

Parliamentary Twitter Analysis: 2014

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FOREWORD

It's three years since Westminster Public Affairs carried out our last Parliamentary Twitter analysis and during that time UK policy-makers have embraced the micro-blogging site like never before. At the start of 2010 only 111 MPs had a Twitter account, by July 2011 still less than half of all MPs (just 275) had signed up. But as our report shows that figure has now leapt to over 450: in other words, more than 70% of MPs are now using the site.

MPs are also sending tweets in a far greater volume than ever before. In 2011 we calculated that MPs spent a total of 1000 hours on Twitter. As this report reveals that number has, as you'd expect, significantly increased. The relaxation of the Commons Twitter ban, overturned at the start of 2011, which until then outlawed Tweeting in the Chamber has certainly helped to increase the volume of tweets sent. But it's also how MPs are using Twitter – an area we touch upon at the end of this report – that is also revealing. From grumbling about the late running of trains or testing out their favourite new joke, to announcing resignations and breaking news on Government reshuffles: Twitter is proving to be a place where MPs can make news headlines at the same time as responding to individual enquiries from voters. So, arguably one of the greatest surprises is that almost 30% of MPs still do not recognize the potential benefits it offers.

So, this report explores parliamentary Tweeting over the last twelve months. It reveals new data about how many MPs and peers are using the site, how long they are spending sending messages, which MPs send the most and least Tweets and we break down our findings by party to assess which ones are using the site most vociferously.

We hope you find this report informative and interesting, and of course do feel free to Tweet about it.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Olly Kendall". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Olly" and "Kendall" being capitalized and prominent.

Olly Kendall – Managing Director of Westminster Public Affairs

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.11 The following findings are based on an evaluation of all parliamentarians signed up to a Twitter account, over the course of 12 months (between 29 July 2013 to 28 July 2014):

- MPs sent a total of 718,431 Tweets in the course of one year.
- Over this twelve-month period MPs spent a combined total of over 115 days (or more than 2774 hours) sending Tweets.
- There are 461 MPs with Twitter accounts (71% of all MPs) an increase since January 2010 of 350 MPs using Twitter. There are 118 of peers (15% of all peers) who use the micro-blogging site.
- There are 82% of Lib Dem MPs on Twitter (46 MPs); 75% of Labour MPs (193 MPs); and 67% of Conservative MPs (203 MPs).
- The MP who has sent the most tweets over the last year is George Galloway, with 16,399 Tweets and re-Tweets to his name. The top-Tweeting Conservative MP is Michael Fabricant (11,311 tweets), the top Labour MP is Karl Turner (12,577 Tweets) and the top Lib Dem is Tim Farron (14,741 Tweets).
- Eight MPs with Twitter accounts did not post a single Tweet in the last twelve months.

2. FINDINGS

2.1 The number of parliamentarians using Twitter:

The number of MPs on Twitter has seen a four-fold increase over the last four years

2.11 There are now a total of 461 MPs and 118 peers on Twitter – 71% and 15% of each House respectively. This is a dramatic rise since January 2010 when only 111 MPs had signed up to the site. There is a massive imbalance between the proportion of MPs versus Peers using Twitter, with a member of the Commons almost five times more likely to be on the micro-blogging site than a colleague in the Lords.

2.12 Given the demographic differences between both Chambers it is arguably not surprising that peers are less likely to be familiar using social media. It may also be fair to say that without the need to seek re-election, and with no constituents to engage, there is less incentive for members of the Lords to broadcast in this way.

Table 1. Tweepers in Parliament by House

House	Total Parliamentarians on Twitter	Total number of Parliamentarians	% of Parliamentarians this represents
Commons	461	650	71%
Lords	118	774	15%
Total	579	1424	41%

Table 2. Total MPs on Twitter by party

Party	Total MPs on Twitter	Total number of MPs	% of party MPs this represents
Conservative	203	305	67%
Labour	193	257	75%
Liberal Democrat	46	56	82%
Other	19	32	59%
Total	461	650	71%

Table 3. Lords on Twitter by party

Party	Total Peers on Twitter	Total Number of Peers	% of party Peers this represents
Conservative	20	219	9%
Labour	43	216	20%
Liberal Democrat	28	98	29%
Other	27	241	11%
Total	118	774	15%

2.2 Number of Tweets sent by parliamentarians:

Labour MPs send the most Tweets but more than 40% are RT's – higher than any other party.

2.21 MPs sent a total of 718,431 Tweets over the 12-month measurement period. Labour MPs were responsible for almost half of all Tweets (47%) sending a total of 337,487 Tweets. However, they were also responsible for the highest proportion of re-Tweets (43% of all Tweets sent by Labour MPs were RTs). Conservative MPs, sent less Tweets – a total of 252,581 (35% of all Tweets sent) but a greater proportion of their MPs tweets were original – just 36% were re-Tweets. The Lib Dems posted 11% of all Tweets sent by MPs.

Table 4. Total number of Tweets sent by MPs, broken down by party

Party	Total Original Tweets	Total re-Tweets	Total Tweets Sent
Conservative	161410	91171	252581
Labour	193078	144409	337487
Liberal Democrat	50693	25774	76467
Other	21225	30671	51896
Grand Total	426406	292025	718431

2.22 Peers sent a total of 113,950 Tweets over the 12-month measurement period. Labour Peers were responsible for almost 40% of all Tweets sending a total of 44,206 Tweets. The Liberal Democrats were responsible for the highest proportion of retweets out of their total (57% of 27,415). Conservative MPs, sent less Tweets – a total of 22,288 (20% of all Tweets sent) but more of their MPs tweets were original – just 25% were re-Tweets.

Table 5. Total number of Tweets sent by peers, broken down by party.

Party	Total Original Tweets	Total re-Tweets	Total Tweets Sent
Conservative	16668	5620	22288
Labour	24469	19737	44206
Liberal Democrat	11818	15597	27415
Other	14095	5946	20041
Grand Total	67050	46900	113950

2.3 The time MPs and peers spend sending Tweets:

MPs spend over a hundred days a year sending Tweets.

2.31 Methodology

The estimates of the time parliamentarians spend Tweeting are based on an evaluation of all Tweets sent by MPs and peers over a twelve-month period – between 29 July 2013 to 28 July 2014 inclusive. In order to estimate the time MPs and peers spend sending Tweets, we have assumed the time taken to send

each Tweet as 20 seconds, and to re-Tweet each Tweet as five seconds.

We have not sought to estimate the total time parliamentarians spend on Twitter, which would require an additional assessment of the time MPs spend reading Tweets, which has not been undertaken as part of this analysis.

2.32 We find that over the twelve month period analysed MPs sent a total of 718,431 tweets, of which 292,025 were re-Tweets. It is therefore estimated that MPs spent over 115 days (or to put it another way, more than 2770 hours) sending Tweets. Labour MPs spent the most time Tweeting: between them they spent an estimated total of more than 53 days Tweeting.

Table 6. Estimates of how long MPs of each party spent sending Tweets.

Party	Total Original Tweets (20s each)	Total re-Tweets (5s each)	Time Taken (seconds)	Time Taken (Hours)	Time Taken (D:H:M:S)
Conservative	161410	91171	3684055s	1023.35	42d 15h 20m 55s
Labour	193078	144409	4583605s	1273.22	53d 1h 13m 25s
Liberal Democrat	50693	25774	1142730s	317.43	13d 5h 25m 30s
Other	21225	30671	577855s	160.52	6d 16h 30m 55s
Grand Total	426406	292025	9988245s	2774.51	115d 14h 30m 45s

2.33 Peers are spending far less time on Twitter. In total over the 12-month period peers spent just over 18.5 days sending Tweets. In common with MPs, it is Labour peers who spend the most time Tweeting. Almost 40% of all Tweets sent by members of the Upper House were from Labour representatives and the 43 Labour peers on Twitter spent a total of six days sending Tweets according to our findings:

Table 7. Estimates of how long peers, by party, spent sending Tweets

Party	Total Original Tweets (20s each)	Total re-Tweets (5s each)	Time Taken (seconds)	Time Taken (Hours)	Time Taken (D:H:M:S)
Conservative	16668	5620	361460s	100.41	4d 4h 24m 20s
Labour	24469	19737	588065s	163.35	6d 19h 21m 5s
Liberal Democrat	11818	15597	314345s	87.32	3d 15h 19m 5s
Other	14095	5946	311630s	86.56	3d 14h 33m 50s
Grand Total	67050	46900	1575500s	437.64	18d 5h 38m 20s

2.4 Top Tweeting MPs:

George Galloway is arguably the UK's top Parliamentary Tweeter

2.41 George Galloway is the UK's most prolific MP on Twitter, sending 16,399 Tweets (including re-Tweets) over the course of a year – the equivalent to 315 Tweets per week, or 45 Tweets each day. Lib Dem Tim Farron is not far behind in second place with 14,741 Tweets sent throughout the course of

the year. Although it is worth pointing out that a much greater proportion of Tim Farron's Tweets were original: 13631 of his Tweets were original with just 1110 re-Tweets compared to George Galloway who sent 6,465 original Tweets and re-Tweeted 9934 Tweets. In third place is another Lib Dem MP, Julian Huppert, who sent a total of 13,401 Tweets over the same period.

Table 8. Top overall MP Tweepers by Tweets ad re-Tweets sent

MP	Original Tweets	Retweets	Total of all Tweets
George Galloway	6465	9934	16399
Tim Farron	13631	1110	14741
Dr Julian Huppert	5663	7738	13401
Karl Turner	4751	7826	12577
Michael Fabricant	6282	5029	11311
Angus MacNeil	4644	6317	10961
Dr Stella Creasy	7017	3943	10960
Jamie Reed	5915	4314	10229
Andrew Percy	8381	1078	9459
Andrew Gwynne	3306	5533	8839

2.5 The 'lurkers':

Some MPs just aren't using Twitter, despite having signed up for accounts.

2.51 Twitter isn't for everyone, and some MPs just refuse to share their thoughts with the Twittershpere. Maybe their staffers signed them up without their say-so, perhaps they lost their password or maybe they just changed their mind. Whatever the reason for their dormancy, below we list the top ten least active MPs last year on Twitter, eight of whom did not post a single Tweet:

Table 9. Top MP Tweeters by Party

Party	MP	Total Tweets
Conservative	Michael Fabricant	11311
	Andrew Percy	9459
	Karl McCartney	8223
Labour	Karl Turner	12577
	Stella Creasy	10960
	Jamie Reed	10229
Liberal Democrat	Tim Farron	14741
	Julian Huppert	13401
	Greg Mulholland	7028

Table 10. Top MP re-Tweeters

MP	Retweets
George Galloway	9934
Karl Turner	7826
Dr Julian Huppert	7738
Angus MacNeil	6317
Karl McCartney	5802
Andrew Gwynne	5533
Jonathan Edwards	5138
Michael Fabricant	5029
Jamie Reed	4314
Grahame Morris	4045

Table 11. MPs who Tweet the least frequently

MP	Tweets
Adrian Bailey	0
Sir Paul Beresford	0
Richard Drax	0
Dai Havard	0
Kwasi Kwarteng	0
Jim Shannon	0
Bill Wiggin	0
David Wright	0
David Heath	1
Gerry Sutcliffe	5
Glenda Jackson	11

2.6 How MPs are Using Twitter:

MPs are using Twitter in increasingly sophisticated and varied ways

2.61 An MP's Twitter feed is an increasingly important tool in their communications arsenal. In some instances Twitter is helping them to get their issues aired beyond the social networking site and to the wider public. There are the few obvious examples where Twitter has helped to elevate a story or speed the process by which it has hit the headlines in the past year. Baroness Warsi's recent resignation Tweet has since been re-Tweeted more than 33,000 times and took the Government by surprise. David Ward MP's tweet about his empathy with the people of Gaza made news headlines in the UK and ensured the little-known Lib Dem MP was a household name, at least for a while. The Prime Minister kept the Westminster Village captivated in July, using the site to announce his Cabinet and ministerial reshuffle.

2.62 But it perhaps the more usual ways that Twitter is being used by MPs, on a more frequent basis, which defines the real utility of the site. You only have to scroll through an MP's feed to see how they are using Twitter to engage local constituents, or at least sign-post all the work that are doing locally. There are plenty who use Twitter to show their humorous side. "Far as I'm concerned, Scotland can keep the EU membership card in any divorce, we'll keep sterling instead" Andrew Percy MP Tweeted recently. Or those like Stella Creasy who, in a shameless, but probably successful attempt to win votes Tweeted, "ARGH ARGH ARGH its coldplay on @bbctw makes mad lunge for remote control as ears begin to lacerate". Indeed it's MPs like Creasy and Percy whose informal, light-hearted approach to Tweeting highlights the site's arguably most important benefit for elected representatives: the way it can help to humanize MPs at a time when they are still struggling to bounce back from the damage of the expenses scandal and the wider political disengagement that plagues Westminster.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 MPs are spending more time sending Tweets than ever before. With more than 70% of MPs now using the site, the question really is why the remaining 30% do not sign up. At a time when trust in politics and our policy-makers remains low a forum for direct engagement with voters is surely something which should hold great appeal to MPs.

3.2 That said, in the seven days following the completion of this analysis, two more MPs joined Twitter: Owen Paterson, who joined following his reshuffle out of the Cabinet (@Owen_PatersonMP) and Bob Russell (@Bob4Colchester). We wish them happy Tweeting.

3.3 We should also point out that a number of new peers were also appointed to the House of Lords since this analysis was undertaken and were not included within this report.

SOURCE OF DATA:

This report is based on data compiled specially for Westminster PA by Yatterbox (www.yatterbox.com), the social media monitoring service for PR, communications and government relations professionals. Yatterbox alerts you instantly when verified influencers, such as politicians and journalists mention the keywords you specify. You can also add your own custom list of influencers to Yatterbox, making it the simplest, most powerful tool for listening to your stakeholders on social media. To try it for free, visit yatterbox.com