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What citizens want:
How young citizens are behaving in the digital era
and what parliamentarians need to know to respond

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Foreword

The previous study in this series reported the results of an investigation into how the technologically 'early adopter' set of Parliamentarians view, respond to and use new communications technologies. The analysis presented a tri-partite model of parliamentarians: the Representative, the Party Actor, and the Legislator, each role making use of ICT in a different way.

This paper will look at things from the other side of the political fence – citizens, and in particular, young ones – the 'beneficiaries' or 'victims' of representation, party wooing and legislation. Here, we present a picture of how young people (and by their very nature, early adopters) are viewing and using technologies, and how they view and 'do' politics (or not). Just as with the tri-partite nature of the parliamentarians, this paper looks at three dimensions of our young citizens: consumers, social beings, and political actors.

The previous paper was designed to take things forward, by setting out user needs and recommendations to aid problem areas, and hence it included recommendations for individual parliamentarians and their Parliaments.

In the same vein, the recommendations set out in this paper are designed for those politicians, parties and parliaments ready for a change, and reforming groups and individuals ready to support them. This paper presents some of the most recent investigations into citizens, participation, politics, and online behaviour¹ and builds on some already presented broad recommendations for change - taking them to the next level. Here, we translate a broad reform agenda into a concrete set of actions which comply with, and hopefully move towards implementation of these very 'global' level recommendations.

Please note this report is based on information and published research conducted mainly, but not entirely in the UK and USA. Hence the conclusions and recommendations may apply to any European country, the reader should bear this in mind when reviewing the conclusions and recommendations, which may or may not be applicable to their country.

i Introduction

Parliamentarians & Citizens – An unhappy marriage

Parliamentarians and citizens in most developed democracies, seem hopelessly bound together in a somewhat unhappy marriage: Both of them can be said to be on the one hand, dissatisfied and resentful, while on the other seeking for more opportunities to interact, converse, be listened to and in general, more responsiveness.

The risk in this situation is not only a potentially acrimonious divorce, but a risk of long term damage to the institution – the parliamentary representative system - itself.

A Crisis of Engagement?

There is little dispute that the political marriage has broken down.

‘Political realists’ now argue that the public has become an almost superfluous presence within the political system, invariably ill-informed, inconsistent in its opinions, uninfluential when it participates and unable to overcome the mysteries of rational choice calculations when it votes.ⁱⁱ

Only the most narrow-minded refuse to accept that the current disengagement is real, and requires a real response. The causes have been much debated, and range from perceived voter apathy, disinterest or laziness, to negative media, or even a general contentment among the voting population.

However, recent more in-depth research into this disengagement, experienced by most developed democracies, points to deep structural and systemic problems, which require appropriately meaningful responses.

The risks of inaction, are too big to ignoreⁱⁱⁱ:

A loss of mandate and legitimacy, and with it, a diminished political equality; Lack of dialogue between the governors and the governed, essential to representation; Heavily diluted recruitment pool for political leaders; The rise of undemocratic forces; and the rise of ‘quiet authoritarianism’ (where governments are no longer held to account).

Generation Y or Generation M

The ‘young citizens’ referred to in this paper are the group known as Generation Y, or latterly, Generation M – i.e. those born between 1980 and 2000.

Generation Y (aka The Net Generation, Millennials, Echo Boomers, iGeneration and Google Generation) is generally considered to be the last generation born in the 20th century, i.e. includes those in their mid and early 20s, teenagers and children over the age of 5.

More recently, Generation M (where M stands for media, "Me, Myself, and I", "middle income", or "millennium, marketing and media") is a variant on the Generation Y label, describing same generation, with a more media- and Internet- savvy consumer bent. They are characterized by a high availability of leisure time, critical but not rebellious thinking and generally acting younger than their biological age. Moving out of their parents' houses late and frequent job changes are also thought to be typical.

In terms of their use of new media, this group is increasingly 'dependent' on the internet and new technologies, for a wide range of activities, from managing their daily lives to building and maintaining virtual communities.^{iv} A recent study found that a staggering '82% of (US) kids are online by the seventh grade' (aged 12-13 yrs).^v

From first to second generation internet: Web 1.0 to 2.0

The arrival of the internet brought the information superhighway, the transformation of time and space, working life, migration of services and business processes to an online, any-time, any-place environment..... evolving from brochure-ware to transactions and e-commerce; transforming how public and private sectors conduct their business – 'front and back office'.

Web 2.0, on the other hand, claims to signal a total transformation in the nature of social and commercial interaction, placing powerful tools in the hands of the end user (at the expense of the provider, supplier...) forcing a transformation in the very nature of the relationship, not only the service provision.

Web 2.0 is about second generation of services available on the World Wide Web that lets people collaborate and share information online. In contrast to the first generation, Web 2.0 gives users an experience closer to using desktop applications than the traditional static Web pages.^{vi} Web 2.0 applications use a combination of techniques to allow for mass publishing (web-based social software), including blogs and wikis, and web syndication. Still a buzzword, it incorporates whatever is new and popular on the Web (such as tags and podcasts), but it has already generated new trends in behaviour amongst the web 2.0 savvy users – Generation M.

Within this new realm, user generated content renders the audience the subject; values of liberty, freedom, respect rule, and characteristics such as listening, continuous conversations, engagement, and harnessing the collective (whether information, music resources, opinions, intelligence) become the norm. With it has developed a disaggregated, devolved empowerment of the individual user (the public) which appears to fit well with the concomitant interactive evolution of traditional media, where television has developed its live core of reality TV programming.

ii Generation M as (online) consumers

Whether it's Generation Y or M, our young 'adolescents' are both high *consumers* and *users* of ICTs: *consumers* as purchasers of the gadgets, and *users* as these technologies are deployed to assist them in their other consumer habits.

New media and technology are their life. They are spending an average of 6.5 hours per day, exposed to or using new media^{vii}. They are extremely high consumers of technological products and services (Mobile phones, handheld devices, music players and music, cameras, video and web-cams, DVD players and recorders, computers, gaming devices and games...), but not only. Gen M are seeking self-representation through their product choices, particularly true in the case of 'aesthetics of clothes and leisure activities'.

Critical researchers

From sneakers or concert tickets to 'eco-package' holidays, today's web savvy young adults are smart and critical shoppers who understand how to use the available technologies to inform themselves and complete their transactions. They have developed the necessary research skills to always know where to find the cheapest, the best, the free, the latest... of the gadgets, goods and services they want. 'Gen M' tend to be extraordinarily good at finding and manipulating information, and are particularly adept at analyzing visual data and images^{viii}.

Their critical judgement has been developed through much word-of-mouth exchange with their friends, and honed with the aid of web-based comparative shopping applications. They have high expectations in terms of range and choice, which has become almost a 'meta value' and won't make allowances.

Empowered consumers

To some extent, the concept of consumer power has become more of a reality with Generation M. They are informed, critical, expectant, remain somewhat value driven, ready to spend, but equally ready to punish purveyors of poor quality, disrespect or lack of values.

They have come to expect high quality goods and services and are very 'process aware' – conscious of how they are treated at every step of the way (and hence the increasing research into satisfaction as an output of the consumption experience^{ix}). Conditioned by the 'instant refund if the price changes'^x customer policy, poorly designed or slow e-commerce websites, or bad customer returns policies won't go unnoticed, and frequently will thwart a successful sale.

Furthermore, the prevalence and strength of 'word of mouth' (read: 'viral web') as a central feature of online Gen M behaviour has meant that a single negative customer experience can soon turn into an international corporate nightmare. (For example, see the re-mastered Dell 'Hell' website by a dissatisfied customer, beamed round the world in seconds by thousands of other amused potential customers)^{xi}.

They are not however, unforgiving. Successfully resolved customer complaints can generate not just improved vendor image but actual (rather than just potential) repeat custom.^{xii} Moreover, research has shown that managing dissatisfaction proactively not only prevents loss of business but builds customer loyalty.^{xiii}

The power of the crowd

While amongst the literature on the sociology of consumption there has been a great emphasis on the ‘individualized activity of choosing amongst the products of a global market’^{xiv} many parts of the consumer process are, in fact driven and influenced by a group dynamic. Generation M ‘listen to’ and advise each other much more, whether online, by phone, or SMS. They have unwittingly developed more than a conversational addiction – but a consultation habit, regularly checking the barometer of opinion among their friends and virtual networks.

This ‘consultation habit’ has provoked an interesting corporate response: business gurus are now advising companies to think beyond their usual ‘marketing minded’ communications strategies, and involve their potential audiences in product development and business decision-making. The ultimate in consumer empowerment!

A word about exclusion: Generation –M

Generation M is predominantly about the haves, rather than the have-nots, where choice is a ‘consumer society’s meta-value’^{xv}. They are products of the contented majority^{xvi}, who themselves exert considerable influence over the consumer choices of their baby-boomer parents. The have-nots, on the other hand, pumped full of the same wants and desires are left behind, “consigned to a new, more individualized and isolating form of poverty,”^{xvii} depending on a welfare state which fails to provide the empowerment their more financially secure counterparts enjoy.

...And the markets answer

So how is the commercial world responding to Generation M and its web 2.0 way of life? Marketers and media companies recognize that young adults are extremely marketing-savvy and have little brand loyalty, making them difficult marketing targets^{xviii}

They understand that the era of 'spin' and 'happy talk' is over, to be replaced by press releases as deconstructed, tagged paragraphs, ripe for the picking of the viral buzzing hoards of public commentators, who will report their own, un-spun 'user' take on events. There is a clear shift in the position of the opinion leaders among the marketing professionals, in line with the mood change occurring across the wired generations:

“...We'll be a means by which a company can reach out to bloggers to affect product development... We [the PR industry] have to be about truth, listening, learning, and telling the corporation stuff it doesn't want to hear. Five years from now, I hope PR people have the balls to say what they know. We need to give clients good advice.... forging stronger relationships for companies with their employees, who can become a primary and credible source of information to the general public.”^{xix}

Edelman even foresees the role of PR in the future being about initiating ‘ties with traditional adversaries such as non governmental organizations, whose involvement is required to achieve trusted solutions to difficult issues.’

There is even a discussion about involving consumers early on in the process of product development, “getting involved at an early stage in co-creating brands with enthusiastic and informed consumers, not just at product launch as at present”,^{xx} echoing similar debates about which stage of the policy making cycle to involve citizens.

For the corporate world, however, the rules of engagement are clear. While multi-nationals such as Walmart try to enter into conversations with ‘Walmart friendly’ bloggers they are extremely cautious about the perceived honesty and transparency of their approach, all too aware of the nightmare that might befall a company who disrespects the rules and values of the community.

iii Generation M as social beings

As predicted, generation M are equally self-determined and intense in their online social, and entertainment habits. While US teenagers are spending over 8 hours per day (albeit crammed into a real 6.5 hours)^{xxi} in mainly social and entertainment-oriented online activity, the European trend will not be too far behind. The mantra is: always in contact, conducting multiple simultaneous conversations, via multiple channels.

No more the lonely geek

This generation is entertainment or pleasure motivated and sociable. Contrary to the early stereotype of the isolated geek interacting online and failing to cultivate their already non-existent social skills, generation M are highly sociable – and indeed much of their online activity is both driven by a need for intense interaction, and complemented by much offline activity.

The staggering growth in social networking websites is testimony to the addiction to constructing, maintaining and participating in new social networks: joining online communities, sharing their thoughts, opinions, diaries, photos, music and videos.... with a community of known and unknown others. Moving on from *Friends Reunited* (a distinctly Web 1.0 phenomenon) teens and twentysomethings across the world are flocking to online hubs such as *Bebo*, *Myspace*, *Facebook*, *Friendster*, *del.icio.us*, *youtube*, in an attempt to establish their social identities, including building their offline 'social currency'. *Myspace*, has a staggering 60 million users. On *youtube* 35,000 new videos are added each day, and 30 million videos are viewed daily. *Myspace* is "where you go when you need a friend to nurse you through a breakup, a mentor to tutor you on your calculus homework, an address for the party everyone is going to. ...For a giant brand like Coke, these networks also offer a direct pipeline to the thirsty but fickle youth market"^{xxii}.

Are our politicians missing the boat here? Interacting with each other, in highly participatory and democratic fashion, these communities are transparent, democratic, equality-producing, successfully securing the active participation of what are, for political elites, the Holy Grail of voterdom.

"The Toadies broke up. It was four years ago, when Amanda Adams was 16. She drove into Dallas from suburban Plano, Tex., on a school night to hear the final two-hour set of the local rock band, which had gone national with a hit 1995 album. "Tears were streaming down my face," she recalls, a slight Texas lilt to her voice. During the long summer that followed, Adams turned to the Web in search of solace, plugging the lead singer's name into Google repeatedly until finally his new band popped up. She found it on Buzz-Oven.com, a social networking Web site for Dallas teens. Adams jumped onto the Buzz-Oven network, posting an online self-portrait (dark hair tied back, tongue out, goofy eyes for the cam) and listing her favorite music so she could connect with other Toadies fans. Soon she was heading off to biweekly meetings at Buzz-Oven's airy loft in downtown Dallas and helping other "Buzzers" judge their favorite groups in marathon battle-of-the-bands sessions.

(Buzz-Oven.com promotes the winners.) At her school, Frisco High -- and at malls and concerts -- she passed out free Buzz-Oven sampler CDs plastered with a large logo from Coca-Cola Inc., which backs the site in the hope of reaching more teens on their home turf. Adams also brought dozens of friends to the concerts Buzz-Oven sponsored every few months. "It was cool, something I could brag about," says Adams, now 20 and still an active Buzzer.

Now that Adams is a junior at the University of North Texas at Denton, she's online more than ever. It's 7 p.m. on a recent Saturday, and she has just sweated her way through an online quiz for her advertising management class. (The quiz was "totally out of control," write classmates on a school message board minutes later.) She checks a friend's blog entry on MySpace.com to find out where a party will be that night. Then she starts an Instant Messenger (IM) conversation about the evening's plans with a few pals.

At the same time, her boyfriend IMs her a retail store link to see a new PC he just bought, and she starts chatting with him. She's also posterizing for the next Buzz-Oven concert by tacking the flier on various friends' MySpace profiles, and she's updating her own blog on Xanga.com, another social network she uses mostly to post photos. The TV is set to TBS, which plays a steady stream of reruns like *Friends* and *Seinfeld* -- Adams has a TV in her bedroom as well as in the living room -- but she keeps the volume turned down so she can listen to iTunes over her computer speakers. Simultaneously, she's chatting with dorm mate Carrie Clark, 20, who's doing pretty much the same thing from a laptop on her bed".^{xxiii}

Extract from lead article, *Business Week* 12/12/05

Far from anonymity, all this online-initiated social activity is not taking place in an abstract virtual world, but with strong links to users offline identity and real communities.

Moreover, while (American) kids are spending their 6.5 hours per day on new media, the same young people are also reported to be spending more time with their families, being physically active and pursuing other hobbies.^{xxiv}

Contrary to expectations, investigations into the motivations of 'LAN gamers' at an event dominated by 19.5 year old males, spending 2.5 hrs per day gaming, revealed that the social context is not just highly important, but their primary motivation (with 'need to know more about gaming', and the competitive aspect coming second and third).^{xxv}

An examination of face-to-face social networks and mobile phone text message-mediated social networks, revealed that levels of intimacy of those friends communicating through both channels (FTF and MPTM) rated higher than those with only face-to-face interaction.^{xxvi}

A strong anchoring to offline cultural and social groups links cyberspace to local communities^{xxvii} Research into territoriality and generations has shown that while first generation immigrants have been using technologies to reflect their offline networks (maintaining contacts and organizing communities) the online practices of the second generation reflect these networks in new and 'subtler' ways -- forming partially sovereign communities that 'pivot on hyphenated identities'^{xxviii}

Mainstream news and media follows UGC

True to web 2.0 ethos, generation M are sidelining the mainstream news output of traditional media, in favour of their own 'user generated content' (UGC). Even the news producers themselves are leaning not just to the picking up of user stories and photos, but actually creating content deals with UGC and civic journalism sites. While in 2004 the world saw the first photos of the Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta uploaded to *flickr* and subsequently reproduced by the mainstream news agencies, in 2006 the South Korea based citizen journalism project *OhMyNews* is among many to strike a deal content exchange deal with the mainstream media – in this case, the International Herald Tribune.

This trend is echoed on mainstream television, with the survival and evolution of reality TV (in programmes such as *Pop Idol* and *Big Brother*) and the consequent new participatory relationship between viewer and screen.^{xxix}

Much debate about the utility and 'worth' (or worthiness?) of all this activity.

It is generally accepted that the informational uses of mass media have a positive link to production of social capital and civic involvement, and the use of internet for information exchange (predominantly amongst the young) more strongly influences trust in people and civic engagement. Conversely, however, it has been argued that social-recreational uses of new media are negatively linked to these civic indicators.^{xxx}

An important question remains as to the impact of increased user content in TV programming on public values. 'Mainstreaming', the tendency of high media exposure to be associated with movement towards the cultural mean or centre of gravity, has typically taken the shape of a values shift towards the more traditional or conservative positions of the Television world, by those non-holders, following high exposure.^{xxxi}

But with the rise of audience driven, focused and even produced programming comes more variation in the represented values (i.e. less conservative positions), and hence the influencing centre of gravity.

iv M-powered as Citizens?

Disengaged but not apathetic

Now we have glimpsed the Generation M in their natural habitat, we turn to a less common environment.

Formal political involvement amongst this group is limited. (Only 37% of those aged between 18 and 24 voted in the 2005 UK elections.)^{xxxii}. A recent enquiry in the UK into the health of British democracy reported that they tend to get involved only “when things go wrong”, usually in response to an intolerable, emotive and isolated situation.^{xxxiii} In this case, it might be to join (or less frequently, to set up) a campaign; write to, contact or visit a Member of Parliament, and demonstrate. Rarely, will young people contribute to a formal consultation.

Informal political involvement, on the other hand is thriving. Many of those disenchanted with ‘politics’ are actively involved in charity work, some form of volunteering, petitions, and local community groups. Online, this translates into forwarding email petitions, disseminating and sharing information of concern, and other public interest activities. In general, generation Y or M are more likely to express themselves as ‘active citizens’ through the online/interactive environment than in more traditional spaces of civic engagement.

Understandably, informal involvement can provide greater returns: a sense of satisfaction, of ‘doing something worthwhile’, which often delivers direct results – i.e. more efficacy linked to their inputs.

In depth research by the Power Commission revealed the reasons cited for their limited involvement in formal political affairs, and the concomitant low levels of influence are:

- uncertainty and personal insecurity - the fear of not making sense, not knowing enough or ridicule (particularly among young women)
- a general lack of awareness of the participative options available (and particularly a fear of an un-ending involvement)
- Underlying alienation from existing political systems and structures (manifested by a negative attitude towards politics, regarding any public involvement as mere lip-service, since ‘all decisions have already taken’)
- Previous poor experiences of involvement and lack of trust in things working out better in future
- A general disinterest – and to a much lesser extent, laziness

Generation M, like many others in the disaffected camp, don’t feel they have much control or influence over issues that affect their lives. (In the recent British Election Study, 67% of the population rated their influence on public affairs between 0 and 3, (where 0 equals none, and 10 is very high)).

They feel that not being involved, deprives them of the possibility to influence policy formation in the areas of social life that are important to them (i.e. mainly issues that affect their lives and communities, local health, education provision, crime, law and order and also

national and global issues such as environment, global security). Ironically, for a group used to constant interaction, and increasingly being consulted in commercial decision making circles, the idea of on-going influence (in policy formation or political decision making) is alien, and involvement is a distant concept.

In their findings, Power has tried to dispel some of the myths that surround general political disengagement, including that of young people. Their research rejects the commonplace explanations of an apathetic, uninterested public, with a weak sense of civic duty, or lack of involvement as a sign of widespread economic and political contentment. Similarly, other false explanations are the lack of competitive elections, the existence of an overly negative and cynical (news) media or plainly, a lack of time.

In reality, the disengaged claim they don't have enough influence, that the political parties are too similar, lacking in principle, and not offering enough choice; that the (British electoral) system leads to unequal and wasted votes; that parties and elections require public commitment or endorsement of too broad a range of policies. In addition, a lack of information and understanding about formal policies, and inconvenience of participative (voting) procedures are also cited.

Search for the authentic representative

Reporting on his recent research among Big Brother voters in the UK, Coleman^{xxxiv} describes the "Rise of the remote-control citizen" which constitutes a new kind of citizenship, combining autonomy and flexibility of the audience with the collective decision making of the traditional political public.

Coleman also rejects the image of the disengaged (in this case, Big Brother viewers) as apathetic 'couch potatoes': 51% of whom described themselves as 'good citizens' Suggesting that these active and critical audiences might even be more discriminating than those driven by 'blind duty or deaf indifference', he draws a contrast between the 'enervated condition of the political public and the empowered status of media audiences'^{xxxv}

The insights delivered into the mindset of the Big Brother viewer – to a large extent, synonymous with generation Y/M – cover their information searching, talking about politics and voting in the (then) upcoming election, and the 'search for the *real* representative'.

This last element, strikes at the heart of what it is that is important for generation M, to see in their politicians: "in an age of mediated politics, the role of being a representative entails appearing to be someone who is extraordinary enough to represent others, but ordinary enough to be representative of others"^{xxxvi}

This evidence suggests that citizens support for policies and politicians depend as much upon how they *feel* about them, than what they *know* about them.

Incredibly enough, for a group of skilled people-watchers, expert in judging the credibility of others, they claimed to have real difficulty in assessing the authenticity and ordinariness of their political candidates – of supreme importance to their own political decision making. This presumably, says more about the obscurantist party campaign strategies than any failure of judgement, from a group who have strong self-belief in their ability to recognise the authentic:

The Big Brother viewers think that if they were to decide the election outcome the result would be more genuine because those politicians selected would be more real, true, trustworthy... and because they have 'more representative judgement than the existing middle class voters who decide now'.

What Gen M citizens want

- *Power and influence*

Unsurprisingly, young people want more influence in areas of importance to them. They want direct and meaningful power but at the same time, are undoubtedly sceptical about whether this will deliver results.

- *More transparency and accountability*

They want to better understand what's going on, when it affects or concerns them, what they can do and more influence control.

- *Information from neutral trusted sources*

In terms of information, young people want political information provided by their trusted informers. The Big Brother research showed that the election information most trusted by the BB viewers came from journalistic sources, not the Parties themselves, and they least trusted politicians speeches (47%).^{xxxvii}

- *Ordinary, listening political representatives*

Citizens want 'ordinary persons' and 'good listeners' to represent them in politics. To the Big Brother audience, Jamie Oliver is more real, has more values, and is more credible, than Tony Blair – and is also deemed to have more impact on the world around him!

- *Broadening the definitions of what is political*

Rigid definitions of what constitutes 'political participation' fail to take account of other much indulged forms of democratic activity. "People who do not think of themselves as acting politically frequently find themselves employing democratic discourses and principles..."^{xxxviii}

- *Widening of the political agenda*

Following on from broadening the definition of political activity, the political agenda itself is in need of reworking. Many young people, while completely switched off by the narrow agendas saturating mainstream media, (as with BBs during the election campaign) are interested and active on issues and subjects completely unrelated (global warming, war in Iraq).

- *Enjoyment not duty*

As can be observed by the entertainment seeking, social network building and leisure occupied generation M, a commitment to participate is more likely if motivated by enjoyment than a sense of obligation.

On this note, Coleman warns of any concerns over “dumbing down”:

The “image of Big Brother as a refuge for a politically distracted generation, which squanders its precious votes on televised popularity polls while refusing to meet its civic obligations at the ballot box reflects a hopelessly narrow conception of politics which assumes that the professionally-devised agendas of political elites must be of greater value than those emanating from common experience.”^{xxxix}

In short, Web 2.0 citizens want genuine responses to their disenfranchisement, not more political marketing: Gimmicks may work once, or twice, but will soon be seen for what they are.

vi. Parliamentarians: Meet Generation M!

In the last sections, we have glimpsed the general outlook and trends taking place among the younger, completely-connected generation. How does this knowledge translate into experience for politicians?

On the basis of our research, we have constructed a schema of “*What’s required to reconnect Generation M*”. These are the more ‘top-level’ pointers for politicians to start out in their re-connection efforts.

However, in order to begin a more sustained and ‘authentic’ relationship, a deeper, fundamental change is required. Changes of this nature have already been scoped by the aforementioned Power Commission, in some detail.

In this section, we provide an outline of these recommendations with comments which may serve as a guide to their implementation. While these recommendations were developed for the UK parliamentary system, we have used these results as a basis for our work for two main reasons:

- i) The research required to reach the conclusions of any worth, on such weighty and fundamental matters, is well beyond the scope of this research exercise. The work undertaken by the Power Commission in the UK, was however appropriately extensive, comprehensive and in-depth, producing insightful and forward thinking results.
- ii) Although Power Commission was set up to examine democracy in the UK, their analysis of the problems and a great many of the subsequent recommendations are relevant and applicable to many developed democracies.

10 Golden Rules of (Gen M) Engagement

How to be treated

- 1 **Respect**
 - Respect their intelligence, independence, need to be communicated with, own 'rules of engagement', priorities and issues of concern – and need for expectation setting.
 - Don't invade, spam, mass market, or target them - but engage.
- 2 **Understand what affects them**
 - Recognise when they are affected or concerned by issues or subjects that you may be dealing with, of have some influence over
- 3 **Value their input**
 - and show them when this input is used and valued.

Where to find them

- 4 **Go to their favourite places** – not yours.
 - Start to communicate with them on their favourite sites, interact with their favourite bloggers (their opinion leaders), dialogue with their favourite media (traditional offline press/TV/radio and internet).
 - Identify the main 'hangouts' (physical and virtual) and let them know you are ready to be present.

What to offer

- 5 **Listening ear**
 - Don't just be 'ready to' listen, be proactive in it.
 - First ask them what they want you to know. *Then* ask what you want to find out from them.
 - Make sure that your 'listening exercise' is regular and becomes a permanent feature of how you relate to them – and let them know about it.
 - Remember to provide feedback to the wider group, on what you've heard, understood and plan to do about it.
- 6 **Opportunity to initiate and influence**
 - Define a process for them to take initiative with you (whether this is to put issues on your agenda, to request you to do something on their behalf... or innovate
 - Demonstrate clearly where, how and when they can influence things – with you, issues you're working on, other bodies/organs of governance, etc.
 - Be certain to set expectations about what can be achieved at each stage

7 **Transparency & Accountability**

- Be more transparent about what you are doing:
Show them how you spend your time, what are you working on, what you are trying to achieve, who you are meeting with and what you discuss - and how much you are paid
- Be more accountable for your actions:
Explain what you have done, and why, and what this has achieved, and for whom – and particularly explain things in terms of who benefits and loses

How to do it

8 **Making information available – and used!**

- Make sure that all the relevant information is available in the right format, accessible in the right places at the right times.
- Do not inundate them with information – make sure it is short & sweet (do not overestimate the ‘eyeball space and time’ you have allotted)
- Use the most appropriate media channels for the information available
- Use a web 2.0 type strategy (i.e. disaggregated approach) to getting your information ‘out there’
- Assessment: Always make sure you can find out what’s being read, and by whom/how many – or why not.
- Feedback: allow and facilitate feedback on each information item

9 **Innovation in engagement opportunities**

- Work hard to be innovative in how you engage (at least at the outset, while you are trying to break into new territory).
- Enable them to participate and contribute to something in a new or different way (without detracting from the substance and value, and not resorting to gimmicks)

10 **Maintain communications channels**

- Be accessible as much of the time as possible, setting expectations about when you are/are not available. Remember, this is a constant-contact generation, who can understand when you’re not available – but don’t expect to be ignored.
- Do not be afraid of communications overload. You will find ways to manage any increase in contact – this is after all what the objective is.

And finally...

10 ***Don’t try to be cool.***

Be yourself – you will be more appreciated for being genuine than ridiculed for being the older, out of touch politician you are expected to be.

Addressing fundamental change

In overview, the Power Commission articulated a fundamental reform agenda, designed address the systemic weaknesses which cause (or contribute to) the problems of public disengagement from formal politics. This agenda has three main axes:

- i) Rebalancing of power away from Executive and unaccountable bodies to Parliament and local government
- ii) The Introduction of greater responsiveness and choice into the electoral and party system
- iii) Allow citizens more direct and focused say over political decisions & policies

The detailed recommendations associated with these three broad axes are outlined below. Those recommendations that are most 'transferable' are likely to be those in the third section, given the relative peculiarities of the British electoral system.

POWER Commission recommendations

1. *Rebalancing Power: Between Executive and unaccountable bodies, to Parliament and Local Government*

	Recommendation	Comments
1	Concordat between Executive & Parliament indicating where key powers lie, and providing significant powers of scrutiny and initiation, for Parliament	Should be flexible and revised by mutual agreement
2	Parliamentary committees given independence and enhanced powers, including to scrutinise and veto key government appointments and to subpoena witnesses to appear before them	Should include proper resourcing. Upper House committee should be able to co-opt external expertise when considering complex legislation or policy
3	Limits to be placed on the power of party whips	
4	Parliament to have greater powers to initiate legislation, launch public inquiries and act on public petitions.	
5	Reform Upper House membership: 70% to be selected by a responsive electoral system for 3 parliamentary terms	Suggest minimum age (40yrs) to avoid career politicians with no other world experience
6	Decentralization of powers from central to local government	
7	Concordat between central & local government setting out respective powers	
8	Local government powers enhanced to be able to raise taxes and administer own finances	
9	Independent mapping of Quangos (non-elected public bodies) and other public bodies to clarify and renew lines of accountability between elected and unelected authority	
10	Ministerial meetings with business representatives to be logged and listed (monthly basis)	
11	New overarching select committee to scrutinise Executives activities in supra-national bodies and multi-lateral negotiations (esp. EU) and hold these to account and conducted in best interests of the people	

2. Real Parties, True Elections: Electoral & party system changes

	Recommendation
12	Introduce responsive electoral system to both Houses of Parliament and local councils
13	Closed list system to have no place in modern elections
14	Replace requirement for (election) candidate deposit threshold with collecting supporters signatures, in order to appear on the ballot
15	The Electoral Commission to take more active role in promoting candidacy, to ensure more women, people from black & ethnic minorities, low income groups, young people and independents are encouraged to stand for election.
16	Voting and candidacy age limits to be lowered to 16 years. (except candidacy for Upper House – Lords)
17	Introduce automatic individual voter registration at 16 yrs.
18	Citizen Curriculum in schools should be revised: Made shorter, more practical, and result in a qualification
19	Party donations from individuals should be capped at £10,000, and organisational donations capped at £100 per member and subject to full democratic scrutiny within the organisation
20	State funding to support local activity by political parties and independent candidates, based on the allocation of individual voter vouchers (£3 per year to be allocated per voter, to the candidate of their choice – to be used for local activity).
21	Text and email voting to be considered, only after other reforms have taken place
22	Accelerate realignment of constituency boundaries

3. Downloading power: More influence for citizens

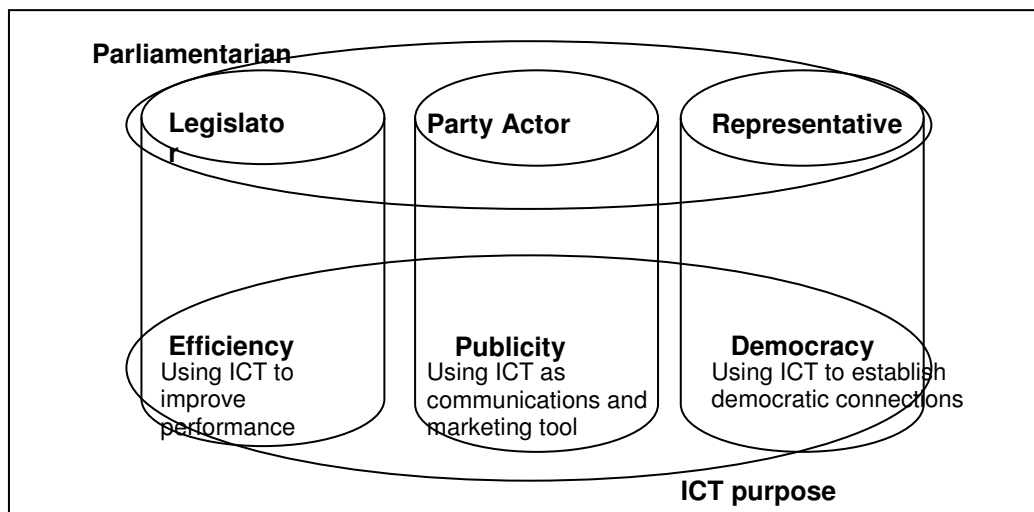
	Recommendation	Details/Comments
23	All public bodies required to meet duty of public involvement in their decision & policy making	<p>Genuinely mean 'involvement' not lip-service 5 principles of good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Influence</i>: Involvement processes must offer a measure of real influence over final decisions • <i>Feedback</i>: Participants need a full explanation of how their views were taken into account • <i>Deliberation</i>: A structured space where all involved can explain & discuss (face-to-face) • <i>Information</i>: Equal provision of all relevant information in an accessible format to inform decision making • <i>Independence</i>: Design and implementation by independent bodies, wherever possible <p><i>Expected outcome</i>: Imbue all public decision & policy making with culture of effective public involvement; challenge widespread public sense of lack of involvement</p>
24	Citizens should have the right to initiate legislative processes, public enquiries and hearings into public bodies & their senior management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The threat is often enough to ensure greater account is taken of public wishes and concerns • To avoid hijacking by professional lobbying organisations & media a suggested process includes time & opportunity for detailed public deliberation. • This right would operate at local and national level. <p><i>Expected outcome</i>: Allows citizens to decide what issues are important, and provide them with power over these issues. Public interest in single issues will re-connect them to formal democratic processes. Hearings on public bodies boost accountability; Rebalances relationship between state & citizen</p>
25	Reform of rules on plurality of media ownership (especially in light of digital	Concern that media has overtly strong influence over government policy & decisions

	broadcast & internet)	Efficacy of reforms outlined by the Power Commission may be limited by a media lacking in political diversity and responsible use of its political power.
26	Requirement that public service broadcasters develop strategies to involve viewers in deliberation on matters of public importance (aided by use of ICT)	Broadcast media is key to seizing the opportunity to engage large numbers in deliberation on issues of national importance – but broadcasters with a public service remit should be required to undertake this.
27	Members of Parliament required & resourced to produce annual reports , hold AGMs and make more use of innovative engagement techniques	MPs felt to be ‘not listening enough’ – more accountable to parties, than voters Annual Reports to be distributed to all voters in the constituency and discussed at the AGM – organised according to best practices – both specifically funded. <i>Expected outcome:</i> Address lack of formal, resourced and high profile methods for MPs to listen and respond to voters concerns, between elections
28	Ministerial meetings with campaign groups/their representatives should be logged and listed (monthly)	
29	Creation of new independent national statistical information service to provide spin-free information to the public	
30	Democracy hubs (resource centres) to be set up in each local authority area	

vii. Conclusions

Generation M, as we have tried to show here, are not beyond the reach of our politicians. Indeed, it is a generation ‘ripe for the picking’, always ready and interested to communicate, interact, engage – as long as the tone, time, place, and substance are right!

Fig. 1: How parliamentarians use ICT



In the previous study, we presented a model of how parliamentarians are using new technologies in their work (Fig.1). Similarly, an (albeit simplified) model representing how young citizens are using new media in their own lives can help us to map the two together (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

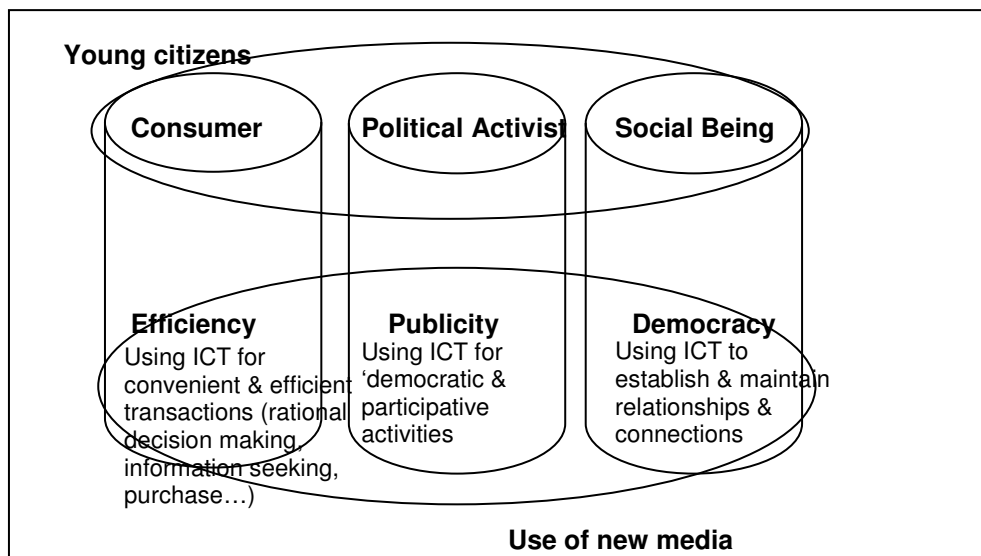
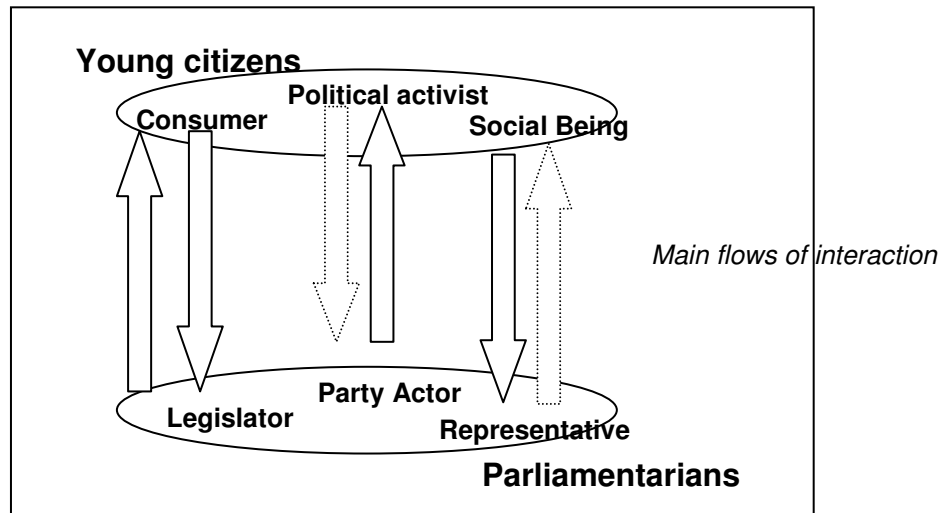


Fig. 2: Young citizens use of new media

Fig. 3: Potential flows of interaction using ICT



The above model (Fig. 3) represents the potential for overlap, in the different modes of using new communications technologies, by parliamentarians and young citizens. An albeit over-simplified version of events, this model represents the similarities in approach to using ICT of the Parliamentarians and the Generation M citizen, in their three roles.

Parliamentary Legislator and Gen M Consumer:

Both want relevant comprehensive inputs, delivered in a convenient fashion, on which to base their informed decisions, and complete the transaction/legislation efficiently.

Political Actor (Parliamentarian) and Political Activist (Citizen):

The parliamentarian wants to broadcast, publicise, campaign and win support for his/her party or cause – and relate to potential multipliers (citizens) in the process. The citizen is ready to campaign for their cause (or party), and in so doing, possibly building alliances with and acting as multiplier for the parliamentarian.

Parliamentary Representative and Social Being:

The Social Being wants to create and sustain social relationships, feel part of a community and exchange with others – in an enjoyable and fulfilling way. The Representative wants to know and understand the needs, interests and views of his/her citizens, and in doing so needs to be able to tap into these networks, and inquire in an un-invasive, friendly manner.

From this vantage point, the constantly discussed gap between political elites and young (non) voters is not an unbridgeable divide. It is possible to identify some common points in how the two groups are playing out their various roles, within the new media reality. It is now up to the politicians and their institutions to take the first steps, to do which they have to be ready for the results. The Finnish Orks (winners of the Eurovision Song Contest) speak volumes for what democracy unleashes!

Notes

- ⁱ Recent survey work of Prof. S. Coleman, European Social Survey, Eurobarometer Surveys
- ⁱⁱ Coleman, S. (2006), p.12
- ⁱⁱⁱ Clearly identified by the Power Commission
- ^{iv} McMillan, Sally J, “Exploring Models of Interactivity from Multiple Research Traditions: Users, Documents, And Systems”
- ^v Pew Internet and American Life Project
- ^{vi} The term was popularized by O'Reilly Media and MediaLive International as the name for a series of web development conferences, in October 2004.
- ^{vii} KFF
- ^{viii} Claudia Koonz, Professor of History, Duke University, cited in Time article (Wallis, C. “The multi-tasking generation”, *Time Magazine*. 27 March 2006)
- ^{ix} Singh, J Widing RE – Eur Journal of Marketing
- ^x Gap clothing company
- ^{xi} See www.thisistrue.com/dellhell.html or www.complaints.com
- ^{xii} See the literature on managing customer dissatisfaction. TARP (US government) study claimed 54.3% of dissatisfied customers would re-purchase when their complaints were satisfactorily resolved, while less than 20% said they'd re-purchase when complaints were not communicated to seller, or not resolved satisfactorily.
- ^{xiii} Singh and Widing
- ^{xiv} Baldock (2003) p.66
- ^{xv} Bauman Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Buckingham: Open University Press p.58
- ^{xvi} Bauman (1998), and Galbraith (1997)
- ^{xvii} Baldock, (2003) p.66
- ^{xviii} Jupiter Research “Reaching Elusive Audiences: Young Women and Men” Card, Wigder Matiesanu & Stein. September 8, 2005
- ^{xix} Richard Edelman, (Founder of Edelman PR) at ‘Syndicate’ (conference) New York, May 2006
- ^{xx} *ibid*
- ^{xxi} Similar research by Forrester Research Bouquet and Favier in 2006, puts this figure at 5.5. hours
- ^{xxii} *Business Week*, 12 December 2005
- ^{xxiii} *ibid*
- ^{xxiv} KFF p16
- ^{xxv} Jansz, J. and Martens, L. (2005)
- ^{xxvi} Igarashi et al. (2005)
- ^{xxvii} Matei, S. and Ball-Rokeach, S.J. (2001)
- ^{xxviii} Van den Bos, Nell
- ^{xxix} Holmes, (2004)
- ^{xxx} Shah, D., McLeod, J., and Yoon, S-H. (2001)
- ^{xxxi} Besley (2006) p47
- ^{xxxii} International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, www.idea.int
- ^{xxxiii} See findings of the (UK) Power Commission 2006.
- ^{xxxiv} Coleman, Coleman, S. (2006) p.12
- ^{xxxv} Coleman, S. (2006) p.12
- ^{xxxvi} *ibid* p21

^{xxxvii} 58% trusted the television coverage of the elections, as opposed to only 24% who trusted the party-produced materials (leaflets, manifestos)
^{xxxviii} Coleman, S. (2006)
^{xxxix} *ibid* p27

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