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They Work For You.com

Keeping tabs on the UK's parliaments & assemblies

Analysis of users and usage for UK Citizens Online Democracy

May 2011

Tobias Escher¹

<http://people.oi.ox.ac.uk/escher/> :: tobias@mysociety.org



¹ Tobias Escher is currently a Doctoral Student at the Oxford Internet Institute of the University of Oxford.

About this report

This report was commissioned by UK Citizens Online Democracy as part of an evaluation of the major mySociety websites.

UK Citizens Online Democracy
483 Green Lanes
LONDON
N13 4BS
United Kingdom

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Executive Summary

About

TheyWorkForYou is a website, launched in 2004, that provides detailed information on members of parliament (including their voting behaviour and expenses) as well as parliamentary proceedings such as debates. It covers the Westminster and the Scottish parliaments as well as the Northern Ireland Assembly. In 2006 it officially became a mySociety project.

Cost

The website cost only a few thousand pounds to set up, as a result of the major contributions to the site made by volunteers, but with annual maintenance costs of more than £20,000 it is currently the most expensive of mySociety's projects.

Usage

TheyWorkForYou is by far the most heavily used mySociety website, receiving on average between 200,000 and 300,000 visits every month. This is about twice as much as traffic to WhatDoTheyKnow which is currently the second most popular mySociety site. Noticeable usage peaks occurred in May 2009 during the height of the MP expenses scandal when many people visited the site to see the expenses records of their MPs (450,000 visits within one month), as well as in May 2010 when the site provided an election quiz to help voters decide on how to cast their vote in the General Election (280,000 visits in a week). The web statistics and data from the user survey suggest that about half of the overall audience of TheyWorkForYou are regular users that come to the site repeatedly, with about one in five using the site at least once a month. A considerable share of usage is work-related. Not only do 30% of respondents to the user survey state this explicitly but usage is also concentrated during working hours and working days.

The 2% of visits that can be directly attributed to the UK parliament are clearly motivated by professional interest, as well as the additional 2-3% from other governmental sources. However, two thirds of traffic is received from search engines with about 2% contributed by a Google Adwords campaign. About 10% of searches are explicitly for "TheyWorkForYou" but the majority are for names of specific representatives. The remaining 30% of traffic is split equally between direct entry and referring websites such as Wikipedia and the mySociety site WriteToThem which both contributed 1-2% of overall traffic.

By far the most popular content on TheyWorkForYou is the section with information about the House of Commons, which receives two thirds of all traffic. Within this section the profiles of individual MPs are of most interest while debates in the House receive only 15% of traffic. The option to receive email alerts for appearances of certain representatives or keywords in debates also proved popular, with almost 110,000 registered email alerts and a total of 2.8m alerts sent out in 2009 alone.

User satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the site as measured by the Net Promoter score is 18% which is considerably lower than that reported for WriteToThem (44%). Satisfaction levels are mainly related to whether users found the information they were looking for (Net Promoter score of 30%) or not (Net Promoter score of -30%). The only slight issue with the site seems to be with design, but almost all users think the site is very navigable and well structured.

User description

Data on users is derived from a user survey conducted between October 2009 and March 2010. Due to the nature of the site it was not possible to collect information from a representative sample of users. The data therefore can only be taken as indicative of broad trends (see section C.3 on Sample Bias / Representativeness).

In terms of prior political activity three out of five users (60%) have never looked up information on what their representatives were doing before they came across TheyWorkForYou. While there are clearly users who are already politically active, not only in relation to checking information on their representatives, and who are organized in groups, one in five users (21%) of the site has not been politically active within the last year, was not involved with a political or community group and has with the help of TheyWorkForYou looked up information on representatives for the first time.

In terms of demographics there is a strong male bias and a strong overrepresentation of people with a university degree that also translates into strong participation from high income groups. Few of these deviations can be explained by already existing biases in political participation as the observed bias is much stronger than the one reported for those who are politically active (for reference data see section 4.1 Political Engagement in Britain). Also in the TheyWorkForYou audience people above the age of 54 tend to be over-represented, while those younger than 45 are under-represented in comparison to the Internet population. The share of retired people is twice as high as the Internet average and also sick or disabled people are over-represented.

TheyWorkForYou's success in achieving its own goals

Goal 1: to provide unbiased, non-partisan information

Almost all users believe that TheyWorkForYou provides unbiased and non-partisan information.

Goal 2: to bridge the growing democratic disconnect (e.g. most people don't know the name of their MP, nor their constituency, let alone what their MP does or says in their name)

The majority of people who come to site already have basic political knowledge: four out of five state that they already knew the name of their MP. At the same time three out of five users have never before looked up information on what their MP was doing in parliament. About 90% of users say the website has improved their knowledge about their representatives. As one user commented: *"It is a way of getting parliament to the people"*

Goal 3: to make it easy for people to keep tabs on their elected and unelected representatives in Parliament and other assemblies, provide information in a better way than official sites

Most users argue the site is easily navigable and well structured. As one user said: *“it gives every voter the chance to participate more in our democracy and ensure that their MP is representing the constituency”*

The comments also repeatedly explicitly mentioned that TheyWorkForYou is much better than the official parliament site. However, in the teaser to the survey about 40% of users indicated that they did not find what they were looking for. While this number is in part related to the timing of the teaser question which might have come too early for some visitors, there is some significant concern here for a systematic bias as in particular women, older people, those without a university degree and those with some form of disability had more difficulty of finding the information they were looking for.

Goal 4: to allow fact checking (e.g. give access to source evidence) and make MPs feel accountable; to reward truthful MPs, to allow fair judgement of MPs on basis of what they do

The watchdog function is to some degree on the users' minds, given the 30% who responded they were checking a fact and keeping an eye on what their representatives do. The user comments clearly indicate that this is important to users, as expressed for example by this one: *“I can make a judgment on an MP by looking at his/her voting record”*. For about half of all users this has even led to an improved opinion about their representatives.

General goals of mySociety:

Goal 5: to build websites that give people simple, tangible benefits in the civic and community aspects of their lives as well as to teach the public and voluntary sectors, through demonstration, how to use the internet most efficiently to improve lives.

mySociety has succeeded in building a site that a large number of people is using, that seems to offer some benefit to them as almost half of them use the site repeatedly and that users say is easy to use.

Goal 6: to reach a representative share of the (Internet) population and activate people who would otherwise not get engaged

The data on the politicisation of TheyWorkForYou users highlighted above shows that this goal has been achieved to some degree, e.g. as three out of five users (60%) have never looked up information on what their representatives were doing before they came across TheyWorkForYou. However, the user demographics exhibit a very strong bias towards male users as well as the educated and high income groups of society, suggesting that engagement does indeed happen but mainly from social groups that are already more likely to be politically engaged.

1 Site Description

TheyWorkForYou.com is a website that offers rich information on both the members and the proceedings of all parliaments and assemblies in the UK with the exception of Wales but including the House of Lords. The information available includes records of voting behaviour, speeches and expenses by members of the respective parliament or assembly as well as the written proceedings such as debates or written statements. The information available varies depending on the respective parliament or assembly (see Table 1 below) with most detailed information being provided for the Westminster parliament for which debates are not only accessible in text form but also as video coverage. Users have the opportunity to annotate written proceedings or create customised newsfeeds and email alerts for the latest appearances of an individual members as well as email alerts mentioning certain keywords. Last but not least TheyWorkForYou provides a short and uniform URL to every section of parliamentary proceedings to allow easy and precise linking.

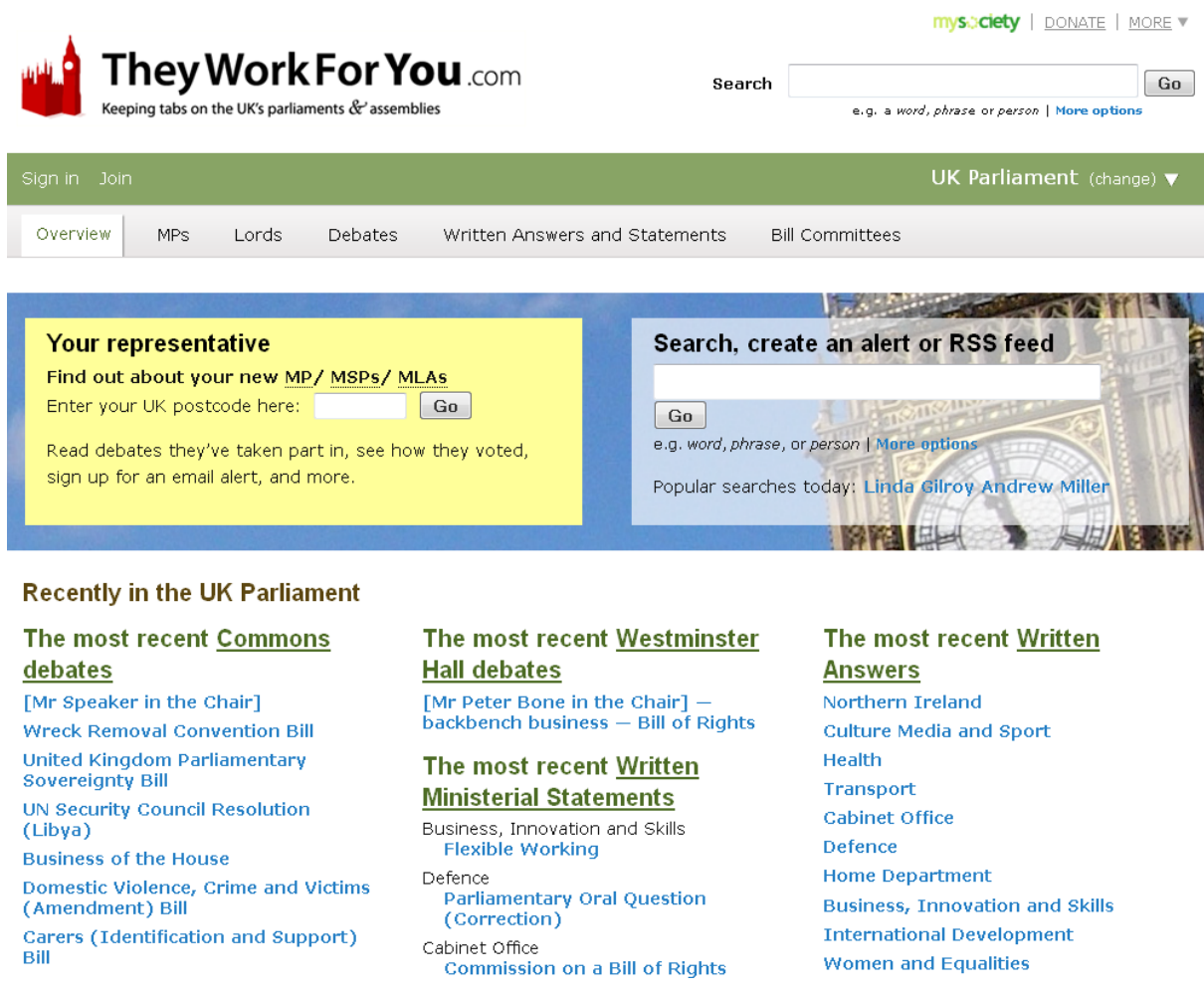


Figure 1: Screenshot of TheyWorkForYou homepage (March 2011)

The website obtains its data via scraping and parsing the official parliamentary records published on the Web. For example the data for the UK parliament is extracted from the online version of Hansard with

the help of code developed by the Parliament Parser project², run by many of the same people as is TheyWorkForYou. The following table outlines in detail which information is available on TheyWorkForYou for the various parliaments and assemblies.

Table 1: Coverage of TheyWorkForYou

parliament / assembly	members	proceedings
<i>House of Commons</i>	all Members of Parliament (MPs) back until 1806	House of Commons Hansard: all debates since General Election November 1935; all written answers and written ministerial statements since General Election of June 2001
<i>House of Lords</i>	all Lords back to the House of Lords Act 1999	full House of Lords Hansard (except Grand Committees) since November 1999
<i>Scottish Parliament</i>	all Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)	full Scottish Parliament Official Report (since May 1999)
<i>Northern Ireland Assembly</i>	all Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)	full Northern Ireland Assembly Hansard (since July 1998)
<i>Welsh Assembly</i>	no coverage	no coverage

Goals of Site

The main goal of TheyWorkForYou is to provide unbiased information on what members of parliament have been doing, saying and voting on. As it says on the website³, it is motivated by the perception of a growing democratic disconnect that manifests itself in the fact that many people do not know the name of their MP or what their MP does or says in their name. Out of this main goal come some specific aims related to the provision of this information. These became clear during a number of informal interviews with those people at mySociety involved in running the site. Roughly these goals can be put into three categories: value, transparency and engagement:

Value

- To provide better information than official sites, in particular make access to information more logical for people who are interested
- To allow easy navigation of all the data related to a specific MP (e.g. make it easy to find out how MPs vote)
- To allow tracking of legislative bills

² <http://ukparse.kforge.net/parlparse/> [26.04.2010]. This project is also supplying the data for the website www.publicwhip.org.uk

³ TheyWorkForYou – About Us. <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/about/> [15.03.2011]

Transparency

- To allow fact-checking (e.g. give access to source evidence)
- To allow fair judgement of MPs on the basis of what they do and to make MPs feel accountable; also to reward truthful MPs
- To allow citizens to act as watchdogs

Engagement

- To make citizens better informed
- To engage people in politics (engagement being any form of action concerned with politics)
- To reduce costs of lobbying on issues people care about

Underlying these goals are mySociety's two main missions. The first is to be a charitable project which builds websites that give people simple, tangible benefits in the civic and community aspects of their lives. The second is to teach the public and voluntary sectors, through demonstration, how to use the internet most efficiently to improve lives. These official goals are again supplemented by goals that are not necessarily explicitly stated but that seem to be inherent in many of the discussions among the mySociety community. These centre around activating people who would otherwise not get engaged and more broadly in reaching a representative share of the (internet) population.

1.1 History

TheyWorkForYou was officially launched on 6 June 2004 at the NotCon04 (now Open Tech) conference. Work on the website had begun about a year earlier by the group of people who had already built FaxYourMP and Public Whip.

Immediately after its launch it was named "*the most amazing, subversive piece of political webware*" by Web guru Cory Doctorow on the widely read blog boingboing.net. In early 2006 it officially became a mySociety project and mySociety has been responsible for keeping it up and running ever since. It started out covering the debates in the House of Commons.

Table 2: Timeline of major steps in TheyWorkForYou development (2004 – 2010)

2004	
6 June 2004	Launch of TheyWorkForYou.com at NotCon04 (now Open Tech) conference
2005	
April 2005	Now possible to see how MPs voted on key issues in parliament
2006	
early 2006	TheyWorkForYou officially becomes a mySociety project
June 2006	The proceedings and members of the House of Lords are added
December 2006	Addition of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2007	
September 2007	Even the Queen has her own page on TheyWorkForYou ⁴
2008	
May 2008	Coverage of the Scottish Parliament is introduced thanks to the volunteer contribution of Mark Longair
June 2008	Video coverage of the House of Commons debates is added to TheyWorkForYou, helped by the efforts of users in timestamping the data
2009	
June 2009	Site design underwent a major revamp
July 2009	Extension of TheyWorkForYou coverage to include House of Commons debates back until 1935
2010	
May 2010	As part of a major volunteer effort TheyWorkForYou offers an election quiz in which voters can match their opinions on national as well as local issues with the preferences of the candidates running in their constituency

Currently Matthew Somerville of mySociety takes the lead on maintenance of the site, assisted by the other mySociety paid developers, but the creation was a major volunteer effort to which many people contributed including Richard Allan, Martin Belam, James Crabtree, James Cronin, Louise Crow, Stephen Dunn, Yoz Grahame, Phil Gyford, David Heath, Francis Irving, Joe Lanman, Ben Laurie, Mark Longair, Tom Loosemore, Stefan Magdalinski, Dorian McFarland, Anno Mitchell, Danny O'Brien, Duncan Parkes, Etienne Pollard, Richard Pope, Sam Smith, Matthew Somerville, Tom Steinberg, Stuart Tily, Julian Todd and Denise Wilton.

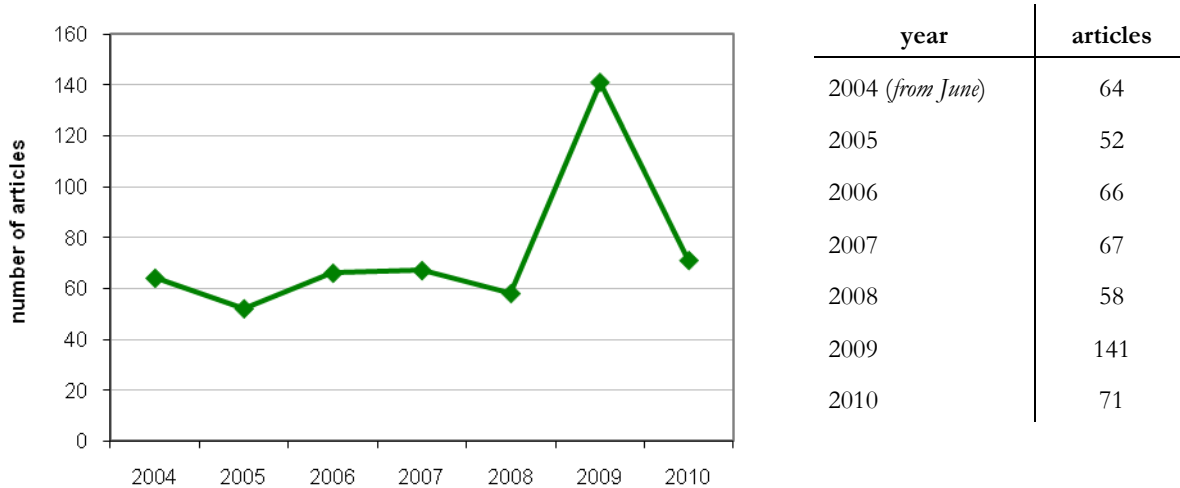
Section 1.3 “Size & Cost” outlines the efforts involved in developing and maintaining the site.

⁴ http://www.theyworkforyou.com/royal/elizabeth_the_second [17.03.2011]

1.2 Awards & Media

Early on the site achieved recognition of its important contribution to democracy when it received the 2005 New Statesman Media Award in the category Contribution to Civic Society.⁵ The website is also regularly mentioned in newspapers with an average of slightly more than one article a week. An exception is the year 2009 when coverage more than doubled with 141 news articles, mainly related to the MPs expenses scandal when newspapers were regularly referring their readers to the website in order to get details on their representatives' expense figures.

Figure 2: Articles in English language newspapers mentioning 'theyworkforyou' (2004 – 2010)



Source: Nexis UK, search for terms 'theyworkforyou'

Unfortunately information on the number of blog posts mentioning 'theyworkforyou' is not reliably available because Google Blogsearch, the only blog search engine that covers past years, counts some content on TheyWorkForYou as blog posts and includes these in its search. However, coverage in the blogosphere is extensive with Google Blogsearch reporting more than 14,000 posts mentioning "theyworkforyou" in 2010 alone.

1.3 Size & Cost

Based on code size, TheyWorkForYou used to be the third biggest of the main mySociety projects after WhatDoTheyKnow and WriteToThem but with the inclusion of an elaborate testing suite its code base is now the biggest, as the table below highlights. While it cost very little to develop, reflecting the major contribution to the site made by volunteers, it is by some distance the most expensive project to maintain.

⁵ <http://www.newstatesman.com/nma/nma2005/nma2005winners.php> [17.03.2011]

Table 3: Development and maintenance cost of major mySociety projects

	WriteTo Them	TheyWork ForYou	Pledge bank	ePetitions ⁶⁶	FixMy Street	WhatDo TheyKnow
start of development	01.08.2004	01.06.2003	01.01.2005	24.04.2006	01.09.2006	01.08.2007
official launch	14.02.2005	06.06.2004	13.06.2005	14.11.2006	07.03.2007	22.02.2008
<i>development</i>						
man hours	1,288	1,500	833	651	315	760
development cost	£24,080	£5,000	£16,280	£18,764	£6,660	£23,750
lines of code (incl. markup) ^{a)}	85,404	298,078	19,359	31,440	15,670	210,939
<i>maintenance (annually)</i>						
server & bandwidth	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000
developer support (days)	8	48	8	8	8	20
labour cost	£2,400	£14,400	£2,400	£2,400	£2,400	£6,000
backups and other support cost ^{b)}	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000
total annual maintenance cost	£8,400	£20,400	£8,400	£8,400	£8,400	£12,000

Source: *mySociety*

Notes: Numbers reflect state of affairs in 2010. ^{a)} as of February 2011, does not reflect a number of libraries shared between projects; as with all mySociety projects the source code is open source, in the case of TheyWorkForYou under a BSD-style license, ^{b)} rather than just static state backups, mySociety works through a regular programme of testing, including recreating sites and services totally from the back-ups in place to make sure they are robust and appropriate

Before TheyWorkForYou officially became a mySociety project one of the key developers was paid for a month by a small grant from UK Citizens Online Democracy. In summer 2006, the Ministry of Justice (then the Department for Constitutional Affairs) provided £6,000 out of its Innovation Fund to develop the TheyWorkForYou API. In summer 2008 the same fund again gave money to allow extending the TheyWorkForYou coverage to include historical debates back until 1935. In the past, as with all mySociety sites, the bandwidth costs were donated by Easynet, but this has ceased. TheyWorkForYou also gets some support through a Google grant for free Google Adwords campaigns which amounted to about \$60,000 in 2010 (see section 2.1.4 Advertising).

⁶⁶ Online petitions of the UK Prime Minister, available at <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/>. Since May 2010 it is no longer possible for members of the public to create and sign new petitions, but mySociety still maintains the searchable archive of former petitions available from the Prime Minister's website.

2 Site Usage

2.1 General Usage: Visitor Statistics

The following figure illustrates the development of visits to the website⁷. The numbers show a growth in the first two years of the existence of the site. Since 2007 on average visitor numbers have remained fairly stable between 200,000 and 300,000 visits a month with noticeable drops during the summer months (which corresponds to the summer recess of the Westminster parliament) and between Christmas and New Year. A visitor record was achieved in the run-up to the 2010 General Election when TheyWorkForYou received more than 230,000 visits in election week alone, equalling the number it would usually receive in a full month. For more details see section 2.2.3 General Election Campaign 2010. Another significant usage spike occurred in May and June 2009 when in relation to the MP expenses scandal⁸ many people were using the site to check on their MPs' expenses.

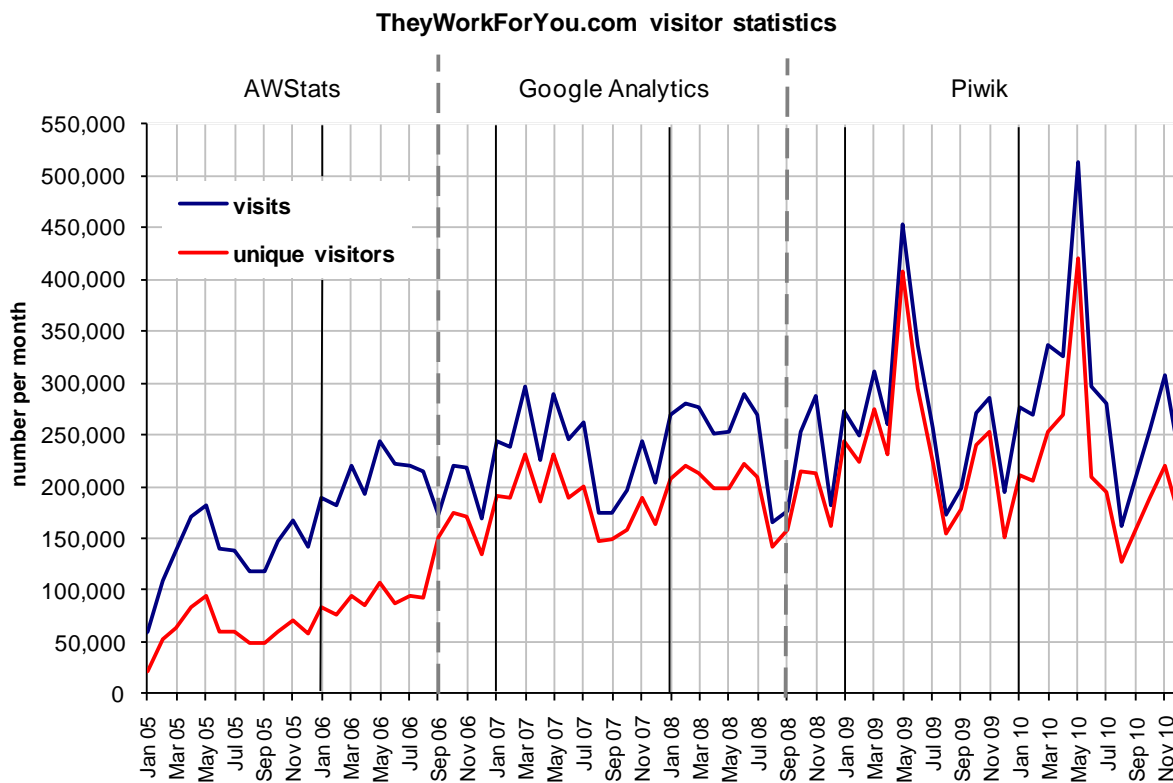


Figure 3: Visits and unique visitors to TheyWorkForYou (November 2004 - December 2010)

Source: *mySociety* AWStats, *mySociety* Google Analytics, *mySociety* Piwik web analytics

Note: Underreporting for data in April 2010 as no statistics were collected from 26 April 2010 until around midday Friday 30 April 2010 due to an update error.

⁷Detailed web stats are available from Google Analytics since September 2006 and from Piwik since September 2008, both of which employ a page-tagging technology. Before this, logfile data (dating back to November 2004) was analysed using AWStats.

⁸ For a useful summary see the Wikipedia article: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_Parliamentary_expenses_scandal

In terms of traffic TheyWorkForYou has been consistently mySociety's most popular site. It receives about twice as many visits as the second most popular site WhatDoTheyKnow where people can view and submit Freedom of Information requests.

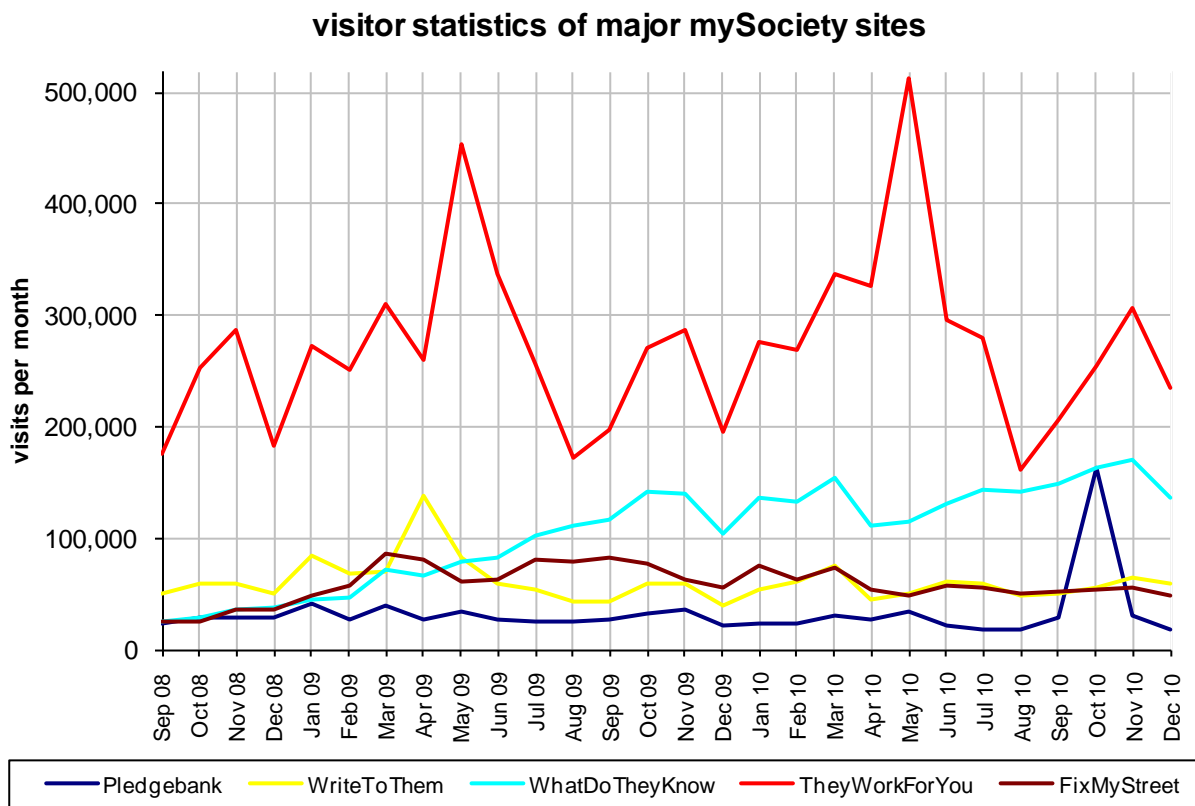


Figure 4: Visitor statistics of major mySociety sites (September 2008 - December 2010)

Source: mySociety Pivik web analytics

Note: Underreporting for data in April 2010 as no statistics were collected from 26 April 2010 until around midday Friday 30 April 2010 due to an update error

2.1.1 Usage Patterns

During its more than six years of existence the site has exhibited a number of periodic usage patterns. As can be seen in Figure 3, each year in August it receives considerably less traffic, owing to the summer recess of Westminster parliament and most likely that of other parliaments and assemblies as well. A similar low-usage period time is the time around Christmas and New Year when apparently few people are motivated to check relevant information.

General elections typically result in an increased interest in the information on TheyWorkForYou. The unprecedented usage peak during the General Election campaign in 2010 is covered in detail in section 2.2.3, and the General Election campaign in May 2005 also resulted in an increase in traffic. Apart from the General Election campaign in 2010 the most popular time in terms of traffic was the MP expenses scandal, particularly in May 2009. Weekly traffic to the site was more than twice as high as average with for example 150,000 visits in the week from 11-17 May. Major news sites such as the website of the Telegraph and the Guardian would refer their users to TheyWorkforYou.

Days with particularly high numbers of visits usually reflect significant events British politics. In 2007 the most popular day (18,402 visits) was 28 June 2007 when Jacqui Smith was appointed Home Secretary. On that day, 7% of all searches mentioned her name and 160 visits came via her Wikipedia page. In 12 June 2008 when David Davis resigned as MP in order to force a by-election traffic hit another year high (17,731 visits) with significant traffic coming from search engine searches for David Davis (14% of all visits) and order-order.com, otherwise known as the Guido Fawkes blog (5% of all visits). In 2009 the most popular day was 28 April (36,960 visits). 58% of visitors came through direct entry of the URL, about four times as many as average (see section 2.1.3 on referrers), and 16% of search engine searches were specifically for www.theyworkforyou.com. This unusual pattern resulted from an explicit mention of the website in The Mirror. The newspaper urged their readers to visit this website and then to email their MPs in a campaign to get full citizenship rights for Gurkhas who fought for Britain⁹. In 2010 the busiest day on the site was pre-election day with 84,253 visits to TheyWorkForYou (including the election quiz).

Most visits occur on working days during office hours (9am – 5pm), when traffic is about twice as high as on weekends. This indicates that a considerable share of traffic could be work related, and indeed about 30% of people answering our user survey say that their use of the site is somehow related to their work (see also section on user groups below). Nevertheless, considerable usage also takes place after 5pm as the figure below shows for the year 2010.

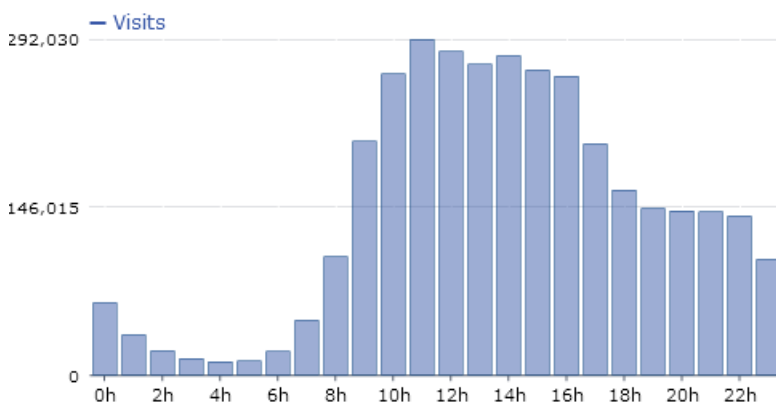
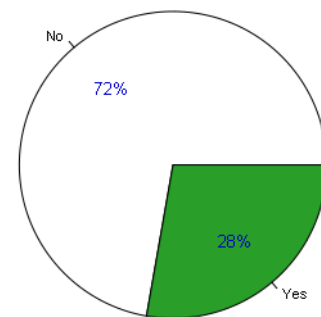


Figure 5: Time of day for visits to TheyWorkForYou (2010)

Source: *mySociety Pivik web analytics*

Is your use of this site in any way related to your work?



N=879
missing values=24 (3%)

Figure 6: Work-related usage of TheyWorkForYou (from survey)

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10*

⁹ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/celebs/news/2009/04/28/treat-gurkhas-like-the-heroes-they-are-115875-21314272/> [17.03.2011]

2.1.2 Frequent Users

In 2010 about one third of visits were repeat visits. This number has been very stable over the last few years, and it can be thought of as a lower bound for the share of actual people using TheyWorkForYou repeatedly¹⁰. Data from the user survey suggests that about 60% of users have used TheyWorkForYou more than once within the last twelve months, as the figure below shows, which seems not unreasonable given the web statistics. According to this data (however, see notes on how far one may generalise survey results in section 3 Site Users) about 20% of users access the site very frequently, at least once a month or more. This is roughly supported by data from Google Analytics showing that in 2010 at least 12% of users (again, a lower bound for the reasons cited above) visited the site nine times or more.

Within the last twelve months: How often have you used TheyWorkForYou?

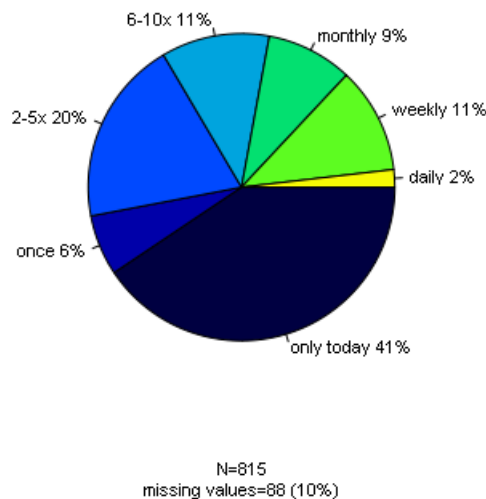


Figure 7: Use frequency of TheyWorkForYou (based on responses to user survey)

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10*

¹⁰ The number of first time visits is bound to be inflated given that people use different computers and browsers or might delete their cookies, all resulting in their visit being counted as a first time visit.

2.1.3 Referrers

There are three main sources of traffic to a website: visitors arriving from search engines after searching for a term for which the site was in the relevant results list, links from other websites, and people who access it directly by typing the address in the browser. The figure below illustrates the share of these three sources for TheyWorkForYou.

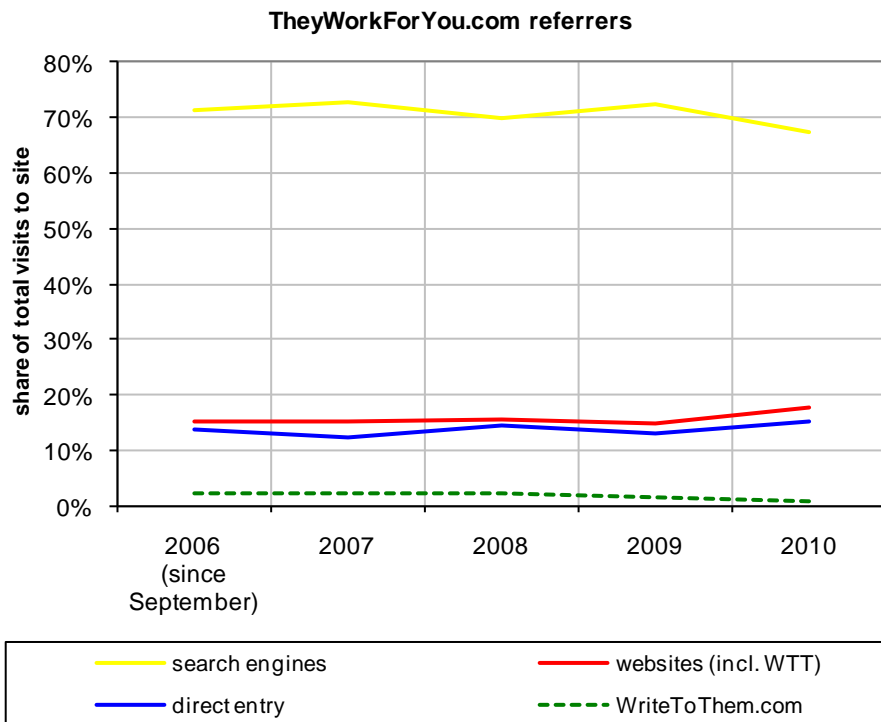


Figure 8: Where visits to TheyWorkForYou are coming from (2006 - 2010)

Source: *mySociety Google Analytics*

It shows a consistently high share of around 70% of traffic arriving from search engines. In nine out of ten cases traffic from search engines comes from Google, of which, in 2010, around 2% was traffic generated by a Google Adwords campaign. The most popular search terms are variants of “*they work for you*” which in 2010 accounted for almost one out of ten searches. Other popular searches that lead people to TheyWorkForYou are searches for variants of “*who is my mp*”. However, the majority of searches are for names of particular representatives. Traffic from search engines declined slightly in 2010 as a result of an increase in traffic from other websites (in particular Wikipedia) and from users accessing the site directly. This change is likely to be related to the election campaign.

Search engine referrals often include traffic from people who already know TheyWorkForYou and might use it to find the site faster, illustrated by the already highlighted fact that in 2010 around 10% of all keyword searches included the words “*they work for you*” in some variation. However, the most important role for search engines is to let people know about the site in the first place as data from the

user survey underscores: about half of those responding to the question say they found out about TheyWorkForYou with the help of a search engine.

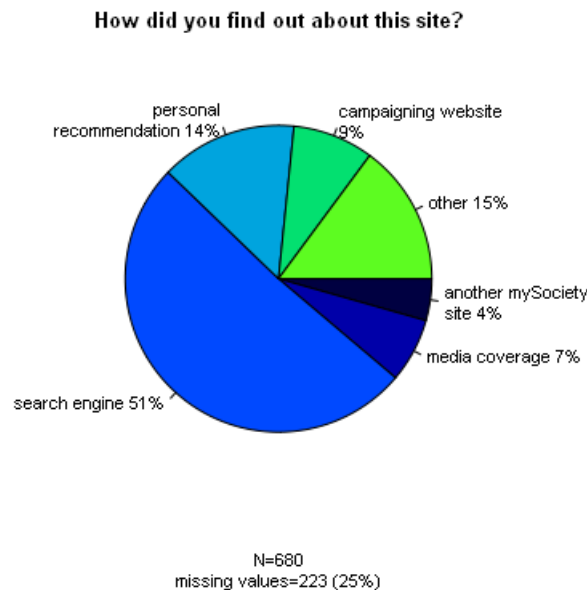


Figure 9: How users of TheyWorkForYou find out about the site

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10*

Personal recommendations and campaigns as well as media coverage are also important ways for people to find out about TheyWorkForYou, together accounting for about 30%.

About 4% in the user survey said they found out about TheyWorkForYou from other mySociety websites. Indeed, as Table 4 documents, for a long time WriteToThem.com (a mySociety website where citizens can send messages to their elected representatives) was the website from which TheyWorkForYou received most visits, usually around 2% of all visits from 2006 to 2008. In recent years this share has dropped, most notably in 2010. This seems part of a general decline in referrals from WriteToThem, which might have been accelerated by the General Election: there were no MPs for a period of about three weeks between the dissolution of Parliament and the election, so WriteToThem did not allow writing to MPs during this time. Currently, the number one referring website is Wikipedia which often carries links to TheyWorkForYou from its pages about MPs and in 2010 was responsible for 2% of overall traffic.

The following table outlines the top five referring websites for the last four years. Apart from the dominance of WriteToThem and Wikipedia, in 2007 and 2008 traffic from the official website of the UK Prime Minister was an important driver of traffic to the site because it linked to the transcript of Prime Minister's Questions on TheyWorkForYou¹¹. 2010 also saw Twitter rise among the top five referrals, particularly on 17 November 2010 when more than 1,000 visitors came to the site in relation to a written answer about the telephone tapping of the Metropolitan Police Service, as well as through tweets relating to the General Election on the 29 April, 6 May and 12 May. The General Election also

¹¹ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page306>

marked the start of a sustained increase in traffic from Facebook, which now also features in the top 5 referrers.

Table 4: Top 5 referring websites to TheyWorkForYou (2007 – 2010)

rank	2007	2008	2009	2010
1	writetothem.com (58,710)	writetothem.com (59,176)	en.wikipedia.org (64,246)	en.wikipedia.org (75,184)
2	en.wikipedia.org (51,855)	en.wikipedia.org (55,501)	writetothem.com (43,499)	writetothem.com (28,840)
3	number-10.gov.uk , number10.gov.uk , pm.gov.uk (24,579)	number-10.gov.uk , number10.gov.uk , pm.gov.uk (25,156)	telegraph.co.uk (17,781)	ukpollingreport.co.uk (24,412)
4	hearfromyourmp.com (17,360)	google.co.uk (10,479)	google.co.uk (12,695)	facebook.com (22,461)
5	publicwhip.org.uk (11,352)	publicwhip.org.uk (10,470)	publicwhip.org.uk (10,566)	twitter.com (20,492)
<i>Total traffic from websites</i>	419,868	462,081	498,554	624,027

Source: *mySociety Google Analytics*

Note: Numbers in brackets denote visits from this site to theyworkforyou.com.

2.1.4 Advertising & Marketing

In general mySociety does not heavily market its sites, mainly due to financial constraints. The only real form of advertising happens in the form of Google Adwords sponsored via a Google grant. In 2010 about 43,000 visits (2% of overall traffic) were generated by sponsored ads that showed up next to people’s Google searches for words such as “*member of parliament*” or names of particular MPs. In 2010 an ad was displayed for about 4m searches which resulted in almost 150,000 clicks.

Apart from that, TheyWorkForYou is linked from other mySociety sites, in particular WriteToThem where users are for example encouraged to sign up to TheyWorkForYou e-mail alerts for their constituency MP after they send a message to their representative. As a result WriteToThem is one of the most important website referrers for TheyWorkForYou, in 2010 sending about 30,000 visits to the site and accounting for about 1% of total traffic. Otherwise publicity efforts are usually related to specific mySociety campaigns and announcements, and make use of the mySociety blog, Facebook and not least the site itself. For example the blog was used for publicising the election quiz prior to the General Election 2010 when a blog post on mysociety.org told readers “*How to get TheyWorkForYou Into*

*Your Local Paper/Radio Station in 5 minutes*¹² and in 2009 the Facebook group had some success in marshalling support against a Commons vote which was aimed at concealing MPs' expenses¹³. These campaigns also generated some media coverage (see also section 1.2 Awards & Media).

2.1.5 Special User Groups

Among the main site users are a number of organisations of particular interest. Every week about 1,500 visits come from the Houses of Parliament (as identified by source IP addresses resolving to parliament.uk) which account for about 2% of all visits made to TheyWorkForYou. The figure below illustrates this usage for 2010 – notably, it only takes place during working days.

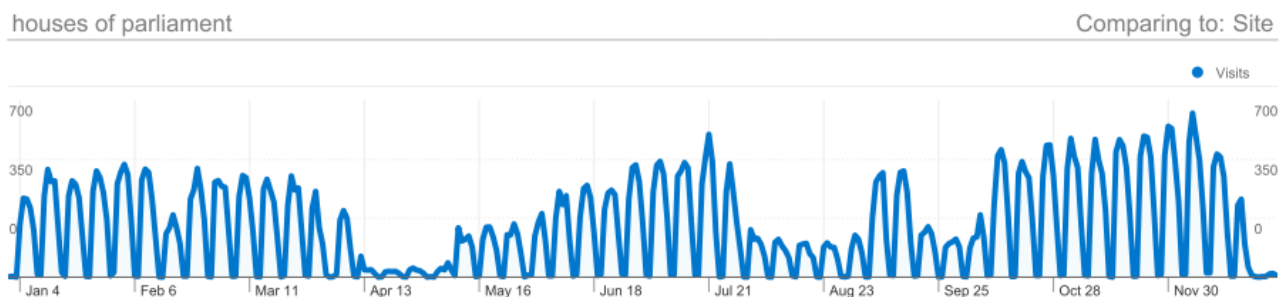


Figure 10: Visits from UK parliament to TheyWorkForYou (2010)

Source: *mySociety* Google Analytics

An additional 2.5% of visits come from governmental sources (.gov.uk and mod.uk). Apart from government, the site sees substantial usage by the BBC, which accounted for almost 0.5% of all visits in 2010, or by political parties. The Conservative Party Central Office accounted for 0.26% of traffic up until the General Election, after which usage substantially decreased. Comments from the user survey also underscore that parts of the civil service are relying on TheyWorkForYou:

"I find it very useful at work (civil servant)."

"Great research tool - everything is clearer than the PIMS [Parliamentary Information Management Service] database we have on the intranet"

"I've just been told by an MP's chief of staff that it is better than Hansard!"

2.2 Specific Usage: Popular Content and Feature Usage

In general the bounce rate of visits to TheyWorkForYou is around 60%. That is, three out of five visitors to the site access just one single page before leaving. What is more, two thirds of visits take less than 30 seconds, although this is not a reliable measure for people accessing one page only. This does not necessarily signal that users did not find relevant content. It might also mean that people very quickly find what they are looking for, in particular as all the information about an individual MP is

¹² <http://www.mysociety.org/2010/05/04/how-to-get-theyworkforyou-into-your-local-paperradio-station-in-5-minutes/> [17.03.2011]

¹³ <http://www.mysociety.org/2009/01/21/blimey-it-looks-like-the-internets-won/> [17.03.2011]

summarized on a single page. This is supported by the fact that even among returning visitors, those that apparently have found a real value on the site, more than half of visits bounce, suggesting that the single page they visited did indeed give them what they were after. Also around 15% of visits take five minutes or longer, suggesting a real interaction with the content.

2.2.1 Popular Content

Judging by traffic the most popular content on TheyWorkForYou is the information relating to the House of Commons, which accounted for two thirds of page impressions in 2010. The second most popular section is search, which is often also for content related to proceedings of the House of Commons. 6% of traffic goes to the House of Lords while the remaining two assemblies covered on TheyWorkForYou (Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly) account for comparatively little traffic totalling 3% of all page impressions. Last but not least around 8% of the traffic is related to miscellaneous features of TheyWorkForYou such as the API, email alerts, debate annotations and the lookup for the constituency boundaries in the Scottish and Northern Irish elections. The overall picture was the same as in 2009, hence indicating a rather stable interest pattern.

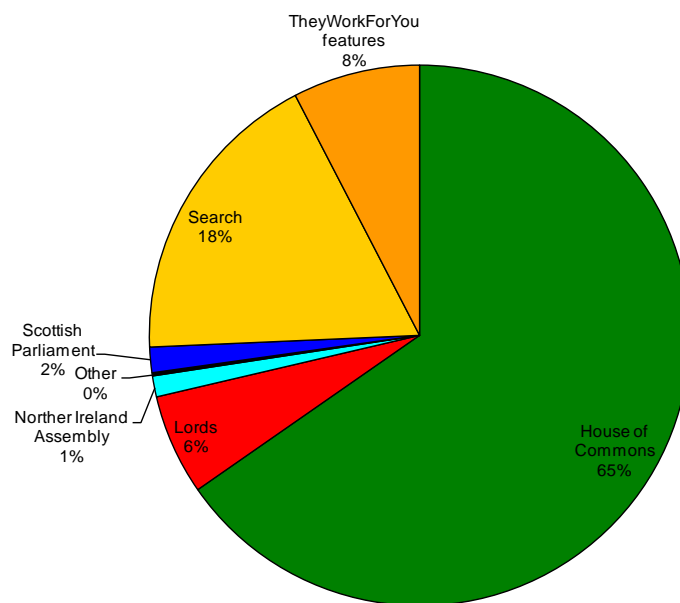


Figure 11: Distribution of page impressions to content sections on TheyWorkForYou (2010)

Source: *mySociety Google Analytics*

Note: *Based on a total of 9,022,537 page impressions for whole year of 2010; the same picture emerges for analysis of unique page impressions, i.e. counting repeated impression within one session of the same user only once.*

The figure below breaks down the traffic to the House of Commons content in order to show what kind of information is accessed in this most popular section. The majority of traffic goes to content about MPs (profiles and postcode lookup), followed by some margin by written answers and statements as well as Commons debates. Again, the popularity of the individual content sections has changed little since 2009.

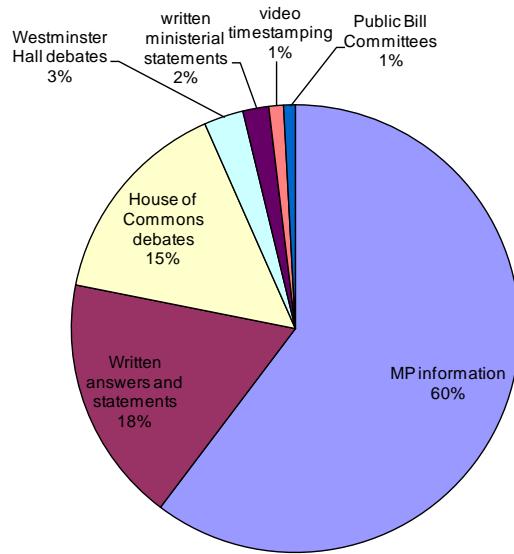


Figure 12: Traffic to House of Commons related content (2010)

Source: *mySociety Google Analytics*

Note: *Based on a total of 5,886,650 page impressions for whole year of 2010.*

The table below reports the top three most popular pages in 2009 for a number of content sections. One fact to highlight is that debates can be popular even if they are already dated, the famous speech by Winston Churchill on Britain’s war efforts being a case in point which is linked from Wikipedia article(s). Similarly, a written answer to a question by Sarah Teather MP in 2006 about the minimum classroom temperatures in the UK is still very frequently found through Google searches as well as a particular answer on Yahoo Answers.

Table 5: Most popular pages in selected content sections (2010)

rank	MP profile pages	Commons debates	Written Answers and Statements	Lords profile pages	Lords debates
1	David Cameron (29,022)	12.07.2010 debate on NHS White Paper (5,440)	03.11.2009 James Brokenshire to Ministry of Justice on offences relating to Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (5,305)	Lord James of Blackheath (4,293)	01.11.2010 debate on Comprehensive Spending Review (8,987)
2	Gordon Brown (25,761)	04.06.1940 Winston Churchill: “We shall fight on the beaches ...” (4,687)	25.07.2006 Sarah Teather to Education and Skills on classroom temperatures (4,493)	Lord Mandelson (3,340)	21.10.2010 debate on economic and cultural impacts of immigration in the UK (6,416)

3	Diane Abbott (24,181)	06.04.2010 debate on Digital Economy Bill (2,297)	16.11.2010 Tom Watson to Attorney General on telephone tapping of the Metropolitan Police Service (3,596)	Lord Henley (2,745)	15.06.2010 debate UN paper “Treating Drug Dependence through Healthcare, not Punishment” (1,367)
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Source: *mySociety Google Analytics*

Note: *Based on page impressions (provided in brackets).*

Video coverage of Commons debates was added in June 2008. It dates back to June 2007 and is up to date with the exception of recent months, due to some technical difficulties which still need to be fixed. Access figures of these videos also point to popular topics in Commons debates as illustrated in Table 6 below. It is important to note that these access numbers do not necessarily translate into debates having been watched, but usually signal that a user has accessed the text of the debate for which the video will automatically be loaded. Still it is a rather eclectic collection. The Christmas Recess debate for 2008, in which traditionally mainly backbenchers discuss a wide range of issues, is apparently the all time favourite. Otherwise Prime Minister’s Questions during the economic crisis in late 2008 have proved popular with users as has for example the Academies Bill.

Table 6: Top 3 video of debates most often requested from TheyWorkForYou (2008 – 2010)

rank	2008	2009	2010
1	18 December 2008 Christmas Recess Debate (mainly backbenchers on a range of issues) (19,933)	19 November 2008 Prime Minister’s Questions (see rank 2 for 2008) (36,884)	8 December 2009 questions in the House of Commons to Communities and Local Government Secretary (18,322)
2	19 November 2008 Prime Minister’s Questions (mainly on economic crisis and recovery) (17,876)	18 December 2008 Christmas Recess Debate (see rank 1 for 2008) (25,323)	18. December 2008 Christmas Recess Debate (see rank 1 for 2008) (17,096)
3	11 June 2008 debate on Counter-Terrorism bill (6,924)	15 January 2009 debate about report on collapse of Equitable Life as well as Gaza (21,579)	22 July 2010 Debate on Academies Bill (15,220)

Source: *mySociety TheyWorkForYou AWStats*

Note: *Numbers in brackets denote hits on respective video file.*

The search queries of users are another source of information about content of interest. The largest chunk of external search traffic albeit with only 10% of the total search traffic is for variants of “*they work for you*”, apparently from people who know the site or have heard about it and want to find it via the search engine. The remaining 90% of searches are predominantly for names of individual representatives. The internal search phrases also reveal a strong interest for individual persons, led by searches for the Prime Minister.

Users were also questioned directly about their usage motivations. These do not always translate directly into specific content sections and, with hindsight, the provided categories were not ideal which is probably also the reason why they are nearly evenly distributed. Nevertheless they do highlight that there is a significant number of people who tend to just browse content on TheyWorkForYou with no specific use intention as well as that the watchdog function is to some degree on the users mind, given the 30% of users who responded they were checking a fact or keeping an eye on their representatives. As one user commented:

“Because a) it’s useful and provides info in simple terms and b) it’s necessary to keep track of MPs.”

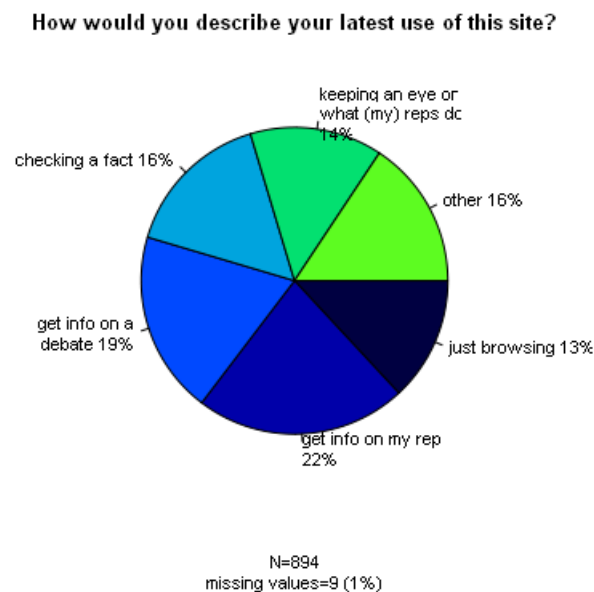


Figure 13: Usage motivations of TheyWorkForYou users

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10*

2.2.2 Popular Features

The website provides the opportunity to create *email alerts* notifying users of appearances of a particular representative or mentioning of certain keywords. As of March 2011 there were almost 110,000 different email alerts registered, sent to about 65,000 different email addresses. A substantial amount of email is generated in this way. For example about 2.8 million emails were sent in 2009 alone in relation to registered email alerts. After the General Election in May 2010 the number of email alerts has

substantially increased as can be seen in Figure 14. A noticeable spike in May, June and July 2010 is likely to indicate users creating alerts for newly elected MPs and those who have moved to the front benches. Even towards the end of the year several thousand new alerts were still being created each month. As of March 2011 the most popular email alerts for MPs were Gordon Brown (684 alerts), Meg Hillier (587) and Diane Abbott (553), however, none of them can currently rival the subscription numbers reached by George Galloway (1040) when he was still an MP.

There is also the opportunity to *annotate debates*. There are now more than 26,000 comments on debates and each month between 200 and 300 new annotations are added. The drop in annotations during summer recess (see figure below) indicates that users seem mainly to annotate current debates.

Users can also *register on the site* if they want to post annotations to debates or manage their email alerts more easily. As of March 2011 there are more than 20,500 people (i.e. email addresses) registered and every month this number increases by 200 to 300 with a marked increase in the month following the election (see figure below).

As of March 2011 almost 11,000 people have also subscribed to receive the TheyWorkForYou *newsletter* which is supposed to provide information on TheyWorkForYou stories and relevant content on a monthly basis.

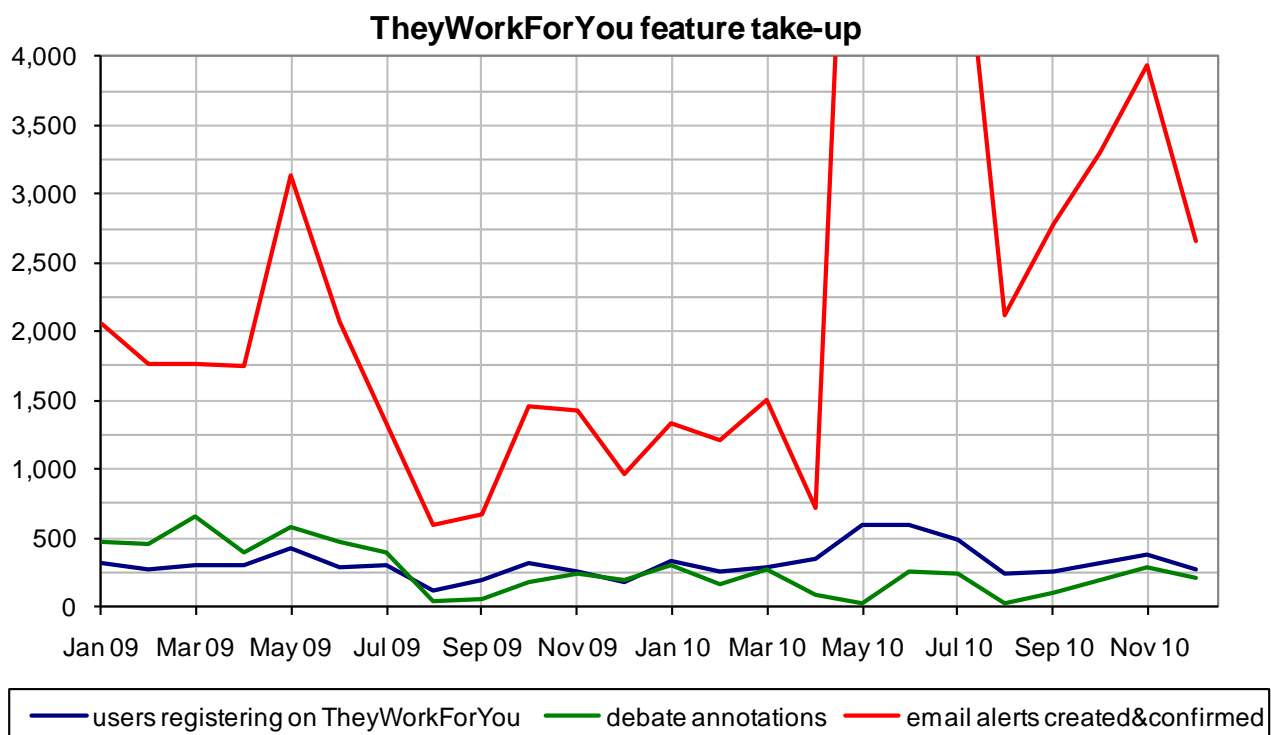


Figure 14: Signup rates to TheyWorkForYou site and email alerts as well as debate annotations (2009 - 2010)

Source: *mySociety TheyWorkForYou database records*

Note: In May 2010 a total of 8,481 email alerts were created and confirmed, in June 13,612 and in July 5,420.

In June 2008 video coverage of Commons debate was added to the site. Now when reading a debate the video of the particular speech can be watched too while the corresponding Hansard text is

highlighted next to it (see section 2.2.1 on Popular Content for the most often watched videos). The video is obtained from BBC Parliament but was manually marked up to tag the beginning of each individual speech by a group of more than 350 volunteers. Coverage of Commons debates goes back to June 2007 and is up to date with the exception of the most recent few months, due to some technical difficulties. The volunteers not only timestamped the initial full year's backlog of video coverage, amounting to more than 40,000 speeches, in about twelve weeks,¹⁴ but they continue to mark up new video as it is added, as the figure below shows. The total lack of activity around parliamentary summer recess in August and September in all three years is testament to the speed of the volunteer efforts as there is never a real backlog of videos to timestamp.

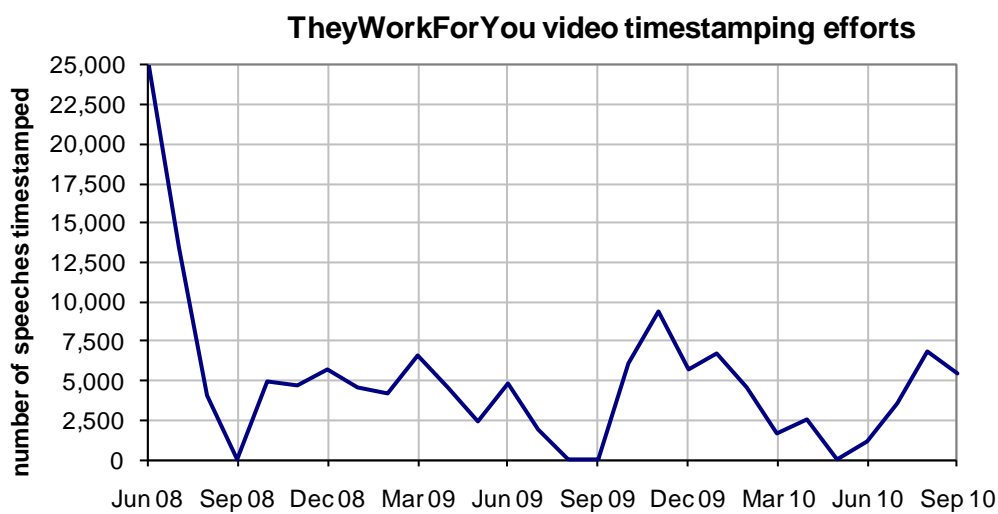


Figure 15: Development of volunteer video timestamping on TheyWorkForYou (June 2008 – September 2010)

Source: *mySociety TheyWorkForYou database records*

Note: *There is no data for the last three months of 2010 as during this time import of video was broken.*

2.2.3 General Election Campaign 2010¹⁵

The election campaign for the General Election started formally with the dissolution of parliament on 12 April 2010 and ended with the close of polls at 10pm on 6 May. For this election a quiz was provided under the subdomain *election.theyworkforyou.com* that allowed voters to compare their views on local and national issues with those of the candidates running for election in their constituency. It was set up in a major effort by mySociety and volunteers (read more about it in section 5 Anecdota) and had a sizeable impact on traffic to TheyWorkForYou. In 2009 TheyWorkForYou received on average around 65,000 visits every week. Usage of TheyWorkForYou had already increased slightly but notably in March with about 70,000 weekly visits, and further in April with about 90,000 weekly visits, despite the fact that there were no debates taking place in the House of Commons nor were there any MPs

¹⁴ <http://www.mysociety.org/2008/08/28/amazing-volunteers-do-entire-year-of-theyworkforyou-video-clip-timestamping-in-weeks/> [17.03.2011]

¹⁵ All data reported in this section obtained from Google Analytics because due to an update problem no data was collected with Piwik from 26 April 2010 until around midday Friday 30 April 2010.

because Parliament had been dissolved. In the week of the election TheyWorkForYou experienced a record usage peak: with more than 230,000 visits to TheyWorkForYou (excluding the election quiz) normal traffic nearly quadrupled. Usage was particularly high on the day before the election when the site received in a single day the same number of visits as it would otherwise get in a full week. Traffic to TheyWorkForYou has clearly benefited from the election quiz: on election day and the day before, about 25,000 visitors to TheyWorkForYou went on to access the election quiz. The election quiz alone received about 100,000 visits in election week of which traffic from TheyWorkForYou accounted for about 55%. Effectively TheyWorkForYou and the election quiz received a total of 280,000 visits in election week (2 – 8 May), 84,000 on pre-election day alone. The figure below visualises visits to both TheyWorkForYou (in green) and on top of that visits to the election quiz (election.theyworkforyou.com) that came not via TheyWorkForYou but from other sources (in red).

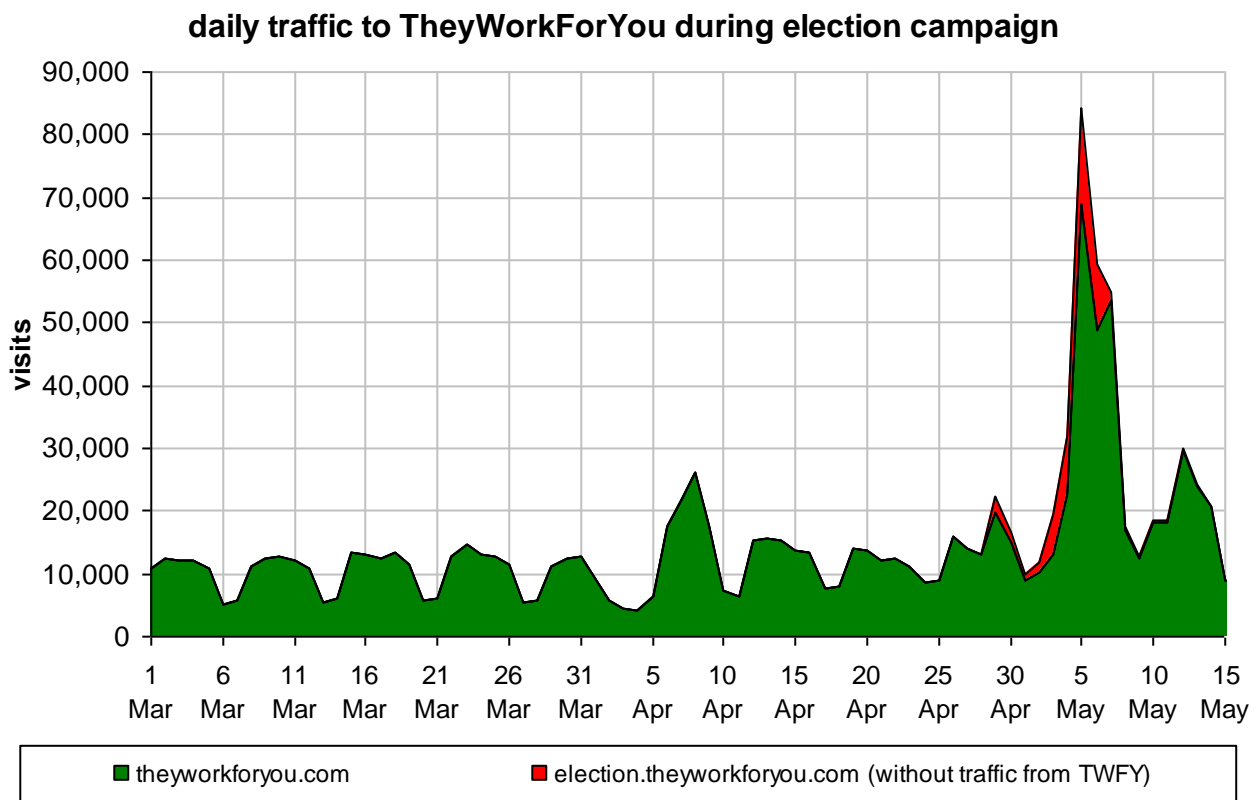


Figure 16: Traffic to TheyWorkForYou and election quiz during election campaign

Source: mySociety Google Analytics

Note: Traffic to theyworkforyou.com excludes traffic from election.theyworkforyou.com and vice versa so numbers add up to total visits to both sites.

2.3 User Satisfaction

The following section presents user assessments of the site that are mainly derived from the survey of users of TheyWorkForYou, which is described in more detail in section 3 Site Users. This sample is not representative of the entire TheyWorkForYou audience. In general it can be assumed that this is less of a problem for questions concerning the general assessment of the site. However, user satisfaction is

clearly related to whether use of the site was successful, here defined as the user having been able to find the information that was being searched for. From the statistics generated by the teaser that asked this particular question it can be seen that of all 12,333 users who responded to the teaser by 20 April 2010, 59% found what they were looking for. In the survey sample this is substantially more, with 80% of users saying that they had found the relevant information. So people who found the information they were looking for on the site were more likely to answer the survey and clearly their assessment of the site is more positive than that of people who did not successfully use the site to find a particular piece of information. Therefore where appropriate, the answers of these two groups will be analysed separately. Cause for concern should be the differences between those users who were able to successfully use the site and those who failed to find the information they were seeking. There are no significant differences between these two user groups in relation to political knowledge and involvement but there are significant demographic differences. Users who fail to find information on TheyWorkForYou are more often women (50% more than successful users), older people (in particular 55-64 years old), are less likely to have a university degree (54% vs 66%) and twice as likely to have a disability than successful users. What is more, this is not just a question of becoming familiar with the site, because half of those unsuccessful users are actually repeat users who still fail to find information despite their prior experience with the site as Figure 17 shows.

Within the last twelve months: How often have you used TheyWorkForYou?

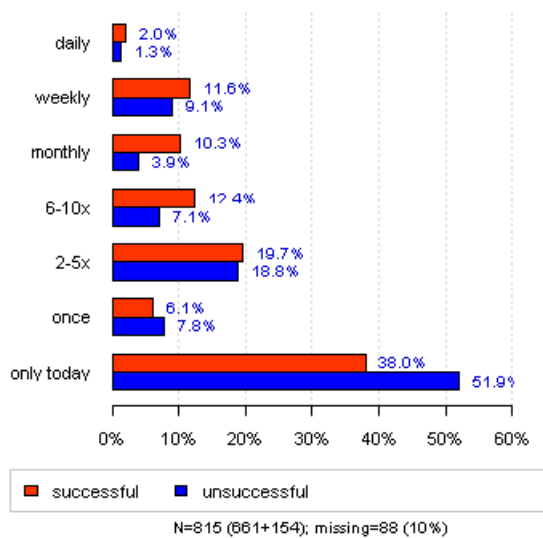


Figure 17: Comparing usage frequency of successful and unsuccessful users

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10*

On general measure of satisfaction is asking users how likely they are to recommend the site to friends or colleagues. Based on this a measure called the Net Promoter score is calculated. By asking users about the likelihood of recommendation of a service the Net Promoter score aims to be a simple measure of both customer satisfaction and user loyalty. It calculates the difference between the group of promoters of a site (those indicating a likelihood of recommendation of 9 or 10) and the group of

detractors (scoring 0 - 6) – users indicating 7 or 8 are considered to be passive and are not taken into account (for more details see Reichheld, 2003).

According to this calculation, 44% of TheyWorkForYou users are Promoters while 26% are Detractors, resulting in a Net Promoter Score of 18%. While in general this might be called a conservative estimate of satisfaction because it does not count many that are “likely” to recommend the site (i.e. those scoring 7 or 8), it is a rather low score, in particular compared to the Net Promoter score of 44% reported for WriteToThem (Escher, forthcoming).

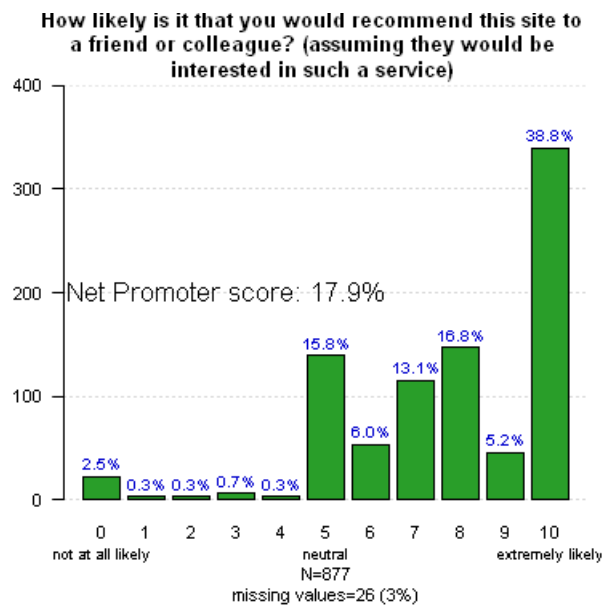


Figure 18: Net Promoter score, i.e. likelihood of users to recommend TheyWorkForYou

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10*

Unsurprisingly the Net Promoter score of those who did not find the information they were looking for is much lower. In fact, they are diametrically opposed: those who found the information have a score of 30% while those not finding the information scored -30%.

While it comes as no surprise that TheyWorkForYou will be mainly judged by whether or not it satisfies a particular need for information, it is useful to identify the issues that users like and don't like about the site that might be responsible for the comparatively low overall Net Promoter score. Figure 19 reports the assessment of a number of site characteristics by respondents to the user survey. TheyWorkForYou achieves very good scores for navigability and the structuring of information. Almost all respondents found the site easy to use and well set up. Comments by users in the survey very often highlighted that TheyWorkForYou is much more usable than the official sources:

“It is a hundred times easier to search than Hansard itself. I've spent two hours on Hansard before coming here and have just found what I want in under a minute.”

“More functional than the Parliament website”

“In general keep up the good work. Far better than the Parliament website.”

Concern only derives from the comparatively poor assessment of the site design as about 30% of users judged the site not pretty to look at. Crucially, virtually all users believe that TheyWorkForYou provides information in an unbiased and non-partisan way which is also expressed in some of the comments in the user survey:

“It is good to see what was actually said rather than heresy from the media.”

“you can access factual information rather than rely on the media’s interpretation”

“impressive in it’s neutrality”

This information has helped to improve most users’ knowledge about their representative as expressed in this comment:

“Excellent repository of information. Important democratic resource.”

This improved knowledge has improved the opinion about their representatives for at least half of the surveyed users. On all these items unsuccessful users were predictably more negative than those users who found the information they were looking for.

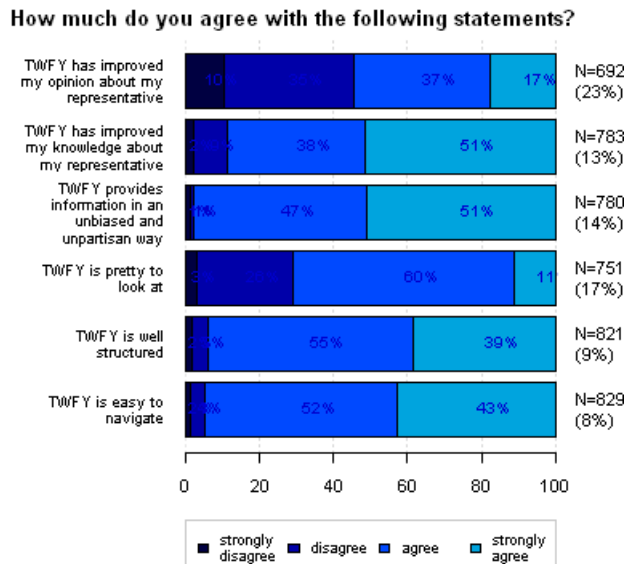


Figure 19: User assessment of TheyWorkForYou usability and use effects

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10*

Users made a number of suggestions for features that would improve the site. Regularly these included the contact details of MPs and their surgery times, but also there were requests for an improved print layout, and lists of MPs who did (not) attend a certain debate.

3 Site Users

Most of the information in this section is derived from an online survey to which users were randomly invited when visiting the site (for detailed information see section C.1 Survey). This form of sampling via an intercept survey design is notoriously difficult for obtaining samples that are representative of the wider website audience. Therefore, what the results present is a detailed picture of characteristics and opinions of 903 people who used the site between 22 September 2009 and 11 April 2010. While it cannot confidently claim any formal representativeness for the wider TheyWorkForYou audience, we believe that in general terms it is indicative of that wider audience's characteristics and opinions. For a detailed discussion on the representativeness of the sample and possible biases please refer to section C.3 Sample Bias / Representativeness.

One of mySociety's key aims is to build sites that are useful to and used by citizens from all walks of life without exception. Therefore, this research will analyse how inclusive the audience of TheyWorkForYou is by comparing it with the British population. However, obviously the site cannot reach those who lack Internet access. For that reason, the data collected on the demographics of TheyWorkForYou users will be compared to the demographics of British Internet users, in other words this *comparison will focus on how well British Internet users are represented on TheyWorkForYou*.

At the same time, it is important to note that political participation in democracies has never been inclusive. Instead, it has always been biased towards resource-rich citizens, that is those with better education, higher income and larger social networks as section 4.1 "Political Engagement in Britain" will outline. A simple comparison of the audience of TheyWorkForYou with British Internet users in general fails to take these circumstances into account and is destined to simply show that TheyWorkForYou users are not representative of the Internet population. Instead, a fair comparison would be to focus only on Internet users who have looked up political information online, in other words, people who have engaged in the form of political participation for which TheyWorkForYou can be relevant. Therefore, another comparison will focus on *those Internet users only, who have looked up information online on a MP, local councillor, political party or candidate*. As will be shown below, this group is very much biased towards resource-rich parts of the population. Their demographics will be compared with those of users of TheyWorkForYou in order to assess the potential of TheyWorkForYou to change these persistent patterns of participation.

The data for these comparisons is provided by the Oxford Internet Survey 2009 (Dutton et al., 2009)¹⁶. Based on a random sample of more than 2,000 people it aims to give a representative picture of all people in Britain aged 14 years and older¹⁷. For a comprehensive comparative overview refer to the table in section D Detailed Survey Results and Comparative Data.

¹⁶ See website of OxIS: <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis/> [17.03.2011]

¹⁷ This does exclude Northern Ireland but its population is comparatively small and there is little reason to believe the results would be much different. Given that the basic comparator is British Internet users and the sample size of for these is 1,401, in the worst case (ie.

3.1 Political Profile of TheyWorkForYou Users

Based on data from the online user survey of visitors to TheyWorkForYou, this section mainly enquires into the question of whether users of TheyWorkForYou are already politically engaged, or whether their use of the site is their first experience of contact with politics that may or may not constitute a step towards more engagement.

Knowledge & information about political representatives

According to recent data by the Hansard Society (2010: 24,101:24,101) not even half the population can correctly name their MP (44%) which is only slightly better for higher social grades (52%). Compared to these findings the users of TheyWorkForYou are very knowledgeable: four out of five users claim they knew the name of their MP before they used TheyWorkForYou. While this suggests a better knowledge of basic parliamentary politics, it has not translated into a real interest for most of them as three out of five users (60%) have never looked up information on what their representatives were doing before they came across TheyWorkForYou. This is a large number given that - according to OxIS 2009 - 15% of Internet users have looked up this kind of information within the last year (see section 4.1 Political Engagement in Britain), and presumably more have done this in the past.

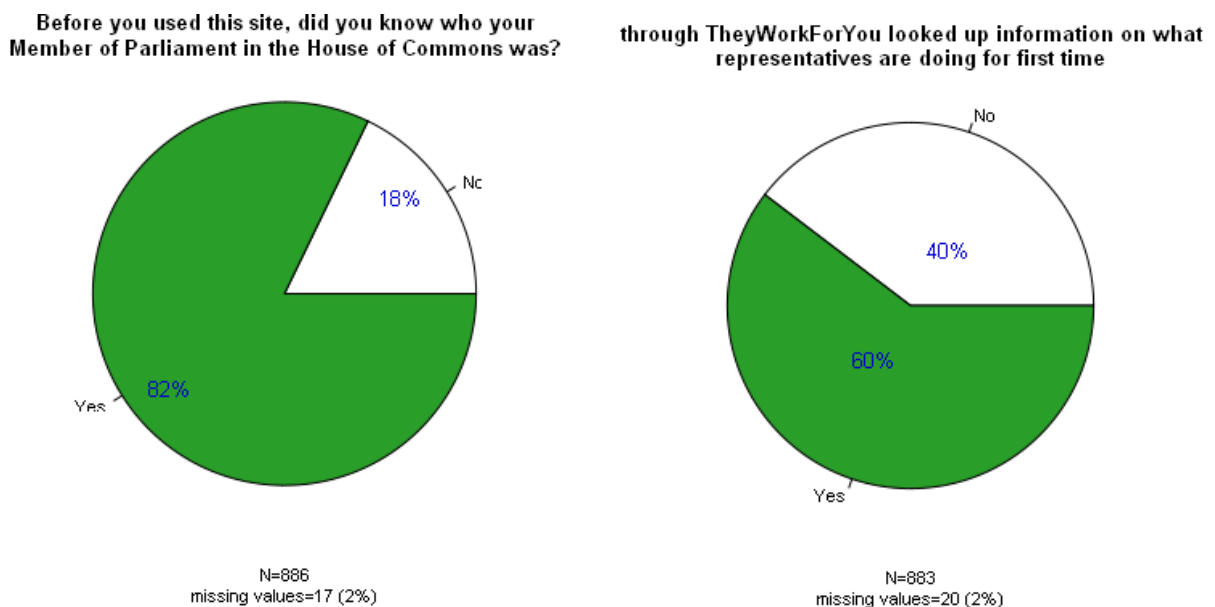


Figure 20: Knowledge of TheyWorkForYou users about their MP and whether with the help of TheyWorkForYou they looked up information about representative for the first time

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10*

50% share) there will be a confidence interval of +/-2.6% (confidence level 95%) for measures derived from this data. For most measurements the confidence interval will be smaller but for comparison to politically active people or people who have looked up information on politicians or parties sample sizes are smaller (687 and 204 respectively) hence confidence intervals can be larger (up to 3.7 and 6.9 respectively). However, the statistical test of choice is a χ^2 - test to analyse whether or not two distributions are significantly different from each other and which will take the sample size numbers into account.

Involvement with politics and community

TheyWorkForYou users are more politically engaged than the average Internet user, and their political participation¹⁸ takes place particularly often online though by no means exclusively. However, around two out of five users have not been engaged in any other political activity apart from using the TheyWorkForYou website.

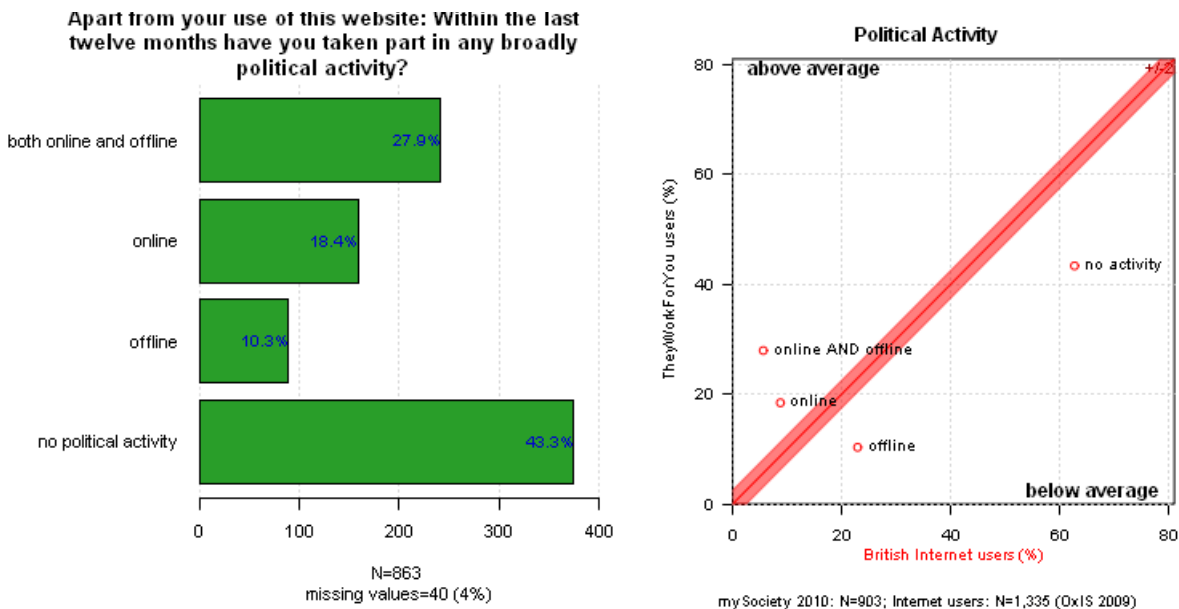


Figure 21: Political activities online and offline of TheyWorkForYou users

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009*

Despite the bias from the population the site nevertheless reaches out to a large share of otherwise politically inactive people. This is also supported by findings regarding the participation in political and/or community groups. More than half of TheyWorkForYou users have not been involved in organized groups. As we can see from OxIS data, this is a substantially lower degree of organization than exhibited by the British Internet population and in particular by those Internet users who looked for political information in the last year. However, TheyWorkForYou users show a stronger degree of organization in political groups (such as parties, unions or civic organisation e.g. for human rights) than in community groups. Their lower propensity to be active in community groups (such as charities, initiatives, churches, sports clubs or volunteer organisations) as compared to the OxIS data might in part be related to a slightly more inclusive definition of community group by the OxIS data (which also named neighbourhood and school organizations).

¹⁸ This includes, for example, taking part in demonstrations, signing a petition, contacting a politician, boycotting a product, donating money or displaying a campaign badge.

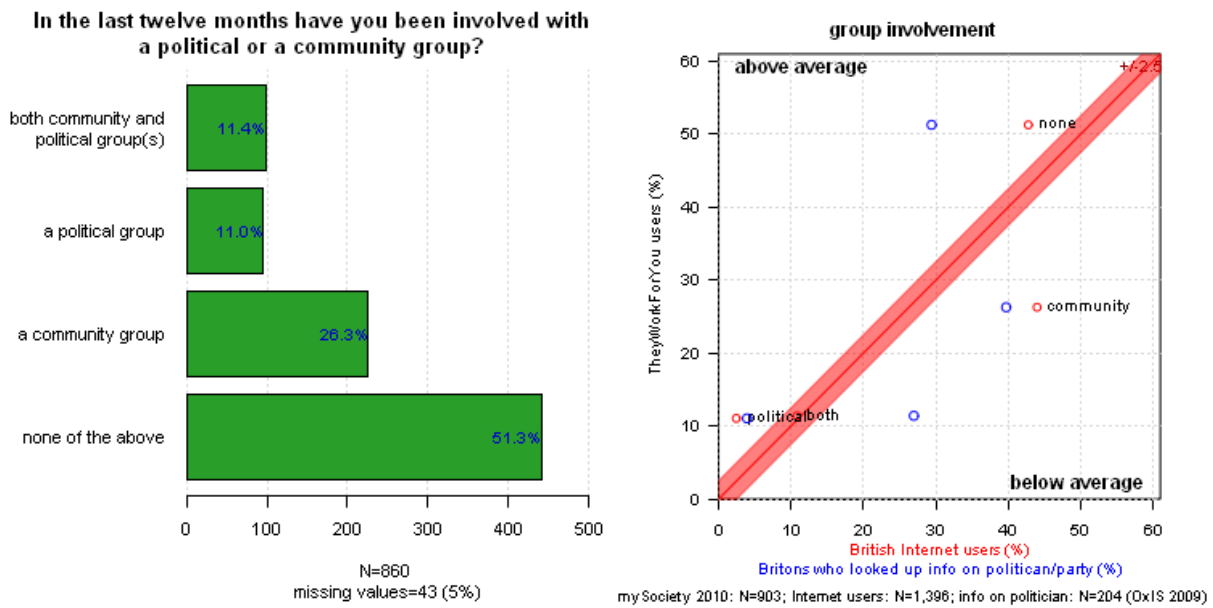


Figure 22: Membership of TheyWorkForYou users in political and community groups

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009*

In summary, while there are clearly TheyWorkForYou users who are already politically active and who are also organized in groups, the online survey shows that one in five users (21%) has neither been politically active (online and/or offline) within the last year nor been a member of any group and importantly, has got information for the first time on what his or her representatives are doing through the use of TheyWorkForYou.

3.2 Demographics of TheyWorkForYou Users

The following section reports the findings in relation to demographic characteristics of TheyWorkForYou users. For detailed numbers please refer to section D Detailed Survey Results and Comparative Data.

3.2.1 Gender

These days there is no gender gap for Internet use and political participation in general. Women are just as likely to use the Internet or engage in politics as men. However, when it comes to looking for information about politicians, men are still overrepresented. This male overrepresentation is mirrored in the TheyWorkForYou audience where two thirds of users are male.

Could you please indicate your gender?

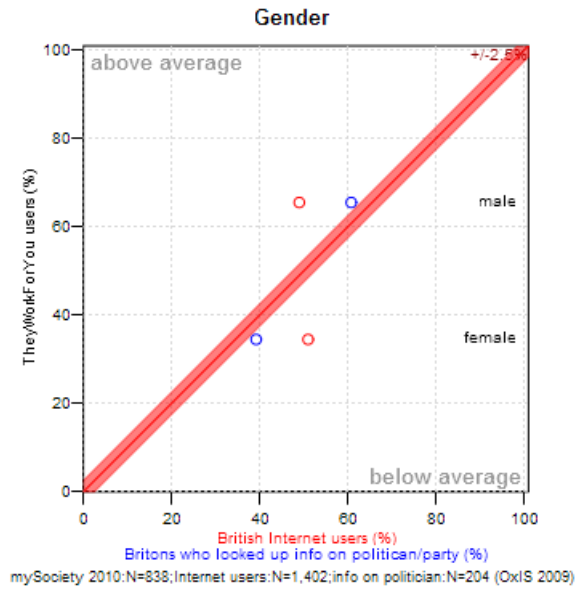
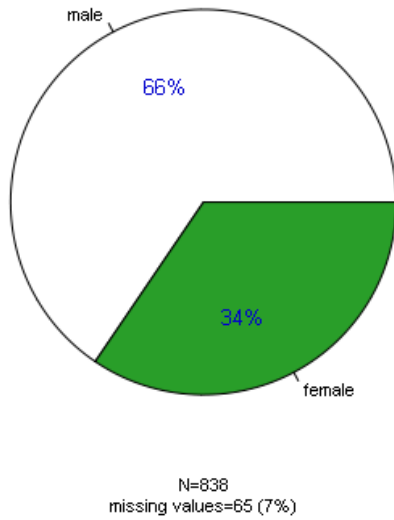


Figure 23: Gender of TheyWorkForYou users

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009*

3.2.2 Education

It is a well-established finding that better educated people are more likely to participate in politics, and this is in particular the case for researching information about politicians: Internet users with a higher education background are five times as likely to have looked for this type of information in the last year (26%) as people with only a basic level of education (5.5%). TheyWorkForYou users exhibit an even stronger bias with almost two thirds (64%) having completed a higher education degree as compared to a quarter (27%) of Internet users and 47% of those Internet users who were checking information on politicians in the past year.

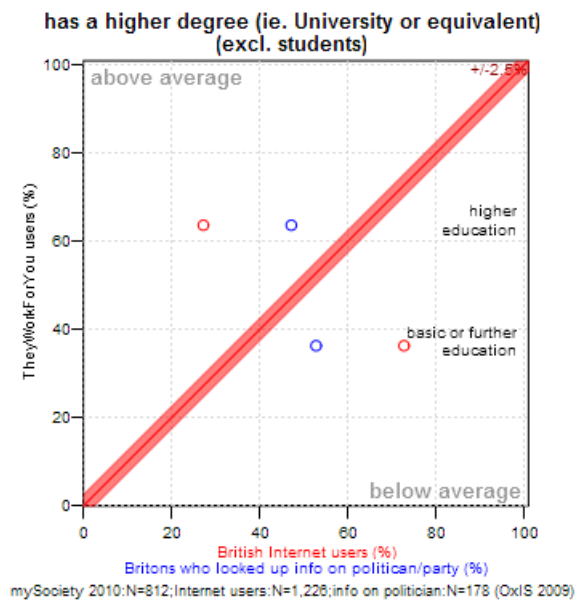
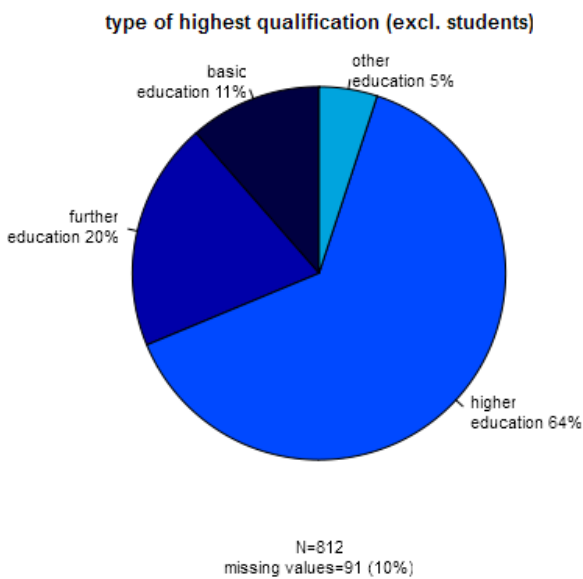


Figure 24: Educational attainment of TheyWorkForYou users

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009*

3.2.3 Income

Income is problematic to measure, as many people do not want to share this information. In this survey the income question was the one most often left unanswered with about a quarter of participants skipping it. Nevertheless, income is an important indicator as political participation is very much resource driven. According to OxIS, 54% of people in the highest income range (here defined as having an annual household income of more than £40,000) have been politically active within the last year. They are more than twice as likely to be politically active as people from the lowest income group (up to £12,500) where only 24% have participated.

This overrepresentation of high-income groups is also apparent on TheyWorkForYou. While intermediate income groups are underrepresented, low-income groups are fairly represented on TheyWorkForYou.

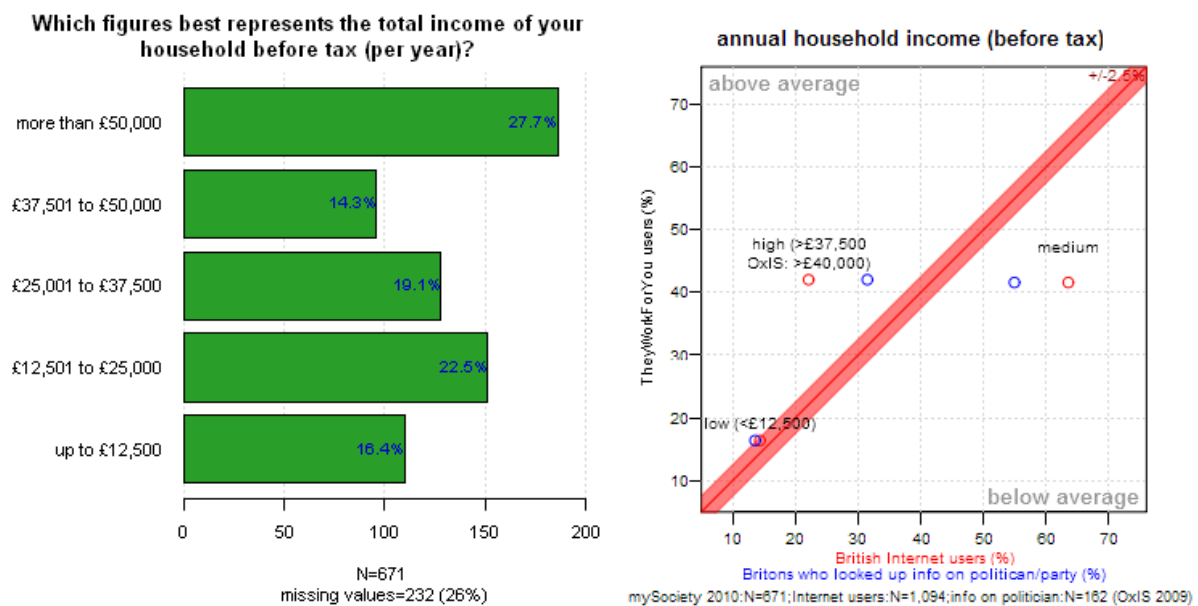


Figure 25: Income of TheyWorkForYou users

Source: mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009

3.2.4 Age

The age cohorts that are most politically active are those aged 35 to 74 where between 35% and 40% in each group have been engaged within the last year. There are signs of increased engagement also for those below 18 years of age (34%). In the TheyWorkForYou audience, people above the age of 54 tend to be overrepresented while those younger than 45 are underrepresented in comparison to the British Internet population. The findings are similar for a comparison with only those Internet users that have checked this type of information in the last year.

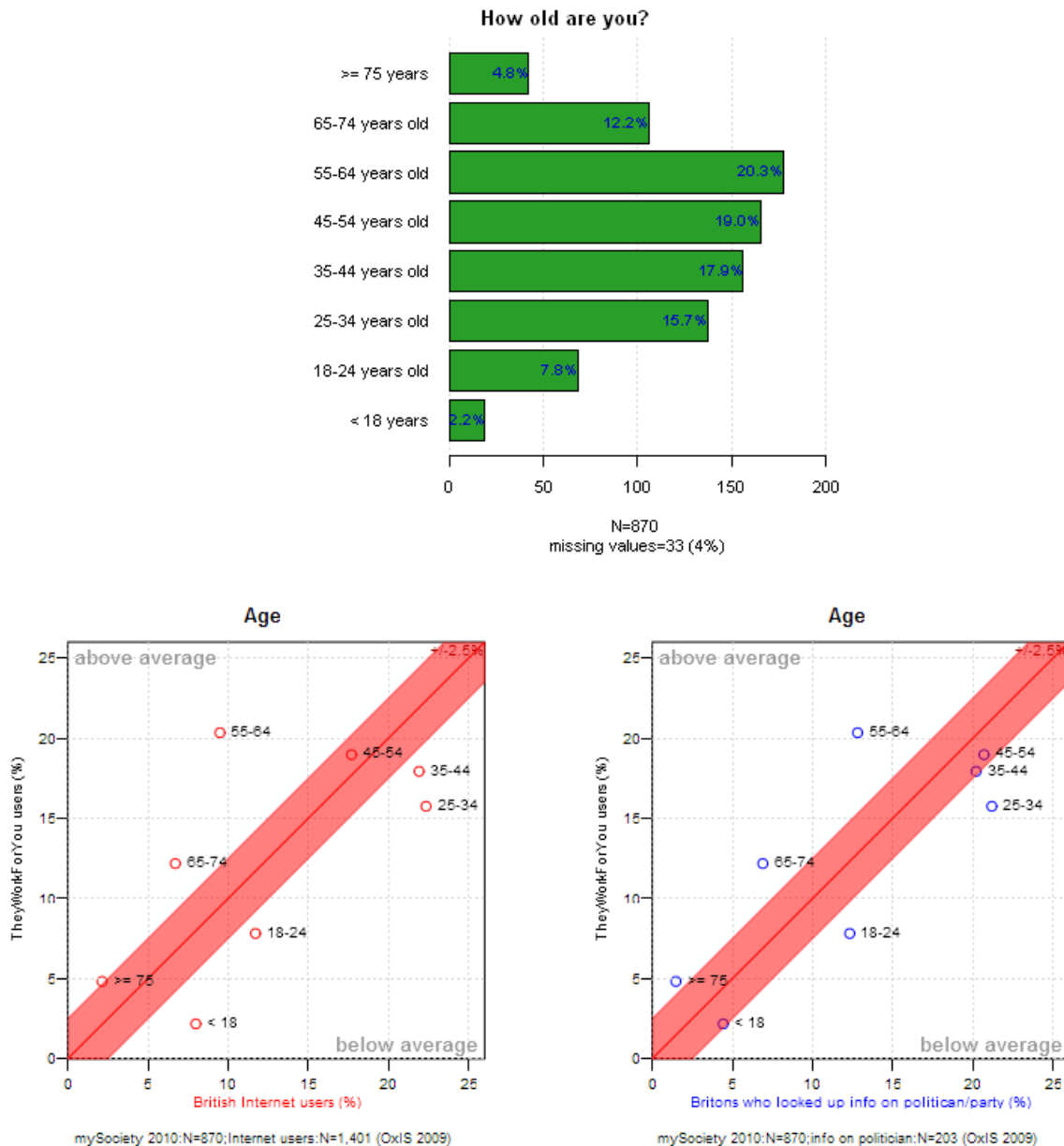


Figure 26: Age of TheyWorkForYou users

Source: mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009

3.2.5 Occupation

Political participation is also related to occupation, even if not very strongly. For example, the data from OxIS shows that in the British population, only 17% of the unemployed have engaged in political activities within the last year, while people in employment (38%), retirement (34%) or students (40%) were more than twice as likely to do so. However, for the particular activity of checking information on politicians, these differences are less pronounced: only sick or disabled people and home carers are less likely to get involved. Overall, in this regard, their profile is not significantly different from British Internet users in general.

What is noticeable on TheyWorkForYou is the high share of retired users which is twice as high as the Internet average, and also sick or disabled people are over-represented. At the same time, home caretakers and students are under-represented.

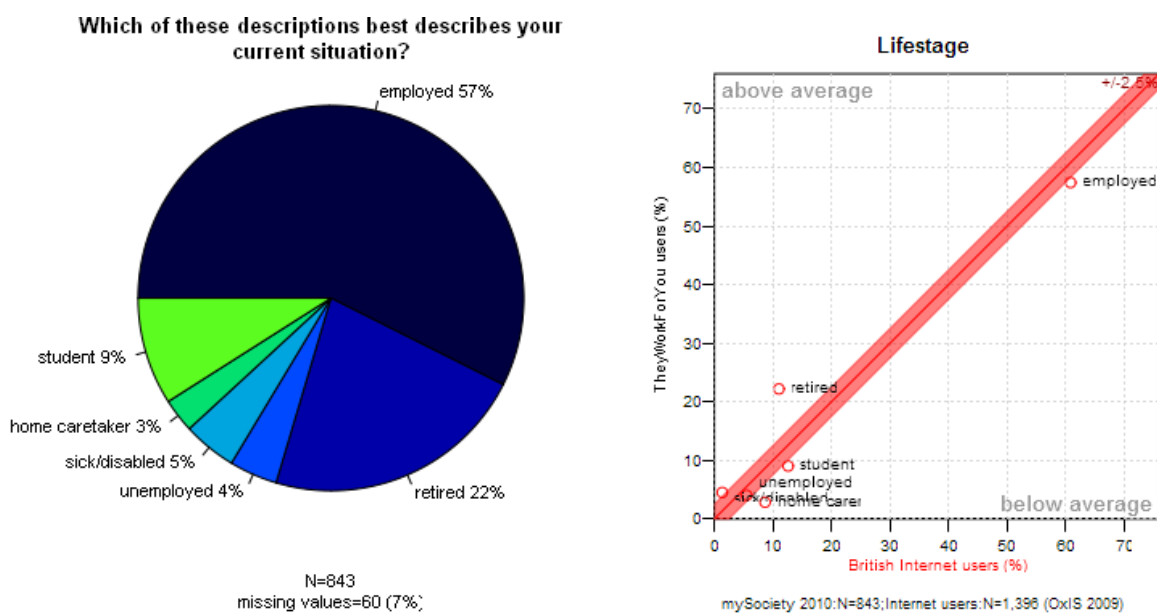


Figure 27: Occupation of TheyWorkForYou users

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009*

3.2.6 Ethnicity

Questions regarding the ethnic background are difficult because they measure a sensitive issue and the usually small numbers of respondents with minority backgrounds make analysis problematic. Due to this there is no reliable data available from OxIS on the ethnicity of people in relation to particular political activities. The available data suggests that white people are overrepresented on TheyWorkForYou with about 95% of the audience compared to 92% in the Internet population.

To which one of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?

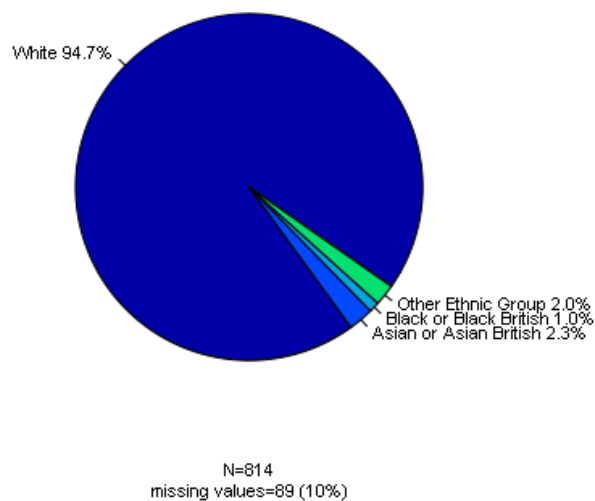


Figure 28: Ethnic background of TheyWorkForYou users

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009*

3.2.7 Disability

According to the OxIS data, citizens with disabilities are not more likely to participate politically, but they are still under-represented online. While three quarters of people without a disability are online, this is only the case for 41% of people with disabilities. There are no differences between British Internet users in general and those Internet users who have looked up information on politicians in the past year. In contrast, on TheyWorkForYou there is a strong over-representation of disabled people who account for about one in five users on TheyWorkForYou, compared to less than one in ten for the British Internet population.

Do you have a health problem or disability which prevents you from doing every day tasks at home, work or school or which limits the kind or amount of work you can do?

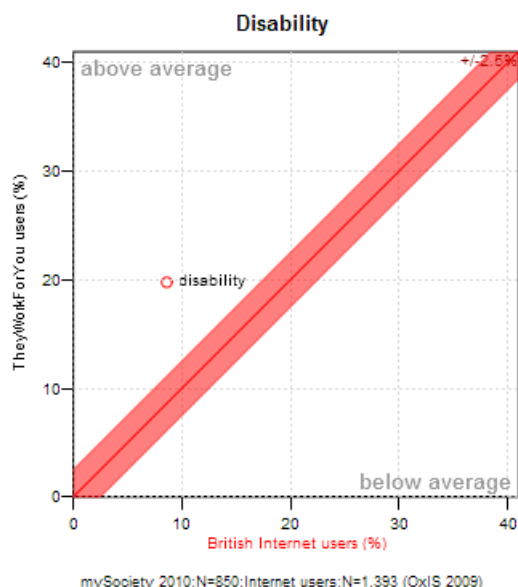
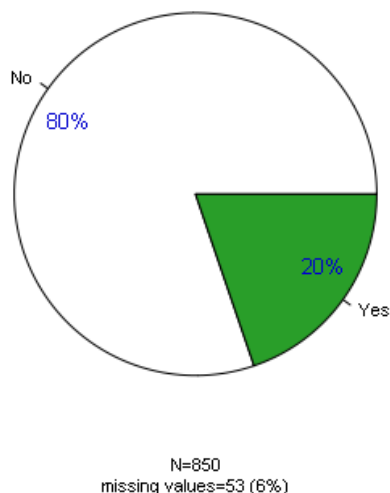


Figure 29: TheyWorkForYou users with health problems and disabilities

Source: *mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10; comparative data from Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009*

4 Ecosystem

4.1 Political Engagement in Britain

The most general measure of political participation is voter turnout. This has been declining in the UK since the early 1990s: while in 1992 almost 80% of those eligible to vote turned out, the most recent General Election in May 2010 had only 65% of those eligible actually casting their vote (Tetteh, 2008: 18:18; BBC News, 2010). Looking beyond turnout to more specific acts of political participation, the numbers are even smaller. According to the Oxford Internet Survey in 2009 about two thirds of the population had not been politically active¹⁹ at all within the previous year (see detailed analysis in section D Detailed Survey Results and Comparative Data). This leaves a third of the population that is active to some degree and for those, signing petitions (69%), deliberately buying certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (41%) and contacting politicians or government officials (35%) are the most popular forms of participation. Relevant for the particular form of participation that TheyWorkForYou focuses on: more than half of the population (56%) would use the Internet to find the name of their local MP if they did not know it (Dutton et al., 2009). For Internet users, the Internet is by far the most popular choice in this situation with three out of four Internet users (77%) would go online to find the information. Moving on from the hypothetical situation to the real action, within the last twelve months in total 15% of Internet users²⁰ have looked for information about an MP, local councillor, political party or candidate and indeed the vast majority (87%) used the Internet to do so.

Not only are the numbers of people participating in political activities rather small, those people that do also constitute a particular group of the population. Research into political participation has consistently established that people who are politically engaged are heavily biased towards resource-rich parts of the population (Milbrath 1965; Verba and Nie 1972; Parry, Moyser et al. 1992; Deth 2006). In effect politically active people in Britain differ from the general population in a variety of important aspects. They are better educated (50% more people with a higher degree), have a higher income (50% more people have a household income before tax of more than £40,000 a year) on the expense of low income groups (less than £12,500 a year) and are clearly more often organised in political groups (23% have participated in the activities of a political group within the last year vs 11% in population). They also tend to be in their forties or fifties (45 to 64 years old) and are focused around the employed citizens.

The profile of participants varies in relation to the specific activity carried out. British Internet users who have looked up information on a politician or party in the last year exhibit stronger deviations

¹⁹ Defined as signing a petition, taking part in a demonstration, deliberately buying certain products, contacting a politician, donating money to a political or civic organisation or group, contacting a political party or joining a civic organisation or association or a political party.

²⁰ There is unfortunately no data available on the population as a whole.

from the average British Internet user than the differences found between politically active Britons and the general population. This is in particular the case for education (47% have a higher degree compared to 27% in Internet population), income (32% with household income above £40,000 a year vs 22% for Internet users) and gender (male bias with 61% vs 49%) as well as the degree of political organization (31% participated in a political group within the last year compared to 14% in the Internet population).

The potential of information and communication technologies to overcome this participation bias is severely limited by the digital divide, as both access to the Internet and the skills to use it are not equally distributed. It is in particular those groups that are already excluded from traditional participation that are also more likely to be excluded from the Internet and lack the appropriate skill base (Helsper, 2008). The combination of biased political participation and the digital divide is expected to produce even more uneven results in terms of online political participation. As a result, several authors (Gibson, Lusoli et al. 2005; di Gennaro and Dutton 2006; Hindman 2008) have found that online participation is not more but may in fact be less inclusive than offline participation.

4.2 Similar Sites

It is a claim to TheyWorkForYou's fame that it has inspired a large number of similar sites in other countries. In a number of cases the source code of TheyWorkForYou has been the basis of these projects.

Table 7: Websites similar to TheyWorkForYou

Address	country	description
http://www.openaustralia.org/	Australia	An Australian version of TheyWorkForYou, based on the same source code and started in November 2007.
http://openparliament.ca/	Canada	A site with the same mission and similar functionality as TheyWorkForYou but built on Python and Django
http://folketsting.dk/	Denmark	Records of votes and speeches.
http://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de/	Germany	Reports mainly on MPs and the voting behaviour of their parties as well as adding a feature to ask public questions. No written record of parliamentary proceedings.

http://www.nosdeputes.fr/	France	Offering information on the members of the French parliament.
http://www.kildarestreet.com/	Ireland	Set up by John Handelaar with the source code of TheyWorkForYou.
http://parlamento.openpolis.it/	Italy	An ambitious effort to make accessible the complicated workings of Italy's government.
http://atviras-seimas.info/	Lithuania	provides statistics for MPs
http://www.politikercheck.lu/	Luxembourg	A partner website of the German site Abgeordnetenwatch which is focused on public questioning of MPs but also documents some parliamentary votes.
http://www.politix.nl/	Netherlands	Tracks the voting behaviour of Dutch MPs.
http://www.theyworkforyou.co.nz/	New Zealand	Effort by Rob McKinnon, who is also a mySociety volunteer. As the name suggests, similar to the UK version but with some additional features, e.g. news coverage. Set up in November 2006 but suspended in January 2010.
http://www.alesiivoteaza.ro/	Romania	A site by the Institute for Public Policy (IPP), a Romanian non-governmental organization, which is focused on MPs and their activities in parliament
http://www.undemocracy.com/	United Nations	Effort by Julian Todd, who is also a mySociety volunteer, to make accessible the written proceedings of the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly.

http://www.parliament.uk	United Kingdom	Main website of UK parliament. Redesign in 2008 totalled £3.5m and annual running costs of more than £200,000 ²¹
http://www.govtrack.us/	United States	Offers very detailed analysis of voting, speeches and donations of Members of the US congress.

A more extensive list is provided by the Wikipedia page dedicated to “Parliamentary informatics”²².

²¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/jul/11/houseofcommons.lords1> [28.05.2010]

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_informatics [28.05.1981]

5 Anecdota

Without any claim to being comprehensive, the following list provides a brief summary about some noticeable issues and events around TheyWorkForYou:

- A 2006 article by The Times²³ argued that the statistics on TheyWorkForYou about the number of times an MP has spoken in debates would result in an increase of unnecessary interventions during debates. The reporting of these statistics was subsequently changed to indicate rough trends (e.g. above average, etc) but still in 2008 this issue was raised by Chris Bryant, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Leader of the House of Commons, in a Westminster Hall debate on 23 October 2008²⁴.
- In 2007 Anne Snelgrove MP used a public parliamentary speech to remind her husband of their approaching 30th wedding anniversary, using the fact that he is subscribed to a TheyWorkForYou email alert on her speeches²⁵.
- In summer 2008 the volunteer effort to match up BBC video coverage of parliament with the written transcript was a sweeping success, timestamping more than 40,000 video clips in just twelve weeks with several volunteers contributing thousands of timestamps.
- In 2008 The Daily Telegraph newspaper rated TheyWorkForYou as 41st in a list of 101 most useful websites as *“A powerful way of keeping tabs on MPs and peers: attendance records, voting patterns, recent statements and more.”*²⁶.
- In January 2008, a TheyWorkForYou widget was added to the personalised homepage of Google (iGoogle) which was also included in <http://www.google.co.uk/politics>. TheyWorkForYou also featured on the UK Google site for the General Election in 2010²⁷.
- In July 2009 a story emerged in newspapers about a civil servant that had been sacked after making comments to Communities minister Hazel Blears, suggesting she had used TheyWorkForYou to post the comment, which caused concern about mySociety’s handling of user data. In fact she never posted anything on the site and the newspaper later printed a correction²⁸.

²³ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article735429.ece> [17.03.2011]

²⁴ <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/whall/?id=2008-10-23b.139.0#g151.0>

²⁵ <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debate/?id=2007-07-11b.1548.0>

²⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/6554835/The-101-most-useful-websites-2008.html> [17.03.2011]

²⁷ <http://www.google.co.uk/intl/en/landing/elections2010/mps/>

²⁸ <http://www.mysociety.org/2009/07/06/theyworkforyou-nothing-to-do-with-this-sacked-civil-servant-story/> and <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tomskitowski/3707069444/> [17.03.2011]

- TheyWorkForYou produces tables of expenses together with their overall ranking among all MPs which have been used by a number of MPs on their personal websites, for example by Harriet Harman and Mark Hoban²⁹.
- Since March 2010 the website of the Conservative Party has used the API of TheyWorkForYou to provide a postcode-to-constituency look-up facility.
- In order to provide an elaborate election quiz on TheyWorkForYou for the general election of 2010, mySociety initiated a major volunteer effort that was instrumentally put into action by volunteers Seb Bacon, Tim Green and Edmund von der Burg. It involved the creation of Democracy Club³⁰, a network of about 6,000 people volunteering to collect details about candidates and opinions in their constituency for YourNextMP³¹, a database of all candidates standing for election. The volunteers devised questions regarding local issues in their constituency that were put to all candidates in the relevant constituency together with a number of question on national issues devised by an independent panel of judges. Of a total of 4,156 candidates running in the election, 1,669 (40%) answered the survey questions.
- In May 2010 a woman tried to stab Stephen Timms MP because of his support for the war in Iraq. In her police interview she claimed to have used TheyWorkForYou³² to obtain information on MPs who had supported the war.

²⁹ <http://www.harrietharman.org/my-allowances> & <http://www.markhoban.com/type3.asp?id=20&type=3> [17.03.2011]

³⁰ <http://democracyclub.org.uk/> [17.03.2011]

³¹ <http://yournextmp.com/> [17.03.2011]

³² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/nov/03/roshonara-choudhry-police-interview> [17.03.2011]

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C. Methodology

C.1. Survey

The user survey on TheyWorkForYou was started on 22 September 2009 and employed an intercept survey design (Couper, 2000: 485p:485p). A special procedure would randomly invite about 20%³³ of visitors to the survey by a teaser asking “*Did you find what you were looking for?*” (shown in Figure 30 below). In order to keep the survey as unobtrusive as possible it was decided not to force a reaction to the teaser so users could continue navigating the site whilst the teaser was displayed. The selection procedure ensured that after either answering the questionnaire once or declining to participate, there would be no further invitations (based on a cookie).

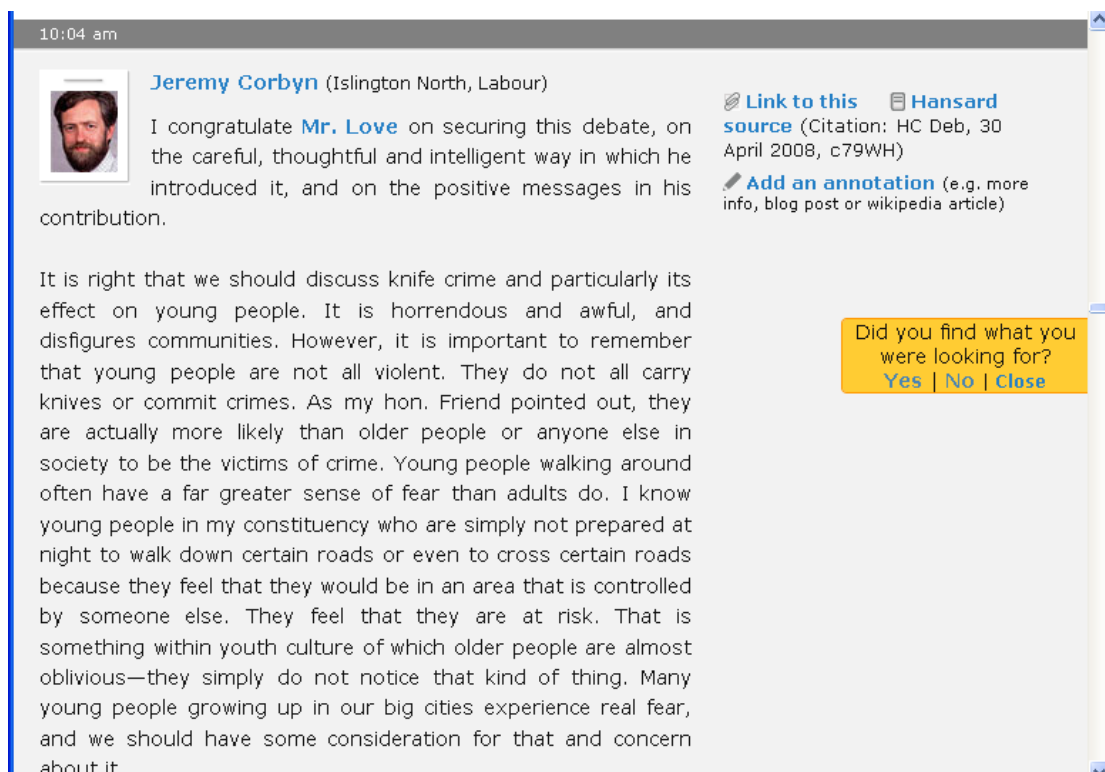


Figure 30: Screenshot of teaser inviting visitors to TheyWorkForYou to participate in online survey

If the invited visitors to the site selected either Yes or No to the teaser question (rather than ignoring it) they would be forwarded to a single web page containing the questionnaire, of which a part is shown in Figure 31 below (for the complete questionnaire see C.2 Survey Questionnaire). Users were not required to fill in the survey, nor did they have to answer all questions if they chose to participate.

³³ From 22 September until 20 October 2009 the sampling rate was 10% which was then increased to 20% of all visitors in order to collect more responses.

Glad we could help you! Maybe you could help us by answering some questions in our user survey which will contribute to make TheyWorkForYou even better – five minutes should be enough. If you don't want to participate, thanks anyway, [return to where you were](#).

TheyWorkForYou's quick and painless user survey

We (ie. the people from mySociety, the independent non-profit who runs this site) hate to bother you with this but we really would like to know what you (dis)like about our site and whether it is used by a representative share of the population (we would not want to only serve one particular group exclusively). We know we ask some personal stuff but be assured:

- The questions from here on are **completely anonymous**.
- This also means that we cannot connect your answers to whatever you do on our sites.
- Of course we would like you to answer all questions but you don't have to if you feel it's none of our business.
- These are all the questions. **We won't ask more**. So it should take only 5 minutes.

Your feedback will help us **make the site better** and help us tell more people about it.

Within the last twelve months: How often have you used TheyWorkForYou?

Before you used this site, did you know who your Member of Parliament in the House of Commons was? yes no don't want to answer

Before you used TheyWorkForYou did you ever look up information on what your representatives were doing? yes no don't want to answer

How would you describe your latest use of this site?

- just generally browsing out of interest/curiosity
- obtaining information on my representative
- obtaining information on a particular debate
- checking a particular fact
- keeping an eye on what (my) representatives do
- other
- don't want to answer

Is your use of this site in any way related to your work? yes no don't want to answer

Are you a registered user of TheyWorkForYou? (This means do you have a log-in that allows you to add annotations?) yes no don't want to answer

How likely is it that you would recommend this site to a friend or colleague? (assuming they would be interested in such a service)

How did you find out about this site? from another mySociety site

Figure 31: Start of questionnaire

The user survey was designed in order to obtain a more detailed picture on the demography and political engagement of TheyWorkForYou users and to gather information about their experience using the site.

Data was collected from 22 September 2009 until 11 April 2010. The survey was then suspended on 12 April when the Westminster parliament was dissolved for the General Election, in order to separate the data from the election campaign.

Table 8: Response rate for user survey as of 20 April 2010

teaser shown on site (<i>visits to site, i.e. does not equal unique visitors; only visitors who have not responded to teaser earlier</i>)	235,149
followed invitation (<i>responded to teaser</i>)	12,333 (~5%)
cooperation rate (<i>submitted questionnaire</i>)	1,130 (~9%)
completion rate (<i>defined as having missed not more than four out of eleven essential variables³⁴</i>)	1024 (~91%)
response rate I (completed surveys from total number of times teaser was shown)	>0.4% (<i>lower bound as repeat visitors will have been shown teaser several times</i>)
response rate II (completed surveys from total number of people who responded to teaser)	8%
<i>Number of responses used in analysis (only those completed before 12 April 2010, i.e. dissolution of parliament for General Election)</i>	903

The questions that people most often refused to answer were³⁵:

1. income (26%)
2. opinion on representative (23%)
3. opinion on design of site (17%)
4. opinion on objectivity of site (14%)
5. opinion on change in knowledge about representative (13%)
6. location (13%)
7. usefrequency (10%)
8. ethnicity (10%)
9. opinion on structure of site (9%)
10. opinion on navigability of site (8%)
11. education (8%)
12. gender (7%)
13. disability (6%)

³⁴ Essential variables concerned netpromoter, referrer, groups, activity, age, gender, education_any, lifestage, income, ethnicity, disability.

³⁵ Percentage based on people that completed the questionnaire (ie. not more than 4 missing variables)

This result is somewhat interesting if compared to the findings on WriteToThem (Escher, forthcoming). While not surprisingly most users are hesitant to answer the income question, the reluctance to share details on frequency of use and the opinion about several aspects of the site are hard to explain. It is possible that the question on opinions about the site posed some usability challenges. In general, the rather large number of missing variables points to the fact that users were less motivated to answer the questionnaire.

C.2. Survey Questionnaire

The complete text of the survey follows below (for a screenshot see Figure 31). The design was very simple, all the questions were displayed on a single webpage and users were free to leave questions unanswered.

Within the last twelve months: How often have you used TheyWorkForYou?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • never, this is the first time in the last 12 months • about once within the last 12 months • 2 - 5 times within the last 12 months • 6 - 10 times within the last 12 months • roughly every month within the last 12 months • roughly every week within the last 12 months • roughly every day within the last 12 months • don't want to answer
Before you used this site, did you know who your Member of Parliament in the House of Commons was?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • don't want to answer
Before you used TheyWorkForYou did you ever look up information on what your representatives were doing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • don't want to answer
How would you describe your latest use of this site?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • just generally browsing out of interest/curiosity • obtaining information on my representative • obtaining information on a particular debate • checking a particular fact • keeping an eye on what (my) representatives do • other (<i>please specify</i>) • don't want to answer
Is your use of this site in any way related to your work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • don't want to answer
Are you a registered user of TheyWorkForYou? (This means do you have a log-in that allows you to add annotations or contribute to the glossary?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • don't want to answer
How likely is it that you would recommend this site to a friend or colleague? (assuming they would be interested in such a service)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from 0 (<i>not at all likely</i>) to 10 (<i>extremely likely</i>) • <i>feel free to tell us why</i> • don't want to answer

How did you find out about this site?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from another mySociety site • from media such as newspapers, etc • from a search engine (e.g. Google or Yahoo) • recommendation by friends or colleagues • from a campaigning website • used this site before • other (<i>please specify</i>) • can't remember • don't want to answer
Is there any feature that you would like to see on the site for which you would be willing to donate some money so that it can be developed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free text
How much do you agree with the following statements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • possible options: <i>strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, don't want to answer</i> • TheyWorkForYou is easy to navigate • TheyWorkForYou is well structured • TheyWorkForYou provides information in an unbiased and unpartisan way • TheyWorkForYou is pretty to look at • TheyWorkForYou has improved my <i>knowledge</i> about my representative • TheyWorkForYou has improved my <i>opinion</i> about my representative
In the last twelve months have you been involved with a political or a community group, e.g. by being a formal member or by volunteering?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a political group (e.g. a party, an union, a civic organisation e.g. for human rights) • a community group (e.g.a charity, an initiative, a church, a sports club, a volunteer organisation) • both community as well as political group(s) • none of the above • don't want to answer
Apart from your use of this website: Within the last twelve months have you taken part in any broadly political activity? (This includes for example demonstrations, signing a petition, contacting a politician, boycotting a product, donating money or displaying a campaign badge)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yes, online • yes, offline • yes both online as well as offline • none of the above • don't want to answer
How old are you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less than 18 years old • 18-24 years old • 25-29 years old • 30-34 years old • 35-39 years old • 40-44 years old • 45-49 years old • 50-54 years old • 55-59 years old • 55-64 years old • 60-64 years old • 65-69 years old • 70-74 years old • 75 years and older • don't want to answer

<p>Could you please indicate your gender?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • female • male • don't want to answer
<p>What is the last type of educational institution (e.g. school, college or university) that you have attended or which type of educational institution are you attending now?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary school or equivalent • Secondary school or equivalent • Special school or equivalent • Sixth form college or equivalent • Technical college or equivalent • Further Education College • Adult Community College • University or equivalent • other • don't want to answer
<p>Which of these descriptions best describes your current situation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working full time (30 hours a week or more) • working part time (8-29 hours a week) • retired • unemployed • permanently sick or disabled • in community or military service • undergraduate student • postgraduate student • in full time education (not degree or higher) • in part time education (not degree or higher) • doing housework, looking after children or other persons • none of the above • don't want to answer
<p>The incomes of households differ a lot in Britain today. Which figures best represents the total income of your household before tax?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to £12,500 • £12,501 to £25,000 • £25,001 to £37,500 • £37,501 to £50,000 • £50,001 to £75,000 • £75,001 to £100,000 • more than £100,000 • don't want to answer
<p>To which one of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ British ○ English ○ Welsh ○ Scottish ○ Irish ○ Other white • Mixed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ White and Black Caribbean ○ White and Black African ○ White and Asian ○ Other Mixed • Asian or Asian British <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Indian ○ Pakistani ○ Bangladeshi ○ Other Asian

- Black or Black British
 - Caribbean
 - African
 - Other Black
- Chinese
- any other ethnic group
- don't know
- don't want to answer

Do you have a health problem or disability which prevents you from doing every day tasks at home, work or school or which limits the kind or amount of work you can do?

- Yes
- No
- don't want to answer

Do you have any other comments (e.g. on the survey, on your usage, etc)?

C.3. Sample Bias / Representativeness

This survey relies on the cooperation of TheyWorkForYou users. As there was no other means available of contacting the whole audience of TheyWorkForYou, the chosen method to invite users to participate in this survey was via a teaser shown on the site. This is always the least preferable option as many people will simply overlook it, others will be annoyed even though it was designed to minimise disruption, and frequent users of the site have a higher chance of being invited to the survey. Last but not least, even though it was recorded how often the teaser was shown, there is no way to determine exactly how many people (as opposed to visits to the site) have been presented with the choice to participate in the survey. Recruiting of participants is even more difficult because as the analysis shows most users come to TheyWorkForYou only for a short time, looking for a particular fact. They leave the site very quickly and can hardly be expected to be motivated to spend up to five minutes doing a survey.

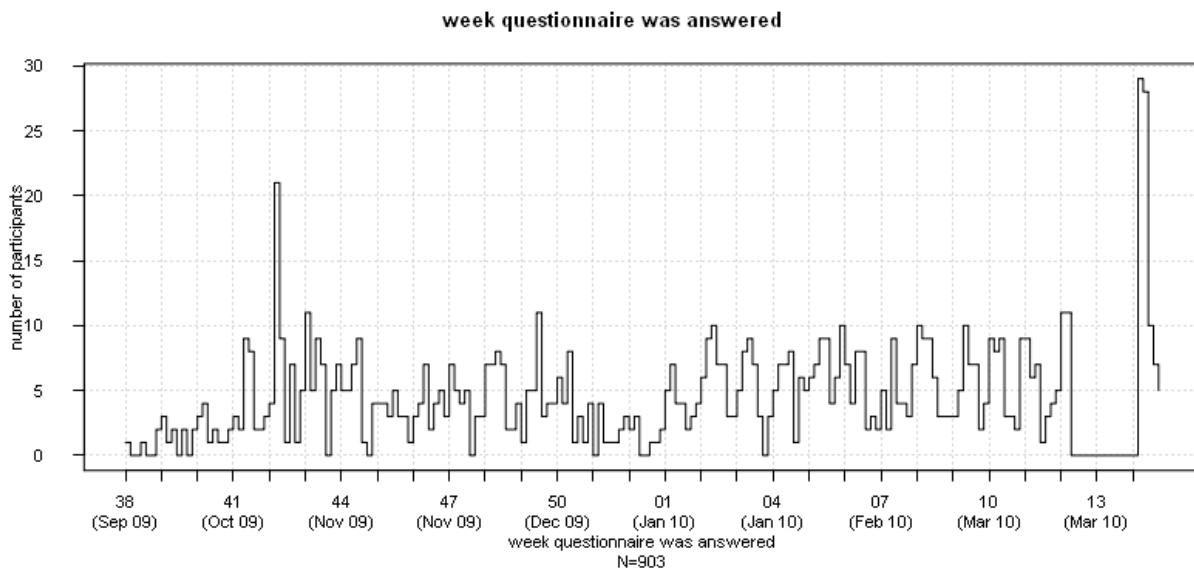


Figure 32: Responses to survey questionnaire over time

Source: mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10

The overall response rate is at least 0.4%. This value is a lower bound as the teaser is likely to have been shown multiple times to the same person visiting the site repeatedly. What is more, it is fair to assume that many people simply did not notice the teaser as it was designed to disrupt browsing as little as possible. Of those that actually got to the questionnaire because they answered the question in the teaser (*Did you find what you were looking for?*) about 8% completed the questionnaire. There is little comparative data available but an experimental study of Alvarez et al (2003: 31:31) which used a website banner to recruit participants to a survey reported an overall response rate of 0.017% (compared to 0.4% in this survey), a click rate of 0.3% (compared to 5% in this survey) and a conversion rate from clicking the banner to participating of 5.6% (compared to 8% in this survey). The figures reported for the TheyWorkForYou survey compare favourably to these numbers though it has to be kept in mind that the Alvarez study recruited subjects on third party sites and the impressions probably did not account for automated queries.

The response rate itself is just an imperfect proxy measure for how representative the sample is for the whole TheyWorkForYou user population. The goal of every survey is to obtain a sample representative of the population (in this case of the users of TheyWorkForYou). As long as all people are equally likely to participate and the surveyed time frame is long enough to account for variations throughout the survey period the actual response rate is not really a problem. It is, however, possible that certain types of users are more (or less) likely to respond to the survey which would introduce a bias in the sample and hence into the results. The representativeness of the sample is in particular relevant for demographic questions, in order to see how much TheyWorkForYou users differ from the British Internet population according to the nationally representative sample from OxIS 2009. For the assessment of the site demographic characteristics such as age and gender can still play a role but probably less so.

There is no data collected on the website about the users, hence there is a lack of reliable indices that might allow some assessment of the representativeness of the sample. However, there are a number of weak estimators. For example until 20 April 2010 of all 12,333 users who responded to the teaser 59% found what they were looking for which is a more or less consistent rate throughout the sampling period³⁶. By contrast, in the survey³⁷ this is substantially more with 80% of users finding the relevant information. It should perhaps not surprise that those “successful” users are more inclined to answer the survey. Subsequently it can be expected that those users answering the survey are more satisfied than the general user. What is more, the analysis has shown that those successfully using the site differ significantly in their demographic characteristics from those who fail to find the relevant information on the site.

Another estimator is the amount of frequent usage. According to the web stats, in any given year around two thirds of visits to TheyWorkForYou are first time visits. This is an upper limit for the actual share of people using TheyWorkForYou for the first time because the number of first time visits is bound to be inflated given that people use different computers and browsers or might delete their cookies, all resulting in their visit being counted as a first time visit. It seems not unreasonable to expect that around 50% of users of TheyWorkForYou are regulars who have used the site at least twice within the last year. In the

³⁶ Data is available for 27 November and 20 October 2009 when the rate was 56% each time.

³⁷ That only takes into account responses up to 11 April 2010 but as highlighted the rate seems to be quite consistent.

sample four out of ten respondents said they were visiting the site for the first time. This is not a huge deviation from the web stats, in particular as the sampling method is bound to produce samples that include more frequent users of the site as these have a higher chance of being invited to the survey. Taken together, this signals that, at least on this measure, the sample seems to have reached a broad share of the TheyWorkForYou audience and not just a selective share. Also there is a rather constant share of about two thirds of all visits arriving via search engines on TheyWorkForYou. Many of those people arriving via search engines do already know about the site, as around 10% of searches use TheyWorkForYou or a combination of these words in their search. This means the number of people who genuinely find out about TheyWorkForYou for the first time by using a search engine is lower. On this assumption, the share of 50% of users who indicated in the survey that they found out about the site from a search engine is not too far off.

Overall it cannot be assumed with any confidence that the sample is representative of the entire audience of TheyWorkForYou. With confidence the results can be used to assess the characteristics and opinions of a share of the TheyWorkForYou audience only but it can be assumed that based on the few imperfect proxy measures above the bias of the sample might not be too extreme.

D. Detailed Survey Results and Comparative Data

Based on the Oxford Internet Survey 2009 (Dutton et al., 2009) the following table summarises the main socioeconomic indicators of a) the British population, b) British Internet users, c) those British people who said they have carried out at least one political activity within the last year and d) those Internet users who have looked up information (online and/or offline) about an MP, local councillor, political party or candidate³⁸. The table also reports the respective results from the survey of TheyWorkForYou users.

Table 9: Patterns of political participation in Britain compared to TheyWorkForYou users

	British population	Internet users	politically active citizens (in last year) ^{a)}	Internet users who looked up information on politician/party (in last year) ^{b)}	TheyWorkForYou users
Source	OxIS 2009	OxIS 2009	OxIS 2009	OxIS 2009	mySociety online user survey
Number of cases ^{c)}	2,013	1,401	687	204	903
	<i>all values as percentage of respective population</i>				
Gender				++	**/++
male	48	49	50	61	66
Education ^{d)}		**	**	++	**/++
higher education	20	27	30	47	64
Monthly gross income household		**	**	++	**/++
≤ £12,500	26	14	18	14	16
£12,501 - £40,000	58	64	58	55	42 (- £37,500)
> £40,000	16	22	24	32	42 (> £37,500)
Age		**	*		**/++
< 18 years	6	8	6	4	2
18-24 years	10	12	9	12	8
25-34 years	18	22	14	21	16
35-44 years	18	22	19	20	18
45-54 years	16	18	20	21	19
55-64 years	12	10	14	13	20
65-74 years	12	7	12	7	12
≥ 75 years	8	2	5	2	5
Occupation		**	**		**/++
employed	49	61	54	64	57
retired	23	11	23	13	22
unemployed	8	6	4	6	4
sick/disabled	3	1	3	1	5
home caretaker	8	9	6	4	3
student	9	13	10	13	9
Ethnicity				++	**/++
White	93	93	93	85	95
Asian/Asian British	3	3	3	7	2
Black/Black British	3	3	4	6	1
other ethnic group	1	1	1	3	2
Disability		**			**/++
	15	9	15	8	20

³⁸ The Oxford Internet survey provides this information only for Internet users who have looked up information (online and/or offline) about an MP, local councillor, political party or candidate within the last year.

Active in groups (in last year) ^{e)}		**	**	++	**/++
no	49	43	31	29	51
a community group	40	44	47	40	26
a political group	2	2	4	4	11
both	9	11	19	27	11
Pol. participation in last year ^{a)}		**		++	^{f)} **/++
no activity	66	60	-	31	43
offline	19	19	56	19	10
online	4	6	13	9	18
online & offline	11	15	31	41	28

Source: Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) 2009, except „TheyWorkForYou users“: mySociety/UK Citizens Online Democracy user survey 2009/10

Note: ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$ (based on χ^2 -test, always in relation to British population); ++ $p \leq 0.01$; + $p \leq 0.05$ (based on χ^2 -test, always in relation to British Internet population);

^{a)} political participation was defined in OxIS as signing a petition, taking part in a demonstration, deliberately buying certain products, contacting a politician, donating money to a political or civic organisation or group, contacting a political party or joining a civic organisation or association or a political party;

^{b)} based on the following question (to Internet users only): “Have you done any of the following in the past year: Look for information about an MP, local councillor, political party or candidate?”;

^{c)} indicates number of cases in base category. Number of cases for individual items may be smaller due to nonresponse on particular variables

^{d)} excluding those respondents who are currently students except those on a postgraduate degree

^{e)} based on the following OxIS questions: for political groups: “Do you participate to the activities of: A trade union, an environmental or animal welfare organisation, any other political or campaigning organisation?”; for community groups: “Do you participate to the activities of: any social or sport club, a residents, neighbourhood, school or other local group, a charity organization or social aid organisation, religious or church organisation?”

^{f)} apart from their use of TheyWorkForYou;

E. mySociety – a short summary³⁹

mySociety is a charitable organisation and an open source community which work together to build the world's most popular and effective democracy and transparency websites. Despite directly employing only 12 people and focussing primarily on the UK, mySociety's websites were used by over 5 million people in the last year. Those citizens undertook practical, meaningful activities as varied as getting potholes fixed to delivering messages from individuals appealing against extradition from the UK. Our purpose is to deliver simple, tangible benefits for citizens, using the internet.

What we do

mySociety builds websites like TheyWorkForYou.com (parliamentary transparency), WriteToThem.com (for contacting politicians) and FixMyStreet.com (report a problem in your street to your local council).

The best way to understand what any of our websites does is to visit it: they are often single-purpose, and by trying it out, the user should immediately grasp what that purpose is.

Consequently, our sites tend to have a minimalist, unfussy feel. That reflects our obsession with making our tools as usable as possible for people who have never engaged before, never before written to a politician or never examined a voting record. Our metrics suggest we succeed at these goals, with 50% first timers being usual. This means that each year we are engaging enormous numbers of people in the UK's democratic system for the first time, fixing problems in their lives at the same time.

Everything we build is open source software. This means that our ideas and technology can be copied and re-used in democracies across the world, from the Ukraine to New Zealand. We are a virtual community with a core of a few increasingly-renowned paid developers, and a much larger group of volunteers who do everything from code entire websites to putting up posters in workplaces. Recently a group of non-technical volunteers (including one government minister) helped chop up and time-stamp 37,000 video clips of Parliament in just a few weeks. With over 2.5 million visitors expected this year, this video addition will make a real difference to showing citizens what is happening in their name in Parliament.

Why we do it

Elections in most countries happen only every few years. In between those elections there are innumerable decisions made by government that the public has a right to have a say in. mySociety believes that appropriate uses of technology can help people to engage, and to get the things changed in their society that they want changed. We are not interested in direct democracy - we're interested in patching and upgrading the democracy we've already got.

mySociety also believes that the institutions of government and civil society need help understanding quite how substantially the internet can be used to make change for the better. We therefore exist not just to build sites directly for members of the public, but we strive to help often recalcitrant institutions realise what's best for them and their users. When we succeed, the results can be spectacular - the previous Prime Minister's office commissioned us to build a petitions website that went on to become the biggest non-partisan democracy website in the history of the world (over 8 million signatures so far).

mySociety is politically neutral. It is important that everything we do is accessible to all, no matter what political allegiance. [TheyWorkForYou](http://TheyWorkForYou.com) deals with facts, not opinions.

³⁹ For an up-to-date version see http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=dcqzzt5_39dzqrw2hr

History

mySociety was founded in late 2003, building on the foundations of a small volunteer community that had been around for several years prior. It was founded by Tom Steinberg, a policy analyst in the UK government who was unusually familiar with technology in having been a systems administrator prior to his policy career. He was therefore able to see that the work of this small volunteer community was more far more meaningful and empowering to most citizens than the bulk of the multi-billion pound 'eGovernment' agenda, and set about building an organisation that could replicate and accelerate their work.

That project proceeded with funding from every source possible, foundations, individuals both wealthy and not, government departments and eventually business commissions from the likes of Google, the BBC and No10 Downing Street.

By its 5th birthday, mySociety had built an international reputation as the most successful engineers of impactful non-partisan websites in the world. In 2007 the UK government asked Tom Steinberg to write its new information strategy, the Power of Information Review, and implemented almost all of the recommendations. At around the same time the then Prime Minister included a whole chapter on mySociety in his book *Britain's Everyday Heroes*.

Organisational Structure

mySociety is an open source organisation that breathes the methods it preaches. We have no offices, to help keep overheads down to extremely low levels, and organise ourselves using a variety of open source internet technologies, such as email lists, chat rooms, wikis and so on.

Around three quarters of the core of the organisation are unpaid, and a meritocratic system tends to mean that the people who do the most work end up having a larger and larger say over where the organisation goes, and what projects get worked on.

We are a registered charity in the UK, which wholly owns a company so that we can do work for organisations wanting our skills, with the profits being returned to the charity.

Future

MySociety's stated aims are to build websites that give people simple, tangible benefits in the civic and community aspects of their lives; and to teach the public and voluntary sectors, through demonstration, how to use the internet most efficiently to improve lives.

Both predicate a future in which mySociety has a permanent place, always innovating, and always developing. With the future of web technologies growing at such a pace, and society shaping itself to adapt to new possibilities, providing online access to civic processes will continue to be a substantial challenge, and one that mySociety will happily rise to.

Our open source approach and agile methodology, together with our dispersed workforce, allows for some interesting possibilities, particularly when it comes to working with organisations overseas. In the past, we have not always been able to extend much assistance (beyond access to our code) to those expressing an interest in setting up similar projects abroad – not that this has stopped the launching of many comparable projects, from a Catalan FixMyStreet to a Lithuanian WriteToThem.

This state of affairs looks set to change in 2011, as for the first time we employ paid full-time staff abroad. Thanks to funding from the philanthropic Omidyar Network, two mySociety employees will be bringing the principles of TheyWorkForYou to the challenging and complicated political landscapes of Kenya and Nigeria.

Our other major project for this year will be the launch of FixMyTransport, a UK specific website which takes the principles of FixMyStreet and applies them to public transport. By providing an easy interface through which passengers can report problems with their journey, we hope to provide one more channel through which citizens have the power to make improvements in their own everyday life.

Like FixMyStreet, FixMyTransport will rely on the power of transparency and crowd-sourcing to get stuff done. You can read more about it here: <http://www.mysociety.org/fixmytransport>.

mySociety operates as an open forum, within which any member is welcome to suggest new ideas for projects. With the majority of the organisation being made up of developers who understand the availability, restrictions and above all the possibilities of open data, this can lead to innovative, and surprising, ideas. The best of those ideas - time and money allowing - get built.

Key Details

Director: Tom Steinberg

Email: director@mysociety.org

phone: +44 7811 082158

web: www.mysociety.org

Marketing and Communications Manager: Myfanwy Nixon

Email: myf@mysociety.org

Phone: +44 7976 961845