



Project Name: **Connected Politicians: MLAs and Social Media**
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INTRODUCTION

Stratagem has followed the social media revolution within electoral politics and campaigning since 1998. We have tracked the social media journey of our local political representatives - the good the bad and the indifferent.

In the run up to the last Assembly election, Stratagem conducted a number of research pieces. Ranging from an analysis of the 2011-2015 Programme for Government to an evaluation of campaigning organisations' engagement with MLAs, this work, conducted by Alan Meban, which measured political connectedness, gave us some pause for thought.

Why? Our electoral system - PR STV in multi-seat constituencies - lends itself in particular to fierce battles both within and between parties for first preferences as well as transfers. Constituency issues and service were a central aspect of electoral campaigning during the last 2016 Assembly election.

In the digital age we live in, social media has become one of the key channels of communication for individuals and organisations across society. Therefore, we might expect politicians to be easily located online and therefore, to further signpost details of their constituency offices. This was not always the case.

In developing a suite of political connectedness metrics, our approach was to test the digital connectivity of MLAs. Given the importance of personal contact and service provision in the life of any successful elected representative, the signposting of constituency offices or advice centres so constituents could get hold of them to help resolve a problem, again, was the main focus of our research.

As Government Departments and Assembly Committees are now embracing social media and Twitter in particular, MLAs will need to cut through more noise than ever. As our traditional six-seater constituencies turn into five-seaters in the next Assembly election, competition will become even more fierce.

From functional and clunky 'shop front' first generation websites to snazzy selfies, our elected representatives and parties vary in their tone and approach in communicating effectively and regularly with constituents. It will be interesting to see how MLAs and the parties deploy social media to better effect over this mandate.

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings in the report:

- Independents and MLAs with single representation scored highly in terms of digital footprint
- Four out of the top ten social media MLAs retired or lost their seat after the last election
- The digital footprint for female MLAs was higher than that of their male counterparts
- South Belfast, South Down and Foyle were the most "connected" constituencies, whilst Fermanagh & South Tyrone, West Belfast and East Londonderry had the lowest digital footprint
- Only 20 per cent of MLA websites were responsive to different devices, such as mobile phones
- No email or contact forms were available for eight MLAs - seven of which were from Sinn Féin, one UUP
- Just two MLAs (both whom have stepped down) had no online presence apart from on their party websites
- Opening hours of MLA offices were available online for 58 MLAs
- Information on regular surgeries were available for 11 MLAs online - all of whom were Unionist
- 90 of the outgoing MLAs had Twitter profiles
- 92 had Facebook profiles
- Single party representatives had much larger followings than individual MLAs (with a few exceptions) in the "big five" parties
- Nationalist MLAs had more followers on both Twitter and Facebook on average than Unionist MLAs
- Sinn Féin had almost double the number of followers than the UUP
- Longevity in the Assembly - and not youth - brings more followers
- 51 outgoing MLAs had personal websites, but only 22 of these were returned in the top search result

METHODOLOGY

How well connected were the outgoing cohort of MLAs? What was their digital footprint, and how easy were they to track down electronically or in real life?

Those are the questions that informed our analysis of the 108 outgoing MLAs as we trawled through search engines, social media tools, and their own websites (as well as those of their parties) to get a handle on their level of connectivity.

We split the analysis into three areas, each carrying a maximum of 20 points.

Finding their digital footprint

How easy is it for a constituent to find a local Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly member on Twitter or Facebook? Are their social media streams up to date? If you Google them, which websites show up on the first page of results? Do they have their own website? How well does it display on a mobile phone browser (its level of responsiveness)? Are they mentioned on a constituency website run by their party? Do these websites give you their email address or provide a contact form?

Finding their physical presence

Once you've found your MLA online, do they provide the address of their constituency office or advice centre? A postcode to make it easy to find for those relying on GPS? Or a map? Do they advertise their opening hours? The practice of holding regular surgeries around a constituency seems to be dying out. But for the MLAs who still run surgeries, do they publish the address and times, or would you have to phone the office to find out?

Evidence of activity

Once you've found your MLAs online, do they publish much evidence of what work they do in the constituency? If they have a blog, is it up-to-date? Do they link out to the NI Assembly or services like *They Work For You* to independently showcase the speeches they make and questions they ask in the Assembly? Can you subscribe to updates from their website by RSS? If their website has a photo gallery, is it ever updated? And if they link to social media profiles, do the links work?

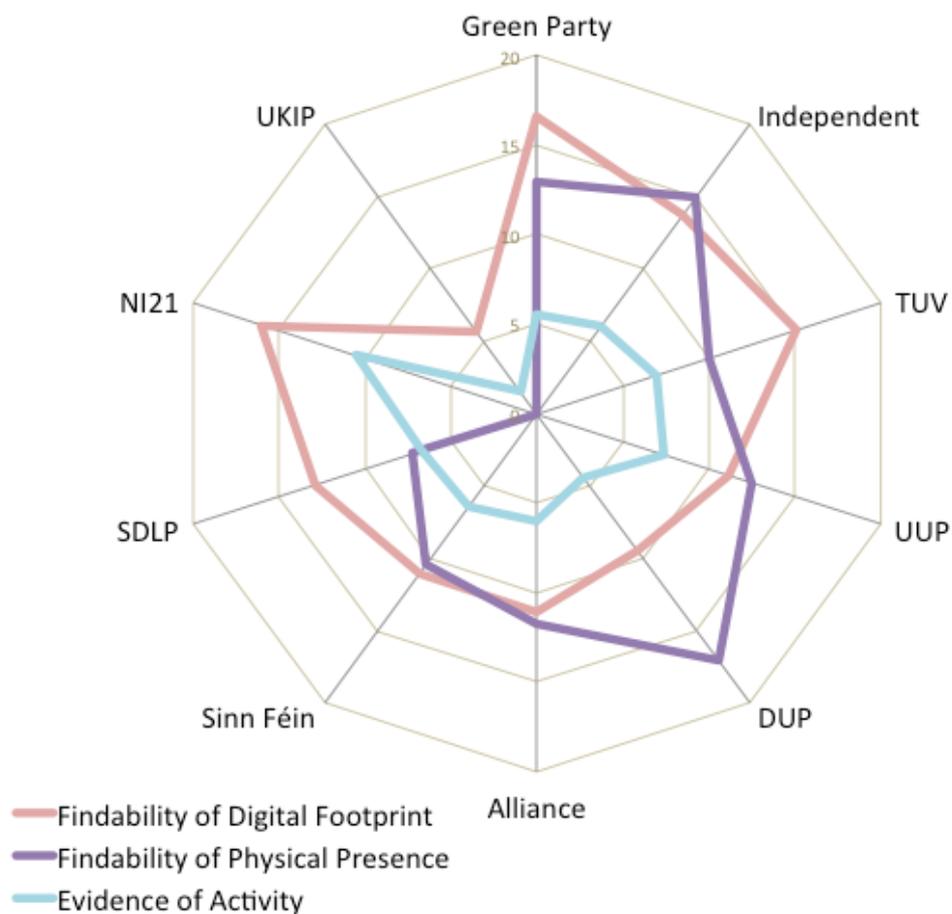
About the study

The analysis and searching was conducted over a 48 hour period during the last two days of the 2011-2016 Assembly term. Google searches were conducted in a browser that was not logged into any Google service to minimise the effect of search history. Twitter searches were conducted while logged into a Twitter profile that does not follow any MLAs. This report has deliberately avoided singling out individual MLAs for praise or criticism, preferring to look at the trends.

CONNECTIVITY SCORECARD

On the radar chart, we plotted the average scores for parties for three dimensions: the ease of finding their digital footprint, the ease of finding their physical presence, and online evidence of their political activity, including within their constituency. With a maximum score of 20 in each of the dimensions, we can compare the strengths and weaknesses of the parties.

Independents and MLAs from single-representative parties scored the highest, with the Green Party's Steven Agnew top of the cumulative scores, followed by the independents and TUV. Sitting below them were The UUP and DUP sat neck and neck below them, followed by Alliance, Sinn Féin and the SDLP. But within these constructed measures, strengths and weaknesses varied with the DUP clearly leading the way by most consistently pointing to office locations, while the NI21 MLA and UUP scored highest in terms of evidence of activity.

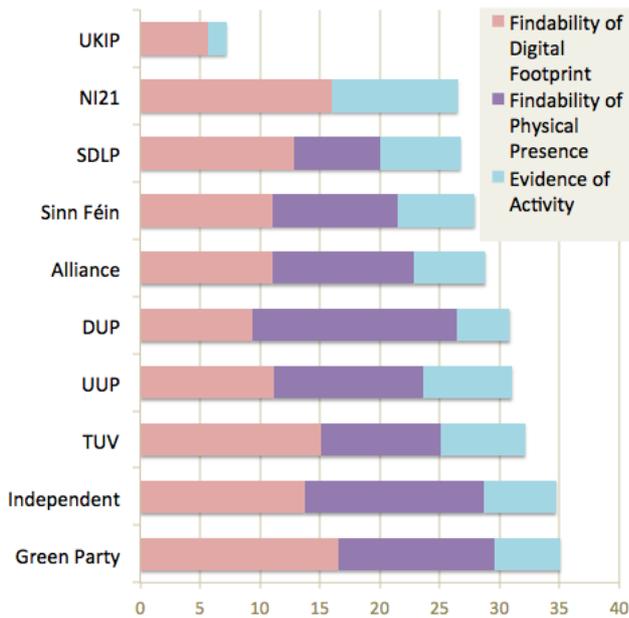


Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

WHAT WE FOUND

Digital Footprint

In general, independents and MLAs from single-representative parties scored highly. Of the larger parties, the SDLP and Sinn Féin had three outgoing MLAs in the top ten online performers, while the DUP had one.



Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

Averaged across all MLAs in the parties, the UUP, Sinn Féin and Alliance had a nearly identical score, above the DUP, but below the SDLP.

MLAs who were first elected in the 2011 Assembly election had more easily found digital footprints than those who were re-elected to Stormont that year. The most recently co-opted MLAs scored lower than average, while those co-opted in 2014 and 2015 were above average.

The digital footprint of female MLAs (average 11.8) was higher than their male counterparts (10.6).

Findability of Digital Footprint		
Party	Score	Average
Co-opted in 2014	13.9	10.9
First elected in 2011	12.4	
Co-opted in 2015	11.7	
First elected in 2011 (following substitution)	10.7	
Co-opted in 2012	10.3	
Re-elected in 2011	10.3	
Co-opted in 2016	9.7	
Co-opted in 2013	8.1	

Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

The constituencies with the strongest scores were Belfast South, South Down, and Foyle, while Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Belfast West and East Londonderry lagged behind the rest.

Only one constituency (North Down) was found to have a separate website for every outgoing MLA. Five out of six MLAs in Belfast East and Belfast South had their own websites. Conversely, no websites could be found for any outgoing MLA in two constituencies (Belfast West and Upper Bann).

Very few websites for outgoing MLAs were responsive (ie adapt to display appropriately on mobile devices). It was clear that many had been created within the last two years, but the templates used - often common across several MLAs - had not been designed with mobile devices in mind.

Having found the MLA on an individual, constituency or party website, was there a contact form or an email address? (The NI Assembly profile for each MLA lists an email address but this analysis focused on party political online presence.)

Email addresses were listed for 97 MLAs. Contact forms were available for 57 MLAs. In eight cases - one UUP and seven Sinn Féin MLAs - neither an email address nor a contact form was on the individual, constituency or party website.

Samuel Gardiner (UUP) and Kieran McCarthy (Alliance) were the only two out of the 108 outgoing MLAs that had neither a presence on Twitter nor on Facebook, nor did they host their own website. Their digital footprint was restricted to information available from their parties' websites.

Physical Presence

For 11 MLAs, no postal address for a constituency office was specified on the individual, constituency or party website. For the 97 with an address listed on a website, the postcode was missing for two of these MLAs.

Less than half of MLAs had a map showing the location of their office on their individual, constituency or party website. In one case the map was too small to be legible and was a small indistinct static image that couldn't be zoomed in on.

Office opening hours were displayed for 58 MLAs. In three cases the hours of opening were not published on the same page as the office address. In one case the party website detailed the opening hours but not the MLAs own individual website. It took three clicks to navigate through pages to find the hours of opening on one MLAs website.

The DUP's central website provided a much more comprehensive set of information about constituency office locations and opening hours than any other party. Sinn Féin did well across their central and constituency sites, but were less consistent with the supply of postcodes, and did not publish any convenient maps. The SDLP scored less well, with address information missing for six of their outgoing MLAs at the time of survey.

Office opening hours were available online for less than half Sinn Féin's outgoing MLAs, for three SDLP MLAs and for only two Alliance MLAs. Constituents would have to ring up to inquire and not simply be able to drop in.

Findability of Physical Presence		
Party	Score	Average
DUP	17.1	
UUP	12.5	
Alliance	11.8	12.8
Sinn Féin	10.4	
SDLP	7.2	
Independent	15.0	
Green Party	13.0	
TUV	10.0	8.8
NI21	0.0	
UKIP	0.0	

Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

Regular surgeries outside the main constituency office of MLAs were poorly signposted online. Holding surgeries around a constituency seems to be a practice in decline. Evidence that surgeries were held could only be found for 11 MLAs (all unionist). Of those 11 MLAs, nine published the times of the surgeries, but only four published the addresses of their surgeries online. Assembly election literature suggests that more surgeries are being run than were listed on websites.

Once again, the information about MLAs first elected in 2011 is more comprehensive than those re-elected at the last Assembly election. It's not surprising that the three MLAs co-opted in 2016 had very little information about their office addresses online (nothing at the time of survey for the two co-opted SDLP MLAs).

The constituencies with the strongest scores were North Antrim, East Antrim, North Down and South Antrim, while Belfast West and West Tyrone lagged behind the rest.

Evidence of Activity

The single outgoing MLAs for NI21 and TUV scored well in this domain which examines how well they explain their work to interested constituents. Looking across the largest five parties, the UUP, Sinn Féin and SDLP scored more highly than Alliance and the DUP (who lag far behind).

While a third of outgoing DUP MLAs had blogs, only half had been updated in the month before the analysis was undertaken.

Outgoing female MLAs showed more evidence of their constituency work than male MLAs. Across the five largest parties, Alliance and SDLP women were top, while UUP men were well ahead of the other parties.

Evidence of Activity		
Party	Score	Average
UUP	7.4	
SDLP	6.7	
Sinn Féin	6.4	5.8
Alliance	6.0	
DUP	4.4	
NI21	10.5	
TUV	7.0	
Independent	6.0	6.1
Green Party	5.5	
UKIP	1.5	

Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

The constituencies with the strongest scores were Belfast South, South Down, North Down and Foyle, while Strangford and Upper Bann lay behind the rest.

Class of 2011

MLAs who were first elected in 2011 seemed to take advantage of the decreasing cost and complexity of setting up websites. Nearly all plugged into social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Uptake is less prevalent for MLAs first elected in 2011 but co-opted into the Assembly before May that year. Will the class of 2016 behave similarly?

A smaller proportion of those who were re-elected in 2011 can be found on social media platforms, and only half maintain a personal website. As a cohort, they also share evidence about their activity within their constituency online more regularly and across more channels than those re-elected.

Co-opted MLAs

Numbers of MLAs co-opted in any calendar year are small, so it is difficult to attach significance to their patterns of online behaviour. However, looking across outgoing MLAs who were co-opted into the Assembly between 2011 and 2016, they were below average in terms of findability, but excelled in terms of documenting their constituency work online.

Very few co-opted MLAs had websites, perhaps explained by this being a low priority when entering the Assembly mid-term and running to catch up with more established colleagues.

Disregard for 'Mobile First'

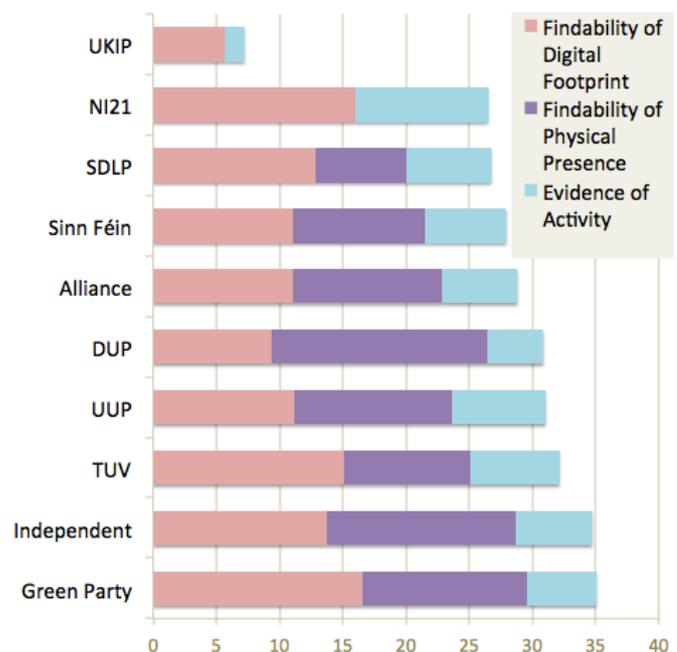
The 'mobile first' design approach takes into account smaller screens (eg, phones and tablet) before adding in further features and content for larger and larger screens. Given the increasingly 'mobile first' nature of internet usage during the 2011-2016 Assembly term, only 20% of outgoing MLA websites could be judged as fully responsive, and more than half had significant problems (mostly relating to the size of text and width of layout). This is despite the fact that research by Ofcom in 2015 found that Smartphones are the method of choice for people accessing the internet.

A small number of websites which included support for browsing on mobile devices were hampered by broken menus and other obvious usability issues. Whilst many MLA websites had been built on top of content management systems used for blogs, only 55% were exposing RSS feeds to allow constituents to subscribe to updates.

Digital Connectedness

The connectedness of Alliance's outgoing MLAs was mid-table. Despite many of the MLAs launching new websites over the last couple of years, they were not mobile friendly.

Looking at the other main parties:



Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

The **DUP's** strength lies in their online signposting of the location of constituency offices and advice centres. However, their outgoing MLAs had poor digital footprints and there was considerably less evidence of their constituency activity than other large parties.

Sinn Féin's connectedness was middling. Their weaknesses were a tendency not to publish precise information online about office locations, and a network of old-fashioned looking constituency websites that were prone to host out-of-date information.

SDLP's outgoing MLAs had above average digital footprints and could easily be found online, publishing information about work in constituencies. However, SDLP websites were very poor at publishing constituency office address information.

The **UUP's** strength was in publishing information online about the work of MLAs in their constituencies. Their outgoing MLAs had moderate digital footprints.

Class of 2016

The digital footprint of MLAs joining the Assembly in May 2016 will be critical to their online communication with constituents. The use of a Facebook page can provide up-to-date information as well as photo and video galleries to any number of constituents. However, providing deeper access to speeches and questions (through automated plugins built around They Work For You or the NI Assembly website) requires separate websites. However, any new website is of minimal use if it is not optimised for use on mobile phones and tablets.

During the next Assembly term some old social media platforms will wane and new ones will emerge. Instagram is already more popular than Twitter with younger age groups. Reaching the full spread of constituents and stakeholders will require juggling many different channels. Indeed, it may be impossible - or impractical in terms of time - to sustain the number of online channels required. So decisions will need to be made throughout the expected five year term on which tools to concentrate MLA and staff effort.

TWITTER

As part of the development of a suite of political connectedness metrics and analysis of the 108 outgoing MLAs from the 2011-2016 Assembly, we can make some specific observations about the use of Twitter.

- At the end of March, 78 of the 108 outgoing MLAs had Twitter accounts that could be found by searching Twitter for "Forename Surname MLA" or "Forename Surname Assembly";
- Another seven could be found by dropping any reference to their elected role and just searching for "Forename Surname";
- In total, at least 90 outgoing MLAs had Twitter accounts, though some would be very difficult for constituents to find;
- 84 had tweeted in the last month;
- 12 had one or more parody accounts that showed up in searches for the real politician. Only one outgoing MLA had fewer Twitter followers than the parody account.

A small number of super-popular politicians (like the First and Deputy First Ministers and party leaders) skew the average (mean) followers of MLAs by party. Looking at the median (the middle value) generates a more useful value to compare.

MLAs who fall outside large parties (TUV, NI21, Green and independents) generally had much larger followings on Twitter than MLAs who are part of the big five parties.

Nationalist MLAs had more Twitter followers than unionists. Sinn Féin MLAs tended to have nearly double the number of followers compared with UUP.

Every MLA who joined the Assembly through co-option since 2014 had a Twitter account and showed activity within the previous month.

In fact all but two of the 20 MLAs co-opted since the 2011 Assembly election were active on Twitter.

Evidence of Activity		
Party	Score	Average
UUP	7.4	
SDLP	6.7	
Sinn Féin	6.4	5.8
Alliance	6.0	
DUP	4.4	
NI21	10.5	
TUV	7.0	
Independent	6.0	6.1
Green Party	5.5	
UKIP	1.5	

Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

Sorting the MLAs by year of first entering the NI Assembly (through election or co-option) shows that it is longevity in office - not youthfulness - that brings about larger numbers of followers on Twitter.

Use of Twitter by party				
Party	MLAs not on Twitter	MLAs on Twitter	AVERAGE followers	MEDIAN followers
Sinn Féin	4	25	8177	3667
SDLP		14	3507	3150
Alliance	1	7	3136	2792
DUP	11	27	3308	2069
UUP	1	12	3162	1863
TUV		1	15112	15112
NI21		1	12884	12884
Green Party		1	10066	10066
Independent		2	4896	4896
UKIP	1	0		

Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

Other observations

- Searching Twitter for one Executive Minister brings back their Assembly Private Secretary ahead of the Minister. The wording of a Twitter profile is key to being found in searches.
- Before the Assembly term finished, some MLAs used the term "MLA" in their Twitter profile, some mentioning "Assembly" or "@niassembly" and some used less common phrases like "NI legislator".
- Before the Assembly term finished, a number of MLAs set their Twitter accounts to "private". This meant that only existing followers could see their status updates. Some regular Twitter users stopped tweeting altogether in the six months before the end of the Assembly term.
- A number of outgoing MLAs changed their Twitter usernames in advance of the election to drop "MLA" or add the word "vote". These changes were rarely reflected in links to their Twitter accounts from party or constituency websites or on their own websites.
- Some MLAs do not tweet about politics, restricting themselves to sport.
- Some MLAs whose surnames begin with 'Mc' format their name with a space immediately after the 'Mc'. Searching Twitter for "Abby McAdam" will not match with users whose profile lists them as "Abby Mc Adam". (Facebook ignores the space.) It's a matter orthography, but one that breaks Twitter and variations of the spelling of these MLAs surnames tend to occur across party, personal and NI Assembly websites as well as Wikipedia and social media profiles.

FACEBOOK

As part of the development of a suite of political connectedness metrics and analysis of the 108 outgoing MLAs from the 2011-2016 Assembly, we can make some specific observations about the use of Facebook.

Individual Facebook account profiles can only have a maximum of 5,000 friends. Facebook Pages can be liked and followed by any number of users and there is no need to approve friendship requests.

42 MLAs had Facebook Pages. A further 10 had a constituency Facebook Page that mentioned what they were doing. It was clear that five MLAs had set up Facebook pages within a couple of months of the election with a view to publicising their campaign for Assembly re-election.

87 MLAs had individual Facebook profiles or Facebook Pages that had been updated within the last month.

92 of the 108 outgoing MLAs (ie, all but 16) had personal Facebook account profiles that could be found by searching Facebook for "Forename Surname MLA".

Use of Facebook by party		
Party	Personal Facebook profile	No findable personal Facebook profile
Alliance	2	6
DUP	4	34
SDLP	1	13
Sinn Féin	6	23
UUP	2	11
Green Party		1
Independent		2
NI21		1
TUV	1	0
UKIP		1
Overall	16	92

A handful of profiles had been abandoned, and some had very few posts that were visible to non-Facebook users who were not friends.

A couple of outgoing MLAs had two Facebook profiles (not Pages) and split their personal and private personas between them.

Some local politicians estimate that up to half of their case work is first raised informally through the medium of a Facebook message. Facebook can be used by MLAs to express their personality and interests outside of politics, as well as keep friends within the constituency and beyond up to date with issues, events, news and views.

Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

Two Sinn Féin MLAs automatically posted their tweets on Facebook: one still responded to people's comments, the other showed no interaction on their account, despite a high level of interaction between their Facebook friends. While convenient and efficient for the MLAs concerned, images posted on Twitter don't display particularly well when they are published into the Facebook interface in this fashion.

Other observations

- There were a plethora of abandoned Facebook pages for constituency groups and previous election campaigns. Since they had not been deleted - and perhaps could not be deleted as those with permission may not even work for parties any longer - they pollute Facebook search results and cause confusion.
- Some outgoing MLAs had switched back from using Facebook Pages to just updating their personal Facebook profile during the Assembly term. This should be considered a backward step in terms of shareability and constituency influence.
- When some MLAs posted on Facebook, the privacy setting they used most often meant that only Facebook friends (or friends of friends) could see the updates, even the obviously political updates that were in no way personal.

GOOGLING YOUR MLA

If you wanted to get in touch with your MLA, Googling "Forename Surname MLA" or "Forename Surname Constituency" are likely to be very common techniques. All 108 outgoing MLAs could be found using these methods, with a personal or party webpage, Wikipedia entry or NI Assembly profile normally appearing as the first search result.

For more than half of outgoing MLAs, their Wikipedia entry or NI Assembly profile was the top result returned by Google.

51 MLAs (47%) had their own website, but it was only the top result for 22 of the 108 outgoing elected representatives.

In the case of one recently co-opted MLA, a newspaper article announcing their arrival at the Assembly was returned ahead of any other online profiles.

Two MLAs had individual websites that didn't appear on the first page of Google search results, showing a lack of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

Four MLAs - all elected in 2011 - had websites whose domain name had expired, though the URL was still known to Google and being returned (for now) in search results. In one case the defunct website was still the top search result returned by Google.

Three-quarters of MLAs co-opted after the 2011 Assembly election had not set up individual websites. All 15 had easily located Facebook profiles (with 14 showing activity on Facebook within the last month), though just two had a set up a Facebook Page.

Constituency-specific websites existed for 29 MLAs.

Constituency-specific Facebook Pages or public Facebook Groups existed for 61 MLAs, eight of which hadn't been updated since 2015.

Googling for MLAs	
Top search result	Total
Wikipedia/NI Assembly	64
Individual MLA website	22
Party website	18
Social media	2
Constituency website	1
Newspaper article	1

Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

WEBSITES

A total of 51 personal websites were located across all 108 MLAs. News about the specific activities of 53 MLAs could be found on their individual, constituency or party websites. In one case, the content management system underpinning the website had been hacked and dubious news stories about Canadian politics were intermingled with Northern Ireland political affairs.

MLA websites	
Use of website or Facebook	Total
MLA news on a website (individual, constituency or party)?	53
Published a blog post in the last month?	32
Regularly published blog posts during Assembly term?	36
Evidence of ward-level activity online (website or Facebook)?	81
Evidence of constituency-level activity online (website or Facebook)?	85
Link to They Work for You or NI Assembly AIMS?	8

Connected Politicians (MLAs 2011-2016)

32 MLAs had published a blog post (or news item) in the last month. 36 had published updates regularly (monthly or quarterly) during the five years of the Assembly term.

Some evidence of ward-level activity could be found online for 81 MLAs. Approximately half was visible on websites (individual, constituency or party) and half on Facebook (account profiles or Facebook Pages).

Some evidence of constituency-level activity could be found online for 85 MLAs. Again, approximately half was visible on websites (individual, constituency or party) and half on Facebook (account profiles or Facebook Pages).

Very few MLAs, constituencies or parties linked to resources that would automatically provide a view or a feed of activity within the NI Assembly. Eight MLAs linked to They Work For You (which provides links to speeches and voting records) or the NI Assembly question database.

A single MLA linked to a now deprecated BBC Democracy Live feature, allowing constituents to watch videos of their contributions in the Assembly chamber and committee rooms.

Only 13 MLAs published major speeches online. Only five of those referenced anything in the last six months. More published a few paragraphs in press releases.

It is clear that picture and video galleries are common tick list requirements when parties or MLAs specify new websites. However, once launched, effort is not sustained to replenish the content.

78 MLAs published photo galleries on their individual or constituency websites or their Facebook profiles or Pages. One MLA still kept their Flickr account up to date. Only 48 MLAs had added a new photograph within the last three months.

25 MLAs published videos on their individual or constituency websites or their Facebook profiles or Pages. The majority of these were hosted on YouTube. Only eight MLAs had published a new video clip within the last three months (three on websites, five on Facebook).

Out of a total of 90 outgoing MLAs with discoverable Twitter accounts, exactly two thirds published a link to their Twitter profile from their individual, constituency or party website. Only 48 of these links worked. The remaining 12 mostly pointed to misspelt or old Twitter usernames that had long ago been renamed. In one case the MLAs Twitter account was set to private, so the advertised website link took constituents to their empty locked profile. Two MLAs who had their own Twitter accounts only linked to constituency Twitter profiles from their websites.

Of the 87 MLAs who had active individual Facebook profiles or Facebook Pages (that had been updated within the last month), only 48 published a link to their Facebook profile or Page from their individual, constituency or party website. Only 38 of these links worked. The remaining 10 were bad links or pointed to older now defunct Facebook Groups or Pages.

One MLA linked to their Instagram profile from an individual, constituency or party website. No pictures had been added since mid 2015.

Another MLA linked to their LinkedIn profile from an individual, constituency or party website. The profile was up to date.

No MLAs used online platforms to link to a Google+ profile from an individual, constituency or party website.

RSS feeds - allowing users to subscribe to updates through a blog post reader - were only available for 27 MLAs (on their individual or constituency websites). In one case, the RSS feed was not embedded in the website's metadata so could not be picked up automatically; instead it was just listed as a textual link on the human readable portion of the webpage.

Other observations

- One outgoing MLA (a party leader) had a personal website, but it had been configured (robots.txt) to prevent search engines indexing its content.
- A number of MLAs who entered the NI Assembly long before the 2011 election had particularly antiquated websites.

- One website for an MLA retiring at the end of the Assembly term has not changed its design since its launch back in March 2006. It was kept up to date with press releases until February 2015, though the photo gallery hadn't been added to since 2011.
- One MLA's main URL redirected back to a hand-built website still hosted on an old Tiscali domain. The news archive stretches back to September 2004.

ABOUT STRATAGEM

The first public affairs company in Northern Ireland, Stratagem has supported organisations through the delivery of integrated public affairs and public relations support for nearly two decades.

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We strive to make positive social and environmental impacts in the work we do with our clients, helping to foster a society that is peaceful, participative and democratic.

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