policy proposals, or the election which are equally binding on all irrespective of location.

Horizontal and Vertical Communications on Facebook and Twitter

Facebook and Twitter are fast becoming standard campaign communication tools. The offer campaigns the opportunity to directly communicate with supporters, crafting their message apart from broadcast media cycles and framing. But they likewise afford the

opportunity for supporters to provide feedback to candidates and party members. Likewise, the growth of online support provides some evidence for how candidates are doing, at least amongst users of these communities. Figure 1 charts the growth of online support measured by the number of Facebook fans for the three major parties, their leaders, and the Birmingham candidates with public pages.

[Figure 1 here]

The results show that Facebook membership is very responsive to events during the campaign with a spike in fans of both Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats coinciding with the first debate. However, for the local Birmingham candidates, Facebook played a relatively small role in connecting candidates and citizens with little fan growth during the course of the campaign. The continued growth of support for Clegg and the Liberal Democrats throughout the campaign suggests that this is not a proxy for polling support as support tailed off considerably towards the end of the campaign. However, it does signal the continued growth of persons receiving direct communications from the campaigns via Facebook.

However there are notable differences in the campaign structures communicatively invoked between different candidates, between the national and local levels, and between Twitter and Facebook postings. The three main parties invited supporters to follow aggregated lists of Tweets from party officials during the course of the Leaders Debates and they used their Twitter and Facebook accounts to provide rolling commentary as the debates progressed. Here too, stylistic differences were notable as the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives spoke directly to their audiences, highlighting statements made by their candidate as well as launching attacks on their opponents. On Facebook, Labour typically had more of a defensive posture as the incumbent, and focused more on providing links for the followers to read up on Labour accomplishments under the heading, "For the Record" as policy issues came up during the debates. This strategy is notably different from the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives as it does not present a direct rebuttal to claims made in the debate and it speaks in the third person rather than as a statement construable as more directly targeted at the fan or follower. This grammatical difference can project greater distance between the party and supporters, while the necessity of following a hyperlink to read Labour's response creates additional distance, making the online rebuttal accessible to only those who are more committed and willing to track down their response.

To provide a more systematic accounting of the content of Twitter and Facebook messages we performed an automated content analysis identifying the incidence of words corresponding to horizontal communications, metacampaigning, and policy issues. The analysis was conducted using the Natural Language Toolkit within the Python programming environment (Bird, Klein, and Loper 2009). These key terms were derived inductively from reading the corpus of Facebook and Twitter posts. The words corresponding to horizontal communications include: participate, invite, you, I, and involved as these words correspond with personal appeals and enjoin readers to take part in an activity, particularly as equals. The metapolitical terms include: polls, debate, democracy, and community referenced the scene of political competition. The policy

terms include: economy, deficit, recovery, and immigration as these were the most common themes raised both on these platforms and in print media.[8] Finally, "vote" was added to the list of search terms as an indication of a "vertical" campaign communication as it was a common example of injunctions for members of the electorate to take a predefined and highly institutionalized action. The posts are arranged chronologically such that the x-axis, indicating the word offset, corresponds roughly to the temporal location during which the word appeared during the campaign. The results are displayed in Figures 2a and 2b.

[Figures 2a and 2b here]

The results show a great deal of personalism with consistent references throughout the campaign to "I" and "you." However, there are few words indicating that the campaigns are creating spaces for individuals to contribute their individual creativity with sparse use of "invite," "involved," or "participate." Words like "contribute" and "ability" were not included in these results as they did not appear at all in any of the posts. The most common form of participation called for via Twitter and Facebook is to "vote." There are some references to policy issues, in particular the economy. Immigration received much lower billing despite its presence in print media. Labour and Liberal Democrats invited their followers to read their immigration policy and characterizing it as reasonable without going into detail about their otherwise unpopular policies. Meanwhile, Conservatives were reluctant to mention their policy until the infamous incident between Gordon Brown and Mrs Duffy which immunized them against charges of bigotry in calling for a highly restrictive immigration policy. To analyse the posts in greater depth than the automated content analysis permits, each post was coded according to the five dimensions of horizontal communications identified above. The most common form of horizontal communication were personalistic posts providing behind the scenes information as well as communicating emotional states. The distribution of the forms of horizontality as well as the percentage of horizontal communications across Facebook and Twitter are presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

Overall, Tweets tend to be more horizontal than Facebook posts at either the national or local level. In part these results are driven by differences in the extent to which there are references to supporters. This may be attributable to differences in the cultures of use between the two platforms. Twitter has a convention of using the @ symbol and "rt" to refer to others and pass along their Tweets whereas Facebook has only recently introduced the ability to tag "friends" directly in a comment and it is likely that it will take some time for the practice to become as widespread. Similarly, the architectural design of Twitter facilitates the organization of Tweets around #'s facilitating the creation of threads that can be followed by people otherwise unconnected. Facebook, in contrast, is better integrated into many other websites and platforms which facilitates a posting identity that is less message than link-centred. Hence, Facebook's architectural design

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[8]   The content analysis of print media is not included here.

facilitates the construction of agent-centred online presence within a defined network whereas Twitter facilitates the discrete transmission of information across more loosely connected networks of individuals.

This distinction is evident in the coverage of Labour's "doorstep" campaign encouraging supporters to go door-to-door urging their neighbours to vote Labour. While it received scant attention on Facebook, the party used the # tags #labourdoorstep and #changewesee as mechanisms for followers to contribute and follow other supporters. This communication continued throughout the course of the campaign on Twitter. Likewise, the appropriation of Liberal Democrat supporters tags #iagreewithnick and the ironic #nickcleggsfault by party leaders became a means to give recognition to their online supporters who came up with the tags.

At the local level, personal or behind-the-scenes comments are particularly common as a means to communicate with supporters, thereby bringing supporters into the world of the candidate and providing a note of authenticity – even if these posts are calculated communications. This is not to say even with this modest amount of horizontal messages, that there is expansive space for entrepreneurialism. To the contrary, much of these horizontal communication flows are aimed solely at reducing the distance between candidates and supporters by speaking to them in a personal manner, not as a member of a political elite but as an equal. To the extent that they call for participation in the campaign of communication inputs, this is often highly circumscribed and structured such as appeals to help hand out fliers or knock on doors.

The debates were a key area where the campaigns attempted to insert Twitter and Facebook communications into the reception of the debates. Use of Twitter and Facebook during the Leaders Debates shows an evolution in the architecture of the two-step flow model of communication and opinion formation. The parties showed a concerted effort to create an information environment framing the issues during the debates. This is particularly notable given the hybridity (Chadwick 2011) of media consumption whereby supporters were encouraged to watch the debates while logged into their Facebook and Twitter accounts in addition to watching the debates with fellow party supporters. In this way, leaders of each party could directly insert themselves into the public receipt of the debates, providing individuals with a favourable set of memes to draw upon when forming an opinion.

Time plays a key role in the appearance of horizontal messages. They predominantly appear initially in the campaign and at the end with the middle filled with vertical messages highlighting poll figures, spinning debate results, or calling attention to either their own or their opponents' campaigns. In the first week, Labour invited supporters to voice their reasons for voting Labour in the campaign; Liberal Democrats encouraged their supporters to send in questions to the digital debate sponsored by Facebook and YouTube; and Conservatives asked for feedback on their campaign sticker designs. At the local level, Keely Huxtable, a Conservative challenger, asked for volunteers to hand out fliers. The middle period of the campaign was filled posts highlighting policy positions, attacking opponents position, and notifying supports of campaign stops, at times with links to media from the event. Finally, at the end, Liberal Democrats, in particular, were imploring supporters to find people who had not yet voted and to go to constituencies where the election was thought to be close in an effort to get their voters to the polls.

Regarding the differences between the national and local levels of the campaign, we have already noted a greater degree of personalism in the local-level campaign. Figures 3a and 3b indicate that in general there was a considerable degree of references between the local and national campaign with the exception of the Labour party which made little reference to the campaigns in local areas. This could reflect the position of Labour in the polls and the fear that the Labour brand would more likely than not hurt the chances of success for individual candidates.

[Figures 3a and 3b here]

Discussion: Digital and Political Networks
The evidence presented here shows that the predominant patterns of digital campaign communications are generally consistent with Michels' "iron law." The preponderance of messages communicated via Twitter and Facebook reflect a command and control rhetoric of authority rather than a mechanism for communicatively connecting campaigns and supporters in a mutually accepted co-produced relationship. These communications often were attempts to direct attention to particular issues or frame events rather than create participatory spaces. However, it is not totally absent from campaign communications. In particular, local campaigns made greater use of personalism and were more likely to enjoin supporters to participate in the campaign. Additionally, at the beginning of the campaign, it was a means by which to attract and bind supporters to the campaign. However, it Facebook and Twitter posts did not open space for supporters to take a significant role in the execution of the campaign, make use of their collective knowledge beyond a marginal degree, and only in limited capacities campaigns facilitated communication between supporters. More generally, this research points to three observations regarding the role digital networks play in structuring campaign networks.

First, the properties of the communication channel matter. For Michels, the primary channels of communication between party leaders and supporters were either speeches or the party press. In both cases, Michels notes that these define a hierarchical relation of authority between the leader as speaker/author and the audience as passive consumer. However, across Twitter and Facebook, there is greater equalization in the communicative capabilities of party leaders and supporters. But even between the two platforms, subtle yet decisive differences exist. Both the properties of the digital environment and the customs of its use play an important role in these use of the technology for horizontal or vertical communications. Facebook is agent-centred in that one receives communications only pertaining to the individuals and groups which they opt-in to receive. On the other hand, Twitter enables both agent-centred and "conversation-centred" encounters as the platform supports both an organization of communications around particular agents followed by a user as well as users to follow conversations organized around # tags. Twitter also is not as closed as use of "@" and "rt" can address persons not already within a particular network. Around the time of the campaign, Facebook enabled a feature allowing persons to reference others directly in their posts but this feature has not become as customary as it is on Twitter indicating a

gap between technical feasibility and its conventional incarnation.

Second, Facebook and Twitter's public platforms are not conducive to some campaign functions. The informational advantage Michels assumed leaders possessed over party supporters not only corresponds to a cognitive advantage, it serves a functional purpose as campaign strategies and voter research are typically not materials a campaigner would want out in public. Though the collective intelligence can be crowd-sourced, as Conservatives did in soliciting responses to Labour's manifesto, the decision-making process regarding how to use those inputs was not made public. While there are debates about the virtues of organizational openness (see for instance, Jarvis 2009), contemporary campaigning takes the position that there are significant limits to transparency.

Third, party organizations and supporter networks are temporally differentiated. That is, while party organizations and even their campaign wings endure to a certain extent, efforts to involve the public either through inclusive, horizontal communications or their vertical commands, declined significantly in the days after the election. In similar fashion, the ability to maintain a network created during the course of an election has proved a significant challenge for the Obama presidency. In part this may reflect functional differences between members of a political system and its authorities who are charged with the day-to-day operations of the system (Easton 1965; Michels 1999). This does not reflect a limitation of the technology as much as perhaps role differentiation that places constraints on political organizations.

This research provides an overview the use of horizontal communications during the course of a political campaign. The analysis is limited in that it takes for granted the conditions of campaigning in the United Kingdom. Further comparative work is essential to identify the generalizability of these findings across institutional environments. Particularly, systems with open primaries leading up to a general election such as exists in the United States may increase the incentives for the creation of short-term horizontal networks of supporters who take on important roles in campaign. It nevertheless appears that campaigns employ a variety of tactics which are both consistent with Michels thesis as well as challenge, in part, some of his assumptions about the nature of organization. These factors manifest themselves at different points in time during the course of a campaign. One suspects however, that even if there were no cognitive surplus left within online social networks, there still are certain functions for which oligarchy will remain the default mode of organization.
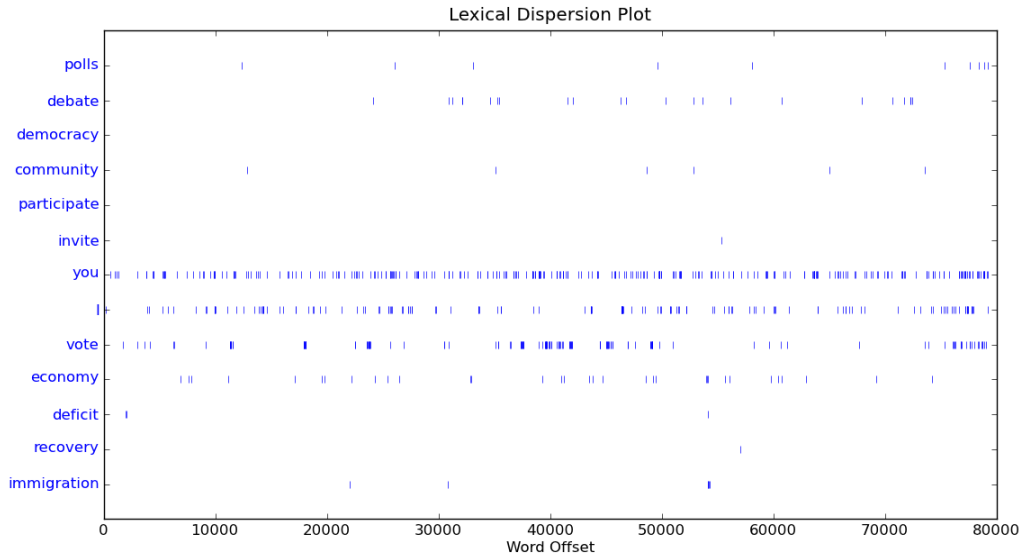
Figure 1: Facebook Supporters
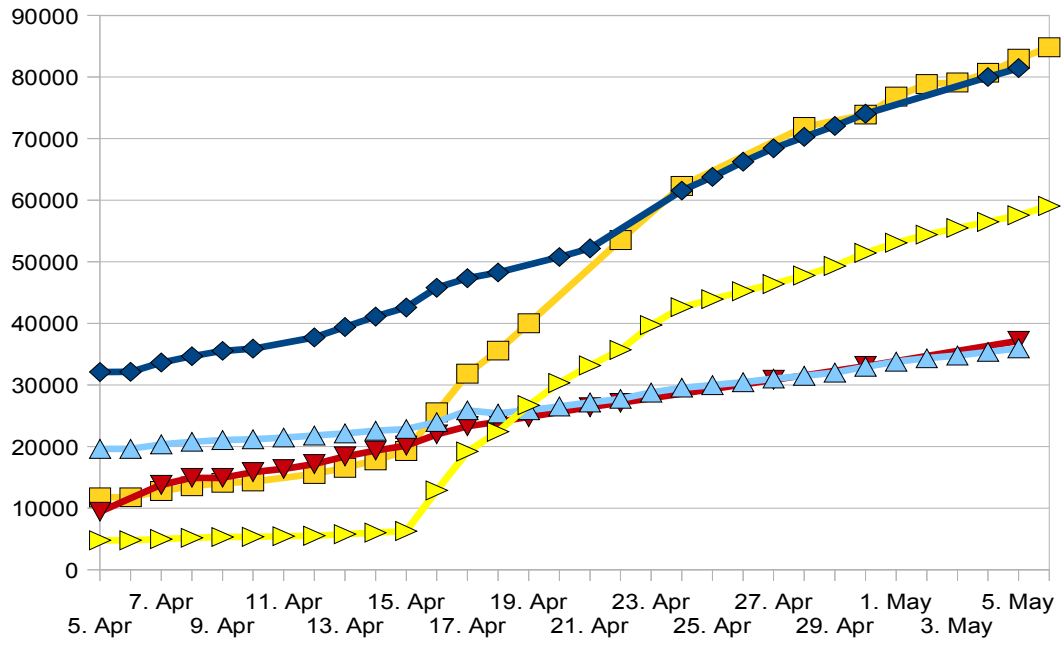
Figure 2a: Facebook Content

Lexical Dispersion Plot
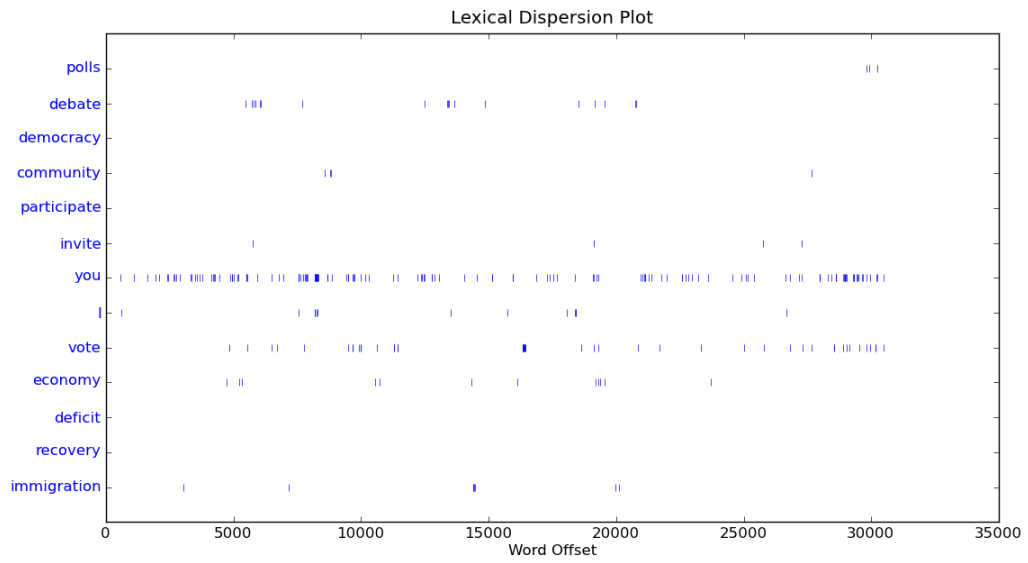
Figure 2b: Twitter Content

Lexical Dispersion Plot

Table 1: Horizontal Communications in Facebook and Twitter (Percentages)

	Facebook	Twitter
Add Personal Creativity to Campaign	7.33	19.52
Get Involved in the Community	0.35	0.95
Invitation to Develop Policy	1.05	3.10
Invitation to Explain Party Support	4.01	8.15
Personal Communication	16.06	20.00
At Least One of These	27.27	47.14

Figure : Facebook Posts by Focus

**Mosaic of Focus (sample)
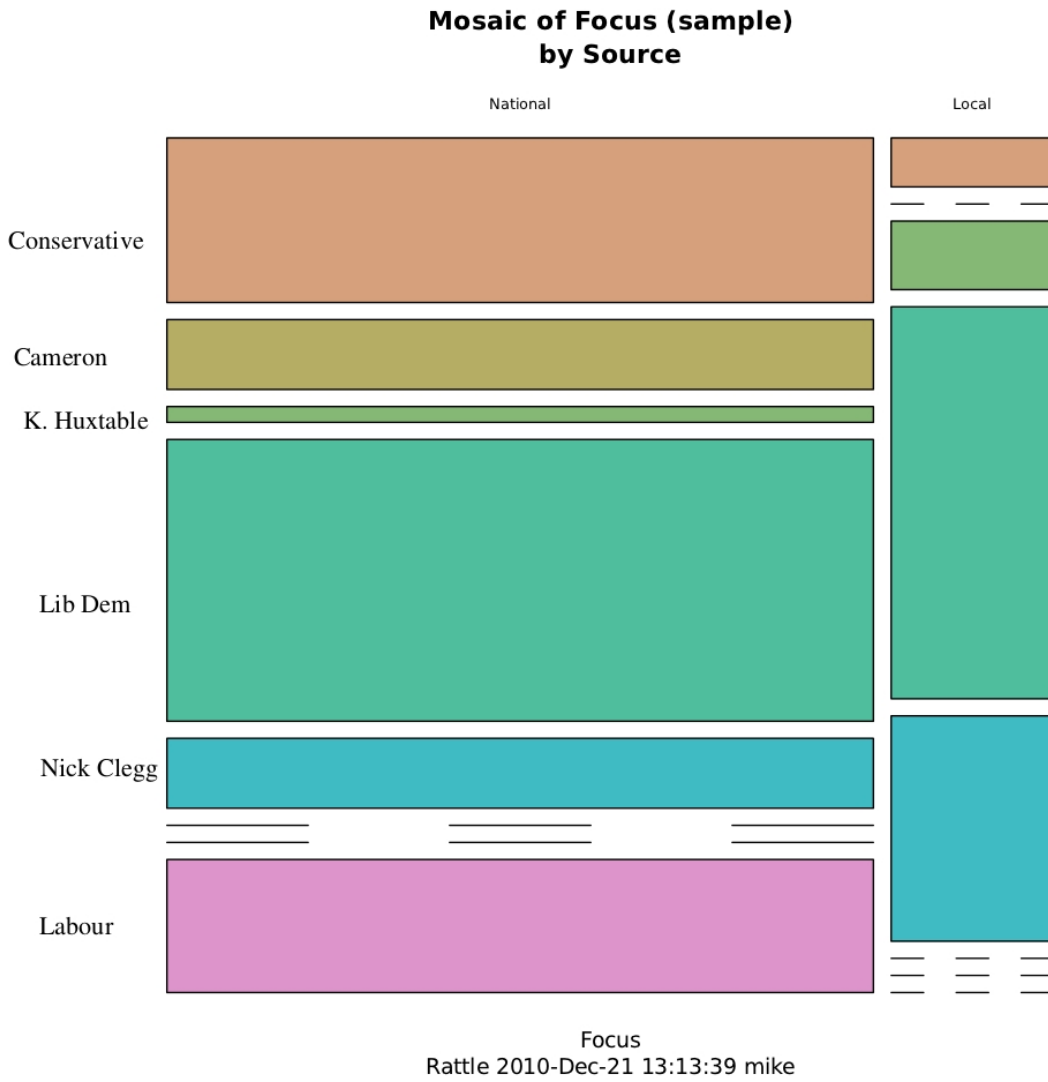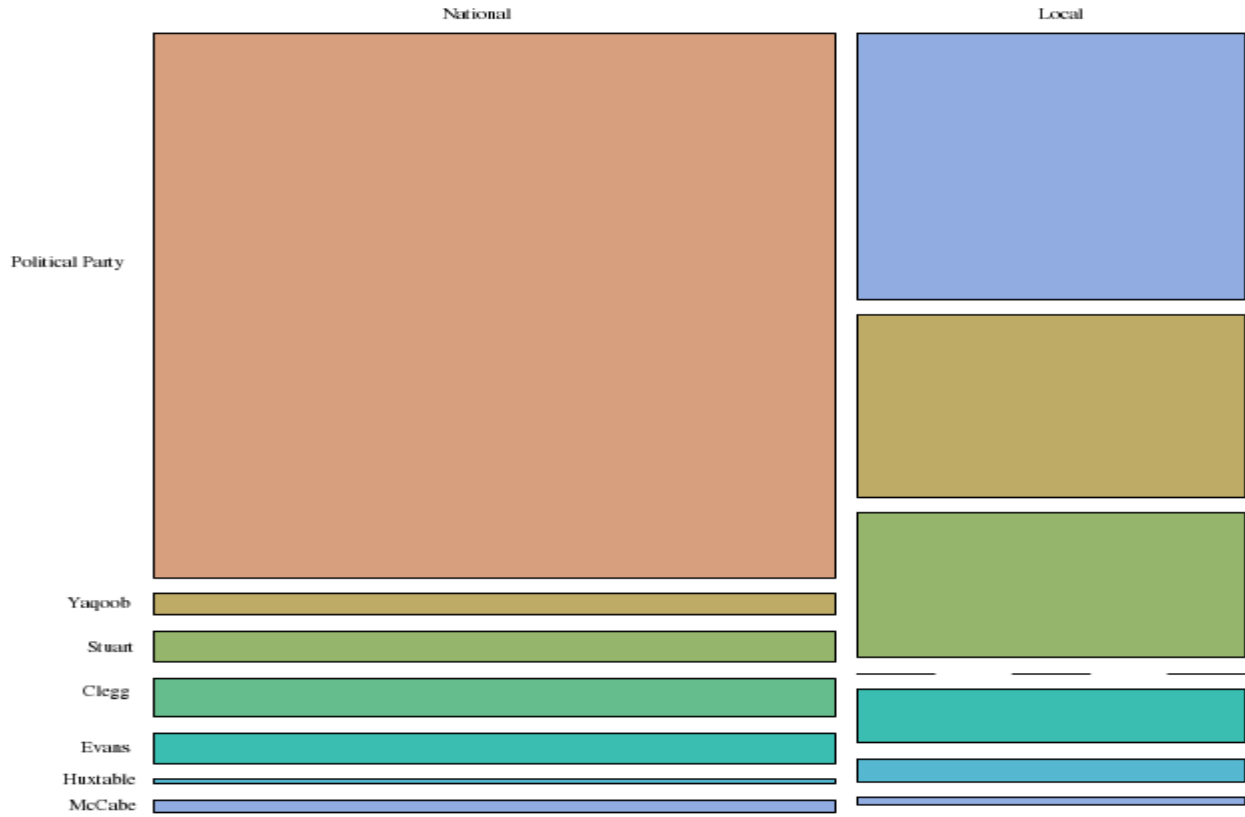by Source**

Focus
Rattle 2010-Dec-21 13:13:39 mike

Figure : Twitter Posts by Focus

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