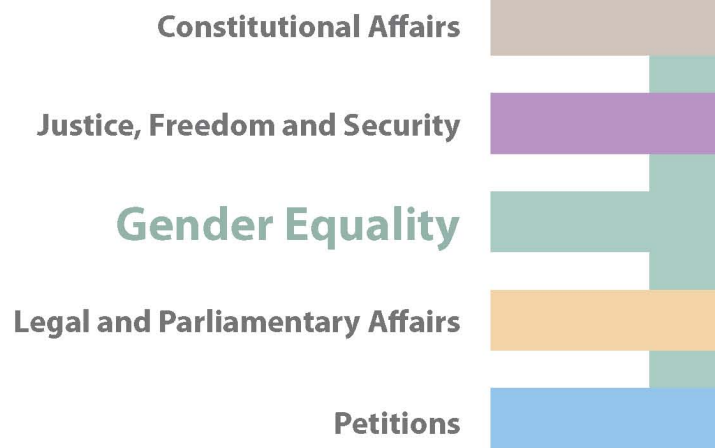


DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT **C**
CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS



Women in decision-making: The role of the new media for increased political participation

STUDY



DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT C: CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

GENDER EQUALITY

**Women in decision-making:
The role of the new media for
increased political participation**

STUDY

Abstract

This study reviews the barriers to women's involvement in politics and, through case studies and research with new media users, how new media may help to increase women's involvement at different levels of political participation, including formal representative politics.

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALDE Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

BBM Blackberry messenger

CoE Council of Europe

EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality

EPP European People's Party

MEP Member of the European Parliament

PES Party of European Socialists

PWN Professional Women's Network

RSS Rich Site Summary or 'Really Simple Syndication' web feed formats

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

- There are different forms of political behaviour and all are important.
- Existing research draws attention to the low level of women's interest in formal politics, compared to men. However, research also suggests that women's political interests are qualitatively different to men's.
- There are several barriers to women's involvement and advancement in formal 'representative' politics. These barriers are social (cultural norms and values), structural (connected with women's smaller share of economic and power resources), and situational (connected with women's role in the family).
- There were few differences between male and female MEP's uses of new media. Women MEPs tend to have more 'followers' and 'likes' on social media accounts, compared to men. Overall, politicians' new media profiles are not interactive enough.
- If women politicians were to use new media tools more effectively, this would allow them to become leaders in this field as politicians, including female, are overall not very innovative at using new media.
- New media can be used in diverse ways to either directly or indirectly engage women in 'political' discourse.
- Lean logic models work better than complicated, institutionalised new media platforms.
- It is essential for new media projects to listen to and value their end users.
- New media tools provide immediacy to action which is useful for women, often allowing women to act when angered or interested in an issue.
- New media tools are essential in helping organisations to build their support network and power base.

Aim

The purpose of the study is to review how new media may be used to increase the involvement of women in politics. It addresses the question of women's involvement in formal politics as well as a broader definition of political participation.

Methods

The study involved qualitative and quantitative research with MEPs as well as 'end users' of new media platforms. It also involved case studies with eight new media projects.

Main findings

Political participation

⇒ *The different forms of political behaviour are all important*

Apart from politics within the 'formal' spheres of elections, parliament and party politics (representational politics) many other forms of political participation are important, both in themselves and because of how they interact with 'formal' representative politics.

Existing research draws attention to the low level of women's interest in politics, compared to men. Some studies have reflected on the inability of formal politics to connect with women or to consider the issues women are concerned with. However, research also suggests that women's political interests are qualitatively different to men's. Beyond turning out to vote, which men and women do in almost equal measure (Mestre and Marin, 2012), women tend to participate in non party actions such as petitions or boycotts more than men and men tend to be more involved with formal politics such as joining a party.

⇒ *Barriers to women in formal politics are considerable*

Barriers to women's involvement and advancement in formal representative politics includes: The prevalence of the 'masculine model' of political life and of elected government bodies, women's relative lack of material resources to support their move into politics; women's additional work burden which denies them the time necessary to engage in politics and cultural values which enshrine male behaviours and norms in political cultures. Media representations of male and female politicians are found to play a substantial role in men and women's 'socialisation' through which women are excluded from political, public discourse.

⇒ *Social media can help women to overcome these barriers*

A woman's journey into representative politics commences at being interested in politics. It is easy to see how new media tools can help to generate and sustain such interest. The next stage in the journey is when a woman puts herself forward for selection to a party election list. For this, women need a network of supporters and time. Again, it is possible to see how new media may be used to assist at this point. Women may build networks of followers and friends which can translate into real power. Such networks may be capitalised into political support and credibility. Finally, a woman must be elected and then she must progress within the political establishment. Again, a strong network would help, for which new media tools may be useful.

Politicians' uses of new media

Based on the analysis of MEPs and other European political institutions' uses of new media, politicians including female politicians are not very innovative at using new media and do not show particularly good practice. This is primarily because of the tension between the necessity of being open, honest, personal and direct with online communication and the need to 'control' the public-facing message, to avoid embarrassment or departure from party lines. Consequently, institutions, including political ones, and politicians are not as good at new media, particularly social media, as individuals and small organisations. However, this weakness also represents an opportunity for women politicians and (future) aspiring politicians:

⇒ *Few but interesting differences in uses between male and female MEPs' uses of new media can be observed*

An original analysis of new media uses amongst MEPs suggest few but interesting differences between male and female MEPs in particular, women MEPs tend to have more followers or likes on their social media platforms.

⇒ *Politicians' new media profiles are not interactive enough*

A key finding from both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of MEP's new media uses is that overall, MEPs tend not to be interactive and the tone employed and content is impersonal.

⇒ *European political groups and mainstream national political parties are not innovative at using new media to attract women to politics*

New media are an opportunity to be 'better than the rest'

Female politicians can make use of new media to advance their interests, careers and causes. Female MEPs interviewed concurred that new media may be a way to raise the profile of marginal groups and issues, including women and women's rights. By using new media effectively and differently, this may be a way of doing so. Moreover, by being innovative with new media, female politicians have a way to be leaders in this approach:

⇒ By adopting **innovative and courageous new media practices**, female politicians can set themselves apart from the rest. New media is an opportunity for female politicians to set the example and become leaders in this approach.

⇒ In so doing, female politicians will **be even better engaged with their voters and wider electorate**. This could have two interlocking impacts – on the one hand to **bypass mass media** and social and cultural barriers that lock women politicians into 'lower' political roles. On the other hand, it may attract the **trust and support of individual voters** by providing direct and honest contact between voters and female politicians.

⇒ In so doing, this may also **inspire other women to get involved** in formal politics.

Keeping an eye on end users

Three research strands with 'end users' of new media were conducted: a Twitter survey, a focus group with women interested in new media, women and politics and members of a professional women's network which uses online networking tools.

⇒ **Political means public**

Most respondents revealed that although they tend to identify themselves as political, their definitions of what this means are fluid and open ended. However, it was broadly felt that in order to be political, action, discussion or advocacy must take place in the public realm and online activity can facilitate this.

⇒ *Organising is made easier through digital technology*

Respondents felt that a person should 'do' more than simply 'click' or 'tweet' in order to be 'truly' political. However, there was a strong feeling amongst participants that **new media tools provide immediacy** to action which is useful, often allowing women to act when angered or interested in an issue. This is because organising is made easier through digital technology, particularly social media. New media tools, through their facilitation of women's networks and links between women interested in similar issues, were able to assist with raising individual women's **political consciousness**.

⇒ *Social media can facilitate physical meetings*

Whilst new media tools were not seen by any respondent as a replacement for physical meetings or one-to-one networking, they were essential in helping expand the reach and size of women's networks.

Good practice in uses of new media

Seven case studies (two of which have been anonymised on their request) provided examples of good practice in uses of new media which may be replicated. These were:

1. "Blog 1", a Blog on European politics
2. "Vasistas", a French and German bilingual blog concentrating on digital rights (<http://vasistas-blog.net/>)
3. "Forum 1", a webforum and portal primarily targeted at mothers
4. "Pikara", e-magazine (<http://www.pikaramagazine.com/>)
5. "The Women's Room" (<http://thewomensroom.org.uk/>)
6. "European Professional Women's Network" (<http://www.europeanpwn.net/>)
7. "Political Association of Women" (<http://www.polsq.gr/>)

⇒ *New media can be used in diverse ways to either directly or indirectly engage women in 'political' discourse*

The case studies show a diverse range of practices and uses of new media that each provide lessons about how new media is used directly or indirectly to involve women in political and public discourse.

⇒ *Political action takes many forms as reflected in the case studies*

In the main, case studies were not concerned directly with formal political processes, although the case study organisers understood the importance of women's representation in formal politics and hoped that their work would contribute to this cause. The primary purpose within all but one case study was to encourage women to find a voice and to build momentum through the size and volubility of their networks.

⇒ *Lean logic models work*

Grass roots projects built their successes in part because of their direct and lean logic models. This means that they have a clear and simple goal, their actions are focussed towards that goal, and they refine, retest and refine again their activities.

⇒ *Projects need to value their end users and listen.*

Growing their network of followers and contacts is the main way that case study projects become effective. They are only able to do this through an active and engaging approach to network management and through deploying only a 'light touch' moderation policy – networks should be user-led.

Further recommendations

- ⇒ There are good practices included in the case studies that could inspire individual MEPs, and others involved with supporting women in politics, may learn from the good practice points of the case studies, including tips regarding design and usability but also engagement on Twitter and Facebook.
- ⇒ Individual MEPs and others involved with supporting women in politics should consider gaining professional advice from social media marketing agencies on how to build and engage networks of supporters.
- ⇒ Political groups should use social media networks to actively search for women who may be interested in running for selection.
- ⇒ All new media projects, including large institutional projects, should avoid duplicating existing platforms and, instead, develop strategies for making the best use of existing ones such as Twitter and Facebook.
- ⇒ Direct projects with lean business models which support political activities in the fields of women's rights and issues may be encouraged and supported through seed funding as a means to empower women. Financial incentives should be provided or supported by the EU budget. However, the projects themselves should not be over-managed. Projects that address cultural and social barriers to women's involvement in politics would be suitable candidates for initial funding.
- ⇒ New media projects should be developed using a gender mainstreaming approach but this should avoid marginalising women's online communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study reviews how new media may be used to increase the involvement of women in politics. It addresses the question of women's involvement in formal politics as well as a broader definition of political participation. The study has three main research aims: 1) understand current uses of new media by European politicians and political institutions, 2) understand and explore new media uses by organisations and individuals which have political implications, and 3) explore the uses and impacts of new media with end users.

1.1. Methods

The study involved four main components: 1) a literature review to understand current knowledge about barriers to women in politics and potential solutions, including new media; 2) qualitative and quantitative analysis of MEP's uses of new media in order to provide current context of new media uses; 3) case study analyses of eight new media projects. These provided insights into how new media are currently being used either to directly address women's rights and political progress or are projects that are dominated by women. 4) Research with female 'end users' of new media platforms and tools was conducted to understand how and why women use new media and its potential impacts on political behaviour. Further details of the methods are included at Appendix 1.

1.2. What are new media?

For the purposes of this study, a definition of new media is necessary. The literature review (see Chapter 2 below) uncovered a number of definitions used in relation to women's use of new media for political purposes. These included 'computer assisted communication' (CAC); social networking, networked activities, online forums'. However, in the fields of communication studies, journalism or media disciplines more dynamic definitions of new media are used which take account of the fast changing nature of new media technology and uses.

We take as a starting point the basic definition of 'new media' provided by Google web definitions and Wikipedia which defines it as '*on-demand access to content any time, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation. Another aspect of new media is the real-time generation of new, unregulated content*' (Google web definitions, Wikipedia)

1.2.1. Web 2.0

New media are firstly defined by being 'new', different from the 'old' media types of print and broadcast media (Williamson, 2009). New media formats are digital. However, the definition is more than a description of the technology. It is a **dynamic concept** linked intricately with its uses, means of production and ownership and technology. These characteristics are encompassed, debated and developed in evolving definitions of 'web 2.0' and 'web 3.0'.

In recent years, the web¹ has developed at an incredibly fast rate with the growth of social networking websites (sites), mobile technologies that allow mobile web surfing and interaction and increases in user participation (Barassi, 2012). The term **Web 2.0** was proposed by Tim O'Reilly (2005), to denote a 'new era' of the web, distinct from Web 1.0, and is widely felt to **enable user participation**, compared to previous incarnations of the web which is seen as an information repository with clear distinctions between the content provider and 'passive' content reader. Web 2 is defined through examples rather than a concrete specification so blogs, wikis, and podcasts are all seen to represent Web 2 activity (Cornelie-Buraga, 2012)².

1.2.2. Web 3.0

Web 3.0 denotes a **greater synchronicity** between web sites and data through metadata and developing **shared language framework** for computers to share information more easily. This will break down barriers even further between websites and applications³. However, there is no clear consensus about the precise definition for Web 3, how it is used or when it came into being. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study it is important to acknowledge that the web evolves at a rapid pace and that it allows for ever greater user participation and cross-sharing of information, opinions and experiences.

1.3. 'Good practice' and standards in the use of new media

1.3.1. Good practice in the use of new media for the purpose of this study

In this study, different online practices have been assessed for their ability to encourage women to **be more involved** in political decision making, and 'good practices' among these have been highlighted. There are no well established definitions of good practice in the use of new media to enhance women's role in politics (Gelber, 2011), therefore, the study provides some **original findings** in this regard.

Case studies and a literature review included in this study have identified the following good practices points for new media projects that work towards increasing women's political participation:

- in terms of technical design standards;
- in terms of what female online 'audiences' like about online communication;
- in terms of what women find engaging about politics; and
- in terms of how barriers to women's political engagement may be tackled.

¹ Also known as 'world wide web' or 'internet'

² Other characteristics of Web 2 include collective intelligence, web application ubiquity, important shared values and architectures of participation

³ A current example of this is RSS feeds which allow data between websites to be easily and instantly accessible via other applications, such as including a Twitter feed on a personal blog.

1.3.2. Standards developed by social media experts

In addition, social media experts⁴ who were interviewed indicate a number of good practice points for new media strategies. These include:

- ***Openness, authenticity and reciprocity in social networking are essential***

For organisations or people with high profiles, being open and willing to listen to readers/end users is important. However, once a relationship has been established with online 'followers', it is important to continue to listening and respond. It can be damaging if you fail to follow through with online social engagement for example by failing to respond to followers on Facebook or Twitter.

- ***Carefully planned communication strategy***

Online communicators with a message to 'sell' including politicians (e.g. bloggers, websites, twitter pages, Facebook pages) must carefully plan their communication strategy. In particular, online communicators should conduct the following essential research:

- Know what their main objectives are and how to measure if these have been achieved (e.g. number of followers, response to posts, supportive comments, 'likes');
 - Examine the activities of 'competitors' to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for their own online 'presence';
 - Identify who their audience is, in particular who is currently listening/reading them and which new audiences they would like to attract;
 - Seek to understand how their current 'brand' or image is currently seen by the public and compare this to the image that the communicator wishes to have;
 - Understand which are the main platforms for finding an 'audience' (e.g. are they mainly on Facebook or Twitter or another platform?).
- ***Knowledge of the target audience and how the audience prefers to talk to each other is essential***

It is important to know about the demographics of the intended and current audience and something about their style of communication. The messages and language used by those aged 18-24 will be different for older age groups, for example, so posts and activities targeted at different groups should be tailored to their interests.

- ***Respect of online etiquette and no embarrassments***

Whilst authenticity and honesty are essential qualities, breaches of online etiquette and embarrassments should be avoided. This means exercising the same caution as would be applied to traditional communications when using Facebook or Twitter. Online communicators may sometimes forget that such platforms are also public platforms. Whilst

⁴Thank you to Redant, London (www.redant.com)

social media in particular requires speedy responses, it is possible to consider which information, photographs, or jokes are appropriate and which are not.

- ***Use of good humour***

The use of good humour in social media is a powerful way of defusing negative publicity or comment. Sometimes negative comments are posted or negative online campaigns started about an individual or organisation. These may be dispatched effectively through the use of personal good humour, if the communicator has skills in this way.

- ***Caution with third parties managing social media accounts***

Caution should be exercised if a third party is used to manage social media accounts particularly if external people do not fully understand the message or audience.

- ***Be fast with comments and posts***

Social media comments and posts (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) should be fast and honest and able to respond quickly to audiences/followers' trends (but with some degree of caution also see above).

- ***Additional standards for politicians in the use of social media***

- Speaking and listening to people in a way which makes them feel connected and part of the political/news debate
- Content should reflect politicians' real personalities – not attempting to portray a 'manipulated' or "manufactured" image

1.3.3. Good practice of gender mainstreaming

- Embed gender equality systematically

Furthermore, the good practices which are identified are aligned at the end of each case study with the EIGE's approach to gender mainstreaming which aims to embed gender equality systematically at all levels of policy making⁵.

Overall, this study explores the role of digital communication for both citizens and politicians' lives. In doing so, it supports the use of gender mainstreaming of political parties, groups and public organisations' digital and new media strategies.

The EIGE means by 'good practice' *'any action, tool or method which is intended to integrate the provisions of Article 16 [on gender equality] (implicitly or explicitly) into policy making'*. Thus, this report also highlights any specific methods or approaches which may be considered good practice for gender mainstreaming.

⁵ The EIGE supports Gender Mainstreaming through the promotion of tools and methods (such as Gender Impact Assessments, gender disaggregated statistics etc) to encourage public institutions and organisations to have:

- A top-down approach with clear political will and allocation of adequate resources,
- The formulation of viable gender equality objectives on the basis of gender analysis,
- Appropriate implementing measures at all system levels (management, monitoring, control, evaluation)
- Strategies that bring on board people from the whole system – the responsibility for GM is system-wide,
- The availability of relevant knowledge and expertise to all system levels,
- Gender balanced participation in decision-making. (see <http://eige.europa.eu/content/good-practices>)

⁶ <http://eige.europa.eu/content/good-practices>

1.3.4. Conclusion: good practice of using new media

Thus, good practice is explored throughout the study in terms of:

- Communication style;
- Audience engagement;
- Social media uses;
- Ensuring the inclusion of both men's and women's views and experiences in new media content;
- Learning for gender mainstreaming.

1.4. Definition of feminism for the purpose of this study

For the purposes of this study the term "feminism" has been used to mean analyses, approaches, actions or interpretations that consider the social (connected with cultural values and norms), structural (connected with economic power and resources) and situational (connected with the family and family formation) causes of inequality between women and men. A "feminist" is an actor in this sense.

1.5. Definition of political participation

The definition of political participation has been drawn from the literature review. Consequently, it is important to note that there are many different activities and behaviours that are considered "political". "Participation" in these includes on the one hand involvement in **formal political activities** (voting, standing for election etc) but also **non-party political activism, advocacy, and public debate**.

2. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, GENDER DIFFERENCES AND NEW MEDIA

KEY FINDINGS

- The most important route for women and men into formal politics is through party politics. For women, involvement in NGOs and social work is more common than for men.
- Women are more likely to engage in non-formal political activities (not linked to party politics), compared to men. Women's interests are often not reflected in mainstream political debate.
- Women's lower political participation can be explained by their lack of financial and power resources, and of time to engage in traditional politics.
- It is also argued that women are socialised to avoid political careers.
- Female MEPs who were interviewed for this study had strong views about the barriers that female politicians face both at the national level and European level, among which socialisation and cultural expectations (see chapter 4).
- Negative media representations of women in politics reinforces the socialisation that deters women from entering politics.
- New media tools are used by women to develop a 'public self' and build confidence in public debate, although not necessarily linked to formal or representative politics.
- New media may provide a challenge to old media representations of women in politics.
- Sometimes referred to as Web 2.0 or Web 3.0, new media is currently characterised by social networks, interactive forums, intense data sharing and collaborative knowledge.
- Primarily, new media provide women with the opportunity to:
 - Network with other women;
 - Create on line selves which build confidence;
 - Appeal to other women and peers through styles and issues that are directly relevant and attractive; and
 - Provide alternative power bases which might be of interest to mainstream politicians.

Equality between women and men in politics in industrialised democracies has grown substantially in the past fifty years (Coffe and Bolzendahl, 2010, Mestre and Marin, 2012). **More women** are running for and being elected to national parliaments than ever before, and a record number of women hold executive positions within their nations' government (Lovenduski 2005; Paxton et al. 2007).

However, there remains considerable disagreement within the research literature about a) the nature of the gender gap in political participation and b) the significance of the gender gap. Thus, some researchers argue that **women engage, overall, less** than men in politics and political activity, others argue that the range of activities against which this difference is assessed is too narrow and misses important ways that women do act politically. For example, Mestre and Marin (2012) argue that women and men **turnout for elections** and chose political parties in **similar ways** but differences continue to exist in political knowledge and interest. However, there is widespread consensus that despite progress, the **gender gap in political representation persists** and 'narrows at a very slow pace' (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

This section synthesises recent literature that, combined, addresses the question '*how might new media be used to engage more women in decision making?*' To answer this question, it is firstly important to understand the reasons why women are underrepresented in political decision making. Secondly, the impact of new media projects on women's participation was explored; finally, the potential mechanisms and means through which women might be better engaged were analysed and, consequently, some potential areas for new media to assist this process.

2.1. Women and formal political representation

Feminist and other researchers of democracy emphasise **the importance of political representation** such as being elected to parliament or in other legislative bodies. Having women representatives in political and other decision-making institutions that work on behalf of all citizens has been a topic of interest and policy at the European level for the past several decades. This goal encompasses both the desire for a fairer representation of women in those institutions - Shvedova (2005) argues that, "*The low level of women's representation in some European parliaments should be considered a violation of women's fundamental democratic right and, as such, a violation of their basic human rights*" - but also that issues of specific interest to women make it onto the policy agenda.

Feminist theorists have used a sharply feminist-critical lens to explore what it means to talk about **gendered politics**, the implications of men's dominance in and of the political sphere, how (and if) women politicians can and do influence both policy and political processes and how democracy could be transformed by the greater involvement of women in both formal and informal politics (see Squires, 1999; Bryson, 2003; Lovenduski, 2005; Waylen et al. 2013). This body of work has generated a set of theoretical concepts and definitions and developed a more nuanced analysis of the very meaning of politics, democracy, and citizenship. Disentangling sex (biology) from gender (social construction) and differentiating between institutions (organisations which make decisions), processes (how decisions are made) and policies (outcomes of decision-making) enable a clearer view to be taken on where women fit into the larger socio-political schema and, importantly, reveals inequalities between men and women. Identifying the *logic* of politics demonstrates how an absence at one end, that is, the lack of women at the institutional level (as elected

representatives) is very likely to have consequences at the other end, that is, that the **concerns of women citizens were less likely to be reflected** in the policy agenda.

However, contained within that appeal for more women to be elected as politicians are two competing and contradictory rationales. On the one hand, the '**equity**' argument says that similar numbers of women and men should be elected representatives on the grounds of fairness and proportionality, on the other, that **women should represent the interests of other women**, that is, the 'difference' argument. Childs (2008) thoughtfully discusses these tensions and distinguishes between women politicians acting *for* women and acting *as* women, arguing that political ideology as well as sex influences the extent to which women behave in either or both of these modes. These contradictory expectations have also been described as differences between women's *descriptive* and *substantive* political representation as well as constituting what Pateman has described as "Mary Wollstonecraft's dilemma" which demands both a gender-neutral (the universal citizen) and a gender-differentiated citizenship (the gendered citizen) (Pateman, 1989).

Philips summarises the key arguments for women's 'substantive' as well as 'descriptive' representation: : (i) *women politicians act as **role models** for aspiring women candidates;* (ii) *equal representation of women and men in parliaments (parity) is a sign of **justice**;* (iii) *only women are positioned to **represent women's interests**;* (iv) *women's political representation **revitalises democracy**;* (v) *women's political representation is necessary for women to put their **confidence in political institutions**;* and (vi) *the presence of women representatives increases the **legitimacy of democratic institutions*** (paraphrased from Philips, 1995; Dovi, 2007). Indeed, the first 'role model' argument, is supported in other research identified in this review which demonstrates greater voting turnout and political interest among young women in areas where the candidate was female (Briggs, 2008) so that women representatives create a 'virtuous circle' of female political engagement.

2.1.1. Women in EU institutions

Macrae (2012) finds that high level European Institutions formalised the 'politics of presence' through a number of conventions and communications. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Council of Europe (CoE) has stressed the importance of women's participation as a prerequisite for democracy (ibid, 2012). For example, in 1988, the CoE made the **first explicit link between gender equality and democracy in an official text** (Hubert, 2004)⁷. The recommendations of the CoE 'Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making', adopted in 2003, set out specific requirements for Governments of Member States towards gender parity including to: *'commit themselves to promote balanced representation of women and men by recognising publicly that the equal sharing of decision-making power between women and men of different background and ages strengthens and enriches democracy'*. The new EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship includes greater involvement of women in decision making as part of the gender equality priority of her work. The gender gap in political life has been highlighted as a **priority for action** both in the Women's Charter (European Commission, 2010) and the EU Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (EC, 2010) which both restate the European Commission's commitment to increasing the percentage of women in decision making roles in public life.

⁷ Council of Europe (1988) *Declaration on Equality of Women and Men*"

Gender parity has been a galvanising objective since the UN's 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Greboval, 2004) which provided a justification for positive action measures to improve women's representation in decision making. The Beijing Platform for Action agreement of 1995 further galvanised support for positive measures to increase women in decision making which have featured strongly in EU policy documents as a result.

However, despite the stated commitment to gender parity in decision making at the EU level, and progress that has been made in women's representation (Coffe and Bolzendahl, 2010, Mestre and Marin, 2012) there still remains a **substantial gender gap** in national parliaments and also within EU institutions (Murray, 2012). For MacCrae, (2012) there has been little progress towards increased gender equality in EU decision-making since the mid 1990s. She points to the 'low point' for gender parity at the EU level during the Constitutional Convention of 2004, where, '*despite a declared aim of increasing democracy in the EU, only 17 of 105 delegates were women*' (ibid, 2012). Table 1 below provides a gender breakdown of representatives in different EU Institutions.

Table 1: Percentage of female representatives in different EU Institutions

	Prior to 1994	1994-1999	1999-2004	2004-2009
European Parliament	17.3% (1984-89)	27.4%	29.7%	31.2%
EP Committee Chairs	n/a	n/a	23%	27.3% (2008)
European Commission	11.8% (1993)	25%	25%	29.6% (2007), 37% (2009)
Commission Committees and Expert Groups	n/a	n/a	28.8% (2001)	n/a
Commission high-ranking Civil servants (level 1 and 2)	n/a	13.6% (1999)	13.9% (2003)	19.5% (2007)
European Court of Justice	0%	4.1% (1999)	13.3% (2000)	11% (2009)
European Court of First Instance	n/a	13.3%	n/a	41% (2009)
European Central Bank	n/a	n/a	n/a	5% (2007)

Source: Macrae, 2012. Where 'n/a' is indicated, gender disaggregated data are not available.

Table 1 shows the largest increases in women's representation in EU Institutions were in the Parliament and Commission; the former increased women's representation by 17% in the twenty years to 2009 (increasing only very slightly between 2009 and 2014), and the Commission increased the number of women representatives by 18 percent between 1994 and 2009. Women's representation in the European Parliament has risen in many member states over the past decade. This is partly as a result of some Member States setting binding **quotas** on female representatives to the European Parliament. (Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, France, and Italy). However, less progress has been made in the financial institutions of the EU and in the European Courts (ibid, 2012) and gender parity is far from reality still. The EP itself acknowledges an "*alarming*" under-representation of

women in the mid terms elections within the European Parliament in 2012 (European Parliament, March 2012).

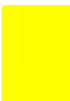
2.1.2. Women in national parliaments


In Member States' own parliaments and politics progress on women's representation has been varied: rapid in some States and incremental in others (Kantola, 2008). Rapid increases in women in parliaments has been seen in Belgium, from 9.4 per cent in 1992 to 34.7 per cent in 2007, UK from 9.2 in 1992 to 18.2 in 1997, and France from 3.7 per cent in 1992 to 18.5 per cent in 2007. The number of women in parliament in Austria, Denmark and Finland has been incremental (ibid, 2008). Kantola observes that in former communist states, previously high numbers of female MPs declined dramatically following the fall of communism: *'from an average of 26 per cent to a mere 9 per cent in the parliaments of these countries'*. Table 2 below summarises the proportions of female representatives in national governments.


Table 2: % women in the single or Lower House of Parliament in EU 27 and EEA, 2012

	President	Women	Men	Women	Men
		(N)	(N)	(%)	(%)
Austria	W	52	131	28	72
Belgium	M	59	89	40	60
Bulgaria	W	55	184	23	77
Croatia	M	39	112	26	74
Cyprus	M	6	50	11	89
Czech Republic	W	43	157	22	78
Denmark	M	73	106	41	59
Estonia	W	21	79	21	79
Finland	M	85	115	43	57
France	M	152	422	26	74
Germany	M	204	416	33	67
Greece	M	63	237	21	79
Hungary	M	35	351	9	91
Iceland	W	25	38	40	60
Ireland	M	25	142	15	85
Italy	M	135	495	21	79
Latvia	W	23	77	23	77
Lithuania	M	32	103	24	76
Luxembourg	M	14	46	23	77
Macedonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of	M	39	84	32	68
Malta	M	6	63	9	91

Norway	M	67	102	40	60
Poland	W	110	350	24	76
Portugal	W	67	163	29	71
Republic of Serbia	M	81	169	32	68
Romania	M	35	268	12	88
Slovakia	M	28	122	19	81
Slovenia	M	34	56	38	62
Spain	M	138	212	39	61
Sweden	M	152	197	44	56
The Netherlands	W	58	92	39	61
Turkey	M	79	470	14	86
United Kingdom	M	144	500	22	78
All countries	9W 25M	2 185	6 217	26	74
EU-27	8W 19M	1 849	5 223	26	74


 acceding countries


 candidate countries


 non EU countries

Source, Database on Gender Balance in Decision making European Commission, DG Justice (downloaded March, 2012)

2.2. Participation in politics: women and girls

That women are underrepresented in parliamentary or representative politics does not mean that they are non-political. A number of studies have explored the different activities and interests of women and girls that may be considered political. However, exactly what it is to be political is a key question which must be clarified before it is possible to investigate women's involvement in politics. A key question when examining the question of 'new media's potential influence on women's political engagement' must be, therefore: *'What forms do female political participation take and which activities are most important?'*

For Burns and colleagues, **political activity** is *'that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or indirectly, by influencing the selection of people who make those policies'* (Burns et al, 2001). Celis and colleagues (2008) emphasise the importance of the variety of arenas where women's issues and concerns are raised including *'legislatures, cabinets, women's policy agencies, non-governmental organisations, and civil society, courts and constitutions'*. Kantola suggests that this diversity offers a variety of opportunities and constraints for women in decision making (Kantola, 2009). Political participation is the most common way in which political activities are conceived and measured by academics and political institutions. Traditionally definitions of participation in politics have referred narrowly to voter turnout and party membership. More recently measures of political participation have been widened to include more informal modes of participation such as signing a petition, and joining demonstrations. Verba and colleagues (1995) provide a useful eight point scale

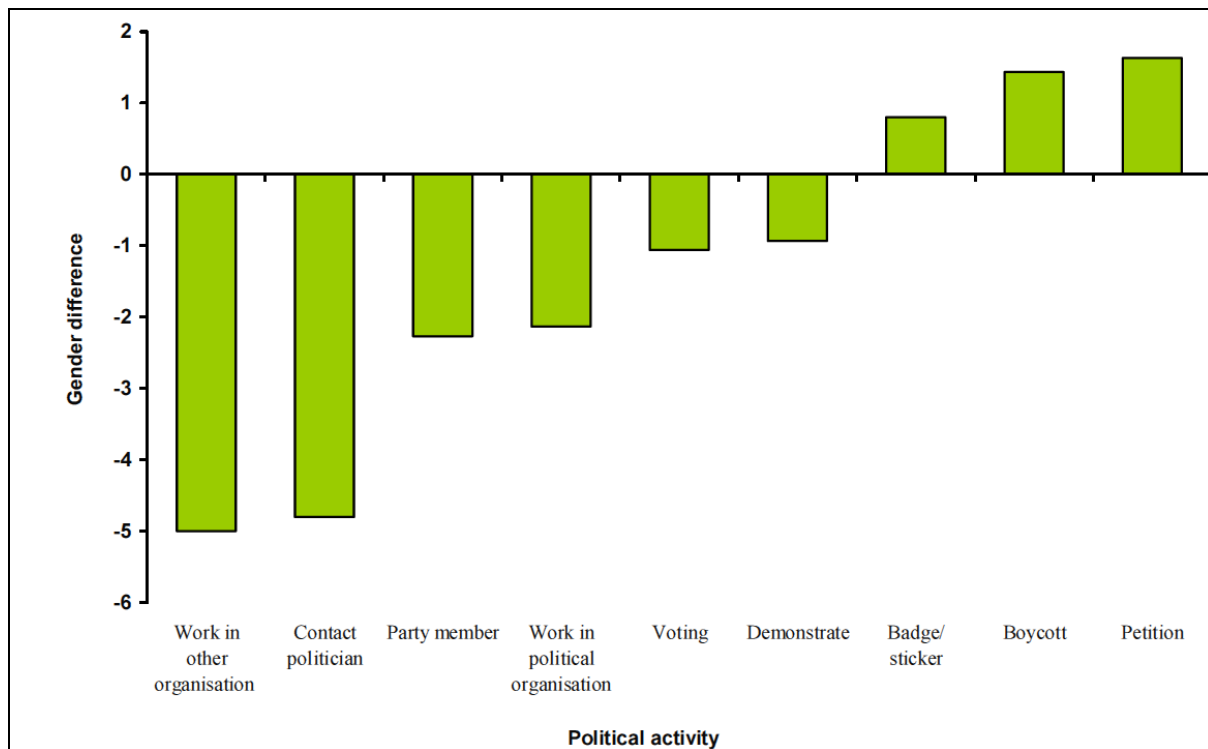
of civic political participation in the context of American democracy which is referred to by Burns and colleagues in their study of political participation of young women:

1. *Voting;*
2. *Working in and contributing to electoral campaigns and organizations;*
3. *Contacting government officials;*
4. *Attending protests, marches, or demonstrations;*
5. *Working informally with the others to solve some community problem;*
6. *Serving without pay on local elected and appointed boards;*
7. *Being active politically through the intermediation of voluntary associations;*
8. *Contributing money to political causes in response to mail solicitations.*

Building on the work of Verba and others, and acknowledging the existence of a wide range of contemporary political activity, the UK Electoral Commission have identified four main types of political participation: voting, campaign-orientated (mainly linked to actions through political parties), cause-orientated (non electoral actions such as signing petitions, boycotting products and demonstrating), and civic-orientated activism (membership of voluntary organisations and community groups) (Electoral Commission, 2004). They used the European Social survey and their own audit to construct a Political Activism index and show some key differences in the participatory activities of men and women. Their results are in keeping with other studies in demonstrating that there is **no gender gap in voting participation**, and that **inequalities in participation exist elsewhere**. Women are equally or more engaged in cause-oriented activism than men, especially signing petitions (41% vs 35%), but significantly less likely than men to participate in campaign-orientated activities, such as contacting a politician and donating money to, or being a member of, a political party (Electoral Commission, 2004). Women are slightly less active than men in civic orientated participation, but the most significant difference is in campaign activities. This is important when we consider that the most traditional entry route into representational politics is through political party activity.

Marien (2008) argues that that the ways in which women politically engage differ from men and there is also considerable variety across Europe. Figure 1 shows gender differences between different types of political activity.

Figure 1: Gender differences according to the kind of political activity undertaken



Source: Marien, 2008. Analysis of European Social Survey data 2002, 2004 and 2006 from 14 EU Member States. A positive value indicates more women than men engage in the activity, a negative value indicates the reverse.

For Marien, '**men are far more likely than women to participate in a conventional sense** that is joining a political party, working in a political organisation and contacting government officials' (ibid, 2008). This finding is applicable in nearly all EU Member States observed but with variation in the size of the difference between men and women. Small gender gaps in conventional political participation were observed in the UK, Belgium and Scandinavian countries but 'statistically noticeable' differences were observed in Romania, Poland and Cyprus. Even larger gender gaps were observed in Portugal and Bulgaria. Women were found to participate slightly more than men in conventional political activities in Estonia and the Russian Federation, but with only a 'negligible difference' (ibid, 2008). However, women's role in traditional politics is still more likely to be involved in minor administrative work or low profile roles rather than in decision making (Matland, 2005).

It should also be noted that political participation and **interest differs across age groups as well as gender**. A significant proportion of literature on participation and interest in politics finds that whilst young people do not vote or take an interest in party politics, they are still *interested* in 'political issues': *Young people are not apathetic, but many are disengaged*' (Worcester 2005). (See also, Henn et al. 2002, 2004, 2005, Kimberlee, 2002, Molloy et al. 2002, Phelps 2004, O'Toole et al. 2003).

Political participation and involvement, therefore, covers a variety of activities and women may have **different patterns** of activity compared to men which also differs by other demographic variables. Based on this understanding of women's participation in politics several studies have identified mechanisms and resources through which women and girls' roles as political actors in terms of mainstream politics may be strengthened, including through on line activity. For example, in her study of young women's political interest and use of technology, Harris (2008) is concerned to identify how the mainstream political

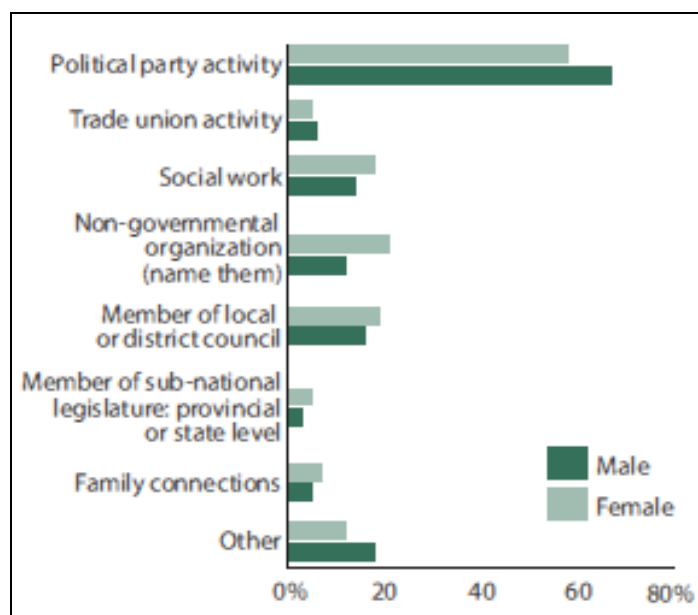
system has failed to harness young women’s latent political interest and ways to put this right; a similar objective was pursued by Geniets (2010) in her assessment of how civic online efforts have failed to engage young women from low socio-economic backgrounds in the UK. Exploring the potential for new media to strengthen and build on the momentum created by women’s political participation in the forums identified above is a key aim of this research.

2.3. Routes into politics

Whilst political interest and involvement may take many forms, a question remains about how these activities may translate into women **standing for election** and how new media may be useful in this regard. To address this, the literature review examined what routes and barriers exist to women getting into decision making roles in politics.

Routes into parliament or government vary according to the electoral and party system of each country. However, a report by the Inter Parliamentary Union in 2008 based on a survey with parliamentarians from across the world, including Europe, identified the **most significant pathways** for women and men. These are shown in figure 2 below. This clearly shows that the ‘traditional’ route (IGU, 2008) into politics through party political activity is most important for both men and women. Involvement with Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), social work and local politics (such as local councils) is a more important route for women compared to men. Thus, for women and men alike the ability to engage in and progress through party politics at a local level is the most important first step on the road to electoral politics.

Figure 2: Entry routes into politics for women and men



Source: Inter Parliamentary Union, 2008

Having identified the dominant routes into parliamentary politics, the literature review sought to explore what helps and hinders women through these routes.

2.4. Barriers to entry into politics

Matland (2005) identifies three crucial hurdles women must pass before entering national parliament: *1) they need to select themselves; 2) they need to be selected as candidates by the parties; and, 3) they need to be selected by the voters.* Each hurdle presents its own particular challenges, especially for women; and the specific process of passing from 'aspiring' to elected politician varies between each country. Further, women are outnumbered by men at *each* of these three stages. At the very first stage, when the personal decision is made to run for office, the individual requires both personal **ambition and resources**. Importantly, Matland observes, that at this first stage '*already at [there are] more men than women*' (ibid, 2005).

The other journey 'stages' into politics are shaped by the nature of the electoral system (Matland 2005, Shvedova 2005) (for example proportional representation systems are found to produce more women MPs compared to other systems); how parties select and nurture candidates and other institutional factors which are a product of both constitutional law and party political history (Kassem, 2012, Kenny and Verge, 2012)⁸.

A **working hypothesis** for this study is that institutional and constitutional factors are not as malleable as processes at the 'first' stage of a journey into politics: the point where a woman decides to enter politics. Thus, our research questions focus on **how new media may encourage women's interest, confidence, network, power bases** or other factors identified in research as being important in that first stage. However, the literature also identifies the importance of elected politicians' links with NGOs and women's organisations for encouraging women in decision making, advancing women's political careers and promoting female politicians' agendas (Shvedova, 2005). This study will explore where new media might assist in this manner also.

2.5. Getting women to the 'first stage' in politics

For Matland, that there are fewer women at the 'first stage' is down to socialisation: '*Men, across virtually all cultures, are socialized to see politics as a legitimate sphere for them to act in*' (ibid, 2005). This statement belies a large section of literature which seeks to understand why women deselect themselves at this first' stage'.

Structural, social and situational explanations are frequently referred to in the literature about women's (comparative lack of) engagement in politics. 'Structural' explanations describe the situation that, despite the growing participation of women in the labour market and increasingly comparable levels of male and female educational attainment, women's resource deficit in terms of socio economic status (education, job, power) means they have more obstacles and fewer enablers to help them into power, compared to men (Mestre and Marin, 2012). The situational explanation emphasises the unequal division of unpaid labour and the higher burden of family responsibilities that women bear which inhibits their engagement in politics; finally, the situational explanation emphasises different beliefs and

⁸ Kassem's 2012 study of political parties in different nations globally finds that parties' values and beliefs are crucial predictors of women's engagement in politics at a high level (such as being elected in national Government). Kassem finds that in most of the five Nordic countries studied gender equality is an important value of the main political parties, resulting in high shares of female legislators. This indicates the important role political parties play in advancing women and nominating them to public office, according to Kassem. She concludes that not only do parties offer a plausible explanation for variations in female representation in 'developed' democracies but also in providing an answer to why are some parties superior to others in advancing women's political career.

attitudes 'transmitted' by society according to gender (Mestre and Marin, 2012, Burns et al, 2001). The European Commission also draws attention to structural, social and situational causes identifying social attitudes, intense workload and 'culture of long working hours', limited political will as well as limited financial resources as barriers to women's involvement in decision making⁹.

Shvedova (2005) provides a useful summary of the main **obstacles for women in politics**, worldwide, at the three different 'stages' of a journey. These obstacles fall into structural, situational and social categories. Table 3 below summarises Shvedova's analysis.

Table 3: The main obstacles for women's participation in politics

obstacle	explanation
The prevalence of the 'masculine model' of political life and of elected government bodies;	political life is organised by male norms, values and lifestyles and working patterns
Lack of party support for women	women are rarely decision makers in political parties, even though they play important roles in campaigning.
Lack of sustained contact and cooperation with public organizations such as trade (labour) unions and women's groups	although women's organisations can help women parliamentarians overcome barriers, there is a less contact between politicians and these groups, compared to other interest groups.
the nature of the electoral system,	different systems produce different numbers of female parliamentarians. The PR system is most conducive to high numbers of women elected politicians.
Socio-economic obstacles	low socio economic status of women, compared to men means women have fewer power and material resources to support her move into politics
Linked to socio-economic obstacles: women's lack of time resources	women carry a disproportionate share of domestic work, despite high numbers of women in paid employment. Women's additional work burden prevents them from having time necessary to engage in politics
Women's socialisation	male values tend to dominate politics in many countries and women's roles are culturally viewed as being in the home rather than in politics. This impacts on women's confidence to engage in politics, attitudinal prejudice against women and women's lack of trust and confidence in politics.
The role of the mass media, linked to above	women politicians are covered less by the mass media than their male counterparts and events and issues of importance to women are not covered as much as other issues. This reduces women's interest in politics. Mass media also reinforces gender cultural stereotypes about the role of women which prevent women from engaging in politics.

Source: Summarised from Shvedova, (2005)

⁹ See for example, the Commission's Roadmap for equality between women and men, 2006–2010.

2.6. Interest in politics

In order for a woman to make the first 'stage' of a journey into politics, the literature identified that *interest in politics* is an important prerequisite. There is a significant proportion of literature on women's political engagement that focuses on this issue, as a means to understand the gender gap in politics.

Recent research in the UK shows that levels of interest in politics are at their lowest for several years and that the gap between men and women's interest in politics continues. For example, in 2012 only 37% of women said they were 'fairly' interested in politics in comparison to 49% of men (Hansard, 2012a). The same study found that **knowledge of politics is also in decline**, but that there is **less of a gender gap**. Interestingly, women self report to be less knowledgeable about politics than men, but when their knowledge is measured by a set of true/false questions the gender gap in knowledge is significantly reduced (Hansard 2012a).

Political interest and involvement is affected by a number of factors in similar ways for males and females. An individuals' educational level and their parents' own level of involvement and interest in politics positively relates to an individuals' own level of engagement.

These factors begin to shape a person's political interest at a young age and much research has focussed on **adolescents' political behaviours**. Eckstein and colleagues' recent research into adolescent boys and girls found adolescence to be a crucial period in life concerning the emergence, consolidation, and development of political points of view (Eckstein et al, 2012). Other research has found differences for male and female adolescents. For female adolescents, significant value similarities with their parents, especially with their mothers, occurred in Schmid's study (Schmid 2012). Value similarities with their friend were found in both gender groups, but appeared to be higher in the female group. Also, in both gender groups, a positive parent - child relationship quality was linked to higher social responsibility. In summary, Schmid's findings, also confirmed in other studies, show that parents as well as peer group factors contribute to adolescents' value acquisition (Schmid, 2012, Cicognani et al. 2012) Furthermore, a gender gap is identified in political interest and in the use of the Internet for adolescents (Cicognani et al. 2012)

In her study of young women's interest in mainstream¹⁰ politics, Briggs (2008) identifies that socially disadvantaged young women are **alienated from most political debate**. Young women in her qualitative research reported that they felt political discussion has little to do with their lives and that politicians are far removed from their every day experiences. This contributed to their lack of interest in national parliamentary politics but does not mean that the girls in her sample did not have political beliefs. The girls were interested in issues that affected their lives but felt unsure about where or how to express their voices on these issues. The girls reported feeling that if they could personally relate to politicians they might be more able to approach them and take an interest in their policy. Thus, the girls rated highly a live webcam portraying the UK's prime minister in his home. This was felt to break down the barriers between them and the politician.

The underlying causes of differences in political interest by gender were explored by Mestre and colleagues (2012) who suggest that interest in politics is an **important pre-requisite** of democratic politics. In their regression analysis of survey data from a representative

¹⁰ Defined as party politics and politics conducted through the national parliament

sample of Catalan men and women, the researchers find that, after controlling for individual resources, situational factors and the socialization factors, situational factors are found to be the most important predictor for political interest, in particular the **distribution of domestic and caring tasks**. The study confirms the authors' hypothesis that *'the more hours women devote to these types of tasks, the less interest in politics they show'* (*ibid*, 2012). Mestre and colleagues' study confirms Burns and colleagues' assertion that political participation is rooted in private life; *'the private roots of political action'* (Burns et al, 2001) are, therefore, still important.

Any attempt to engage women further in politics will need to factor in the **time constraints** that women face in their daily lives.

2.7. Media representations of women and men elected representatives

One of the key issues which influence women's political aspirations is the **relative lack of role models**, not simply in terms of women's *physical* presence as politicians (the lack of which has already been described above) but also in terms of the *public* presence in media discourse. There is now a considerable body of work which looks at the ways in which gender inflects journalistic practice in relation to the coverage of politics and the political process and most of this work is oriented around four primary forms of analysis.

One focus of this body of work is on election coverage, looking at both frequency and content by the gender of candidates (Bystrom et al., 2004); a second focus looks at the representation of women politicians more generally, often in comparison with their male counterparts and often using a matched case-study approach (see Norris, 1997; Ross, 2002); a third strand considers political journalists, exploring the extent to which women work that beat and identifying any differences in practice which could be attributed to the sex of the journalist (North, 2009); and a fourth and more recent strand has focused on women competing for the most senior political jobs, as candidates for Prime Minister or President or running mate positions (Sanchez, 2009; Falk, 2010; Campus, 2013).

In general terms, the vast majority of studies which have considered the representation of women politicians and candidates in mainstream news media have reported findings which are remarkably similar over time and place and most describe two abiding tendencies: one is that **women are represented differently (more negatively) to men** and the other is that women are less visible (in relation to their actual numbers) than men.

Within these tendencies are a large number of thematic findings, most of which suggest that women's electoral success is compromised by a journalistic emphasis on personal and corporeal characteristics (**trivialization**) rather than a rendering of their policy positions. The broader problem of what Tuchman and colleagues (1978) described as women's "symbolic annihilation" (**marginalization**) in their foundational work on women and news, has a contemporary relevance and resonance when considering political women's media fortunes. Even women who compete for and then win the top job are vulnerable to the media's personalising proclivities, so that Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir's same-sex marriage and Angela Merkel's dress sense are subject to as much media scrutiny and discussion as the way they govern their respective countries or their position on global terrorism. The use of specifically gendered language to describe women politicians - for example, women are strident and hysterical whilst men are assertive and authoritative - also positions them as

women first, their sex rather than their profession being their primary determinant (**commodification**).

Framing analysis has been a particularly helpful tool in interrogating news discourse for its gendered nuance, identifying historical and geo-political trends through an interpretive feminist framework which seeks to understand why we get what we get (Norris, 1997). Thus, in general terms, the triple whammy of *trivialization*, *marginalization* and *commodification* serve to produce a **political media discourse which too frequently disavows the potency of women as credible political actors and undermines democracy by withholding information about them from the public during election campaigns**. Not only is the process of democracy itself ill-served, but such coverage sends out a strong message to girls and women that they should expect to have a very difficult life if they have the ambition to become a politician. Of course, this is not always and everywhere the case and the last few years have seen increasing numbers of women achieve the top political job, but many would argue that this has been in spite of rather than because of mainstream news media.

2.8. Women, men and new media

Gender researchers and feminist scholars have also become interested in new media as a development which has the potential to break down or flatten social hierarchies (Friedman, 2005) in more general terms. For example, Williamson suggests that **digital media have already begun to challenge socio-cultural and political norms** in Britain (Williamson, 2009). New media differs from traditional 'old' media in that its structures of ownership and participation are new and directly challenge the monopoly on mass communication possessed by traditional media producers: *'The internet has fragmented and decentralised the context in which communication occurs'* (ibid, 2009).

Geniets (2010) also finds that new media provides a **potential break with old social hierarchies**: *'new technologies give individual producers of media content more freedom, and empower them to expose, interact with and reveal backstage behaviour related information about themselves as well as others to a mass media audience'*.

However, while new media, overall, is identified as an agent for (generally positive) social change, its effects are not gender neutral.

In her study of political communication through new media, Beetham draws parallels between activities on 'cyberspace' and the growth of the periodical press in the mid to late 19th Century. Beetham observes that the advent of on line technology and the ability to interact freely on line and access information easily does not free us from 'material circumstances' and that access to political, economic and knowledge power are a) related and b) unequal. Beetham's observations concur with other strands of literature about digital new media and equality.

There is a substantial literature on the '**digital divide**' which claims and explores differences in access to new media not just in terms of material access but also a divide between individuals' understanding and use of on line culture and applications. These divides have been called the first and second level digital divides. The divide in uses of new media is especially detected between the young and the old but also between men and women (Wei and Hindman, 2011). This research identifies a consensus that simply having

access to the web will not necessarily solve potential sources of inequality. For example, if the web is used as a toy or entertainment rather than as a tool, it may not enhance the user's life chances (ibid, 2011). However, this review did not find evidence that women's use of the web is less 'tool' oriented compared to men's, indeed some evidence was uncovered that men use the web for entertainment more than women, who tend to use it for growing their social capital and finding information. Indeed, the evidence on different uses of the internet by men and women is very mixed, due in part to a wide variety in the variables used in this field of research.

Warren and colleagues (2011) report that despite similar levels of physical access to the internet between men and women, the types of use vary. Men are more likely to participate in online community groups whilst women are more likely than men to communicate with others and expand their social network. Furthermore, the authors suggest that women who participate in on line networks experience considerable negative feedback from men and that this has led to a decrease in women's participation on these forums.

In another study of different uses by gender, Haferkamp (2012) and colleagues find that women's online behaviour is '**more interpersonally oriented**' while men are more task and information oriented.

Thus, critics of the view that new media is a new source of power argue that these claims are unsubstantiated due to variation in on line behaviour by gender, age and other demographic variables. Overall, however, the research on the political impact of new media is too underdeveloped to predict its impact. However, a number of studies were identified which point to the potential positive effect of on line technologies for women and girls based on studies of its actual use (e.g. Harris, 2008, Keller, 2012).

There is also a considerable body of emerging literature about the potential of the internet to increase participation in politics. As with the internet and inequality, the debate around the potential of the internet to make a positive contribution to democracy through **increased access, transparency and opportunity for participation** suggests that technology in itself will not necessarily overcome issues of low interest, lack of 'citizenship' skills, opportunities and other factors which affect participation in politics. Some, such as Bimber (1999) suggest that participating in politics through the internet is less time consuming than traditional ways of becoming involved in politics or political actions (Bimber, 1999). For example, emails to government officials and politicians can be more easily/quickly written and sent than traditional letters. Others suggest that due to the new opportunities afforded by the internet for people to 'learn about, talk about, and take part in politics' it has the potential to bring "new people into politics" (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010).

However, political scientists have questioned whether successful innovations designed to increase participation can balance out the existing inequalities in levels of participation between different sections of society. Some suggest that rather than bringing new people, such as the underrepresented, into politics new media may simply be another way for the people who were already politically active to play out their participation. Another strand of thinking which questions the direct effect of new media on participation is that online participation may require citizens to develop a new set of **skills specific to engaging online** (Best & Krueger, 2005). This means that those who possess the 'civic skills' needed to engage in political issues in the offline world may not necessarily be transferable to online forms of participation.

In her study of young women's use of the internet, Harris (2008) argues that the mere act of 'going online' allows women to create identities that are a first step for women to identify themselves as a citizen. The simple ability to create a **public self** provides '*young women with a capacity to play with gender and to resist feminine stereotypes*' (Harris, 2008). This ability will help young women to **build confidence** as political actors.

Similarly, Keller (2011) argues that blogs are particularly important on line spaces for young women to forge political identities and **confront sexist cultures**. She draws upon two examples of blogs the 'Seventeen Magazine Project' by an American high school student, which satirises the 'beauty and lifestyle' tips of the teen magazine 'Seventeen' and 'the Fbomb' blog created by a 16 year old girl '*for teenage girls who care about their rights as women and want to be heard*'. Both blogs attracted large international followings. As with Harris, Keller suggests these blogs are examples of how new media allows previously disengaged or marginalised groups to challenge power bases using styles of communication that will appeal to peers. Both blogs have the intention to entertain as well as mobilise young women into political action.

2.9. Gender, politics and new media

It is important to recognise that mainstream, and mostly offline, media remain the main source of information for citizens about politics (Hansard, 2012b). When asked to confirm mediums they used as a main source of information for political news and information, 75% of adults cite television, 27% cite tabloid newspapers, 26% cite radio, 20% cite news websites, and 16% cite broadsheet newspapers in the UK. With the exception of news websites, internet based sources of information are not commonly accessed as a main source with only 6% citing social media, 1% using political party websites and 1% using political blogs as a main source of information about politics. Similar patterns exist in the USA with the Pew Internet survey showing that television remains the dominant source of news about election campaigns (67%). However, the **gap between use of the internet and offline sources such as newspapers is narrowing** with 27% citing newspapers and 24% using the internet as their main source of election information in 2010 (Pew Research Centre, 2010). In both countries this data varies by age, with younger people using a greater variety of sources and more online sources than older people, as well as having higher levels of internet use more generally. This and other studies of use of the internet as a news source underline the importance of considering the world of political information available online alongside continuing offline habits. Newman et al. (2012) remind us that online news consumption most often compliments rather than substitutes offline news habits. This also suggests that representations of politics and in particular the role of women in politics in the mainstream offline media remain crucially important to women's perceptions of politics.

As with studies of politician's use of new media, most studies of citizens' use of new media focus on the public's behaviour during election campaigns. The internet was an important source of news, political material and discussion during the 2010 British election campaign. It was used slightly less by women than men for this purpose with 64% saying they had sourced information about the election online compared to 73% of men (Fallon et al. 2011). A smaller gender gap was visible in the USA, with 25% of men and 24% of women using the internet as a main source of campaign/election news (Pew Research Centre, 2010). The UK election was named the first "**social media election**" and saw an unprecedented volume of tweets around key events such as the leadership debates, the following of

political candidates on Twitter and involvement via political party fan pages (Newman et al, 2012). Newman et al. also highlight that some studies have claimed a possible link between the level of use of social media and increased engagement in politics through the higher than expected turnout of young voters (18-24 year olds) and their self reported high levels of engagement in the election.

Looking at the limited research available about how new media is used by women for more active or participatory political purposes we see that there are gender differences in the way that women use new media which could have implications for the way in which they participate in politics. The limited research available suggests that **women tend to use new media in relation to politics for networking** whereas **men are more likely to use it for promoting their own views**. A study of the 2010 UK general election found that only 10% of posts on the 'Lib Dem Voice' blog were by women, with 79% of blog posts made by men (Fallon et al., 2011). Women's interest in the election was more visible through their role as fans of the Liberal Democrat Facebook page, but even here they were less visible than men with only 37% of the 'fans' being women. Fallon et al. (2011) conclude that "overall, the evidence for online politics suggests that the more an activity involves self-promotion, expounding your views to others or the risks of conflict, then the more likely there is to be a male dominance". Studies in the USA show similar trends with women internet users being more likely (79%) to use social networking sites than men (63%) and no gender differences in use of Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2012). Although blogging in the USA and the UK is just as popular amongst women as men, research shows that the most influential blogs tend to be by males and that women are noticeably absent from political blogging (Pedersen, 2007).

A deeper understanding of the ways in which women use new media to participate in political issues not only has the potential to increase the opportunities for women to **transform their political interest into action**, it also allows for political actors to take a more inclusive approach to encouraging participation. For example, politicians have recognised that the internet allows them access to citizens in a way that is not only more direct, but also capable of targeting precise groups of voters such as mothers. In addition to Twitter and Facebook, politicians in the UK are aware of the benefits of communicating with specific groups of citizens through online forums which attract specific sections of the voting public. For example, in the 2010 general election leaders of all three of the main political parties took part in webchats with members of the parenting forum and campaign group 'Mumsnet'. Newman et al (2012) suggest that this is an example of how *'a collaborative network organized to support professional women can instantly become a source of political empowerment'*.

2.10. Women politicians' use of new media

One of the most recent trends in political communication has been the explosion of studies exploring the ways in which politicians are using new media (including *Facebook* and *Twitter*) to communicate with their publics in an effort to **subvert the gate-keeping tendencies** of mainstream media (Hooghe and Teepe, 2007; Strandberg, 2009).

Most research has focused on new media during **election campaigns**, attempting to explore both the content but also the influence of web-based messages on election outcomes (Chen, 2010; Grant et al., 2010). For a number of scholars, the internet has already become an enabling technology, where candidates who have historically been

marginalised by mainstream media can establish a web presence and communicate directly with the electorate (see, for example, Chadwick, 2006; Davis et al., 2009). Gilmore (2012) found that **women candidates were indeed able to establish a web presence and gain public visibility** which, whilst not necessarily achieving an advantage over their male competitors, they could at least play in the same arena. Web-based forms of political communication, especially social media forms, enable politicians to have **much more control over their own message-making strategies** and this works particularly well for women whose often unelected or junior status is less likely to be constrained by having to work the party message. The great advantage of the internet, personal websites, *Twitter* and *Facebook* is that as well as sending information out to potential voters, politicians' adoption of social media means that they become part of the mediated lives of those voters, proactively arriving in their *Twitter* feeds and *Facebook* newstreams without their needing to actively seek them out. For politicians with less brand recognition, such as women, this is a very considerable advantage not only in subverting mainstream media's marginalising tendencies but enabling a much human persona to emerge and build reputation and to foster a much more interactive relationship between candidate and voter (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2012).

It should be noted, however, that **almost no published study** on politicians' use of social media **explicitly explores gender-based differences** in either content or citizen affect. Even studies which are focused on issues of personalization of individual MPs' websites (eg Hermans & Vergeer, 2009) or blogs (Nilsson, 2012) are oddly silent on issues of gender difference, although in terms of adoption, Jackson and Lilleker (2011) suggest that in their study of British MPs, women were significantly over-represented as Twitter adopters in comparison to their numbers in Parliament. However, preliminary findings from a very recent study on *Facebook* suggest that **women politicians are more likely than men to: post original comments** (as distinct from cutting and pasting links), upload photographs, **include non-political messages**, and **respond directly to comments and questions** posed by members of the public (Ross, 2013). So, although gender does seem to be an important variable in politicians' use of new media, we still know very little about the contours of gendered difference, both in terms of content and influence.

2.11. Summary: increased participation of women in decision-making through new media

The literature review has finessed the question of 'how might new media improve women's involvement in decision making'? It has provoked a number of further questions which are necessary to address first. These questions and answers are presented in table 4 below.

Table 4: Questions and Answers regarding increased participation of women in decision-making through new media

Why is it important for women to be involved in parliamentary politics at the EU and Member State level?	Underrepresentation of women in politics is fundamentally undemocratic . Parliamentary politics shape important aspects of citizens' lives
What are the most important routes into parliamentary politics for both men and women?	The most important route for women and men is through party politics . For women, involvement in NGOs and Social work is more common than for men.
What barriers do women face along these routes?	Women lack financial and power resources and time to engage in traditional politics. Women are also socialised to avoid political careers and are deterred by a 'male-centric political culture.
What form does women's political activity take?	Very varied . Women are more likely to engage in non-formal political activities (not linked to party politics), compared to men. Women's interests are often not reflected in mainstream political debate.
How might women's latent political interest be translated into parliamentary politics?	Actions to address the structural, social and situational barriers listed above.
In what ways, when and how might new media help?	New media is most likely to help at the 'first' stage in a journey into politics: when women make the personal decision to run for office.

New media represents a break from old in terms of technology but also the means of production. Sometimes referred to as Web 2.0 or Web 3.0, new media is currently characterised by social networks, interactive forums, intense data sharing and collaborative knowledge. Whilst some researchers argue that differences between men and women's use of on line networks represents a further digital divide, a number of studies point to the potential positive impact of new media for young women. Primarily, **new media provides women** with the opportunity to:

- Network with other women
- Create on line selves which build confidence
- Appeal to other women and peers through styles and issues that are directly relevant and attractive
- Provide alternative power bases which might be of interest to mainstream politicians.

It is difficult to 'engineer' points of interest or communities of action through new media. As the web and new media are incredibly fast evolving technologies, they are driven by participation and collaboration, which cannot be easily 'imposed'.

3. ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL GROUPS' AND NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES' USES OF NEW MEDIA

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, European political groups' uses of new media tend to be far from interactive.
- European political groups prefer to use their websites to discuss, highlight and/or promote gender equality issues rather than social media such as Facebook and Twitter.
- No particular good practice points were highlighted in European groups' uses of new media.

A review of the main political parties' new media uses in all in European Member States revealed very low levels of activity designed to attract women into politics. There is prove that involvement in online activities can directly lead an individual to be 'identified' and 'recruited' into formal politics.

3.1. European political groups' uses of new media

All seven political groups have a **website** and they all have **links to social media platforms** on their websites, such as Facebook, twitter, flickr and youtube. Moreover, all political groups' websites had **RSS feed**. However, only one party (Party of European Socialists) had an interactive website where people can leave a comment or ask a question publicly. The same political party had a web forum, i.e. an **online discussion site** where people can hold conversations in the form of messages. In order to be able to take part in an online discussion on the Party of European Socialists' web forum, one would need to register and log in beforehand.

All groups had the option of subscribing to a newsletter, apart from the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. All seven groups have Facebook, Twitter as well as YouTube and Flickr accounts.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr - mostly non interactive uses

The number of 'likes' on Facebook varies between 76,564 and 1,806, with three political groups having over 10,000 likes. Those groups with large number of 'likes' often had a large number of followers on twitter as well. However, the **difference** between the number of followers, and tweets on twitter amongst the groups was **not as great**. Often, those groups with a higher number of 'likes' on Facebook, had a larger number of tweets than other political groups. This may suggest that political groups that are active on one social media platform are more likely to be more active on other social media platforms compared to other political groups.

EPP Group of European People's Party website contains a separate page describing its work with the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). This page contains links, articles and comment on gender equality and women's rights. . There were no recent posts (the last 4 weeks) on Facebook or tweets about gender equality or women's issues.

The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) includes a number of posts relating to women's issues and rights, which may be navigated to using the search function, but no single page dedicated to women's issues.

ALDE had **one re-tweet** concerning quotas for women in boardrooms, which also encouraged people to join the debate. ALDE don't have a separate page on their website for women and gender issues. The page is instead called 'combat discrimination', which includes all forms of discrimination, not only gender inequality. There is little mention of women and gender issues on their Facebook page, although there were some posts regarding gender quotas in the boardroom.

As already mentioned, few political groups' websites were interactive. However, the European Greens have a Twitter feed on their website, which may be considered as **partly interactive**, as people can comment on Tweets in the public domain. The website itself had several articles concerning gender equality as well as links to 'gender network-parallel session' (powered by the European Green Party). However, there were few re-tweets concerning women's and gender equality issues and no postings on Facebook concerning women's and gender issues.

The Greens/European Free Alliance also had a twitter feed on their website. Furthermore, they had links to current campaigns and events in the EP concerning women and gender issues. Moreover, their website contained **links to women's rights** together with links to new reports, articles in the media and news, as well as links to events concerning gender equality issues. However, there were no recent tweets or recent postings on Facebook concerning women's and gender equality issues.

European United Left/Nordic Green Left's website contained articles and reports concerning 'tackling gender stereotypes', although there was no separate page for women's or gender issues. Their Facebook page contained articles and posts and there were **tweets** on their twitter account regarding gender equality issues.

European Conservatives and Reformists Group had no recent posts (the last 4 weeks) on Facebook and no recent tweets concerning women's and gender equality issues. There are few articles concerning women's rights and gender equality.

Most political groups' websites contain some information and/or discussion regarding gender equality issues or women's rights. However, the European United Left/Nordic Green Left were the only group actively using Facebook and/or Twitter to discuss, highlight and/or promote gender equality or women's rights.

3.2. Analysis of national political parties' uses of new media to attract women into political decision making

A quantitative analysis was undertaken of a sample of **political parties' online presence** from each of the 27 Member States. The main political parties of each country were included in the analysis (n=118). The **websites** and any further **links to social media** were examined for if they included posts or other content on **women's issues** and rights, if there were links to other new media content on women's issues and rights. The content was also explored for examples of new media uses to directly seek women to become involved in politics.

Of all 118 parties assessed, the majority included **some mention or content** concerning women's issues or rights. A **minority included links to social media or other online content** specifically addressing women's rights. Only one party was noted to have links to a specific online campaign to attract women into their party politics, this was based in the UK. However, the site was **for information only**, providing readers with information about the support and advice available to women wishing to become involved in party politics.

3.3. Summary of EP political groups' and national political parties' uses of new media to attract women

The data suggests that European political groups **prefer to use their websites** to discuss, highlight and/or promote gender equality issues **rather than through social media** such as Facebook and Twitter. This is consistent with the high use of websites, compared to social media, found amongst individual MEPs (see chapter 4). Thus, websites are the preferred new media platform for communication more generally within the European Parliament context, based on the sample examined.

Overall, European political groups' uses of new media tends to be **far from interactive**; nor is new media used to post non-politics related items.

The review of new media output by the main political parties across the EU27 revealed **very poor levels of use of new media** to attract women into politics. Whilst new media were used to provide information about women's issues and rights more generally, there were very few examples of where it was used to directly attract women into the party processes. As this picture also applies to those MEPs with a specific interest in gender and/or women's issues and rights (either formally or informally), it has to be concluded that **social media has not noticeably become a key tool for advocating or debating gender-related issues**.

Future research could usefully compare social media uses amongst MEPs concerned with gender, to those on other specific issues (for example environmental issues or welfare reform), to determine if social media have been used to a lesser or greater extent in these areas and their impacts.

4. USES OF NEW MEDIA BY MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

KEY FINDINGS

- The analysis of new media uses suggests few but interesting differences between male and female MEPs in particular.
- Women MEPs tend to have more followers or likes on their social media platforms, yet there is little or no difference in the amount of content that is posted between women and men.
- Overall, MEPs' and European political groups' uses of new media tend to be far from interactive.
- Politicians, national political parties and European political groups' uses of new media are not particularly innovative.
- All female MEPs interviewed reported that new media are useful for sharing information and linking with voters, however they were felt by MEPs to have serious limitations.
- A web profile of an MEP which shows particularly good practice of new media uses, includes clear navigation and information architecture, good links between social media and her website, provision of multiple opportunities for followers to have a dialogue with her.

Social media marketing experts who were interviewed highlighted the following good practice points: social media should be personal and honest, end users should be listened to and responded to; knowledge of audience is essential in how new media platforms are planned; take time and use common sense before posting to avoid embarrassments however the approach should always include good humour.

4.1. Introduction

In this section, existing politicians' uses of new media in their political activities are examined. The analyses include a quantitative exploration of a sample of MEPs' (n=54) uses of new media and qualitative exploration of female MEP's uses of new media. The quantitative exercise provides context for the qualitative work in that it shows the range and spread of new media practices within MEPs' work. It also provides some data on European political groups' uses of new media.

In this section a further in-depth assessment of one 'case study' use of new media for an individual MEP who is involved in gender equality work is provided. This is in the form of a 'webprofile' - an assessment of the design, usability and presence, rather than of impact of her new media uses.

4.2. Review of new media uses by MEPs and political groups in the European Parliament

4.2.1. Sample of 54 MEPs

This section provides for the new media uses of a sample of MEPs (n=54), both **male and female**, purposively and **randomly selected** from each of the **EU 27 Member States**. Two MEPs were selected from each Member State, bringing the sample to 54 (33 men and 22 women). We examined the extent of use of different new media tools and some elements of function, for example websites' interactivity. Table 5 summarises the data.

Overall uses of new media

Table 5: Summary of 54 MEP's uses of new media

websites/blogs	Number of MEPs with own website or blog	44 (81.4%)
	Number of MEPs with no own website or blog	8 (14%)
	Number of blogs/websites with forums	3 (6.8%)
	Number of blogs/websites with no forum	41 (93%)
	Number of blogs/websites with links to social media	33 (75%)
	Number of blogs/websites with no links to social media	11 (25%)
	Number of blogs/websites with RSS feeds	18 (40%)
	Number of blogs/websites with no RSS feeds	26 (59%)
Facebook	Number of MEPs with Facebook account	45 (83%)
	Number of MEPs with no Facebook account	9 (16%)
	Number of Facebook accounts allowing posting from non friends	23 (51%)
	Number of Facebook accounts not allowing posting from non friends	22 (49%)
Twitter	Number of MEPs with twitter account	39 (72%)
	Number of MEPs with no twitter account	15 (27%)
	Average number of followers	1280
	Average number of following	967

Base: 54 MEPs

The majority of MEPs in the sample had websites or blogs (2 had only blogs), only 8 out of 54 (14%) MEPs had none. Only one MEP had no indication of any social media use, including no website. 5 (50%) MEPs without website had a Facebook account, whereas 4 (80%) of these MEPs also had twitter accounts (although one MEP's twitter account appears to be unused). Overall 6 (60%) of the MEPs without a website had a twitter account.

The data suggest that the **majority of MEPs are using social media in some capacity**. What differs is which platform MEPs use and how often. The analysis further suggests that the majority of MEP's websites are **not interactive** - meaning for example, that readers/end users are unable to leave a comment or ask a question on the website that can

be viewed by all. 14 out of the 44 (31%) MEPs' websites allowed some level of interaction such as having twitter feed where recent tweets are updated or an option to join the conversation, or a space where people can take part in a public discussion. One website allowed readers to leave comments on their blog, either on the website or as a link to the blog. Some websites allowed readers to take part in online surveys. Only 3 (6.8%) MEPs' websites had a web forum: an online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of messages.

One MEP in the sample had a 'question and answer' option on her website. Through this, anyone can ask a question or leave a comment, which the MEP responds to in the same space.

The majority of MEPs with websites (33, 75%) had **links on their website to social media platforms**, such as twitter, Facebook, YouTube and/or Flickr. 11 MEPs out of 44 (25%) had no such links on their website. 26 of 44 MEPs with websites (59%) did not have an RSS feed on their site¹¹.

9 MEPs (16%) had no Facebook account. Out of those with a facebook account, 22 (49%) would not allow wall postings from non-friends. 15 (28%) MEPs did not have a twitter account. 2 MEPs had a twitter account although the twitter account had not been activated, i.e. no activities had been registered yet.

Thus, of the sample of 54, MEPs are more likely to have a Facebook account than a Twitter account. (83% had Facebook account vs. 72% who had twitter account). The analysis also suggests that social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter are widely used by MEPs, although the usage, i.e. amount of activity of each social media platform varied considerably between MEPs.

4.2.2. Uses of new media to discuss women's issues

MEPs may be active within the European Parliament in discussing or advocating for women's issues and gender equality, however analysis showed that this often is not reflect in their use of social media. **Few MEPs within the sample of 54 use social media to advocate for gender equality and/or discuss women's issues.** 12 (22%) MEPs out of the sample of 54 use new media to discuss women's issues. Only 8 of the 44 MEPs with websites or blogs (18%) have links to campaigns on women's issues or gender equality. These are all women MEPs. However, taking the totality of new media, including social media and websites/blogs, 4 (12.5%) of male MEPs discussed gender equality issues online, compared to 9 (41%) women. Thus, female MEPs are more likely to have new media activities relating to gender or gender equality, based on a snapshot of new media content.

MEP's uses of social media often reflect their work within the European Parliament and issues that are currently high on the agenda within the European Parliament. Whether or not this reflects a lack of work, action or activity concerning gender equality and women's issues within the European Parliament is not identifiable from the data.

¹¹ An RSS feed is a link to frequently updated content, such as a blog or Twitter account, which may be placed on a website or other digital space so that the updates are displayed wherever the 'feed' is placed.

4.2.3. Differences in MEP's uses of new media by gender

Equal numbers of men and women (5 men and 5 women, 16% and 23% respectively of the total number of males and female in the sample), had no website or blog. 4 (18%) women and 5 (15%) men had no Facebook account. 7 (31%) women and 10 (31%) men had no twitter account. An equal number of men and women were interactive on their websites, i.e. they discussed with and answered questions from people publicly online.

The data suggests that there is **little difference** between how **men and women** use social media overall. There was a negligible difference in the average number of tweets between men and women, at 2,372 and 2,138 respectively. What differed was the average number of followers on twitter, which for women was 1,628 and for men only 969.

The number of followers often, but not always, corresponds with a high number of tweets. On the one hand this suggests that the more you tweet, the greater number of followers you will have. On the other hand, it might also suggest that a higher number of followers may encourage a more active use of twitter. The correlation between the two is difficult to determine from the data.

However, in terms of the amount of tweets (admittedly for a snapshot alone, and not accounting for the length of time twitter accounts have been open), there is little difference between men and women's usage of twitter. Male MEPs tweet as much as women, although with fewer (average) followers.

Moreover, the average number of 'likes' on Facebook between women and men differed substantially. The average number of 'likes' for male MEPs was 922, whereas for women, the number was almost double at 1,861.

Whilst these findings suggest some potentially interesting different uses, it must be noted that the **sample does not take age into account**, which might be an important factor into how, why and when people use social media.

4.3. New media uses of MEPs showing interest in equality between men and women or women's rights

The new media uses of a sub sample of MEPs were analysed in more detail. These MEPs were selected for the sample (n=11) because they demonstrated some interest or involvement in European Parliament work concerning equality between women and men or women's rights and issues, either informally or formally (the latter might involve being a member of a specific committee, for example).

The sub sample analysis provides more **in depth information about how social media can be used to discuss women's issues and to promote gender equality**. 3 out of 11 (27%) of the MEPs did not have a website. However, these MEPs all had a blog instead where they have actively discussed gender equality and women's issues.

4.3.1. Facebook and Twitter activities

The sub sample included 10 women and one man. The majority, 7 out of 11 (64%) have been active in a formal capacity within the European Parliament. The majority of MEPs in the sub sample are either very active or moderately active on both Facebook and twitter. 6 MEPs, (55%) were active users of Twitter, 4 (36%) moderate active, and 1 (9%) minimally active. In terms of Facebook: 4 (36%) MEPs were active users, 5 (45%) moderate, 2 (18%) minimally active. This suggests that MEPs in this sample are slightly more frequent users of Twitter than of Facebook. Only 1 MEP was minimally active on twitter, whereas 2 MEPs were minimally active on Facebook, although based on a very small sample.

Analysis suggests that MEPs in the sub sample with a 'formal' involvement with gender equality or women's rights are **more active** in promoting and discussing gender issues than others in the sample through Facebook and Twitter. Activities on social media platforms concerning gender or gender equality include posting comments, links, articles, information about upcoming events, new research, 'likes' on Facebook and re-tweets concerning gender and women's issues. However, one MEP in the sample who was not an active member of a committee on gender equality was found to actively discuss gender equality issues and women's health issues using new media (website, Facebook and twitter). **This demonstrates that MEPs may be actively involved in gender equality advocacy or debate via new media without being part of a formal structure.**

4.3.2. New media are primarily used for information purposes

The sub sample did not primarily use new media to engage or interact directly with members of the public about gender or gender equality issues. Instead, new media are, for the most part, used to **inform about these issues**, typically by posting information about upcoming (political) events, articles, new research and/or comments by the MEP and/or others, rather than actively engage in discussions concerning gender and women's issues.

An examination of a snapshot of tweets and Facebook posts (which were up to a week old) revealed that the majority of all tweets and posts were **related to official European Parliamentary work**. There were very few postings of a personal nature or concerning issues outside of the European Parliament space. Both national and European politics were discussed on Facebook and Twitter.

4.3.3. Use of new media out of necessity or capacity?

The analysis of new media uses suggests few but interesting differences between male and female MEPs. In particular, women tend to have more followers or likes on their social media platforms, yet there is little or no difference in the amount of content that is posted between women and men. Taken with the limited research available about gender differences in new media use, which finds that women tend to use it to build networks and social capital, whereas men tend to use it to access information or for entertainment, it may appear that **female MEPs are adept at networking online**. However, it is not possible to say either from the quantitative analysis presented above or from published literature whether MEPs online networking is because other means of building support are less available to them and they *have to* do this (as some research suggests) or because they are better at it for other cultural or social reasons.

Overall, however, MEPs' and European Political groups' uses of new media tends to be far from interactive; nor is new media used to post non-politics related items.

4.4. Views on new media of female MEPs

4.4.1. Introduction

A series of interviews were conducted with female politicians from four different Member States of the EU. All respondents were female. Interviews are anonymised and semi-structured.

The purpose of the qualitative work is to explore both how new media may have been or could be used to advance women politicians' political careers and also how, once elected, it may be used to engage with voters, citizens and other political actors. The analysis presented below is a synthesis of themes that emerged from the interviews.

4.4.2. Social and structural barriers to women's involvement in politics

Respondents reported a very **diverse set of experiences** as politicians, in terms of routes into politics, political beliefs and styles. However, all, except one respondent, were vocal about the gender barriers experienced both in getting into politics in the first place and in advancing their politics once elected. The barriers reported were both structural and cultural in nature but only cultural barriers were highlighted universally.

Social barriers reported included pre-defined 'female' roles in both parliament and government that are shaped by gender and can hamper careers. For example, it was reported that female politicians are expected to work on '*non-investment*' portfolios such as health, welfare or education, rather than '*wealth-creating*' responsibilities such as technology, business and industry.

*"We're expected to run the 'spending' departments, rather than the investing ones".
(Female MEP)*

Subsequently, it was reported, 'spending' departments were considered as 'less important' than the 'investment' departments, particularly in economic hard-times, thus reinforcing a deficit of women in powerful political roles.

Social expectations were also felt to govern female politicians' behaviour and body language, which, in turn was believed to affect their promotion prospects, according to one respondent. In this situation, female MEPs are '*expected*' to behave in a **compliant and facilitating** manner towards more senior male politicians, rather than in an adversarial or challenging way. Moreover, it was reported by two respondents that female politicians are judged and valued according to their physical appearance more than their male colleagues. Thus, **promotion prospects** were felt to be 'better' for female MEPs who are both feminine in behaviour and appearance. One other respondent noted that men tend to have more confidence in their ability and ambition, compared to women, making them more likely to want to present themselves for a political career. **Men's comparative confidence** also means they are quicker to posit a point of view in the media whereas women will hesitate until their own position is clear to them. This leads to fewer women expressing themselves in public, compared to men, it was felt.

Although social barriers to women's involvement in politics were noted universally by respondents, structural barriers were not noted to the same extent and some differences were identified according to the nationality of respondents. A respondent from a Scandinavian Member State reported that structural gender barriers to engagement as a politician do not exist, due mainly to a proactive gender equality policy in parliament which achieves a high number of female politicians. Higher numbers of female politicians was also due to **proactive policies** within certain political parties; such that some parties have a gender quota policy, although gender quotas were not enforced through legislation. Conversely one respondent observed that **political parties can also act as barriers** to women's involvement in politics, noting that women are more likely to be elected if they are directly elected rather than through a party. These observations are consistent with research which underlines the importance of political parties' systems and norms in selecting candidates, which may be a help or hindrance for encouraging women politicians (e.g. Matland, 2005, Kassem, 2012, Kenny and Verge, 2012).

One respondent highlighted the potential *benefits* of gender differences in representative politics. It was suggested that being an older female and, therefore, 'outside' of the dominant political culture was felt to be a benefit as it allowed her to relate more directly and honestly with constituents.

"I'm different because I'm an older woman, I don't fit with any expectation or model and always speak my mind. People like me for that" (Female MEP)

Another respondent makes a related observation about female politicians' appeal to voters.

'Some parties are dominated by female politicians and there is popular support for those parties because the electorate vote for women'. (Female MEP)

Thus, even if political culture is excluding of female politicians, women are still valuable and effective politicians when engaging with the electorate.

4.4.3. Uses and experiences of new media

All respondents reported using new media, or having **staff** use new media on their behalf. The most frequently mentioned was Facebook. MEP's own websites and Twitter were mentioned less frequently. Respondents were asked about their current uses of new media and about the potential opportunities and threats it represents to women's involvement in politics.

New media tools are used in diverse ways, including the simple provision of information, such as contact information, or links to resources on MEP's websites. However, Facebook and Twitter were used to network with constituents directly. **Networking** reported takes the form both of simple interaction on an 'informal' basis, which was felt to be important in helping the politician to develop a rapport with constituents, allowing the latter to learn about the politicians' personality and values on a more personal level. Networking was also used for more overtly political or issue based activities. Respondents reported strong advantages and strong disadvantages with new media tools.

4.4.4. Disadvantages of using new media

A reported disadvantage was the **potential for misinterpretation** of (twitter or Facebook) posts. One respondent recalled how the mainstream press had picked up on her tweet which was then taken out of context and used to write **negative coverage** about her. In this case, the respondent was surprised that what was felt to be an innocuous tweet should be used in this way. *'I have learned to be more careful what I tweet now'* (female MEP). Another disadvantage reported concerned the 'personalisation' of politics and politicians through social media tools, which may distract people from the politics:

'There is a risk [to new media] that people become less interested in the politics and more interested in your personal life and character. In some ways this is a good thing because it breaks down barriers between politicians and constituents but it is the politics that are important and not the personalities (female MEP).

Respondents suggested that posts on different new media platforms (e.g. a 'tweet' or a Facebook update) should be as **authentic** as possible in order to appeal to constituents, preferably created by the politician themselves and not an assistant or other party staff member. However, given the time constraints faced by politicians this was not often possible and so, social networking tools were most frequently used to convey simple messages such as publicising a report that has been published, rather than posting an opinion or beginning an online discussion.

4.4.5. Advantages of using new media tools

When MEPs used social media tools in a **strategic** way such as using direct posts to begin a debate or to spread a campaigning message, significant effects were reported. For example, in one case, an MEP tweeted about a campaign to increase the number of women on company boards. This was re-tweeted many times and attracted a lot of interest and discussion over Twitter. In another case, a politician used Twitter to correspond directly with an individual who disagreed with them over the way that **campaigning** activities were organised. These conversations directly led to a change in the campaigning activities.

Another reported advantage of social media is the opportunity to **engage with local press** in politicians' own country. Local press are more interested in their MEPs, it was reported, than the national press thus local press often 'picked up' a tweet or Facebook post from the politician and covered its content in their newspaper. In this way, social media are used to directly link with a larger number of local constituents than online tools alone. This was felt to be particularly important for ensuring older people, who are less likely to be users of social media, are kept informed about the work of their MEP.

New media was felt to **offer some solutions** to the social barriers to women's involvement in politics. For example, women's relative reluctance to express views in public or lack of confidence to do so may be addressed in an online platform, where avatars may be used, or on networks that are supportive in style.

"Women will wait until they have a position before they say something in politics... online networks make it easier sometimes for women to express their views and try out their arguments' (female MEP)

However, such an advantage was felt to be lost for women if and once they are involved in formal politics, where one *'has to be more guarded'*.

4.4.6. New media may provide a voice for marginalised groups

New media was reported to offer opportunities to engage with and provide a voice to marginalised groups in society and two MEPs reported using social media for this purpose. Examples of such activities include **linking with interest groups** via twitter and Facebook and directing campaigns to those groups. As social media tools allow people to form groups, for example a Facebook group or through a twitter hashtag it becomes easy to target information, opinion and campaigning messages at those self-identified groups. This has the effect of creating a network of contacts who take interest in the politician's activities.

I posted [my opinion] on Facebook about a recently published report and this resulted in thousands of new Facebook 'friends'. (female MEP)

"I direct my action at specifically interested groups and post to them, this creates a network that follows my activities"(female MEP)

In forging online communities of interest and networks who are linked over specific issues, social media could provide sources of support and credibility to MEP's actions, which are **alternatives to traditional forms of power and interest**, such as 'old media' or business, respondents felt. However, respondents felt that such alternative power bases would take some time before they were able to make significant changes to policy, in particular those relating to the economy or business.

"If you blog about an employment issue and you have lots of followers, that doesn't mean you are going to go on strike or speak to your employer because you need to have the physical support of those around you, in your workplace etc for that to happen" (female MEP).

Two respondents reported **finding potential political allies and colleagues** through twitter. In both cases, the politician noticed an online correspondents' talent for discussion and their knowledge. Subsequently, the politician returned to the correspondent for advice on a number of issues and in one case, the correspondent became involved in formal party politics.

"What social media shows is that it is always worth contacting your MEP because a clear voice will always be listened to, even if it's just one person" (female MEP)

The major advantage of new and social media, identified by respondents, is its ability to **link with diverse and dispersed women** thus providing an opportunity for politicians to hear what their constituents have to say in a direct and prompt way. This means of communication could be further used, including by political parties, and not just individual politicians as a way of hearing women's views. However, one respondent suggested that parties should be more proactive in this respect:

"Political parties should go out and ask women what they think rather than wait for women to go to them and voice an opinion" (female MEP)

4.5. New media is used for information sharing by MEPs

The female MEPs interviewed had strong views about the **barriers** that female politicians face both at the national level and European level. The barriers were mainly concerned with socialisation and cultural expectations which mean that female politicians find it more difficult to be taken seriously by male colleagues who tend to be the decision makers within political parties. This manifests, for example, in few female politicians being given **high profile portfolios** such as economy or business.

The respondents' views on the **potential for new media** were mixed both within themselves and between respondents. Whilst all respondents reported that new media were useful for sharing information and linking with voters, it was seen to have **serious limitations in terms of action and campaigning**, in particular, whilst it might be considered as a useful means of being in touch with supporters, it might not help politicians and women join together in support for example, to strike over pay.

Respondents also expressed some anxiety between the need for direct, open and personal communication and the need to retain privacy and control.

4.6. Good practice for use, design and functionality: singled out MEP's new media practice

This case study was selected for 'web profiling' because it shows interesting practice and provides data on 'good practice' in terms of use, design and functionality. The selection was made by a web professional¹². The MEP's name has been changed and other details removed for anonymity. 'Katja' is an MEP who is actively engaged with gender and gender equality politics and advocacy within the European Parliament.

Katja makes use of several social media platforms to support her agendas, as well as her own website without over duplicating content over all platforms, utilising the different user interactions supported by platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. She uses her website and social media appropriately, in that she appears to have considered which platforms are most suitable for particular purposes.

The "good practice points" are presented in the box below.

One MEPs' use of new media: Good practice points

Website uses:

- ⇒ Consolidated and publicised social media activity;
- ⇒ A blog that highlights and presents key issues / news;
- ⇒ A calendar featuring upcoming events; and
- ⇒ Information about Katja, her role as MEP and her activities.

¹² Part of the research team

Navigation / Information Architecture:

The site has very clear navigation that uses drop-down function to appear compact and categorise options. Section titles are clearly labelled with terms that visitors are likely to understand, e.g. no acronyms / abbreviations. The categorisation of pages has been well thought out and information is easy to access.

Blog:

Differentiates blog clearly from other website pages. Good use of tags to enable users to identify / search for relevant content. Blog posts (and most pages) feature a Facebook 'like' button allowing readers to share content via Facebook.

Social Media linked to Website:

A twitter feed is published that allows visitors to view Katja's Tweets and click through to her Twitter profile. She has a Facebook 'like' button in her website's header and a Facebook 'widget' which shows some of her 'Likers' and invites the viewer to also 'Like'. Availability of an RSS feed allows visitors to connect up to her site's blog via the RSS viewer of their choice. This is also available via her Facebook page. Social Media 'Follow' buttons are present for Twitter, RSS and You Tube.

Facebook uses:

- Consolidated and publicised social media and blogging activity;
- Shared key news / issues with those who have 'Liked' her page;
- Offers 'likers' opportunity to have a dialogue with her / each other;
- Enables sharing by community of 'likers' of any material / links Katja posts to the page;
- Presents a window on Katja's political activity through a range of media (e.g. photos, videos, blogs).

Use of a Facebook 'Page' / Integration with Facebook via her Website:

Katja has a Facebook 'Page' rather than a Facebook 'profile'. This is important as visitors to her page can 'like' her, and receive updates. It also becomes an **open forum** where people can comment on, share and 'like' the content that she chooses to post. She connects her website to her Facebook profile through the use of a Facebook 'Like' button in a predominant position on her website's header. She also uses a Facebook badge, with a link to her page and an indication of how many 'likes' her page has accumulated.

Comment: Web users increasingly expect to find public figures, businesses, institutions, etc. represented on Facebook via a page as opposed to a profile whereby you must become a 'friend' to receive updates.

Katja has linked her Twitter stream with her Facebook page, allowing Facebook users to access her tweets. She has also published an RSS feed from her blog.

The content published on her Facebook page appears interesting and has prompted discussion and individual likes.

Twitter uses:

- Engages in discussion relevant to Katja's agenda through re-Tweets (forwarding Tweets on to followers) and replies to Tweets by others • Share own thoughts, activities and relevant events / links;
- Amasses a large network of followers (those who view your tweets directly) and follows. Katja has 1752 followers and follows 1 897.

You Tube uses:

Katja has a You Tube 'channel'. This is used as a place to host videos of Katja speaking and visitors can subscribe to the channel to get notified when new content is posted. Videos can be / are shared via her Facebook page / Twitter feed. She has listed her website, Facebook and Twitter addresses as part of her You Tube profile enabling users to easily click through to her other online profiles.

4.7. Conclusions on MEPs' uses of new media - good practice?

In this chapter, results of interviews with MEPs on and analyses of their uses of new media are presented. They showed widespread use and acceptance of new media, however, uses of interactive tools and components were far more limited.

The analysis of new media uses suggests few but interesting differences between male and female MEPs in particular, **women tend to have more followers or likes** on their social media platforms, yet there is little or no difference in the amount of content that is posted between women and men. Taken with the limited research available about gender differences in new media use, which finds that women tend to use it to **build networks and social capital**, whereas men tend to use it to access information or for entertainment, it may appear that female MEPs are adept at networking online. However, it is not possible to say either from the quantitative analysis presented above or from published literature whether female MEP's online networking is because other means of building support are less available to them and they *have to* do this (as some research suggests) or because they are better at it for other cultural or social reasons.

Female MEPs who were interviewed had strong views about the **barriers** that female politicians face both at the national level and European level. The barriers were mainly concerned with socialisation and cultural expectations which mean that female politicians find it more **difficult to be taken seriously** by male colleagues who tend to be the decision makers within political parties. This manifests, for example, in few female politicians being given high profile portfolios such as economy or business. The respondents' views on the potential for new media were mixed both within themselves and between respondents. Whilst all respondents reported that new media were **useful for sharing information and linking with voters**, it was seen to have serious **limitations in terms of action and campaigning**, in particular, whilst it might be considered as a useful means of being in touch with supporters, it might not help politicians and women join together in support for example, to strike over pay.

Websites are the preferred means of communication for MEPs in this sample, as opposed to social media. This picture also applies to those MEPs with a specific interest in gender

and/or women's issues and rights (either formally or informally), thus, social media has not noticeably become a key tool for advocating or debating gender-related issues. Future research could usefully compare social media uses amongst MEPs concerned with gender, to those on other specific issues (for example environmental issues or welfare reform), to determine if social media have been used to a lesser or greater extent and the impacts of this.

New media works best when they is **personal**, attempts to connect directly with individuals through humour and honesty. This is not obviously compatible with maintaining a high degree of **control** as may be necessary for politicians. Respondents expressed some anxiety between the need for direct, open and personal communication and the need to retain privacy and control.

It would appear that MEPs more generally and those working specifically in gender equality functions do not make full use of this style of online networking, in particular, there are **poor levels of interactivity**, an element of **mistrust of new media** as well as not wanting to lose control of privacy.

However, the interviews with female MEPs about new media uses found that, for this small group of respondents at least, social media in particular was used to connect and network, even in some cases for posting jokes or items not necessarily connected with parliamentary work

5. INDIVIDUAL WOMEN'S USES OF NEW MEDIA IN 'POLITICAL' AND OTHER RELATED ACTIVITIES

KEY FINDINGS

- New media tools might help women to be political.
- 'Clicktivism' is frequent but not considered adequate as a political behaviour.
- New media are enabling women to know about political actions, such as demonstrations, and to educate and inform them about issues considered political.
- Most importantly, online projects and networks seem to inspire women to act politically and resist things which they do not like.
- New media tools are apparently not considered as a replacement for physical meetings or one to one networking.
- New media could be used to push organisations to a different level of engagement.

5.1. Introduction

5.1.1. Methodology

In this section findings from three separate research strands with 'end-users'¹³ of new media¹⁴ are presented. These include

- a focus group with a diverse group of women recruited from the general public;
- an in-depth twitter-enabled survey, and
- an in-depth semi-structured survey of members of an international professional women's network.

The samples included in this section were not randomly selected and so **applying the findings to a wider population should be done with caution**. However, the findings are derived from the views of women from diverse backgrounds, ages and nationalities and so

¹³ End users are individuals who access a product (website, tweet, facebook post) as 'readers', they may be active or passive in their use of the product for example. they may simply read the text or they may contribute a post or comment or upload their own content. Overall, end users are the intended 'audience' for the products.

¹⁴ Respondents and participants for the first two research strands were purposively selected a) for the focus group using a 'meet-up' call out¹⁴ b) for the twitter survey, using contacts made through the case studies, a tweet was sent out and re-tweeted by OpCit Research¹⁴ followers and others, to encourage women to complete the survey. Thus, both samples were self selecting but had some pre-existing familiarity with social media. The third strand was conducted with members of a case study project (case study6) selected because end users were not necessarily new-media aware and many were project members prior to its use of new media. Thus, the sample represents women who are a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar with new media uses. All women in the samples were targeted because they express an interest in gender issues, either through their membership of the networks targeted or because they self selected (in the case of the focus group).

serve a useful function in suggesting ways forward in relation to recommendations of this study.

This section of the research was carried out in line with 'audience research', an important methodology in media studies research. Audience research seeks to understand the motivations and impacts of media on audience groups¹⁵.

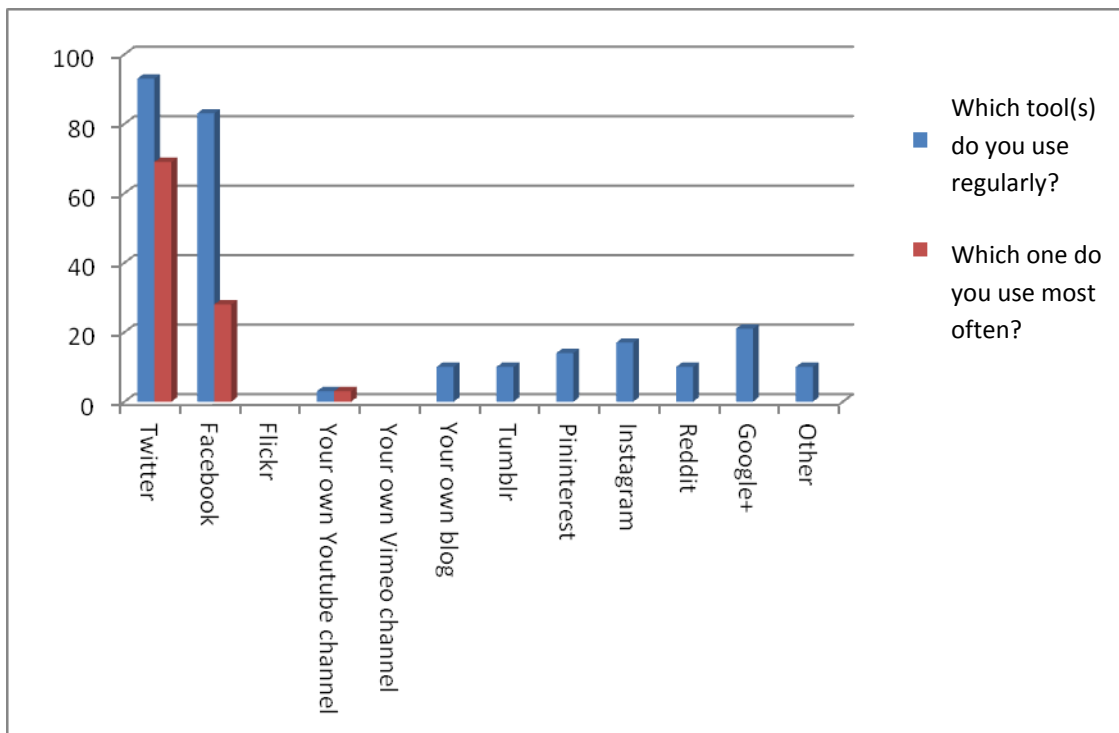
Thus, this end user research should be read in conjunction with the case study reports (see chapter 6), because they augment the picture of how the examined new media products may result in outcomes for women at the 'receiving end' of projects. Although sample sizes are relatively small, the **combination of qualitative data** from the focus group and text answers in the twitter survey, **build a complex picture** of the nature and frequency of uses.

5.1.2. Active users of new media

Respondents most frequently reported using Twitter and Facebook regularly (i.e. once per week or more). In particular, Twitter was reported to be used the most often in one survey (see chart 1). However, a wide range of other tools were used on a regular basis, including content-uploading functions, such as 'your own Youtube channel' and 'your own blog'. This suggests that respondents are fairly active participants in new media activities, as these actions require not only uploading but also, creating content beyond the limited text allowances of twitter or Facebook and in the case of Youtube, creating video content for upload. Focus group participants also reported using Facebook and Meetup as well as Twitter to get information about events, news about friends' activities and for professional reasons.

¹⁵ Most recently, audience theory and research concerns the extent to which audiences are passive versus the extent to which audiences are able to interpret the messages they 'receive' through the media¹⁵. Whilst there is some division among audience theorists between the passive and active views of the audience, others seek to understand media impacts through the '*totality of media [means of] production, content and reception*' (Philo, 2007, Philo, Henderson, McCracken, 2009)¹⁵.

Chart 1: Uses of new media tools (% total responses)



Source: Twitter survey. Base: 29

5.2. Characteristics of 'a political person'

End users revealed interesting perspectives about what they characterise as a political person. Chart 2, Appendix 2 provides a breakdown of responses.

5.2.1. Being active in formal politics

Formal politics such as party or electoral politics was most frequently mentioned as the 'type' of issue or subject that a 'political person' engages with, in the Twitter survey. This suggests that although the past 18 months has seen an **explosion in acts of civil unrest** by a wide range of mostly 'ordinary' people across Europe which could easily be described as 'political', respondents in the survey nonetheless have **very traditional views** about what constitutes a 'political' person, favouring formally elected politicians as the best example. Focus group participants expressed the view that even debating or discussing issues was a political act, with the important qualification that it must be conducted in public:

'There's a difference between talking in your kitchen or with friends and debating publicly. If you take your views and opinions out to the public or to those you don't know, then it is political'. (Focus group participant)

For this respondent, the political element of an action is in 'going public'.

Thus, whilst Twitter survey respondents most often selected formal politics, **definitions of what is political are very broad**. In open text responses, 'caring about society' or 'issues other than oneself' were perceived as 'being political'. Chart 10 shows the *behaviours and*

actions 'political *people*' were perceived to be engaged with by Twitter survey respondents. The most frequently reported was '*taking an interest or caring*' (with almost half of total responses in this category). Being informed or opinionated and being involved in elected or formal politics were also strong categories.

Respondents also generally **viewed themselves as 'political people'**. This was characterised by some focus group respondents as resisting things that upset them or empowering themselves through deliberate action. Being political involved personal resistance:

'I used not to be political. I used to be 'oh, there's bad things happening but I don't really care. I just walk away'. But now, for some reason, I decided: actually, no! I won't just say 'ok'. I will argue with people on the bus, I will stand up for squatters rights'.

Overwhelmingly, Twitter respondents consider themselves to be political people, in terms of their own definitions¹⁶

5.2.2. Diverse motivations for using new media tools for political activity

When asked what motivated them to begin the 'political' activities they described, Twitter survey respondents most frequently selected '*I wanted to **inform** others about a political issue*' (31% of total responses) (see Chart 3 Appendix 2) '*I wanted to find others who **share** my political views*' was also a common response (17% of total responses). However, the second most frequently selected response was '*other reasons*'. When asked to describe 'other' motivations, example responses were as follows:

*'I wanted to **discuss** an issue close to my heart with a politician who was making ill informed and inaccurate comments'* (survey respondent)

*'I'm **curious** about what others are doing and want **to promote my own** (work related) work'* (survey respondent)

*'I Just like to **debate** and share opinions'* (survey respondent)

'All of the motivations listed are relevant' (survey respondent)

Both the selected answers and open text answers show diverse motivations for starting an online political action and respondents demonstrate motivations that are both seeking interaction (such as wanting to connect with others to debate and share views) and those centred on specific issues or actions (such as wanting to change a national policy).

Focus group respondents explored their motivations for online activity in more depth. All participants gave examples of how they had used new media directly to engage with political action including:

- Joining a demonstration through online activity.
- Researching political issues, posting information and analysis.
- Arranging 'meet up' groups to discuss politics.

¹⁶ Caution should be exercised when interpreting this finding. The survey was titled '*women, politics and new media*' thus women who perceive themselves as political may have been more likely to come forward. However, a wide range of networks and contacts were used to publicise the survey including tweets by non-political organisations with large follower bases, thus the findings are derived from a diverse set of respondents.

- Beginning an online petition.
- Attending a focus group.

5.2.3. Outcomes of new media uses

Respondents were asked about the outcomes if any, they perceived from the new media activities they earlier described. The results are provided in Chart 10 (Appendix 2). The most frequently reported outcomes concern **Twitter or Facebook activities** such as having tweets 're-tweeted'. Many respondents reported being directly messaged or communicated with online, either on twitter, or on their own websites or blogs.

A large proportion of respondents also reported meeting up with people that they had connected with via new media tools.

5.2.4. Mixed views on whether and how new media help respondents to be 'political people'

Respondents were asked the extent to which new media had helped them to be political people in the way that they previously defined a political person. Twitter survey respondents demonstrated a degree of reticence about this issue and, there was **considerable deviation** between responses.

Twitter survey respondents reported some perceived limitations with new media in terms of information overload and the ill-considered tone of many posts and tweets, which may explain the reticence. However, the issue is a complex one which is difficult to grade through a closed survey question. Focus group respondents were able to explore the issue more fully.

Focus group respondents clearly expressed that online media had helped them, in a number of ways, to **find a public self** which has **empowered** them to feel and act political: '*I don't know why I suddenly started to feel differently*', a participant said as she explained how she has recently begun to be less passive in her daily life:

'I won't take things anymore. For example, I won't let men on the street say rude things to me, or to say things about my being an immigrant. I think it's because I have access to all these different views and opinions online and I'm much more aware of things'.

The same participant also explained how she had found out about demonstrations and actions through online platforms.

Another respondent concurred that online communication can awaken and embolden a person's political voice:

'There's a project called 'Everyday Sexism'¹⁷ which allows you to hear about other women's experiences [like the ones recounted during this discussion]. To hear about other's experiences makes you realise that something is wrong and encourages you to do something about it. It is easier to talk about the subject of being a woman

¹⁷ <http://www.everydaysexism.com/>

because of this because it's difficult to tackle the subject of sexism'. (Focus group participant)

5.2.5. New media offer opportunities to women to participate in politics

Twitter survey respondents were asked: *Do you think that new media can help more women to participate in politics and in what ways?* There were 20 responses. Some of these are provided below.

Those who disagreed (n=2) felt that new media effects were no different from women, compared to men. For example:

No, it helps generally everybody alike.

It's equal for men and women

Those who had mixed views (n=4) included:

Depends on the woman, I have always been engaged, since long before social media existed.

I don't really know- I think it's part of a multidimensional change, which needs to happen at all levels of debate, engagement and action.

Those who agreed (n=13) formed the **large majority** of responses. For example:

Yes. By giving access to politicians and journalists and gaining information.

Yes. Women may find out about less traditional male-oriented 'party politics' and be exposed to messages from women more like themselves.

Yes. Traditional politics is very unfriendly to women if not directly contemptuous. The anonymity afforded by social media [will help].

Definitely. New media (including email and websites) is a way of joining the debate for people who find it harder to get to traditional meeting.

Whilst there were mixed views, more than half the respondents who answered this question believe that **women could be particularly advantaged by the more 'open' and less controlled nature of social media**, both in terms of women parliamentarians being able to get their message across to citizens without journalists obstructing them, but also for women citizens who can network with others, be exposed to new ideas (including from women parliamentarians) and feel less isolated.

5.2.6. New media may build women's 'political' consciousness

Focus group respondents were more positive about the **opportunities** provided by new media for encouraging women to become involved in politics. It was felt that significant barriers exist to women's political involvement and engagement which are concerned with socialisation:

'Little girls (and boys) have learnt behaviour which encourages little girls to be smiling and gentle and accommodating at all times, even if they disagree with something'. (Focus group participant)

'That's exactly why women don't know how to respond when they are shouted at on the street. They don't want to offend the men who are calling out to them!' (focus group participant)

Focus group participants agreed that in order to confront social and cultural barriers to women's political involvement, women must feel personally empowered and must build their own **confidence to act publicly**. It was felt that online tools provide easily accessible and high impact means of developing public selves, either by facilitating physical meetings or by providing an online space to exercise political views and opinions. In summary, if a woman is ready to face social barriers that may 'hold her back' from political engagement, **online tools are able to help instantly**. Moreover, online projects that highlight women's issues such as the 'Everyday Sexism' project will serve to raise women's awareness of issues that affect them and by encouraging small public acts, will raise their political consciousness.

Respondents from the professional women's network demonstrated that the provision of an **easily accessible support network** encourages women to seek support and build confidence. The most common reason for joining the professional women's network was to *'add their voice to help women profess in business in general'*. This has parallels with the consciousness-raising effect of other online tools reported by focus group participants. Women's network respondents frequently reported using online tools to seek advice and support about their career. Thus, online platforms are easily adopted as a place for support and empowerment. Some of the following responses show the ways in which online tools are used in such 'consciousness forming' and empowering ways:

New media could join forces of people scattered in various places having difficulties to meet because of time and locations.

New media helps in building relationships that can defend a cause.

New media would help in terms of becoming global and facilitating infinite type of professional interest networks.

5.3. SWOT¹⁸ analysis according to end users

End users identified strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOTs) of new media for their political activities.

¹⁸ Strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

5.3.1. Strength (and threat): The rapid and passive nature of new media communication

Respondents were asked about the kinds of activity they participate in via the new media platforms they named in previous answers. Responses are detailed in Chart 2 (Appendix 2). There is a high concentration of activities that are rapid and passive, **requiring limited input**, such as re-tweeting or signing an online petition.

However, a significant number of responses also suggest more 'active' political uses of new media including 21% of respondents reporting they had '*created a twitter account for a political cause*', 31% were actively seeking followers/friends for the political cause they have created accounts for. Focus group participants and women from the professional women's network also described how they use new media as **integral parts of their lives**, helping them to build networks of friends and allies, share information and gather advice.

5.3.2. Strength: Speed and directness

The most frequently used adjectives to describe the advantages of new media used for political activity were connected with its *speed* and *directness*. The notion of 'directness' is also important, given that a significant complaint about traditional media, especially news media, is the propensity for journalists to only allow certain voices and views to be expressed: with the global universe of 'netizens'¹⁹, one person can **speak to countless others without gatekeepers** acting to block or mediate the message.

One response is an interesting example of how social media was used in a direct campaign:

I ran 'no to costa' campaign in [a small town in UK] and Social Media was the absolute key (survey respondent)

Such a response has clear resonances with events linked to the Arab Spring and any number of acts of civil disobedience across Europe which have been enabled by both the setting up of Facebook group pages as means to alert activists to upcoming events, but also more pervasive technologies such as texting and BBM²⁰. **Activist campaigns** have also become more frequent on Twitter via phenomena such as 'Twitter' or 'Tweet' bombs, which are mass tweets to a particular account which can effectively close down an account for a period of time. Sites such as 'change.org' or 'Care2' are also used by individuals, to ask others to sign petitions against specific actions or organisations or to demand action of some kind. At the very least, such campaigns serve to amplify and raise awareness of whatever 'issue' is being discussed, and sometimes rendering visible something which others would prefer to remain hidden, for example, the impact of a franchised coffee-shop on the independent café scene. The use of Twitter in these ways is exemplified in case study 5 in particular.

5.3.3. Weakness: Loss of attention due to abundance of data

Respondents were asked what they perceived as limitations of using new media for the political activities they described as being involved with. Results are provided in Chart 6, Appendix 2. The limitation most frequently mentioned by Twitter survey respondents was

¹⁹ A hybrid term of citizen and 'the net' which denotes 'citizens of the net'.

²⁰ BlackBerry Messenger

that messages and arguments may get lost in the morass of data that is generated online. For example:

*'Information can **get buried** because there is so much of it'* (survey respondent)

'[Social media posts] need someone to read them... as so much information is shared' (survey respondent)

*'You can **get lost** in the forest of tweets'* (survey respondent)

This was underlined by both focus group and professional women's network respondents.

5.3.4. Weakness: information which is too rapid and too unconsidered

The two most frequently mentioned limitations again reflect findings from other studies. What they suggest is that the very features which are seen as positive aspects of social mediated communication, particularly speed and reach, are precisely the same aspects which are criticised, so care needs to be taken when considering the overall benefits of using social media as an **effective political tool** in particular the **balance between reach and clarity** of message.

However, this 'weakness' was underplayed by focus group participants who felt that, on balance, whilst rapid responses and high volumes of information online was potentially distracting, the **benefits by far outweigh this disadvantage**.

'I used to hate Facebook but now I realise that I use it so much to get information about work and about political groups that it is really important'. (Focus group participant)

5.3.5. Weakness: Lack of privacy

Some respondents expressed anxiety over the public nature of online communication. In particular three respondents expressed **concern over stating political opinion publicly**, worrying that employers may be offended and take action against them. One respondent expressed anxiety about her physical appearance being on display: *'on the internet everyone knows you're a dog'*.

5.3.6. Opportunity: Political action and networking

A number of Twitter survey respondents have actively tried to commence political action or networking for political causes, perhaps *because* of the ease with which social media **enables individuals to become politically active**. There is also a large proportion of respondents (48%) who have *'publicly corresponded with an elected politician via social media about an issue that concerns me'*.

Again, the simple act of following someone on Twitter or asking to be a friend on Facebook means that a link can be made between a citizen and a politician which can, in principle (if not always in practice), **enable a two-way flow of communication**. Interestingly, there are relatively low numbers of respondents who have *'written in their own blogs about issues they consider to be political'* (although only 3 respondents in total reported that they use their own blog at least once per week).

The networking effect of new media tools was also reported to be powerful among professional women's network respondents. Respondents were asked what they felt might be the main advantages of using a new/social media platform intended to support and advise professional women. These included:

To learn from others' experiences and get tips.

There is an opportunity to share and consult.

Advice pages increases awareness of the situations women face.

Online platforms provide the ability to network and have face to face meetings as well.

Thus, **linking with others** in similar positions and sharing information and knowledge was an important advantage of online tools, which have implications for political action as well as in the field of business.

5.3.7. Opportunity (and threat): minimal effort with possible disproportionate high effect

Online 'political' activity appears to be focussed on rapid interaction and networking, rather than tasks requiring more intensive input (such as blogging) which again reflects findings from other studies suggesting that the **short-form messaging style** which is the primary characteristic of social media is popular precisely because it requires minimal effort but can be disproportionately effective if a tweet or post is taken up by others and goes viral or starts trending. The 140-character limit of Twitter mostly results in tweets which are much **less 'careful' and 'considered'** than other forms of political communication, often with a provocative or even hostile orientation which in turn, further encourages a wider circulation. It also provides the author with the instant gratification of having 'done something'.

Professional women's network respondents also reported the benefits of **instant and easy communication** through online tools. New media tools, it was reported could help spread information about the organisation and attract new members

5.3.8. Opportunity: the ability to find likeminded individuals instantly

The global and highly accessible nature of social media means that an individual's need to find like-minded individuals with whom to share ideas or debate issues is almost instantly met once the individual goes online and either joins an existing group or creates her own. The most frequently mentioned perceived advantages of new media, reported by respondents, were both the **ability to 'connect with others who share your view'** and to **'reach those who are unknown to you'**. Thus, the ability of new media to help individuals network, connect and build groups with shared views are important advantages for end users over more traditional forms of communication. Importantly, the crucial distinction between 'old' and 'new' models of media is between a mode of communication which is one-to-one (old media, sender to receiver) and one which is 'one to many' (new media, one sender to an infinite number of receivers, without geographical or temporal limits). These advantages are reported more frequently than the simple ability to access information or others' opinions. The focus group discussion reiterated this point:

'I am just sick of how things are run... I just said one day 'enough' and I forced myself to get out in the public. It was a choice'. (Focus group participant)

This participant became active primarily through 'meet ups' that she had either arranged or responded to. Through this she was able to meet others with similar interests and became linked with a wider network of people involved in political action and debate. Thus, new media was essential for her to be publicly engaged and involved.

Professional women's network respondents also underlined the importance of new media for encouraging and supporting networks of likeminded people.

New media helps in building relationships that can defend a cause.

New media provides the ability to network and have face to face meetings as well.

New media provide the opportunity to share/consult.

5.3.9. Threat: 'clicktivism' versus empowerment

The rapid and 'easy' nature of online activism is at the same time a possible **threat to genuine political engagement**. When asked if and how new media had helped them 'be political' focus group respondents explained a risk is that action can be dismissed as 'clicktivism':

'Simply clicking a tweet button or posting something on Facebook is not enough to be considered political action It's known as 'clicktivism' – it's not enough, on the one hand, to just click a button' (Focus group participant).

5.4. Summary: Effects of online political activities

There was overall concurrence between the focus group and twitter survey participants that political thought and action may be defined in a broad manner. However, 'to be political' means to think, discuss or **be present in public**. This finding is closely allied to recent research literature which clearly defines political action, such as those seen during the Arab spring recently, as taking place in a public space. Whether that space is physical or virtual, the gathering and sharing of support with others is what constitutes the political nature (Butler, 2011, Gisler, 2005)²¹. Thus, the first political action for many of the respondents was to **create a public online presence and to build it**.

For some, new media tools facilitated political action in more direct ways, for example letting them find out about demonstrations or events. Many research participants revealed that they had **physically met up with others** as a result of online interaction.

The respondents to the professional women's network online survey revealed that women-focussed spaces were important for **advancing women's role in the workplace** although these spaces do not need to be women-only. Also, online tools were generally perceived as beneficial both to themselves and their professional networking and to the professional women's network as an organisation.

²¹ The word 'political' derives from the Greek word 'politikos' meaning, 'of or pertaining to, the polis'. See Miller, Fred, "Aristotle's Political Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/aristotle-politics/>> .

Thus, overall, new media are seen as **essential supports for building individual agency** – confidence, control and action as well as building network strength and support and collective voice.

Whilst there were some perceived limitations of new media tools, notably the ability to create 'too much information' or that it encourages superficial action, these **criticisms were not deep**. Overall, new media tools were seen as both necessary and, by some, as sufficient for exercising political will.

6. NEW MEDIA PLATFORMS - BEST PRACTICES TO INSPIRE WOMEN'S INTEREST IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

KEY FINDINGS

- Involvement in online activities can directly lead an individual to be 'identified' and 'recruited' into formal politics.
- Women's voices are encouraged and supported to create a new dynamic in public political discourse through new media.
- New media widen the reach of individuals' and groups' objectives by building networks and attracting supporters.
- New media harness women's political interest and help to overcome some barriers to women's involvement in politics, particularly, the social/cultural barriers.
- Arguably, new media allows a process of 'disintermediation' of women's issues e.g. the removal of the need for those representing women's issues to access media institutions.
- Women appreciate public spaces created by social media where they feel confident and able to engage in political discussions away from the usual arenas which are dominated by male values.
- Numbers of supporters and attention by mainstream media are important criteria for the evaluation of the impact of a social media tool.
- The purely 'new media' projects appear to make better use of social media than those with a "real world extension" and have larger numbers of followers or Facebook likes.
- Some new media projects have become powerful sources of contact for politicians.
- Larger, more established or formal institutions face a particular challenge in how they encourage and respond to potentially dissenting voices and controversies over institutional policy.

6.1. Introduction

In this section, case studies of new media projects are reviewed. Case studies were selected because they either directly address gender (in)equality or have been started by women or predominantly by women. They have been selected to include a diversity of geographical location and language as well as organisation type. Some have been started purely as new media platforms and other case studies are the new media supports for an organisation which exists offline also.

The case studies all show good practice, or at least, practices that other organisations may learn from, to encourage greater involvement by women in politics or public life. Some of these projects are directly concerned with women in formal politics, others are concerned with broader social barriers which may impact on women's involvement in politics. All provide lessons for how new media can create new channels of communication, attract support and build networks.

Case studies detail 1) the *origin and purpose*: general background and intention of the site/platform 2) *functions* of the site/platform 3) *outcomes* of the site and its activities - these may be **intended or unintended outcomes** that result from the site/platform, in any case, changes that occur either for the individuals involved or the wider community, which may be linked to the site/platform, are described.

Good practices in terms of communication style, audience engagement, social media uses, how women's views and experiences are included and lessons for gender mainstreaming are summarised at the end of each case study.

Some case studies have been anonymised and names changed at the request of the participants.

6.2. Case Study 1: "Blog 1" A Blog on European politics

6.2.1. General information

Where based	Created in Belgium
Language	French and English
What is it?	Blog
Who created it?	Female Brussels-based blogger
How long has it been going?	>2 years
Twitter?	Yes. > 4000 followers >1500 following; over 4000 tweets
Facebook?	Yes. 205 likes
RSS feed?	yes
Multi media?	video, text, photos

6.2.2. Origins

Blog 1 was started by one woman, 'Sarah', who is of French origin and based in Brussels. Sarah has "a passion" for European politics as well as for social media. She had been working in both European politics and social media spaces when she was encouraged to begin the blog by a journalist for a French newspaper who had connected with her via Facebook. The journalist had taken an interest in the Sarah's Facebook posts because she wanted to find out about developments in European politics and Sarah posted comments and opinions on this subject.

6.2.3. Purpose

The original purpose of Blog 1 was to provide up to date, insider information about European politics primarily for a French audience and with a focus on French interests in Europe, *"to build a bridge between the French people and European [politicians and officials] so that both can learn about the others' view"*. For this reason, the blog is bilingual (English and French). Blog posts are organised into 11 categories which cover, broadly, developments in social media and internet technology, developments in the 'Euroblogosphere'²², posts about being French and French politics, politics in general. There is also a category for women's issues and rights, which Sarah includes because she has *"always been interested in gender issues and gender blogging"*, describing herself in one blog post as a feminist. Moreover, Sarah believes that it is important for women to blog and she encourages more women to do likewise via her blog posts and in her daily life, because it is an important way for a gender equality perspective to enter the public realm: *"Blogging gets stuff in the media that would not otherwise make it because blogging is about analysis and opinion, so gender can get discussed. For this reason, social media helps women's issues and rights to get aired"*.

6.2.4. Functions

The blog is a portal for a number of Sarah's other online activities. There is a **concurrent Twitter and Facebook** page. **Tweets are fed through to the blog page**. Links with social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were important for Sarah to promote her blog and build influence. *"it is important when you start a blog to keep it personal, concise and to be able to promote it, so using Twitter and Facebook is important"*. With over 4000 Twitter followers, Sarah has **a strong platform to engage people, begin debates and campaigns**. Thus, Blog 1 has become a cross platform online identity rather than a blog spot alone. The identity is increasingly linked to Sarah's own identity and name so that she is now de-anonymised to a large extent, *'I started being anonymous but everyone knows it's me'*, even though she doesn't use her own name on the blog.

Within the women's issues category, Blog 1 shares comment and opinion about a range of issues with a pro-feminist viewpoint. In one post Sarah presents her own analysis of the gender breakdown of **'Eurobloggers'**²³ nominated for 'Blogging Portal'²⁴ blogging awards, in which she reports a gender bias against female bloggers: *"Generally women are not as comfortable voicing their political opinions as men are"* states the blog and goes on to urge women to blog more (Blog 1).

In addition to over 4000 followers on Twitter, Blog 1 twitter account is also following over 1700. It tweets several times a day and scores highly in a Twitter ranking platform (Retweet rank)²⁵. Thus, it is an active and influential Twitter account.

²² This term describes the constellation of blogs that are about Europe and European politics

²³ Bloggers on European issues

²⁴ <http://www.bloggingportal.eu/>

²⁵ Retweet rank compares Twitter accounts' reach with other twitter accounts, based on numbers and nature of followers, frequency of re-tweets.

6.2.5. Outcomes

New media activities supported greater involvement in formal politics

Sarah reports that, through the use of Twitter and Facebook and the large number of 'followers' or 'friends', Blog 1 has, she has been **encouraged to become more involved in formal politics**. She belongs to a European political party and has recently been elected to a local party committee in '*one of the lower ranks*'. She began her involvement in formal politics when asked to contribute to an election campaign because she possessed '*specific skills*' in social media and in communication more generally. Sarah feels that the large number of twitter followers appealed to her party colleagues who felt that she would have some influence as a result. However, the impact of having large numbers of followers was somewhat overestimated by colleagues working in formal politics. Sarah feels, '*they thought that because I have a lot of followers and friends I could just tweet something and that would get instant results*'. Sarah explains that it is important for social media activity to have high integrity and to be personal and honest, thus, a tweet that is obviously part of a political campaign would be less influential than one from an individual who is tweeting her own view. "*It is very important to have integrity when you tweet. People have to know what your interests are*".

Sarah feels that her online activity is strongly political although her online politics has a separate identity and function to those of her formal politics. Her online activities are party-neutral and concern cross-cutting issues. Her posts are agenda-forming rather than agenda-following themes. **They are highly personal viewpoints**. In addition to blogging and social media, Sarah works as a political lobbyist as well as being a political party member; thus, in order to avoid '*conflicts of interest*' she maintains a non-partisan approach in her online activities: Her coverage and analysis of gender issues is one area that she feels able to blog about because it does not cross over with her professional or party political activities.

Results of specific online campaigns

Blog 1 has been involved with **direct social campaigns**; these have been coordinated through social media linked to the blog as well as posts on the blog. For example, in 2009, Blog 1 was involved in a campaign to achieve gender balance in the European Commission. Blog 1's Twitter and Facebook accounts were used to gather support for gender balance, resulting in over 1000 Facebook 'likes' for a campaign-related post. Due to the high levels of attention and support via the social media platforms, the campaign was 'picked up' and covered in (French) national mainstream media. Blog 1's social networking campaigning was also noticed by an umbrella blogging network which promoted the campaign gathering it further support. The goal of the gender balance campaign (to have one third European Commissioners being female) was finally realised, "*It did feel as if we had some influence*" (Sarah).

6.2.6. Summary

Sarah has built **considerable influence** and following through her blog and linked social media activities. This developed because she has an interest in and professional knowledge of European level politics and because she approaches her blog **with personal integrity**, providing **personal points of view** and through open and humorous posts. Although her online success has, Sarah feels, partly to do with her non-partisan and personal approach,

these activities have also assisted her to gain influence in the formal political, partisan world, including becoming involved in more formal party politics. Sarah acknowledges the tension between the need to remain non-partisan and personal in the blogging space and the institutional commitments and responsibilities that come through employment and politics.

Sarah's online success, she feels, is due to her ability to communicate in general: "**people who do social media well are good communicators anyway**". It was necessary for her to learn how to create a blog and how to promote it. She has invested substantial personal time to this end, driven by a personal commitment and passion for European politics. Sarah believes that blogging is an important way for women to find and express political voice because blogging is personal analysis and opinion allowing non-mainstream views to be expressed in a public space. The 'gender balance in European Commission' campaign is an example of how voices that are primarily personal may be 'picked up' in the media, giving it additional leverage. However, although Sarah believes that blogging is a powerful tool to increase the impact of women's voices, it is increasingly difficult to build influence in the blogging space because there is a great deal of competition for readers.

6.2.7. Good practice points

Category	Description
Communication style	Personal, humorous, direct and honest, with cross platform engagement (eg to Twitter and Facebook)
Audience engagement	Design of the site is clean and the user-experience is simple, articles and themes are easy to browse through the author's use of 'tags' – keywords.
Social media uses	Good connectivity within the 'Euroblogosphere'.
Inclusion of women's views and experiences	Humorous and engaging blogs about representations of women and sexism. The site itself is a space for showcasing the views and experiences of a 'political woman' thus, is a space for other women interested in politics.
Learning for gender mainstreaming	This is an example of how one woman has become involved in more 'formal'/representative politics through online dialogue. The blogger was 'talent spotted' by a political party through her online activity, demonstrating that through proactive engagement online political organisations can actively attract women into formal politics.

6.3. Case study 2: "Vasistas" A French and German bilingual blog concentrating on digital rights <http://vasistas-blog.net/>

6.3.1. General information

Where based	Belgium
Language	German and French
What is it?	Blog
Who created it?	Two female journalists based in Brussels
How long has it been going?	>2 years
Twitter?	Yes. > 180 followers >420 following; over 1000 tweets
Facebook?	No
RSS feed?	no
Multi media?	video, text, photos
Other	donation button via flattr

6.3.2. Origins

Vasistas was created in 2009 by two women, one French and one German, who live and work in Brussels. The women work in diverse fields which are not directly related to the core subject matter of the blog. The blog is hosted via a free blogging platform²⁶ and has a linked Twitter account. The blog is followed directly²⁷ by over 200 people.

6.3.3. Purpose

The blog Franco-German and covers issues that impact on French and German people. However, there is also comment in English. The main topics of interest are described in the blog as '*digital rights, the surveillance society, politics, human rights, the EU and social issues in the digital age*', although other subjects may be covered. However, one founder describes '*citizens' rights*' as being the overarching concern of the blog. The bloggers began to blog because they were concerned about the '*lack of coverage in German and French languages of technology and new media*'.

The intended audience is broad as the intention is to '*make the digital freedom issue accessible to a wider public than it is currently*'. Their goal is to educate as wide a range of readers as possible, including women, but they do not specifically target women.

The blog founders are keen to avoid being cast as feminist bloggers or as appealing specifically to women. That two women founded the blog is incidental, according to its founders and the blog is not particularly concerned with gender issues: '*women cannot be treated as a homogenous group so we aren't covering gender issues themselves*'. Indeed, in the early days of the blog's creation the founders were invited by an influential 'feminist blog' in German to be included in a profile of new blogs but declined to do so after they were presented as 'feminist': '*We didn't want to be ghettoised as women or labelled as*

²⁶ Wordpress.

²⁷ It is possible to directly follow blog posts via a Wordpress link which sends updates to followers' email accounts.

feminist bloggers'. However, gender is discussed on the blog in terms of the gender bias towards men in the blogosphere: *'gender does get discussed a lot in terms of the fact that most bloggers are male'*.

6.3.4. Functions

The blog site is used mainly by readers who simply gather information and do not 'interact' with either other readers or the bloggers. Although blog posts are open to comment, only a limited number of such comments exist. Thus, the blog is more of a passive information source, rather than interactive platform. Interactivity is achieved through other **linked social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook**. **Blog posts are 're-posted'** on Twitter and Facebook pages, including the 'Facebook walls' of 'friends' Facebook pages. Cross posting and social media posting generates attention and additional readers. However, activating a social media campaign is very time intensive *'We have to find time to tweet at least twice a day'*, which is difficult to fit in with full time employment.

Blog posts are organised via a **'tag cloud'²⁸**, rather than a category list in which the 'boldest' words concern digital rights, EU and censoring. Posts include multimedia including photos, text and videos. The posts are personal viewpoints and are written in an easy-flowing non-technical language. In addition, videos and articles from other magazines, website and blogs are posted on Vasistas. Links to other websites and blogs are included on Vasistas' home page.

Although Vasistas goes through periods of high and lower activity levels, there are between 300 to 1000 readers per day. This is despite a relatively low number of direct followers. The bloggers report that 'cross posting' to other sites whereby links are posted to others' sites which encourages reciprocal posting by those sites, encourages readers. Cross posting was achieved with 'netpolitics.org' for example, which resulted in higher traffic for Vasistas.

6.3.5. Outcomes

The anti-ACTA campaign

The digital rights focus of Vasistas centred for a time around an anti-ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement) campaign²⁹. Vasistas wanted to **raise public awareness** of ACTA and digital rights issues 'in an easy language'. However, it was difficult to raise interest in ACTA because *'it is a niche topic that only geeks and policy wonks are interested in'*. 30 posts and discussion threads³⁰ have been created on the ACTA subject, these include limited responses and comments by readers. However, certain posts are tweeted via a shortened web link³¹ including posts on ACTA giving the posts greater chance of being read. As part of the anti-ACTA campaign by Vasistas, the founders **encouraged readers to write to their MEP** to ask them not to support the ACTA agreement. This was done both through direct blog posts and also cross and re-posting to other blogs, social media pages. Through this process the founders 'learnt a lot' about social media technology.

²⁸ A 'tag cloud' is a list of words that appear on a website (including a blog) more or less bold depending on the importance of the words to the site. Tag clouds are used as navigation aids in which the tagged words are linked to a webpage.

²⁹ The European Parliament's ACTA proposals intended to curb pirating and illegal file sharing, has provoked serious challenge by civil rights groups and in academia, in particular the 'Digital Chapter'.

³⁰ A discussion thread is one or more linked posts and comments relating to a specified subject

³¹ Tweets are limited to 140 characters so weblinks are usefully shortened using a 'URL shortener', which are mainly free internet tools for reducing the characters of an html link.

Vasistas reports that they have had interesting interactions via twitter with an individual about ACTA, including with someone they suspect of being a *'European Parliament insider'*, although the identity of the correspondent was not known. Nevertheless, the correspondence does signify that interesting and informative debates can be started via Twitter.

6.3.6. Summary

Vasistas are keen to distance themselves from gender issues or feminism, *'it is a **post-feminist world'***, seeing their politics as focussed on a core set of issues to which gender should not form a key element. The founders' reaction to being 'labelled' as feminist reflects the attitude of third wave feminism in this sense. The founders argue that women are *'not a homogenised'* group and that generalising women's attitudes and feelings in relation to the web (for example, *'considering whether women are less confident than men in expressing opinions online'*) is a disempowering act in itself. Thus, despite being founded by two women, gender is only incidentally discussed within Vasistas, and in relation to the lack of women in the blogosphere.

However, the founders also support the notion that there should be more female role models with in the real and online worlds. These role models should be women simply *'getting on with'* whatever they are interested in and expressing their opinion and voice online. Moreover, by **encouraging women to share views** and read others' opinions, the bloggers feel, **would encourage more women to be interested and involved in politics**. However, for the founders of Vasistas, the message is more important than the medium – moreover, the bloggers believe that women will engage with politics and public life through the issues that affect them.

6.3.7. Good practice points

Category	Description
Communication style	Personal, humorous. The design of this blog is clean and easy to navigate
Audience engagement	Good connectivity with wider EU Blogging culture.
Social media uses	Appropriate connections with, and references to the network of EU Blogs with which it is associated through the use of links, pingbacks and trackbacks. Visitors can subscribe to the blog directly or via RSS, and posts are open to comments.
Inclusion of women's views and experiences	This is not explicitly or implicitly for women although it is run by women. The founders point out that there are too few women involved in blogging in any subject area.
Learning for gender mainstreaming	Caution should be exercised when designing online platforms by 'gender'. By treating women as a separate group with different design and user experience needs, this may marginalise them.

6.4. Case Study 3: “Forum 1” A webforum and portal primarily targeted at mothers

6.4.1. General information

Where based	United Kingdom
language	English
What is it?	Web forum and online magazine targeted at UK mothers
Who created it?	One UK mother, co-created by two of her friends
How long has it been going?	>10 years
Twitter?	yes. 43,000 followers. >1000 following. Over 15,000 tweets
Facebook?	yes. > 32,000 likes
Multi media?	photos, video, text
Other facts	4 million unique users monthly; >£3million (€3.5 million) turnover, >25,000 daily posts
Other	follow on Google +
Other	Youtube channel
Other	Forum 1 bloggers network
Other	Forum 1 academy : workshops and courses on diverse subjects
Other	Forum 1 local groups: local meetings, childcare services, other services, shops, businesses.

6.4.2. Origins

Forum one was founded by one mother who thought of the idea of creating a forum for parents to swap information and experiences about being parents, following a bad family holiday experience. The founder asked two friends to join her to help develop the site, and a third friend wrote the code for the site. The three original founders approached the early development of the site in a flexible manner, using a ‘trial and error’ approach that involved responding quickly to feedback and usage patterns of their users.

A key component of the successful development of Forum one was the **clear and instant regard for the comments and opinions of forum members** who are *‘intelligent and committed women who have no problem speaking their mind’* (Forum one, employee). Initially the forum was launched during the early 2000s when an internet economic bubble was encouraging ever increasing investment in start up websites and virtual businesses. However, shortly following the Forum’s launch the bubble, known as the ‘dot com bubble’, burst and money was quickly pulled away from the technology sector. Forum one had to scale back its plans and instead decided to grow incrementally.

Today, Forum **one is one of the most influential forums** and websites in the UK and two of its female founders have been dubbed in the UK press as *'two of the most powerful women in the country'*. Forum one has a large turnover and is listened to by politicians and business leaders as a genuine voice of UK mothers. Its users are overwhelmingly mothers, although some fathers also participate in the forum.

6.4.3. Purpose

The purpose of the forum remains the same currently as its original intention – to provide a **supportive space for parents** to share information and advice about a wide range of subjects relating to raising children and the broader experiences of being a parent – as well as anything else they want to talk about. It also empowers its users by reacting quickly to their comments and preferences. *'Forum 1 derives its success from the discussion forums which are lightly moderated when compared with similar forums, and from a sense of stakeholderhood in the space that users have'*. (Forum 1 employee). Forum administrators listen carefully when users raise issues to do with the operation of the site, and if there is enough support and agreement, the administrators give serious consideration to changing or adapting the site accordingly. *'The founder believes that if users say something then we should take them seriously'*. (Forum one employee).

The overall politics or organisation 'ethos' is in line with a **'peer to peer' approach** whereby people are informed by each other about issues rather than being advised to make particular choices. In this sense, the Forum is not *'doctrinaire'* and is very keen to avoid any sense of feeling of being prescriptive to its users. (Forum one employee)

Forum one was designed with real mothers and end users in mind and staff describe it as a place to go for *'a mother who may be largely housebound with very small children and has no adults to talk to during the day'* as a key user' (Forum 1 employee).

The forum does not describe itself as feminist but respondents acknowledge that many users of the site hold a **'broadly feminist'** stance. *'While we welcome dads as well as mothers, it's very interesting to see the effect of a largely female-dominated online space where women feel safe'*. (Forum one employee)

6.4.4. Functions

Forum one is a **very active network with over 25,000 daily posts**. It hosts discussion forums with user-instigated discussion threads. It has 'offshoot' projects which carry the Forum one brand such as 'Forum one Academy' (a range of short courses and workshops), 'Forum one Local' - an access point for locally organised meetings, events and information. Forum one also adopts and promotes campaigns for action and social change, according to whichever subject/s are posted and supported by its users.

Forum 1 has a policy of **light-touch moderation** so that users can post as openly as possible without censorship. This **'encourages a sense of stakeholderhood'** in the Forum (Forum 1 employee). However, long-term 'Super Users' – who are not in any way employed by the site administrators – can act as unofficial guides within discussions, and their presence can help to shape and maintain the tone of the talk discussions. They often provide valuable input to discussions and have formed close bonds with each other through their engagement with the Forum. Many are 'articulate and educated' so they can contribute and encourage debate and discussion.

Forum 1's 'campaigns' are selected and promoted only *'with the buy-in of users'* (Forum 1 employee) so that only if an issue appears to be important to users will it get picked up and supported by the Forum as a whole. When this occurs, an issue may become an official campaign, or it will be subject to an online survey of Forum 1 users, issued and analysed by the central Forum 1 staff. Its 'guest campaigns of the week' may encourage Forum users to donate to specific charities. A key part of the campaigning strategy is to **engage with the mainstream media** with examples of users' experiences and statistics on how prevalent these are. The large number of Forum users means that any data collected provides convincing and compelling evidence that the issue is 'real' and that it affects a large number of people.

6.4.5. Outcomes

Campaigns and collective support

Forum one has developed a number of successful campaigns which have either been designed to raise awareness amongst the general population or to achieve a social or political change directly. An example of the first type of campaign is a campaign to raise awareness about miscarriages and how those who have experienced miscarriages are treated by health care professionals. Forum one picked up on the issue from a post about ill treatment by one woman who had experienced a miscarriage and which provoked a large number of comments. The Forum asked members if they had had similar experiences and collated these to present them as evidence to health care agencies in order to improve treatment. This campaign was *'picked up by the press'* (Forum 1 employee) and was covered in many mainstream magazines and newspapers.

The forum also encourages **mutual support and friendship** which also **spreads out into the 'real and physical' world**; for example, users make knitted toys and blankets in order to show support for parents who have been bereaved. This movement was intended to allow parents to express their sorrow for others' losses. The movement resulted in real world meetings between Forum users to share the blankets and toys and to offer friendship to those who have lost their children.

"When I've finished my not very well knitted squares, I sort of sigh and think, well they aren't very good, but you look at the picture of the blanket, and you really get it. The whole thing, the feelings behind it, so many people contributing, wanting to send comfort and love' (forum users and support movement participant)

However, online mutual support and advice is a mainstay of the Forum. *'People will post a problem and they will be contacted by another [forum member] who is nearby to where they live, who will offer help or just information.'* (Forum one employee)

Political influence

The UK press has made much of **the Forum's political influence** even dubbing the previous UK general election as the '[Forum 1] Election'. This is because many of the Forum's users were considered as 'floating voters' who had found a collective identity through their Forum membership and, therefore, were perceived by politicians and the media as a clear constituency that should be directly canvassed for support. Forum staff suggest that the online nature of the forum and its **'independence from mainstream media and business interests'** mean it is a useful space for politicians to try to 'sell' their message directly to voters avoiding any 'distorting filters' of traditional institutions. Thus,

the forum was approached by a leading politician's media team to directly communicate with forum users. This was arranged and the politician was subsequently subjected to a number of personal and political questions during a live Forum 1 discussion. However, for Forum 1 employees, its political influence is a result of more than the high number of users, it is also because the mainstream media is interested in what the Forum says and promotes. What this denotes is that Forum 1 is a 'news event' in itself and attracts a lot of interest from the mainstream media. What the forum does and says, as a consequence, is widely reported.

6.4.6. Summary

Whilst Forum one is not a feminist project its high numbers of female users means that it has women's [self-directed] interests at heart. In this way, the Forum has indirect political influence which is felt to benefit its women users through its campaigning and support activities that have been noted above.

Forum one is a strong example of how **women's voices are organised together through a single (albeit complex) identity** – that of being a parent - to offer mutual support and friendship. This support network has at times extended beyond the virtual world into the physical space and employees note that strong friendships have been started through the Forum when users who live near to each other have agreed to meet in person.

The forums' success is due to its open and light-touch moderation policy and in how it provides a female-dominated space for women to express their views and ask for and offer support, *'as they know it's other women out there, women feel safe to express their views'* (Forum one employee).

The Forum's political influence is also clear. This is due to the high number of users who are very committed and active (over 25,000 posts per day) but also because of the wider media attention to Forum 1 'phenomenon' has attracted. The Forum is itself newsworthy and is seen as an authority on policies and issue that affect parents. Examples of this include specific campaigns but also when the Forum's founder has commented on recent budgets and other Government decisions – her comments were widely reported in the mainstream press and were represented as a 'verdict' by parents on Government policy. In this way, the forum has created new political power both for an individual but, also and linked, for a network of women.

6.4.7. Good practice points

Category	Description
Communication style	Humorous, honest, open
Audience engagement	Well populated and animated forums that range thematically. Extremely well thought out and thorough links with other online media, particularly social media. Extremely user-led and user-focussed. Very minimal moderation
Social media uses	Very well resourced use of social media, Twitter, Facebook. Over 44,000 followers on Twitter and is frequently brought into discussions through @mentions
Inclusion of women's views and experiences	Completely user-led discussion and championing of users' own issues and interests. A very 'ground up' platform which is inclusive and respectful of users' comments and views. A light -touch means of moderation through 'super users', means that the community is very well engaged and committed.
Learning for gender mainstreaming	Being respectful to and listening to women's voices through genuine engagement can both encourage women to share their views and opinions and connect with other women. This can translate into a real power base

6.5. Case Study 4: "Pikara" e-magazine

<http://www.pikaramagazine.com/>

6.5.1. General information

Where based	Spain
language	Spanish
What is it?	e-magazine and forum for 'gender balanced' news and comment
Who created it?	Bilbao based Spanish feminist
How long has it been going?	>2 years
Twitter?	yes. C. 200 followers. > 250 following. >2,000 tweets
Facebook?	yes, >6,500 likes
Multi media?	photos, video, text
Other	follow using Tuenti ³²

³² Dubbed a 'Spanish facebook', a social networking site for Spanish students and young people.

6.5.2. Origins

Pikara was started by four main partners who are all journalists and has 20 regular contributors. Contributors are mainly women but men will occasionally contribute. It self-identifies as a feminist magazine. It is funded through donations from private individuals and donations from companies as well as grants from civil society organisations. Its Director is based in Bilbao, Spain, and it is addressed to a national audience.

6.5.3. Purpose

The founding purpose of Pikara is to provide a **'different kind of journalism'** (Pikara founding partner) to that found in mainstream media, in particular to provide a **'gender perspective'** which the founders felt were missing within mainstream press.

The overall purpose of Pikara is 'ideological' (founding partner) because its intention is to **rebalance the gender perspective in mainstream press** by presenting the voices and experiences of everyday women. However, although there is an ideological purpose to the Pikara, it is also journalism and, as such, endeavours to be objective: *'newspapers are usually not objective because they allow only men to be the experts, so in a sense we are ideological by trying to put across women's voices but we are really about making journalism more objective'* (founding partner). The founders are keen to ensure that the journalism is of a high standard.

Pikara is *'not a project for and by women'* (founding partner) per se, and it encourages men to contribute articles. Pikara covers a wide range of subjects from economics to reproductive health with the additional quality that it includes a gender balanced perspective.

6.5.4. Functions

Pikara aims to **provide a space for women's voices in the public realm, not only of experts and professionals** but *'also of the cleaner and other women who aren't asked usually for their views'*. (founding partner) An example of this is when prostitution was discussed in the mainstream press. Pikara was concerned that sex workers were only the subject of discussion and were not asked for their opinion or view. So, Pikara undertook its own research to reach sex workers to include their experiences in the public debate.

Although Pikara is not a *'women's issues'* publication specifically, it has been identified by external individuals and organisations as the **'go to' place to gain a woman's perspective**. For example, Pikara's director was asked to participate in a mainstream radio programme to provide a *'feminist perspective'* but she was also asked to participate in a Spanish Language Board discussion about gender-sensitising some Spanish words. *"Newspapers often call us for our perspective on issues because they see us as experts on gender but that doesn't necessarily make those newspapers feminist, they just include our point of view"* (founding partner).

Local media, in particular, have become regular partners of Pikara so that the founders were asked to participate in a local radio show, for example, once per week. They are regularly asked to provide views and comments in local newspapers also. The local press has been more engaged with Pikara than the national press and the founding partners are keen that this should continue because local media tends to attract a *'different audience'* (founding partner) than mainstream media, including many older people.

Pikara offers multimedia but is mainly text based. There is a **video blog** section which has recently been used to show videos relating to 'the hunter hunted' project. The hunter-hunted project was started by a feminist activist who uses her mobile phone to record incidents of verbal and other harassment of women by men in the streets of Spain. She encourages other women to do likewise through workshops and writing 'how to' guidelines. The video blog section of Pikara shows the footage captured by different women across Spain of the harassment they encounter.

Pikara 's content is written by the four founders and contributors but also includes many **cross posted** articles from other blogs, journals or social media. This is because the founders *'don't have the time necessary to generate their own content'*. (founding partner) Pikara has a related Facebook and Twitter account but the authors find it difficult to find time and resources to generate content for all of these platforms. However, Pikara has over 6 000 Facebook 'friends' and 200 followers which are able to generate content for those platforms.

Pikara **has never had a 'deliberate marketing strategy'** (founding partner) Their readership largely developed spontaneously through attracting the interest of readers who share their concerns and perspectives. However, despite this lack of strategy, there is a clear demographic identity to their readers and followers who are *'80% young women'*. (founding partner)

Pikara currently employs a **light touch moderation policy** on its social media platforms because they did not want to censor any point of view expressed. However, recently, there have been internal arguments about whether or not the Facebook page should remove negative comments about women. Some within Pikara feel that such posts should be removed; others feel that the Pikara community is able to 'deal' with such comments on its own. For example, recent comments from one poster suggested that *'women like to be cat called in the street'*, (emagazine founder); Pikara is, at the time of writing, undecided if this comment should be removed or left for other Facebook posters to respond in their own way.

The founders feel that it is important, however, to **distinguish between individual commenters** who are genuine posters, and **'internet trolls'** who indiscriminately attack websites and social media pages. The founders feel that 'trolls' are much more difficult to handle as they have time to *'fill up a site with comments'* in retaliation for their comment being removed.

Although Pikara is intended as a platform for objective journalism, it has also become a **platform for political and feminist activism** to some extent. For example, anti-globalisation and anti-austerity campaigns and actions were publicised through the emagazine and later reported on. Pikara has also publicised 'slutwalks'³³, and suggested direct action in support of a pro-choice campaign. This has been done using its Twitter account. Pikara has actively supported the 'hunter-hunted' video blogging project by hosting the blogging space after Youtube removed some of the footage posted as by participants in the campaign. Thus, although Pikara is intended as a journalistic project, it also engages in some forms of direct action and activism.

Pikara is not involved with formal party politics because, according to one founder, such politics are largely discredited in Spain following the economic crisis, and they **would not**

³³ Slutwalks are an international movement of feminists who protest against sexual and other violence against women when the way a woman is dressed is used as an excuse for the abuse. Participants gather in large groups and march, dressed as 'sluts'.

ally themselves with political candidates. However, the founders acknowledge that the underlying purpose of Pikara is political in the sense that the founding message is *'the personal is political'* so by engaging with women's lives and experiences and helping to promote women's voices, their actions are in a sense 'political' (founding partner).

The founding partners **would like to see more women involved in formal politics** and they see their work as encouraging women to become interested in politics by raising awareness of political issues and how these affect women on a daily basis. They believe that social media are useful ways of breaking down some of the social and cultural barriers that prevent women from being involved in or interested in politics. For example, when the female Spanish Vice President was criticised for returning to work too soon following childbirth, Pikara observed through its website and social media comment that male politicians are not subject to similar criticism after they become parents. Thus, Pikara hopes to challenge social attitudes that may prevent women from engaging in politics or seeing it as 'not for them'.

6.5.5. Outcomes

Providing a gender perspective which results in activism

A key purpose for Pikara is to provide a gender balanced journalism that challenges the mainstream media's lack of gender perspective, according to the founding partners. It has achieved this through building a **readership and social media following** so that Pikara itself is now a recognised authority on gender issues. In this sense, Pikara has created vocal advocates for a woman's perspective on social and political issues, even if the readership is smaller than that of mainstream media platforms.

Pikara has also provided insights that have been **picked up in the mainstream press** from women whose voices have been otherwise ignored, such as speaking to sex workers when sex working was being discussed in public. Thus, an important outcome for Pikara has been to increase the presence of women's voices and perspectives within the mainstream press, particularly the local press. The extent to which this coverage translates into changes in attitudes within society is not known but it is not the founding intention of Pikara to change minds, only *'to provide a more balanced journalism'*.

A secondary outcome has flowed from Pikara's founding purpose is the creation of a space for feminist and other political activism. As Pikara's audience is interested in and committed to feminist [and anti-capitalist] movements, Pikara's social media platforms and website have evolved into **information points** for these movements.

6.5.6. Summary

Pikara shows how the line between journalism and activism may easily be merged because a) Pikara has a clear ideological perspective (a feminist one) and b) Pikara has a number of active followers who coalesce around it and who are also involved with protest and activism. Pikara is an interesting example of how women's voices may be included within the mainstream media, particularly by working with the local ('old') media, and how new media platforms may be used to challenge mainstream media's narratives on issues that affect women.

6.5.7. Good practice points

Category	Description
Communication style	Humorous style but serious analysis of political issues
Audience engagement	Innovative uses of multi media, particularly video
Social media uses	Good links with different social media platforms, in particular supporting a Youtube channel
Inclusion of women's views and experiences	Very focussed on women's rights and feminist analysis
Learning for gender mainstreaming	By including a woman-focussed voice – one that deliberately shows women's points of views on a range of issues – mainstream media representations of stories and issues that affect women can be challenged, both by working with mainstream media and challenging it from without.

6.6. Case Study 5: "The Women's Room"

<http://thewomensroom.org.uk/>

6.6.1. General information

Where based	United Kingdom
Language	English
What is it?	Webservice and online campaigning organisation
Who created it?	One woman based in London
How long has it been going?	<1 year
Twitter?	Yes. >9,000 followers. >950 following. >14,500 tweets
Facebook?	Yes. 572 likes
Multimedia?	Text and photos

6.6.2. Origins

The Women's Room was created by two women but is now run by one, Caroline, who is a full time student based in London. The Women's Room was established following two days of coverage of a 'female issue' (The Women's Room site) on a national mainstream radio programme. In particular, Caroline noticed that the radio presenters were discussing breast cancer, a cancer that primarily affects women, but the panel of experts discussing it, as well as the radio presenter were exclusively men. *"It got to the point where the presenter even asked the male expert, 'how would you feel if you were a woman experiencing breast*

cancer!" (The Women's Room founder). Caroline was upset that no woman was included in the discussion, despite there being *'plenty of female medical experts on the issue'*. The radio programme later claimed that they were unable to find female experts to participate in their discussion despite their best efforts. In response, Caroline sent out a request via Twitter for female experts on issues that were discussed on the radio in order to *'create a list of female experts'*. She received a *'wealth of responses'* and was able to compile a female expert list. A journalist with a national newspaper was a follower of Caroline on Twitter and noticed the tweet and its responses. Subsequently the journalist emailed Caroline to ask her to participate in a news item about the radio programme and Caroline's response. This item was a prominent article in the newspaper. Following this, the *'female expert list'* was developed further into a website and service offering a database of female experts who are willing to talk to the press on a range of subjects.

Twitter was again used to find volunteers to help develop the website for the service after Caroline tweeted a request for coders. She did not know code herself and considers this to be a disadvantage, *'not knowing code is like living in a foreign country and not knowing the language'*. However, someone volunteered to develop the website code without payment and the website was developed. Again following a tweet, Caroline was able to raise £1 500 (€1 771) from *'many small donations'* on a single day. She believes that because the idea for the website – to provide a database of women experts – was simple and credible that people were easily drawn to it.

'This was an idea that people felt 'why hasn't it been done before'' (The Women's Room, founder).

6.6.3. Purpose

The purpose of The Women's Room is deliberately simple. It is to provide a **single database of female experts in the UK** in a range of disciplines and subjects **so that the mainstream media can easily find women to participate** in discussions and debate or contribute to articles or broadcasts.

'We wanted to make it easier for the media to find women to talk to' (The Women's Room founder)

Caroline describes herself as a feminist and has been a *'feminist blogger'* since before the webservice was started. It is for this reason that a **journalist from a national newspaper was following her on Twitter**. Thus, Caroline was **motivated by a sense of injustice** that women have been misrepresented and underrepresented in the press and a desire to empower women by providing more women with a voice in the mainstream press, *'women are in the press only as victims, rarely presented as experts or equals'*. The database, Twitter and Facebook followers have become a valuable resource through which The Women's Room can communicate to a large number of women. The Women's Room developed and expanded its core aim to include building a *'collective voice'* for women as part of its mission. The latter is the focus for The Women's Room's work in the immediate future.

'Women have far more power than we – or the media – currently realise. Let's harness it and change the face (and voice!) of the world' (The Women's Room, site).

6.6.4. Functions

The core activity of The Women's Room reflects the **simplicity and clarity of its aim**: it is a database of female experts who are willing to participate in media discussion across a range of subjects. The database is organised according to category of expertise and also by geographical region. By organising the data in geographical region, The Women's Room hopes that local media will make use of the database and also that *'women will be able to get together and form local networking groups'* (The Women's Room, site). There are 34 expertise categories which are further broken down into subcategories where appropriate. The categories are *'Africa, America, Arts, Asia, Australiasia, Commerce and Industry, Crimonology and Criminal Justice, Defence, Diversity, Education and Teaching, Employment and Work, Energy, Europe, Farming and Agriculture, Government, Health and Fitness, Heritage, Hospitality, Humanities, Infrastructure and Planning, Law, Maths and IT, Media and Creative Industries, Middle East and North Africa, Poles, Politics, Public Services, Religion, Science, Sex and Relationships, Social Sciences, Society, Sports, Third Sector (NGOs)'*. 2, 648 women are registered on The Women's Room.

Twitter is a very important tool for The Women's Room and is used to generate and host discussion by experts and other Twitter followers on a range of subjects. It has a large number of followers and The Women's Room sees this platform as a powerful resource for advocacy and campaigning in the future.

'Our Twitter conversations are driven by experts [female experts linked to their expert database]' (The Women's Room, founder)

This makes the Twitter conversations informed and influential. **The Twitter account has hosted a number of discussions that have political dimensions** and which are seen by The Women's Room as potentially influencing politicians' views. For example, a Twitter conversation took place about the recent UK budget, following a Women's Room tweet.. In another example, a Twitter conversation condemned an Ikea³⁴ catalogue for the Saudi market which *'airbrushed out'* all the women in the pages. The Women's Room acknowledges that the Twitter account and website have considerable potential political power due to the background, education and size of its followers and database of members, however, political influence in the direct sense of influencing policy makers has not been the main focus for their work. However,

'sometimes we forget about political power and what power we could have. But we are planning to get more involved perhaps, in getting the [Government and elected politicians] more interested in our voice in the future.' (The Women's Room, founder)

The website also includes a **'media watch'** page in which recent press coverage is organised into 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' categories, the thumbs up for coverage that includes a balanced gender ratio of participants or which presents a gender balanced view. The 'thumbs down' for the opposite. Examples are provided by The Women's Room, Twitter followers via tweets or are directly emailed.

The Women's Room has actively participated in a **campaign to get the Bank of England to include women on its banknote** designs. This was done through its twitter followers who retweeted the campaign tweet which directs people to a petition site.

³⁴ Furniture retailers with worldwide stores

The website also includes a Forum for individuals to discuss whatever issues they wish, and a page directing readers to **links and other resources**. The website has a **minimal moderation** policy and will avoid censoring comments, even if these are critical of either the website or its mission.

6.6.5. Outcomes

Followers

In simple terms, The Women's Room mission was to create a database of female experts and it has achieved this, with **2,648 now registered**. The database has been used by a number of mainstream media platforms to find female experts and many have appeared on national television. Another important outcome for The Women's Room is the large Twitter and Facebook following it has attracted as well as the number of individual financial donations made to the project at its inception. These demonstrate the appeal that The Women's Room has with a wide audience. The founder believes that the project has attracted support in this way, because of the simplicity and clarity of its purpose achieving direct and potentially high impact results for a relatively small investment.

Building a collective voice

An important result of the project, reported by the founder, is **the network it has created, almost as a by-product of the services' core mission**. The database and Twitter followers are a potentially powerful resource for advocating and campaigning for change, as well as providing a rapid response to perceived injustices in both the mainstream media and in broader society (for example, the Twitter response to the Saudi Ikea catalogue). The collective voice has been used to start campaigns for example, the twitter campaign and linked online petition to include women on UK banknotes received over 27,000 signatures. The campaign also attracted the interest and support of mainstream newspapers as well as through television and radio broadcasts.

6.6.6. Summary

The Women's Room's success was achieved in a relatively short time scale – the project commenced only seven months prior to the time of writing. This was due to the simplicity and clarity of its mission and that it was a simple direct solution to a clearly articulated and demonstrated problem: the lack of women experts included in media discussion. The solution was low risk and potentially high impact and for this, the founder believes, the idea was attractive to a large number of people. The large number of followers, database entries and, by the nature of being a press-engagement project – attention of the media - has created a potentially powerful network of women who are engaged with the media. The project founder is aware of this potential power but is in the early stages of realising how this can be used to bring about social change. The Bank of England bank note campaign is a good example of how The Women's Room has used its network resources to achieve this and it is likely that similar campaigns will be run. Although the outcome of the bank of England banknote campaign is not yet known, The Women's Room has created high profile media attention and substantial numbers of supporters to the campaign.

The project demonstrates the power and usefulness of Twitter without which the project would not have begun or developed. However, its early success is also due to the pre-existing efforts and Twitter following of the founder who had been a feminist blogger for some time prior to founding The Women's Room. If the founder did not already have a voice

in this way, it is doubtful if the project would have succeeded to such an extent. .. Nevertheless, the case study demonstrates that a successful, potentially powerful resource can be started with very minimal resources.

The founder describes that she 'discovered feminism' relatively late in her life (although she is still under 30 years old) but that, in doing so, she felt empowered to create a public self and to begin campaigns and discussions about gender equality. This, coupled with social media tools, were the catalysts to her becoming an 'active citizen'.

The founder would like to develop the project further through encouraging more experts to sign up to the database and by including older women both as experts and followers and supporters. She acknowledges that although Twitter is a powerful tool and can provide women with access to a voice, there is a risk that older women may be excluded by it: *'it is not very user friendly'*.

So far, the project has built its success on simple, clear missions or campaigns (its founding role and the bank note campaign) which are easy to understand both for the wider media and for its supporters. It will be **interesting to see if and how the project goes on to tackle more multi-faceted and complex issues** in its work and whether this will be as successful.

The founder and the website itself are **deliberately non-party political**. However, the founder **accepts that formal politics are very important for advancing gender equality**, in particular encouraging more women to become involved in politics. The experiences of The Women's Room have shown to the founder that women often lack the confidence in their abilities and their opinions to 'go public'; *'I had the experience the other day when a woman who was a professor in her field said 'oh I don't consider myself to be an expert'* (The Women's Room, founder) By challenging this view and encouraging women to take part in public life, The Women's Room aims to encourage more women will become involved in formal politics as well as in the media.

6.6.7. Good practice points

Category	Description
Communication style	Simple, plain language, often humorous
Audience engagement	Uses a dynamic social media strategy to encourage debate and canvass views. Very simple 'logic model' to all of its work so that the audience knows exactly what The Women's Room is for.
Social media uses	Extensive uses of Facebook and in particular, Twitter. Links to these through the website
Inclusion of women's views and experiences	Dedicated to women's experiences and gender equality.
Learning for gender mainstreaming	Through a simple, high impact, low investment project, well known barriers to women's engagement in public life can be tackled.

6.7. Case study 6: The European Professional Women’s Network (EPWN) <http://www.europeanpwn.net/>

6.7.1. General information

Where based	Various European Countries
Languages	Various but with a focus on English language
What is it?	Global on and offline professional networking community committed to the advancement of women in leadership. The network has always had an online presence as this is the backbone of its cross-geographical location network, and has recently begun using social media
Who created it?	Avivah Wittenberg-Cox, CEO of one of the world’s leading gender consultancies, http://www.avivahwittenbergcox.com/ . Avivah started EPWN with the Paris Network, and it has grown into a Federation of Networks over the past 10 years.
How long has it been going?	>10 years
Twitter?	yes.> 1695 followers. >1200 following. >220 tweets
Facebook?	yes. 120 likes
Multimedia?	text, video, photos

6.7.2. Origins

Network 1 was started as a community of professional women to offer networking opportunities to support the advancement of professional women across Europe. It’s membership is organised according to the different participating countries. The network has 22 country-based networks, over 3000 paying members, in 17 cities through Europe, representing over 90 nationalities. It has a small staff of 2 full time posts (equivalent) which are funded through membership fees as well as corporate sponsorship.

6.7.3. Purpose

The network was started by a female CEO of one of the world’s leading gender consultancies who self-identifies as a feminist and wanted to create an opportunity for women to share their views about the role and experience of women in society and in the workplace so that their views may be developed and encouraged.

The network’s mission statement includes advocating for more female business people to be involved in leadership positions.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: ADVANCING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP. Leveraging 100% of the world’s talent will result in an economically sustainable, happier society. Gender

balanced decision making creates strength of character, resilience and growth. We aspire to accelerate the pace of change and to inspire our community to embrace new skills and put reforms into action.

The network is focussed on workplace and business culture and aims to bring about cultural change within business organisations so that women's perspectives both as clients, customers and colleagues are taken into account in the organisation's decision making and practices. They wish to 'accelerate the pace of change' and to bring this about through both transformation of business practices at senior levels but also at the lower levels of management. The organisation is concerned with cultural change which it sees as changes in attitude and expectation.

'For example, people tend to recruit other people who are like themselves in both gender, age and character so as older, white men are in positions of leadership they will replicate themselves in those roles.' (network organiser)

6.7.4. Functions

The EPWN uses new media through its own website as well as twitter and Facebook pages. It also has a web-enabled networking platform for members to network and access resources through a single portal.

The EPWN organises over 600 events per year across Europe for over 13,000 participants. The events include seminars and workshops offering business and leadership advice, talks and discussion groups hosted by experts and leaders in various fields. An important service for its members is the mentoring and coaching programmes it organises. These are free (to members) one to one coaching and mentoring provided by women business leaders who provide time on a voluntary basis. The organisation estimates that around 74,000 of person hours are 'donated' in this way and through other voluntary activities and inputs through the network.

The organisers note that for some members, particularly those who have childcare as well as professional responsibilities find it difficult to attend events in person, so there has been a growing demand for web-enabled events (webinars) which members could either participate in live or could watch at a later date. The network is currently researching a suitable provider for this sort of service but finds that it is an expensive product to commission (whilst the delivery and capture is relatively inexpensive, the hosting costs are causing issue for this Not for Profit organisation). The network organisers feel that it is not suitable to use free tools that are available online for hosting group discussions and broadcasts because they wish to maintain a strong branded identity and customised webcasting service to suit their needs so that freeware³⁵ services would not be suitable.

6.7.5. Outcomes

Online networking and mutual support

The impact of the online activities is difficult to distinguish from the other activities of the network and its online work is an extension of its established mission and actions. However,

³⁵ Freeware is free and widely available software or tools, in this case vimeo or google hangout might be free alternatives to a purchased webinar or podcast software.

the use of the web-enabled network, which connects a large number of network members allows a quicker exchange of information, advice and support amongst members.

The [online network forum] is the element that connects all of our members around the world. There is a lot of activity and it allows members to interact with each other very directly, they post messages, share best practice, create working groups on specific topics – most of the content is unmoderated'(network organiser)

The network is used to gather insights from other leaders and women in business, so that these may be used in arguments and discussions in the workplace. These insights may be about a wide range of issues and not necessarily gender-related, however, that the network is intended to promote the advancement of women in leadership means that a gender perspective naturally comes into play through these insights. For example, one member reported difficulties in getting women involved in senior leadership roles within her company although customers of that company are primarily female. She was advised and supported by other network members on how to make the argument to her peers and colleagues.

Canvassing opinion and views

An important impact of the network is connected with the size and activity of the network. The large membership of over 3000 professional women is a potential resource that can be asked for opinion and direction about a range of issues. The network organisers are aware of the potential political power of this resource, which is made more efficient through the use of new media. For example, the network organisers have launched surveys and discussions about policy issues with political implications, notably the debate about women board membership quotas. This was done using SurveyMonkey³⁶ and also through online discussion forums on the networking site. Additionally, local networks are able to embark upon action unilaterally and some have engaged actively with advocacy work on national political issues. However, the organisation acknowledges that despite the large network resource and useful data sets on its network's opinions and views, these have not been released in the public domain or used to advocate for change or been shared with the press. The organisers admit that they wish to 'do more' to raise the profile of the network and this may be done through high profile advocacy work which is driven by the opinions and participation of its members. They plan, for example, to collate data from its members and create policy papers and briefings.

6.7.6. Summary

The EPWN was established before social media became an embedded means of communication within society and the organisation is currently assessing and developing its use of social media both for its own organisational purposes and also to educate its network members. The use of the online network forum, which is accessible for its members only, has already proved a useful way for the organisation to speed up the pace of communication and support activity that it has always provided. Thus, social media is allowing the network to do more of its core activities in attracting attention, and ultimately new revenue streams. Thus the pace of change that they are attempting to bring about may be accelerated through these developments. However, the network organisers also acknowledge that more could be done to make use of social and other new media to harness the potential power of the network to influence policy and social change. They have begun to do this through online surveys and polls.

³⁶ A web-enabled survey platform

The use of social media is also becoming more used to keep down operation costs in their emergent strategy and repositioning – moving to become a network with a global, not just European remit (with the addition of Istanbul to its cities, and sights on Sao Paulo, Singapore and Dubai in 2013/14), and a network that welcomes men as allies to advancing women in leadership.

The EPWN organisers are keen to avoid alienating some of its members through the use of social media because they feel that some members have poor skills in using this technology. The organisation has developed workshops and training sessions to address the skills gap but acknowledges there is a divide within the membership between those who know and those who don't know how to use social media effectively.

6.7.7. Good practice points

Category	Description
Communication style	Professional in tone, friendly
Audience engagement	Clearly defined purpose on the home page. The website is organised through different 'city networks' providing a regional identity through the site.
Social media uses	Uses Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube. Good twitter feed which encourages debate and connectivity between followers
Inclusion of women's views and experiences	Dedicated to women in business, their experiences and needs
Learning for gender mainstreaming	Care should be taken when creating an online extension of an existing organisation not to alienate members with fewer new media skills. However, the case study illustrates the importance of adopting a new media strategy for older organisations which can greatly benefit their work if developed in the right way. This should be done through a well thought through consultation, ensuring that members' wishes are listened to.

6.8. Case Study 7: “Political Association of Women”, Greece <http://www.polsq.gr/>

6.8.1. General information

Where based	Greece
Languages	Greek
What is it?	A network of women to encourage political participation in Greece
Who created it?	A group of Greek female politicians
How long has it been going?	>15 years
Twitter?	No
Facebook?	Yes. 38 likes
Multimedia?	Text, photos

6.8.2. Origin

The Political Association of Women (Greece) (‘Association’) is an **association of women formed in Greece to encourage greater participation in formal politics**. The Association is a newcomer to new media although the group itself has been established for over 15 years. The Association began as a result of concerted efforts by Greek politicians to improve the participation of women in Greek politics. It is a coalition of politicians from different parties.

6.8.3. Purpose

The purpose of the association is to **prevent gender imbalance in politics** in favour of either gender.

It aims to *‘foster democratic values by promoting and implementing equal opportunities for men and women in all aspects of economic, social, cultural and political life’* (Association employee). The association places emphasis on gender equal participation of men and women in democratic institutions, public offices and decision making bodies.

The Association’s new media platforms include a **website** and it is currently developing its social media activities, in particular **Facebook** in order to *‘attract wider interest in our work and expand our traditional basis’* (Association head).

6.8.4. Functions

The Association (in general) hosts a number of activities and actions including organising events and conferences concerning gender equality in decision making, they also coordinate campaigns for affirmative action for women in collaboration with other organisations. They also advise and campaign within Government departments to implement actions to improve gender equality.

The online activities include a website which includes video and text content. The Association is **currently interested in developing its social media activities** although it is very early stages of doing this.

6.8.5. Outcomes

Anticipated outcomes for the new media work

The uses of new media are so far very limited for the Association in that it has a Facebook page and a website. The Facebook page provides links to news items with political themes and allows comments to be posted on its wall.

By using Facebook the organisation hopes to extend its reach to a wide range of users. It reports the anticipated benefits of using Facebook to include being able to interact with supporters and 'friends' in a direct way through '*immediate communication*' (Association employee). As yet, the association is not clear about how it will use its social media resources to galvanise supporters into political action which is a key aim of the association. For example, the association does organise round table discussions, demonstrations and campaigns with its members, however as yet, it has not used online tools to help coordinate these actions.

6.8.6. Summary

The Association is a long established organisation of female politicians who campaign actively for greater representation of women in political and other decision making roles. However, they have not, as yet, made great use of new media tools. There is an absence of Twitter use and their website provides only limited information and interactivity. Funding for the association is limited and this may explain the underdevelopment of its new media resources. However, that the Association is now keen to develop its social media action now, after 15 years of existence, illustrates the necessity of social media for organisations.

The Association could learn useful lessons from the other case studies in how to build up a committed network of supporters, how to share information and resources with colleagues and allies and how to generate an instant response to developments in the world that are relevant to gender equality. The Association expresses a willingness to use new media to meet its stated aims and encourages the use of new media among existing politicians also, '*especially women, [who] should use new media to promote a "healthier" political system, they should become good examples to voters in general and consequently to women, in order to regain their trust.*' (Association employee). As an older organisation that did not develop initially through new media, it will face particular challenges that newer projects do not have, particularly compared to those which commenced exclusively as new media projects (see case studies 1,2,3 and 4). In particular, locating the skills and resources to code and design interactive and interesting websites and using social media to its full potential will be a particular challenge.

6.8.7. Good practice points

Category	Description
Communication style	Professional, clear and succinct text
Audience engagement	Uses of multi media on the website (video and photos)
Social media uses	Facebook account, in development
Inclusion of women's views and experiences	The Association is dedicated to raising women's profile in formal politics
Learning for gender mainstreaming	The case study is a useful example of a women's organisation in early stages of new media development and of an organisation that has existed for many years. The extent to which new media are developed from now on and how successful these are will provide useful lessons for other organisations wishing to do similar. If the Association can learn from other new media projects, including those in this study, to develop its new media tools well, this would provide useful experience for others to learn from. A particular challenge may be finding the skills and resources to develop effective social media and websites.

6.9. Summary: Lessons from the case studies

The main aim of the case studies was to identify existing opportunities to get more women involved in political decision making and how new media might help in creating them.

The analysis of the studies has focused on the following elements:

1. What is the purpose of the new media project?
2. What do the new media projects do in order to fulfil their purpose?
3. What have been the outcomes and results of the project?
4. What are the good practice points that emerge from case studies in terms of communication style, audience engagement, social media uses, inclusion of women's voices and experiences and lessons for gender mainstreaming?

The following discussion explores these questions in relation to two central concepts identified in the literature review – types/levels of political participation (Electoral Commission, 2004), and obstacles to women's participation in politics (see summary of Shvedova, 2005 in Section One of this report).

6.9.1. The purpose of new media projects

*The key role of new media within the case studies was either **directly or indirectly to involve women in 'political' discourse** (rather than participation in formal politics) through a diverse range of practices. Case studies had very diverse views about what it*

means to be political and whether their work was political. Only case study 7 had the express intention to involve more women in formal politics.

One case study demonstrated how involvement in online activities has directly led an individual to be **'recruited' into formal politics**. However, it was more common for projects to illustrate how women's voices have been encouraged and supported to create a new dynamic in public political discourse, in particular case studies 3 and 5.

With the exception of two cases case studies (1 and 7) the producers and their projects did not consider that they were primarily concerned with the formal political process. In one case, this was due to a **mistrust of formal party politics** *'because political parties are so discredited we don't want to attach ourselves to them'* (case study 4).

'Women can talk about whatever they want and what matters to them. We don't say we're particularly political although sometimes it can end up being political'. (Case study 3)

'We're primarily about providing a collective voice for women... to challenge mainstream media and how it represents women'. (Case study 5)

'For us, the personal is political. [Formal politics] doesn't consider that reproductive health or child care is important for them but it is important and political to women'. (Case study 4)

In all case studies, **new media have been used**, or groups are attempting to use it, **to widen the reach of its objectives** - to build their networks and supporters.

6.9.2. Functions and activities

The projects demonstrated a **diverse range of functions** and activities online. Some projects were 'purely' new media, in that they had begun as online activities, whilst others were the online platforms of already existing organisations. The purely new media projects, overall, demonstrated greater use of multiple platforms for example, linking their websites to Facebook and Twitter feeds, commencing campaigns through Twitter, cross posting between platforms. However, 'older' organisations (case study 6 and 7) have begun to develop their social media platforms. The case studies demonstrate the importance of linking different new media accounts and activities so that each is an extension of the same project. For example, including an RSS feed for Twitter and Facebook allows content to be instantly 'copied' across the platforms.

The case studies included both **interactive and campaigning type activities** (case studies 2, 3, 4 and 5) such as online petitions and video blogging as well as more informational practices – simply posting information or links. One project had a specific objective: to provide a database of women experts willing to contribute to the mainstream media. Others participated in campaigns or advocacy type work, for example: a Twitter campaign and online survey to get women on national banknotes, hosting video posts of sexual harassment posted by individual women; posting, cross posting and tweeting to reform European legislation on digital rights; starting a campaign of support and comfort for parents whose children have died; encouraging members to boycott food brands.

6.9.3. Outcomes

Disintermediation of women's issues

By creating an alternative public arena for women to engage in political discourse, the case studies demonstrate **the potential of new media to overcome some of the obstacles to women's participation in politics**. These include obstacles posed by the current representation of women and women politicians by the traditional media. Arguably new media allows a process of 'disintermediation' of women's issues e.g. the removal of the need for those representing women's issues to access media institutions in order for them to mediate between political organisations and the public.

In addition, the case studies frequently demonstrate the **value placed on creating public spaces where women feel confident and able to engage in political discussions** away from the usual arenas which are dominated by male values and hindered by women's socialisation.

Only a few negative experiences were reported by projects but these showed that new media also mirrors power relations in the "real world". Two projects reported some comments that were negative about women were posted. Such negative comments have caused discussion among case studies about whether or not these should be censored. In two cases, these debates are ongoing. However, the largest (in terms of membership) project (case study 3) has resolved this issue by applying **a light touch moderation**, not censoring any comment unless it is personally abusive. For case study 3, this policy works well because negative comments (such as sexist remarks), are typically dispatched by members of the forum with the support of other forum members.

Encouraging women's involvement in political activity

The outcomes recorded by the **case studies relate to two forms of 'political' participation** for women, identified in the literature review:

- **cause-orientated** (non electoral actions such as signing petitions, boycotting products and demonstrating); and
- **civic-orientated** activism (membership of voluntary organisations and community groups) (Electoral Commission, 2004).

For example, campaigning or advocacy activities were common activities of the projects. Some of the outcomes of these activities are measured in the numbers of supporters achieved and attention by mainstream media. For example, at the time of writing the 'women on bank notes' campaign gathered over 27,000 signatures and attracted widespread media attention. The bereavement support campaign resulted in money being raised for cancer support charities and online discussions about experiences of miscarriage which resulted in press coverage and calls for reforms to the health care system.

New media: powerful sources of contact for politicians

One case study (case study 3) shows how organisations based **entirely in new media applications can achieve positions of political power** through building up a powerful constituency which is valued by politicians. In such a case, new media have allowed powerful networks of women citizens to confront a important obstacle to women's

engagement with formal politics - a lack of sustained contact between politicians and women's groups (Shvedova, 2005). Case study 3 is a very large network of members as well as being commercially successful. Its strength derives from the power and volubility of its members. Case study 3 is an extremely powerful network of women (the overwhelming majority are women) which is entirely member-driven. Its forum and discussions are led by the members themselves, and campaigning activity is started on their behalf only if members have expressed concern about an issue. As a result, the project's key asset is its large membership of active and dedicated users. This, in turn, is translated into political and media power because it is believed to be a 'genuine voice' for women (both as voters and consumers).

6.9.4. Good practice points

The good practice identified in the case studies demonstrates common themes in terms of communication style and audience engagement. New media platforms work well when the **language is clear and concise**, the **pages are easy to navigate** and the style is **humorous and engaging**. These qualities were highlighted by social media marketing experts as good practice (see Chapter 1).

It is important for projects to link with other available social media so that content may be uploaded instantly and organisations can listen to developments and comments, if not in real time, then with speed. **Using RSS feeds** is a good way of cross posting between social media accounts and websites.

Importantly, it is good practice to have a **reciprocal and respectful user engagement approach**. This means readers and followers are listened to and responded to. Users should be able to post comments or ask questions. Case study 3 and 5, in particular were adept at this. Their content and activities are almost entirely user-driven. This creates a sense of ownership and empowerment among the users. These good practice points are also supported by the end user research (see following chapter).

6.9.5. Lessons for gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is the practice of making gender considerations systematic across different levels of policy making. This may involve conducting gender impact assessments and ensuring women's views and experiences are taken into consideration. A few important lessons from the case studies emerge which are relevant to gender mainstreaming, particularly concerning engaging women's views. Firstly, and overall, the **case studies demonstrate how important and useful new media are to organisations**. Taken together with the literature review findings and experiences of politicians (see chapters 2 and 3) it is clear that new media are an ever present aspect of modern life and can reach wide audiences. Thus, **as an important means of communication, new media strategies should be developed using gender mainstreaming principles**. However, **it is important that women are not marginalised through** the creation of '**women-focussed**' pages, but rather that organisations should seek the participation and engagement of women's views through social and other new media platforms. Women *are* online, engaged and willing to advocate for their own rights and issues. Larger organisations, including political parties should learn to listen.

Other issues

A potential challenge, particularly for older organisations that have not developed as purely new media projects, **may lack the skills and resources to develop effective and**

engaging new media (especially social media) strategies. A particular challenge for political organisations or politicians is that their new media uses strike a balance between openness, directness and user-involvement and the need to protect reputation.

Larger organisations or individuals with existing public profiles are perceived (by some case study respondents) to be **more controlling** of their social media output, unable to openly engage with its network either because of capacity constraints or due to reputational risk.

However, case study 3 has shown how a large organisation can have both an open and reciprocal user engagement approach and still be a highly respected organisation.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Starting position

7.1.1. No women in decision-making, no policies for their concerns

Feminist theorists have used a sharply feminist-critical lens to approach the questions 'why are women underrepresented, what can be done to improve the situation, and what would be the impacts?' They have highlighted how an **absence of women** at the institutional level (as elected representatives) is very likely to mean that the **concerns of women citizens were less likely to be reflected** in the policy agenda. All different forms of political behaviour have a role to play.

The importance of women's involvement in formal politics or political representation has been underlined by a large number of feminist and other researchers of democracy. However, many forms of **political participation or other behaviours exist outside of the formal political sphere** which must be understood both to acknowledge their importance as well as how they interact with more formal political behaviours. Verba and colleagues' eight point list of political behaviours shape the notion of political participation for this study:

1. *Voting;*
2. *Working in and contributing to electoral campaigns and organizations;*
3. *Contacting government officials;*
4. *Attending protests, marches, or demonstrations;*
5. *Working informally with the others to solve some community problem;*
6. *Serving without pay on local elected and appointed boards;*
7. *Being active politically through the intermediation of voluntary associations;*
8. *Contributing money to political causes in response to mail solicitations.*

7.1.2. Barriers to women in formal politics and the media

There are barriers to women's involvement and advancement in formal political processes. These include the prevalence of the '**masculine model**' of **political life** and of elected government bodies, women's relative lack of material resources to support her move into politics, and women's **additional work burden in the household and for caring** prevents them from having time necessary to engage in politics. Another barrier are cultural values which enshrine male behaviours and norms in political cultures, for example when women are involved in formal politics or parties, they tend to be in administrative or back office positions (Matland, 2005).

Media representations of male and female politicians are found to play a substantial role in men and women's 'socialisation' through which **women are excluded from political, public discourse**. Two findings about media representations dominate: 1) women

politicians are represented more negatively than men and 2) women politicians are less visible (compared to their actual numbers) than men.

7.1.3. Differences in women and men's political behaviours

Research also draws attention to the comparatively **low level of women's interest in formal politics**. Some studies have reflected on the inability of formal politics to connect with women or to consider the issues they care about. Thus formal politics may not adequately represent the needs of women and women become less interested. Lack of interest in formal politics is particularly an issue for the young – males and females – who are not apathetic but '**disengaged**' (Worcester, 2005).

Beyond turning out to vote, for which men and women do in almost equal measure (Mestre and Marin, 2012), women politically engage differently from men. Men tend to be more involved with formal political action, women tend to participate in **non party actions** such as petitions or boycotts.

7.1.4. Hypotheses on how new media might help get more women into politics and decision making

After identifying the barriers to political participation for women, a number of hypotheses about how such 'new media' might help. These included:

- **New media may encourage more women to enter formal politics:** by building their confidence as public actors (and through ways described in the other hypotheses);
- **New media may empower women and girls** by creating the opportunity to develop public selves and exercise their abilities to argue and persuade;
- **New media may undermine dominant media narratives:** by creating innovative ways of challenging them;
- **New media may allow women politicians to bypass mainstream media** by appealing directly and proactively with voters, including women voters with the potential to become more visible and, therefore more powerful;
- **New media may spark women's interest for political thinking and action** by highlighting and educating women about issues that are of concern to them and by encouraging women to network and act together;
- **New media may strengthen women's associations and political acts** by spreading awareness and enlarging movements.

These hypotheses were explored through this study.

7.2. Uses of new media by MEPs, political Groups and national political parties

7.2.1. Few but interesting differences in uses between male and female MEPs' uses of new media

The analysis suggests that women politicians tend to have more followers or likes on their social media platforms than men, yet there is little or no difference in the amount of content that is posted between women and men. It may appear that female MEPs are more adept at networking online. This may be because women have *had* to make efficient use of non mainstream channels of communicating with citizens and voters because mainstream media has tended to marginalise female politicians. Further research would be needed to understand if and why female MEPs may be 'better' at the networking element of new media.

7.2.2. Politicians' new media profiles are not interactive or personal enough

A key finding from both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of MEPs new media uses is that overall male and female MEPs tend to **be far from interactive** and tone and content tend to be impersonal, focussing directly on parliamentary business. While MEPs are elected to conduct parliamentary business and to an extent have to be controlled in their online presence, **effective new media communications require a closeness of tone, honesty and openness**, and a sense that a 'real individual' is doing the communicating. The importance of these qualities was underlined both in the web profile of a 'good practice' use of new media by an MEP ('Katja') and by social media marketing agencies who took part in this research.

7.2.3. New media may help build political confidence and support for MEPs

The female MEPs interviewed expressed some ways offered by new media to **engage with voters** and **to bypass conventional media**. In particular, these activities drew attention of local news papers and broadcasters taking an interest in their social media postings. New media was also used to get advice and guidance from citizens and voters about political actions.

For example, one MEP's twitter correspondence resulted in changing a planned demonstration. Another MEP had regularly sought advice and opinion from a Twitter follower whose views she respected. Subsequently, the 'follower' became involved in formal politics. These examples show how new media may **help MEPs to 'do their job' more effectively**. This may be the case for both male and female politicians but for women, the ability to engage directly with voters could help **build political confidence and profile**. Indeed, female MEPs tend to have more positive feedback from their social media correspondents than do males, a fact which can be seen as evidence that this is already beginning to happen.

7.2.4. **New media are an opportunity to be 'better than the rest' which female politicians can use to advance their interests, careers, and causes**

Whilst there are few differences between either male and female politicians' uses of new media or between those working specifically in gender equality and those who are not, elements of 'good practice' show opportunities for female politicians, and those interested in gender issues to **become 'better than the rest'** in using new media. This may provide them with an additional edge with voters and with a means to connect with voters when mainstream media tends to neglect them. Female MEPs interviewed concurred that new media may be a way to raise the profile of marginal groups and issues, including women and women's rights. Used effectively and differently, new media could fulfil this role.

7.3. **End users**

Three research strands with 'end users' of new media were conducted: a twitter survey of a purposive twitter user sample, a focus group with women interested in new media, women and politics and members of a professional women's network which uses online networking tools.

7.3.1. **Organising is made easier through new media**

All **respondents** revealed that perceptions and definitions of what it means to be political were fluid and broad and that **the majority identified themselves as political people**. Being political may be as unspecific as 'caring about other people' or 'being informed'. However, there was a strong feeling amongst participants that new media tools provide immediacy to action, often allowing women to act when angered or interested in an issue because organising is made easier through the web.

Interestingly, the respondents were quite polarised between those using new media for more 'passive' activities such as simple posting (tweeting or Facebook posts) or information gathering and those who are more active, including starting petitions, organising face to face meetings or corresponding directly with politicians.

7.3.2. **To be political means to think, discuss or be present in public**

There was overall concurrence between participants that political thought and action may be broad – from being informed and concerned about issues 'unconnected' with oneself to being involved in a political party. However, focus group participants were able to tease out in more detail what constitutes the threshold for 'political' behaviour. End users felt that **'to be political' means to think, discuss or be present in public**. Thus, the first political action for many end users was to create an online presence and to build it. This was often perceived as enabling and encouraging of further action, for example, by arguing online some participants were able to finesse their positions, build confidence and find others who share their opinions.

7.3.3. Physical meetings often follow online correspondence over political activity

For some respondents, new media tools facilitated political action in more direct ways, for example letting them find out about demonstrations or events. Many research participants revealed that they had physically met up with others as a result of online interaction.

7.3.4. Women find spaces that are focused on women's issues useful but they do not have to be women-only

The respondents to the professional women's network online survey revealed that women-focussed spaces were important for advancing women's role in the workplace although these spaces do not need to be women-only. Also, online tools were generally perceived as beneficial both to themselves and their professional networking and to the professional women's network as an organisation.

Overall, new media are seen as essential supports for empowering individual agency, (confidence, control, and action) as well as building network strength, support and collective voice.

7.4. Case studies

Case studies provided a number of examples of where the good practice advice provided by digital marketing **experts** and others, may be put to useful effect. The majority of case studies were innovative and engaging – their logic lean and to the point. Key finding from the case studies are:

7.4.1. New media can be used in diverse ways to either directly or indirectly engage women in 'political' discourse

The case studies show a diverse range of practices and uses of new media that each provide lessons about how new media is used directly or indirectly to involve women in political and public discourse. Some **showed how new media directly led to a woman being recruited into formal politics**, another how women's voices have been supported to create a new dynamic in public discourse. In all cases, new media has been used, or groups are attempting to use it, to widen the reach of its objectives.

7.4.2. Political action takes many forms for case studies

Case studies were mainly unconcerned directly with formal political processes, although their producers understood the importance for women of women's representation and hoped that their work would contribute to this cause. The majority of projects are concerned with providing women **a voice in the public arena**, to express opinions and experiences that matter to them, without formalising these into formal political expressions. It was important for the large majority of projects to allow their readers/end users/participants to engage fully and not to be managed or moderated. The primary mode of assistance, and feminist action within the case studies, was to encourage women to find a voice and to build momentum through the size and volubility of their networks.

7.4.3. Lean logic models work

Grass roots projects succeeded in part because of their direct and lean logic models. This means that they have a clear goal, they start action towards that goal, they refine, retest and refine again their activities. Smaller, **grass roots projects appear to be better** at this mode of business than larger organisations, this is likely to be because of the simple aims and objectives as well as the small teams (often of one person) responsible for their creation.

7.4.4. Projects need to value their end users and listen

Part of the founding philosophy and ethos for many of the case study projects is that they are enabling for their end users and **directly encourage their support and involvement**. This is maintained through direct and frequent communication through social media, through open moderation policies and by recognising that without end users, there is no need for a project.

Small projects are not necessarily the only ones that can succeed in this way: large projects and organisations can also do very well, as in case study 3 but *because of and not despite of* a bold approach to network engagement.

7.4.5. Large networks of followers means large influence

The case studies showed that, overall, a key mechanism through which new media may help get more women into politics and achieve more for women, is through the size of their networks of followers. Large networks are noticed by politicians and by the media. Power may be harvested from these networks. The larger the network, the more influence it may have in addressing, for example, the lack of women leaders. Case studies provided particular examples of online campaigns to break down some of the barriers to women in formal politics among which:

- a Twitter trend, an online petition, and Facebook reactions to get a better gender balance in the European Commission;
- a campaign to get images of women on banknotes;
- bloggers rebutted and satirised gender imbalanced media coverage of politicians.

7.4.6. Good practice points

Communication style and user engagement: New media platforms work well when the language is clear and concise, the pages are easy to navigate and the style is humorous and engaging. Importantly, it is good practice to have a reciprocal and respectful user engagement approach. This means readers and followers are listened to and responded to.

Lessons for gender mainstreaming: As an important means of communication, new media strategies should be developed using gender mainstreaming principles. However, it is important that women are not marginalised through the creation of 'women-focussed'

pages, but rather that organisations should seek the participation and engagement of women's views through social and other new media platforms. Women *are* online, engaged and willing to advocate for their own rights and issues. Larger organisations, including political parties should learn to listen.

7.5. Recommendations

- Individual MEPs and others involved with supporting women in politics may learn from the good practice points of the case studies, including tips on design and usability but also engagement on Twitter and Facebook.
- Individual MEPs and others involved with supporting women in politics should consider gaining professional advice from social media marketing agencies on how to build and engage networks of supporters.
- Political parties should actively search for women who may be interested in running for selection, through social media networks.
- All new media projects including large institutional projects should avoid duplicating existing platforms and instead develop strategies for making the best use of existing ones such as twitter and Facebook.
- Direct projects with lean business models which support political activities in the fields of women's rights and issues may be encouraged and supported through seed funding but should not be over-managed. Projects that address cultural and social barriers to women's involvement in politics would be suitable for initial funding.
- New media projects should be developed using a gender mainstreaming approach but this should avoid marginalising women's online communication.

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APPENDIX 1: METHODS

The study began with an extensive **literature review** to finesse the research question and to help define the research design and purpose. The review involved a synthesis of up to date research on both women's political participation and barriers to this, the meaning of political participation and action and some literature on developments in new media. The literature review provided a useful summary of the key barriers to women's involvement in politics at a number of levels and the potential ways that new media may address these.

Over 100 studies were initially reviewed, 71 articles and papers were included in the analysis. These studies were identified through the application of search filters (a search strategy) including exclusion criteria which were applied to bibliographic databases of published peer reviewed literature. Web searches also identified relevant 'grey' (non-peer reviewed) texts. Synthesis of the literature was done thematically, based on our key research questions.

A quantitative analysis of MEPs' uses of new media was undertaken to help establish the current context for new media use within the European Parliament context. This allows findings of the qualitative research with MEPs to be placed in context. 54 MEPs were purposively selected (two from each of the Member States, 33 men and 22 women) for inclusion. Data was gathered about the sample's uses of new media including whether they have Facebook and Twitter accounts and websites or blogs. The content of these platforms were also assessed for levels of interactivity. A further sub sample of 11 of the original 54 MEPs was further analysed. The sub sample were selected because they had expressed interest or opinion about either gender equality or women's issues and rights. The sub sample's uses of new media in terms of how gender or women's rights and issues were discussed were then analysed.

In addition to quantitative analysis of MEP's uses of new media **qualitative interviews with female MEPs** (n=5) who were interested in gender equality were also undertaken. The interviews helped to establish current uses and practices as well as difficulties and disadvantages of new media. This was closely linked with a review of new media uses by a wider sample of MEPs and European political parties. Interviews were semi structured, recorded through notes and later coded for analysis using specialist coding software.

Quantitative analysis of the new media uses of both **European political groups** (n=7) and **national political parties** in each of the 27 Member States (n=118) were conducted. This involved identifying if new media had been used to post comment or analysis on women's rights or issues and whether other media platforms had been created on women's rights and issues. New media output was also examined to identify if national political parties used new media specifically to attract women into party politics.

Interviews with 2 professional agencies working in social and digital media marketing³⁷ were conducted. Their expertise is in expanding the reach of mainly corporate clients through new media networks. Thus, they are particularly adept at understanding what works and does not work well when trying to spread influence, reach and expand networks. The questions related to any politician, male or female, national or European however, answers reveal best practice in terms of new media engagement. As a 'new' platform for politicians, learning from good practice advice may provide useful opportunities

³⁷ Thank you to Redant, London. www.redant.com

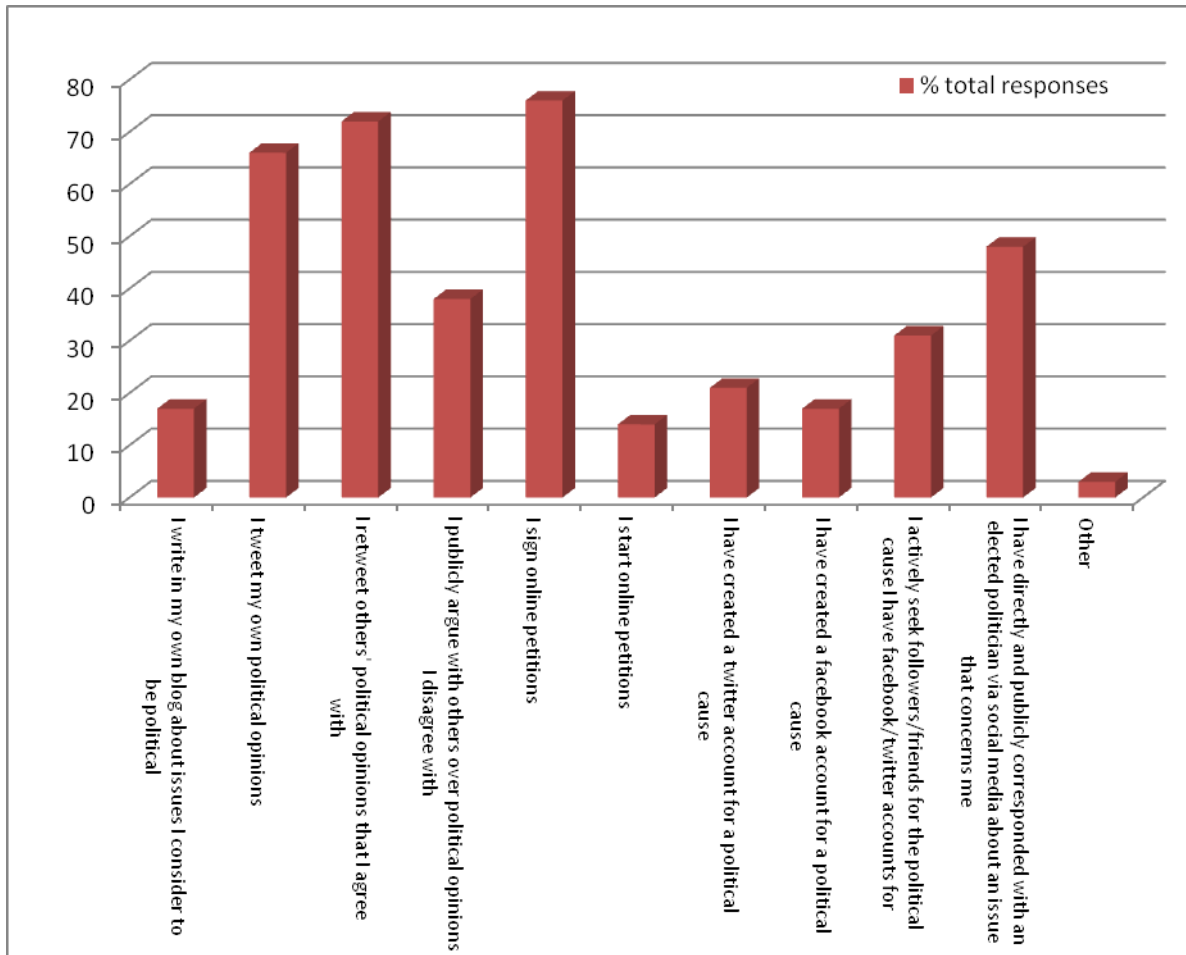
particularly for female politicians in seeking to get noticed when mainstream media frequently fails to represent female politicians both in terms of amount and quality of coverage. Responses to the structured questions are provided below.

Research with 'end users' of new media tools and projects was conducted. This was both qualitative and quantitative: two surveys were conducted 1) a 'twitter survey' with a broad range of female twitter users and 2) an online survey of users of a professional women's network which deploys online tools. Both surveys were conducted with a purposive sample of end users who self selected by responding to a request to complete the survey. Whilst the samples were purposive, they were recruited through a wide spread communication and respondents were, therefore, likely to be from diverse backgrounds and ages. However, it is acknowledged that older age groups may be underrepresented in the samples. Finally, a focus group was conducted with women to explore the experiences of end users more fully. The focus group had 5 participants who were purposively selected through a 'meet up' call for those interested in 'women, politics and new media'. All participants were female. The method of 'recruitment' to the focus group ensured a reasonably diverse group of participants in terms of age and nationality (based in London and through a widely published call for participants, in addition an incentive of a £20 (€23.5) high street voucher was provided).

The study also involved detailed **case studies** of 7 projects that use new media in different ways to address women's political participation. Case studies were selected to represent a broad range of activity as well as geographical region and language. The case studies were either specifically concerned with women's issues and rights or were created by women. This involved in-depth interviews with project 'producers' (project organisers) and reviews of their new media output. Good practice was identified in the case studies in terms set out both by the digital media marketing agencies as well as good practice in gender mainstreaming set out by the EIGE.

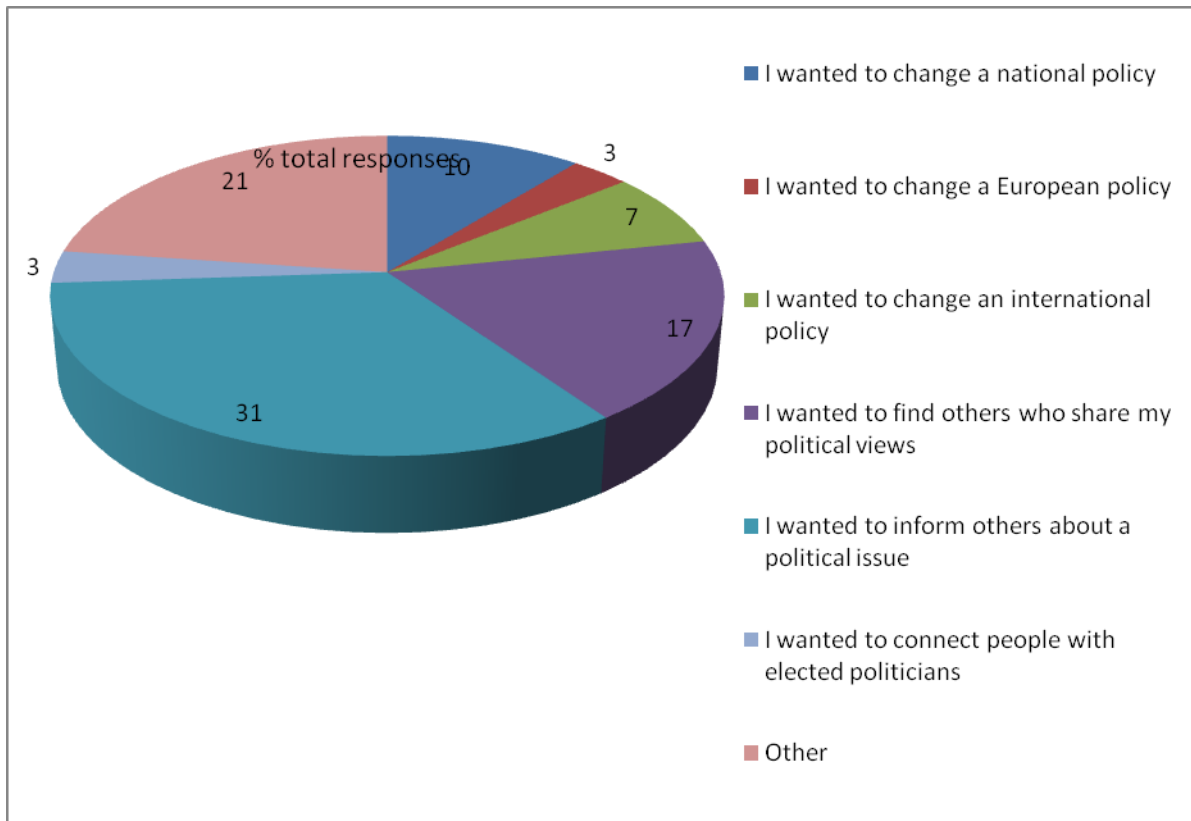
APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL CHARTS FROM THE END USERS SURVEYS

Chart 2: New media activities



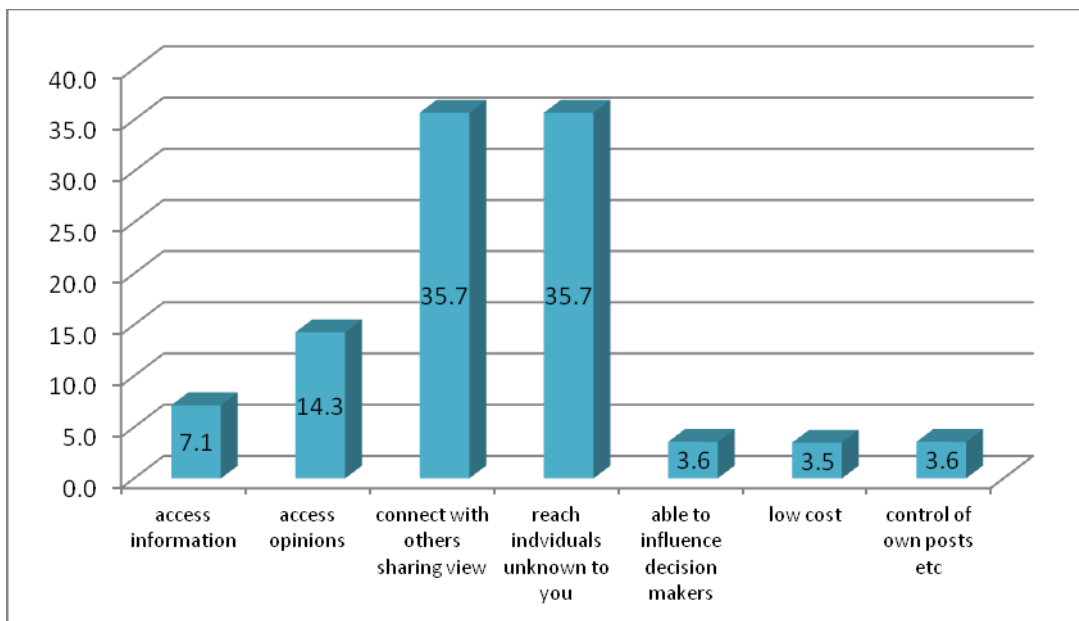
Source: Twitter survey. Base 29

Chart 3: Motivations for engaging in new media activities described



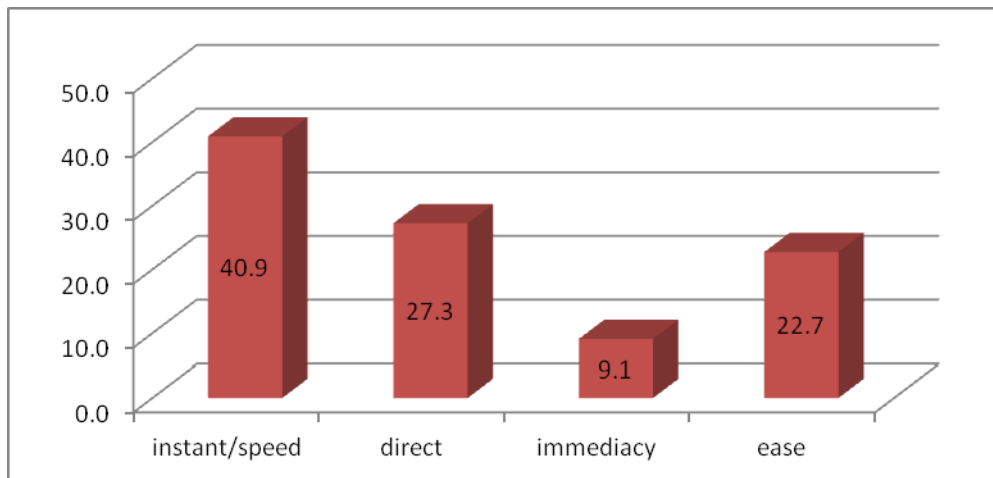
Base: 27 Twitter survey respondents

Chart 4: Advantages of using new media for the political activities you take part in: Perceived impacts and processes (% total responses)



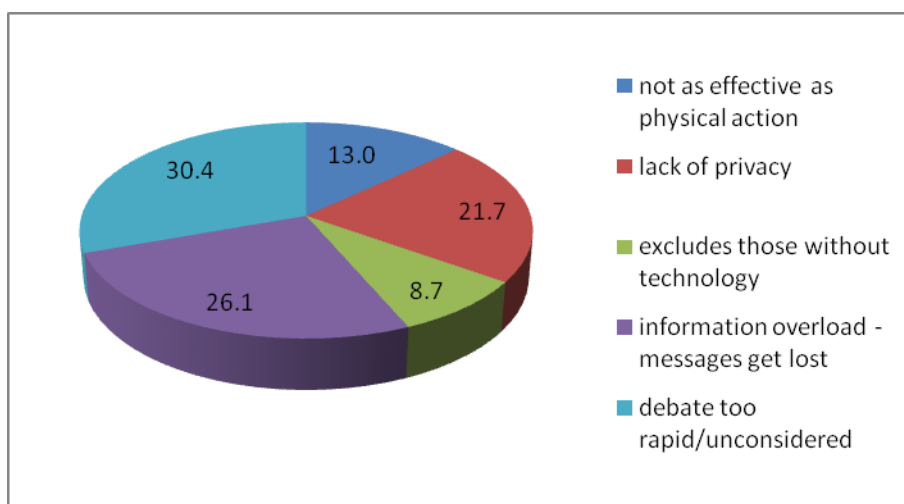
Base: 28 Twitter survey respondents

Chart 5: Advantages of using new media for the political activities you take part in: Adjectives used to describe advantages of using new media (% total responses)



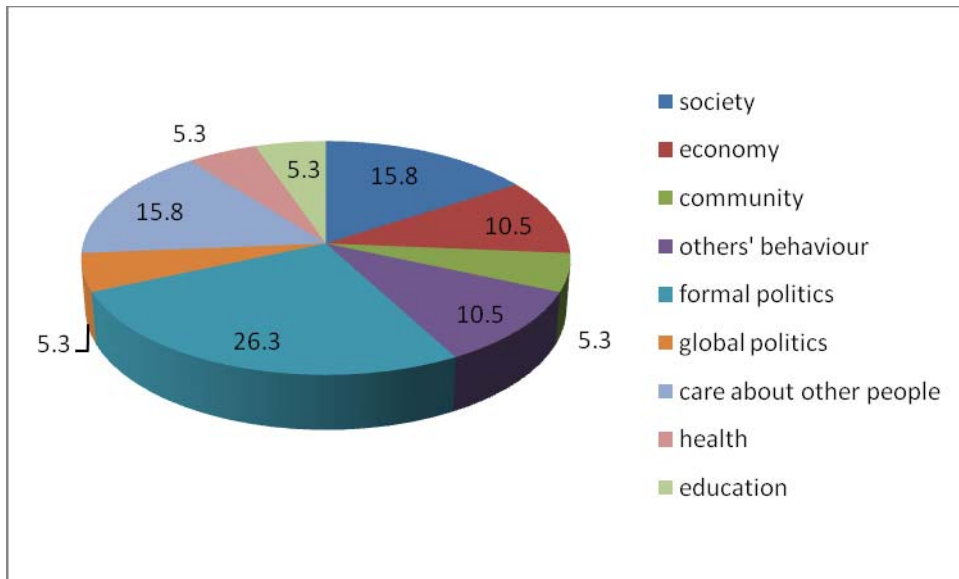
Base: 22 Twitter survey respondents

Chart 6: Perceived limitations of new media for political activity (% total responses)



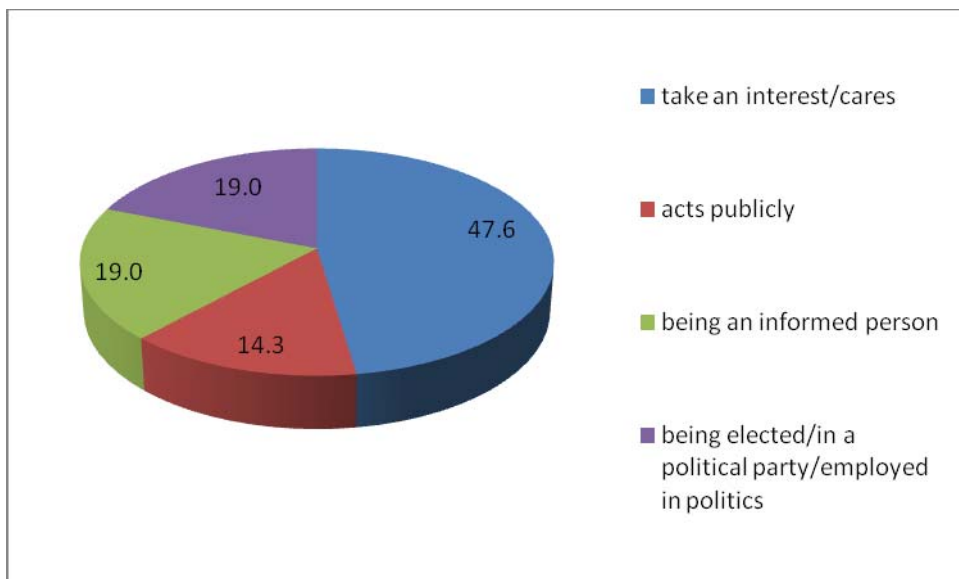
Base: 23 Twitter survey respondents

Chart 7: What is a political person? Issues perceived as being political (% total responses)



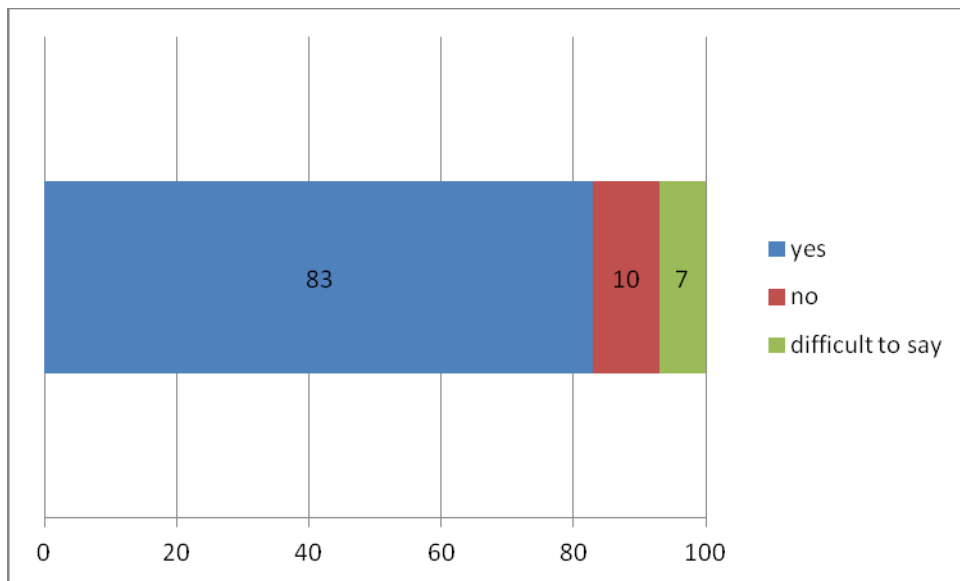
Base: 19 Twitter survey respondents

Chart 8: What is a political person? Behaviours and activities (% total responses)



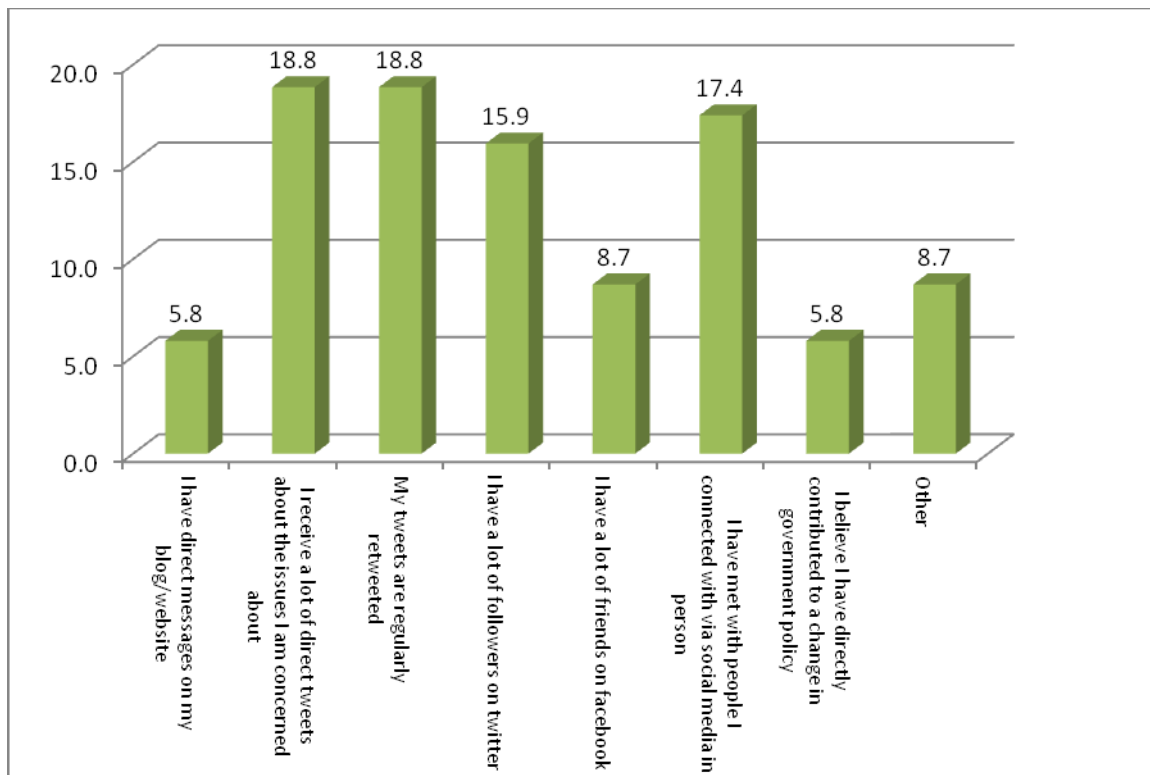
Base: 21 Twitter survey respondents

Chart 9: Respondents views on whether they are a 'political person' (% of total responses)



Base: 29 Twitter survey respondents

Chart 10: Perceived impacts of their new media activities (percentage of all responses)



Base 29 respondents, 69 selections.

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