A study of voters’ online information behaviour

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The Referendum on Independence for Scotland

<table>
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<th>BALLOT PAPER</th>
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<td>Vote (X) ONLY ONCE</td>
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<th>Should Scotland be an independent country?</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>YES</th>
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<th>NO</th>
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Images: Electoral Commission

[Image of ballot box and person inserting a vote]
Aims of User Study

- Identify motivations for, and barriers to, public use of campaign sites
- Investigate the types of information, tools and technologies voters most value
- Assess the likelihood of campaign sites being visited again
- Explore the extent to which they influence voting behaviour
User Study

- Used the ‘interactive, electronically-assisted interview’ method

- So far, interviews conducted in:
  - Robert Gordon University library
  - Aberdeen’s busiest community centre
  - a church serving Commonwealth citizens

- Plans to conduct further interviews in:
  - a care home for older people
  - a sports centre

- Used laptop with mobile broadband ‘dongle’; iPad; and smartphone
Profile of Sample (to date)

- 54 interviews conducted so far
- 22 male, 32 female; from a range of age groups
- 29 in employment, 4 seeking work, 21 students
- 48 eligible to vote in referendum, 46 will definitely be voting
- Majority were regular and confident computer and Internet users
- Just 3 had never used social media
• Reluctance to look at the Scottish Government’s White Paper (670 pp) or other lengthy and wordy policy documents

• Preference for concise documents and statements (e.g. Better Together’s 2- to 3-page factsheets)
Positive About the Use of Infographics

As part of the UK
the cost of transporting groceries
are spread across
63 million consumers
rather than 5 million in Scotland.

Our shopping bills are kept lower in the UK.

As part of the UK
we benefit from
lower mortgage repayments.

Our finances are more secure in the UK.
Need For ‘Facts’ Rather Than Opinion-Based Information

- Unconvinced by over-reliance on opinions of ‘ordinary people’

- Instead expressed a need for ‘facts’ about the impact of independence or of remaining in the UK
Sceptical About Impartiality and Reliability of Information Presented

- General acknowledgement of likely bias in information presented

- Need expressed for more information on sources of data/statistics presented
Further Levels of Cynicism

- Cynical about some of the imagery used
- Cynical about the use of celebrity endorsements
Post-Search Evaluative Questions

- 91% thought campaign sites are a useful way of providing information
- 91% found them easy to use
- 89% found the content interesting
- 93% found the content easy to understand
- 65% might look at campaign sites again before 18th September
Just 37% described the information as ‘very’ or ‘quite’ reliable

For 75% the campaign sites had no influence on their voting intentions

Instead, a continued preference for ‘traditional’ information sources and campaign methods