

The Impact of Internet Tools upon Volunteer Mobilisation and Party
Membership at a Local Level: A Study of the Experiences and Perceptions of
Liberal Democrat Grassroots Activists

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Abstract

This thesis studies how Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers within local election campaigns. It also identifies who is most likely to use these tools and who is most likely to perceive that they are useful.

Existing studies of the use of Internet tools to mobilise volunteers are limited because they have typically focused upon the Internet-as-a-whole, instead of breaking it down into smaller, more meaningful categories. It is important to study Internet tools individually as they each have different features and some are more deeply integrated into mobilisation practices than others. Therefore, this thesis addresses this limitation by focusing upon three specific Internet tools: Facebook, Twitter and email. It uses data generated from a participant observation, survey and series of semi-structured interviews.

Similarly, few studies have been carried out in England or within the context of second order elections. As a result, this thesis explores the perceptions of grassroots activists in relation to English local elections, thus offering a relatively unique perspective upon the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation.

The findings confirm that it is beneficial to analyse Internet tools individually because there are significant differences in how they are used, in addition to who uses them and who perceives them to be useful.

Email is the most commonly used; it is also perceived to be the most useful for mobilising volunteers and increasing membership.

Younger people are more likely to use Facebook and Twitter and to perceive that they are useful tools, whereas older people are less likely to do so. This emphasises the importance of younger supporters, as the party would find it more difficult to reach online audiences without them.

This thesis argues that people that become involved as a result of Internet tools are less likely to remain heavily involved over the long-term. For instance, externally elected public officials are less likely to join online or use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This fits with a wider pattern of engagement amongst party elites and long-term members. It emphasises the importance of using a combination of online and offline tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Long-term trends consistently point towards significant falls in the membership levels of mainstream political parties, including the Liberal Democrats. Some parties, such as the Labour Party in the run-up to the 1997 general election, have managed to buck this trend, but only in the very short-term (Ward et al. 2002; Whiteley, 2009). Similarly, the social demographics of party membership have become more restricted. Members are increasingly middle-class, with left of centre parties, such as the Liberal Democrats, particularly reliant upon public sector professionals (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). Not dissimilarly to most parties, women, young people and ethnic minorities are also underrepresented within the Liberal Democrats (Lusoli and Ward, 2004).

Recruitment is not the only problem; empirical evidence also shows a long-term decline in the levels of activism amongst individual members and supporters, particularly in terms of election campaigning (Norris, 2000). Overall, members and supporters spend fewer hours volunteering. This has a particularly strong impact upon the Liberal Democrats who are especially dependent upon volunteers to run a strong local campaign (Cutts, 2004; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005).

There is a vast amount of empirical evidence that shows that political parties are no longer the mass participatory vehicles they once were. These trends are not just present within Great Britain; they have been highlighted across a range of advanced industrial democracies since the 1960s (Katz et al. 1992; Mair, 1994; Whiteley and Seyd, 1998; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Scarrow, 2000; Mair and Van Biezen, 2001; Ward et al. 2002; Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Dalton, 2005; Russell, 2005; Whiteley, 2009).

This gradual decline has coincided with the development of a number of new technologies. The radio, television and telephone all changed the nature of how

society communicates. As each of these three technologies became more widespread, there followed periods of academic research and debate relating to whether each might increase participation within democratic elections.

Perhaps therefore, it is unsurprising that the Internet is the latest technological development to become intertwined with debates relating to how electoral participation may be reinvigorated. Since the 1990s it has commonly been suggested that Internet tools may modernise politics by renewing public interest and participation in democratic institutions. Much of the early work containing such suggestions was highly speculative and tended to be wildly optimistic about the mobilising potential of Internet tools (see for instance, Grossman, 1995; Negroponte, 1995).

Despite a great deal of initial optimism that Internet tools may change the nature of democracy by various commentators, including Bonchek (1995), Mann (1995), McGookin (1995), Phillips (1995) and Rheingeld (1993) it soon became apparent that with the exception of various groups, such as young people (Boogers and Voerman, 2002; Lusoli, 2005) and those already engaged in politics, this new technological development would have little impact upon democratic participation at all. It would not encourage vast numbers of citizens to vote and neither would it significantly alter voting intentions across large sections of the electorate (see for example, Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Gibson et al. 2003; Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Lusoli and Ward, 2005). Candidates and parties communicating with citizens via Internet tools were essentially, "Preaching to the converted," rather than expanding the pool of engaged citizens (Norris, 2004), as only the most engaged were likely to seek out political information online. Correspondingly, party and candidate websites often tended to replicate the materials that were already published offline and the new interactive potential of these technologies was often neglected (Norris, 2004).

Whilst the impact of Internet tools upon electoral participation may have been a far cry from initial expectations, a number of studies suggest that one of the key benefits of Internet tools may actually lie with the rather less glamorous business of

mobilising volunteers. Norris (2004) and Norris and Curtice (2008) argued that, contrary to popular belief, the effects of Internet tools may be underestimated, as the 'real' advantage of Internet tools is in their potential to communicate with the politically engaged, in order to encourage these 'information seekers' or 'opinion leaders' to participate further and ultimately become volunteers or political activists.

This is because these opinion leaders are also more likely to disseminate the information that they read amongst friends, colleagues and neighbours, by talking about politics with others (Weimann and Hans-Brend, 1994; Brosius and Weimann, 1996; Burt, 1999; Shah and Scheufele, 2006). This means that the standard approaches to measuring the impact of Internet tools upon political involvement which involve focusing upon communication from a political party, via the Internet and directly to a voter, instead of through a third person, such as a party activist, are limited. A study by Himelboim et al. (2009) added support to Norris' claim. As a result, both authors noted that this is an area in need of further research.

Therefore, this project is focused upon the following research questions:

- Q1 How do grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers?
- Q2 What are the predictors of whether or not grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters have used Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers?
- Q3 To what extent do grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers?

1.2 Limitations of Existing Work

Chapter Two contains a critical discussion of the theories and research that is relevant to this topic. Whilst this research can provide a number of useful insights into the impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers, it also has a number of limitations and these are briefly outlined during the following section of this chapter.

A great deal of the existing research has assessed and accounted for the impact of Internet tools upon voter intention or turnout, as opposed to the mobilisation of volunteers. As already mentioned, it has generally been concluded that the impact of Internet tools upon turnout or voting intention is limited (see for example, Bartle, 2005; Gibson et al. 2003; Gibson and Ward, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Himelboim et al. 2009; Lusoli and Ward, 2005; Norris, 2004; Norris, 2008; Norris and Curtice, 2008; Margolis and Resnick, 2000). A small number of studies that are mainly focused upon analysing the impact of Internet tools upon turnout also found limited evidence that these tools may have a positive impact upon mobilising volunteers with certain demographic characteristics (see for example, studies by Levenshus, 2010; Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Ward et al. 2003). The authors of these studies argued that the real value of Internet tools might lie with their potential to quickly and cost-effectively build a relationship with supporters in order to increase mobilisation of volunteers. They also noted that further research would need to be carried out within this area before it was possible to acknowledge or dismiss the existence of these effects, as despite using a recognised theoretical framework in order to support these suggestions, there was very little empirical work to support their claims.

Secondly, studying the existing academic literature has shown that the vast majority of studies relating to the link between Internet tools and mobilisation have not been carried out within England. They mainly relate to countries such as the USA, Australia and Germany. Each of these countries has a very different political system to that found within the England. For example, the political system within the UK is

much more constrained and party-centred than within the USA, which places a great deal of emphasis upon the candidate (Gibson and Römmele, 2008). Similarly, the use of federalism within the USA means that there are more frequent elections and therefore, more opportunities for innovation and experimentation than in Britain, where a national election is held once every five years (Gibson and Römmele, 2008). This means that there is limited empirical evidence that relates to grassroots activists' perceptions of the impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers within England.

Thirdly, the vast majority of empirical studies have focused upon the main political parties within each country. This means that there is little evidence relating to how minor parties or third parties, such as the Liberal Democrats, may use Internet tools.

Finally, as explained in more detail within Chapter Two, much of the existing research within this area has focused upon the Internet as a whole. However, scholars including Nielsen (2011) Pasek et al. (2009) and Effing et al. (2011) have argued that certain Internet uses are more likely to contribute to social capital and political participation than others. This means that it is necessary for any further research studies, including this project, to differentiate between Internet tools, so that a more thorough knowledge of Internet effects can be developed. This project is focused upon three main Internet tools and these are Facebook, Twitter and email.

This study aims to generate a body of empirical evidence that will begin to address the aforementioned gaps, i.e. the limited evidence relating to grassroots activists' perceptions of the impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers, the lack of studies carried out in England, the limited number of studies that have differentiated between Internet tools when measuring perceptions of Internet effects and finally, the scarcity of studies focused upon either a third party or minor party.

1.3 The Argument in Brief

Despite the fact that past research has explored the extent to which political parties use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, very little research has analysed individual Internet tools. Instead it has generally analysed the Internet-as-a-whole. This means that many analyses of the link between the Internet and volunteer mobilisation are limited because they do not account for the differing ways in which various Internet tools are used to mobilise volunteers within the context of a political campaign. This thesis focuses upon Facebook, Twitter and email in order to illustrate that there are differences in the extent to which Internet tools are integrated within volunteer mobilisation practices, how they are used and the perceptions of the extent to which they are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

This thesis is focused upon the perspectives of grassroots members and supporters. Arguably, these people have a greater level of engagement with day-to-day local level campaigning than any other group, thus meaning that they can offer a detailed and rich insight into how grassroots members and supporters encourage others to join the local campaign. Focusing upon the experiences and views of grassroots activists means that it is possible to assess the extent to which different Internet tools are used by those on the ground within the context of the local election campaign, thus offering a relatively unique perspective, not generally offered by other detailed studies focused upon the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation.

A survey of Liberal Democrat members, alongside a participant observation and series of semi-structured interviews was used to generate data to provide an insight into the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation. This combination of methods meant that it was also possible to explore why some tools may be used more widely than others. For instance, whether any difference in perceptions of usage could be attributable to respondent age, political experience or other factors. These findings were compared with the findings of studies that focused upon the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation within the context of the election campaigns of mainstream political parties competing in first-order elections outside

the UK in order to consider whether there are any major differences in the results. Studies by a range of scholars including Nielsen (2011), Pasek et al. (2009) and Ward et al. (2002) were used as points of comparison.

Ward et al. (2002) found that the vast majority of members did not join the Liberal Democrats online. Whilst the proportion of members joining online may have increased since 2002, this thesis explores whether the vast majority of new members continue to join the Liberal Democrats via a 'traditional' offline method, such as by post or face-to-face. Past research has shown that members that join online tend to have very different characteristics to those that join offline and they tend to be less involved with the daily life of the party over the long term (see for instance, Chadwick, 2007; Gibson, 2013). They are also less likely to run for an externally elected public office. Therefore, this thesis also explores how the proportion of people joining online is affecting the organisation of the party's local campaigning, in addition to assessing whether those that have held an externally elected public office, such as the role of a councillor, are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers, than those that have not held office.

Previous studies have hinted that it is likely that some people are more likely to use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers than others. Therefore, this study seeks to establish whether the predictors of whether a respondent has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers are different to whether they have used Twitter and email to do so.

A number of older studies have found that levels of education can be linked to propensity to use the Internet-as-a-whole for political purposes, (see for instance, Katz et al. 2001, Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2008 and Wang, 2007). Therefore, this study tests whether holding a first degree is a significant predictor of using Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers. Similarly, previous research has shown that younger people are more likely to use Internet tools for a range of political activities, including joining a political party (Ward et al. 2002), seeking political information (Xenos and Foot, 2008; Lenahart, 2006; Tedesco, 2007)

and interacting about politics (Xenos and Foot, 2008 and Tedesco, 2007).

Therefore, this thesis seeks to establish whether this group may also be more likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers.

Ward et al. (2002) found that 31% of online Liberal Democrat members perceived that Internet tools had led them to join the party. This research was carried out over ten years ago and it appears to be the only study to assess whether Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools led them to join the party. Therefore, this thesis seeks to assess whether this figure has changed by using the results of the survey, semi-structured interviews and participant observation to discuss whether the majority of members perceive that Internet tools did play an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Many members are volunteers and many volunteers are members, although this is not always the case. As a result, an awareness of whether Liberal Democrat activists perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party can also provide an insight into the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation.

Given that there are likely to be differences in how different Internet tools are used within the context of volunteer mobilisation, it is also logical to suggest that there may be differences in the perceptions of the usefulness of Facebook, Twitter and email as tools for mobilising volunteers. This project differs from previous studies because it considers the extent to which grassroots activists perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers, instead of focusing solely upon the views of those typically viewed as holding a higher position within the party hierarchy, such as campaign staff, Members of Parliament or election agents. It also identifies a number of the predictors of the extent to which Liberal Democrat members are likely to perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers, in order to assess whether people with certain characteristics are more or less likely to hold certain perceptions of Internet tools.

1.4 Case-Selection: Why Focus upon the Liberal Democrats?

There are a number of UK political parties upon which this study could have been focused. It could have focused upon one of the 2 largest political parties in the UK; the Conservative Party or the Labour Party. It could also have been focused upon one of the smaller parties, including UKIP, the Green Party or their many counterparts. It may even have been possible to focus upon each of these parties and offer a large breadth of analysis. However, as mentioned previously, this project is solely focused upon the Liberal Democrats. The following section offers three main reasons why this is the case.

Historically, the Liberal Democrats have been at the forefront of UK politics in terms of the understanding and adoption of Internet based technologies. The party has been very keen to make use of these tools in order to facilitate intra-party communication and was the first British party to make use of a subscription-based intranet. From 1994, this was used for discussion and acquiring party software; far before the other UK political parties utilised the communication potential of the Internet (Liberal Democrat Voice, 2013; Ward et al. 2003).

Furthermore, Paddy Ashdown, the former leader and current Chair of Electoral Strategy for the party, championed the use of the Internet as a party promotional and interaction tool (Ward et al. 2003). He encouraged the use of Internet tools in order to provide the party rank-and-file a means of inputting into the policy development process, a facility for developing campaign materials and for communicating with other members. The party introduced a subscription-based intranet in 1994; its purpose was to provide members with a means of discussing party affairs and sharing campaign software. In 2002, when Internet usage in political campaigning was starting to become more common, the party already had over 800 subscribers to this system. Similarly, in 2003 the party had a mailing list of around 9000 supporters (Ward and Gibson, 2003). This history of innovative Internet usage also suggests that the party would provide an excellent test case for the discussion and analysis of online attempts at mobilising volunteers. It suggests that any associations between

Internet use and the mobilisation of volunteers will be more visible within data generated from Liberal Democrat members, than from their Conservative or Labour counterparts.

In addition to this, a number of academics have argued that the decentralist ethos of the Liberal Democrats promotes grassroots involvement, hence, meaning that individuals are more likely to respond to online attempts at mobilisation (Gibson and Ward, 2000; Painter and Wardle, 2001). Ward et al. (2003) argued that this means that they are a particularly good 'test case' to examine political parties' propensity to using the technology in participatory and innovative ways, hence providing a second reason for focusing this study upon the Liberal Democrats.

The Liberal Democrats are known to have a predominantly middle-class membership in comparison to the Labour Party (Ward et al. 2003; Gibson and Römmele, 2008; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). Research has shown that voters falling within the 'middle-classes' are more likely to make extensive use of Internet tools (Gibson and Römmele, 2008; Norris and Curtice, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2011; ONS, 2011). A recent survey by the ONS (2011) found that there are twice as many 'regular' Internet users in ABC1 households than in DE households. Again, this suggests that any link between the use of Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation will be more visible within data generated from Liberal Democrat Party members, than from their Labour Party counterparts. Combined with the other points detailed in this section, it seems logical to focus the study upon the members of this party.

Finally, this project could have focused upon all members of political parties in England. This would have provided the opportunity to assess how Internet tools have impacted upon the mobilisation of volunteers across a much greater range of parties. However, this would have meant that it would not be possible to obtain a significant depth of analysis. The data obtained would be less rich and detailed; hence, only providing a superficial analysis of trends within this area. Existing work has already identified a number of broad trends, including the propensity to mobilise a higher number of young members and volunteers via Internet tools (Boogers and

Voerman, 2002; Lusoli, 2005; Norris, 2004; Norris and Curtice, 2008) and the authors of much of this work have called for more detailed work that investigates this link further. Evidence from a US context has also shown that Internet tools impact upon larger parties differently to smaller parties. It would be practically impossible to discuss these differential effects within the scope of the project, although this provides an opportunity for future research.

Given that this project is only focused upon one party, it will also seek to assess whether the perceptions and use of Internet tools within the party are a result of a relatively unique organisational culture that exists within the Liberal Democrats and is particularly focused upon technology and innovation, as suggested by Ward et al. (2002) or whether they may be a result of some other factor, such as age, as suggested by a range of scholars (see for instance, Boogers and Voerman, 2002; Lusoli, 2005; Norris, 2004; Norris and Curtice, 2008).

To summarise, this study is focused upon the Liberal Democrats because they are seen to be a good 'test case' to examine political parties' propensity to using Internet tools in innovative and participatory ways. They have a decentralist ethos which promotes grassroots involvement, in addition to a predominantly middle class membership who would be more likely to use Internet tools, alongside a former leader who remains responsible for campaigning and has long championed the Internet as a means for the party to promote itself and encourage supporters to have more input into the political process.

1.5 Case-Selection: Why Focus upon Local Elections?

This research project is focused upon the impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers at a local level. The phrase 'local level' refers to the mobilisation of grassroots volunteers or members by other grassroots volunteers or members. For the purposes of this project, it is assumed that both elected councillors and candidates can also be referred to as members of the 'grassroots'.

This project is also framed within the context of the English local election campaign. The term 'local elections' generally refers to county, unitary authority, borough, district, city, town and parish elections. This project focuses upon county, unitary, authority, borough, district and city elections. Town and parish elections are not discussed within this project because they have different characteristics to the aforementioned local elections. For instance, candidates often choose not to be associated with a known political party, which significantly alters the voter decision-making process, as voters are unable to use party ID as a heuristic device to help them simplify their search for and interpretation of new information (Achen and Bartels, 2006; Sanders et al. 2011; Schaffner et al. 2001; Schaffner and Streb, 2002). Turnout is also significantly lower (Anstead, 2008; Norris and Reif, 1997; Rallings and Thrasher, 2005; Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Choosing not to include these types of election within this study enables a greater depth of analysis of perceptions of the impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers within the Liberal Democrats, as opposed to the effects upon political candidates in general.

Local elections are commonly referred to as second-order elections because voters, parties and the media generally view them as less important than first-order elections, such as national elections (Rallings and Thrasher, 2005). Despite the immediate relevance of local issues to voters' lives, turnout is generally lower than in national elections (Gerber et al. 2003) and voters are more likely to vote for protest parties or parties outside of the mainstream parties that they would vote for in a national election (Anstead, 2008; Norris and Reif, 1997). Similarly, the typical English local election only draws between 20% and 50% of the registered electorate (Gerber et al. 2003; Rallings and Thrasher, 2005).

As noted in Harold Gosnell's (1927) study of voter mobilisation in Chicago during the 1924 and 1925 local elections, the quiescence of local elections makes them ideal 'testing grounds' or 'laboratories' for studying methods of increasing electoral participation or mobilisation. Gerber et al. (2003) also noted that the limited campaigning, alongside lower levels of media attention mean that the effects of

interventions and attempts to increase electoral participation or mobilisation can be more readily detected. This suggests that any perceived effects that Internet tools may have upon the mobilisation of volunteers will be more easily detected if analysed within the context of a local election campaign, as opposed to in the run-up to a national election.

Despite this advantage, local elections have generally attracted less attention from scholars of politics, unless they involve particularly heated racial politics from parties of the far right or other circumstances that make them atypical. Much of the research relating to the impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers has focused upon national elections, especially within a European or American context (see for example, Bimber, 1998; Bimber, 1999; Jackson and Lilleker, 2010; Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Lusoli and Ward, 2005; Norris, 2004; Ward et al. 2002; Ward et al. 2003). Therefore, it can be argued that there is a lack of research relating to local elections, which further justifies the case for a research project focused upon this area.

To briefly summarise, this project is focused upon grassroots involvement within the context of local elections because the limited levels of campaigning in comparison to national elections, alongside lower levels of media attention mean that the effects of interventions and attempts to increase electoral participation or mobilisation can be more readily detected. A second reason for this focus upon local elections also relates to the lack of empirical research relating to the impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers within this type of election campaign.

1.6 Thesis Overview

This thesis is focused upon the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation within the Liberal Democrats. This topic is discussed both theoretically and empirically throughout the following chapters: theory and existing research (Chapter Two), research design (Chapter Three), an exploration of how grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise both new and

existing volunteers (Chapter Four) and an analysis of the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers (Chapter Five). This is followed by analysis of the extent to which Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools can provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers (Chapter Six) and finally a conclusion that discusses, contextualises and identifies the implications of some of the most important findings of this research project (Chapter Seven).

Chapter Two is focused upon the theoretical and empirical background to the research. It contains a critical discussion of the various theories and empirical research that may be used to explain the use and perceived impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers. The empirical research and theories that are discussed can be broadly categorised into two main areas; these are drawn from party organisations literature and social movement literature. The expectations of this thesis are presented towards the end of this chapter.

The research design chapter (Chapter Three) contains an introduction to the central variables that have been used in order to carry out the empirical analysis that underpins this thesis. This is followed by a discussion and justification of the methods used throughout this project and finally, an explanation of the measurement of the central variables used within the analysis.

The following chapter contains an empirical investigation of how grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise new and existing volunteers (Chapter Four). It also discusses how these people use Internet tools to engage in a range of related behaviours, such as increasing membership, fundraising, campaigning for votes and so on. This is because these activities are closely linked to mobilising volunteers and can help to build up a more detailed and nuanced overview of this area.

Data from a participant observation, survey and series of semi-structured interviews were used as the basis for this discussion and also, the analysis within the two subsequent empirical chapters.

The subsequent chapter identifies a number of the predictors of using Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership (Chapter Five). Once again, increasing membership was included within the chapter because it is closely linked to mobilising volunteers and can help to build up a more detailed and nuanced overview of this area.

A range of predictor variables is used throughout this analysis. These include whether a respondent is a youth member, i.e. aged under 30 years, whether they are aged over 60 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold a first degree, whether they believe that they hold a professional occupation, whether they engage with the party offline at least once a week, whether they use Facebook, Twitter and email daily, whether they use Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week and whether they have ever held an externally elected public office.

Chapter Six is the final empirical chapter. This chapter discusses the extent to which Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools provide a useful means for mobilising volunteers. It also considers the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Once again, party membership is considered alongside volunteering because it is closely linked to volunteering and can provide a more detailed, nuanced description of the area under study. The chapter also identifies a number of the predictors of the extent to which respondents perceive that Internet tools can provide a useful means for mobilising volunteers and also the extent to which Internet tools played an important role in encouraging respondents to join the party.

The predictor variables used within this chapter include whether a respondent is a youth member, i.e. aged under 30 years, whether they are aged over 60 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold a first degree, whether they believe that they hold a professional occupation, whether they engage with the party

offline at least once a week, whether they use Facebook, Twitter and email daily, whether they use Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week and whether they have ever held an externally elected public office.

Finally, the conclusion chapter (Chapter Seven) discusses and contextualises the most important findings from this project. It also identifies a number of limitations and paths for future research.

1.7 Conclusion

In summary, this introductory chapter briefly introduced the three central research questions upon which this thesis is centred. The questions are focused upon how grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers, the predictors of whether or not respondents have used Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers.

Prior to the introduction of these questions, there was a discussion of the political and contextual background to this study. As explained in greater detail earlier in the chapter, this study is set within a period of consistent decline in both the membership and the levels of grassroots activism present within mainstream political parties across advanced industrial democracies. Naturally, this decline has impacted upon the Liberal Democrats. Other important factors that impact upon this study and hence were considered, are a changing political and technological landscape; both of which have led to debate relating to whether new technological developments, such as the radio, television and the television have impacted upon political participation and mobilisation. Commentators have also debated the impact that Internet tools may be having upon the political sphere; it has been argued that the Internet differs to previous innovations in communication, as it is the only technological innovation to enable mass two-way communication and therefore, warrants further investigation. This is discussed further in Chapter Two.

This chapter also described the limitations of existing work within this field. Previous studies have assessed the impact of Internet tools upon voting intention and turnout. They have also explored the impact of Internet tools upon mainstream political parties. However, few, if any studies have focused upon how Internet tools may impact upon the mobilisation of volunteers within a third party in the UK, i.e. the Liberal Democrats. Furthermore, little work has focused upon second-order contests, such as local elections, hence providing a significant area for investigation.

Finally, an overview of each chapter of this thesis was provided, alongside a brief explanation of the overall argument that has been developed.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically discusses theories and research from three main areas in order to provide an overview of the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation. The three areas are campaign professionalisation, party organisations and social movements. This chapter brings each of these areas together and develops a series of expectations¹ that aim to enable exploration of how Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, identify a number of the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and also to discuss the extent to which Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers.

Past research offers some valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Internet as a tool for mobilising volunteers. However, the majority of this existing research has either focused upon the role of Internet tools within attempts to mobilise voters or impact upon voter intention, as opposed to focusing upon volunteers; has analysed the Internet-as-a-whole, as opposed to breaking it down into smaller and more meaningful categories; is not focused upon UK political parties; does not relate to second order elections such as local government elections; does not relate to third parties or minor parties and similarly, does not consider the perceptions of grassroots members and supporters. This chapter brings together findings from the aforementioned fields in order to address this area by developing a series of expectations that relate to the research questions described within Chapter One.

Therefore, Section 2.3 of this project is focused upon the theories and empirical

¹ This thesis seeks to generate evidence to support or refute 'expectations' instead of 'hypotheses'. This is because the project aims to investigate Liberal Democrat members' perceptions of relationships between variables, instead of testing causal relationships between variables. This provides a descriptive account of the use of Internet tools and therefore, the phrase 'expectations' was used, as it is less formal than the phrase 'hypotheses'.

research relating to the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation. Section 2.4 contains an explanation of how campaign professionalisation has impacted upon both the demand for volunteers and the way in which they are mobilised. Section 2.5 contains a critical discussion of how Internet tools may have impacted upon party organisations, including the role of volunteers. As previously mentioned, existing research shows that different Internet tools may be linked to volunteer mobilisation in different ways, therefore, Section 2.6 contains a description and justification of which Internet tools are examined within this study. Much like many research topics, there are a number of different views relating to the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation. Section 2.7 contains a critical discussion of these differences and seeks to account for the different perspectives. Finally, Section 2.8 is focused upon a number of possible positive and negative influences upon the extent to which Internet tools may be perceived as a useful means of mobilising volunteers. It also considers what may condition these effects.

However, before proceeding to discuss the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation, it is necessary to define the concept of mobilisation and discuss the main arguments for why mobilising activists is important both to a political party and to the health of local democracy and civic society.

2.2 Mobilisation

2.2.1 The Concept of Mobilisation

Mobilisation may be defined in a number of ways. For example, it may be defined as a process, whereby staff engage in a series of activities, such as asking people to volunteer. This process is often time-consuming and staff spend hours identifying potential volunteers, building a relationship with them and also, asking them to participate (Nielsen, 2011). However, mobilisation can also be defined as an outcome. This outcome may be getting a number of people to knock on doors, distribute leaflets or carry out campaign activity. There is much work that shows that mobilisation processes and practices are powerful predictors of political participation,

alongside the better known predictors, such as socio-economic status or people's positions within social networks (McAdam et al. 2001; Verba et al. 1995).

One of the key dependent variables within this study is perception of mobilisation outcomes. Therefore, the term 'mobilisation' is used to refer to the number of people or the number of hours that have been spent engaging in political activity, as a result of others engaging with the aforementioned mobilisation process. Throughout the analysis, it is clearly specified whether the unit of measurement relates to the number of people volunteering or the number of hours spent volunteering. This is because research by Bimber (2000), Shah et al. (2001a) and Zhao (2006) has indicated that one of the reasons why studies relating to the mobilisation potential of Internet tools have yielded such inconsistent results relates to the fact that, often, these 2 units of measurement have not been clearly differentiated.

Foot and Schneider (2006) provided a very broad outcome based definition of mobilisation. This definition includes a vast range of activities, ranging from low involvement activities, such as signing up to an email distribution list, to high involvement activities, such as volunteering to contact voters on the doorstep. In order to enable a greater depth of analysis of the concept within the context of this study, i.e. a third party English local election campaign, this project utilises a much narrower definition of the term 'mobilisation'.

Throughout this project the term mobilisation is used to refer to the number of people or number of hours spent volunteering on campaign related activities, such as carrying out administrative work, knocking on doors to talk to voters, telephoning voters and running events. It has not been used to refer to low involvement activities that only require a few seconds or minutes of effort, such as sharing a link to a political website, discussing political issues online or chatting about political issues with a friend.

2.2.2 Why Mobilisation Matters

This section of the chapter is focused upon why mobilisation is important both to a political party and to the health of democracy or civic society. The ability to mobilise activists is important to all political parties, but particularly so for the Liberal Democrats. A range of studies has evidenced this. Research by Pattie et al. (1998), Whiteley and Seyd (2003), Cutts (2006), Dorling et al. (1998), Denver et al. (2004), Russell and Fieldhouse (2005) and numerous others has found that a stronger presence at a local level benefits Liberal Democrat performance within electoral contests. When referring to the term 'local level', they referred to either a ward or constituency level, as opposed to any activity carried out by the party headquarters. For continuity, this thesis does not include activity carried out by party headquarters when referring to activity at a 'local level'.

Whilst studying the campaign activity of the Liberal Democrats, Cutts (2006) and Russell and Fieldhouse (2005) report that local ward level volunteers provide a particularly useful means of mobilising the vote, thus implying that such functions could be carried out more effectively where an active volunteer network exists. Whiteley and Seyd (2003) came to a similar conclusion during a study of the three main parties in the UK. They used a series of surveys of party members and subsequently constructed a constituency activism index that was based upon the self-reported activism levels of members within individual constituencies. Variations in constituency activism were associated with variations in turnout in the anticipated direction, within the context of a General Election campaign.

Denver et al. (2004) also carried out a series of surveys and subsequently argued that on the basis of aggregate data, stronger local level campaigning by Liberal Democrat activists within an electoral district produces higher turnouts than occur in electoral districts where campaigns are weaker. In addition to impacting upon turnout, Denver et al. (2004) also found that higher levels of local level campaigning generally produces better results for the party against both Labour and the Conservatives, once again suggesting that the Liberal Democrats' electoral success

is affected by the mobilisation of volunteers at a local level. Older research by Denver and Hands (1996) also showed that people that are already inclined to support the Liberal Democrats and Labour are more likely to respond to local efforts made by volunteers from these parties, thus furthering the importance of mobilising activists for the party.

These findings related to the importance of the mobilisation of volunteers are not limited to this small, but commonly cited, group of scholars within the UK. National surveys from a number of advanced industrial democracies have consistently shown that voter contacts carried out by grassroots volunteers generally have a positive effect upon turnout (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992; Kramer, 1970; Kramer, 1971; Krassa, 1988; Krassa, 1989). It is important to remember that even modest effects within a statistical sense may be consequential to the outcome of a local election, thereby making party efforts worthwhile. As a result, party organisations continue to invest heavily in maintaining and developing pools of volunteers despite the general scepticism relating to the mobilisation potential of party organisations and interest in party politics more generally.

Each of these studies has illustrated the importance of grassroots volunteers to both turnout levels and election results for the Liberal Democrats. However, grassroots volunteers can also aid local democracy by providing information to the voter in a 'low cost' manner, i.e. with little additional effort on the part of the voter. As acknowledged by Campbell et al. (1960), "Many people know the existence of few, if any major issues of policy." It could be argued that this impacts negatively upon the democratic process, as research from the USA by Bartels (1996) found that when voters were not fully informed, incumbent presidents performed almost 5 percentage points better and Democratic candidates did almost 2 percentage points better than they would have if voters had been 'fully informed'.

Arguably, an increase in the number of volunteers from a range of political parties can aid the voter decision-making process by rendering information cost-effective to even apolitical individuals. Since knocking on a person's door to offer political

information makes it more accessible, the net effect may be that low-awareness individuals who typically ignore most political information are less likely to do so within a face-to-face context. This is comparable to the suggestion by Parkin (2010) that candidate appearances on late night comedy shows can aid the evaluation of candidates amongst even highly disengaged individuals who typically avoid such information.

This argument suggests that activists play an important linkage role within democracy, between the political elite and the electorate. This once again emphasises the importance of the mobilisation of volunteers.

2.3 The Early uses of Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers

The following section provides a brief introduction to the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation. It contains an explanation of initial predictions relating to the relationship between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation, followed by a discussion of how these views changed once the use of Internet tools in political campaigning became more commonplace. The implications of this theory and the related research will be explored in more detail in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Many scholars predicted that the use of Internet tools would lead to a large increase in political participation and mobilisation (Bonchek, 1995; Delli Carpini, 2000; Mann, 1995; McGookin, 1995; Phillips, 1995, Rheingold, 1993; Rheingold, 2000). Others predicted that it would lead to a decline in social capital and participation in general (Kraut et al. 1998; Nie, 2001; Nie and Erbring, 2000). In contrast to popular expectations the increased popularity of Internet tools did not result in a vastly increased level of public participation within party politics or issue-based activism, in general (Bartle, 2005; Gibson et al. 2003; Gibson and Ward, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2005; Polat, 2005) but neither did it have a large negative impact as predicted by others (Kraut et al. 1998; Nie, 2001; Nie and Erbring, 2000). The decline in participation that was briefly discussed in Chapter

One has not been reversed. No overall increase in party political activism has been detected. Similarly, many political parties have taken a very cautious approach to the adoption of online technologies because they fear losing control of their message by delegating power and authority to the public (Chadwick and Stanyer, 2010; Norris and Curtice, 2008; Ward and Lusoli, 2005).

Despite this reluctance of political parties to use Internet tools, particularly social media, for fear of losing control over their message, general Internet usage by citizens has become more social and participatory. Web 2.0 sites, i.e. sites that allow users to generate content, such as Facebook and Twitter, are the most popular activity on the Internet (Larsson and Moe, 2012; Pasek et al. 2009; Shirky, 2011). In April 2011, Facebook had approximately 600 million registered users (Pew, 2011) and ComScore, a well-known market research organisation, found that people were spending more time using Facebook than Google (ComScore, 2011). Similarly, the widespread diffusion of mobile Internet in recent years has also increased citizen engagement with social media and allowed for more frequent access to email (Treré, 2011). A considerable body of research has concluded that political parties are struggling to keep up with this changing environment and that most are struggling to implement online engagement strategies relating to social media, email and websites to their benefit (Aarts and Semetko, 2003; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009; Jackson and Lilleker, 2010; Ward and Gibson, 1998). These commentators have argued that political parties appear to be using these online technologies without any particular strategy, perhaps underestimating the potential related to implementing a social media strategy, as they do not understand it.

Obama's 2008 election campaign is regarded by many as one of the exceptions to this. Much of it was based around participatory online technologies (Christakis and Fowler, 2009; Citron, 2009; Effing et al. 2011; Greengard, 2009; Edelman, 2009; Sunstein, 2009; Talbot, 2008; Zhang et al. 2010). Alongside the campaign's official website, Obama's team used fifteen different social media sites and email in order to run an online campaign. However, instead of being used as a stand-alone tool, the online campaign was used to complement an active offline campaign; the

importance of which will be discussed later in this chapter. This proved to be an important aspect of his online strategy.

There are a number of other examples relating to the link between Internet tools and mobilisation. Although less commonly cited than the Obama campaign, Ségolène Royal's campaign during the French elections of 2007 offers an additional insight into the mobilising potential of Internet tools. Along with her campaign team, the French Presidential candidate's hybrid election campaign consisting of interlinked online and offline elements, helped to increase membership of the Socialist Party from 120 000 members to 200 000 members (Clift, 2007; Lilleker and Malogón, 2010; Jackson et al. 2010; Vaccari, 2008). Of these new members, 90% had never been a member of a political party (Clift, 2007). Furthermore, although not within the context of an election, some have argued that Internet tools played a role in enabling the mobilisation of protesters during the 2011 Egyptian revolution and the subsequent series of events across the Middle East that are now referred to as the 'Arab Spring' (Comunello and Anzera, 2012; Eltantawy and Wiet, 2013; Kirkpatrick and Sanger, 2011). These studies of the role of the Internet within the mobilisation of citizens in France and the Middle East each suggest that the Internet holds the potential to act as a tool for mobilising citizens across the world. Therefore, this study examines the precise role of a range of Internet-based technologies within the context of the Liberal Democrats' local election campaigning.

2.4 Campaign Professionalisation and Volunteer Mobilisation

2.4.1 Campaign Professionalisation and the Demand for Volunteers

This section of the chapter is focused upon the professionalisation of political campaigning and the implications that this may have for the demand for volunteers and therefore, mobilisation processes and outcomes. It also contains a discussion of the different terms used to describe these changes in the characteristics of political campaigning, before clarifying which terms are the most appropriate for use throughout the remainder of this project.

Commentators have suggested that political campaigning has undergone a process referred to as professionalisation (see for example, Gibson, 2013; Kavanagh, 1995; Norris, 2004; Rosenbaum, 1997; Scammell, 1995). The extent to which this change in the characteristics of the political campaign has impacted upon the role of volunteers and hence, the mobilisation of these individuals within the context of the local election campaign is commonly debated (Denver and Hands, 2000; Norris, 2001; Norris, 2004; Gibson, 2013).

Professionalisation is not the only term used to describe the change in political campaigning that has occurred over the last 100 years or so. The 'Americanisation' of political campaigning is sometimes used to describe changes in political campaigning that initially occurred in the US, but were subsequently 'exported' to other countries, including the UK (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Scammell, 1998; Swanson and Mancini, 1996). The characteristics of Americanisation include an increased focus upon leaders and candidates, instead of parties; the use of technical experts, such as those that can carry out opinion polls and a reduction in direct contact between party headquarters and both grassroots volunteers and voters, as parties depend upon modern news media, instead of more traditional forms of grassroots campaigning, such as knocking on doors or holding rallies (Swanson and Mancini, 1996). This is similar to professionalised campaigning, which is often believed to require fewer grassroots volunteers (Norris, 2004). Similarly, Denver et al. (2000) used the related terminology of 'Fordist' and 'Post-Fordist' campaigning. Economists and sociologists have long used these terms to distinguish between the different phases in the production process. 'Fordism' refers to the mass production of goods as pioneered by the US car manufacturer, Henry Ford. 'Post-Fordism' is a more recent development that refers to smaller, more flexible forms of manufacturing that can be used to tailor make products. Therefore, Denver and Hands (2000) used the term 'Fordist campaigning' to refer to campaigning designed to achieve economies of scale using a relatively undifferentiated campaign strategy that does not target voters and relies heavily upon relatively unskilled labour from volunteers, amongst related characteristics that are less relevant to this project. They used the term 'Post-Fordist campaigning' to

refer to the use of targeting and specialists, such as opinion polling within the context of the election campaign. Post-Fordist campaigning is also considered to rely less upon the mobilisation of volunteers.

Each of the aforementioned terms differs slightly, but they do have a number of common characteristics. These may be best captured by Norris' (2004) use of the terms, 'pre-modern campaigning', 'modern campaigning' and 'post-modern campaigning'. For consistency, these terms have been used to describe these previously described changes in the nature of campaigning throughout the remainder of this chapter.

The pre-modern political campaign was based upon direct communication between candidates and citizens at a local level (Norris, 2004). This was supported only by ad-hoc planning from the party headquarters. Political parties also focused upon winning positive coverage in daily newspapers (Norris, 1997). In this type of campaign local branches selected candidates, knocked on doors, posted leaflets and generally provided the link between the party and candidates, as opposed to the party headquarters (Kavanagh, 1995; Norris, 2004; Rosenbaum, 1997; Scammell, 1995). Voters generally experienced an active local election campaign because most campaigning was concentrated within local communities and involved labour-intensive political activities, such as rallies, doorstep canvassing and meetings. This type of campaigning was very labour-intensive and therefore, was dependent upon the successful mobilisation of volunteers (Denver and Hands, 2000). During this period of campaigning, the electorate held stronger party loyalties (Kavanagh, 1995; Lazarsfeld et al. 1994; Rosenbaum, 1997; Scammell, 1995) and therefore, the goal of the campaign was mainly to reinforce partisan support, as opposed to converting new voters (Lazarsfeld et al. 1994; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

In contrast, modern campaigns are coordinated more centrally. External consultants advise political parties and instead of face-to-face communication, national television provides one of the main means of communicating political events to the electorate (Norris, 2004; Panebianco, 1988). Similarly, newspapers are less popular.

Politicians and their advisors carry out polls, run branded advertisements, engage in leadership tours and attempt to win positive coverage in the nightly television news (Norris, 2000). For voters, this involves a more passive experience, as the main focus of the campaign is further from their doorsteps. This means that they are more likely to become disengaged spectators (Scammell, 1995; Kavanagh, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1997). Similarly, these centralised activities require little local labour and as result, the mobilisation of volunteers is of far less importance than it was during the pre-modern campaign (Norris, 2004; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). The electorate holds a lower level of partisan loyalty than during the pre-modern campaign (Scammell, 1995; Kavanagh, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1997).

Finally, Norris (2004) introduced the concept of the post-modern campaign. Parties that engage in post-modern campaigning use an even wider range of professional consultants (Norris, 2004). They advise on areas, such as advertising, public opinion, marketing and strategic news management. These advisors often hold an influential role within government and run a 'permanent campaign' (Norris, 2004) as opposed to a 'short campaign' focused almost exclusively upon the 6 weeks prior to polling day. Any grassroots activity is closely co-ordinated by this group of 'professionals' (Smith, 2009). News media is much more fragmented and complex. It involves a wide variety of Internet sites, in addition to a vast range of 24-hour television channels and also, newspapers (Adamic and Glance, 2005). It has occasionally been argued that this type of campaigning has represented a return to some of the forms of engagement found in the pre-modern stage of campaigning. This is because some of the new channels of communication allow greater levels of interactivity between voters and politicians. For example, Twitter allows citizens to instantly communicate with their local elected representative, if he or she holds an account (Conover et al. 2011; Gibson, 2013). It is widely agreed that the electorate has far less partisan loyalty and therefore, that political campaigning involves both persuasion and reinforcement of existing partisan loyalties (Scammell, 1995; Kavanagh, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1997). This type of campaign involves targeted local activity, under centralised control, thus resulting in an increased demand for volunteers, much like during pre-modern campaigning.

As illustrated, this change in characteristics of political campaigning has had various implications upon both the demand for volunteers and the communication channels used to mobilise them. The next section of this chapter contains a more detailed explanation of the link between professionalisation and Internet tools.

2.4.2 The Role of Internet Tools within Campaign Professionalisation

The following section of this chapter provides a short overview of the relationship between campaign professionalisation and Internet tools, alongside a critical discussion of the impact that this may have had upon volunteer mobilisation. In assessing the impact that Internet tools may have had upon electoral participation, scholars have considered two contrasting viewpoints. One view is based upon the suggestion that the use of Internet tools has increased participation in democratic processes such as party political volunteering and the other is based around the suggestion that the use of Internet tools has led to a decrease in these activities. Therefore, this section also contains an introduction to these two arguments, which initially appear to offer contrasting views relating to the nature of the relationship between Internet tools, professionalisation and the mobilisation of volunteers.

The professionalised or modernised top-down approach to campaign organisation has dominated post-war elections in Europe and the US (Kavanagh, 1995; Norris, 2004; Rosenbaum, 1997; Scammell, 1995). This has been particularly pertinent across the last three decades. Scholars have debated whether Internet tools have aided professionalisation by furthering existing trends towards centralised control of political campaigns by technology literate party elites and the subsequent micromanagement of voters or whether it has reconnected parties with their civic roots by providing the ability to engage in a more democratic form of organisation. For example, by providing online tools that allow supporters to build their own local campaigns and mobilise others that hold similar beliefs. Scholars such as Lipow and Seyd (1996), Howard (2005) and Wring and Horrocks (2000) have argued that it has aided professionalisation and centralised micromanagement. Others such as Heidar

and Saglie (2003) and Margetts (2006) have argued that it has empowered the grassroots by providing additional opportunities to contribute to their local election campaign. The latter suggestion would imply that party members may perceive that Internet tools have led to an increase in the number of people volunteering to help a political campaign or joining the party.

As previously explained, despite the variety of terminology that has been used, the vast majority of political campaigns theory acknowledges that campaigning appears to have entered a third stage of development in the late 1990s, which, throughout this chapter is referred to as post-modern campaigning (Farrell and Schmidt-Beck, 2003). This change in election campaigning was prompted largely by a changing media landscape that included the widespread adoption of Internet tools, in addition to a continued decline in class-based loyalties to political parties (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Norris, 2000; Swanson and Mancini, 1996). The electorate is no longer viewed as homogenous and political parties are able to engage in differentiated and individualised direct communication as a direct result of new technologies, such as websites, email and extensive voter databases, such as 'EARS' or 'Connect', both of which are used the Liberal Democrats. This has a number of implications for volunteer mobilisation and they are discussed in Section 2.5.

As noted earlier in this thesis, some scholars have come to the conclusion that the Internet has aided the move towards professionally managed campaigns and the subsequent micromanagement of voters, as opposed to providing what the optimists refer to as a local campaign managed by enthusiastic supporters (Lipow and Seyd, 1996; Howard, 2005; Wring and Horrocks, 2000). They claim that this has occurred because the Internet has allowed political parties to directly target particular groups with campaign messages, for example, by targeting known supporters with emails, or interacting with them via social networking sites in order to encourage them to act in a certain way (Farrell, 2006; Plasser and Plasser, 2002). This segmentation of voters and subsequent dissemination of information to a very narrow audience is commonly referred to as 'narrowcasting' (Gibson, 2013).

This more cynical view differs from the views of scholars such as Heidar and Saglie (2003) and Margetts (2006) who have argued that Internet tools have allowed political parties to provide supporters with online tools that enable them to develop locally run campaigns and design campaign materials, such as leaflets or posters, without the interference of staff from party headquarters.

These two contrasting views are analysed in more depth in the following section. Similarly, the links between each of these two competing views are discussed, alongside a consideration of the reasons for these differences in opinion. This consideration of similarities and discussion of the reasons why these scholars held differences in opinion has allowed for a fuller, more nuanced understanding of the general relationship between Internet tools and the mobilisation of volunteers.

2.5 Internet Tools and Party Organisations

2.5.1 Organisational Impact of Internet Tools upon Party Structures and Volunteer Mobilisation

The following section is focused upon the organisational impact of Internet tools upon party structures, particularly at a grassroots level. As discussed in the previous section, many scholars have argued that the widespread adoption of Internet tools and the associated professionalisation or modernisation of political campaigning has had a substantial organisational impact upon party structures and the role of volunteers.

In contrary to earlier arguments relating to whether professionalisation and the use of Internet tools has led to the centralisation or decentralisation of political campaigning, a growing body of scholars have argued that use of Internet tools has meant that political campaigning initially appears to have become more decentralised but ultimately, contains a number of the characteristics of both approaches (see for instance, Chadwick, 2007; Gibson, 2013; Karpf, 2012). These

scholars have suggested that adapting to the online environment has allowed party headquarters to develop a more networked form of organisation that benefits from aspects of both centralisation and decentralisation. They can provide online tools that allow for a networked organisation that relies upon social ties, as opposed to a need for formal membership. This gives grassroots supporters a stronger decision-making role within certain areas. Within a Liberal Democrat context, this may mean that supporters that engage with the party online are less likely to become a member of the party than those that engage offline. This is important to the Liberal Democrats and other UK political parties because annual membership fees provide a means of funding campaign activity.

Research by Chadwick (2007) suggested that the adoption of Internet-based tools amongst political parties was leading them towards a model of operation that relied upon a structure that appeared to be very decentralised and provided a floating support base, as opposed to a less transient group of ongoing supporters. This type of organisation is more typically associated with the social movements that engage in issue-based activism, instead of party politics (see for instance, Quan-Haase et al. 2002; Wojeieszak, 2009). Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012) both argued that current trends suggest that the organisational structure of political parties may eventually resemble that of the US campaign organisation MoveOn, which relies upon Internet tools to mobilise a relatively large floating support base, in order to campaign for various policy changes, but does not require formal membership and annual subscription fees.

If this is the case, then parties that are particularly dependent upon membership subscriptions, such as the Liberal Democrats, may lose an important source of revenue. This problem was exacerbated between May 2010 and May 2015, as being in government for the first time in almost seventy years meant that the party had not received Short Money, which is an annual payment to enable opposition parties to more effectively fulfil their Parliamentary functions. Within the Parliament of 2005-2010 this provided the Liberal Democrats with over £1.7 million of funding per year (Parliament, 2014). Therefore, if the Liberal Democrats had remained in

government following the 2015 General Election, then lower levels of membership may have had a disproportionate impact upon the party, which may have meant that it needed to seek new sources of funding.

Howard (2005) offered further support for the claim that Internet tools have impacted upon the organisational structure of political parties by creating a networked model of organisation that reduces the need for formal membership. Like Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012), he also argued that the use of Internet tools have given grassroots supporters a stronger decision making role. He found evidence that US candidates' Internet use between 1996 and 2004 provided the opportunity for more grassroots involvement within a campaign. Within the context of the Liberal Democrat local election campaign, this would suggest that grassroots members may perceive that Internet tools have contributed to a decline in membership, but provided them with a stronger decision making role within the party, as they have been provided with the tools to meet other volunteers and organise campaign activities online, as opposed to relying upon party headquarters to run the entire campaign. Little thought may have been given to the overall control retained by party headquarters, as a result of providing these online tools.

However, it should be noted that each of these studies is focused upon the Internet-as-a-whole, as opposed to dividing Internet usage into smaller, more meaningful categories, so that it is possible to examine any differences. For instance, it has been suggested that Facebook and Twitter may be used in different ways and therefore may have different mobilisation outcomes (see for instance, Nielsen, 2011). Similarly, there may also be differences between email and social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, as suggested by Pasek et al. (2009) and Nielsen (2011), amongst others. It should also be acknowledged that the aforementioned research was carried out within the US. As a result, this study seeks to identify whether there are differences in the extent to which grassroots members and supporters perceive that Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, can be a useful means of mobilising volunteers within English local elections, in order to provide evidence that can be used to begin to fill this gap in knowledge.

In contrast to the work by Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012), a number of UK studies have been more pessimistic in nature and indicated that claims that the use of Internet tools has led to greater empowerment and mobilisation amongst grassroots members and supporters have been exaggerated. Gibson and Ward (1999) found that, in reality, internal uses of technology for member consultation have had limited impact upon central decision-making. Research by Lusoli and Ward (2004) and Pedersen and Saglie (2005) also showed that those that join online tend to be less involved in offline campaign activities, such as knocking on doors or attending meetings, than those that also joined offline. As explained within Chapter One, the Liberal Democrats are particularly reliant upon voluntary labour as a means of campaigning, therefore, it could be argued that it is particularly important to identify the characteristics of the people that are most likely to join the party online, as these people may be less likely to remain involved in the long-term.

Despite the claims of those that argue that political campaigning continues to retain characteristics of a centralised activity (see for example, Gibson and Ward, 1999; Gibson and Ward, 1999) and those that believe that it is becoming less so (see for example, Chadwick, 2007; Howard, 2005; Karpf, 2012; Pedersen and Saglie, 2005), there is not enough empirical evidence to come to a definitive conclusion. Therefore, this study also aims to contribute to knowledge within this area by analysing whether or not grassroots members and supporters perceive Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, can be useful means of mobilising volunteers, thus indicating that the party holds a more decentralised structure. As previously noted, this study is seeking to find out whether findings from the US (see for instance, Nielsen, 2011; Pasek et al. 2009) hold true within English local elections.

2.5.2 Internet tools and Volunteer Mobilisation within the 'Web 2.0' Era

The following section is focused upon Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation within the 'Web 2.0' era. It contains a definition of the terms 'Web 1.0' and 'Web 2.0', alongside a critical discussion of how the ability to engage in multi-way interaction may impact upon both how grassroots members and supporters use Internet tools to

mobilise volunteers, in addition to the extent to which they may perceive that Internet tools provide a useful means of doing so.

Much of the theoretical and empirical work within this area has differentiated between a 'Web 1.0' and a 'Web 2.0' era. As acknowledged by a range of scholars (see for instance, Effing et al. 2011; Gibson and Römmele, 2008; Xenos and Foot, 2008), these are very contested terms because the creator of the Internet, Tim Berners-Lee, referred to them as 'jargon' and stated that he had always intended that the Internet should be used in ways consistent with the style of communication in both the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 era. It was simply the case that the characteristics of early Internet use had not met his expectations (Anderson, 2007). Nonetheless, these terms are very common within academic literature; Web 1.0 refers to a top-down approach to Internet use where users can view content of websites and Web 2.0 refers to an interactive mode of use where users collaborate with each other in order to generate content (O'Reilly, 2005). Social-networking sites are an example of Web 2.0. Scholars often use these terms to differentiate between the time period when citizens typically used Internet tools in a passive mode and simply received information, to the period where users typically fulfilled a more interactive role that allows them to easily produce content (Chadwick, 2009; Gueorguieva, 2007).

One of the earliest examples of user participation and co-creation of online content, or 'Web 2.0' within a political campaign and mobilisation context occurred during the 2004 US Presidential election cycle (Turk, 2012). Candidates from the Democratic and Republican parties made use of Web 2.0 as part of an attempt to mobilise volunteers. Howard Dean was one of the most famous examples. Whilst he did not win the Democratic Party's nomination, his use of Web 2.0 tools is widely regarded as having had a transformative organisational impact upon his campaign, thus allowing him to move from outsider status, to one of the frontrunners within this race. Supporters had the opportunity to co-create his campaign by using Internet tools to organise their own events and also to mobilise others, thus leading scholars to debate the impact that Internet tools may have upon the mobilisation of volunteers within a party political context (Montero, 2009; Trippi, 2004). If Internet tools are

perceived to increase campaign involvement and volunteer mobilisation within the Liberal Democrats, as is believed to be the case for Howard Dean, then this may mean that 'outsider' or relatively unknown candidates are more likely to be elected to internal and external positions. Ultimately, this may impact upon the demographic characteristics of those involved in politics, in addition to changing the nature of political campaigning.

Obama adopted a similar approach and used technology to offer a combination of top-down and peer-to-peer, bottom-up organising. Potential volunteers were provided with the digital tools to organise a grassroots campaign, however, they were also subject to central monitoring and training in order to keep them focused on the end goal of voter mobilisation. Obama's model utilised a Web 2.0 site, named 'My Barack Obama', developed by one of the co-founders of Facebook, in order to allow supporters to join the campaign (Borins, 2009). Once registered, supporters could use this site to organise events, set up fundraising sites and mobilise voters on behalf of the candidate (Lilleker and Jackson, 2013). Harfoush (2009) noted that this quickly became established as a 'critical mass' of users and was the obvious target for those wishing to help the campaign. It was reported that over 2 million users had signed up to this site by polling day, 200 000 offline events had been organised, 35 000 groups had been created and \$30 million raised via its fundraising facility (Edelman, 2009).

Following the success of Obama's campaign, the Liberal Democrats set up a similar Web 2.0 site during the run-up to the 2010 General Election (Merton Liberal Democrats, 2009). It was named 'Lib Dem Act' and was open to both members and non-members that supported the party. It aimed to bring supporters together, so that they could organise local events or campaign activities and mobilise other volunteers (Lib Dem Act, 2009). However, it was not used as much as expected and as a result, did not form part of their strategy in the run up to 2015 General Election (Lib Dem Voice, 2013c). Many of the studies relating to the perceived impact of Internet tools upon the mobilisation of volunteers are based upon US case-studies and this example further underlines the importance of carrying out work within a UK context,

as similar Internet tools appear to have different effects within different contexts. Whilst it is commonly acknowledged that Lib Dem Act was not as successful as the My Barack Obama site, it would be useful to assess whether Liberal Democrat members perceive that other Internet tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and email are particularly useful means of mobilising volunteers. This study aims to contribute to knowledge within this field by focusing upon party members' and supporters' perceptions of the impact that Internet tools may have upon the mobilisation of volunteers for a UK political party. If these tools are perceived to be useful then it could be argued that those that do not currently use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers would benefit from adapting their campaign practises to incorporate such an approach.

The e-campaign that the Liberal Democrats attempted to emulate was often viewed as a continuation of the online grassroots culture that Dean generated. This culture was commonly referred to as a 'net-roots' ethos and commentators argued that it marked a fundamental shift in the manner in which campaigns are run, much like the previous move from pre-modern to post-modern campaigning (Castells, 2009; Gueorguieva, 2007; Kalnes, 2009; Karlsen, 2010; Lilleker and Jackson, 2010; Montero, 2009). The 2008 Obama campaign showed how Internet tools could be used to create new forms of collaboration between the grassroots and the political campaign itself. A study by Montero (2009) even suggested that this approach would soon replace the traditional mass membership and meeting models of political organisation that are commonly seen across many democracies across the world, including within the UK. However, there appears to be little or no UK empirical evidence to support or refute this claim.

It would be very useful to know whether this trend is present within the UK and therefore, this study aims to begin to assess whether this is the case. Furthermore, despite widespread acclaim of the revolutionary qualities of both Obama and Dean's online campaigning, and the subsequent use of such techniques in election campaigning and volunteer mobilisation attempts in democracies across the world, there is very little academic measurement and discussion of precisely how these

groups have used Internet tools or the impact that grassroots members and volunteers perceive that they have had upon volunteer mobilisation (Gibson, 2013). It is particularly useful to gain an insight into how grassroots members and supporters use Internet tools because it would mean that political parties, including the Liberal Democrats, can create Internet tools that better meet the needs of this group and potentially, increase the number of people using them to mobilise other volunteers.

Gibson (2013) provides one of a few studies from the UK. She originally suggested that, in practice, use of such online technologies means that key tasks, such as mobilising fellow volunteers, raising funds and related activities, are outsourced to a group of online volunteers, who hold the power to act autonomously, in a way that was not possible before the introduction and widespread usage of Internet tools. This was illustrated by the campaigns of both Dean and Obama. She argued that party staff and members were almost the only people that mobilised volunteers or ran campaigns before the widespread use of Internet tools.

However, the advent of Internet tools has enabled parties to provide the infrastructure for such tasks to be carried out remotely, thus meaning that enthusiastic supporters can mobilise others and campaign locally. This means that Internet tools do have the potential to bring more citizens into the electoral and political process, including new volunteers. Gibson's (2013) work is focussed upon a first order election, i.e. the 2010 General Election. Therefore, it can be used to provide a useful benchmark for research concerning smaller electoral contests, such as local elections.

Despite finding some degree of evidence that the Internet as a whole was related to increased volunteer mobilisation, Gibson (2013) remained fairly cautious in her views and suggested that these new volunteers may hold different characteristics to those recruited prior to the introduction and widespread usage of Internet tools; she suggested that they may still actively promote the party, but they may not pay an annual membership fee, attend meetings, fulfil more official roles on local branch

executive committees or hold externally elected positions. She felt that they may be more likely to engage in a set of behaviours within the context of one election, as a result of engaging with a webpage or similar, which fits with the predictions of Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012); thus adding weight to the suggestion that the use of Internet tools is associated with a change in party structure that places an increased emphasis upon a floating support base.

There is little or no UK-based evidence to support or refute the findings of this study and Gibson (2013) calls for more research within this area. Her findings imply that Liberal Democrat members and supporters are likely to perceive that volunteers mobilised as a result of engaging with online content will be less heavily involved with the party in the long term and likely to only help over the period of one election campaign. This implies that Internet tools are less likely to be perceived as a useful means of increasing party membership and are more likely to be perceived as useful for mobilising volunteers on an ad hoc basis, perhaps when they feel passionate about a particular issue or campaign. This project aims to uncover whether this is the case within the context of the Liberal Democrats' English local election campaigning.

2.6 Which Internet Tools is this study focused upon?

Evidence from Bennett (2008), Pasek et al. (2009), Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012), Zhao (2006) and others has shown that politically knowledgeable, interpersonally trusting and civically engaged individuals, i.e. those that are most likely to volunteer to help a political party or campaign, share particular patterns of Internet use.

Until recently, most studies had divided Internet use into a small number of excessively broad categories and this meant that researchers had been unable to address the potential impact of individual websites, such as Facebook or Twitter, in any great level of detail. Pasek et al. (2009) argued that differences between social networking sites are as large as those between the more commonly cited categories of use, e.g. informational, versus social networking. Similarly, they found that the smaller categories are robust to attempts to account for differences between the

users of these sites. As a result, this thesis is focused upon sites individually in order to establish whether use of each social networking site induces a specific culture that can either encourage or hinder mobilisation.

Nielsen (2011) made a similar claim. His ethnographic work led him to suggest that 'mundane' Internet tools, such as email, are much more deeply integrated into mobilising practices than 'emerging tools', such as social networking sites and 'specialised tools' such as campaign websites. Nielsen's work differs from work by Pasek et al. (2009) as it places all social networking sites into one category. This limitation means that he has been unable to assess the impact of individual social-networking sites upon the mobilisation of volunteers. These studies suggest that it may be the case that the Liberal Democrats may find it easier to mobilise volunteers by using certain Internet tools. It would be useful to gain greater insight into whether this is the case, as it would enable UK political parties, including the Liberal Democrats, to assess whether it is better to focus their limited resources on using certain social networking sites to target potential volunteers.

This study builds upon the work of Nielsen (2011) and Pasek et al. (2009), amongst others, such as Zhao (2006) and focuses upon a 'mundane tool'; i.e. email and two 'emerging tools'; i.e. Facebook and Twitter. It has differentiated between the two types of social-networking site in order to identify whether there are any differences in the extent to which they are used to mobilise volunteers and the extent to which they are perceived to be useful for this task, within the context of English local elections. The 'specialised tool' of the party website is not the focus of this study because a considerable amount of work has been carried out on the efficacy of such technology in recent years (see for example, Lilleker et al. 2011; Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Ward et al. 2002) and also because focusing upon just three Internet tools, as opposed to four, will allow for a suitable depth of both quantitative and qualitative analysis throughout this research project. Whilst not the focus of the study, the party website(s) will be referred to where it is perceived that this may complement the discussion and aid understanding of the use of Facebook, Twitter and email as tools for mobilising volunteers.

2.7 Accounting for the Competing Views of the Link between Internet Tools and Volunteer Mobilisation

There are many different opinions relating to the impact that Internet tools may have upon volunteer mobilisation. Some studies have suggested that Internet tools have had a positive impact upon volunteer mobilisation, whereas others have suggested that they have had a negative impact. Similarly, the size of any impact has also been debated. This section aims to compare and contrast these studies in order to account for these competing perspectives.

Unlike the technology that came before it, the Internet holds the rather unique potential to be able to both transmit information and with the diffusion of Web 2.0 technologies, build relationships with large groups of physically disconnected individuals. Delli Carpini (2000); Rheingold (2000); and Sproull and Kiesler (1991) were all part of the group of scholars that predicted that these 'online communities' would increase civic engagement and reduce the cost of collective action, which means that citizens would be more likely to volunteer to help a political campaign. Despite these positive predictions, the majority of early studies reported the opposite effect. They found that instead of engaging in offline political or community activity, users actually spent less time engaging in social interactions and became depressed or lonely, as a result of engaging with this new form of communication (Kraut et al. 1998; Nie and Erbing, 2000). Furthermore, research by Jennings and Zeitner (2003) found that young users were less trusting than young people who did not use the Internet. Individual levels of trust are strongly linked to individual propensity to volunteer; therefore this study appeared to suggest that the Internet as a whole was linked to a decrease in volunteering amongst young people. These studies were all based within the US.

Greater insight into this disagreement is provided by subsequent research that has shown that an individual's Internet use has a positive relationship with his or her social capital. Kraut et al. (2002) carried out a follow-up study with respondents from a study that initially produced pessimistic results. In contrast to their first study, they

found that over a long-term period, as opposed to a short-term period, Internet users were no more depressed than non-users and were equally likely to engage within the local community, including with activities such as volunteering.

The inconsistency of findings of studies within this area appears to be the result of a lack of methodological consistency. Some researchers have used short diary studies (Kraut et al. 1998; Nie and Erbing, 2000), whilst others have used longitudinal studies (Kraut et al. 2002). Similarly, some have based their study upon the effects of types of Internet use that an individual engages in, whilst others have based it upon hours of Internet use. Therefore, there have been many calls for studies that clearly acknowledge the different types of Internet use and where the subjects of measurement are more specifically and carefully addressed (Bimber, 2000; Shah et al. 2001a; Zhao, 2006). As previously explained, this research project is focused upon different Internet tools, as Effing et al. (2011), Nielsen (2009) and Pasek et al. (2009), amongst others have argued that one of the key limitations of research within this area is that many studies have referred to the Internet-as-a-whole, instead of breaking it down into categories, such as social networking sites, email and so on; thus meaning that there is little knowledge relating to the effects of engagement with different types of online media. Therefore, direct comparisons to these studies have been made within the empirical chapters of this thesis, as opposed to those focusing upon other units of measurement.

There are a small number of studies that have categorised Internet use in a manner that may reflect some of the major differences between websites (Shah et al. 2001a; Zhao, 2006). These studies refer to Internet use for informational purposes, social purposes, recreational purposes and communicative purposes. This has allowed for the gradual development of a more nuanced understanding of Internet effects, much like the debate relating to broadcast television, whereby the type of television show being viewed has been shown to have different effects upon individual civic engagement (Norris, 1996; Pasek et al. 2006).

Shah et al. (2001a) explored the relationship between Internet usage and civic engagement by dividing Internet usage into four categories: social recreation, which relates to playing a game, or participating in an Internet chat room; product consumption, financial management and information exchange, such as the exploration of interests, information searching and sending or receiving email. They found a series of consistent positive relationships between information exchange and various measures of social capital including trust, engagement, knowledge and size of respondent's friendship network, but negative correlations between social recreational uses. In terms of the Liberal Democrats and volunteer mobilisation, this suggests that those that volunteer as a result of online communications may be more likely to hold high levels of trust, engagement and knowledge. They may also have a larger online network of 'friends'. Correspondingly, they may be less likely to use Internet tools for social and recreational purposes than non-volunteers.

Similarly, Zhao (2006) divided Internet users into three categories: web users, email users and chat users. He found that email users were the least likely to interact with their social connections offline, thus offering additional evidence that dividing Internet usage into different categories can offer a more nuanced understanding of the link between Internet tools and social capital. Zhao's findings suggest that if Liberal Democrat members wish to invite others to a campaign or social event then it may be sensible to use tools such as Facebook or Twitter, instead of email, in order to target those that are more likely to interact with their social connections offline.

Numerous US-based studies have identified a link between informational Internet usage and various products of social capital. Those that engage in information seeking online consistently show higher levels of internal efficacy, political knowledge and civic participation (Hargittai, 2007; Johnson and Kaye, 2003; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Pasek et al. 2006; Eveland Jr. et al. 2004). Within a Liberal Democrat context, this is likely to mean that those that volunteer are more likely to use the Internet for information-seeking purposes. Whilst the categories proposed by Shah et al. (2001a) and Zhao (2006) appear to capture meaningful differences in Internet effects, it could be argued that they also overlook vast distinctions between

website types, features and designs, in addition to user characteristics and their relationships with the medium. Therefore, this study has been designed to capture these differences by focusing upon two different types of social media and email. It will also add to knowledge within this area by analysing the link between user characteristics, relationships with these communication channels and mobilisation.

In light of the aforementioned studies it seems logical to suggest that the most civically engaging uses of Internet tools and hence, the uses that are most likely to be perceived to encourage volunteer mobilisation, will be those that encourage interpersonal interaction, broaden social ties and provide information relating to how individuals can become more politically involved. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, hold the potential to fulfil these functions and therefore, Liberal Democrat members may perceive that they are particularly useful tools for encouraging people to volunteer. Their social features facilitate the development of a virtual community and therefore, may allow social capital to develop. This means that one might expect to find a positive relationship between levels of social networking usage and volunteer mobilisation, as a result of this increase in social capital.

2.8 Positive and Negative Influences upon Online Volunteer Mobilisation

There are a number of indirect references to positive and negative influences upon volunteer mobilisation within this chapter. Similarly, there are indirect references to what may condition these positive and negative effects. The following section contains a summary of these influences, alongside any others contained within the literature. It also contains an explanation of what may condition these effects.

Numerous studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between online information seeking and volunteering to help a political party or campaign (see for instance, Eveland Jr. et al. 2004; Hargittai, 2007; Johnson and Kaye, 2003; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Pasek et al. 2006; Shah et al, 2001a). Similarly, a detailed study by Shah et al. (2001a) found that there is also a positive relationship between

volunteering to help a political party or campaign and exploring interests online, sending and receiving email and having a greater number of people within one's online network. Therefore, it seems logical to suggest that each of these variables may have a positive influence upon the likelihood that a Liberal Democrat member or supporter has either used Internet tools to mobilise volunteers or joined the party as a result of using Internet tools.

Ward et al. (2002) carried out a study relating to Internet tools and Liberal Democrat members. They found that those that joined the party as a result of online communication were more likely to be younger, heavier users of 'traditional media', existing Liberal Democrat volunteers and more frequent visitors to the national Liberal Democrat website. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that those that have used Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, have joined the party online or perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party are also more likely to have these characteristics. It should be noted that this study was carried out when email was far less widely used and before the invention of the social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter. As a result, it would be useful to gain an insight into whether it is likely that these variables are still associated with joining the party or mobilising volunteers. This is tested within Chapter Five of this thesis.

A number of studies including one by Shah et al. (2001a) found that those that use Internet tools only for social and recreational purposes are less likely to volunteer to help a political party. Therefore, it seems logical to suggest that this is a negative influence upon online mobilising behaviours. Similarly, email users are the least likely to interact with their social connections offline (Zhao, 2006). This suggests that Liberal Democrat members and supporters may perceive that email is less useful for mobilising volunteers, particularly in relation to activities, such as attending meetings or doorstep canvassing.

Furthermore, a number of scholars have attributed Barack Obama and Ségolène Royal's success at least partially to the way in which their campaign teams integrated their online and offline campaigns (Christakis and Fowler, 2009; Citron,

2009; Effing et al. 2011; Greengard, 2009; Edelman, 2009; Sunstein, 2009; Talbot, 2008; Zhang et al. 2010). For instance, Obama's team used fifteen different social media sites, email, a website and linked this with an active offline campaign in order to mobilise volunteers. As a result, it could be argued that the provision of an integrated campaign by party headquarters is likely to lead members to perceive that Internet tools are a useful means of mobilising volunteers. Whilst this study does not seek to measure the extent to which the Liberal Democrats have chosen to integrate their online and offline campaigns, it is important to remember that this contextual factor is likely to impact upon perceptions of the usefulness of the Internet as a tool for mobilising volunteers and potentially be one of the reasons why Internet tools may be perceived to have a different impact upon volunteer mobilisation within the US than within England.

2.9 Expectations

The following section of this thesis details a number of expectations that relate to each research question. These expectations were developed following a detailed examination of the theories and the empirical research relevant to this study.

Expectations one to three relate to the research question that seeks to explore how Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and engage in related activities. Expectations four to eight relate to the research question that seeks to establish the predictors of Internet usage amongst Liberal Democrat members and supporters. Finally, expectations nine to eleven relate to the research question that seeks to gain an insight into the extent to which Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools are a useful means of mobilising volunteers.

Expectation One: In terms of engaging in party political activity, email is used by a higher proportion of grassroots Liberal Democrat members, than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Four, which focuses upon how grassroots Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and engage in related party political activity.

During an ethnographic study of mobilising practices during two congressional election campaigns in the US, Nielsen (2011) found that ‘mundane’ Internet tools, such as email, are much more deeply integrated into mobilising practices than ‘emerging’ tools, such as social networking sites. Whilst Nielsen has not investigated the differences between individual social networking sites and has simply viewed them as one category, which was criticised by Pasek et al. (2009) and others who argued that there are significant differences between sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, it seems logical to suggest that this may also be the case within this study.

A reason why this may be the case includes the suggestion that UK political parties commonly ‘export’ new campaign techniques that they have seen in use within the US, so that they can be tested within a UK context (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Scammell, 1998; Swanson and Mancini, 1996). Examples of ‘exports’ include an increased focus upon leaders and candidates, instead of parties; the use of technical experts, such as those that can carry out opinion polls; and a reduction in direct contact between party headquarters, and both grassroots volunteers and voters (Swanson and Mancini, 1996).

Therefore, Chapter Four tests whether Nielsen’s (2011) findings hold within the case of a ‘third party’ in the UK, both of which amount to significant changes in context.

Expectation Two: Grassroots Liberal Democrat members use email to engage in non-party political activity, more frequently than they use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to do so.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Four, which focuses upon how grassroots Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and engage in related party political activity.

This expectation is based upon a similar premise to that of expectation one. Nielsen (2011) found that email was used more widely than Facebook or Twitter amongst political campaigners. Again, he argued that this was because Facebook and Twitter are 'emerging tools', whereas email is perceived as a more established or 'mundane' tool, with which most people are now familiar. This study 'tests' whether Nielsen's suggestion holds true outside of the context of a US congressional campaign and within the context of the local election campaign of a 'third party' in England. Nonetheless, as email was introduced long before Facebook and Twitter were created, it is logical to predict that it is more widely used.

If the evidence suggests that this expectation can be accepted, then it seems likely that future studies will find that the gap between the number of people that have used email to mobilise volunteers and the number of people that have used social media to mobilise volunteers will decrease. This is because Facebook and Twitter are less likely to be viewed as 'emerging' technologies over time and instead may be viewed as commonplace or 'mundane'.

Expectation Three: People are more likely to join the Liberal Democrats using an offline communication channel than an online communication channel.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Four, which focuses upon how grassroots Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and engage in related party political activity.

As illustrated within this chapter, despite the fact that many early studies relating to the link between Internet tools and the mobilisation of volunteers claimed that this new technology would revolutionise participation (Bonchek, 1995; Mann, 1995;

McGookin, 1995; Phillips, 1995; Rheingold, 1993), empirical evidence from subsequent studies suggested that this was not the case (see for instance, Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Margolis and Resnick, 2000).

Since the turn of the century when these claims emerged, some studies have found that Internet tools may lead to a small increase in volunteering and general political participation (Bartle, 2005; Gibson et al. 2003; Gibson and Ward, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2005) whereas, others have suggested that those who use Internet tools are actually less likely to participate (Kraut et al. 1998; Nie, 2001; Nie and Erbring, 2000). Given that none of this range of recent studies has found that there has been a vast increase or decrease in the mobilisation of either volunteers or other electoral participation, as a result of the use of Internet tools, it is logical to predict that there is unlikely to be a vast increase in the number of politically engaged individuals choosing to join the Liberal Democrats by using an online sign-up method since the party introduced this facility. If this is the case, then this would fit with the research that claims that it is 'politics as usual' within the 'Internet era'.

Expectation Four: Predictors of the use of email to mobilise volunteers will be different to the predictors of the use of Facebook and Twitter to do so. Similarly, the predictors of the use of Facebook to mobilise volunteers will be different to the use of Twitter and email to do so and so on.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Five, which focuses upon the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership within the Liberal Democrats.

A small number of scholarly publications have offered limited evidence that certain online political activities are more likely to appeal to people with certain characteristics. For instance, Tedesco (2007) and Xenos and Foot (2008) both found that young people are more likely to use social networking sites than email or websites, when they engage with political communication. Similarly, in a study of

issue-based activism in Italy, Treré (2011) found that students were more likely to use Facebook and Twitter than email. This is because this group is thought to prefer the interactive features that such a tool provides. Similarly, as acknowledged by Pasek et al. (2009) different social networking sites are built for different purposes, which means that each site has different features. He claimed that some of these features are more likely to lend themselves to the creation of social capital than others. This means that users of certain sites may be more likely to volunteer to help a political party than others.

Early research based upon non-representative samples of MySpace and Facebook users has illustrated that those that use MySpace and Facebook are more likely to engage in offline political activity than users of other Internet tools (Bode, 2012; Ellison et al. 2008; Hargittai, 2007; Nyland et al. 2007; Valenzuela et al. 2008). The authors of these studies claimed that this is because these sites generate a higher level of social capital than some others. They argued that this higher level of social capital exists because people on these sites are more likely to use their real name and interact with those they know offline, than users of sites, such as Twitter or YouTube.

Expectation Five: Age is likely to be a predictor of using each of the three Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Five, which focuses upon the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership amongst Liberal Democrat members.

Little, if any research is focused upon what impacts upon the likelihood that a grassroots members of a political party will use an Internet tool to mobilise other volunteers. Nonetheless, Ward et al. (2002) found that younger people were more likely to join the Liberal Democrats using an online method or cite that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join. Norris and Curtice (2008), Xenos and Foot (2008), the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011), Tedesco

(2007) and others also found that those that use Internet tools to acquire political information tend to be younger. Neither of these sets of findings relates directly to using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, but it stands to reason that if this demographic group is more likely to use Internet tools to acquire political information, then they may be more likely to use it as a means to mobilise other volunteers.

Furthermore, Xenos and Foot (2008) and Tedesco (2007) argued that there is evidence that younger people are more likely to use Internet tools in an interactive way than older people. They are more likely to share interactive political material or mobilisation appeals with friends and also more likely to respond to interactive material that friends have provided. This willingness to share interactive political information and mobilisation messaging adds weight to the claim that age is likely to be a predictor of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

Expectation Six: Educational background is likely to be a predictor of the use of using each of the three Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Five, which focuses upon the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership amongst the Liberal Democrats.

In surveys of party members and supporters, educational background has been shown to be related to propensity to use online tools to share political information and discuss politics online. For instance, Katz and Rice (2002) found that individuals that are educated to degree level are more likely to both use Internet tools for political purposes and engage in offline community and political activity.

Correspondingly, a more recent study published as part of the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2008) showed that individuals that use Internet tools to interact with others about politics are more educated than the population as a whole. It also showed that individuals with a degree are more likely to create political content to be shared online. A study by Wang (2007) also provided evidence to suggest that individuals educated to degree level are more likely to use Internet tools

for political purposes.

There appear to be few, if any studies that test whether this holds true within the context of using these tools to mobilise volunteers. However, as education has been shown to be linked with the likelihood that an individual will interact with others about politics online and also the likelihood that they will create political content to be shared online then it is reasonable to suggest that it may also be a predictor of using online tools to mobilise volunteers.

Expectation Seven: Externally elected public officials, such as councillors, are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, than those that are not externally elected public officials.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Five, which focuses upon the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership amongst the Liberal Democrats.

Research by Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012) has suggested that the adoption of Internet tools amongst political parties is leading them towards a model of operation that relies upon a structure that appears to be very decentralised and provides a floating support base, as opposed to a less transient group of ongoing supporters. People that partake in offline activity, as a result of engaging with political material online, are less likely to remain involved in the long-term. Similarly, in a study of UK political parties in the run up to the 2010 General Election, Gibson (2013) argued that volunteers mobilised via social media have different characteristics to those that are mobilised as a result of using more 'traditional' offline methods. She found that those mobilised online were less likely to pay an annual membership fee, attend meetings, fulfil more official roles on local branch executive committees or to seek externally elected positions. She also found that the type of people that use Internet tools to keep in touch with other supporters of a political cause are less likely to engage in offline political activity, such as attending meetings, attending fundraising events or delivering leaflets, than those people that use the telephone or face-to-face

conversations to keep in touch with other supporters. As a result, it is logical to suggest that externally elected public officials are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, than those that do not hold an externally elected public office.

A number of studies from just over a decade ago add weight to this suggestion. They have also indicated that members that join online tend to be less involved in the daily life of the organisation (Römmele, 2003; Schweitzer, 2005; Ward et al. 2003). Each of these three studies found that even when supporters do pay an annual membership fee, they are often more passive participants and spend less time on a range of political tasks, including attending meetings and doorstep campaigning; thus suggesting that they may also be less likely to seek office as a Liberal Democrat representative.

Expectation Eight: Younger members are more likely to have joined the party online.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Five, which focuses upon the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership amongst the Liberal Democrats.

There are very few studies that focus upon Internet tools and party joining behaviour. Instead, they focus upon volunteer mobilisation, turnout and information sharing. This is most likely because the vast majority of studies have been carried out in countries where political parties do not operate with a system of mass membership, such as the USA. In their study of Liberal Democrat members, Ward et al. (2002) found that age is a significant predictor of whether an individual will join the Liberal Democrats using an online method, i.e. the website sign-up option. Since 2002, no studies appear to have investigated the predictors of online joining behaviour. Nonetheless, given the similar context of the study, i.e. the same country, the same political party, it seems logical to suggest that this project will also find evidence to

support the suggestion that those that join the Liberal Democrats online are likely to be younger.

Expectation Nine: the majority of members are likely to perceive that Internet tools did not play an important role in encouraging them to join the party, however, regular Internet users are more likely to perceive that Internet tools encouraged them to join.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Six, which focuses upon the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

A study by Ward et al. (2002) found that 31% of online Liberal Democrat members perceived that Internet tools had either directly or indirectly led them to join the party. Whilst Internet tools have become both more widely and more frequently used in the 12 years since the Ward et al. study, the vast majority of studies have indicated that the widespread usage of Internet tools have not led to any significant increase in the mobilisation of volunteers (see for instance, Bartle, 2005; Gibson et al. 2003; Gibson and Ward, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2005). There are a number of key differences between members and volunteers; for example, not all members are volunteers and not all volunteers are members. This is exemplified by the rise of the less engaged or 'cheque book' member (Katz and Crotty, 2006; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005; Scarrow, 2007); an individual that pays their yearly subscription and is happy to receive information from the party, but takes little or no interest in participating in daily party life. Nonetheless, membership is a form of political participation and as a result, it seems logical to predict that, much like is the case with volunteering, the use of Internet tools has led to little or no significant increase in the number of members joining political parties, including the Liberal Democrats and that it has remained the case that the majority of Liberal Democrat members do not perceive that Internet tools played an important factor in encouraging them to join the party.

A small number of studies have offered evidence that certain online political activities are more likely to appeal to people with certain characteristics, e.g. those that already use Internet tools frequently (see for example, Tedesco, 2007; Treré, 2011; Xenos and Foot, 2008). Therefore, it is also likely to be the case that people that use Facebook, Twitter and email daily are also more likely than others to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

Expectation Ten: the majority of members are likely to perceive that email is a more useful means of mobilising volunteers, than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Six, which is focused upon the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

Shah et al. (2001a) divided Internet use into four different categories; social recreation, product consumption, financial management and information exchange. They found positive relationships between information exchange and measures of social capital, including trust and political engagement. Zhao (2006) built upon this study by dividing the Internet into three categories; email, website users and chat users. He found that email users were more politically engaged and also more likely to interact with their contacts offline. This indicates that there is a strong likelihood that emails are perceived to lead to better volunteer mobilisation outcomes than Facebook and Twitter campaigns.

Similarly, other studies have shown that informational Internet usage is closely linked with social capital and that people that use Internet tools for information also demonstrate higher levels of political knowledge and civic personalisation (Eveland Jr. et al. 2004; Johnson and Kaye, 2003; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Pasek et al. 2006; Wellman et al. 2001). A respondent needs to opt into an email distribution list so that they can receive information about a political party, but they do not need to opt in to view political information from a friend or acquaintance on Facebook or

Twitter. Opting into an email service fits with a pattern of information seeking and therefore, further supports the suggestion that email users may be more likely to volunteer and hence the perception amongst Liberal Democrat members that email is a more useful means of mobilising volunteers.

Expectation Eleven: the majority of members are likely to perceive that there are differences in the usefulness of different types of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as tools for mobilising volunteers.

This expectation is tested in Chapter Six, which is focused upon the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

A number of scholars have argued that existing studies of the impact of Internet tools upon political participation are limited because most examine the Internet-as-a-whole, instead of breaking it down into smaller, more meaningful categories (see for instance, Ellison et al. 2007; Gibson, 2013; Shah et al. 2006; Zhao, 2006). A study by Pasek et al. (2009) found evidence that Facebook users tend to hold greater political knowledge and levels of civic engagement, whereas MySpace users hold lower knowledge and are less trusting of users. He argued that these differences are a result of different 'cultures' caused by the features of the Internet tool, the type of people that use the site and the patterns of interaction that tend to emerge based on both of the aforementioned factors. Along with others (Ellison et al. 2007; Gibson, 2013; Shah et al. 2006; Zhao, 2006), he suggested that these differences in social capital mean that different Internet tools are perceived to be a more useful tool for encouraging participation than others. As a result, it is logical to suggest that different Internet tools are perceived to lead to different mobilisation outcomes.

2.10 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter contained a critical discussion of the theoretical framework and empirical research upon which this study was based. It brought together research by scholars within the field of party organisations and the field of social movements in order to develop a set of expectations for testing within the three empirical chapters of this thesis.

Contained within this chapter is the definition of the term 'mobilisation' that has been used throughout this project was provided. Within this study, the term 'mobilisation' has been used to refer to an outcome, instead of a process. Similarly, it was necessary to explain what counted as volunteer mobilisation and what did not, within the context of this project. For instance, sharing a link online is not considered as a form of mobilisation within this project, as it is a very low involvement and effort activity.

Subsequently, an explanation the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation was provided. This was followed by a discussion of how the professionalisation of political campaigning has impacted upon both the demand for volunteers and the techniques used to mobilise them. The chapter also contained a critical discussion of the perceived organisational impact of the Internet upon party structures and the nature of online mobilisation attempts within the 'Web 2.0 era'. This showed that different scholars have offered different views relating to the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation. As a result, this chapter also provided an explanation for these differences, before explaining which aspects of the Internet are examined within this study. Finally, an explanation of the positive and negative influences upon volunteer mobilisation was provided, in addition to a discussion of what may condition these effects.

Throughout this process, it became apparent that there were a number of areas in which this study could contribute to knowledge within these fields. For instance, much of the existing research within this field relates to the Internet as a tool for

mobilising voters or impacting upon voter intention, as opposed to mobilising volunteers. Similarly, as noted by Pasek et al. (2009) and Nielsen (2011), amongst others, the majority of studies have analysed the Internet-as-a-whole, instead of breaking it down into smaller and more meaningful categories. Furthermore, very few are focused upon UK political parties, smaller political parties or relate to second order elections, such as local government elections. Finally, there appears to be a limited understanding of the extent to which grassroots members and supporters perceive that Internet tools can provide a useful means for mobilising volunteers. This research was used alongside the research questions shown in Chapter One, in order to create a series of expectations that are tested within Chapters Four, Five and Six. However, prior to this, the following chapter outlines the research design that was used throughout this project.

Chapter Three: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

A mixed method approach was used to investigate the research questions presented within Chapter One of this thesis. This approach focused upon generating data from a participant observation, a survey of Liberal Democrat party members and a series of semi-structured interviews. The following chapter provides a rationale for utilising a mixed method approach. It also contains a description and justification of each of the research methods that is used, alongside a discussion of key issues affecting the data generation and analysis stages of this project.

3.2 Case Selection: The Liberal Democrats

As explained in detail within Chapter One, this study is focused upon the Liberal Democrats because they are seen to be a good 'test case' to examine political parties' propensity to using Internet tools in innovative and participatory ways. They have a decentralist ethos which promotes grassroots involvement, in addition to a predominantly middle class membership who would be more likely to use Internet tools, alongside a former leader who remains responsible for campaigning and has long championed Internet tools as means for the party to promote itself, alongside encouraging supporters to have more input into the political process.

3.3 Overview of Research Design

It was necessary to use data generated from different combinations of research methods in order to answer each individual research question. The first research question asks how Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email to volunteers. The data generated from the participant observation, survey of Liberal Democrat party members and series of semi-structured interviews were all used to answer this question. The second research

question aims to uncover the predictors of whether or not grassroots Liberal Democrat members have used Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers. Only the data generated from the survey was used to answer this question. Finally, the third question aims to assess the extent to which grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, are a useful means of mobilising volunteers. Much like the first research question, the data from the participant observation, survey and semi-structured interviews were all used to answer this question. The rationale for using each of these approaches in relation to each research question is discussed later in this chapter.

3.4 Rationale for use of a Sequential Mixed Method Approach

The term 'mixed method approach' refers to, "The combined use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies within the same study in order to address a single research question," (Azorin and Cameron, 2010). The approach adopted is also referred to as 'sequential' because each of the three methods utilised, i.e. a participant observation, a survey and a series of semi-structured interviews, was carried out in sequence, instead of concurrently (Bryman, 2008). There are four main reasons why using this approach is believed to be the most appropriate means of gathering data to answer the aforementioned research questions.

The first is because utilising qualitative research can provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of survey findings. Existing studies have already provided a broad indication of overall trends relating to the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation (see for instance, Nielsen, 2011; Pasek, 2009; Ward et al. 2002; Ward et al. 2003). Although they have been carried out within slightly different contexts, for instance, a different country with a different electoral system or a first order electoral contest, they have provided a useful benchmark for further research. Scholars, such as Nielsen (2011), Pasek (2009) and Gibson (2013) have called for work that provides a deeper, more nuanced account of the subtle differences between different Internet tools, alongside more detailed accounts of how citizens

use them to mobilise others. A survey alone would not provide such an account, however, the integration of qualitative methods would offer this deeper, richer perspective. Examples drawn from qualitative data are commonly used to illustrate findings from quantitative research (Mason, 2002). Therefore, the semi-structured interviews and participant observation within this project provide a form of contextual understanding that has been used alongside the generalisable findings and relationships shown by the survey.

Related to this is the sense of 'completeness' that is provided by a mixed method approach, as one type of data can be used to explain unexpected results shown within the other (Bryman, 2008; Greene et al. 1989). This is particularly important within the context of this project because Chapter Two highlighted a number of inconsistent findings related to the perceived impact of Internet tools upon volunteer mobilisation. For instance, initial research suggested that Internet tools are associated with a decline in volunteer mobilisation, whereas others indicated that it was associated with an increase. This is largely believed to a result of inconsistent methodological approaches with some studies using longitudinal diary studies and others using short surveys. Similarly, some studies focus upon the number of volunteers mobilised and others focus upon the number of hours of volunteering completed (see for instance, Bimber, 2000; Shah et al. 2001a; Zhao, 2006). As a result, this study aims to use a range of research methods to provide a more complete picture. It also clearly indicates which form of measurement is used at the relevant points, i.e. hours of volunteering or number of volunteers. Lusoli and Ward (2005) and Park and Kluver (2009) have both used mixed method approaches when studying the link between Internet tools and election campaigning, and have cited similar reasons for using such an approach.

As previously explained, the semi-structured interviews were carried out after the participant observation and the survey. This is because it meant that the questions in the interviews could be structured so as to provide an explanation of the findings generated by the survey or participant observation. For instance, during the analysis of data from the participant observation, it became apparent that a senior Liberal

Democrat employee offered a view that appeared to contrast with the data generated during the survey. Structuring the data generation in this way provided a particularly useful means of explaining this unexpected comment, as it meant that it was possible to ask further questions to gain a deeper insight into this perspective.

Thirdly, a mixed method approach is useful to this project because it means that the results of the participant observation helped to inform the survey results and also to develop a relevant sampling frame. It is commonly acknowledged that this approach provides a very useful means of instrument development. The results from the participant observation were used alongside relevant findings from the theories and existing research within this field in order to construct the survey. This meant that better wording and more comprehensive closed answers could be developed (Bryman, 2008; Mason, 2002). This proved to be particularly useful because the participant observation showed that academics and party members often use different phrases to describe the same concept. Carrying out the participant observation first meant that it was possible to ensure that the wording of questions within the survey and interviews was accessible to party members.

The precise way in which the findings of the participant observation were used to inform the survey is explained in more detail later in this chapter.

A mixed method approach also aided the development of a sampling frame for the semi-structured interviews. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked whether they would be happy to engage in a semi-structured interview. This was used to create a pool of potential respondents for this phase of the project and subsequently facilitate the development of a sampling frame. This is explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Finally, it was particularly important to triangulate the results of the data collection by offsetting the strengths and weaknesses of different methods against one another. This is because there is a mixed range of research findings within this area, as illustrated within Chapter Two and this meant that the results of this study would contrast with the results of some of the others. Using a range of research methods

meant that findings could be converged and cross-validated in order to accurately explain the results, thus increasing the validity of findings (Campbell and Fiske, 1959; Webb et al. 1966; Smith, 1975; Denzin, 1978, McGrath et al. 1982).

3.5 Participant Observation and Analysis

Participant observation was used to generate data that could be used to answer research questions one and three. It was not used to generate data to respond to the second research question. The first research question aims to find out how Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers. The third question aims to assess the extent to which the Liberal Democrat grassroots perceive that Internet tools provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers.

There are many different types of participant observation that could have been carried out. Therefore, the following section contains an explanation of the type of participant observation was used and an explanation of why this was the most useful means of gathering data to answer these research questions. It also provides a rationale for the choice of geographical area under study, an explanation of the dates and times that the participant observation was undertaken, an analysis of key issues experienced, an explanation and rationale for the units of measurement used within this part of the study, a discussion of document collection and analysis and the identification of relevant ethical issues for this stage of the research project.

For the purposes of this project, participant observation is defined as, “A qualitative method of social investigation, whereby the researcher participates in the everyday life of a social setting and records their experiences and observations,” (Jupp, 2006). The extent to which the researcher participates in the everyday life of the social setting may vary and therefore, this is discussed later in this section.

3.5.1 Rationale for use of Participant Observation

There are a number of reasons why a period of participant observation was carried out, alongside the survey and semi-structured interviews. Each of these points is discussed in detail within this section.

Firstly, unlike survey research, participant observation offers researchers a very comprehensive and in-depth perspective on a given phenomenon. As explained earlier in this chapter, there is a reasonable amount of empirical work that is focused upon analysing broad mobilisation trends, albeit none that is focused specifically upon a UK political party, i.e. the Liberal Democrats, within local government elections. Therefore, it was particularly useful for this project to generate data that provides a deeper, more nuanced perspective, instead of only a broad analysis of trends. A participant observation is known to be a means of generating very rich, detailed data because it involves going directly to the phenomenon under study and observing it as fully as possible (Foot and Schneider, 2006; and Nielsen, 2011). This data was used to complement the trends identified within the survey-based research. Directly observing how grassroots members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers provided the opportunity to view a range of nuances of attitude that would have been difficult or impossible to identify using data from a survey or a one-hour interview (Nielsen, 2011). A chance interaction with the group under study illustrated this very well. During an informal discussion at the Liberal Democrat's semi-annual party conference which occurred prior to commencing the participant observation, a number of representatives from the local party explained to the audience of sixty to eighty party members, staff and elected representatives that they frequently used the 'latest technologies' to recruit members and described their efforts as 'relatively successful'.

However, within a week of beginning the participant observation, it was clear that this group used Internet tools a lot less frequently and with a lot less success than they had originally proclaimed. Later in the participant observation, a local member said that he felt that Liberal Democrat HQ had been keen to promote the use of Internet

tools within local election campaigns and as a result, may have become, “A little carried away,” when explaining this local branch’s success. He also commented that he felt that the representative from the local branch that presented at the conference may also have been particularly keen to present his branch in the best possible light by showing that they successfully embrace new ideas. Another local member commented that sometimes successes are slightly exaggerated at party conferences.

The timings of the survey and semi-structured interviews meant that many respondents were asked to reflect upon volunteer mobilisation following an election campaign period, i.e. from June to August 2011, which is in the period directly following the campaign period in the run-up to the May 2011 local elections. In contrast, the participant observation also enabled the study of the mobilisation of volunteers over a period of time. It was carried out in the 8 weeks prior to the local elections, which meant that it was possible to directly observe how the way in which Internet tools are used to mobilise volunteers changes during the run-up to the election, rather than relying upon second-hand accounts of such activities. Nielsen (2011) carried out an analysis of US mobilisation practices and commented that, “Interviews provide data on what people say and what people say they do, but participant observation provides primary data on what they actually do.” The clear disadvantage to the participant observation was that it related to one stage of the electoral cycle, however, this was offset by the semi-structured interviews and the survey, where respondents were asked to draw upon their experiences throughout the different stages of the electoral cycle.

Unlike surveying and semi-structured interviewing, a period of participant observation allows the researcher to investigate social life within its natural habitat, hence offering the opportunity to improve the quality of the data generated (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). It can be argued that perfectly adequate empirical data relating to the mobilisation of volunteers can be obtained by using surveys and interviews; however, numerous methodological studies have shown that respondents to surveys and interviews are significantly more likely to offer a response that they perceive to

be socially desirable (Howell, 2013; and Mason, 2002). For example, a systematic analysis of election study data from the US by Chang and Krosnick (2009) found that respondents often feel anxious to provide the “correct” response in a survey, or qualitative interview. This is particularly relevant to this study because the participant observation data showed that Liberal Democrat volunteers and election candidates in the area studied are frequently encouraged to dedicate as many hours to the local campaign as possible. Throughout this time it became very clear that volunteers and candidates told one another that they had worked far more campaign hours than was actually the case. Therefore, it is logical to suggest that respondents may choose to report a higher number of campaign hours worked in order to provide a more socially desirable response, particularly if they are campaigning in a target seat. Using data generated by participant observation can offset this problem and make it less of an issue (Bryman, 2008) by providing an opportunity to both observe what participants actually do and to engage in triangulation, hence increasing the validity of the research findings.

Similarly, the period in the field made it possible to learn the specialist terminology used by Liberal Democrat activists. Terms, such as, “EARS,” “Huddle,” “Connect,” “Soft Con,” and “Riso,” were used. Firstly, hearing these terms used in the field meant that it was not necessary to interrupt the ‘flow’ of a semi-structured interview by asking the respondent what they were referring to. Secondly, the terms learnt during this time were used to inform and improve question design in the survey. Finally, it meant that it was possible to make sense of this terminology when respondents used it in response to the open-ended question at the end of the survey.

Finally, during the participant observation, it was very easy to compare online and offline mobilisation efforts. It was possible to directly assess the amount of time that volunteers spent using online and offline channels, in addition to addressing the perceived importance of each of these approaches.

The participant observation was not used to generate data to answer research question two, which aims to uncover the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers. The data that relates to the second research question is discussed in Chapter Five. This chapter also discusses a number of other related areas, including the predictors of whether respondents have used Internet tools to increase membership and the predictors of whether respondents have joined the party online. It discusses these related areas because they are very closely linked to volunteer mobilisation and can provide a more detailed overview of the area under study, in addition to showing any relevant patterns. It was not possible to discuss such a wide range of behaviours using data from three different research methods and therefore, only the survey data was used within this section.

3.5.2 Key Variables and Areas of Interest within Participant Observation

As previously explained, the participant observation was used to answer research question one and research question three. Research question one is focused upon how Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers. Research question three is focused upon the extent to which Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive Internet tools to be a useful means of mobilising volunteers. This research question is discussed in Chapter Six, which also identifies a number of the predictors of the extent to which respondents perceive that Internet tools can be useful means of mobilising volunteers and also, the extent to which respondents perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

A number of areas of interest and variables were studied throughout the participant observation. Appendix 2 (page 308) shows the key areas of interest or variables that formed the focus of the participant observation. It also illustrates how they relate to each of the research questions. Data related to the use of Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and engage in wider campaign activity was generated in a number of ways.

Firstly, whenever a person was observed using an Internet tool to mobilise volunteers, this was noted down. The notes related to what they were doing online, which tools they were using, how long they spent using this tool and whether anyone had engaged with their content, i.e. in the case of Facebook and Twitter, whether they had made a comment or replied and in the case of email, whether they had responded. I also asked the person being observed whether they felt that their online mobilisation or campaign attempts would be successful and whether they had been successful in the past. I also asked the person whether they felt that their offline attempts, if they had made any, had been successful. Additionally, I asked the person being observed to estimate how many people that they believed that they may have mobilised as a result of each of these appeals.

Secondly, I recorded when references to other people mobilising volunteers were made. Where possible, I asked similar questions of the person making this reference. In addition to this, when people said that they did not use certain Internet tools or any Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, I spent time discussing why they chose not to do so. Spending an extended period of time with Liberal Democrat activists meant that it was possible to generate very detailed, rich data related to the variables of interest, unlike within the subsequent survey.

3.5.3 Geographical Area under Study within Participant Observation

The participant observation was focused upon a branch of the Liberal Democrats operating within one geographic area. This area was chosen because the Liberal Democrats controlled the city council at the time of study and there is evidence that a strong level of local representation is often associated with a high local level of membership or activism (see for instance, Denver and Hands, 2000; Whiteley, 2009), the local party were happy to participate in the research, the branch under study are known to be strong advocates of ICTs, hence providing a benchmark for future studies and finally the belief that the city has a large activist community.

The participant observation was focused upon three adjoining local government electoral districts, commonly referred to as wards. Each of these wards falls within one Parliamentary constituency. The branch of the party whose activities were observed has asked not to be directly named in this research project. However, they stated that they do not wish to remain anonymous; and are happy for any details that may indirectly identify them, such as city size, electoral history, details of online campaigning and similar to be used.

There are a number of reasons why local government wards within this particular constituency were chosen. Firstly, the Liberal Democrats were in control of the city council at the time. As briefly explained previously, studies have shown that parties with local representation are more likely to have a strong local network of members and activists (Cutts, 2014; Denver and Hands, 2000; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005; Whiteley, 2009). The study was focused upon a local branch that perceived that they had a strong local network of members and supporters in the hope that any trends in using new technologies, such as Internet tools, to increase membership or mobilise volunteers, would arguably be more salient.

Secondly, the executive committee who run the local branch and the campaign team were both happy for a participant observation to be carried out within the constituency. It was important to gain the consent of the local branch and to carry out an overt, as opposed to covert observation for ethical reasons. This is explained in more detail later in this chapter. Thirdly, the branch under study is widely perceived by many within the Liberal Democrats to be a strong advocate of the use of new technologies within politics. Whilst discussing the possibility of carrying out the participant observation with this branch, two members of the executive committee noted that they have been using ICTs for internal party discussion and voter identification since the early 1990s. Given that this is the first stage of data generation and analysis, the data generated from the participant observation with this technology literate, active branch of the Liberal Democrats should provide a useful benchmark for the next two stages of data generation, i.e. the survey and semi-structured interviews.

Finally, discussions with grassroots activists and experienced campaigners within the city prior to deciding upon a geographical area upon which to focus the study indicated that the city is widely perceived to have a large activist community. Alongside the smaller political parties, such as the Green Party and UKIP, organisations, such as Yes to Fairer Votes, 38 Degrees, Feminist Network, Anarchist Federation and Friends of the Earth, were all running large, high-profile campaigns throughout the time that the participant observation was being carried out. As a result, it seems logical to suggest that any trends in using Internet tools to increase volunteering will be most salient in an area where political and social activism is more commonplace.

3.5.4 Key Characteristics of the Area under Study within Participant Observation

This section aims to provide a contextual background to the participant observation by detailing a number of the political characteristics of this area and discussing the ‘competitiveness’ of the wards that were studied for the Liberal Democrats.

The constituency in which the three wards are situated is located within a city that is represented by 4 MPs. The city is in the south of England and has a tradition of local activism, with environmental issues and sustainable transport commonly cited as being of importance. The constituency has returned a Labour MP to Parliament for well over 50 years. The Liberal Democrats came second in this district during the 2005 and 2010 General Elections. However, from the 1930s to 2001 they continually came third (UK Polling Report, 2013). Despite being represented nationally by the Labour Party, when the participant observation was carried out, the party controlled the City Council and held 38 of the 70 seats. Labour held 17 seats, the Conservatives held 4 seats and the Green Party held just 1 seat. Seven of these Liberal Democrat held seats were within the same constituency as the council wards being studied. This fits with the Liberal Democrat tradition of gradually building up local representation and using it as a stepping-stone to achieving Parliamentary representation (Cutts, 2004; Fieldhouse et al. 2006; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005).

Therefore, this was a geographical area in which the Liberal Democrats planned to run a high-intensity campaign in order to hold onto their seats.

It is important to acknowledge that the participant observation was carried out almost one year after the Liberal Democrats entered a coalition government with the Conservative Party. The Liberal Democrats were the minority partner in the coalition and their poll ratings in March 2011 were 8% (YouGov, 2011), which was lower than they had experienced since they had formed in 1989. Furthermore, as noted by Russell (2010), the early stages of the coalition with the Conservative Party had not proven to be popular with many of the party's more 'progressive' members or supporters, many of whom left following the party's coalition with their competitors. The local party explained that they believed that negative perceptions of the coalition government would mean that they would have to campaign harder locally, in order to hold or gain seats.

The city is governed by a unitary authority (ONS, 2013). It is divided into thirty-five wards, which elect two councilors for a four-year term. Twenty-four of the seventy seats were available in the 2011 elections and there were to be no elections the following year, as the council is elected in thirds. This meant that it was particularly important that the party held their seats, again suggesting that this would be a sensible location for a participant observation that aimed to provide insight into the campaign activity of a particularly active branch of a political party.

The Liberal Democrats contested all of the wards where elections were held. Therefore, in order to enable depth of analysis the participant observation was focused upon just three of these wards. In order to generate as wide a range of data as possible, it was necessary to select wards with varying degrees of competitiveness:

- A ward with an incumbent Liberal Democrat councillor; this ward should be one that the local party expects to hold relatively easily

- A marginal ward; this ward may or may not have an incumbent councillor, but it should be a seat that the party will be in close competition with at least one other party, in terms of vote-share
- A ward where the party is typically expected to perform poorly and as a result, does not expect to win. This may be a ward where the Liberal Democrats typically come third or even fourth

This participant observation was only carried out across three council wards and these wards are clearly not representative of the entire country. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that any results or findings are indicative and illustrative, hence, meaning that they cannot be generalised across all political parties or even the entirety of the Liberal Democrats. They merely offer additional depth to the findings from the survey and semi-structured interviews.

3.5.5 Dates and Times of Participant Observation

The participant observation was carried out between 4th March and 4th May 2011. The campaign team generally worked from 8am until around 8pm and often ate together or socialised at the end of this day. There was a team of volunteers working on each day of the eight weeks prior to polling day. The participant observation involved following this team on six days out of every seven and living with a retired Liberal Democrat councilor who was assisting the campaign team. Meeting with the team after a day of work provided an opportunity to observe their reflections upon their experiences.

3.5.6 Negotiating and Maintaining Access

One of the key challenges within the participant observation related to negotiating access to the field of study. This is commonly perceived to be one of the most difficult aspects of participant observation (Mason, 2002). For the purposes of this research project, access is defined as, “The process of gaining and maintaining entry

to a setting, or a social group, or of establishing working relations with individuals, in order that social research can be undertaken,” (Jupp, 2006).

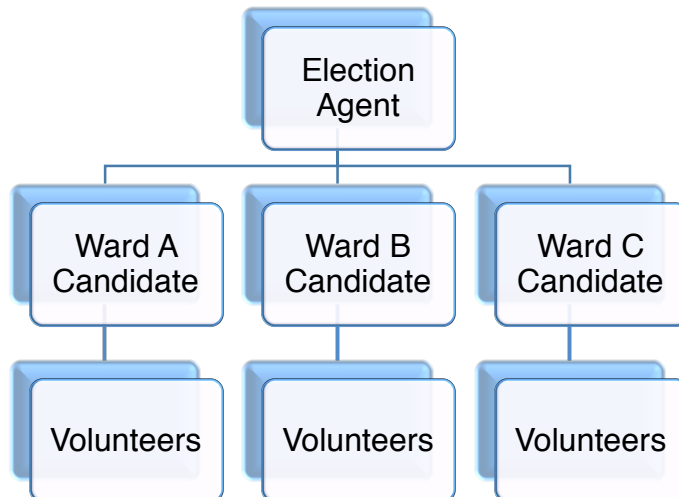
Initially, access was negotiated via a former employee of the party who both worked and resided within the constituency. This person discussed the proposal with the executive committee and active members of the local branch and they decided that they were happy for a researcher to join the local election campaign for the eight weeks running up to the 2011 local elections.

Once access had been negotiated, the following challenge was to ‘become a member of the group’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Mason, 2002). I considered this to be particularly important because I wanted those observed to trust me, so that they acted in the same manner that they would if I were not there. The group under study consisted of around 20 members. The campaign in each of the three wards was co-ordinated by one person who had also been appointed as the ‘election agent’. An election agent is the person that is legally responsible for the conduct of a candidates’ political campaign and to whom campaign material is sent by the candidate (Electoral Commission, 2013). Candidates in English elections may also act as their own election agent. In this case the agent was formerly employed as a campaigns manager by the party and chose to play an active role in planning and managing the 3 campaigns. Whilst not a paid position, the agent had a vested interest in electoral performance in the wards as he was a Liberal Democrat councillor who had been elected to Ward A approximately one year previously and was planning to seek re-election in 2014. At this point, it should be noted that the 3 wards under study geographically bordered each other.

The Liberal Democrat candidate in each of the wards was expected to work with the elections agent in order to run their campaign. The candidates were also expected to mobilise volunteers and fundraise. The purpose of the fundraising was to help pay for the printing of leaflets and similar campaign literature.

The following chart provides a visual depiction of the organisational structure within the community under study:

Figure 3.1: Organisational Structure within Community under Study



In order to both develop the local knowledge required to become part of the group and to gain an understanding of the environment in which they were operating, a search of relevant documents was carried out. Sources such as old election records, campaign materials and newspaper articles from previous years provided an insight into the local party's previous campaign efforts and history, alongside media commentary relating to campaign activities. The next step involved talking to the initial contact, the elections agent, about the campaign activities of the branch. This stage proved particularly useful, as the relationship with the election agent had been formed many years prior to beginning the participant observation, meaning that he was willing to discuss the group and their successes in a particularly open manner. In addition to being advantageous, this relationship proved to be disadvantageous at times, as it became very clear that what he thought he "knew" and therefore, was willing to discuss, was actually a mixture of fact and his own personal points of view. Lee (1993) and Mason (2002) commented that this is a common occurrence within participant observation, particularly during the later stages when participants have become more familiar with the researcher.

It was initially a little difficult to develop an open and trusting relationship with participants. I believe that this was because I was introduced to the group by a person that had previously held a relatively senior position within the organisation, which meant that volunteers and candidates were initially less trusting and open about their campaign activities. During the first few days, they maintained that they engaged in what was considered “best practice” by the group, however, in subsequent weeks it became clear that group members utilised a variety of other campaign methods that were not considered to be as effective, instead utilising more time or cost-effective measures, such as delivering leaflets, as opposed to engaging in face-to-face contact by knocking on doors. Babbie (2013) noted that, where possible, researchers should choose the person that introduces them to a community with great care, as this initial impression may affect how members communicate with the researcher. However, in this case, such a considered approach was not an option.

In making direct, formal contact with the group, it was important to provide some kind of explanation of the purpose of the study (Babbie, 2013). A written overview was provided to the executive committee and members initially tasked with deciding whether to allow access to the group. Once the participant observation had commenced, a brief verbal overview was provided to members of the group, where possible, so that those being observed were able to provide their informed consent. However, some members of the group appeared to be pleased that someone appeared to find them interesting enough to study, so when asked, a more detailed explanation of the project was provided. This proved to be particularly useful, as these interested individuals spent a significant amount of time sharing their views and explaining various concepts.

3.5.7 Issues in Participant Observation: The Role of the Observer

One of my key concerns related to the participant observation related to the role that I played within the group. I was aware that the quality, type and amount of data generated could be impacted upon by the extent to which I participated in the daily

life of the group (Kawulich, 2005).

Within the participant observation I fulfilled a 'participant as observer role'. This meant that I was a member of the group being studied, i.e. the Liberal Democrat local campaign team, and the group were aware of my research activity. I occasionally participated with activities whilst observing others, but I was more interested in observing than in participating (Gold, 1958).

This approach is best used when a researcher gains access to a setting by virtue of having a natural and non-research reason for being part of the setting (Gold, 1958), for example, having worked as an employee of the political party under study, as is the case within this research project. As an observer, I was part of the group under study. A benefit of this approach is that it is much less obtrusive to those being observed and hence, encourages behaviors that are more reflective of the typical nature of the phenomena under study, i.e. the use of Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, arguably generating more reliable and valid data.

3.5.8 Issues in Participant Observation: Carrying out Semi-Structured Interviews whilst in the Field

A total of 8 semi-structured interviews were carried out throughout the participant observation period. The reason that these interviews were carried out was to provide an additional insight into the actions of members of the group under study. They provided the opportunity to ask participants why certain actions were taken and how they felt about them. As a result, no particular interview script was used. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The text was subsequently analysed using the coding frame used throughout the participant observation. This is shown in Appendix 1 (page 306).

3.5.9 Issues in Participant Observation: Recording Observations

Full and accurate notes were maintained throughout the period of observation. These were taken when observing, where possible. When this was not possible, the results were recorded as soon as possible, afterwards.

In order to maximise the benefit of the presence of an observing, thinking researcher on the 'scene of action', both empirical observations and reflections were recorded. The reflections were noted at the end of each day of observation. It is not possible for a researcher to observe and record everything. Therefore, the observations recorded throughout this study represent a sample of all possible observations and the notes generated only represent a sample of all observations.

It was important to ensure that the field notes made related to the research questions identified at the beginning of this study. Therefore, care was taken to ensure that the notes related to the variables and areas of interest identified in Section 3.3.2. As previously mentioned, one of the aims of the participant observation was to generate data that would inform the next stages of data generation i.e. the survey and semi-structured interviews. Hence, notes were made relating to any specialist words, or terminology that was used. More detail relating to what was observed and measured during the participant observation is shown in the table in Appendix 2 (page 308). The table clearly indicates how each of the areas for observation relates to the research questions and the formation of the subsequent stages of the data generation.

3.5.10 Ethical Issues in Participant Observation

There are a number of ethical issues that are important within any social research project. Conducting qualitative field research involves addressing a number of issues arising from the researcher's direct contact with the people being studied (Babbie, 2013; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

This continued, direct contact means that issues such as the behaviour of the researcher and the consequences for people being studied and for others belonging to the same or similar groups are particularly pertinent (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Murphy and Dingwall (2001) point out that, "Research participants may experience anxiety, stress, guilt and damage to self-esteem during data collection," and whilst this also applies to interviewees, the difference is that in observational studies people may be 'on view' for longer periods of time and in a wider range of activities. Therefore, the researcher's ability to cause harm in the process of data generation is greatly increased.

Additionally, the fact that observational studies often involve the development of close relationships in the field raises a number of specific issues. Some of these relate to questions about reciprocity, mutuality and (in) equality in relationships (Mason, 2002). It is not appropriate to assume that reciprocal relationships can or should be developed. Those observed may simply not desire such a level of involvement with the researcher or the research project and if they do, it is important to carefully consider whether this can or can wish to be offered, especially in light of one's ethnographic self and stance on exiting from the setting. Murphy and Dingwall (2001) note that, "Participants may form close relationships with the observer and experience loss when the study is completed and the observer withdraws." Correspondingly, "Participants are not always particularly interested in follow-up and researchers must be wary of further burdening them with expectations of intense involvement, arising more from their own need for affirmation than from any need, or desire from the participants themselves."

As a result, care was taken to avoid 'pushing' a close relationship upon participants. This also fitted with the post-positivist approach to the research project, which advocates that the researcher may 'bias', or 'influence' the researched, but attempt to recognise and minimise the effects of such influences (Howell, 2013). In contrast, upon exiting the research environment, despite efforts not to 'push' or enter a close relationship with participants, Murphy and Dingwall's notations proved to be particularly salient as a number of participants continued to engage in

communication following the completion of the study. This was via telephone, email and also, forms of social media, such as Facebook, or Twitter. The emergence of this type of reciprocal relationship was useful when attempting to clarify information or thoughts, but occasionally proved to be tiring, due to the sheer volume of communications.

Informed consent is an ethical principle that implies a responsibility on the part of the researcher to strive to ensure that those involved as participants in research not only agree and consent to participating in the research without being pressurised or influenced, but that they are fully informed about what it is that they are consenting to (Jupp, 2006). It is often suggested that every single person to be studied by a researcher should be informed about the research in a comprehensive and accurate way and should give their unconstrained consent (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Jupp, 2006; and Mason, 2002). However, there are a number of practical difficulties in negotiating access with every participant within a field setting (Mason, 2002). Such difficulties arose when a number of people external to the immediate group being studied joined the event being observed. These people included activists from neighbouring areas, visiting MPs, VIPs and political competitors.

Additionally, there were a number of occasions where 'private' events and interactions were unintentionally observed. Rather than assuming advanced consent in such situations, it was necessary to either not include such information within the research notes or to ask the participants whether they were happy for the details to be anonymously recorded. When it was perceived that such a request may make a participant feel uncomfortable, the events and interactions were simply not used.

The research setting was not an entirely public place, where all goings on were transparent and openly available to all participants. Throughout this time, insights and knowledge that are not available to all participants were gained. As a result, the local group requested that the research notes were not discussed with other people

until after the local election campaign period had ended and care was taken to ensure that this request was met.

Researchers rely upon being given access to settings; this is particularly the case for those engaging in participant observation. Research that is subsequently found to be objectionable by the people being studied or gatekeepers, may have the effect that these people and others, refuse access in the future. This concern was of particularly pertinent throughout this study. It relates more to the negative reaction of people to research and findings, rather than ethics, but was considered alongside the ethical implications of the research for simplicity. Local politics is often characterised by both clashes of interests, personalities and also of conflicting interpretations. There are no simple solutions to such conflicts. Given this potential for conflicting interpretations and the undesirable implications of being perceived as having incorrectly interpreted campaign activity or similar events, rather than immediately providing an entire copy of the research study to those who requested it, participants were initially offered a short booklet summarising key findings and the opportunity to read the study if they still wished to. This strategy aimed to minimise the effects of local politics impacting upon the accuracy of data generation, in addition to negative consequences, such as difficulties negotiating access for future research.

3.5.11 Analysis of Participant Observation Data

The data generated throughout this time was analysed using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, QSR NVivo. NVivo was used because it offers a range of tools that assist with handling and organising large amounts of qualitative data, ideas and information (Crowley et al. 2002). It is possible to input data from a range of research generation methods, such as observations, interviews, document analysis and literature reviews into the programme. Data can be coded and the coded material quickly retrieved, which saves long periods of time searching through handwritten notes that may also be easily mislaid. As a result, the software can help to ensure the consistency and to a certain extent, the accuracy of observations.

There is a need to categorise or segment data within qualitative research (Mason, 2002). This is typically done after the data collection and this project was no different. A number of categories were initially developed in relation to relevant information contained within existing research related to this topic. Each of these categories was given a code, for simplicity. Categories included, “Participant makes positive comments relating to use of Facebook to mobilise volunteers,” “Participant makes negative comments relating to use of Facebook to mobilise volunteers,” “Participant makes positive comments relating to use of Twitter to mobilise volunteers,” and “Participant makes negative comments relating to use of Twitter to mobilise volunteers,” amongst others.

A number of categories were developed throughout the qualitative data analysis process. These were in response to patterns not mentioned by the literature. A list of all the categories and codes used can be found in Appendix 1 (page 306). Where relevant, phrases, observations and related notations were categorised and given a code. Some notations were given more than one code, if this was perceived to be required.

3.6 Survey Design, Distribution and Analysis

The second stage of the research focused upon the creation and distribution of a self-administered survey. Therefore, this section of the chapter contains a rationale for use of a self-administered survey, discussion of question construction and wording, explanation of the appearance and layout of the survey, description and justification of the sampling frame used, explanation of response rates and critical discussion of the implications of using an Internet-based survey.

The survey was based both upon information contained within the theories and existing research related to this topic, in addition to the data generated by the participant observation.

3.6.1 Rationale for carrying out a Self-Administered Survey

There are a number of reasons why a self-administered survey was used to generate data for this study. Firstly, a self-administered survey fits well with the epistemological approach underlying this study in that whilst the abandonment of total separation between the investigator and investigated is not possible, one can still attempt to pursue a certain level of objectivity (Howell, 2013). As a result, the researcher having no direct personal contact with the respondent whilst the survey is being completed is perceived to offer a number of benefits, particularly in relation to ensuring a relatively 'objective' study. Therefore, this part of the data generation is less likely to suffer from the issue of interviewer or observer bias and does not face the difficulties experienced during the qualitative data generation (Mason, 2002).

On a more practical note, despite the relatively high fixed costs associated with using online survey software, in this case, £350, this method remains less expensive and time-consuming than travelling to far off places, or using the telephone to conduct the survey directly (Jupp, 2006). A further benefit relates to the reproducibility of survey designs; a clear explanation of the methods and the procedures used means that the survey may be replicated, if desired. It is particularly important that this research is replicable because previous studies related to the perceived effects of Internet tools upon volunteer mobilisation have offered a range of results and this is believed to be a result of methodological inconsistency. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Furthermore, such transparency and accountability is particularly valuable when used alongside methods, such as semi-structured interviews or a participant observation, as despite the best efforts of the researcher, key interactions and procedures found within such research methods can often remain hidden (Babbie, 2010; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2005).

It is commonly acknowledged that surveys provide an excellent means of collecting relatively large amounts of quantitative data (Jupp, 2006). They allow for standardised measurement across respondents and hence, clear comparison of Liberal Democrat members' perceptions of the usefulness of

Internet tools as a means for mobilising volunteers and increasing membership. Similarly, a survey of party members allows for generalisation to the population of interest through use of an adequate sample size. This would not be possible through use of a participant observation or interviews alone. Furthermore, the commonly cited criticism that their highly structured nature means that a lesser depth of information is obtained can be countered by the generation of data from a participant observation and semi-structured interviews; both of which allow for the generation of deeper and more nuanced data (Howell, 2013).

Surveys have formed a key methodological component of a number of similar studies related to Internet effects (see, for example, Carlson and Strandberg, 2008; Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Lusoli and Ward, 2005; Gibson et al. 2003; Gibson and MacAllister, 2009; Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt, 2010; Strandberg, 2013; Ward et al. 2002; Ward et al. 2003). In 2002 and 2003, Ward et al. (2002; 2003) utilised the Internet to survey Liberal Democrat members, alongside members of the Countryside Alliance, in order to examine how members were using the Internet-as-a-whole to participate in organisational life and to assess whether this new use of technology was enhancing their participatory experience. Their online survey received 1065 responses from across the organisations and offered an indicative insight into online participation. The sample size allowed for analysis of sub-groups of the population. Comparison points included length of membership, sex, age and occupational status. The quantitative aspect of this study uses a similar approach to analyse how Liberal Democrat members use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and also to assess how effective they perceive these tools to be at doing so.

Studies with a similar methodological approach to that of Ward et al. (2002; 2003) have been carried out in recent years, for example, Lusoli and Ward (2003) report that fairly consistent patterns have emerged in all of the membership surveys undertaken. A later study by Lusoli and Ward (2004) utilised an online survey of both Liberal Democrat and Labour Party members in order to generate data about party members' online behavior, party participation and activism. This survey was

active for three weeks and as argued by the authors, provided a useful benchmark and stepping stone for further research into this under-researched area. As a result it has occasionally been used as a point of comparison throughout this project.

3.6.2 Survey Design and Administration: Question Selection

The main aim of the survey was to provide data that shows how grassroots Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers, the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and also, the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools can provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers. Initially, a large number of questions were constructed and considered for inclusion in the survey. Several attempts at wording were made, in order to reduce ambiguity, achieve the degree of precision necessary to ensure that respondents understood exactly what was being asked, to check that the language used was free from technical terms and to decide which question types to use.

A copy of the questions used within this survey is shown in Appendix 3 (page 310). Similarly, a table that contains an explanation of how each of the questions within the survey relate to the research questions identified in Chapter One can be found in Appendix 4 (page 328). The table also shows how the survey data was analysed in order to provide meaningful data that can be used to answer the research questions and contribute to knowledge within this field.

3.6.3 Survey Design and Administration: Appearance and Layout

In order to maximise the impact of the survey, great care was taken to ensure that it was presented in an accessible manner. Specific guidelines published by Plymouth University (2011) were consulted in order to make the survey accessible to those with dyslexia. Respondents were also offered the opportunity to receive a paper copy of the survey, if they wished.

Instructions relating to how to participate were clearly written in the email. Respondents were briefly reminded of these instructions when beginning the survey. They were also reminded that all responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

3.6.4 Survey Design and Administration: Question Wording and Piloting

Surveys should be piloted for a number of reasons (Howell, 2013; Jupp, 2006). Firstly, to test how long it takes respondents to complete it, to check that all instructions and questions are clear and also, to enable the researcher to remove any items that do not produce usable data. It is particularly important to check question wording, as political scientists and political activists often use different terminology to describe the same concept.

The survey was tested with three different groups of members. When contacted, three constituency organisations were willing to meet to discuss the content of the proposed survey and offer feedback. Each group consisted of between five and eight respondents from a range of backgrounds; there were both male and female respondents, a range of ages and also, members with varying lengths of membership. This was to ensure that the survey was easily accessible to a wide range of people.

Each group met separately. The purpose of the exercise was explained at the beginning and a series of instructions were provided. Respondents that owned a laptop were asked to bring it along and those that did not have a laptop were provided with one and were asked to complete the survey online. The length of time it took for each person to complete the survey was recorded. Once this exercise was complete, a short focus group was carried out. Respondents were asked to discuss their responses to the following questions:

- Were the instructions clear?
- Were any of the questions unclear? If so, which ones and why?

- Did you object to answering any of the questions?
- In your opinion, has any major topic been omitted?
- Was the layout of the survey clear?
- Was the layout of the survey attractive?
- Do you have any further comments? If so, please elaborate.

The responses provided by these individuals were considered and a number of changes made. Once the changes had been implemented, each of the three groups met again and discussed the alterations prior to the distribution of the final survey.

3.6.5 Sampling

In the case of this project, the population of interest is the 21 934 members of the English Liberal Democrat Party (Lib Dem Voice, 2012). At this point, it should be emphasised that this study focuses solely upon members of the English party, hence, excluding members of the Scottish party, the Welsh party and European sister parties, as these candidates are significantly less likely to be involved in local election campaigns in England.

Hakim (2000a) recognised that when surveys are focused upon a well-defined group, rather than the general population, it can be difficult to identify a suitable sampling frame, particularly if the group of interest is small or widely scattered, like the membership of the Liberal Democrats. Administrative records are sometimes used as sampling frames; for example, the unemployment register has been used to obtain samples of the unemployed in the past. In this case, a list of each Liberal Democrat branch in England was used as the basis for a sampling frame.

A list of local branches was obtained. At the time, there were 499 local branches across the 533 constituencies in England. An email was sent to the Membership Secretary of one in four local branches, as email addresses are made available to the public. The initial email explained the purpose of the research and asked whether the branch would be willing to send a link to the survey and a covering email

to a random sample of their membership. More detailed information was sent to the branches that were happy to participate. The groups that participated sent the email to one in three of their membership. Overall, the survey received 679 unique responses, which is very high.

3.6.6 Return of Surveys, including Non-Response

A record of local branches that had responded was maintained, alongside a record of the date of response. Initially, response was very good and then it slowed down. Non-response is a recognised problem as, “The likelihood, repeatedly confirmed in practice, that people who do not return surveys differ from those who do,” (Moser and Kalton, 1971). In order to minimise the effects of non-response as far as possible, follow-up requests were sent to organisations that had not replied, three weeks after the initial email. Similarly, the local branches involved were asked to send a follow-up email to members 2 weeks after the initial email request was sent.

Sample response rates are important in survey research because non-response increases the likelihood of error, or bias (Howell, 2013; Jupp, 2002). It affects the amount of data collected and the comprehensiveness of this data, in relation to the sample. This survey was sent to 3697 party members and 679 responded, meaning that the response rate is 18.4%.

3.6.7 Internet-Based Surveys

Bias may occur when certain types of people may be less likely to respond than others. It should be noted that this is not only a sampling problem; response rates can also be affected by factors such as the method of data collection (Punch, 2005). This is particularly relevant to this study, as the survey is carried out via the Internet; a mode of communication that has often been criticised as being more heavily used by certain demographic groups. This issue has been recognised in a range of studies (Chang and Krosnick, 2009; Malhotra and Krosnick, 2007, Sax et al. 2003) and is discussed in detail within the following section.

The use of online methodologies in both academic and commercial surveying has increased rapidly in recent years. Such surveys are now regularly referred to as authoritative sources of national popular opinion in both media reports and academic publications. These include surveys carried out as part of the series of American National Election Studies; a series of national surveys of the American electorate and a number of the surveys carried out by the Pew Research Center, including parts of their Internet and American Life Project.

Until quite recently, the use of the Internet in national election surveys had generally been quite limited (Chang and Krosnick, 2009; Gibson and McAllister, 2009), therefore the following section of this project discusses 'Internet mode effects' in relation to the decision to conduct an online survey. The term 'Internet mode' refers to whether a particular survey administration model causes different data to be collected (Gibson and McAllister, 2009).

Initially, a number of election studies used Internet technology on a relatively experimental and exploratory basis and subsequently focused upon three main questions:

- How representative the sample is of the wider electorate
- How closely any causal inferences made about political behavior correspond to those drawn from more traditional surveying methods
- How well the poll results matched the election outcome

Gibson and McAllister (2009) are amongst a number of commentators to have discussed such Internet mode effects. They claimed that overall, despite the significant attitudinal biases present in online samples, the direction and significance of relationships between variables of interest essentially replicate those found in offline samples. In addition, they found that online surveys are accurate in predicting election outcomes; with online polls in the run-up to US and UK national elections since 2000 generally coming closer to the final result than their conventional counterparts. UK examples of accurate surveys include the 2001 and 2005 British

Election Studies. Examples from the rest of the world include the 2001, 2004 and 2010 Australian Election Studies and a 2001 study by the Center for Survey Research at Ohio State University, which focus upon the US Presidential Election.

Gibson and McAllister's (2009) study is based upon data from the 2001 Australian Election Study and focus mainly upon whether online versions of election studies can produce more accurate or truthful results of vote choice and party preference than their more conventional offline counterparts.

The question was examined using data from the AES, in which a self-completion Web and self-completion mail survey were carried out. The results show that there are no significant differences in the expression of political preferences across the different survey modes. However, the issue of vote choice varies depending upon whether an individual has Internet access, thus leading the authors to conclude that until the issue of universal choice is resolved, its substitution for existing methods would be undesirable, as this would exclude an important and politically distinctive subset of the population. This project does not relate to vote choice, as presumably all members of the Liberal Democrat Party tend to vote for the party at election time, thus suggesting that an online methodology would be suitable for use in this project.

Furthermore, since this piece of research was carried out, Gibson has carried out a number of studies that are based upon data generated by Internet surveys (Ackland and Gibson, 2013; Cantijoch and Gibson, 2011; Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013; Gibson and McAllister, 2013). Gibson's studies focus upon the use of Internet tools within political participation, thus suggesting that an online survey would also be suited to this project. In order to overcome the aforementioned shortcomings, however, this survey has been carried out alongside a participant observation and series of semi-structured interviews.

Existing studies also point to the benefits offered by online surveys, including evidence that suggests that an online environment can lower the social context of a survey, thus promoting greater openness from respondents in answers on political

preference items (Gibson and McAllister, 2009). Other advantages offered by online surveys include the fact that they are generally cheaper to administer, can provide very large samples and are more likely to include some of those “hard-to-reach” groups, including busy professionals who are rarely at home and who generally dislike the intrusiveness of face-to-face or telephone interviews (Murray and Fisher, 2002). They can also minimise errors and omissions by using smart software to ensure that all items are answered fully (Couper et al. 2001; Haraldsen et al. 2002; Schaefer and Dillman, 1998). Such software was used in this study.

Online surveys can also solicit more accurate responses from respondents. As with mail surveys, people have more time to consider their answers and the lack of an interviewer provides greater freedom to answer sensitive questions truthfully (Gibson and McAllister, 2009; Musch et al. 2001). Also, since people have opted to complete the survey rather than having been selected completely at random, it is plausible that they are more inclined to provide their honest opinions. The suggestion that one can extract more honest opinions from respondents using online methods gains support from a broad range of research relating to mode effects of electronic and computer-assisted surveying. As early as 1986, Sproull and Kiesler compared responses on a series of sensitive topics using self-administered electronic surveys and equivalent paper-based surveys. They found significant differences in the levels of extremity of opinion expressed and concluded that the more impersonal interaction with a computer, the more likely respondents would be less concerned with social norms, meaning that the impressions they give to other are more self-absorbed and less inhibited.

Other work confirms this and it is referred to as the “computer effect” (Turner et al. 1998; Tourangeau and Smith, 1996; Walsh et al. 1992; Bradburn et al. 1991). Tourangeau and Smith argue that the computerised environment offered uniquely high levels of privacy and legitimacy to respondents, encouraging them to make potentially embarrassing admissions. This is particularly useful in the study, as Liberal Democrat candidates are required to commit a certain amount of hours to

campaigning; meaning that they may be more inclined to provide a socially desirable response, if in a face-to-face or one-to-one situation.

3.7 Semi-Structured Interviews

3.7.1 Rationale for use of Semi-Structured Interviews

The final stage of the research project involved carrying out a range of semi-structured interviews. Interviews are the most common form of qualitative research (Punch, 2005). The following section of this chapter contains a discussion of the process that was used in order to generate this data.

Semi-structured interviews were initially used to generate data to answer all three of the main research questions within this project, although as previously explained, only the data that relates to research question one and research question three was used within this project. They were carried out during two different stages of the project. Initially eight were carried out during the participant observation period and subsequently the remaining forty-seven were carried out after the completion of the survey. As previously mentioned, the interviews were used alongside the participant observation to provide a deeper, more nuanced explanation of how Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and the perceived usefulness of this activity.

The vast majority of studies within this area is quantitative and analyses broader trends. This research method allows the project to focus upon more than just the quantification of data. The data generated from interviews can offer greater depth, nuance, complexity and roundness to a research project, rather than the kind of broad surface patterns that surveys may provide (Letherby, 2003; Mason, 2002).

One of the key benefits of using interviews within this project related to the ease of which they can be tailored to the individual respondent. Therefore, if a respondent had made some interesting comments within the participant observation or the

survey, it was possible to gain a greater insight into their perceptions. These comments were subsequently used to provide a more holistic response to each research question.

3.7.2 Planning and Conducting the Semi-Structured Interviews

Detailed and rigorous planning was carried out prior to the interview process. This was because the interviews did not follow a predesigned set and sequence of questions; which meant that I needed to ‘think on their feet’ during the interview process. One of my priorities was ensuring that the interview interaction actually generated the relevant data and not simply a social encounter with a keen Liberal Democrat activist. This proved to be one of the key issues whilst carrying out the fifty-five interviews for this project. At the time of the data generation, the Liberal Democrats in government were engaging in a series of new events that were perceived as quite controversial amongst grassroots membership, for example, entering a coalition with a party of the centre right; the Conservatives and subsequently, not supporting some of their previous manifesto ‘pledges’ whilst in government (see for instance, Guardian, 2011; Telegraph, 2011 or a range of media outlets). Furthermore, many of these topics were not particularly popular with previous Liberal Democrat voters (see for instance, Russell, 2010). As a result, a large number of the respondents were keen to discuss these issues, as opposed to the proposed interview topic. It became apparent that it would be all too easy to generate a pleasant social encounter whose content had little, or no bearing on the research questions that the interview was designed to address.

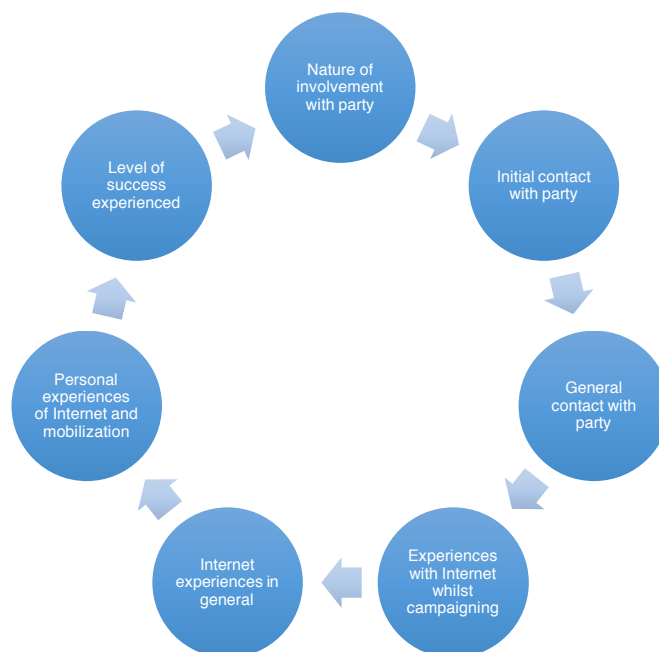
The purpose of the interviews was to generate data that would answer each of the following research questions:

Q1 How do grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers?

- Q2 What are the predictors of whether or not grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters have used Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers?
- Q3 To what extent do grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers?

Prior to working out a list of questions that may be used within the interview, I listed a number of topics that I felt were key to gaining data that would shed light upon the research questions. These are listed in the following diagram.

Figure 3.2: Topics for Discussion within Semi-Structured Interviews



I used each of these topics to create questions that linked to the topics and the aforementioned research questions. I checked that each of the smaller questions was actually contributing to answering a bigger question, so that valuable time with a respondent was not being wasted. Appendix 6 (page 343) illustrates how each of the questions that respondents were asked relates to the main research questions

that this study aims to address. I drafted a structure prior to the interview. It was very flexible and variable, but still provided a guide to the key issues and types of questions to be discussed. A copy of these loosely ordered questions and the associated prompts is shown in Appendix 5 (page 341).

3.7.3 Turning Semi-Structured Interviews into Data

Prior to beginning the interviews, it was necessary to decide what counts as data. One major challenge related to how the researcher can be sure that they are not simply inventing data, or misrepresenting the perspectives of respondents. As a result, the analysis focused mainly upon recorded interactions, as opposed to detailed analysis of facial expression, tone of voice and so on. However, it should be acknowledged that both audio and video recordings are only partial reconstructions of interviews, rather than full records of them. Therefore, brief notes were made following each interview. They related to the non-verbal cues that respondents displayed in relation to each question. For example, confusion, or a slower response when responding to terms relating to the Internet. This included phrases such as “Web 2.0,” “Retweet,” or, “Facebook page.” These cues were uploaded to NVivo with the interview transcripts and were analysed.

Data was analysed in an ‘interpretive’ manner. Mason (2002) described this as wanting to ‘read’ the interviews for what they might mean, or what they might infer outside of the interview interaction itself. As a result, the interviews were recorded using an audio-recording device and were subsequently uploaded onto a computer, so that they could be analysed using NVivo.

3.7.4 Analysis of Data and Presentation of Results

Much like the data generated from the participant observation, the interview data was analysed using QSR NVivo. Once again, a number of categories were developed both prior to and throughout the analysis process. A list of all the categories and codes used can be found in Appendix 7 (page 347). Instead of

simply replicating the style in which quantitative data is presented, i.e. by referring to the number of times, proportion of responses that addressed a given theme or topic in a certain way, the analysed qualitative responses have been presented in a manner that aims to explain or provide a deeper insight into the reasons behind the quantitative results. For example, key quotations were lifted from the qualitative responses when a particularly pertinent number of respondents had indicated that they felt a similar way.

3.7.5 Communication Medium used to carry out Semi-Structured Interviews

This research embraced the notion of participant choice and respondents were asked whether they would prefer the interview to be carried out via telephone or via Skype. Approximately half of the interviews were carried out over Skype and the other half over the telephone. Skype interviews can allow the researcher to experience the benefits of traditional face-to-face interviews, whilst also benefitting from aspects of telephone interviewing. The following section discusses the implications of using Skype to carry out interviews.

Face-to-face interviews are generally regarded as the best means of generating data with high levels of validity and rigour (Bryman, 2008; Deakin and Wakefield, 2013; McCoyd and Kerson, 2006). However, face-to-face interviews can be problematic due to time and financial constraints; particularly when respondents are geographically dispersed, as is the case throughout his project (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013; Sedgewick and Spiers, 2009). This is particularly relevant if respondents forget to attend the interview and the researcher has travelled for a considerable amount of time beforehand.

Telephone interviews are often suggested as an alternative to face-to-face interviews, as although they can lose some of the subtleties associated with physical interaction, this loss allows the researcher to 'stay at the level of the text', (Holt, 2010) and avoid imposing contextual information on the data, thus fitting with the post-positivist approach taken throughout this research. Furthermore, the practical

benefits of scheduling the interview and the subsequent freedom to shift times at the last moment are also advantageous, as respondents often have busy lives (Holt, 2010).

Recent research has suggested that the Internet offers a viable means of overcoming issues around access and distance (Evans et al. 2008). For example, Flick (2009) suggested that Internet chat-rooms come the closest to offering the type of interaction that is generally experienced within face-to-face interviews. This is a result of the synchronous nature of real-time interaction. Software such as Skype, further advances this argument, as it offers synchronous interaction between the researcher and the respondent, in addition to providing the visual and interpersonal aspects of interaction (Evans et al. 2008). Therefore, the researcher can respond to body-language and related non-visual cues, if necessary. Internet technologies such as Skype also offer similar advantages to telephone interviews. These include low costs as a result of overcoming the need to travel and ease of access (O'Connor et al. 2008).

3.7.6 Issues in Semi-Structured Interviews: Power Distance and Time-Constraints

One of the key challenges throughout the semi-structured interview process related to power distance. It is commonly acknowledged that unequal power relations are an inevitable part of the research process (Finch, 1983; Letherby, 2003; Oakley, 1981). However, much existing research assumes that the researcher holds the balance of power in an interview situation by arguing that the researcher is likely to be perceived 'as intellectually superior' to their respondents and have access to privileges, such as a greater depth of information than respondents (Cotterill, 1992; Collins, 1998; Luff, 1999). However, this imbalance of power in favour of the researcher is not necessarily the case; throughout this project, many of those interviewed were secure in their own power, often as a result of currently or previously holding an elected office or working at a senior position within the organisation. Some of these respondents had worked as councillors and MPs,

whereas others worked as members of the House of Lords, when not actively engaging in grassroots campaigning in their local areas. These respondents were often older and believed themselves to be very experienced and knowledgeable; thus resulting in an imbalance of power in favor of the respondent, in many cases.

There was one particular situation in which I felt unable to control my involvement. One respondent, a retired doctor who had also been a councillor for a number of years, stated that he was happy to be interviewed. He rescheduled the interview 5 times and on occasion stated that he was only available for interview before 7am. During the interview he suggested that I was particularly fortunate to be offered any of his time and imposed strict time limitations and restrictions upon the questions that may be asked. When the interview was finally carried out, it was very difficult to ask him any questions, as he spoke over them and discussed topics of his own interest, despite attempts to move the conversation back to the topic under study. This imbalance of power proved problematic and influenced the data that could be generated. This experience was viewed as a learning experience, rather than a failure. Even in the most difficult of interviews, it was possible to use some of the data. There is a body of academic work that relates to interviewing political elites. Ball (1994) remarked that, "Political interviews are themselves highly political." He subsequently explained that respondents do not simply follow the researcher's plans and noted that, "They carve out space of their own, that they push against or resist my goals, my intentions, my questions, my meanings." Puwar (1997) had similar experiences whilst interviewing MPs. She wrote that she often found herself struggling to maintain leverage over the direction of the interview, particularly when faced with a particularly domineering respondent.

When interviewing respondents for this project, time occasionally proved to be an issue. Prior to arranging the interview, respondents were informed that the interview would take between 45 minutes and one hour, however, many stated that they could only offer half an hour at the start of the interview. Puwar (1997) asked questions slightly more quickly when this happened to her and a similar approach was taken throughout this project, whilst also taking care not to sacrifice too much depth.

Often, access to political elites can prove problematic (Peabody et al. 1990). This was not the case throughout this study, as the research was focused upon grassroots activists, rather than members further up the party hierarchy. Interviews with elites, including councillors, were only carried out if these people perceived themselves as volunteers or activists. These interviews were particularly useful as they provided a dual insight; both from the perspective of the elected official or campaign organiser and the perspective of those that carry out grassroots level campaign activity.

There were a number of situations where 'traditional' concerns about power distance, whereby the researcher may be perceived as holding more power than the respondent, were relevant. A number of techniques were used in order to minimise this perceived power distance. As suggested by Oakley (1981), I briefly discussed my personal identity, by answering questions and sharing knowledge. Similarly, if requested, respondents were given the opportunity to receive a feedback leaflet detailing the key findings of the research.

3.7.7 Ethical Issues in Semi-Structured Interviewing

It could be argued that the issues discussed in the semi-structured interviews were not particularly sensitive; they did not relate to personal or private matters. Despite this, there are a number of ethical issues that are directly relevant to qualitative interviewing.

Care was taken not to use 'trick questions' to catch interviewees out. Similarly, care was taken not to pursue an issue if a respondent did not wish to discuss this area, for instance, confidential plans relating to a by-election in the near future.

Respondents were informed that every effort would be made to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. In practice, this proved to be quite difficult, given the rich and personal data generated from qualitative interviews. Such data was easily recognised by the respondent and also may be recognisable to other people. In order to anonymise all data from the interviews, all references to geographical area,

electoral district or local representative, were removed from quotations cited within the final written version of this project.

As previously mentioned, attempts were made to minimise the impact of unequal power relations during the interview process, both in terms of the interviewer holding power over the respondent and vice-versa. Care was taken not to encourage interviews to discuss topics that they may find sensitive or be unwilling to discuss. Similarly, respondents were informed, both verbally and in writing, that they were not expected to answer any questions that they did not wish to. Finally, every attempt was made to ensure that informed consent was gained from respondents. Respondents were provided with an information sheet that briefly explained the purpose and aims of the research. They were also informed that they had the opportunity to withdraw their consent at any stage prior to the completion of the project and be safe in the knowledge that the data generated from the semi-structured interview would not be used in the project.

3.8 Ethical Approval and Informed Consent

Ethical approval for the participant observation, survey and semi-structured interviews was obtained by following the procedures outlined in the Plymouth University Research Ethics Policy. This involved completing a document that provided information related to the research and steps that needed to be taken to ensure that it was ethical. The Plymouth University Research Ethics Committee approved this document. The relevant ethical issues are discussed at various points within this chapter.

Care was taken to ensure that informed consent was obtained from the relevant individuals. Within the participant observation, the executive committee of the local branch and members that were likely to be involved were given detailed written informed related to the aims of the project and suggestions for their involvement. Those interested were given the opportunity to ask questions or for any concerns to be addressed. Issues such as confidentiality and anonymity were discussed.

Further detail relating to this can be found within Section 3.4.6. In terms of informed consent to the survey, the first page of the survey provided a brief overview of the topic, alongside a statement that addressed anonymity. This statement can be seen in Appendix 3 (page 310). Finally, within the qualitative interviews, respondents were provided with an information sheet outlining the aims of the project, anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw. These ethical considerations are discussed in more detail in Section 3.5.7.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the research design that was used to answer the three main research questions that this project aims to address. It also provided a rationale for such an approach to this project.

Each of the following three empirical chapters addresses one of the three main research questions. The data within each of these chapters was generated during the year 2011. It was generated using a sequential mixed method approach because it enables a deeper understanding of the area under study by triangulating results and offsetting the weaknesses of one approach against the strengths of another. This approach also provides a sense of ‘completeness’ within the results and discussion because unexpected results within one form of data generation, such as the survey, could be explained using data generated another way, for example, the participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Finally, the use of qualitative data alongside quantitative data meant that a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the research topic could be created than if survey findings alone were used.

Participant observation was used because, unlike survey-based research, it can provide a very comprehensive insight into a given topic. Therefore, the data generated can be used to build up a very detailed picture of the context in which Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and also the extent to which they perceive that they are a useful means of doing so.

In addition to being used to inform the survey construction and development of questions for use during the semi-structured interviews, the data from the participant observation was used as a significant basis for discussion in Chapter Four, which explores the way in which Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and also in Chapter Six, which discusses the extent to which Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools are a useful means of mobilising volunteers. It was used to a more limited extent in Chapter Five, which identifies the predictors of whether respondents have used Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

In addition to the aforementioned details, this chapter also provided a rationale and description of the area in which the participant observation was carried out, an explanation of how access to this group of people was granted and a detailed discussion of how the data generated during this time was recorded and analysed, so that it could be used to answer the research questions of this project.

This chapter also provided an explanation of why a survey is a suitable means of generating data for use within this project, alongside an explanation of how the questions asked throughout the survey are linked to the research questions. Amongst a number of less significant reasons, a survey was used because it provides a means of collecting data from a relatively large number of Liberal Democrat members and allows for standardised measurement across respondents, which means that it is possible to engage in clear comparison between groups. A combination of binary logistic regression, ordered logit and frequencies are used alongside the qualitative data in order to contribute to knowledge within this field. Other detail provided in relation the use of a survey included the sampling process followed, the type of questions used and why, the way in which the surveys were administered and the rationale for each of these approaches.

Finally, as can be seen in the subsequent empirical chapters, 47 semi-structured interviews were conducted. This chapter provided a rationale for the loosely scripted questions that were used within the semi-structured interviews and an explanation of

how they linked to the main research questions within this project. The data generated during the semi-structured interviews has been used as the basis for much of the discussion during Chapter Four and Chapter Six.

As with the participant observation, the data generated was analysed using QSR NVivo and a link to the coding frame is provided within the appendices of this thesis was provided. Many of the interviews were carried out using Skype. This posed a number of issues and therefore, a detailed discussion of how this may impact upon the results of this project is provided, alongside a consideration of other issues that were faced throughout the semi-structured interview process.

Chapter Four: How do Liberal Democrat Members and Supporters use Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers?

4.1 Introduction

The theories and empirical research discussed within Chapter Two have provided a number of insights into how Liberal Democrat members may use Internet tools, the predictors of the use of these tools and the extent to which they perceive that they are a useful means of mobilising volunteers.

However, this work did not provide a comprehensive response to these questions. For instance, it became apparent that there is a need for research that differentiates between how respondents use different aspects of the Internet, such as Facebook, Twitter and email, as opposed to studying how the Internet-as-a-whole is used, alongside the predictors and perceived impact of this. Similarly, none of these studies appeared to focus upon second order elections within the UK or third parties. Most were based upon the use of Internet tools by the main parties within national elections.

Therefore, this chapter builds upon the theories and research discussed within Chapter Two by using the data generated during a participant observation, series of semi-structured interviews and survey to find out how Liberal Democrat grassroots members and supporters use Internet tools. The examination of existing research showed that some scholars believe that analysing the link between the Internet-as-a-whole and mobilisation practices is not an accurate means of gaining an insight into online campaign mobilisation practices or their perceived effectiveness (see for example, Effing et al. 2011; Nielsen, 2011; Pasek et al. 2009; Zhao, 2006). They have suggested that this may be because different Internet tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and email, are used to varying extents by the politically engaged and some are perceived to be more effective than others at mobilising volunteers.

During an ethnographic study of volunteer mobilisation practices within two US congressional election campaigns, Nielsen (2011) found that 'mundane' Internet tools, such as email, were much more deeply integrated into mobilising practices than 'emerging' tools, such as social networking sites. Similarly, Pasek et al. (2009) used a US based case study to argue that different social networking sites induce a site-specific culture that can either help or hinder social capital and hence, the likelihood that participants will engage in offline political activity, such as volunteering. Despite the range of literature relating to this topic, there appears to be little or no recent information relating to the extent to which Liberal Democrat members use different Internet tools for political and non-political activity. Therefore, this chapter seeks to describe how Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers. It also explores how they use these Internet tools for more general political purposes and for non-political purposes.

Nielsen (2011) argued that the main reason why email is more widely used to mobilise volunteers within US congressional election campaigns is because it is a 'mundane' tool, which means that it has been widely used for a much longer time than 'emerging' tools, such as Facebook and Twitter. People commonly use email within their personal or work lives and therefore, are more likely to use it within the party political aspects of their lives.

Most of these studies, including those by Nielsen (2011) and Pasek et al. (2009), have been carried out with the US. As previously explained, there are significant differences between the US and UK political systems. Therefore, this chapter contains a discussion of how Internet tools are used within the volunteer mobilisation practices of a UK political party, i.e. the Liberal Democrats. Furthermore, this chapter also seeks to investigate a range of related behaviours, including whether Liberal Democrat members use email for party political activity and non-party political activity more often than they use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Many of those that volunteer to help the Liberal Democrats are also party members. Gaining an insight into whether new members are joining the Liberal Democrats using Internet tools or via more 'traditional' offline methods would enable those with a vested interest to target their limited resources within the relevant area. For instance, if the vast majority of people join the party using an offline communication channel, then local branches wishing to increase membership may wish to engage in door canvassing or telephone canvassing of known supporters instead of spending a great deal of time developing their own Facebook pages and so on. There appear to be few, if any, studies within the last ten years that describe the proportion of party members that join using online and offline communication channels. Therefore, this chapter aims to test whether Liberal Democrat supporters are more likely to join the party using an offline communication channel, than an online communication channel.

4.2 Expectations

This chapter seeks to test the following expectations:

Expectation One: In terms of engaging in party political activity, email is used by a higher proportion of grassroots Liberal Democrat members, than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Expectation Two: Grassroots Liberal Democrat members use email to engage in non-party political activity, more frequently than they use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to do so.

Expectation Three: People are more likely to join the Liberal Democrats using an offline communication channel, than an online communication channel.

A reminder of the rationale behind each of these expectations is contained within the section of the chapter in which each of these assertions is critically discussed.

It should be noted that one of the key aims of this chapter is to provide a foundation for Chapter Five and Chapter Six. Therefore, it is descriptive and provides an overview of whether and how often Liberal Democrat members use various Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and engage in related activity. Chapter Five and Chapter Six build upon this data to come to more detailed, analytical conclusions that will contribute to knowledge within this field. This fits with the structure used in other mixed method studies relating to how UK political parties have used Internet tools for various campaign activities, including mobilising volunteers. As illustrated within Chapter Two, very few studies have focused upon the link between Internet tools and the mobilisation of volunteers within UK political parties, which means that such descriptive information can offer a useful insight into an area that is just beginning to receive detailed attention (see for example, Gibson, 2013; Ward et al. 2002).

Section 4.3 outlines the variables that are used within this chapter. Section 4.4 of this chapter provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of survey respondents. This section has two main purposes. Firstly, it aims to discuss the differences between Liberal Democrat members and the general population. Secondly, it aims to illustrate the validity of the sample. This is followed by Section 4.5, which seeks evidence in support of the first expectation by assessing whether a greater number of Liberal Democrat members use email for party political purposes than Facebook or Twitter. Section 4.6 is closely related to this and tests whether a greater number of Liberal Democrat members use email for non-party political purposes than Facebook or Twitter. Section 4.7 is focused upon whether new members are more likely to join the party using an online or offline communication channel. In contrast to the previous sections, Section 4.8 of this chapter is not

expectation driven. It seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge within this area by exploring how Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools. It contains a discussion of how often they engage with online sources of information for party and non-party political communication purposes, how often they use Internet tools to communicate with other members and also a measure of how active members perceive that they are online.

4.3 Variables used within this Chapter

This chapter is focused around a number of outcome variables, each of which aims to provide an insight into the use of different Internet tools by Liberal Democrat members and supporters, in addition to the demographic characteristics of respondents to the survey. Demographic variables include age, occupational status, level of formal education and the area in which a respondent lives, i.e. rural or urban. Variables relating to Internet tools include whether a respondent has used Facebook, Twitter and email to campaign for votes in an election campaign, to mobilise volunteers, to increase membership of their local branch, to fundraise for the party and to engage in continuous campaigning. They also include how often a respondent uses Facebook, Twitter and email to engage in non-party political activity, whether they joined the Liberal Democrats via the Internet or have ever renewed their membership online, the frequency at which they use a variety of online information sources; the frequency at which they use online and offline communication channels to engage in party political communication, how 'politically active' respondents perceive that they are online and offline and finally, the frequency at which they use individual Internet tools, the telephone and face-to-face communication to engage in party political communication.

4.4 Overview of Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Liberal Democrat members are no different to members of any other political party in that they are known to hold different characteristics to members of the general population (see for instance, Cutts, 2004; Seyd and Whiteley, 2004). Therefore, this section of the chapter seeks to illustrate this, in addition to providing a more detailed picture of the community under study by detailing the demographic characteristics of the respondents to the survey. This section also serves to illustrate the validity of the sample by comparing the characteristics of respondents to this survey to the characteristics of respondents to relatively similar surveys.

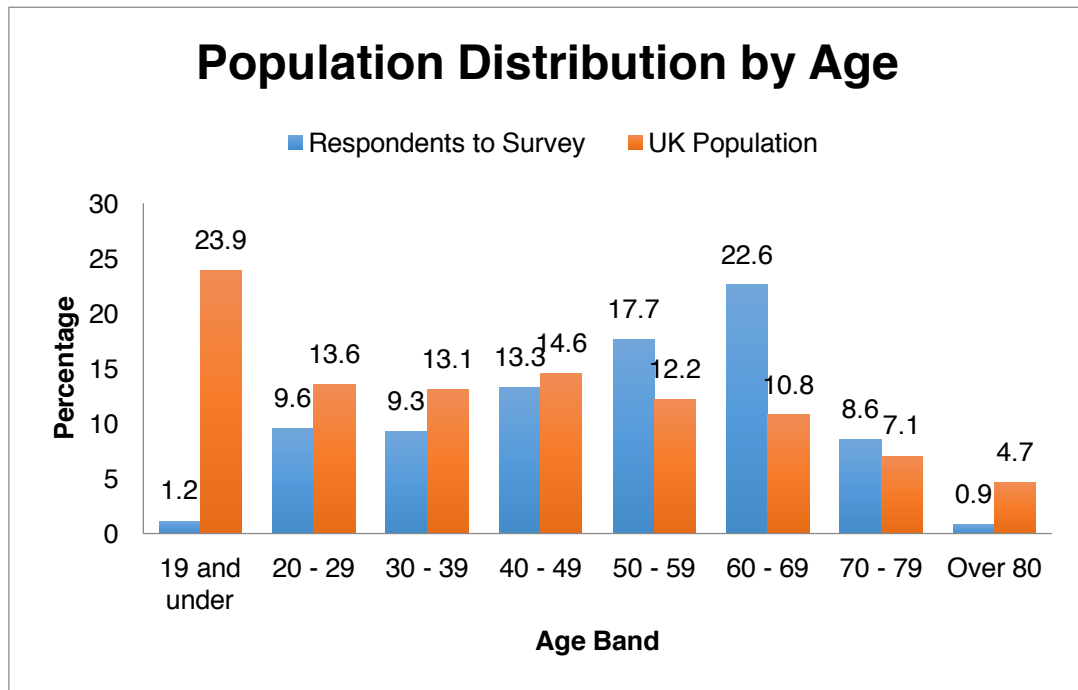
Respondents were asked to state their age at their last birthday. The youngest respondent was 17 years old and the oldest was 85 years old. The mean age was 51.6 years old. These findings are comparable with those of other studies. A study by Seyd and Whiteley (2004) found that 82% of members were over the age of 46 years old and a more recent study by Rallings and Thrasher (2011) that found that the mean age of a Liberal Democrat council candidate was 53 years old. The findings of this survey are comparable to the results of two key studies of those involved with the Liberal Democrats and thus, provide an indication of the reliability of the data generated for this study. There do not appear to be any studies that have published specific information relating to age, sex or related social demographic details of council candidates or Liberal Democrat members that engage in local campaigning since 2011.

Figure 4.1 shows the population distribution by age for respondents to this survey. It also shows the population distribution by age for the UK. These figures were obtained from the UK Census (UK Census, 2011a). The chart shows that there is a big difference between the age of Liberal Democrat members and the age of the UK population. The proportion of Liberal Democrat members under the age of 50 is much lower than the proportion of

the UK population aged under 50. This difference is particularly apparent within the under 19 years age group. The difference in age between respondents to this survey and the UK population suggests that Liberal Democrat members have different characteristics to the UK population and hence, may use Internet tools differently, in addition to holding different perceptions of its usefulness for certain tasks. Similarly, the high proportion of older people is likely to impact upon the results of the survey. This influence is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The following chart shows the number of respondents falling into each age category:

Figure 4.1: Population Distribution by Age



Note: There are 562 responses contained within Figure 4.1.

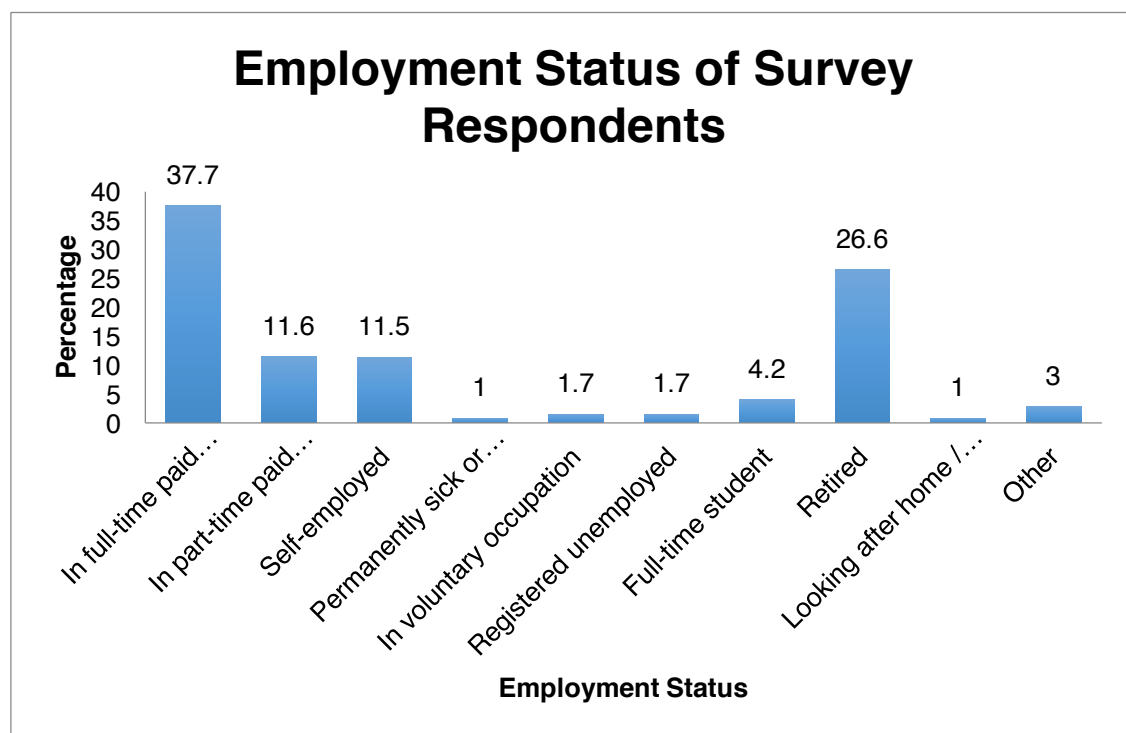
Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The data shows that 30.1% of respondents to this survey are female and 69.9% are male. The Liberal Democrats do not publically declare the proportion of female members within the party, however, in a recent survey of

local election candidates just 27.4% of Liberal Democrat respondents are female and 68.3% are male (Rallings and Thrasher, 2010). Furthermore, an online survey of Liberal Democrat members by Ward et al. (2002) found that 76% of respondents were male. Therefore, it is logical to suggest that these figures are relatively similar to what may have been expected, given that it was over ten years since the Ward et al. survey was carried out. Once again, these figures show that the demographic characteristics of those that responded to the survey are quite different to those of the UK population; 50.9% of the UK population is female and 49.1% is male (UK Census, 2011b).

The following chart details the employment status of respondents to the survey. It shows that over a quarter of respondents are retired and the majority of the remainder are in full-time paid employment.

Figure 4.2: Employment Status of Survey Respondents

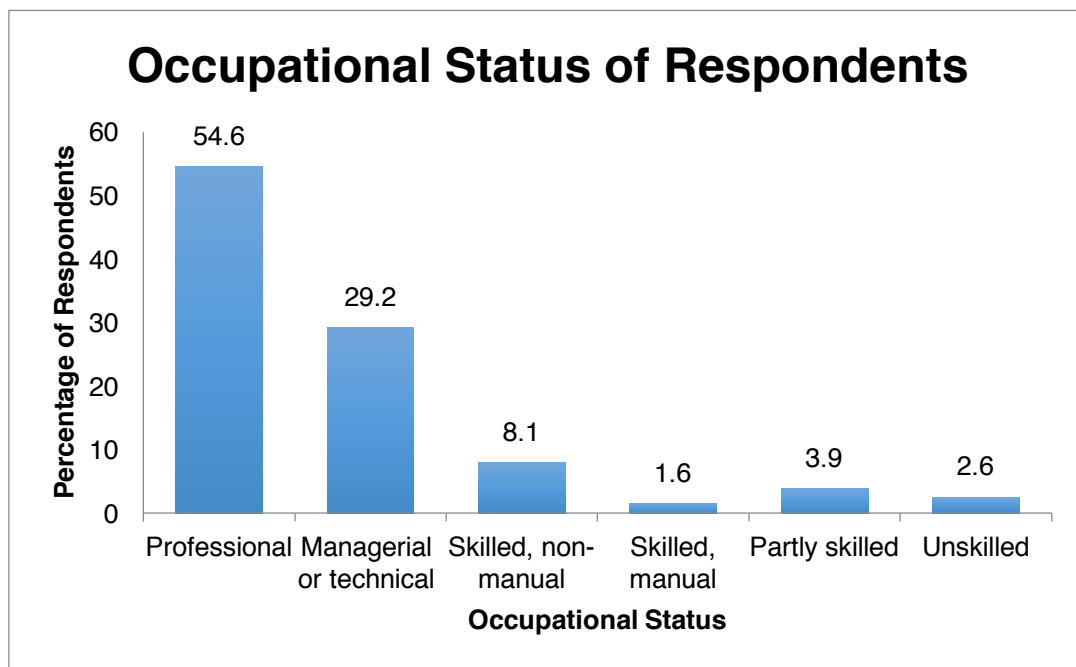


Note: There are 576 responses contained within Figure 4.2.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The following chart displays the self-defined occupational status of respondents. Over half of respondents believe that they have a professional occupation. Whilst there appears to be no data that offers a like-for-like comparison, 29.1% of those that responded to a survey of Liberal Democrat members by Ward et al. (2003) self-defined as belonging to the social classification 'AB' and a further 41.2% self-defined as belonging to the social classification 'C1', both of which are broadly comparable to the 'professional occupation' and 'managerial and / or technical occupation' categories within the survey carried out specifically for this study. This indicates that the socio-economic background of respondents to this survey of Liberal Democrats is comparable to that within a commonly cited study (Ward et al. 2003), again providing an indication of the reliability of the data. It also fits with the findings of research by Russell and Fieldhouse (2005) that shows that many Liberal Democrats are middle-class professionals.

Figure 4.3: Occupational Status of Survey Respondents

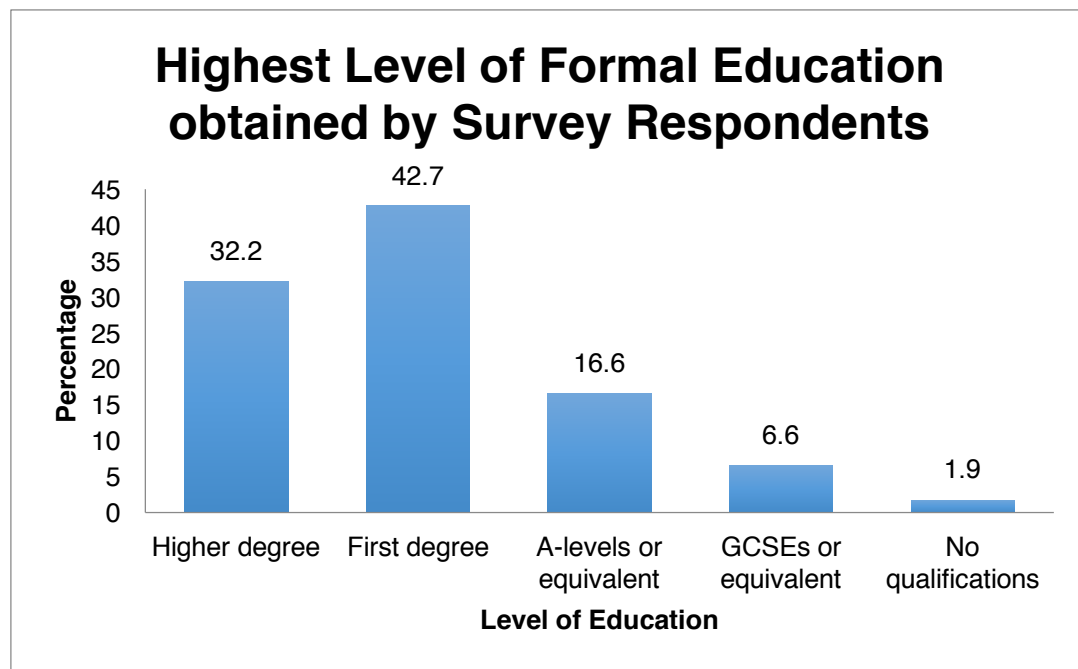


Note: There are 571 responses contained within Figure 4.3.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The following chart displays the highest level of formal education obtained by respondents to this survey.

Figure 4.4: Highest Level of Formal Education obtained by Survey Respondents



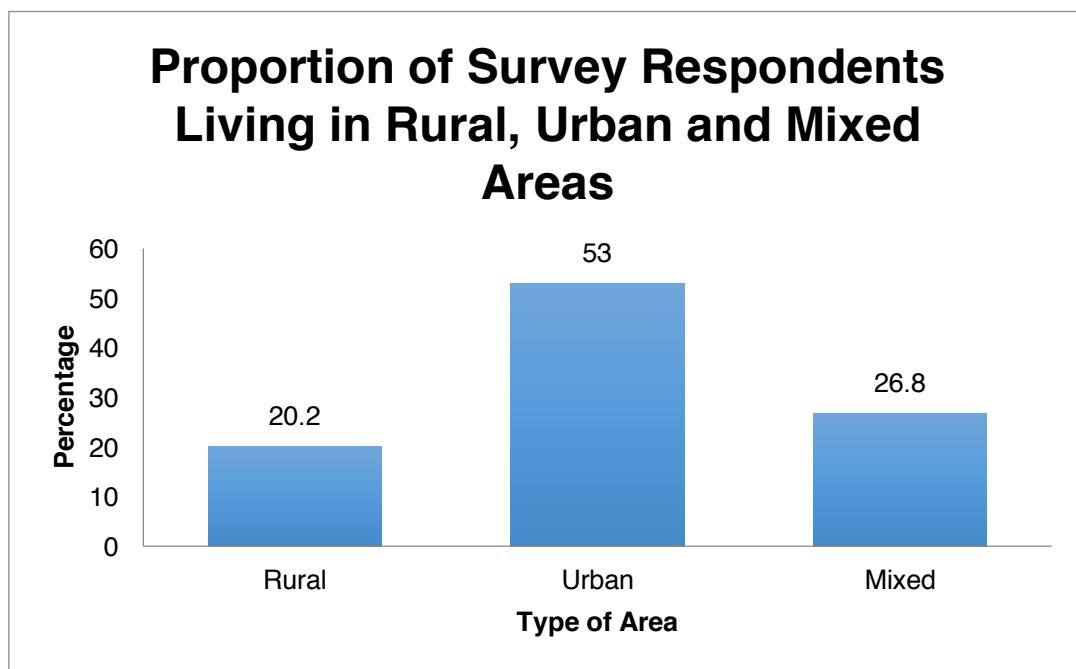
Note: There are 578 responses contained within Figure 4.4.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The chart shows that 74.9% of respondents have either a first degree or a higher degree. This compares to the 27.2% of the population of the UK that holds a degree (ONS, 2012) and fits with the conventional wisdom that members of political parties are disproportionately well educated (see for example, Cutts, 2004). It also fits with the findings of research by Fieldhouse et al. (2006) and Russell and Fieldhouse (2005) that indicates that Liberal Democrat voters and supporters tend to be highly educated. Similarly, it compares to the 67% of respondents that reported holding a degree in a survey of Liberal Democrat members by Ward et al. (2002).

As illustrated on the following chart, 53% of respondents define the area in which they live as urban, 20.2% as rural and 26.8% as mixed, thus suggesting a mix of members from each area.

Figure 4.5: Proportion of Survey Respondents Living in Rural, Urban and Mixed Areas



Note: There are 579 responses contained within Figure 4.5.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

To summarise, this section offers an insight into the demographic characteristics of the respondents to the survey carried out during this study. Whilst there are no identical studies that have used the same questions, comparison to previous studies of Liberal Democrat party members and related groups have reported similar demographic information.

4.5 Testing Expectation One: Do a Higher Proportion of Liberal Democrat Members use Email for Party Political Purposes than Facebook or Twitter?

The aim of the following section of this chapter is to test the first expectation using the data generated during the participant observation, semi-structured interviews and survey. To do so, this section is broken down into five main parts. Each of these parts relates to how Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools for a range of tasks. These tasks were selected because the participant observation showed that they are the key activities that members and supporters have the opportunity to engage with during the run up to a local election and also between local elections.

Section 4.5.1 focuses upon the extent to which Liberal Democrat members use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers. Section 4.5.2 focuses upon the extent to which Liberal Democrat members use Facebook, Twitter and email to increase membership of their local branch by finding new members or retaining existing members. Section 4.5.3 focuses upon the extent to which Liberal Democrat members use Facebook, Twitter and email to fundraise on behalf of the party. Section 4.5.4 focuses upon the extent to which Liberal Democrat members use Facebook, Twitter and email to engage in 'continuous campaigning', which involves promoting the work of the Liberal Democrats outside of the short campaign period. Finally Section 4.5.5 compares this data in order to address whether the evidence suggests that expectation one can be confirmed.

It should be noted that whilst the main focus of this project is volunteer mobilisation, other closely related activities such as increasing party membership have been included within this chapter as a means of comparison. Use of Internet tools for non-political purposes has been included for the same reason.

As explained in detail within Chapter Two, during an ethnographic study of mobilising practices during two congressional election campaigns in the US, Nielsen (2011) found that ‘mundane’ Internet tools, such as email, are much more deeply integrated into mobilising practices than ‘emerging’ tools, such as social networking sites. He also found that younger people are more likely to lead the adoption of ‘emerging tools’ within political parties and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. Therefore, it is logical to suggest that this may also be the case within the Liberal Democrats’ campaigning. UK political parties commonly ‘export’ new campaign techniques that they have seen in use within the US, so that they can be tested within a UK context (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Scammell, 1998; Swanson and Mancini, 1996). Examples of ‘exports’ include an increased focus upon leaders and candidates, instead of parties; the use of technical experts, such as those that can carry out opinion polls and a reduction in direct contact between party headquarters and both grassroots activists and voters (Swanson and Mancini, 1996). Therefore, one may expect new technological trends within volunteer mobilisation and related grassroots activity to be exported in a similar manner.

As a reminder, expectation one is shown below:

Expectation One: In terms of engaging in party political activity, email is used by a higher proportion of grassroots Liberal Democrat members, than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

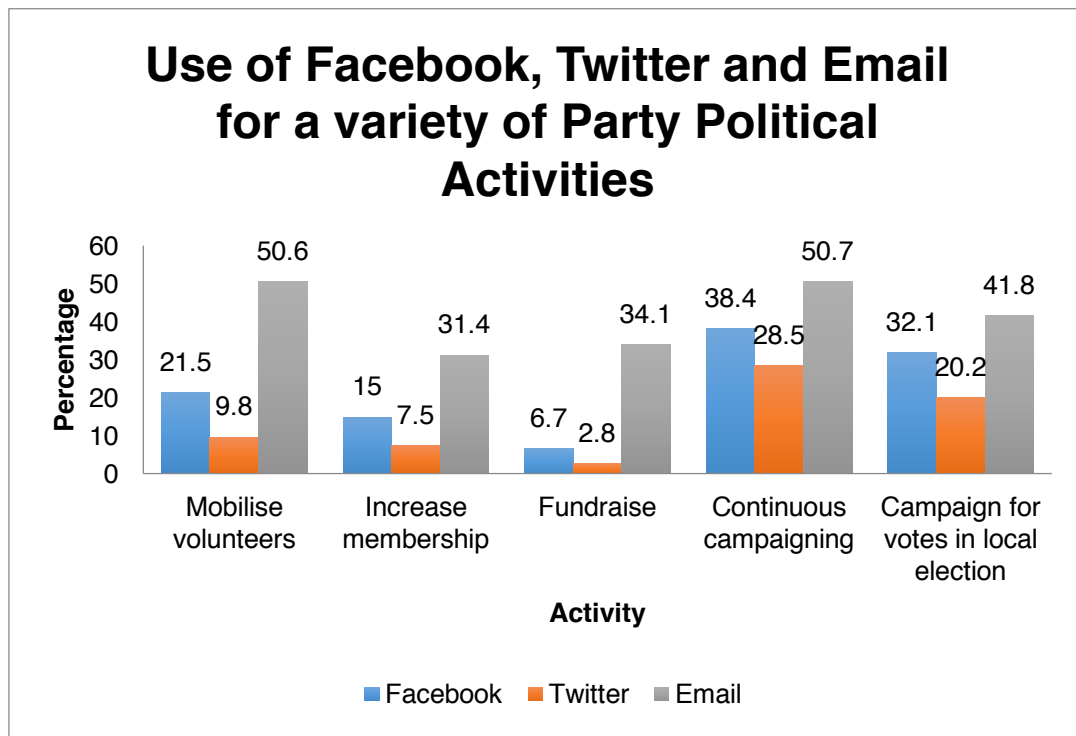
The remainder of this section will seek to assess whether findings from the US that suggest that ‘mundane’ tools such as email are more deeply integrated into mobilising practices than ‘emerging’ tools, such as Facebook and Twitter (see for instance Nielsen, 2011, Pasek et al. 2009) hold true within the case of a third party competing in the UK.

Section 4.5.1 Use of Facebook, Twitter and Email to Mobilise Volunteers

The following section describes and critically discusses how often Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers in order to establish whether expectation one can be met.

The following chart shows how many of the Liberal Democrat members surveyed have used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers. For ease of comparison, it also shows how many of those surveyed have used these Internet tools to increase membership of their local branch, fundraise on behalf of the party, engage in continuous campaigning and campaign for votes within a local election. The figures that do not relate to volunteer mobilisation will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Figure 4.6: Frequency at which Liberal Democrat Members use Facebook, Twitter and Email for a variety of Party Political Activities



Note: The question related to using Facebook to mobilise volunteers received 615 responses, using Twitter to do so received 611 responses and using email to do so received 609 responses.

Similarly, the question related to using Facebook to increase membership received 615 responses, using Twitter to do so received 610 responses and using email to do so received 606 responses.

The question related to using Facebook to fundraise received 615 responses, using Twitter to do so received 608 responses and using email to do so received 601 responses.

The question related to using Facebook to engage in continuous campaigning received 612 responses, using Twitter to do so received 606 responses and using email to do so received 608 responses.

The question related to using Facebook to campaign for votes in a local election received 619 responses, using Twitter to do so received 613 responses and using email to do so received 605 responses.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The chart shows that 21.5% of respondents have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers. This compares to the 9.8% that have used Twitter and the 50.6% that have used email. The data generated during the participant observation also suggests that relatively few Liberal Democrat grassroots members and supporters use Facebook to mobilise volunteers. None of the three council candidates in the area under study used Facebook for any form of volunteer mobilisation or election campaigning. They each explained that they knew of

councillors and candidates who had created either a Facebook Page, or a Facebook Group in order to fulfill the aim of promoting themselves and mobilising volunteers using the Internet, but felt that they did not have the time to do so themselves. The figures shown in the chart fit with Nielsen's (2011) work that showed that email was far more deeply entrenched in US campaign volunteer mobilisation processes than other Internet tools, such as Facebook and Twitter.

As previously mentioned within Chapter Three, a former Liberal Democrat Regional Campaigns Officer was responsible for overseeing the election campaigns in the three electoral districts under study. He explained that he often used Facebook to invite volunteers to events, such as fundraising dinners or campaigning sessions. However, he felt that it had not proven to be a particularly useful means of mobilising volunteers and preferred to invite people to attend by using the telephone. He said, "I've organised lots of campaigning sessions and invited people over Facebook. However, the thing is... People never turn up. They tell you that they will attend, but they don't seem to arrive. I think that it is because Facebook is impersonal. They see that you've invited over 50 people and don't feel morally obliged to follow through on a promise like they would if you'd spoken to them directly."

This suggestion broadly fits with the findings of work by Denver et al. (2004) and Denver and Hands (2000) who claimed that people are more likely to engage in political activity if they are asked on a face-to-face basis, instead of simply being asked to do so via a leaflet that had been pushed through their door. Denver et al. (2004) and Denver and Hands (2000) also found that voters are more likely to turn out on polling day if a party representative has telephoned them and asked them to do so, but to a lesser extent than if someone had knocked on their door, again emphasising the importance of face-to-face communication.

Similarly, none of the council candidates in the wards under study in the participant observation used Twitter for either personal or political reasons. The person responsible for coordinating the campaigns explained that he had a personal Twitter account, but had not used it for over 12 months. Both the candidates and the campaign coordinator knew Liberal Democrat councillors that had used Twitter within a political capacity, but offered a variety of reasons for not using it themselves.

These reasons ranged from a lack of time, to a fear that using Twitter would attract additional casework from residents that would not normally approach the councillor with issues or a perceived lack of ability to use the technology. This is not the only study to have found that political parties and candidates can sometimes be reluctant and are generally very cautious when using new technology. Studies by Chadwick and Stanyer (2010), Norris and Curtice (2008) and Ward and Lusoli (2005) each offer similar findings.

During the participant observation it became apparent that the primary means of communicating with voters was actually by posting leaflets through their letterbox. Each council candidate had mobilised a team of between 3 and 5 volunteers who spent approximately 8 hours a day putting leaflets through letterboxes in the 8 weeks prior to the local elections. A number of studies have acknowledged the importance that many Liberal Democrat members and supporters place upon delivering campaign literature (see for instance, Cutts, 2006; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005), however, this finding is surprising because there is a vast body of research that shows that leaflets have a much lesser impact than two-way communication, such as face-to-face communication on the doorstep (Cardy, 2005; Gerber and Green, 2000; Johnston and Pattie, 2003). The primary means of mobilising voters on polling day was by knocking on their door or telephoning them.

One of the candidates explained that much of the work that the local branch carried out was labour-intensive and as a result, required a large number of

volunteers. However, instead of using a variety of communication channels to contact constituents who may be interested in volunteering, it appeared that the primary means of mobilising volunteers involved asking family and friends who, often, were not particularly politically engaged, but were willing to distribute leaflets as a 'favour' to the candidate. During the semi-structured interviews one councillor commented, "I've been a councillor for 25 years, but I still feel uncomfortable asking people to give out leaflets, or knock on doors... I use Twitter and Facebook, but I wouldn't ask people I don't know to help my campaign online, but I wouldn't ask them to do so offline either." This suggests that a proportion of grassroots members and supporters, including councillors may be reluctant to mobilise volunteers using any form of communication channel, as opposed to simply being reluctant to use Twitter or other online communication channels that they may have heard of. Arguably, this finding is particularly important because it suggests that political elites are less likely to ask voters to volunteer, which may, in turn, lead to fewer people involving themselves in party politics.

Interviews were carried out with a number of respondents that had reported using Facebook, but not Twitter to mobilise volunteers and recruit new members. A former constituency organiser for the party explained, "I use Facebook because I don't want the opposition to know that we are campaigning. I'd rather let them think that we aren't campaigning. You don't have to make everything that you upload to Facebook public... However, Twitter doesn't really offer such a degree of privacy." The majority of respondents offered a similar response. Another commonly cited reason related to the benefits associated with the 'events' application feature on Facebook. Those organising political events are able to send an online invitation to hundreds of people in under one minute. Organisers and guests can view who has responded to the invite. A third reason for choosing to use Facebook, but not Twitter was that many respondents did not like that Twitter only allows users to publish a message of up to 160 characters. Respondents felt that this meant that they were unable to say anything of value in relation to

their political campaign. This fits with findings of scholars such as Nielsen (2009), Effing et al. (2011) Shah et al. (2001a and 2001b) and Zhao, (2006) who have argued that different online communities have different features or characteristics and that this means that some may be better suited to mobilising volunteers than others.

Four of the people interviewed reported using Twitter as part of an attempt to mobilise volunteers. Each said that that they had received no more than 5 to 7 responses to their appeals for volunteers. One respondent commented, “I think that Twitter might be good for raising the profile of a candidate or cause, but I really don’t think that it’s of any real use when it comes to finding volunteers or members.” This appeared to be the consensus amongst each of the four respondents.

Email was a far more widely used means of mobilising volunteers. As previously mentioned, 50.6% of survey respondents had used email to mobilise volunteers compared to the 9.8% that had used Twitter and the 21.5% that had used Facebook. The vast majority of those interviewed said that if a large campaigning session had been planned then somebody within their local branch generally emailed all of the local supporters that had provided an email address. One respondent explained, “We generally email everyone on our supporters list every month. If we are organising a campaigning session then we will mention it on the monthly email and probably also send out another email that is dedicated solely to the event.”

The candidates running in the three wards under study during the participant observation shared similar experiences. They each preferred to use email to mobilise volunteers because they felt that it was cheaper than writing to supporters and quicker than telephoning them. A visiting councillor from a neighboring ward explained, “I think that email is more professional than Facebook or Twitter. I also find it much easier to use, so I assume that my supporters will too... I would rather use the medium that puts me in contact

with as many local supporters as possible, as quickly as possible.” Within the area under study, email was far more entrenched into volunteer mobilisation practices than either Facebook or Twitter, thus lending further support to the first expectation. The participant observation showed that a larger number of volunteers within the area under study felt more comfortable using email, than Facebook or Twitter and hence, were more likely to use email regularly. This fits with Nielsen’s (2011) findings from the US that showed that email was far more deeply entrenched in campaign mobilisation practices than many other Internet tools.

In summary, the results of the survey, participant observation and interviews indicate that email is a far more popular means of mobilising volunteers than Facebook or Twitter. Of all of the Internet tools studied, Twitter is the least commonly used for this purpose. The survey shows that 50.6% of those surveyed reported that they had used email for volunteer mobilisation purposes, compared to 21.5% that had used Facebook and 9.8% that had used Twitter for this purpose. In terms of volunteer mobilisation, the data suggests that some Internet tools are more widely used than others.

Section 4.5.2 Use of Facebook, Twitter and Email to Increase Party Membership

The following section addresses the proportion of Liberal Democrat activists that have used Facebook, Twitter and email to increase membership of their local branch. Much like within the previous section, it does so in order to test expectation one, which suggests that a greater proportion of Liberal Democrat activists use email for a range of political tasks, such as volunteer mobilisation, than Facebook or Twitter.

Figure 4.6 shows that 31.1% of survey respondents reported using email to increase membership of their local branch. This compares to just 7.5% of respondents that reported using Twitter to do so and 15% of respondents that

reported using Facebook to do so. Therefore, email is more commonly than Facebook or Twitter both to mobilise volunteers and to increase party membership.

The data generated within the participant observation and interviews echoed the survey data. Very few of the supporters that were interviewed or involved with the participant observation had used Facebook to promote membership of the party.

During the participant observation it became apparent that the local branch regularly emailed and telephoned members to ask them to help to campaign on a regular basis. The council candidates all felt that very few of the members replied to any requests for help. Despite this, there were a number of supporters who were not members. These supporters spent many hours a day distributing leaflets in the run-up to the election. They also distributed leaflets regularly throughout the year. Over half of the respondents to the semi-structured interviews stated that this was also the case within their local area.

During the participant observation, three of these supporters explained that they were not really aware of what party membership entailed. When asked why he had not joined the party, one elderly man who had been volunteering locally for over 10 years remarked, “Well, to be honest nobody has ever asked me to join... I don’t know what the benefits of joining would be anyway. I suppose you’d only join if you wanted to be a politician. I go to all of the local social events anyway.” This suggests that the local branch in the area under study had not simply chosen not to promote membership via Facebook, but perhaps not to promote membership at all. These findings echo the findings of Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012) who both argue that current trends suggest that the organisational structure of political parties may eventually resemble that of the US campaign organisation MoveOn, which relies upon Internet tools to mobilise a relatively large floating support base, in order to

campaign for various policy changes, but does not require formal membership and annual subscription fees.

The former Regional Campaigns Officer responsible for coordinating the local election campaigns said, “I don't see the point in asking people to become members. Cowley Street (a colloquialism for Liberal Democrat HQ, based upon its previous location in Cowley Street, London) generally keeps the joining fee that they pay, so it's not like the local party sees any benefit. If people already help us, then there's no point in them becoming members, unless they want to attend conference or run for office.” This trend was also detected throughout the semi-structured interviews. Nine respondents made a similar comment, including the leader of a City Council and a member of the House of Lords, who was also very active within his local branch of the Liberal Democrats. Both of these people had been involved with the party for over 30 years. This highlights that there is sometimes tension and differences of opinion between the Liberal Democrat grassroots and the party's headquarters, as acknowledged by Russell and Fieldhouse (2005).

Membership of the national party has declined from 73 276 in 2001, to 48 934 in 2011, when the participant observation was carried out. Whilst this may be part of the overall decline in membership experienced by the majority of political parties in the UK and other advanced industrial democracies, it seems logical to suggest that a lack of motivation amongst the grassroots movement towards membership may have contributed to this decline. Commonly held wisdom holds that fewer members of the electorate than ever before see any benefit to joining a political party (see for instance, Cutts, 2004; Denver et al. 2004). However, none of the aforementioned studies mention that these attitudes are also prevalent amongst those who are already members of the Liberal Democrats, perhaps suggesting that this is an area that may benefit from future research.

The analysis shows that 31.4% of respondents reported using email as part of an attempt to increase membership of their local branch, thus suggesting that some members still place an emphasis on finding new members for the party. This compares to the 15% that reported using Facebook and the 7.5% that reported using Twitter to do so. During the semi-structured interviews, a number of respondents described how they used email to increase membership. The most common means of doing so was by emailing local members and asking them to find one new member each. A respondent who was responsible for organising the campaign activity of a Council Group in the south east of England explained, “Every now and again I email our members and tell them that we’re running a recruitment campaign. Each time I explain that if we each managed to persuade one family member, or friend to spend just £6 on joining the Liberal Democrats, then we’d double our membership locally.”

When asked about the offline activities that they use in order to recruit new members, this respondent explained that he did not use any. He said that his line-managers did not see a benefit in spending a large amount of time recruiting new members to the organisation and preferred that he used his time to find people willing to distribute leaflets regularly. In this instance, the local branch did not believe that recruiting new members would make it easier to mobilise volunteers. They felt that many members were happy to pay an annual membership fee and receive information, but this offered no benefit to the party in terms of the mobilisation of volunteers at important times of the electoral cycle. This sentiment was echoed by eight respondents to the semi-structured interviews and also mentioned by a local MP during a campaign meeting that occurred during the participant observation.

Despite the beliefs of some within the party, it could be argued that a reduction in levels of party membership may have a big impact upon the Liberal Democrats. Russell and Fieldhouse (2005) note that a strong local activist base can be a good source of income generation for the party.

A reduction in the number of members would also lead to a loss of revenue from membership fees. Additionally, scholars including Baines et al. (1999), Bannon (2004), Bradshaw (1995) and Shea, (1996) suggest that party members are much more likely to volunteer their services, than the vast majority of non-members. For example, Bannon (2004) argues that one can segment a market, in this case, a group of potential volunteers, by social group behavior. He suggests that the electorate can be divided into eight categories that are based upon their engagement with a given political party, in this case the Liberal Democrats. These categories are opposition, non-supporter, non-voter, potential supporter / undecided, supporter, activist, hyper-activist and politicians. The vast majority of party members that do not volunteer their time fall into the 'supporter' category; they clearly support the party and take an active interest in any party news that they may receive (Bannon, 2004). He said that it is more cost and time-effective to nurture and develop this relationship, so that some of these members can be 'nudged' into the following category, which is 'activist' and consists of people that offer to help the party.

Furthermore, having access to a larger pool of members can help with the targeting of mobilisation attempts (Bannon, 2004; Baines et al. 1999). As explained by a number of supporters, the Liberal Democrats rely more heavily upon volunteers to knock on doors and make telephone calls, in order to find out the voting intentions of the electorate, than any other party. This labor-intensive activity is generally carried out all year round and the responses to this activity are recorded on one of two software packages; EARS or Connect. If a person has indicated that they are willing to vote Liberal Democrat on several occasions, then the local branch is more likely to ask them to volunteer their time. In order to do so, local branches typically telephone, email or knock on the doors of those that have made this indication and ask if they are willing to volunteer a few hours to the campaign. These people are not generally contacted via Facebook or Twitter, as email, telephone, or knocking on a door are believed to be easier ways of communicating with a

specific person than using Facebook or Twitter, mainly because local branch do not yet have the ability to store Facebook or Twitter details onto the Connect or EARS database. Having access to a larger pool of individuals that have provided the necessary contact details and have self-identified as party supporters would reduce the reliance upon the aforementioned labor-intensive process and free up resources for use elsewhere (Bannon, 2004; Baines et al. 1999).

None of the members or supporters involved with the participant observation or the semi-structured interviews stated that they emailed supporters who were not members, in order to encourage them to become members. This supports the suggestion made previously that the party's grassroots activists do not necessarily perceive a particularly high level of benefit to either the party or the individual in becoming a member, unless the supporter wishes to attend the party's semi-annual conference or run for public office as a Liberal Democrat candidate.

In summary, the results of the survey, participant observation and interviews show that email is a far more popular tool for increasing party membership than Facebook or Twitter. This echoes the findings of the previous section that show that email is the most popular Internet tool for mobilising volunteers. Once again, of all of the Internet tools studied, Twitter is the least commonly used for this purpose. The survey shows that 31.4%% of respondents reported that they have used email to increase membership of their local branch, compared to 15% that have used Facebook and 7.5% that have used Twitter for this purpose. Therefore, in terms of both volunteer mobilisation and attempts to increase party membership, the data suggests that some Internet tools are more widely used than others.

Section 4.5.3 Use of Facebook, Twitter and Email to Fundraise on behalf of the Party

The following section addresses the proportion of Liberal Democrat activists that have used Facebook, Twitter and email to increase membership of their local branch. It does so in order to test expectation one, which suggests that a greater proportion of Liberal Democrat activists use email for a range of political tasks, such as volunteer mobilisation, than Facebook or Twitter.

Figure 4.6 shows that 34.1% of respondents to the survey reported using email to fundraise for the party. This compares to the 2.8% that reported using Twitter to do so and the 6.7% that reported using Facebook to do so. These figures also offer support to the suggestion that email is more widely used than Twitter or email for a variety of campaign activities.

Similarly, the data also shows that respondents to the survey are less likely to use Facebook or Twitter to fundraise than they are to carry out any other activity. In the case of Twitter, continuous campaigning is the most popular campaign related activity with 28.5% of respondents reporting that they have used Twitter for this purpose. This compares to just 2.8% of respondents that reported using Twitter to fundraise. The most popular campaign related activity on Facebook was also continuous campaigning with 38.4% of respondents reporting that they have used it for this purpose. This compares to just 6.7% of respondents that reported using Twitter to fundraise.

The participant observation suggested that the most popular means of fundraising involve more 'traditional' methods, such as building up a relationship with potential donors that are considered to be able to contribute relatively large sums of money to the local branch, holding fundraising dinners or evening drinks with well-known Liberal Democrat politicians, running raffles and 'jumble' sales at local church halls, amongst others. None of those observed said that they use Internet tools to fundraise.

The data clearly shows that there may be differences in the number of people that use each Internet tool for various political activities as initially suggested by Pasek et al. (2009) and others. However, it also shows that there may also be a number of similarities. For instance, as Section 4.5.4 illustrates, continuous campaigning is the most popular campaign related activity on all three Internet tools. Similarly, fundraising is the least popular activity on Facebook and Twitter. It is also one of the least popular activities via email.

Section 4.5.4 Use of Facebook, Twitter and Email for Continuous Campaigning

The following section discusses the proportion of Liberal Democrat activists that have used Facebook, Twitter and email to carry out continuous campaigning. As previously mentioned, the term ‘continuous campaigning’ has been used to refer to any campaign activity that occurs outside of the short campaign period before polling day. Continuous campaigning is discussed in order to test expectation one, which suggests that a greater proportion of Liberal Democrat activists use email for a range of political tasks, such as volunteer mobilisation, than Facebook or Twitter.

Figure 4.6 shows that 50.7% of respondents to the survey reported using email to fundraise for the party. This compares to the 28.5% that reported using Twitter to do so and the 38.4% that reported using Facebook to do so. Once again, these figures offer support to the suggestion that email is more widely used than Twitter or email for a variety of campaign activities.

Furthermore, Figure 4.6 shows that a higher proportion of respondents use Facebook and Twitter for activities that are not linked to mobilisation, membership and fundraising. Continuous campaigning is the most popular political activity on Facebook and Twitter. Campaigning for votes within a local election campaign shortly follows this. This also appears to be the case within the participant observation and interviews. Many of the volunteers that

reported using Twitter reported using it without a particular campaign strategy, such as increasing volunteer mobilisation or party funds. Instead they wanted to promote the 'good work' of the party. One respondent commented, "I enjoy sharing the graphics provided by Liberal Democrat HQ... It's an easy and quick way of showing my friends and family what the Liberal Democrats are doing in government."

In contrast, the survey shows that volunteer mobilisation is the second most popular political activity on email; 50.6% of respondents reported using email to mobilise volunteers, which is just short of the 50.7% of respondents that used email to engage in continuous campaigning. Each of the three council candidates within the participant observation explained that whilst they did not personally use email to mobilise volunteers, they were very grateful that the former Regional Campaigns Officer used email to help find them volunteers. This suggests that grassroots members and supporters are more likely to use email with a clear purpose and as part of a strategy that involves a sustained effort, instead of a click of a mouse, as is the case with sharing material on Facebook or Twitter. It also fits with the suggestions of Jackson and Lilleker (2007a) who claim that email is one of the 'least glamorous' Internet tools but provides the 'most useful' means of reinforcing partisan loyalty and developing a relationship with supporters.

In summary, the results of the participant observation, survey and interviews suggest that email is more commonly used for continuous campaigning than Facebook or Twitter.

Section 4.5.5 Use of Facebook, Twitter and Email to Campaign for Votes in Local Elections

The following section discusses the proportion of Liberal Democrat members and supporters that have used Facebook, Twitter and email to campaign for votes in local elections. It does so in order to test expectation one, which

suggests that a greater proportion of Liberal Democrat members use email for a range of party political activity, such as volunteer mobilisation, than Facebook or Twitter.

Figure 4.6 shows that 41.8% of survey respondents reported using email to campaign for votes in a local election campaign, whereas 32.1% reported using Facebook to do so and only 20.2% reported using Twitter to do so. As can be seen in Figure 4.6, Twitter is far less widely used for each of the political activities under study than either Facebook or email. This supports the suggestion that email is more widely used than Facebook or Twitter.

The vast majority of respondents to the semi-structured interviews said that either they or someone within their local branch emailed all members that had provided an email address to remind them to vote prior to any election. Similarly, within the participant observation, a councillor from a neighbouring area said that he always asked constituents for an email address when carrying out casework. He explained that this was to enable him to email people that he had helped prior to the election to remind them to vote for him. He also said that many of his colleagues used a similar approach.

In summary, these findings suggest that email is more widely used to campaign for votes in local elections than Facebook or Twitter.

4.5.6 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation One can be Confirmed?

Expectation one suggests that in terms of mobilising volunteers and engaging in party political activity, email is used by a higher proportion of grassroots Liberal Democrat members, than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. The evidence suggests that this expectation can be confirmed because the results of the participant observation, semi-structured interviews

and survey each suggest that in terms of mobilising volunteers and engaging in local election campaign activities, email is by far the most commonly used form of online communication amongst Liberal Democrat member. Amongst respondents to the survey, using email to mobilise volunteers was over twice as popular as using Facebook to do so and over five times as popular as using Twitter to do so.

The discussion contained within this section of the chapter contributes to the debate surrounding whether or not there are meaningful differences between how grassroots party members and supporters use different Internet tools. It builds upon Nielsen's (2011) argument that there are differences between how these people use email and how they use social networking sites. Email is more deeply entrenched in campaign mobilisation practices than 'emerging' technologies, such as Facebook or Twitter. It also finds that there are differences in how members and supporters use the different types of social networking sites, i.e. Facebook and Twitter. For instance, Facebook is more commonly used than Twitter. It is also more likely to be used for certain political tasks. This fits with the findings of research by Pasek et al. (2009) that found that there are differences in how and why different social networking sites are used.

These findings are important because they provide evidence that email may also be deeply entrenched in campaign mobilisation practices outside of the US, where most of the previous studies have been based, perhaps indicating that this campaign technique has been 'exported' from the US, where it was originally observed, in line with the commonly cited trend noted by Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (1996) Scammell (1998), Swanson and Mancini (1996) and numerous others. It also indicates that this trend may be observed within the mobilisation practices of a 'third party' with fewer resources than the two main political parties within the electoral system.

4.6 Testing Expectation Two: Do Liberal Democrat Members use Email for Non-Party Political Purposes more frequently than they use Facebook or Twitter?

The following section is very closely related to the previous one. However, instead of asking whether respondents have used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and engage in a range of related tasks, this section aims to uncover how often respondents use these Internet tools for non-political tasks. It does so in order to assess whether respondents use certain Internet tools, such as email, to engage in volunteer mobilisation because they are more familiar with them outside of a political context and therefore, feel more comfortable using them. If the evidence suggests that this expectation can be confirmed, then it seems likely that future studies will find that the gap between the number of people that have used email to mobilise volunteers and the number of people that have used social media to mobilise volunteers will decrease. This is because Facebook and Twitter are less likely to be viewed as ‘emerging’ technologies with which people are unfamiliar and instead may be viewed as commonplace or ‘mundane’.

As previously discussed, Nielsen (2011) found that email was more widely used amongst political campaigners within US congressional election campaigns than other tools, such as social networking sites. He argued that this is because Facebook and Twitter are ‘emerging tools’, whereas email is perceived as more established or as a ‘mundane’ tool, with which most people are now familiar. This section aims to find out whether these claims hold true within the context of a ‘third party’ in England. In doing so, it also seeks to establish whether there is any evidence that Facebook or Twitter may be referred to as ‘emerging tools’.

Expectation two is shown below:

Expectation Two: Grassroots Liberal Democrat members use email to engage in non-party political activity, more frequently than they use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to do so.

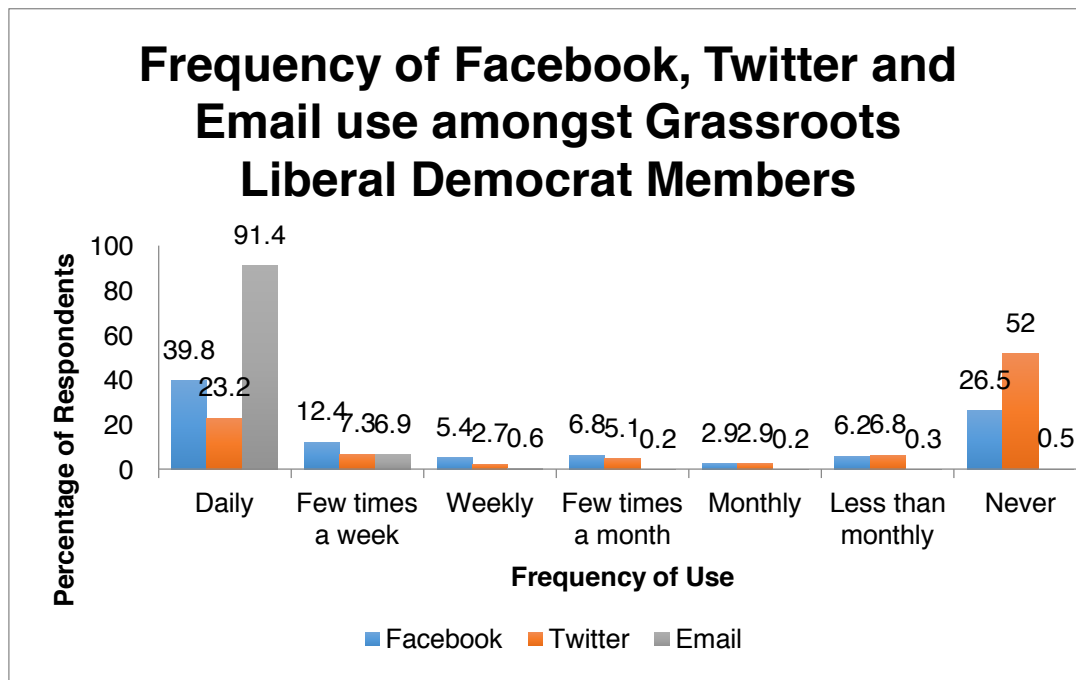
The following section describes and critically discusses the extent to which Liberal Democrat members use Facebook, Twitter and email in order to assess whether the evidence suggests that this expectation can be confirmed.

4.6.1 Frequency of Facebook, Twitter and Email Usage amongst Liberal Democrat Members

Respondents were asked how often they used a variety of Internet tools for non-party political reasons. This is used as a predictor variable in Chapter Five in order to assess whether use of the Internet for non-political purposes is a predictor of use of Internet tools for volunteer mobilisation purposes.

The results are shown in the following chart.

Figure 4.7: Frequency at which Liberal Democrat Members use Facebook, Twitter and Email for Non-Party Political Purposes



Note: The number of the respondents to the question concerning the frequency at which Liberal Democrat members use Facebook was 646, the number of respondents to the question concerning the frequency at which Liberal Democrat members use Twitter was 629 and the number of respondents to the question concerning the frequency at which Liberal Democrat members use email was 648.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The chart shows that email is the most frequently used form of online communication with 91.4% of respondents reporting using it at least daily and 99.2% of respondents reporting using it at least once a month. Only 0.5% of the sample reported that they had never used email for non-political purposes. This can be compared to data from the Oxford Internet Institute (2011a) that showed that 7% of active Internet users in the UK reported that they had never used email. As a result, it seems logical to suggest that those surveyed are more likely to use email than the UK population as a whole.

On a daily basis, Twitter was the least commonly used form of online communication with just 23.2% of respondents using it at least once a day. 48% of respondents reported that they had used Twitter. The Oxford Internet

Institute (2011b) found that 59% of active Internet users had used social networking sites. However, they do not appear to have publically published a breakdown of figures for individual social networking sites. Nonetheless, Ofcom (2013a) reported that by 2013 only 9% of active UK Internet users had ever used Twitter. This is substantially less than the 48% of Liberal Democrats that reported having used Twitter. As a result, it seems reasonable to suggest that Liberal Democrat members are far more likely to use Twitter than the UK population as a whole is to do so.

Facebook is the most commonly used form of social media with 67% of respondents reporting that they use it at least once a month. This figure can be compared to figures from a YouGov survey that shows that 65% of the UK population had used Facebook within the last month (YouGov, 2012). YouGov reported that this percentage varies across age groups and this will be discussed in the following chapter (YouGov, 2012). Similarly, Ofcom (2013b) found that 64% of active Internet users in the UK have used Facebook. This compares to the 73.5% of Liberal Democrat respondents that reported that they have used Facebook for non-political reasons, once again suggesting that Liberal Democrat activists are more likely to use Facebook than the UK population as a whole is to do so. The figures from YouGov and Ofcom add to the body of evidence that indicates that email is more frequently used than Facebook and Twitter; thus indicating that Facebook and Twitter may be perceived as 'emerging' tools, as suggested by Nielsen (2011). This means that if and when personal use of these two social networking sites increases, usage for the purposes of mobilising volunteers within a political capacity may also increase.

The YouGov study found that only 23% of UK Internet users had used Twitter within the last month (YouGov, 2012). This study found that 41.2% of Liberal Democrat members had used Twitter within the last month, perhaps suggesting that Twitter is more popular amongst the more politically engaged. This supports findings by Conover et al. (2011), Larsson and Moe (2012),

Shirky (2011) who also suggested that Twitter may be used more widely amongst individuals that are interested in politics.

This evidence suggests that Facebook and Twitter are more likely to be seen as an 'emerging' technology by the Liberal Democrat grassroots members that were surveyed.

As can be seen in Appendix 3 (page 310), survey respondents were also asked how often they used YouTube and other sites. The results showed that on a daily basis Twitter is used more frequently than YouTube (23.2% compared to 9.2%), but on a monthly basis is used less frequently. This could be used to form the basis of an argument that Twitter is used by a smaller segment of activists, but on a more frequent basis. However, testing this expectation would require further investigation, which is beyond the scope of this project. This contention is supported by the semi-structured interviews and participant observation where it was commonly suggested that Twitter was of limited use during a political campaign because it was used by a small number of highly engaged political activists or enthusiasts, who were most likely to have already decided who to vote for, meaning that any views discussed on this site were unlikely to be representative of those of the electorate.

This was illustrated by a conversation with a Liberal Democrat councillor and two Green Party activists. The local branch of the Green Party had believed that the Liberal Democrats were going to lose their seat in one ward and that the Green Party were going to win it. This was because of the overwhelming level of support on Twitter for the Green Party candidate within the ward. However, the Green Party actually came third in the election, with the incumbent Liberal Democrat comfortably retaining his seat. This fits with a suggestion by Sunstein (2009) and a number of other commentators (see for instance, Adamic and Glance, 2005; Conover et al. 2011; Jackson et al. 2010; Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2012) that within the context of a

national election campaign, Twitter may be described as an 'echo-chamber', as it is more easy to avoid those that do not have similar beliefs, hence, meaning that users may surround themselves with an outspoken minority who hold similar opinions.

To briefly summarise, the data generated suggests that email is the most frequently used form of political communication amongst Liberal Democrat members. When assessed over the period of a month, this is followed by Facebook and then Twitter.

4.6.2 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Two can be Confirmed?

Expectation two is shown below:

Expectation Two: Grassroots Liberal Democrat members use email to engage in non-party political activity, more frequently than they use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to do so.

This expectation has been met because the results of the participant observation, survey and semi-structured interviews each indicate that Liberal Democrat party members use email for non-party political purposes far more frequently than they use Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, it could be argued that social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter are viewed as 'emerging technologies', as suggested by Nielsen (2011) and that they may become more frequently used for the purpose of mobilising volunteers, as their usage becomes more widespread. As a result, future studies may find that this gap in e-participation narrows, as familiarity with such technologies increases, as has been the case with email.

4.7 Testing Expectation Three: Are New Members more Likely to Join Online or Offline?

This section briefly discusses the proportion of new members joining online and the proportion of existing members renewing their membership online. It does so in order to test expectation three. It also discusses the proportion of Liberal Democrat members that choose to renew their membership online, so that a more detailed and nuanced overview of online joining and renewal behaviours can be provided.

As illustrated within Chapter Two, many early studies relating to the link between Internet tools and the mobilisation of volunteers claimed that this new technology would revolutionise participation (Bonchek, 1995; Mann, 1995; McGookin, 1995; Phillips, 1995; Rheingold, 1993). However, evidence from subsequent studies suggested that this was not the case (see for instance, Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Margolis and Resnick, 2000).

Since the turn of the century when these claims emerged, some studies have found that Internet tools may lead to a small increase in volunteering and participation (Bartle, 2005; Gibson et al. 2003; Gibson and Ward, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2005); whereas, others have suggested that those who use Internet tools are actually less likely to participate (Kraut et al. 1998; Nie, 2001; Nie and Erbring, 2000). Given that none of the more recent studies have found that there has been a vast increase or decrease in the mobilisation of volunteers, as a result of the use of Internet tools, it seems logical to predict that there is unlikely to be a vast increase in the number of politically engaged individuals choosing to join the Liberal Democrats as a result of the introduction of the online sign-up method in 2002. If this is the case, then this would fit with the body of literature that suggests that it is 'politics as usual', despite the more widespread use of online technologies.

As a reminder, expectation three is shown below:

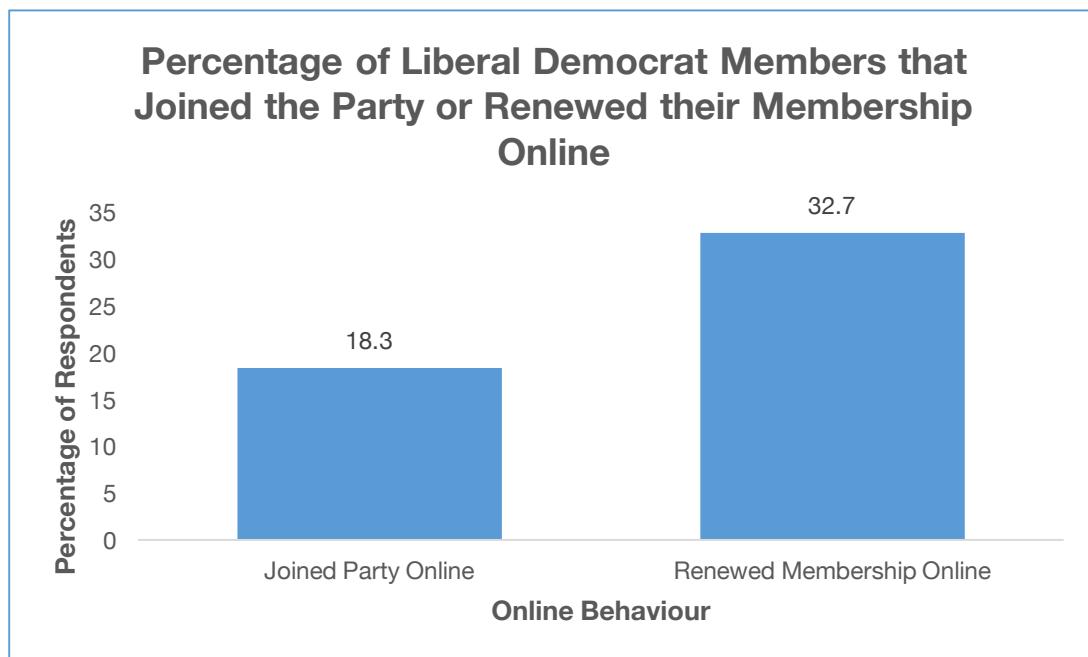
Expectation Three: People are more likely to join the Liberal Democrats using an offline communication channel, than an online communication channel.

This expectation is tested in the same way as the first two expectations, which is by using the data generated during the participant observation, the survey and the semi-structured interviews.

4.7.1 Joining the Party and Renewing Party Membership Online

The following chart shows the proportion of survey respondents that have either joined the party online or renewed their membership online.

Figure 4.8: Percentage of Liberal Democrat Members that Joined the Party or Renewed their Membership Online



Note: There are 648 responses contained within Figure 4.8.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

As shown in the previous chart, 18.3% of respondents reported joining the party online and 32.7% reported renewing their membership online. There appear to be few, if any studies that have specifically published the number or proportion of Liberal Democrat members that have joined the party using an online sign-up; as a result, it has not been possible to compare whether these figures are higher or lower than expected. Nonetheless, these figures show that the vast majority of members still join and subsequently renew their membership using offline methods. This offers support to the expectation that the majority of new members of political parties have joined using offline methods, such as the on the doorstep, or on the telephone. It also fits with the body of literature that has found that the use of Internet tools has not been perceived to have led to a vast increase in the number of people choosing to participate in politics or join a political party (see for instance, Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Margolis and Resnick, 2000).

Similarly, when asked how they believed that the majority of new members joined their local party, most of the respondents to the semi-structured interviews were not entirely sure. One respondent, who volunteered as membership officer for a constituency organisation with an incumbent Liberal Democrat MP and 5 county councillors responded by stating, “I’m not really sure, as we don’t get that many new members. I just focus on trying to get the existing ones to renew.” Whilst clearly not representative of all local branches across the country, many of the respondents noted that they felt that their local branch placed very little emphasis on recruiting new members and as a result, they did not feel that they could comment accurately upon the topic.

Throughout the period of participant observation, which was a time of more intense campaign activity, no new members joined the local branch of the party, either offline or online. When asked whether this was to be expected, the three candidates and former Regional Campaigns Officer who was running the campaigns explained that this was usual. The former Regional Campaigns Officer said that he generally found that two or three people enquired about joining the party in the weeks after an election campaign and cited an example whereby membership of the local branch increased by nearly 20% in the weeks after the 2010 General Election. The local branch had not expected membership to increase so rapidly, as this had not happened after other General Elections. The local consensus was that the vast majority of members had joined after watching Nick Clegg on the television debates. It is widely acknowledged that the television debates led to a short-term surge in support for both Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats. This surge in support is often referred to as the period of ‘Cleggmania’ (see for instance, Cutts et al. 2010; Russell, 2010)

Both the former Regional Campaigns Officer and the councillors felt that the new members were a lot younger than the ‘average’ member. Unusually, they said, these new members had generally had little or no contact with the

local branch previously and had joined online. This fits with work by Gibson (2013) who argued that those that join online are less likely to become involved in the daily life of the party, attend meetings or run for public office. This finding is important because an increase in the proportion of people joining online may eventually mean that political parties struggle to encourage people to attend meetings or unable to field enough candidates at elections. If this were to happen, then the Liberal Democrats would need to seek alternative means of building relationships with members so that they are able to encourage people to become involved with internal decision-making and find candidates to stand for election within their pool of online members.

The next chapter of this thesis uses the results of the survey to explore the predictors of joining the party online. It discusses whether younger people are more likely to join online, as suggested by members of the local branch under study during the participant observation.

In summary, the survey data shows that the majority of respondents had both joined and renewed their membership offline. In contrast, the participant observation shows that there was an increase in the numbers of people signing up online following the first live televised leadership debates in the run up to the 2010 General Election. Nonetheless, this appears to be the exception, rather than the rule. Only 18.3% of respondents reported joining online and 32.7% reported renewing their membership online, thus suggesting that a small, although not insignificant proportion of new and existing members choose to buy membership online.

4.7.2 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Three can be Confirmed?

Expectation three suggests that people are more likely to join the Liberal Democrats using an offline communication channel than an online communication channel. This expectation has been met because the results

of the survey clearly show that a much higher proportion of respondents reported joining the party using an offline communication channel. This fits with the findings of existing studies that show that despite initial predictions that Internet tools would revolutionise political participation; there had actually been very little, if any, detectable change (Bartle, 2005; Gibson et al. 2003; Gibson and Ward, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2005). Despite this, the findings of the participant observation indicate that members of one local branch perceived that the leadership debates prior to the 2010 General Election had led to a surge in the number of supporters signing up online. This fits with Chadwick (2007) and Karpf's (2012) arguments that supporters are more likely to engage with a variety of online content after they have engaged with a political party's message offline. It also leads to the suggestion that whilst the use of Internet tools may not lead to a vast increase in political participation, 'hybrid' campaigning, i.e. the use of online and offline materials that complement one another, may increase the level of participation or mobilisation amongst Liberal Democrat supporters. This is beyond the scope of this study, which does contain an analysis of the perceptions of the usefulness of various Internet tools as a means of mobilising volunteers, but not a measure of the actual number of volunteers mobilised within the context of the Liberal Democrats political campaigning. If this were to be the case, then it seems logical that the number of members that join online will increase as 'hybrid' campaigning becomes more widespread and therefore, may be an area worthy of future study.

4.8 An Exploration of how Liberal Democrat Members and Supporters use Internet Tools

The previous sections of this chapter were focused upon three testable expectations that relate to how grassroots Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools. The remainder of this chapter is not based around expectation testing, yet still seeks to build up a picture of how this group of people use Facebook, Twitter and email. It does so by discussing how frequently

respondents to the survey reported engaging with various online sources of information. It also contains a discussion of how often respondents reported using both online and offline sources for party political purposes, how often they use online communication channels to contact other party members and a measure of self-reported online and offline party political activism.

This more detailed, yet descriptive and exploratory insight into how party members use Internet tools is crucial to this study, as it acts as a precursor to the more analytical stages that focus upon the predictors of using various Internet tools to mobilise other volunteers and also, party members' perceptions of the effectiveness of such technology as a means of mobilising volunteers. For instance, it introduces some of the variables that have been used to ascertain the predictors of a Liberal Democrat member using various Internet tools to mobilise other volunteers. Furthermore, there is relatively limited empirical evidence relating to the use of Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership within the Liberal Democrats. Therefore, it could be suggested that a study relating to this area requires a considerable degree of non-expectation based descriptive and exploratory discussion.

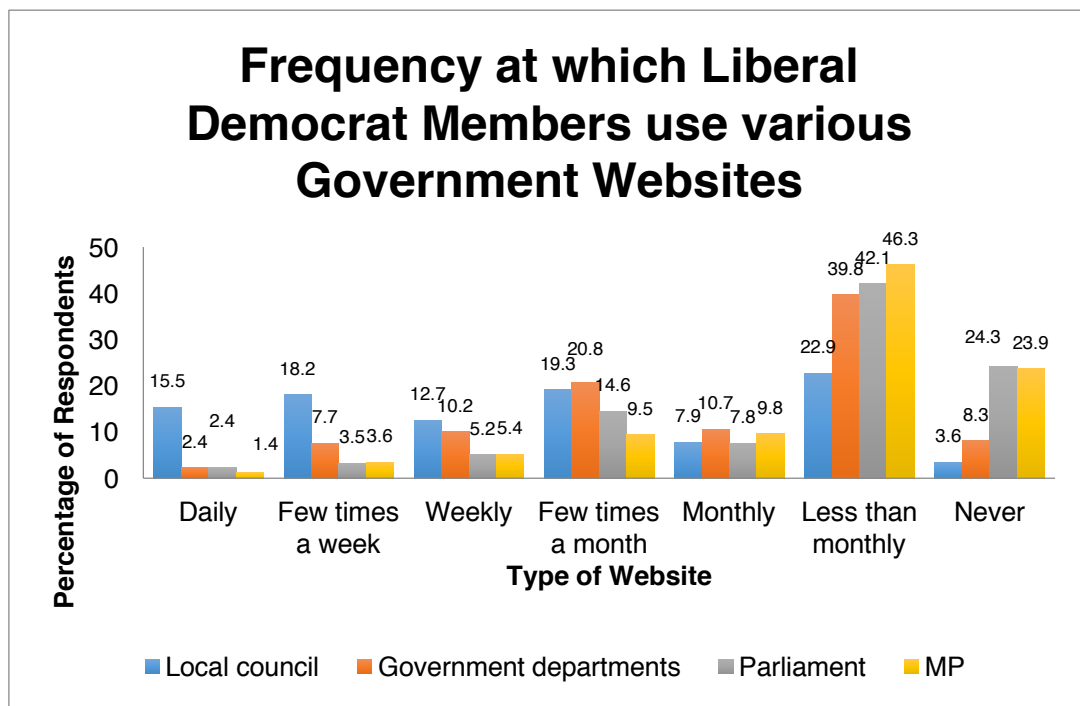
4.8.1 Frequency of Engagement with Online Sources of Information

The following section of this chapter aims to provide an insight into how Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools and what type of political activity they engage in online.

Figure 4.9 shows how frequently the Liberal Democrat members that responded to the survey access a variety of politics-related websites, thus providing an indication of their ability or willingness to engage with online resources, alongside their political connectedness. Ward et al. (2002) surveyed online members of the Liberal Democrats and also asked respondents how frequently they visit each of these sites. Therefore, the

figures generated within this study are compared to those from the Ward et al. study. In addition to being a point of comparison, these figures also provide a useful benchmark relating to how often one of the most politically active segments of society use Internet tools to seek information.

Figure 4.9: Frequency at which Liberal Democrat Members use various Government Websites



Note: The question relating to how often respondents visit their local council website received 647 responses.

The question relating to how often respondents visit the websites of government departments received 635 responses.

The question relating to how often respondents visit the websites of Parliament received 629 responses.

The question relating to how often respondents visit the websites of MPs received 631 responses.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The Ward et al. (2002) study indicates that respondents accessed each of these websites far less frequently in 2002 than they did in 2011. For instance, only 10% of respondents reported accessing their local council’s website ‘a few times a week’ or more, thus indicating that over time website usage has become more commonplace and respondents have become more digitally connected with political information. This also furthers the argument within

the previous section of this chapter that as Facebook and Twitter become more commonly used and are no longer viewed as 'emerging' tools, they will be more frequently used as a tool for mobilising volunteers, meaning that future studies are less likely to identify such large differences between how email and social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter are used. The following table summarises Ward et al.'s (2002) findings.

Table 4.1: Summary of Findings of a study by Ward et al. (2002)

	Percentage						
	Never	Once	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Every week	A few times a week	Daily
Lib Dem website	19	12	18	24	19	6	2
Any political party (including Lib Dem website)	30	4	27	15	8	7	9
Local council	38	8	27	12	5	5	5
Government department	39	8	28	15	5	4	2
Parliament or MP	43	10	26	10	4	4	3
News	45	2	7	9	7	11	18
Pressure group	72	3	12	7	3	2	1
TU or professional association	78	3	11	5	2	1	0
Other	9	0	2	2	1	2	3

In comparison, a 2011 survey by the Oxford Internet Institute (2013) shows that 40% of the UK population as a whole had used the Internet to access information from a governmental department, whereas 91.7% of the respondents to the survey of Liberal Democrats reported having done so. Similarly, 15% of the UK population as a whole reported having ever used the Internet to visit the website of an MP, whereas 76.1% of the respondents to the survey of Liberal Democrats reported having done so. This suggests that Liberal Democrat members are far more likely to access government and politics-related information online than the UK population as a whole is to do so.

During the participant observation, many of the local activists explained that they were particularly keen on engaging with the online activity of pressure groups. Two teenage volunteers said that they had decided to become involved with local politics after 'stumbling across' an online petition by 38 Degrees that aimed to stop Rupert Murdoch buying the BSkyB organisation. They both noted that they had accessed the website and subsequently attended a public meeting. They subsequently helped with the campaign and met a number of Liberal Democrat activists who asked them to become involved with the upcoming local election campaigns.

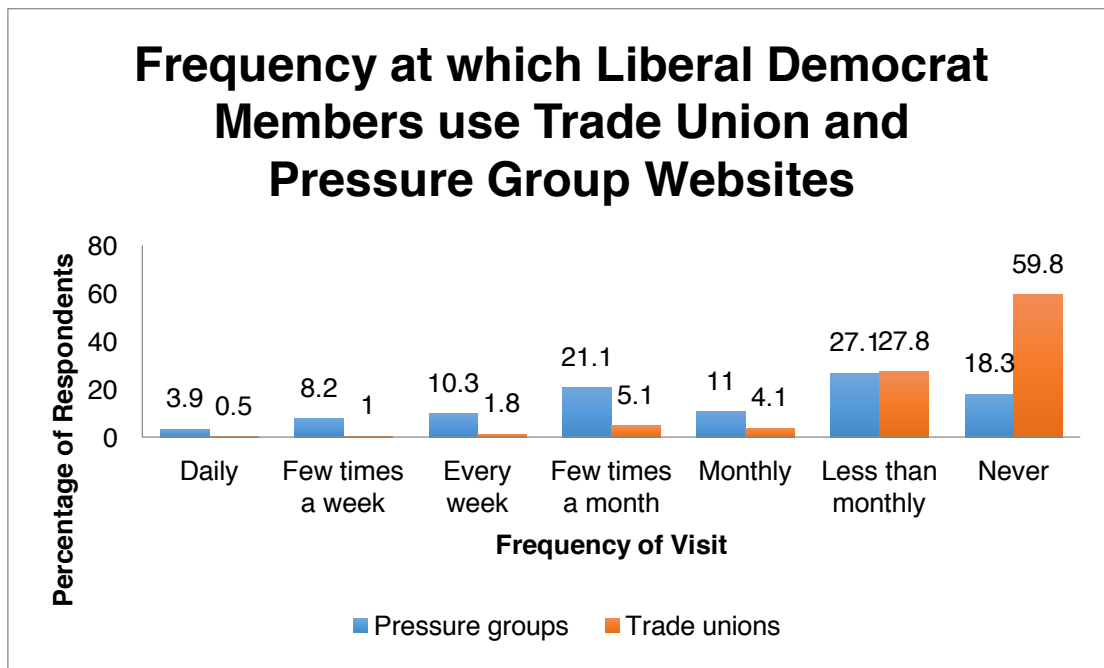
A number of councillors mentioned that they felt that the online activities of pressure groups, such as 38 Degrees, had indirectly led a number of younger people to become involved in party politics. They felt that this was generally the result of potential participants being approached by party activists whilst attending an issue-based event held by a pressure group. Four respondents made a similar suggestion during the semi-structured interviews. Each of the individuals that made these comments lived and worked in a relatively large city, for example, London, Bristol and Birmingham.

Whilst observing the events leading up to polling day, it became apparent that MPs occasionally attended campaigning sessions in order to 'motivate' activists to attend. The four MPs that attended throughout this period held a very different attitude to activists towards pressure groups. Each MP stated that they felt that grassroots

activists and the media had vastly exaggerated the mobilisation capacity of such campaigns. They felt that the activities of pressure groups served simply to increase their workload. 38 Degrees was often cited as an example of an increased workload. One MP illustrated this point by stating, “Annoyingly, I sometimes receive over 700 emails a week from 38 Degrees. They provide facilities that allow members of the public to email me with just one click. I don't read these emails, so they're just wasting their time. However, if these people involved themselves in party politics then I'd have to listen to them.”

Nonetheless, the following chart shows that 54.5% of the Liberal Democrat activists that were surveyed stated that they have visited the website of a pressure group within the last month. As indicated by Table 4.1 only 3% of respondents to Ward et al.'s (2002) survey reported having visited the website of a pressure group 'a few times a week' or more, with an additional 72% reporting that that they had never visited the website of a pressure group. This fits with a growing trend in issue-based activism (see for instance, Bottom and Crow, 2011; Norris, 2004) and also with the suggestion that website use has become more normalised within the last ten years or so.

Figure 4.10: Frequency at which Liberal Democrat Members use Trade Union and Pressure Group Websites



Note: The question related to how often respondents visited pressure group websites received 634 responses.

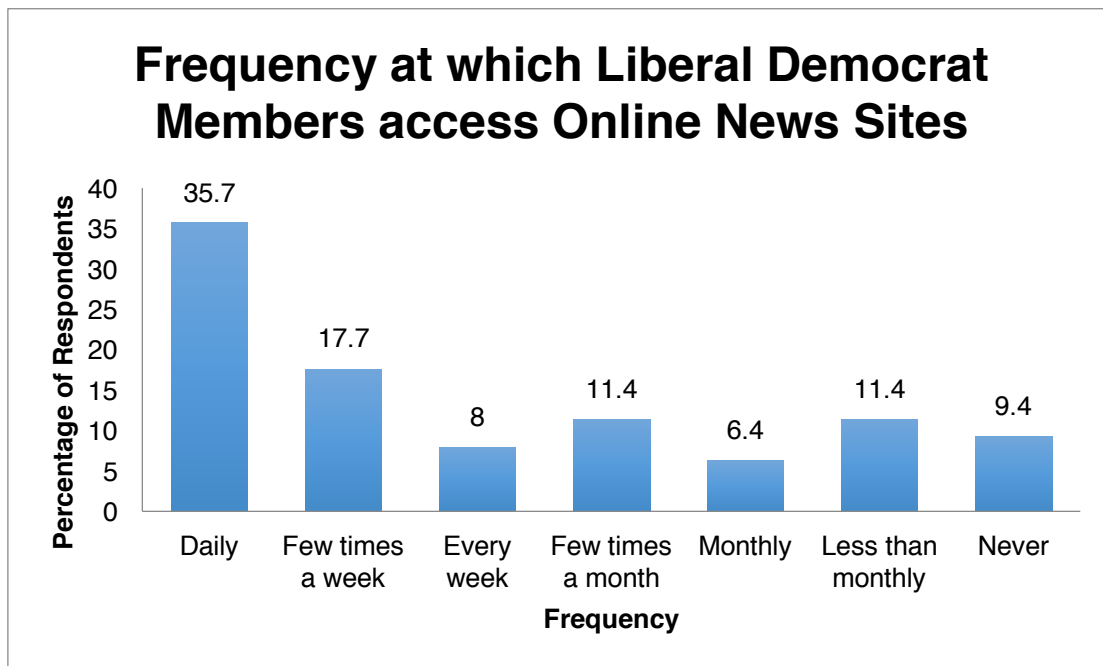
The question related to how often respondents visited trade union websites received 627 responses.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The previous chart shows that 59.8% of Liberal Democrat members stated that they have never visited a trade union website. One may argue that this is to be expected since trade union membership is more commonly associated with members of the Labour Party (see for instance, McIlroy, 1998; Seyd, 1999). The Ward et al. (2002) study found that 78% of respondents had never visited a trade union website; this suggests that the proportion of Liberal Democrats visiting the website of a trade union has increased over the last decade or so.

The following chart shows that the vast majority of activists consume online news relatively regularly; 35.7% of respondents read online news at least once a day and 61.4% engage with online news at least once a week.

Figure 4.11: Frequency at which Liberal Democrat Members access Online News Sites



Note: The question related to how often respondents visited online news sites received 639 responses.

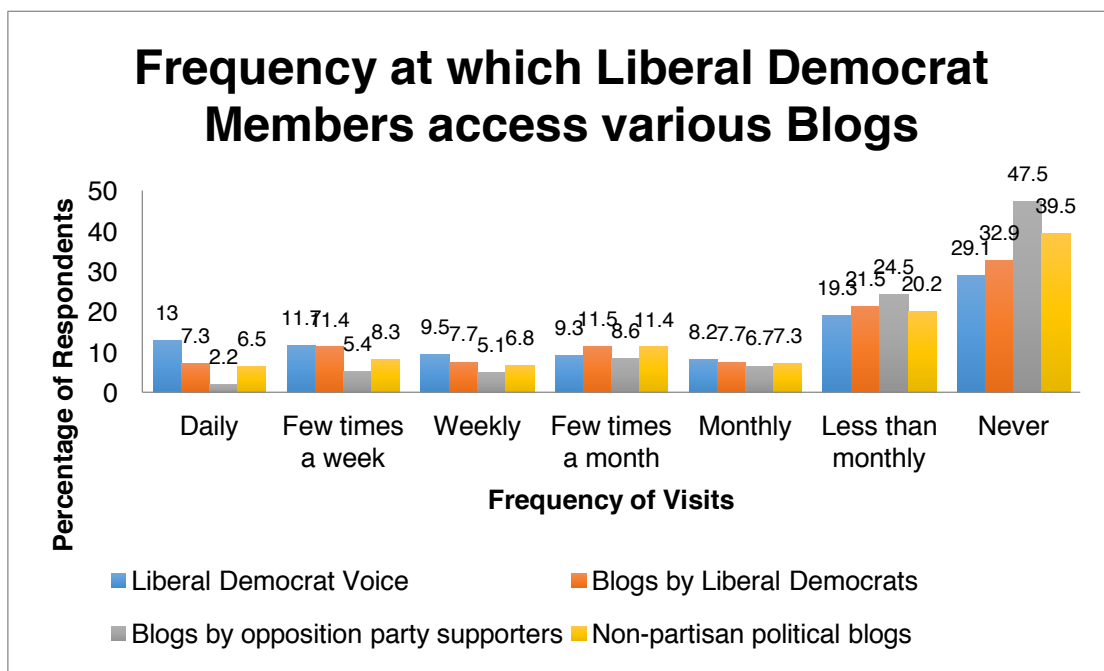
Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The chart shows that 90.6% of survey respondents have accessed online news sources. A 2011 survey carried out by the Oxford Internet Institute (2011) showed that 79% of the UK population had accessed online news. This suggests that Liberal Democrat users are more likely to access online news than the UK population as a whole. Similarly, the number of Liberal Democrats that have used the Internet to access online news has grown. Ward et al. (2002) found that only 26% of Liberal Democrat members had ever accessed online news sources. This increase in the proportion of Liberal Democrat members that have accessed online news sources is unsurprising because when Ward et al. (2002) carried out their survey only 49% of the UK population was online (Office of National Statistics, 2012), whereas 78% of the population is online (Oxford Internet Institute, 2013).

Throughout the participant observation, a number of activists and elected officials explained that they frequently read blog posts and write content for a website named

Liberal Democrat Voice. One activist explained that this website is run by a group of grassroots activists. Any party member can submit a blog post for consideration by the editorial team and these posts may relate to anything from appeals for volunteers, to opinion pieces on policy related issues. He said that the editors post several articles a day. It is relatively popular with party members and supporters, which is illustrated by the 16 000 visitors that it receives each week (Liberal Democrat Voice, 2013). As a result, the survey asked respondents how frequently they visit this blog, alongside a range of others. This is illustrated in the following chart:

Figure 4.12: Frequency at which Liberal Democrat Members access various Blogs



Note: The question related to how often respondents visited Liberal Democrat Voice received 633 responses.
 The question related to how often respondents visited blogs by Liberal Democrat supporters received 633 responses.
 The question related to how often respondents visited blogs by opposition party supporters received 629 responses.
 The question related to how often respondents visited non-partisan political blogs received 630 responses.
 Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

As shown in the previous chart, 70.9% of respondents reported that they had visited the Lib Dem Voice blog, 67.1% reported that they had visited a blog by a Liberal

Democrat supporter, 52.5% reported that they had visited a blog by an opposition party supporter and 60.5% reported that they had visited a non-partisan political blog. In comparison, a survey by the Oxford Internet Institute showed that in 2011 only 45% of the British public had ever visited a blog (Oxford Internet Institute, 2013). This suggests that Liberal Democrat activists are more likely to visit blogs than the British public as a whole. It could be argued that this is unsurprising because studies have shown that Liberal Democrat members are likely to be more well educated and from a higher socio-economic group than the British population as a whole (Russell, 2005; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005; Ward et al. 2002) and those with higher levels of education attainment and those from a higher socio-economic grouping are also more likely to use the Internet, including blogs, to seek information (Oxford Internet Institute, 2013).

There appear to be few, if any studies that show how frequently Liberal Democrat members visit blogs. As a result, this provides a useful benchmark for future study within this area.

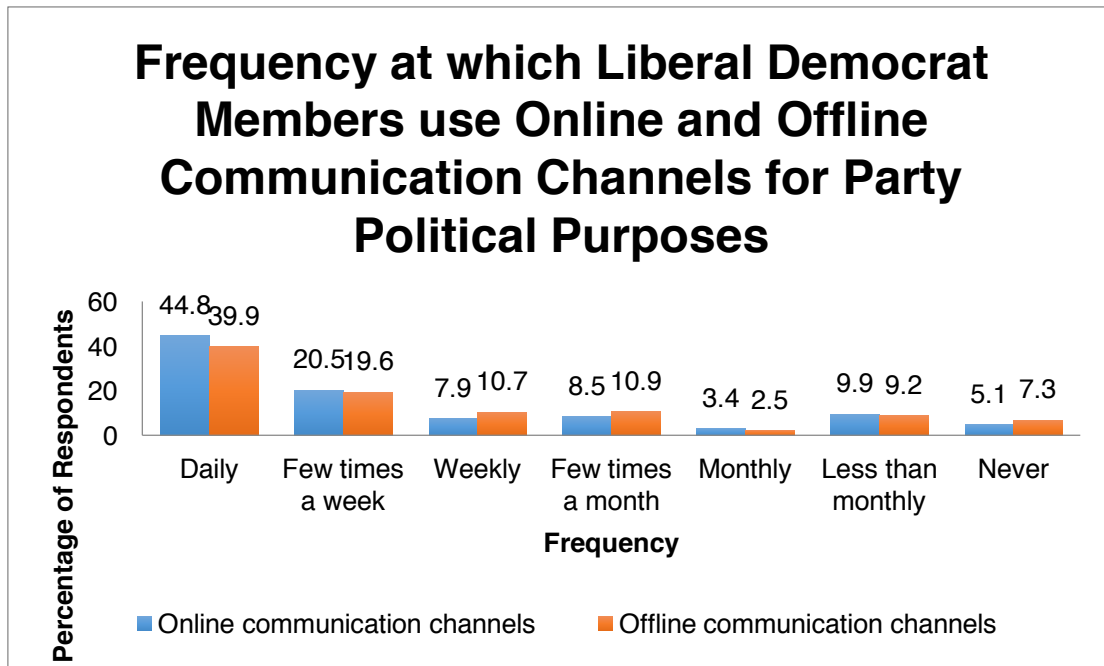
In summary, this section of the chapter provides a more detailed insight into how Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools. It shows how often they use various websites, including those belonging to local council groups and also blogs from a variety of political perspectives. It illustrates that the online political connectedness of Liberal Democrat members has increased since 2002, which is to be expected, which in turn furthers the argument that as Facebook and Twitter become more commonly used and are no longer viewed as 'emerging' tools, they will be more frequently used as a tool for mobilising volunteers.

4.8.2 The use of Online and Offline Communication Channels for Party Political Purposes

Following a period of participant observation, Nielsen (2011) noted that he felt that political activists spent more time engaging in offline campaigning than they did in online campaigning. Respondents to the survey were asked how often they used

both online and offline communication channels for party political purposes. The results are displayed in the following chart:

Figure 4.13: Frequency at which Liberal Democrat Members use Online and Offline Communication Channels for Party Political Purposes



Note: The question related to how often respondents used online communication channels for party political reasons received 649 responses.

The question related to how often respondents used offline communication channels for party political reasons received 644 responses.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The results suggest that a sizeable proportion of those surveyed engage in politics-related communication on at least a daily basis. Similarly, they show that 44.8% of respondents use Internet tools to engage in political communication on a daily basis, compared to just 39.9% using offline communication channels on a daily basis. This fits with Nielsen’s (2011) observation that political activists within the US appear to use offline campaigning methods more frequently than online ones.

Throughout the period of participant observation, it became apparent that the vast majority of politically active members of the local branch under study used both

online and offline communication channels on a daily basis throughout the run-up to the local elections. Overall, however, they used offline communications, such as the telephone or door knocking, to communicate with both grassroots volunteers and voters far more heavily. The majority of respondents to the semi-structured interviews made similar suggestions.

4.8.3 The use of Online Communication Channels to contact other Grassroots Members

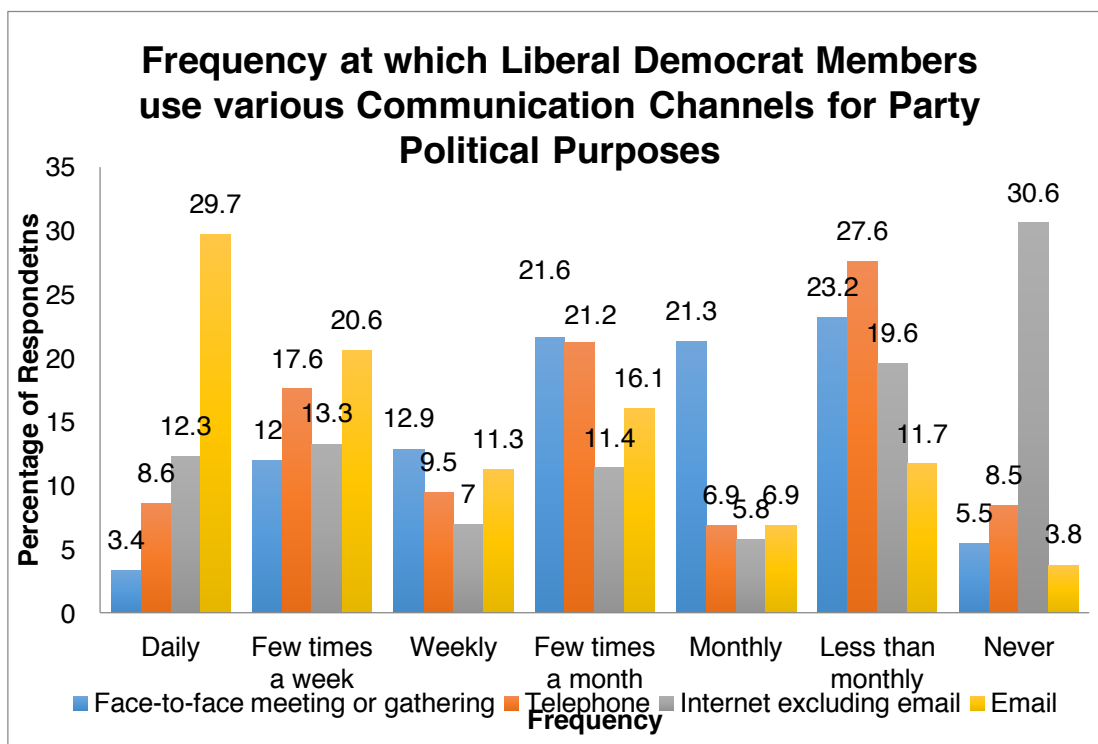
Chapter Two illustrated that academics from a range of backgrounds, from those that study social movements to those that study political communications and psephology, have argued that engagement with online communities, including those found on Facebook or Twitter, may supplement and indirectly increase offline community involvement in at least a small way (see for example, Gibson et al. 2003; Koku et al. 2001; Polat, 2005; Oxford Internet Institute, 2013; Wellman et al. 2001; Wojcieszak, 2009). A commonly cited study by Wellman et al. (2001) found a positive association between general Internet use and participation in politics, in addition to a positive association between participation in online communications related to politics and offline participation in political activity, as did a study by the Oxford Internet Institute (2013). Furthermore, the use of Internet tools may increase involvement in local politics by giving grassroots activists the ability to engage in discussion with groups of likeminded individuals and arrange their own meetings in between centrally organised events, thus increasing participation amongst the already engaged (Gibson et al. 2003; Koku et al. 2001; Wojcieszak, 2009). Similarly, it has been argued that online communication can enhance offline communication by allowing individuals to become more aware of each others' needs and stimulate their relationships through more frequent contact (Koku et al. 2001; Quan-Haase et al. 2002; Wellman et al. 2001).

Therefore, the following section discusses how frequently and the ways in which Liberal Democrat grassroots members and supporters use email, the Internet in general but excluding email, the telephone and face-to-face meetings to

communicate with each other. Telephone and face-to-face meetings are used as a point for comparison. As with the previous section, the results and discussion are based upon the data generated from the participant observation, the survey of Liberal Democrat members and a series of semi-structured interviews with respondents to the survey.

The following table shows how often party members reported using email, the Internet in general but excluding email, the telephone and face-to-face meetings to communicate with other grassroots activists or members:

Figure 4.14: Frequency at which Liberal Democrat Members use various Communication Channels for Party Political Purposes



Note: The question related to how often respondents attended a face-to-face meeting or gathering received 582 responses.
 The question related to how often respondents used the telephone to communicate for party political purposes received 579 responses.
 The question related to how often respondents used the Internet excluding email to communicate for party political purposes received 571 responses.
 The question related to how often respondents used email to communicate for party political purposes received 583 responses.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

Unsurprisingly, the results show that face-to-face meetings are the least popular means of communicating on a daily basis. The semi-structured interviews suggested that those that do meet on a face-to-face basis, either weekly or more frequently, tend to be Liberal Democrat councillors or are employed by the party in some way. As seen in the previous chart, 71.3% of respondents reported that they attend a face-to-face political meeting or gathering on at least a monthly basis. This compares to 2002 when Ward et al. (2002) found that only 60% of respondents to their survey had attended a face-to-face political meeting or gathering. This difference may be accounted for by methodological differences in the reporting of these two surveys; Ward et al. (2002) only reported the number of non-officials that reported attending a face-to-face political meeting or gathering, i.e. they excluded councillors and MPs when reporting on this part of their sample. If councillors and MPs are excluded from the survey data that was generated for use within this project, then a similar figure of 61% is found.

The chart shows that 29.7% of respondents use email to contact other members on a daily basis and 12.3% use a different Internet tool to do so on a daily basis. Similarly, 84.5% of respondents reported that they have used email to communicate with other members or volunteers within the last month and 49.8% said that they have used other Internet tools to communicate with other members or supporters within the last month. Ward et al. (2002) found that only 12.8% used email to contact other members on at least a monthly basis. This suggests that the use of email as a tool for supporter-to-supporter communication is far greater now than it was in 2002. This is unsurprising given that studies have shown that Internet use, including email use, has grown rapidly since 2002 (see for example, Oxford Internet Institute, 2013).

Only 8.6% of respondents use the telephone to contact other members on a daily basis, thus suggesting that Internet tools are the preferred form of communication amongst those within the Liberal Democrat grassroots that like to communicate on a daily basis. Similarly, 63.9% of respondents reported that they have used the telephone to keep in touch with other supporters within the last month. Ward et al.

(2002) found that 62% of respondents had used the telephone to keep in touch with other supporters within the last month. This suggests that use of the telephone to keep in touch with other Liberal Democrat supporters may not have changed, in spite of the introduction of a wider range of Internet tools, such as Facebook and Twitter or the more widespread adoption of older Internet tools, such as email.

As shown on the chart, 30.6% of respondents to the survey do not ever use Internet tools, with the exception of email, to communicate with other grassroots activists. During the participant observation, none of the three council candidates used Internet tools, with the exception of email, to communicate with other activists. Each of the three council candidates said that they had been to University and were involved with their local community. One 45-year-old candidate said, “With the exception of email, I don't use the Internet to talk to other Liberal Democrats because I have other things that I need to do with my time. I don't have time to endlessly debate policy, as I work full-time and have children.” This reason was commonly cited throughout the semi-structured interviews, amongst those that did not use Internet tools for such reasons. Similarly, a sizeable proportion of those that were interviewed after stating that they chose not to use Internet tools to communicate with other grassroots members felt that websites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were for ‘young people’. They had seen their children using these sites or read about them in a newspaper and subsequently decided that they would be the only ‘older’ person to use such websites. The following empirical chapter uses the survey results to discuss the predictors of the use of Internet tools amongst Liberal Democrat members in more detail.

In summary, the results of the survey show that email is the most popular means of staying in touch on a regular basis, followed by other Internet tools in general, the telephone and finally, face-to-face meetings or interactions. Almost one third of survey respondents reported that, excluding email, they did not use Internet tools to remain in touch with one another. The findings from the semi-structured interviews and discussion with individuals from the participant observation indicate that the most commonly cited reasons for this are a general perception that websites, such

as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are for 'young people' and a lack of time to engage in conversation online, as a result of being perceived as non-essential to daily life.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter explores how grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, increase membership and engage in a range of related political activities. It aimed to provide an insight into how Liberal Democrat members use different Internet tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and email, as opposed to investigating how the Internet-as-a-whole is used. In doing so it explored whether a higher proportion of Liberal Democrat members use email than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter to engage in party political activity. Similarly, it explored whether a higher proportion of Liberal Democrat members use email than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter to engage in non-party political activity. Finally, it considered whether people are more likely to join the Liberal Democrats using an offline communication channel, than an online communication channel.

The data from the participant observation, the survey and the semi-structured interviews indicate that in terms of engaging in party political activity, email is used by a higher proportion of grassroots Liberal Democrat members than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Amongst respondents to the survey, using email to mobilise volunteers is over twice as popular as using Facebook to do so and over five times as popular as using Twitter to do so. This indicates that there are meaningful differences between how Liberal Democrat members use different types of Internet tools and supports the claims of Ellison et al. (2008), Nielsen (2011), Pasek et al. (2009), Shah and Scheufele (2006), Zhao, (2006) and others who argue that this is the case within the case within the US.

The results also show that Liberal Democrat members use email for non-party political purposes on a more frequent basis than social networking sites, such as

Facebook and Twitter. This means that expectations one and two were met and adds weight to the argument that email is more deeply integrated within volunteer mobilisation practices than 'emerging' tools, such as Facebook and Twitter (Nielsen, 2011). As a result of Nielsen's argument, it could be argued that future studies will be increasingly less likely to detect this difference in use because familiarity with social networking sites will increase over time and they will most likely become more integrated into campaign mobilisation practices, as has been the case with email, which can be referred to as a 'mundane' tool, as a result of users' familiarity with the technology.

The difference in the extent to which Liberal Democrat members use different Internet tools for party political activity has a number of important implications for the Liberal Democrats. For instance, the party will be able to communicate with a larger number of supporters using email, than if they were to use Facebook or Twitter. It would also be useful for the party to know whether people with certain characteristics are more likely to use certain Internet tools, as this means that the party can better target key audiences, such as younger people and so on. Therefore, the following chapter seeks to explore whether certain types of people are more likely to use certain Internet tools for political purposes.

It was also established that people are much more likely to join the Liberal Democrats using a 'traditional' offline method, than an online one. This is to be expected because most studies indicate that despite initial expectations that the use of Internet tools would lead to a vast increase in political participation; there is actually very little, if any detectable change (Bartle, 2005; Gibson et al. 2003; Gibson and Ward, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2005). There was one exception to this overall trend and it came from the participant observation. The local branch under study perceived that the leadership debates prior to the 2010 General Election had led to a surge in the number of supporters signing up online. This fits with Chadwick (2007) and Karpf's (2012) argument that supporters are more likely to engage with a variety of online content after they have engaged with a political party's message offline and leads to the suggestion that whilst Internet tools

may not lead to a vast increase in political participation when used alone, the use of 'hybrid' campaigning may increase the level of participation or mobilisation amongst Liberal Democrat supporters. It also indicates that it may be beneficial for future studies not to examine the effects of Internet tools in isolation and instead examine how Internet tools are used alongside more 'traditional' offline media. However, the overall trend present within the data suggests that this expectation was met.

Chapter Five: Who uses Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers?

5.1 Introduction

The theories and empirical research discussed within Chapter Two provide a number of insights into the predictors of the use of Internet tools to mobilise volunteers. For instance, a number of studies show that younger people are more likely to use Internet tools for a variety of political purposes (see for instance, Nielsen, 2011; Tedesco, 2007; Xenos and Foot, 2008). Another study from 2002 indicates that those that join the Liberal Democrats online are likely to be heavy users of Internet tools and already regular party volunteers (Ward et al. 2002). However, it is clear that existing research does not specifically focus upon the predictors of using individual Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers. Instead, the vast majority of studies focus upon areas such as, how political parties use the Internet-as-a-whole for a variety of tasks including impacting upon voter intention or mobilising voters. Few of these studies focus upon the perceptions of grassroots member and supporters. Similarly, none appear to focus upon second order elections within the UK or upon third parties.

It would be useful to gain an insight into the predictors of whether grassroots members use Internet tools for a number of reasons. If political parties are aware of who is using Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers then they can provide targeted support for such mobilisation attempts, which may arguably, increase the success of such attempts and offer an electoral advantage. This is particularly true within the case of the Liberal Democrats, as they are particularly dependent upon the work of volunteers to run ward level campaigns (Cutts, 2014; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005).

Therefore, this chapter builds upon the theories and empirical research discussed within Chapter Two by using the data generated during the survey to uncover the predictors of using Facebook, Twitter and email for a variety of tasks related to volunteer mobilisation. It also builds upon the work contained within the previous

chapter that describes and discusses the Internet tools accessed by Liberal Democrat members and supporters, how frequently they use them and also how they use them.

As explained in Chapter Two, a small number of studies have investigated whether certain groups of people are more likely to use certain Internet tools. Tedesco (2007) and Xenos and Foot (2008) both found that young people are more likely to use social networking sites than email or websites, when they engage in political communication. The authors note that this is because this group prefers the interactive features offered by social networking sites. Therefore, it may be the case that different types of people use different Internet tools, thus meaning that the predictors of using Facebook to mobilise volunteers are different to the predictors of using Twitter or email to do so. As previously mentioned, there appear to be no studies that test this. It would be useful to know if this is the case because the Liberal Democrats may wish to offer targeted support to the users of specific Internet tools, in order to promote best practice and increase the success of mobilisation attempts. Similarly, if groups that are underrepresented in politics are particularly likely to use certain Internet tools to mobilise volunteers then political parties may also see an additional reason to provide support for this mobilisation activity, for instance, by holding training at youth conferences or at student-focused events. They may also wish to provide central resources, such as templates or graphics, much like they do with local leaflets. Therefore, this chapter also seeks to test whether the predictors of the use of email to mobilise volunteers are different to the predictors of the use of Facebook and Twitter to do so.

Existing research also suggests that there may be a number of common predictors of the use of Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers. A range of studies (see for instance, Norris and Curtice, 2008; Xenos and Foot, 2008; Weinstein 2004; Tedesco, 2007) have showed that those that use Internet tools to acquire political information tend to be younger. Whilst these findings do not relate directly to using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, it could be suggested that if this demographic group is more likely to use Internet tools to acquire political information, then they

may be more likely to use it as a tool to mobilise other volunteers. When placed alongside the aforementioned willingness of young people to share interactive political information and mobilisation messaging, this adds weight to the claim that youth is likely to be a predictor of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

Therefore, this chapter also seeks to test whether this is the case. Pasek et al. (2009) argue that Facebook users are more likely to connect with people of a similar background, i.e. social class, age and similar beliefs. If age is a significant predictor of whether a person has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers and younger people are more likely to use this tool to mobilise volunteers, then political parties may wish to ask younger activists to mobilise volunteers using Facebook in order to increase the number of young people involved in the political process, as younger people are typically regarded as 'underrepresented' within the Liberal Democrats and arguably, within politics in general (see for instance, Gibson, 2010; Russell, 2005).

Similarly, surveys of party members and supporters indicate that educational background is related to propensity to use online tools to share political information and discuss politics online (see for example, Gibson et al. 2005; Johnson and Kaye, 2005). There appear to be few, if any studies that test whether this holds true within the context of using these tools to mobilise volunteers. Therefore, this study seeks to test whether educational background is likely to be a predictor of the use of using each of the three Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

A body of research suggests that people that either initially volunteer to help a political party or join a political party online hold characteristics that are associated with being less likely to attend meetings, fulfill more official roles on local branch executive committees or hold externally elected positions (Gibson, 2013). Studies from the US by Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012) suggest that the adoption of Internet tools amongst political parties is leading them towards a model of operation that relies upon a structure that appears to be very decentralised and provides a floating support base, as opposed to a less transient group of ongoing supporters. Furthermore, research by Chadwick (2007), Römmele (2003), Schweitzer (2008) and Ward et al. (2003) also provides evidence that members that join online tend to

be less involved in the daily life of the organisation. Each of these three studies found that even when supporters do pay an annual membership fee, they are often more passive participants and spend less time on a range of political tasks, including attending meetings and engaging in doorstep campaigning; thus suggesting that they may also be less likely to seek office as a Liberal Democrat representative.

Therefore, this study seeks to establish whether the type of people that become externally elected public officials are less likely to be highly politically active online and hence are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, than non-elected officials. It does so by testing whether those that report that they have held an externally elected office, such as that of a councillor, are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, than those that have not held externally elected public office. It would be useful to gather more evidence related to whether those that become involved online are less likely to become more transient and passive participants than those that join offline. This is because membership fees provide an important source of funding to the Liberal Democrats, as explained within Chapter Two (see for instance, Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). Similarly, if those that join online are less likely to seek office then the party may find that they have a shortage of elections candidates, if they do not also seek to use offline channels of communication.

In one of the few studies of online party joining behavior, Ward et al. (2002) found that age is a significant predictor of whether an individual will join the Liberal Democrats using an online method, i.e. the website sign-up option. Given the similar context of this study, i.e. the same country, the same political party, it seems logical to suggest that this project may also find evidence to support the suggestion that those that join the Liberal Democrats online are likely to be younger. This chapter seeks to test whether this is the case. It would be useful to know whether those that join the party online do tend to be younger because younger people are underrepresented in politics in general and there is no evidence to suggest that this is any different within the Liberal Democrats (Gibson, 2010; Russell, 2005). If so, the

party may wish to target young people using the online sign up option in order to increase youth membership.

In terms of structure, the remainder of this chapter is divided into a number of key sections. Section 5.2 provides a reminder of the expectations that are tested within this chapter. Section 5.3 outlines the outcome and predictor variables used within this chapter. Section 5.4 is focused upon the variables that are associated with using Facebook, Twitter and email for a variety of activities, including mobilising volunteers, increasing membership and joining the Liberal Democrats online. Section 5.35 considers whether the evidence generated within this chapter suggests that expectations four, five, six, seven and eight can be confirmed. Finally, Section 5.6 concludes the chapter.

5.2 Expectations

This chapter seeks to test the following expectations:

Expectation Four: Predictors of the use of email to mobilise volunteers will be different to the predictors of the use of Facebook and Twitter to do so. Similarly, the predictors of the use of Facebook to mobilise volunteers will be different to the use of Twitter and email to do so and so on.

Expectation Five: Age is likely to be a predictor of using each of the three Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

Expectation Six: Educational background is likely to be a predictor of the use of using each of the three Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

Expectation Seven: Externally elected public officials, such as councillors, are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, than those that are not externally elected public officials.

Expectation Eight: Younger members are more likely to have joined the party online.

5.3 Variables used within this Chapter

This chapter uses a number of outcome and predictor variables in order to provide an insight into the predictors of how grassroots Liberal Democrat members use the Internet tools to mobilise volunteers.

Expectation four is tested using a range of predictor variables. These include whether the respondent can be classified as a 'youth member', i.e. is under 30 years of age; whether the respondent is over the age of 60 years, the sex of the respondent, whether the respondent is educated to degree level, whether they believe that they work in a 'professional' occupation, whether or not a person uses Facebook, Twitter and email daily, how frequently the respondent reports using Internet tools for party political purposes, whether the respondent reports that they engage with the party in an offline manner at least once a week and whether the respondent reports that they have held externally elected public office, for instance, as a councillor. The outcome variables include whether a respondent has reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers, Twitter to mobilise volunteers and email to mobilise volunteers.

The predictor variables used to test expectation five are whether a respondent can be classified as a 'youth member', i.e. is under the age of thirty years, and whether a respondent is aged over sixty years. The outcome variables under study include whether a respondent has reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers, Twitter to mobilise volunteers and email to mobilise volunteers.

One predictor variable was used to test expectation six. This is whether a person is educated to first degree level. Once again, the outcome variables under study are

whether a respondent has reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers, using Twitter to mobilise volunteers and email to mobilise volunteers.

One outcome variable is used to test expectation seven. This is whether or not a respondent has held externally elected public office, for instance as a councillor.

The outcome variables under study are whether a respondent has reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers, Twitter to mobilise volunteers and email to mobilise volunteers

Expectation eight is tested using two predictor variables. These are whether a respondent is considered to be a 'youth member', i.e. is aged under thirty years, and whether a respondent is over the age of sixty years. The outcome variable is whether or not a person joined the Liberal Democrats online.

5.4 Predictors of using Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers, using Internet Tools to Increase Membership and Joining Online

The following sections of this chapter identifies a number of the variables that may predict whether a respondent has used Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers and increase membership of the Liberal Democrats. Increasing party membership was included as a unit of analysis because, historically, the Liberal Democrats have relied upon their local members to act as one of the main sources of voluntary labour within a local election campaign (see for instance, Cutts, 2004; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005; Seyd and Whiteley, 2004). Therefore, it is closely linked with volunteer mobilisation. Additionally, this section of the chapter identifies a number of the variables that may predict whether a respondent joined the Liberal Democrats online.

Existing research suggests that people with certain characteristics are more likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to seek or share political information with their friends and acquaintances. For example, a number of studies show that those that use Internet tools to acquire political information are likely to be younger (see for

instance, Lenahart, 2006; Norris and Curtice, 2008; Tedesco, 2007; Xenos and Foot, 2008). Similarly, many scholars believe that those with higher levels of education are more likely to create political content to be shared online. Therefore, this section tests whether these variables may also be used to predict the likelihood that a person has used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase party membership. Other variables included within this analysis relate to social demographic characteristics, levels of Internet usage, levels of offline involvement with the party and political experience.

In addition to this, these sections of the chapter also uncover some of the predictors of joining the Liberal Democrats online. Gibson (2013) suggests that those that join political parties online hold characteristics that are associated with being less likely to attend meetings, fulfil more official roles on local branch executive committees or hold externally elected positions. Others including Chadwick (2007), Karpf (2012), Römmele (2003) and Schweitzer (2008) made similar observations and report that those that volunteer or join a political party as a result of online communication are more likely to help with a one-off campaign and will be less involved with the daily life of the organisation. Chapter Four shows that the majority of new members continue to join using an offline method. However, the data generated during the participant observation and semi-structured interviews suggest that grassroots members perceive that the number of people joining via the Internet is growing. An awareness of the type of person that is most likely to join online is likely to benefit the Liberal Democrats because it means that they can use this information to target potential members and hence, increase membership numbers and revenue, in addition to benefitting from a larger pool of potential volunteers. Therefore, the following sections of this chapter also seek to find out more about the type of person that joins the Liberal Democrats online in order to shed greater light upon this phenomenon.

Section 5.4.1 of this chapter uses binary logistic regression to analyse the predictors of using Facebook, Twitter and email to both mobilise volunteers and increase party membership. It also uses this form of analysis to uncover the predictors of joining the Liberal Democrats online. The results of this analysis are discussed in more

detail in Sections 5.4.2 – Sections 5.2.5. Section 5.4.2 is focused upon social demographic characteristics that may predict these behaviours, including age, i.e. whether a person is aged under 30 years and is hence a youth member or whether they are aged over 60 years, whether a person is educated to first degree level and whether they hold a professional occupation. Section 5.4.3 is focused upon levels of Internet usage and whether they may be used to predict these behaviours. Section 5.4.4 is focused upon levels of offline political activity and whether they may be used to predict these behaviours. Section 5.4.5 is focused upon political experience and whether those that hold an externally elected public position are more or less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase party membership.

5.4.1 Description of Binary Logistic Regression Output

As previously mentioned, a number of scholars have suggested that research into the link between the Internet and political participation should not focus upon the Internet-a-whole, as this would only provide a limited insight into the mobilisation potential offered by this technology (see for instance, Nielsen, 2011; Pasek et al. 2009; Tedesco, 2007; Xenos and Foot, 2008). Instead, it should focus upon different categories of use or individual Internet tools. Therefore, this section of the chapter uses binary logistic regression to separately analyse the predictors of using Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. Alongside this, it analyses the predictors of joining the Liberal Democrats online.

Binary logistic regression is used to assess the impact of a number of factors upon the likelihood that respondent reported that they have used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers. Each of these models contains a number of predictor variables. These are whether a person is aged over 60 years of age, whether they are a youth member, i.e. aged under 30 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold a first degree, whether they believe that they have a professional occupation, whether they participate in party political activity on behalf of the Liberal Democrats at least once a week, whether they use Facebook, Twitter and email

daily, whether they use Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week, whether they report that they have been an externally elected public official, such as a councillor, and whether they joined the party online.

In terms of using Facebook to mobilise volunteers, the full model containing all of the predictors is statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 533) = 118.1, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish between respondents who reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers and those who did not. The model as a whole explains between 19.9% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 30.2% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in use or non-use of Facebook to mobilise volunteers and correctly classifies 77.3% of cases.

In terms of using Twitter to mobilise volunteers, the full model containing all of the predictors is statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 530) = 80.42, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish between respondents who reported using Twitter to mobilise volunteers and those who did not did. The model as a whole explains between 14.6% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 29.5% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in use or non-use of Twitter to mobilise volunteers and correctly classifies 91.5% of cases.

In terms of using email to mobilise volunteers, the full model containing all of the predictors is statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 527) = 30.32, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish between respondents who reported using email to mobilise volunteers and those who did not did. The model as a whole explains between 5.6% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 7.5% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in use or non-use of email to mobilise volunteers and correctly classifies 59.8% of cases.

The following table shows the variables that predict whether a respondent has used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers.

Table 5.1: Predictors of using Facebook, Twitter and Email to Mobilise Volunteers

	Has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers	Has used Twitter to mobilise volunteers	Has used email to mobilise volunteers
Aged over 60 years	-1.196*** (.330)	-.986* (.527)	-.322 (.205)
Aged under 30 years	1.04*** (.307)	1.318*** (.387)	-.099 (.290)
Holds first degree	.4 (.259)	.058 (.362)	.602** (.203)
Holds a professional occupation	1.114 (.244)	.202 (.329)	-.061 (.189)
Participates offline at least once a week	.23 (.312)	.153 (.442)	.442** (.222)
Uses Facebook, Twitter and email daily	.98*** (.272)	1.383*** (.348)	-.050 (.257)
Uses Internet for party political reasons at least once a week	1.391*** (.415)	2.719* (1.080)	.588** (.245)
Has held externally elected public office	-.480* (.256)	.537 (.361)	-.105 (.196)
Female	-.126 (.263)	-.545 (.355)	.144 (.201)
Constant	-2.468*** (.605)	-4.783*** (1.197)	-.870*** (.429)
Nagelkerke R Squared	.31	.362	.085
N	533	530	527

Note: cell entries represent binary logistic regression coefficients with standard error in brackets

*p < 0.10

**p < 0.05

***p < 0.01

The reference category for 'age' is 31 – 60 years

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

Each of the predictor variables shown in the table is discussed in more detail in the following sections of this chapter. Section 5.4.2 discusses variables related to social demographic characteristics, Section 5.4.3 discusses variables related to levels of Internet usage, Section 5.4.4 discusses the variable related to levels of offline activity and Section 5.4.5 discusses the variable related to political experience.

Binary logistic regression is also used to assess the impact of a number of factors upon the likelihood that respondents reported that they had used Facebook, Twitter and email to increase membership of their local branch of the Liberal Democrats. Each of these models contains a number of predictor variables. These are whether a person is aged over 60 years of age, whether they are a youth member, i.e. aged under 30 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold a first degree, whether they believe that they have a professional occupation, whether they participate in party political activity on behalf of the Liberal Democrats at least once a week, whether they use Facebook, Twitter and email daily, whether they use Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week, whether they have been an externally elected public official, such as a councillor, and whether they joined the party online.

In terms of using Facebook to increase membership, the full model containing all of the predictors is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 532) = 105.29, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish between respondents who reported using Facebook to increase membership of their local branch and those who did not. The model as a whole explains between 18% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 31% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in use or non-use of Facebook to increase membership and correctly classifies 85.9% of cases.

In terms of using Twitter to increase membership, the full model containing all of the predictors is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 530) = 88.72, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish between respondents who reported using Twitter to increase membership of their local branch and those who did not. The model as a whole explains between 15.4% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 36.2% (Nagelkerke R

squared) of the variance in use or non-use of Twitter to increase membership of their local branch and correctly classifies 92.3% of cases.

In terms of using email to increase membership, the full model containing all of the predictors is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 525) = 33.26, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish between respondents who reported using email to increase membership of their local branch and those who did not. The model as a whole explains between 6.1% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 8.5% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in use or non-use of email to mobilise volunteers and correctly classifies 66.7% of cases.

The following table shows the variables that predict whether a respondent has used Facebook, Twitter and email to increase membership of their local branch.

Table 5.2: Predictors of using Facebook, Twitter and Email to Increase Local Membership

	Has used Facebook to increase local membership	Has used Twitter to increase local membership	Has used email to increase local membership
Aged over 60 years	-1.17*** (.44)	-18.14 (2776.77)	-.41* (.23)
Aged under 30 years	1.16*** (.34)	1.01** (.418)	.39 (.30)
Holds a first degree	.44 (.3)	.1 (.405)	.46** (.3)
Holds a professional occupation	-.46* (.28)	.27 (.37)	.26 (.20)
Participates offline at least once a week	.2 (.36)	-.05 (.49)	.58** (.25)
Uses Facebook, Twitter and email daily	1.06*** (.3)	1.64*** (.379)	.205 (.26)
Uses Internet for party political reasons at least once a week	.96** (.47)	1.2 (.74)	.53* (.28)
Has held externally elected public office	-.66** (.3)	-.21 (.41)	.18 (.22)
Female	.14 (.32)	.28 (.44)	-.08 (.18)
Constant	-2.754*** (.716)	-4.357*** (1.043)	-1.734** (.482)
Nagelkerke R Squared	.31	.362	.085
N	532	530	525

Note: cell entries represent binary logistic regression coefficients with standard error in brackets

*p < 0.10

**p < 0.05

***p < 0.01

The reference category for 'age' is 31 – 60 years

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

As with the previous analysis, each of the predictor variables shown in the table is discussed in more detail in the following sections of this chapter.

Binary logistic regression is also used to assess the impact of a number of factors upon the likelihood that respondents reported that they had joined the Liberal

Democrats online. The model contains a number of predictor variables. These are whether a person is aged over 60 years of age, whether they are a youth member, i.e. aged under 30 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold a first degree, whether they believe that they have a professional occupation, whether they participate in party political activity on behalf of the Liberal Democrats at least once a week, whether they use Facebook, Twitter and email daily, whether they use Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week and whether they report that they are an externally elected public official, such as a councillor.

In terms of joining the Liberal Democrats online, the full model containing all of the predictors is statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 517) = 62.47, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish between respondents who reported joining the party online and those who did not. The model as a whole explains between 11.4% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 16% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in joining online or offline and correctly classifies 69.6% of cases.

The following table shows the variables that predict whether a respondent has joined the party online.

Table 5.3: Predictors of Joining the Liberal Democrats Online

	Joined Online
Aged over 60 years	-.42* (.23)
Aged under 30 years	1.1*** (.30)
Holds first degree	-.15 (.22)
Holds a professional occupation	-.05 (.21)
Participates offline at least once a week	-.42* (.25)
Uses Facebook, Twitter and email daily	.28 (.27)
Uses Internet for party political reasons at least once a week	1.07*** (.3)
Has held externally elected public office	-.33 (.22)
Female	-.01 (.22)
Constant	-1.054*** (.475)
Nagelkerke R Squared	.16
N	517

Note: Cell entries represent binary logistic regression coefficients with standard error in brackets

*p < 0.10

**p < 0.05

***p < 0.01

The reference category for 'age' is 31 – 60 years

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

As with the previous models, each of these variables is discussed in more detail in the following sections of this chapter.

5.4.2 Social Demographic Factors that may predict use of Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers, use of Internet Tools to Increase Membership and Joining Online

This section of the chapter discusses the social demographic variables that may predict whether a respondent has used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers, in addition to those that may predict whether a respondent has reported joining the Liberal Democrats via the Internet. The predictor variables discussed within this section include whether a respondent is aged over 60 years, whether they can be classified as a youth member, i.e. under the age of 30 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold an undergraduate degree and whether they believe that they hold a professional occupation. As a brief reminder, 38.6% of the sample is aged over 60 years, 13.7% is aged under 30 years, 69.9% is male and 30.1% is female, 27.5% holds at least a first degree and 46.1% holds a professional occupation.

Whether or not a person is a youth member of the party, i.e. under the age of 30 years, is the strongest demographic predictor and second strongest of all the predictors of whether a respondent has reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.04, which indicates that if a respondent is aged 30 years or under, then the log-odds that they have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers increases by 1.04 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. Furthermore, whether or not a person is aged under 30 years is also one of the strongest predictors of whether they reported using Facebook to increase membership of their local branch. The variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.16, which means that if a respondent was aged 30 years or under, then the log-odds that they have used Facebook to increase membership of the party increases by 1.16 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model.

Whether or not a person is aged under 30 years is the strongest demographic predictor and second largest overall predictor of whether a respondent reported using Twitter to mobilise volunteers. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.31, which indicates that if a respondent is aged 30 years or under, then the log-odds that they have used Twitter to mobilise volunteers increases by 1.31 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. It is also a significant predictor of whether a person reported using Twitter to increase membership. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.01, which indicates that if a respondent is aged 30 years or under, then the log-odds that they have used Twitter to increase membership increases by 1.01 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. This is one of the strongest predictors of whether a person reported using Twitter to increase membership, thus indicating that youth is strongly associated with a range of mobilisation activities across social media channels.

In contrast, whether or not a person is aged under 30 years is not a significant predictor of whether a person reported using email to mobilise volunteers.

This fits with the findings of studies by Tedesco (2007), Xenos and Foot (2008) and Treré (2011) who found that young people in the US and continental Europe are more likely to engage in political communication on a social networking site than via email. It also fits with work by Nielsen (2011) that shows that email is a 'mundane' tool that is used by a wide proportion of the population. It indicates that younger and older political activists are equally likely to use it. It also suggests that social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are 'emerging' tools, as they are newer and more likely to appeal to young people. It is likely that people will eventually become more familiar with Facebook and Twitter. This may mean that youth ceases to be a predictor of whether a respondent has used Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers and increase membership.

Whether or not a person is a youth member of the party, i.e. under the age of 30 years, is also the strongest predictor of whether a respondent reported joining the Liberal Democrats online. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.1, which indicates that if a respondent is aged 30 years or under, then the log-odds that they joined the party online increases by 1.1 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. This fits with the findings of a study by Ward et al. (2002) that showed that people that joined the Liberal Democrats online tended to be younger. Ward et al. (2003) also found that those that joined the Labour Party online tended to be younger, thus suggesting that these trends may also be present outside of the Liberal Democrats.

These findings have important implications for the Liberal Democrats. For example, the party may wish to engage in targeted advertising on Facebook and Twitter because younger people are more likely to join online and are also more likely to use social media to increase membership or mobilise volunteers. Not unlike most parties, younger members are underrepresented within the Liberal Democrats (Russell, 2005), therefore, this may help to increase the number and the diversity of both volunteers and members within the party. An increase in younger members may also increase the number of people that use Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, given that the results of the binary logistic regression indicate that younger people are more likely to engage in these activities. This may ultimately increase party membership and volunteering levels.

Whether or not a person is aged over 60 years is also a predictor of whether a respondent reported joining the party online. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of -.42, which indicates that if a respondent is aged 60 years or under, then the log-odds that they joined the party online decrease by .42 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. This suggests that older people are more likely to join the party using a more traditional offline method. It is particularly useful to know whether older people are less likely to join the party using Internet

tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and email. This is because older people make up a relatively large proportion of the party's membership base and therefore, the party is especially dependent upon their membership fees and the time that they spend volunteering. Therefore, the party needs to ensure that they are using communication channels that are likely to maximise the success of any mobilisation or recruitment efforts targeted at this group.

Related to this, the data shows that whether or not a person is aged over 60 years is also a significant predictor of whether a respondent reported using Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers with those aged under 60 less likely to report having done so. This offers further evidence that Facebook and Twitter may be referred to as 'emerging tools' and are still less likely to be used within the context of a local election campaign.

However, whether or not a person is aged over 60 is also a predictor of whether they had used Facebook and email to increase membership, once again, with those over the age of 60 less likely to report having done so. Similarly, whether or not a person is aged over 60 is not a significant predictor of using email to mobilise volunteers, nor is it a significant predictor of using Twitter to mobilise volunteers. This suggests that the perception of Facebook and Twitter as 'emerging' tools that are most likely to be used by younger people is not the only explanation for these differences in the use of Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. It also offers an amount of evidence that people with certain characteristics are more likely to use certain Internet tools than others.

Holding a professional occupation is not a significant predictor of using Facebook, Twitter or email to mobilise volunteers, nor is it a significant predictor of joining the Liberal Democrats via the Internet. Sex is not a significant predictor of any of the aforementioned behaviours either.

Holding at least a first degree is the strongest predictor of using email to mobilise other volunteers. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of .602, which

indicates that if a respondent holds a first degree, then the log-odds that they have used email to mobilise volunteers increases by .602, after controlling for all other factors in the model. Holding a first degree is not a significant predictor of using Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers. This suggests that there may be differences in the characteristics of those that use email and those that use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

5.4.3 Levels of Internet Usage that may predict use of Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers, use of Internet Tools to Increase Membership and Joining Online

This section of the chapter discusses the variables linked to levels of Internet usage that may predict whether a respondent has used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers, in addition to those that may predict whether a respondent has reported joining the Liberal Democrats online. The variables discussed within this section include whether a respondent reports using Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week and whether they report using Facebook, Twitter and email for any purpose at least once a day. 70.2% of the sample reports using Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week and 18.7% of the sample reports using Facebook, Twitter and email for any purpose at least once a day.

The beta coefficient for 'uses Internet tools for party political reasons at least once a week' is 1.39 and this shows that if a respondent reports using Internet tools at least once a week for party political reasons, then the log-odds that they have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers increases by 1.39, after controlling for all other factors in the model. This means that this is the strongest predictor of whether a person has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers.

Similarly, this is also the strongest predictor of whether a respondent has reported using Twitter to mobilise other volunteers. This variable has a beta coefficient of 2.72, which indicates that if a respondent reported that they use Internet tools for party political reasons at least once a week, then the log-odds that they have used

Twitter to mobilise volunteers increases by 2.72, after controlling for other factors in the model. This suggests that those that are most politically engaged online are also the most likely to mobilise volunteers using both Facebook and Twitter. If a respondent reported using Internet tools for party political reasons at least once a week, then the log-odds that they have used Twitter to mobilise volunteers increases by 2.72. However, it only meant that the log-odds that they had used Facebook to mobilise volunteers increased by 1.39. These figures indicate that using Internet tools for party political reasons at least once a week is a far stronger predictor of using Twitter to mobilise volunteers than it is of using Facebook to mobilise volunteers. This provides a degree of evidence to support Nielsen (2011) and Pasek et al.'s (2009) suggestion that different Internet tools allow for different types of Internet use, which in turn impacts upon who may use a tool and also how they may behave, i.e. how likely they are to use it to mobilise volunteers. It also suggests that Twitter is more commonly used by the most politically engaged.

Using Internet tools for party political reasons at least once a week is not just a significant predictor of whether a person reported using social media to mobilise volunteers. It is also a significant predictor of whether a person reported using email to mobilise volunteers. The beta coefficient of .58 for 'use of Internet tools for party political reasons' shows that if a respondent reported using Internet tools at least once a week for party political reasons then the log-odds that they have used email to mobilise volunteers increases by .58, after controlling for all other factors in the model. This variable has been a significant predictor of using Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise other volunteers, suggesting that there are some common predictors of using each Internet tool in such a way.

It could be suggested that using Internet tools for 'party political reasons' involves either communicating with others or engaging with information, perhaps by consuming or creating it. It is frequently argued that there is a link between using Internet tools to engage in information seeking and subsequently voting (see for instance, Kaid, 2002; Valentino et al. 2004). Similarly, social movements scholars including Pasek et al. (2009) and Gil de Zúñigaha et al. (2012) have found that

politically knowledgeable, interpersonally trusting and civically engaged individuals share particular patterns of Internet use and that this includes an interest in using Internet tools to seek information. Some scholars have also found evidence of a link between communicating within online communities, such as Facebook or a 'chat room' and civic engagement (see for example, Shah et al. 2001a and 2001b; Zhao, 2006). Therefore, it is not particularly surprising that the data indicates that using Internet tools for party political purposes is a predictor of whether Liberal Democrat members have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers.

Despite this, as previously explained within Chapter Two, many of the studies within this area have shown very inconsistent results, with findings varying widely. This is because of a lack of methodological consistency where some researchers have used short diary studies (such as, Kraut et al. 1998; Nie and Erbing, 2000) and others have used longitudinal studies (such as, Kiesler et al. 2002). Similarly, some have assessed the Internet-as-a-whole (Baym et al. 2004; Katz and Rice, 2002; Norris, 2004; Shah et al. 2004) and others have broken it down into smaller parts by differentiating between social networking sites and email (see for instance, Nielsen, 2011; Pasek et al. 2009). As a result, these findings contribute to knowledge within this field by illustrating that there is a link between using the Internet-as-a-whole for party political purposes and subsequently using Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers within the context of a short study.

Use of Internet tools for party political reasons is also a significant predictor of whether a person reported joining the party online. The beta coefficient of 1.07 for 'use of Internet tools for party political reasons at least once a week' shows that if a respondent reports using Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week then the log-odds that they joined online increases by 1.07, after controlling for all other factors in the model. A study by Ward et al. (2002) also found that this is a significant predictor of online joining behaviour. As previously mentioned, this variable is also a significant predictor of the likelihood that a person has used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers, hence suggesting that there is a

link between using Internet tools for political purposes and participation more generally.

Using Facebook, Twitter and email daily is a significant predictor of using Facebook to mobilise volunteers. The beta coefficient of .98 for this variable shows that if a respondent reported using Facebook, Twitter and email at least once a day then the log-odds that they reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers increases by .98, after controlling for all other factors in the model. Using Facebook, Twitter and email daily is the strongest predictor of whether a person has used Twitter to mobilise volunteers. The beta coefficient of 1.38 for this variable shows that if a respondent reported using Facebook, Twitter and email at least once a day then the log-odds that they have used Twitter to mobilise volunteers increases by 1.38, after controlling for all other factors in the model. However, this variable is not a significant predictor of using email to mobilise volunteers. This suggests that those that use social media, particularly Twitter, to mobilise volunteers may be part of a small group of technologically literate political activists that use a wide range of Internet tools for political purposes, whereas, many of those that use email are less likely to use a wide range of Internet tools.

Again this indicates that there are differences between those that use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to mobilise volunteers and those that use email to do so. Facebook and Twitter are most likely to be used as a volunteer mobilisation tool by people that already use a wide range of Internet tools on a daily basis, whereas email is more likely to be used as a volunteer mobilisation tool by those that frequently engage with the party offline.

Using Facebook, Twitter and email daily is not a significant predictor of joining the Liberal Democrats online.

5.4.4 Levels of Offline Activity that may predict use of Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers, use of Internet Tools to Increase Membership and Joining Online

This section of the chapter discusses whether engaging with the Liberal Democrats offline on at least a weekly basis may predict whether a respondent has used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers, in addition to whether it may predict if a respondent has reported joining the party online. Engaging with the party offline may include activities such as attending a meeting, delivering leaflets, door canvassing, telephone canvassing or any related activities. 70.2% of the sample reported engaging with the party offline at least once a week.

Engaging with the party offline once a week is not a significant predictor of using Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Neither is it a significant predictor of whether a person joined the party online. However, it is a significant predictor of whether a person has used email to mobilise volunteers. The beta coefficient of .44 for this variable indicates that if a respondent reported engaging with the Liberal Democrats offline at least once a week then the log-odds that they have used email to mobilise volunteers increases by .44, after controlling for all other factors in the model. This suggests that those that carry out 'traditional' constituency campaigning on a regular basis are more likely to use email to mobilise volunteers than either Facebook or Twitter, thus suggesting that it is much more deeply entrenched in campaign mobilisation practices than 'emerging' tools, such as Facebook or Twitter. This fits with Nielsen's (2011) observations of US congressional elections. It also suggests that those people that are the most politically active on social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, may not be the most active offline.

5.4.5 Levels of Political Experience that may predict use of Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers, use of Internet Tools to Increase Membership and Joining Online

The following section of this chapter discusses whether respondents that report that they have held externally elected office, such as that of a councillor, are less likely to use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers than those that do not report that they have held externally elected public office. It also considers whether those that have held externally elected public office are less likely to use Internet tools to increase membership, than those that do not report that they have held externally elected public office.

Gibson (2013) argues that those that engage in political activism online or join a political party online are more likely to form part of a floating support base, instead of becoming long-term members of a political party. She found that they are less likely to attend meetings, fulfill more official roles on local branch executive committees or hold externally elected positions. Research from Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012) also indicates that those that engage online in this manner are most likely to form part of a more transient base of support. This suggests that Liberal Democrat members that are particularly politically active online may also be less likely to become externally elected officials or have held externally elected public office in the past. The following section of this chapter tests whether this is the case.

The results of the binary logistic regression show that having held an externally elected public office is a significant predictor of whether a person reported that they have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers (see Table 5.1). This variable has an associated beta coefficient of $-.48$, which indicates that if a respondent reported that they have been an externally elected public official, such as a councillor, then the log-odds that they have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers decreases by $.48$, after controlling for all other factors in the model. Furthermore, having held an externally elected public office is a predictor of whether a respondent reported that they have used Facebook to increase membership (see Table 5.2). This variable

has an associated beta coefficient of $-.66$, which indicates that if a respondent reported that they have been an externally elected public official, such as councillor, then the log-odds that they have used Facebook to increase membership decreases by $.66$, after controlling for all other factors in the model. This suggests that those that are most politically active on Facebook are not necessarily the most politically experienced or the most active offline and fits with the aforementioned suggestions of Gibson (2013), Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012).

Despite this, having held externally elected public office is not a significant predictor of whether a person has used Twitter or email to mobilise volunteers, nor was it a significant predictor of whether a person has used Twitter or email to increase membership, thus indicating that there are differences in the characteristics of users of individual Internet tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, as suggested in expectation four. These findings fit with the results of some early research using non-representative samples of Facebook and MySpace users, which found that the users of different social networking sites have different characteristics (Bode, 2012; Ellison et al. 2008; Hargittai, 2007; Nyland et al. 2007; Valenzuela et al. 2008).

It is important to gain an insight into whether those that are most politically active online are also the most politically active offline. This is because an increase in supporters joining the party online or signing up online may have a number of important implications for the Liberal Democrats and political parties in general. For instance, it may result in a shortage of candidates for local and national elections, as those that engage online are less likely to run for externally elected public office. Similarly, these people are less likely to attend local branch meetings; a lack of attendance at local branch meetings may ultimately mean that there are not enough volunteers to run ward or constituency level election campaigns. This may have a significant impact upon the functioning of a democracy, in addition to the success of the party's campaign. As a result, the Liberal Democrats and political parties in general should continue to use a variety of communication channels to promote the benefits of traditional political involvement, instead of relying only upon Internet tools.

This analysis suggests that elected officials are less likely than non-elected officials to use Facebook to mobilise volunteers and increase membership of the party. It also indicates that elected officials and non-elected officials are equally likely to use Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This fits with the aforementioned suggestion that each individual Internet tool is likely to appeal to different types of people (see for instance, Treré, 2011; Xenos and Foot, 2008). It also broadly aligns with findings from Chadwick (2007), Gibson (2013) and Karpf (2012) that show that those that are particularly politically active online, for instance, by joining a political party online or volunteering to help a campaign via the Internet, are more likely to form part of a more transient, floating support base and hence, are less likely to hold externally elected office, such as that of a local councillor.

5.5 Discussion of Expectations

5.5.1 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Four can be Confirmed?

Expectation four suggests that the variables that predict whether a person has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers will be different to the variables that predict whether a person has used Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Similarly, these will be different to the variables that predict whether a person has used email to mobilise volunteers.

The evidence suggests that expectation four can be confirmed. This is because there are differences in the predictors of using Facebook, Twitter and email to both mobilise volunteers and increase membership, which shows that people with certain characteristics prefer to use certain Internet tools for certain activities. For instance, whether or not a respondent has held externally elected public office is a predictor of whether they have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers, but it is not a predictor of whether they have used Twitter or email to mobilise volunteers. Similarly, youth is a predictor of using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers, but not a predictor of using email to mobilise volunteers. It fits with the findings of studies by Nielsen (2011), Pasek et al. (2009), Tedesco (2007), Treré (2011) and Xenos and Foot (2008). Tedesco (2007) and Xenos and Foot (2008) who reported that younger

people are more likely than older people to use social networking sites to engage in political communication. This thesis builds upon these findings by indicating that younger people are more likely than older people to use social networking sites to mobilise volunteers.

As a result, it could be suggested that future studies would benefit from studying different Internet tools separately, so that a more contextualised model of Internet effects can be developed, as proposed by Pasek et al. (2009) and Nielsen (2011), amongst others.

5.5.2 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Five can be Confirmed?

Expectation five suggests that age is a predictor of using each of the three Internet tools to mobilise volunteers. As shown in the discussion of the results earlier in this chapter, whether a respondent is a youth member is a significant predictor of whether a person has used Facebook or Twitter to mobilise other volunteers. However, it is not a predictor of whether a person has used email to mobilise other volunteers. Similarly, whether or not a person is aged over 60 years is a predictor of whether a person has used Facebook or Twitter to mobilise other volunteers, but it is not a predictor of whether a person has used email to mobilise other volunteers. Therefore, this expectation cannot be confirmed.

Chapter Four shows that a much higher proportion of Liberal Democrat members have used email to mobilise volunteers, than have used either Facebook or Twitter. It shows that 50.9% of survey respondents reported using email, compared to the 9.8% that reported using Twitter and the 21.5% that reported using Facebook. This fits with Nielsen's (2011) assertion that email is a 'mundane' tool that is far more deeply entrenched in campaign mobilising practices than social networking sites and is used by a far greater number of people. Facebook and Twitter are far newer forms of technology than email and as young people are often the early adopters of new technologies (see for instance, Jones, 2002; McMillan and Morrison, 2006; Rogers, 1962), the fact that age is not a significant predictor of whether a person has

used mass email to mobilise volunteers may be a reflection of the normalised or 'mundane' role that email plays in campaign mobilisation techniques and society more generally.

It could be argued that when social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter become as commonplace or 'mundane' as email, age will cease to be a predictor of whether a Liberal Democrat member has used either of these sites to mobilise other volunteers. In order to establish whether this is the case, it would be necessary to carry out a longitudinal study that is focused upon identifying whether age remains a predictor of using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise other volunteers.

5.5.3 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Six can be Confirmed?

Expectation six suggests that educational background is likely to be a predictor of the using Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers. However, the evidence generated does not suggest that this expectation can be confirmed. As shown earlier in this chapter, education, i.e. whether a person holds a first degree, is not a significant predictor of whether or not a person has used Facebook or Twitter to mobilise other volunteers and increase membership. However, it is a predictor of whether a person has used email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. Whilst this suggests that it is not possible to accept this expectation, it does provide additional evidence in support of expectation four. As previously discussed, this expectation suggests that the variables that predict whether a person has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers will be different to the variables that predict whether a person has used Twitter to mobilise volunteers. It also suggests that these will also be different to the variables that predict whether a person has used email to mobilise volunteers.

A range of studies have shown that there is a link between educational attainment and propensity to use Internet tools to share, create and discuss political information online (Katz and Rice, 2002; Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2008; Wang, 2007). For instance, in a study from over a decade ago, Katz and Rice (2002) found

that individuals educated to first degree level are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes and also to engage in offline political activity, such as attending meetings or canvassing voters on behalf of a political party. However, this project differs from Katz and Rice's work because this project is not focused upon the Internet-as-a-whole. Instead this project breaks the Internet down into much smaller categories and this meant that education was only a predictor of using one Internet tool to either mobilise volunteers or increase membership.

5.5.4 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Seven can be Confirmed?

Expectation seven suggests that respondents that have held externally elected public office, such as that of a councillor, are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, than those that have not held externally elected public office. The results of the binary logistic regression show that having held externally elected public office is only a predictor of whether a person reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. These people are less likely to have reported using Facebook to mobilise volunteers and increase membership.

This fits with suggestion that those that are particularly politically active online may be less likely to fulfill more official roles, such as running for an externally elected public office and may also be less likely to become involved with other activities, such as attending meetings, running traditional constituency or ward level campaigns and holding internal roles on local branch executive committees (Gibson, 2013). Those that are most politically active online may be more likely to form part of a floating support base (Chadwick, 2007; Karpf, 2012).

However, the results of the binary logistic regression indicate that having held externally elected public office is not a predictor of whether or not a respondent has used Twitter or email to mobilise volunteers or increase membership. This means that the evidence suggests that expectation seven cannot be confirmed.

If the expectation were revised so that it suggests that, “Externally elected public officials, such as councillors, are less likely to use Facebook to mobilise volunteers and increase membership than those that are not externally elected public officials,” then it could have been confirmed. These findings provide further evidence of the importance of differentiating between Internet tools, as recommended by Nielsen (2011), Pasek et al. (2009), Tedesco (2007), Xenos and Foot (2008) and others.

These findings are important because they fit with the notion that the adoption of Internet tools amongst political parties is gradually leading them towards a model of operation that relies upon a structure that appears to be very decentralised and provides a floating support base, as opposed to a more permanent group of long-term supporters (Chadwick, 2007; Karpf; Gibson, 2013). As explained within previous sections, this has a number of important implications for political parties.

5.5.5 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Eight can be Confirmed?

Expectation eight suggests age is likely to be a predictor of whether or not a person reported joining the party online. Whether a person is aged under 30 years and hence able to join the youth wing of the party, is a significant predictor of whether a person has joined the party online. It is actually the strongest predictor of joining online. The results show that younger people are far more likely to join the party online. Similarly, whether a person is aged over 60 years is also a significant predictor of whether a person has joined the party online. Those aged over 60 years are less likely to join the party online.

As a result, there is enough evidence to accept this expectation. This fits with the findings of a study by Ward et al. (2002). Their study found that age is a significant predictor of whether an individual will join the Liberal Democrats online.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter identified a number of the variables that may predict whether Liberal Democrat activists have used Facebook, Twitter and email to both mobilise other volunteers and increase party membership. It also identified a number of the variables that may predict whether respondents joined the party online.

In doing so, it explored whether the variables that predict whether a person has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers are different to the variables that predict whether a person has used Twitter to mobilise volunteers. It also explored whether these are different to the variables that predict whether a person has used email to mobilise volunteers. It discussed whether age and education are predictors of using each of the three Internet tools to mobilise volunteers. It also explored whether externally elected public officials, such as councillors, are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, than those that are not externally elected public officials. Finally, it discussed whether those that join the party online are likely to be younger or older.

The results of the binary logistic regression show that the predictors of whether a person has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers are different to the predictors of whether a person has used Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Similarly, these are both different to the predictors of whether a person had used email to mobilise volunteers. This means that the evidence suggests that expectation four can be confirmed and fits with a range of studies, including Nielsen (2011) who suggests that 'emerging' tools, such as Facebook and Twitter are more likely to be used by certain groups of people, including younger people. Studies by Bode (2012) Ellison et al. (2008) and Hargittai (2007), amongst others, offer similar findings.

Related to this, age is a significant predictor of whether respondents report using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Those aged under 30 years are more likely to have used these tools to mobilise other volunteers, but despite this, whether or not a respondent is aged under 30 years is not a significant predictor of whether

they reported using email to mobilise volunteers. Correspondingly, those aged over 60 years are less likely to have used Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers, but whether or not a person is aged over 60 years is not a significant predictor of whether they reported using email to mobilise volunteers. This means that the evidence generated suggests that expectation five was not met.

Despite this, the binary logistic regression results show that whether or not a respondent is aged under 30 years is one of the strongest predictors of whether they have used Facebook and Twitter to both mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This has a number of important implications for political parties, such as the Liberal Democrats. For instance, it suggests that the Liberal Democrats need younger people, as they are more likely to use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. If the party has fewer younger supporters, then it may struggle to share its message online. Furthermore, younger people have traditionally been underrepresented within the Liberal Democrats and politics in general (see for instance, Russell, 2005). Therefore, if younger people share these messages with one another, then this may enhance the diversity of the party.

The results show that level of education, i.e. whether a person holds a first degree, is only a significant predictor of whether a respondent reported using email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. Those with a first degree are more likely to have used email to mobilise other volunteers. However, education is not a significant predictor of whether a person reported using Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers or increase membership. This means that expectation six was not met. The fact that neither expectation five or six was met, further underlines the importance of differentiating between each Internet tool.

Expectation seven was met; externally elected public officials, such as councillors, are less likely to have used Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This fits with the findings of a study by Gibson (2013), who found that the people that volunteered to help the party as a result of the use of Internet tools are much less likely to pay an annual membership fee, attend meetings, fulfill more

official roles on local branch executive committees or hold externally elected positions. It also fits with work by Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012) that shows that individuals mobilised online are more likely to form part of a transient support base that campaigns on single issues of importance to them, instead of becoming involved with party politics over a longer term period, for instance, by running for or holding public office. These findings are important because they suggest that political parties, such as the Liberal Democrats, should not rely solely upon online communication to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, as these people are more likely to only remain involved over the short term. Instead, they should use a combination of online and offline communication, so that they can mobilise supporters over the long and short term.

Finally, the evidence shows that respondents that joined the Liberal Democrats online are younger. Whether or not a respondent is under the age of thirty years is actually the strongest predictor of whether they reported joining the party online. Similarly, whether or not a person is aged over 60 years is a predictor of whether they reported joining the party online. As a result, expectation eight was met.

Overall, these results suggest that younger people are most likely to use newer, 'emerging' Internet tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. They are also more likely to join the party online. Correspondingly, older people are less likely to use these Internet tools for the aforementioned purposes and are also less likely to join the party online. Younger and older people are equally likely to use older, 'mundane' Internet tools, such as email. As a result, it seems logical to suggest that Internet tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, will only become commonplace and regularly used within the Liberal Democrats' local election campaigns over an extended period of time. When this occurs, it is likely that age will eventually cease to be a predictor of whether a person has used Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. It will also cease to be a predictor of whether a person has joined online. This is most likely to be because people that have used Internet tools when they were young will continue to use them as they become older.

Chapter Six: To what extent do Liberal Democrat Members and Supporters Perceive that Internet Tools are a useful means of Mobilising Volunteers?

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters show that a small, but substantial number of Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and engage in a number of related activities. The findings build upon a range of studies that explore how party supporters use both the Internet-as-a-whole and individual Internet tools to engage in political participation in general, (see for example, Norris and Curtice, 2004; Pasek et al., 2009; Ward et al., 2002; Zhao, 2006) in addition to how they use it to mobilise volunteers within the context of an election campaign (see for instance, Nielsen, 2011). However, there appears to be little or no work that specifically focuses upon the extent to which grassroots members and supporters perceive that Internet tools provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers. It could be argued that these people have the greatest level of involvement with local level campaigning. This is especially true within the Liberal Democrats, as the party is particularly reliant upon the work of enthusiastic volunteers to run its local level campaigns (see for instance, Denver et al. 2004; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). Therefore, it is particularly useful to study the experiences and perspectives of this group because they can offer a more detailed and rich insight into the extent to which Internet tools may provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers at a local level.

Related to this, there appear to be very few studies that seek to account for the extent to which members of political parties perceive that the Internet-as-a-whole or Internet tools may have encouraged them to join. One study from over ten years ago indicated that 31% of Liberal Democrat members felt that Internet tools had played an important role in encouraging them to join (Ward et al. 2002). This suggests that it is likely that a proportion of Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools can provide a useful means of increasing membership and involvement with the party. However, it is important to remember that Internet tools have become

far more widely used within the last ten years or so. There is also an increased number of Internet tools, including Facebook and Twitter. As a result, it seems reasonable to suggest that the proportion of Liberal Democrat members that feel this way may have changed. This chapter seeks to test whether this is the case.

The data discussed in Chapter Four of this study shows that email is more widely used as a tool for mobilising volunteers than either Facebook or Twitter. Nielsen (2011) came to a similar conclusion based upon observations and studies of US election campaigns. Related to this, a number of scholars have found that email users are more politically engaged and likely to interact with their contacts offline than website or chat users (see for instance, Shah et al. 2001; Zhao, 2006). Other studies have shown that those that are politically engaged and interact with people that they know in 'real life' whilst using Internet tools are more likely to volunteer to help a political campaign or community group (Johnson and Kaye, 2003; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Pasek et al., 2006; Eveland Jr. et al., 2004). However, there appear to be no studies that specifically assess whether grassroots members and supporters perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. It would be useful to know whether this is the case because it may provide an insight into the behaviours associated with mobilising volunteers, meaning that political parties can target those that perceive that these tools are most useful, in order to encourage them to mobilise others, thus impacting upon the intensity of the local election campaign. Therefore, this chapter investigates this area further.

As previously explained, it has commonly been argued that many of the existing studies of the impact of Internet tools upon political participation are limited because they focus upon the Internet-as-a-whole instead of breaking it down into smaller, more meaningful categories (see for instance, Ellison et al., 2007; Nielsen, 2011; Pasek et al. 2009; Shah et al., 2006; Zhao, 2006). A number of studies have suggested that use of different Internet tools for political communication may lead to different mobilisation outcomes (Ellison et al., 2007; Gibson, 2013; Shah et al., 2006; Zhao, 2006). One study found that different 'cultures' are formed on different social networking sites and that this impacts upon both social capital and levels of

volunteering (Pasek et al. 2009). However, none of this work has focused specifically upon volunteer mobilisation within the context of a UK political party. Therefore, this chapter seeks to begin to illustrate whether Liberal Democrat members perceive whether some Internet tools are more useful means of mobilising volunteers than others. It also uncovers a number of the predictors of these perceptions.

The remainder of this chapter has been arranged into a number of sections that critically discuss Liberal Democrat members' perceptions of the usefulness of Facebook, Twitter and email as tools for mobilising volunteers and increasing party membership, in addition to the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Section 6.2 outlines the expectations that are tested within this chapter. Section 6.3 describes the variables that are used within this chapter. Section 6.4 considers the role that Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools played in encouraging them to join the party. It also explores the extent to which they believe that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

Section 6.5 focuses upon the predictors of the extent to which respondents perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. It also considers the predictors of the extent to which respondents perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. More specifically, Section 6.5.1 uses ordered logit to uncover the predictors of the extent to which a respondent perceives that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. Similarly, Section 6.5.2 uses this form of analysis to uncover the predictors of whether Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. The results of this analysis are discussed in detail in Section 6.5.3 – Section 6.5.10. These sections also discuss whether there is enough evidence to support the argument that there are differences in the perception of the usefulness of email and social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, as a tool for mobilising volunteers and increasing membership, within a Liberal Democrat context. It also considers

whether Liberal Democrat members perceive some social networking sites to be more useful than others, as a tool for mobilising volunteers. Section 6.6 offers a critical discussion of whether expectations nine to eleven have been met. Finally, Section 6.7 concludes the chapter.

6.2 Expectations

This Chapter seeks to test the following expectations:

Expectation Nine: the majority of members are likely to perceive that Internet tools did not play an important role in encouraging them to join the party, however, regular Internet users are more likely to perceive that Internet tools encouraged them to join.

Expectation Ten: the majority of members are likely to perceive that email is a more useful means of mobilising volunteers, than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Expectation Eleven: the majority of members are likely to perceive that there are differences in the usefulness of different types of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as tools for mobilising volunteers.

6.3 Variables used within this Chapter

This chapter is focused around a number of variables. Expectation nine, ten and eleven are tested using a range of predictor variables. These include whether the respondent can be classified as a 'youth member', i.e. is under 30 years of age, whether they are over 60 years of age, whether they are male or female, whether they are educated to first degree level, whether they report that they hold a professional occupation, whether they respondent engages with the Liberal Democrats offline at least once a week, whether the respondent uses Facebook,

Twitter and email daily, whether the respondent uses Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week and whether the respondent reports that they have held externally elected office, for instance that of a councillor.

The outcome variable used to test expectation nine is the extent to which the respondent perceives that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. The outcome variables used to test expectation ten are the extent to which the respondent perceives that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, the extent to which the respondent perceives that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers and the extent to which the respondent perceives that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. Finally, the outcome variables used to test expectation eleven were the extent to which the respondent perceives that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers and the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers.

6.4 Liberal Democrat Members' Perceptions of the Link between Internet Tools, Mobilising Volunteers and Party Membership

This section of the chapter seeks to explore Liberal Democrat members' perceptions of the role that Internet tools played in encouraging them to join the party and also, the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

6.4.1 Liberal Democrat Members' Perceptions of the Role that Internet Tools Played in Encouraging them to Join the Party

This section describes and discusses Liberal Democrat members' perceptions of the role that Internet tools played in encouraging them to join the party. It is useful to know the extent to which members perceive that Internet tools played a role in encouraging them to join the Liberal Democrats. If the data suggests that Internet tools played a significant role, then the party may choose to invest more of its resources in providing online information or opportunities for interactivity aimed at

those that may join. Similarly, evidence has also suggested that those that join online or as a result of Internet activity are less likely to remain involved with the party in the long-term, hold internally or externally elected positions, attend meetings and engage in a range of other activity (see for instance, Chadwick, 2007; Karpf, 2012; Gibson, 2013). If the data suggests that a high proportion of members perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join, then this may be associated with a more general decline in the aforementioned 'traditional' political activity and mean that the Liberal Democrats could struggle to encourage these people to help run constituency or ward level campaigns over the long term.

As previously explained, a study by Ward et al. (2002) found that 31% of online Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools had led them to join the party. Whilst Internet tools have become both more widely and more frequently used in the time since the Ward et al. study, the vast majority of studies have indicated that the widespread usage of Internet tools has not led to any significant increase in the mobilisation of volunteers (Bartle, 2005; Gibson et al., 2003; Gibson and Ward, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2005). There are a number of key differences between members and volunteers; for example, not all members are volunteers and not all volunteers are members. This is exemplified by the rise of the 'cheque book' member (Katz and Crotty, 2006; Scarrow, 2007); an individual that pays their yearly subscription and is happy to receive information from the party, but takes little or no interest in participating in daily party life. Nonetheless, membership is a form of political participation and a result, it seems logical to predict that much like is the case with volunteering, Internet tools have led to little or no significant increase in the number of members joining political parties, including the Liberal Democrats and that it has remained the case that the majority of Liberal Democrat members do not perceive that Internet tools played an important factor in encouraging them to join the party.

Respondents to the survey were asked how important a role they felt that Internet tools had played in encouraging them to join the party. Only 13.2% of respondents

reported that they perceive that it had played an important role, whereas 75.9% feel that it was not important. Furthermore, 24.1% reported that it had played neither an important nor an unimportant role. This suggests that there has not been a vast increase in the perceived importance of Internet tools as a means of encouraging people to join the Liberal Democrats within the last 13 years. In fact, there may have been a decline.

The data from the participant observation and the semi-structured interviews suggests that most people know of someone that has signed up after engaging with a specific online campaign, but that very few people reported that this was why they had personally signed up. A number of respondents to the semi-structured interviews and two people from the participant observation said that they had attended a number of Liberal Democrat events, including a 'pie and politics' evening and had joined the party, as a result of 'enjoying' these events. Another said that he had joined the party after attending a 38 Degrees event that had been advertised on Facebook. He met a number of Liberal Democrat activists and was thus, motivated to join. This fits with Norris and Curtice's (2008) suggestion that traditional measures of the impact or perceived impact of Internet tools, such as this measure, are limited because they only take into account one-step flows of information. The results of the qualitative data suggested that a two-step flow of information may be occurring whereby online messages from political parties are transmitted to a small group of highly engaged volunteers, who in turn use this information to mobilise others.

6.4.2 Liberal Democrat Members' Perceptions of the Usefulness of Internet Tools for Mobilising Volunteers

This section discusses Liberal Democrat members' perceptions of the usefulness of Facebook, Twitter and email as tools for mobilising volunteers. It also aims to uncover whether members perceive that some Internet tools provide more useful means of mobilising volunteers than others, for instance, whether email is perceived to be more useful than Facebook or Twitter, as suggested by Nielsen (2011).

Chapter Four shows that grassroots members are more likely to have used email, as opposed to Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers. The survey indicates that 50.6% of respondents have used email, compared to the 21.5% that reported using Facebook and 9.8% that reported using Twitter.

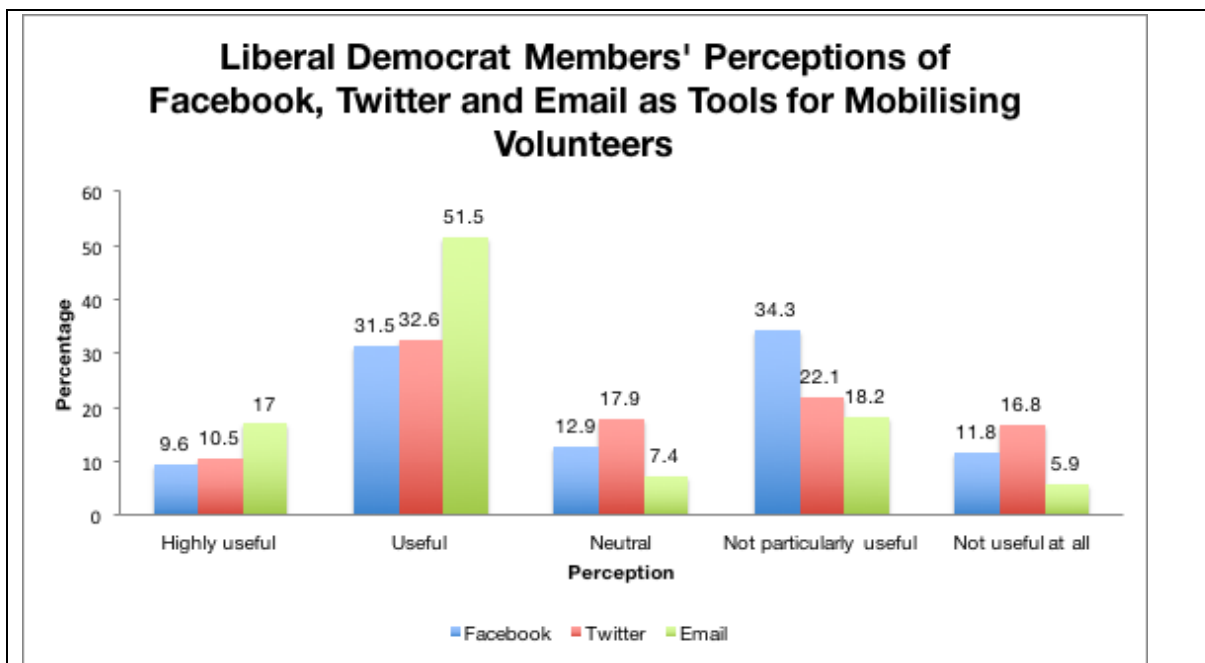
However, the branch of the Liberal Democrats that were studied in the participant observation only occasionally used email as a tool for mobilising volunteers. One person was responsible for emailing local members and supporters. He explained that he generally emailed members and supporters four times a year to inform them of local news, although he believed that a young, former employee within the local branch may send additional emails to members at 'busier' times of year. When asked why he did not email more frequently, he said that the majority of members of the local branch executive committee felt that emailing more often may be perceived as being 'too much' and overload supporters with unnecessary information, thus causing them an inconvenience. This fits with the findings of research by Chadwick and Stanyer (2010), Norris and Curtice (2008), Ward and Lusoli (2005) and others that suggested that political parties have been very cautious when integrating the Internet into their political campaigns toolbox.

Despite these findings, the vast majority of those interviewed that had reported using email felt that it had been of at least some use at mobilising volunteers. Most respondents said that they felt that it provided a cheap and relatively fast means of informing people of planned local campaign activity, particularly in comparison to more 'traditional' methods such as posting a newsletter or note. Despite this, a number of respondents detailed limitations to the use of this technology. An election agent from the north of England echoed the views of many respondents when he said, "Whilst email is useful, we tend to have a problem getting people to open the messages, even long-term party activists. During the last election campaign, I sent an email to over 300 of our supporters to let them know about an action weekend that had been planned. However, when I checked Mail Chimp (a type of software that allows users to send emails to up to 10 000 respondents at a time and is commonly used by Liberal Democrat volunteers and staff) I found that only 2 people

had followed the link in order to get more information.” He later said that he felt that if he had the time to telephone each of these people, then he believed that he would have received a greater level of interest, thus indicating that some Liberal Democrat activists feel that interpersonal communication can be more useful at times.

The following chart shows the extent to which survey respondents perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers:

Figure 6.1: The Extent to which Liberal Democrat Members Perceive that Facebook, Twitter and Email are Useful Tools for Mobilising Volunteers



NOTE: The question relating to the extent to which respondents perceive Facebook to be a useful tool for mobilising volunteers received 178 responses.

The question relating to the extent to which respondents perceive Twitter to be a useful tool for mobilising volunteers received 95 responses.

The question relating to the extent to which respondents perceive email to be a useful tool for mobilising volunteers received 324 responses.

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

The chart clearly shows that email is perceived to be the most useful Internet tool for mobilising volunteers with 17% believing it to be ‘highly useful’ and 51.5% believing it to be ‘useful’. Facebook and Twitter are perceived to be less useful. 9.6% of

respondents perceive Facebook to be 'highly useful' and 31.5% perceive it to be useful. There is very little difference between perceptions in the usefulness of Facebook and Twitter. The chart shows that 10.5% of respondents perceive Twitter to be 'very useful' and 32.9% perceive it to be 'useful', thus indicating that Liberal Democrat members may perceive that Twitter is a slightly more useful tool for mobilising volunteers than Facebook.

As discussed within Chapter Four, the Regional Campaigns Officer from the participant observation explained that he only occasionally used Facebook to mobilise volunteers, as he believed that people were more likely to attend if they had been approached either on a face-to-face basis or by telephone. This fits with results from empirical studies by Denver et al. (2004) and Denver and Hands (2000) that found that people are more likely to participate in a range of political activities if they are asked on a face-to-face basis, as opposed to via a leaflet or letter that has been pushed through their letterbox. The key difference in this study is that the unit of study is not a leaflet or letter. Instead it is another mass form of communication, Facebook.

The previous graph shows that opinion is divided on whether Facebook can provide a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. It also shows that 41.1% of respondents feel that Facebook is either 'highly useful' or 'useful' at doing so, whilst 46.1% of respondents feel that Facebook is either 'not useful at all' or 'not particularly useful' at mobilising volunteers.

Respondents to the semi-structured interviews also held mixed views concerning the use of Facebook to mobilise volunteers. One member who was also employed as a Constituency Organiser by the party remarked, "Every time I organise an action day or campaigning event, we make sure that we create an event on Facebook... I'm not sure why we do it, as hardly anyone replies to it. We only get people responding when we telephone or maybe email." A number of active volunteers commented that they always advertised their event using the social networking site and the opportunity that it presented potential volunteers, despite the fact that they felt that it

often yielded little in the way of results. One ex-councillor said, “I think that we keep using Facebook to promote opportunities to help out because it’s free and doesn’t take very long to set up. That way, if we do occasionally get one or two extra helpers, we’re pleased.”

A number of respondents stated that the campaign staff at Liberal Democrat HQ encourage all local parties to upload their planned campaign activity to Facebook, so this often provides a motivation to do so, even when the local branch is less convinced about the mobilisation potential of the technology. When asked why the organisation’s centralised campaign staff ask them to do so, a Council Leader explained that it ‘helped headquarters to see where events were occurring’. These comments fit with the scholarly literature that suggests that Internet tools provide a means for grassroots activists to increase their involvement by creating a campaign, whilst still allowing the centralised campaign staff of a political party to retain overall strategic control (see for instance, Chadwick, 2007; Gibson, 2013, Karpf, 2012; Nielsen, 2009).

Despite this, two of the respondents to the interviews who were both members of the Liberal Democrat Society at their local University felt that Facebook provides an invaluable means of encouraging people to attend campaign events or social events. The Chair of the Liberal Democrat Society at a large University in London said, “When I was new it made me feel less nervous about attending campaigning events. I could see who was coming along and find out more about what was happening before attending. If it hadn’t been for the ability to discuss this stuff on Facebook, then I probably wouldn’t have gotten so involved... It breaks down the barriers to participation.” This offers a degree of anecdotal evidence to support the academic literature that has suggested that Internet tools may have led to a slight increase in participation amongst young people (Hindman, 2005; Lusoli and Ward, 2004; Norris et al., 2005; Weinstein, 2004).

Twitter is the newest of the three technologies under study within this chapter and as indicated within Chapter Four is also less widely used for both party political

purposes and non-party political purposes by Liberal Democrat members, than Facebook and email. Chapter Four also provides evidence that Twitter is the least popular online means of mobilising volunteers. Only 9.8% of respondents to the survey have used Twitter to mobilise volunteers, compared to the 50.6% of respondents that reported using email and the 21.5% that reported using Facebook.

None of the council candidates or the Campaigns Officer from the participant observation had used Twitter for political purposes. Therefore, they felt that they were not able to comment upon how useful the technology may be to those looking to mobilise volunteers. The Campaigns Officer explained that he hoped to use Twitter to mobilise volunteers at some point in the future, but was currently unable to as a result of constraints upon his time. He felt that he may be ‘missing out’ by not attempting to use the technology to mobilise volunteers.

Despite the positive comments from the Campaigns Officer, the vast majority of respondents to the semi-structured interviews that had reported using Twitter to mobilise volunteers said that they did not find that it was overly useful. The majority felt that it had mobilised three or four volunteers during an election campaign, but does not live up to the hype that they had read about in popular newspapers or on political blogs. A female councillor from a Liberal Democrat run council commented, “I started using Twitter because I’d read lots of media reports about how it was going to reinvigorate politics and vastly increase participation. I was always a bit doubtful, so wasn’t surprised when only a few people responded to my Twitter appeals.” This fits with suggestions that the mobilisation potential of Internet tools has been over-estimated (see for instance, Gibson, 2010).

Fewer than half, 43.1%, of those that reported using Twitter to mobilise volunteers feel that it is either ‘useful’ or ‘highly useful’. Similarly, 38.9% of respondents feel that it is either ‘not particularly useful’ or ‘not useful at all’ thus suggesting that although opinion is split in relation to the usefulness of Twitter as a tool for mobilising volunteers, a slightly higher proportion of party members believe it to be of some use.

This can be compared to party members' views on the usefulness of Facebook as a tool for mobilising volunteers. The survey data shows that 41.1% of those that have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers reported that they perceive it to be either a 'useful' or 'highly useful' means of doing so, thus suggesting that Twitter is perceived to be more useful amongst those that have actually reported using the social networking site. Correspondingly, 46.1% of those that have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers reported that they perceive it to be either 'not particularly useful' or 'not useful at all' compared to just 38.9% of those that have used Twitter. This suggests that the lower proportion of respondents that have used Twitter to mobilise volunteers compared to Facebook cannot be explained by a general perception amongst users that Twitter is less useful than Facebook at doing so.

Nonetheless, for the purposes of comparison, Liberal Democrat members were also asked to report upon the extent to which they perceive Twitter is a useful tool for various forms of political activity. The survey data shows that 70.4% of respondents reported that they believe that Twitter is either a 'highly useful' or 'useful' tool for continuous campaigning. This compares to 58.5% of respondents that reported that they believed that Twitter was either a 'highly useful' or 'useful' tool for campaigning for votes during the short campaign and indicates that Liberal Democrat members perceive that Twitter is more useful as an awareness-raising tool than a tool for mobilising volunteers.

In summary, email is perceived to be the most useful tool for mobilising volunteers with 68.5% of respondents reporting that they perceive it to be either 'highly useful' or 'useful'. Twitter is perceived to be slightly more useful than Facebook as a means of mobilising volunteers. The survey shows that 43.1% of respondents reported that they perceive Twitter to be either 'highly useful' or 'useful' and 41.1% of respondents reported that they perceive Facebook to be either 'highly useful' or 'useful'.

6.5 Predictors of Liberal Democrat Members' Perceptions of the Extent to which Internet Tools played an Important Role in encouraging them to Join the Party and Predictors of their Perceptions of the Usefulness of Internet Tools for Mobilising Volunteers

The following section of this chapter uses ordered logit to identify a number of the variables that may predict whether respondents perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. It also uses this approach to uncover a number of the variables that may predict with whether respondents perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the Liberal Democrats.

6.5.1 Variables associated with the Extent to which Respondents Perceive that Internet tools played an Important Role in Encouraging them to Join the Party

This section of the chapter uses ordered logit to identify a number of the variables that may predict the extent to which respondents perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

The model contains a number of outcome variables. These include the extent to which respondents perceive that Internet tools encouraged them to join the party, the extent to which respondents perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, the extent to which respondents perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers and the extent to which respondents perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers.

The predictor variables within the model include whether a person is aged over 60 years of age, whether they are a youth member, i.e. aged under 30 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold a first degree, whether they believe that they have a professional occupation, whether they engage with the Liberal Democrats offline at least once a week, whether they use Facebook, Twitter and

email daily, whether they use Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week and whether they have been an externally elected public official, such as a councillor.

In terms of assessing the extent to which respondents perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party, the full model containing all of the predictors was statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 535) = 122.94$, $p < .001$, indicating that the model was able to distinguish the extent to which respondents perceived that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

The following table shows the variables that may predict the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

Table 6.1 Predictors of the Extent to which Respondents Perceive that Internet Tools played an Important Role in Encouraging them to Join the Liberal Democrats

	Extent to which respondent perceives that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party
Aged over 60 years	-.695** (.298)
Aged under 30 years, i.e. 'youth' member	1.127*** (.294)
Educated to at least first degree level	-.34 (.257)
Female	.295 (.248)
Holds a professional occupation	-.082 (.231)
Participates offline at least once a week	-.374 (.274)
Uses Facebook, Twitter and email daily	.434 (.275)
Uses Internet for party political reasons at least once a week	.867*** (.331)
Has held externally elected public office	-1.375*** (.244)
Constant 1	.980** (.354)
Constant 2	1.939*** (.368)
Chi-Squared	122.939***
N	535

Note: cell entries represent binary logistic regression coefficients with standard error in brackets

*p < 0.10

**p < 0.05

***p < 0.01

The reference category for 'age' is 31 – 60 years

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

Each of the predictor variables shown within this table is discussed in more detail in the following sections of this chapter. Section 6.5.3 discusses variables related to social demographic characteristics, Section 6.5.4 discusses variables related to

levels of Internet usage, Section 6.5.5 discusses the variable related to levels of offline activity and Section 6.5.6 discusses the variable related to political experience.

6.5.2 Variables associated with the Extent to which Respondents Perceive that Internet Tools are a Useful Means of Mobilising Volunteers

This section of the chapter uses ordered logit to provide an insight into which variables may predict with the extent to which respondents perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

The outcome variables within the models include the extent to which respondents perceive that Internet tools encouraged them to join the party, the extent to which they perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers and the extent to which they perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers.

Each of the models contains a number of predictor variables. These include whether a person is aged over 60 years of age, whether they are a youth member, i.e. aged under 30 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold a first degree, whether they believe that they have a professional occupation, whether they engage with the Liberal Democrats offline at least once a week, whether they use Facebook, Twitter and email daily, whether they use Internet tools for party political purposes at least once a week and whether they have been an externally elected public official, such as a councillor.

In terms of assessing the extent to which respondents perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, the full model containing all of the predictor variables is statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 160) = 472, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish the extent to which a person perceives that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers.

In terms of assessing the extent to which respondents perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, the full model containing all of the predictor variables is statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 84) = 28.9, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish the extent to which a person perceives that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers.

In terms of assessing the extent to which respondents perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, the full model containing all of the predictor variables is statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 289) = 446.01, p < .001$, indicating that the model is able to distinguish the extent to which a person perceives that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers.

The following table shows the variables that may predict the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

Table 6.2 Predictors of the Extent to which Respondents Perceive that Facebook, Twitter and Email are Useful Tools for Mobilising Volunteers

	Extent to which respondent perceives that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers	Extent to which respondent perceives that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers	Extent to which respondent perceives that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers
Aged over 60 years	.570 (.448)	-.045 (.649)	-.259 (.26)
Aged under 30 years, i.e. 'youth' member	1.331*** (.389)	.918* (.517)	.193 (.367)
Educated to at least first degree level	.599* (.331)	-.977** (.469)	.254 (.247)
Female	1.273*** (.365)	1.166** (.512)	.722** (.26)
Holds a professional occupation	.336 (.314)	1.159** (.454)	-.226 (.238)
Participates offline at least once a week	.883** (.407)	1.247** (.593)	.395 (.304)
Uses Facebook, Twitter and email daily	.456 (.338)	.915* (.472)	.794** (.318)
Uses Internet for party political reasons at least once a week	.7 (.528)	.546 (.954)	.412 (.329)
Has held externally elected public office	-.313 (.323)	.508 (.451)	-.1 (.25)
Constant 1	-.31 (.556)	1.210 (1.043)	-2.301*** (.437)
Constant 2	5.241*** (.690)	6.232*** (1.227)	2.521*** (.407)
Chi-Squared	46.1***	32.642***	28.898**
N	160	84	289

Note: cell entries represent binary logistic regression coefficients with standard error in brackets

*p < 0.10

**p < 0.05

***p < 0.01

The reference category for 'age' is 31 – 60 years

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat Members (2011)

Each of the predictor variables shown within this table is discussed in more detail in the following sections of this chapter. Section 6.4.3 discusses variables related to social demographic characteristics, Section 6.4.4 discusses variables related to

levels of Internet usage, Section 6.4.5 discusses the variable related to levels of offline activity and Section 6.4.6 discusses the variable related to political experience.

6.5.3 Social Demographic Characteristics associated with Perceiving that Facebook, Twitter and Email are useful Tools for Mobilising Volunteers and Perceiving that Internet Tools played an Important Role in Encouraging Respondents to Join the Party

This section of the chapter discusses the social demographic variables that may predict whether respondents perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers, in addition to whether respondents perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. As a brief reminder, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are using tools for mobilising volunteers by selecting one option on a five-point scale. They could select 'not at all useful', 'not particularly useful', 'neither useful nor not useful', 'useful' or 'very useful'. They were also asked to rate the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools had played an important role in encouraging them to join the party by selecting one option on a three-point scale. Respondents could select 'not useful', 'neither useful nor not useful' and 'useful'.

The predictor variables discussed within this section include whether a respondent is aged over 60 years, whether they can be classified as a youth member, i.e. whether they are under the age of 30 years, whether they are male or female, whether they hold a first degree and whether they believe that they hold a professional occupation. As discussed in detail within Chapter Four, 38.6% of the sample is aged over 60 years, 13.7% is aged under 30 years, 69.9% is male and 30.1% is female, 27.5% holds at least a first degree and 46.1% holds a professional occupation.

The results of the ordered logit show that whether or not a respondent is aged under 30 years is the strongest predictor of the extent to which they perceive that

Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.33, which indicates that if a respondent is aged under 30 years, then the log-odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by 1.33 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. This fits with the predictions of Boogers and Voerman (2002) and Lusoli (2005) who found that Internet tools are most likely to encourage participation amongst younger members of the electorate.

Whether or not a respondent is aged under 30 years is also a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of .918, which indicates that if a respondent is aged under 30 years, then the log-odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by .918 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. However, whether or not a respondent is aged under 30 years is not a significant predictor of the extent to which respondents perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers.

This fits with the findings of Nielsen's (2011) ethnographic research which indicates that young and old alike are equally likely to perceive that email can be a useful tool for mobilising supporters within the context of US congressional elections. The findings of this thesis offer a degree of evidence that Nielsen's (2011) findings hold true within the context of a local election campaign for a third party in England. In addition to this, Nielsen (2011) suggested that email differs from tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, because email is frequently used by a much wider section of society. He explained that many people are familiar with email and this is one of the reasons why it is so integrated within US political campaigns. As a result, it seems logical to suggest that if Facebook and Twitter become as frequently used by a relatively wide section of society, then whether or not a person is aged under the age

of 30 years will cease to be a predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Facebook and Twitter are useful tools for mobilising volunteers, in the same way that it is not a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers.

This finding is important to the Liberal Democrats because the data clearly suggests that many younger people are enthusiastic about using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers, as shown in Chapter Five. They are also more likely to use Facebook and Twitter, in addition to perceiving that they are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. If this is to change as a result of familiarity with the technology, as may have been the case with email, then the party will no longer benefit from a high proportion of younger people choosing to use Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers or engage in related activities. This may mean that a lower proportion of those that volunteer to campaign or join the party are younger and impact upon the levels of diversity within the party.

Whether or not a person is under the age of 30 years is also a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.13, which indicates that if a respondent is under the age of 30 years, then the log-odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party increases by 1.13 when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. Ward et al. (2002) found that youth was a significant predictor of whether or not a respondent perceived that the Internet-as-a-whole had encouraged them to join the Liberal Democrats, thus suggesting that there is a relatively longstanding link between youth and perceiving that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging a respondent to join. As a result, it could be argued that the Liberal Democrats would benefit from running online campaigns targeted at younger people in order to encourage them to join. They may also wish to encourage younger members to share messages or discuss joining the Liberal Democrats online in the

hope that other younger people will also be encouraged to join the party. Similarly, local branches of the party may benefit from creating online materials that appeal to younger supporters.

The data within this chapter shows that younger people are most likely to perceive that Internet tools are useful means of mobilising volunteers. It also shows that they are most likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Similarly, the data in Chapter Five shows that younger people are more likely to use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and are also more likely to join the Liberal Democrats online. This suggests that younger people may be helping to lead the adoption of new technologies within the Liberal Democrat's mobilisation efforts. Chapter Five shows that it is not externally elected public officials or older people that are leading such efforts, as they are less likely to have either joined online or used Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This finding is important to the Liberal Democrats because it suggests that if the numbers of young people within the party fall, then so will the party's ability to share messages across Internet tools, particularly Facebook and Twitter. It may also mean that the party is unable to communicate with the sections of the electorate that spend more of their time using Internet tools than using more 'traditional' media, such as newspapers, radio or television.

Whether or not a respondent is over the age of 60 years is a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. The variable has an associated beta coefficient of $-.695$, which indicates that if a respondent is over the age of 60 years, then the log-odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party decreases by $.695$ when compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 31 years and 60 years, and after controlling for all other factors in the model. A study by Ward et al. (2002) also found that older Liberal Democrat members were less likely to have joined the party online. As a result, it could be

suggested that little has changed, in terms of the extent to which older people are choosing to join the party online.

Despite this, whether or not a respondent is over the age of 60 years is not a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Facebook, Twitter or email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. Chapter Five shows that those over the age of 60 years are less likely to use Internet tools, but it could be argued that the findings within this section of Chapter Six indicate that they do not choose not to use them because they perceive them to be less effective.

Whether or not a respondent holds a first degree is not a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Neither is it a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. However, it is a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that both Facebook and Twitter are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. In terms of the extent to which a respondent perceives that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, whether or not a respondent holds a first degree has an associated beta coefficient of .599, which indicates that if a respondent holds a first degree, then the log-odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by .599, after controlling for all other factors in the model. In contrast, when the extent to which a respondent perceives that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers is the dependent variable, whether or not a person holds a first degree has an associated beta coefficient of -.98, which indicates that if a respondent holds a first degree, then the log-odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers decreases by .98.

These findings fit with the findings of Chapter Five, which indicate that the variables that predict whether a respondent has used Facebook to mobilise volunteers are different to the variables that indicate whether a respondent has used Twitter to

mobilise volunteers. This suggests that people with different characteristics are more likely to use certain Internet tools, as initially noted within the wider context of political participation by scholars, such as Pasek et al. (2009), Tedesco (2007) and Xenos and Foot (2008). These findings are important to the Liberal Democrats because they indicate that there is a need to use a range of Internet tools in order to reach as many of their supporters as possible because some Internet tools appeal to certain groups better than others.

Whether or not a respondent reported that they hold a professional occupation is a significant predictor of the the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. The variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.16, which indicates that if a respondent holds a professional occupation, then the log-odds that there will be a category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by 1.16.

Despite this, whether or not a respondent reported that they hold a professional occupation is not a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Facebook or email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. Neither is it a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

Whether or not a respondent is female is a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. However, it is not a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. In terms of the extent to which respondents perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, whether or not a respondent is female has an associated beta coefficient of 1.27, which indicates that if a respondent is female than the log-odds that there will be a category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by 1.27. In terms of the extent to which respondents perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, whether or not a respondent is female had

an associated beta coefficient of 1.17, which indicates that if a respondent is female then the log-odds that there will be a category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by 1.17. In terms of the extent to which respondents perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, whether or not a respondent is female has an associated beta coefficient of .72, which indicates that if a respondent is female then the log-odds that there will be a category increase in the extent to which they perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increased by .72.

This is interesting because a number of studies (see for instance, Albrecht, 2006; Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2009 and Robertson et al. 2010) have found that women are often less likely to use Internet tools for political purposes. Furthermore, Chapter Five shows that women are no more or less likely than men to use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers or increase party membership. Therefore, it could be suggested that it is not a perception that Facebook, Twitter and email are not useful for mobilising volunteers and increasing membership that is preventing more women from using these tools for this purpose. It may be the case that using certain Internet tools for political purposes is less likely to appeal to women, yet they feel that it does appeal to others and may encourage volunteer mobilisation and increased party membership.

6.5.4 Levels of Internet Usage associated with Perceiving that Facebook, Twitter and Email are Useful Tools for Mobilising Volunteers and Perceiving that Internet Tools played an Important Role in Encouraging Respondents to Join the Party

This section of the chapter discusses the variables linked to levels of Internet usage that may predict the extent to which a respondent perceives that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers, in addition to the variables that may predict whether a respondent feels that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. The variables discussed within this section include whether a respondent reported using Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week and whether they reported using Facebook, Twitter and email for

any purpose at least once a day. As explained in Chapter Four, 70.2% of the sample reported using Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week and 18.7% of the sample reported using Facebook, Twitter and email for any purpose at least once a day.

The results of the ordered logit show that using Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week is not a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. However, they do show that using Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week is a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. The variable has an associated beta coefficient of .867, which indicates that if a respondent uses Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week then the log-odds that there will be a category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party increases by .867. Ward et al. (2002) found that respondents that perceive that the Internet-as-a-whole led them to join the Liberal Democrats were 'heavy' Internet users. They also found that those that perceived that the Internet-as-a-whole led them to join the party were far more likely to score highly on a range of online 'political connectedness' factors, such as visiting the Liberal Democrat website regularly, news sites regularly, their local MP's website regularly and so on.

These findings suggest that the party would benefit from targeting supporters that use Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week in order to encourage them to join the party, instead of targeting those that do not already use Internet tools for political purposes. They may choose to do so by paying for targeted online advertisements or encouraging local branches of the party to update their social media pages and engage in targeted emailing. During the participant observation, a local election candidate explained that the party's database provides the facility for users to indicate whether voters and supporters have Facebook, Twitter and email accounts, in addition to the facility to store their contact details for

these accounts. This indicates that the party has the technological tools to carry out such a task.

Whether or not a respondent reported using Facebook, Twitter and email for any purpose at least once a day is a significant predictor of whether they perceive that Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of .92, which indicates that if a respondent uses Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week, then the log-odds that there will be a category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by .92. Similarly, whether or not a respondent reported using Facebook, Twitter and email for any purpose at least once a day has an associated beta coefficient of .79, which indicates that if a respondent uses Internet tools for political purposes at least once a week, then the log-odds that there will be a category increase in the extent to which they perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by .79. However, this is not a significant predictor of whether a respondent perceives that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, which offers additional evidence that some people perceive certain Internet tools to be more useful than others for mobilising volunteers and fits with Nielsen's (2011) ethnographic findings from the US. It also fits with studies that relate to participation in general. For instance, Pasek et al. (2009) and Xenos and Foot (2008) found evidence that some social networking sites are more likely to encourage respondents to participate in politics in general than others. Furthermore, whether or not a respondent reported using Facebook, Twitter and email for any purpose at least once a day is not a significant predictor of whether Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

6.5.5 Levels of Offline Activity associated with Perceiving that Facebook, Twitter and Email are useful Tools for Mobilising Volunteers and Perceiving that Internet Tools played an Important Role in Encouraging Respondents to Join the Party

This section of the chapter discusses whether engaging with the Liberal Democrats offline on at least a weekly basis may predict the extent to which a respondent perceives that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers, in addition to whether it may predict the extent to which a respondent perceives that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

Engaging with the party offline may include activities such as attending a meeting, delivering leaflets, door canvassing, telephone canvassing or any related activities. As shown in Chapter Four, 70.2% of the sample reported engaging with the party offline at least once a week.

The results of the ordered logit indicate that whether or not a respondent engages with the party offline on a weekly basis is not a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Neither is it a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, thus suggesting that those that volunteer once a week and those that do not are equally likely to perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. However, whether or not a respondent engages with the party offline on a weekly basis is a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of .883, which indicates that if a respondent engages with the party offline at least once a week, then the log-odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by .883, after controlling for all other factors in the model.

Similarly, whether or not a respondent engages with the party offline on a weekly basis is also a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that

Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of 1.25, which indicates that if a respondent engages with the party on an offline basis at least once a week, then the log odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers increases by 1.25. This shows that those that engage offline on a weekly basis are more likely to perceive that Facebook and Twitter are useful tools for mobilising volunteers than those that do not engage offline on a weekly basis.

As explained throughout this thesis, there appears to be very little academic literature that explores the extent to which grassroots activists perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers and how their perceptions compare to the views of others. Therefore, it has been difficult to compare the findings within Section 6.4 to the findings of relevant research. It could be argued that the results of this analysis are not unexpected because the Liberal Democrats have always claimed to be at the forefront of UK politics in terms of the understanding and adoption of Internet based technologies (see for example, Liberal Democrat Voice, 2013; Ward et al. 2002). The party has been very keen to make use of Internet tools in order to facilitate intra-party communication and was the first British party to make use of a subscription-based intranet, as noted by Ward et al. (2003). As a result, it makes sense that members that are most involved with the party offline on a weekly basis are most likely to perceive that Facebook and Twitter can be useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

It is useful for the Liberal Democrats to be aware that those that engage with the party offline at least once a week are more likely to perceive that Facebook and Twitter are useful tools for mobilising volunteers because it means that party headquarters may choose to utilise grassroots campaigners' positive perceptions of these tools, so that the party can increase its volunteer base. For instance, they may choose to provide Facebook or Twitter templates for those that engage with the party offline on a weekly basis, so that they can promote volunteer mobilisation. They may also choose to use party conferences or meetings to encourage these

people to join in with national Liberal Democrat campaigns that promote volunteer mobilisation, such as national 'action days' where each ward or constituency is encouraged to find as many volunteers as possible to engage in campaign activity on a pre-planned day. As explained by a campaign volunteer within the participant observation, members and supporters are encouraged to use Facebook and Twitter to promote the action day in advance and also to share photos of campaign activity throughout the day.

6.5.6 Levels of Political Experience associated with Perceiving that Facebook, Twitter and Email are useful Tools for Mobilising Volunteers and Perceiving that Internet Tools played an Important Role in Encouraging Respondents to Join the Party

The following section of this chapter discusses whether having experience of holding an externally elected public office, such as that of a councillor, may predict the extent to which a respondent perceives that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers, in addition to whether it may predict the extent to which a respondent perceives that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

Whether or not a respondent has held externally elected public office is not a significant predictor of the extent to which they perceive that Facebook, Twitter or email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. However, it is a significant predictor of the extent to which a respondent perceives that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. This variable has an associated beta coefficient of -1.38, which indicates that if a respondent has held an externally elected public office, then the log-odds that there will be a one category increase in the extent to which they perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party decreases by 1.38.

This finding indicates that those with more political experience, such as councillors, are less likely to feel that Internet tools encouraged them to join the party. It fits with

research by scholars, including Chadwick (2007), Karpf (2012) and Gibson (2013). Gibson (2013) who found that the people that are most politically active online are more likely to form part of a floating support base, instead of becoming long term members of the party. For example, they may become involved in a single issue campaign that they feel particularly passionate about and as a result, knock on doors, distribute literature and engage in related campaign activity. This provides a useful source of local level labour in the short-term. However, Gibson (2013) noted that these people are less likely to attend meetings, fulfil more official roles on local branch executive committees or hold externally elected public office over the long term. Studies from Chadwick (2007) and Karpf (2012) offer similar findings within both the US and UK. This pattern appears to be reflected in the data that is used within this thesis, as externally elected public officials are less likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the Liberal Democrats.

This is important to the Liberal Democrats because it means that if the party focuses the majority of its volunteer mobilisation or membership recruitment efforts online, then it is likely that fewer of these members will remain involved over a longer term period. As a result, the party may struggle to find candidates for elections, particularly local elections that require a greater number of candidates than national or European elections. Similarly, the Liberal Democrats rely heavily upon volunteers to run the party (see for example, Denver et al. 2004; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). A lack of long term membership involvement may also mean that the party struggles to find members to fulfil these roles, for instance, on local branch executive committees or regional committees, amongst others. Furthermore, if the party is unable to field enough candidates at elections, then this may have negative implications for the health of democracy, as some voters are unable to vote for their party of choice.

6.6 Discussion of Expectations

6.6.1 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Nine can be Confirmed?

Expectation nine suggests that the majority of members are likely to perceive that Internet tools did not play an important role in encouraging them to join the party, but that regular Internet users are more likely to perceive that Internet tools encouraged them to join. Section 6.3.1 showed that only 13.2% of respondents perceive that Internet tools had played an important role in encouraging them to join the party, compared to 75.9% of respondents that perceive that it did not play an important role.

Similarly, the results of the ordered logit show that members that use Facebook, Twitter and email daily are more likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Younger members are also more likely to feel this way. Those that have held externally elected public office are least likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Furthermore, those aged under 60 years are less likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party, whereas those that use the Internet for party political purposes at least once a week are more likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. This offers a clear indication that certain groups of people are more likely than others to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. It also fits with the findings of studies by Boogers and Voerman (2002) and Lusoli (2005) that show that Internet tools may lead to an increase in participation only amongst certain groups of people, such as younger people.

Ward et al. (2002) found that 31% of respondents to their survey perceive that the Internet-as-a-whole led them to join the Liberal Democrats, whereas the data generated for this thesis suggested that only 13.2% of respondents perceive that Internet tools had played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

This indicates that Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools have been having at least a small effect on membership levels within the party. However, it also shows that the cyber-optimists, such as Bonchek (1995), Mann (1995), McGookin (1995), Phillips (1995) and Rheingeld (1993), do not appear to have seen their optimistic predictions about the potential impact of Internet tools fulfilled, as there has not been an increase in the percentage of Liberal Democrats perceiving that Internet tools encouraging them to join the party for quite some time. Instead, there appears to have been a decrease.

6.6.2 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Ten can be Confirmed?

Expectation ten suggests that the majority of members are likely to perceive that email is a more useful means of mobilising volunteers than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. The data suggests that this expectation can be confirmed. The results of the survey show that 68.5% of respondents perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, whereas only 41.1% of respondents perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers and only 43.1% of respondents perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. This fits with the findings of a study by Zhao (2006) that show that email users are more politically engaged than users of other Internet tools.

Additionally, the results of the ordered logit show that younger people, i.e. those under the age of 30 years, are more likely to find Facebook and Twitter useful for mobilising volunteers. Similarly, those that use three Internet tools on a daily basis are more likely to perceive that Twitter and email are useful for mobilising volunteers than those that do not use three Internet tools on a daily basis. This offers evidence that it is likely that members with certain characteristics are likely to find certain tools more useful. It fits with the results of a study by Nielsen (2011) who found that certain tools, such as email, are better integrated into US congressional election campaigns, whereas other tools, such as Facebook and Twitter are less well integrated and are more commonly used by younger people.

6.6.3 Does the Evidence suggest that Expectation Eleven can be Confirmed?

Expectation eleven suggests that the majority of members are likely to perceive that there are differences in the usefulness of different types of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as tools for mobilising volunteers. The data generated from the survey indicates that 41.6% of respondents perceive that Facebook is either 'highly useful' or 'useful' as a tool for mobilising volunteers. This compares to 43.1% of respondents that perceive that Twitter is either 'highly useful' or 'useful' as a tool for mobilising volunteers. These are very small differences and as a result, it is not possible to confirm this expectation.

An ethnographic study Nielsen (2011) found that there are significant differences in the extent to which Internet tools are used within US congressional election campaigns. Pasek et al. (2009) also found that different social-networking sites or tools induce different cultures and therefore, may be more useful for certain tasks. Therefore, it seemed logical to suggest that the majority of members are likely to perceive that there are differences in the usefulness of different types of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as tools for mobilising volunteers.

However, the survey data used within this thesis did not indicate that there are any large differences in the extent to which Liberal Democrats perceive that Facebook and Twitter are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. This does not mean that there are no differences in the perceived usefulness of other social media tools, such as LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube and so on. It simply shows that the survey indicated that Liberal Democrat members do not perceive that there is a large difference in the usefulness of Facebook and Twitter as tools for mobilising volunteers.

Chapter Five shows that Facebook is more widely used than Twitter as a tool for mobilising volunteers. Only 9.8% of respondents to the survey have used Twitter to mobilise volunteers, compared to the 21.5% that reported using Facebook. This suggests that the lower proportion of respondents that have used Twitter to mobilise

volunteers compared to Facebook cannot be explained by a general perception amongst users that Twitter is less useful than Facebook at doing so.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter uncovered the extent to which Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Facebook, Twitter and email are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. It also identified a number of the predictors of these perceptions. Furthermore, it identified a number of the predictors of the extent to which Liberal Democrat members perceived that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

In doing so, it explored the expectation that the majority of Liberal Democrat members are likely to perceive that Internet tools did not play an important role in encouraging them to join the party, but that regular Internet users are more likely to perceive that Internet tools encouraged them to join. It also considered the expectation that the majority of members are likely to perceive that email is a more useful means of mobilising volunteers, than social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, but that members with certain characteristics are more likely to find certain tools more useful. Finally, it explored whether the majority of members are likely to perceive that there are differences in the usefulness of different types of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as tools for mobilising volunteers.

The results of the survey show that only 13.2% of respondents perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party, thus indicating that expectation nine could be confirmed. Those that reported using Facebook, Twitter and email daily are more likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join. Respondents aged under 30 years are more likely to perceive that this was the case and respondents over 60 years are far less likely to perceive that this is the case, thus indicating that as the age of respondents increases, then the likelihood that they will perceive that Internet

tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the Liberal Democrats will decrease. Externally elected public officials are also less likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

It is important that externally elected public officials are less likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. This is because it fits with the findings of a wider body of research that indicates that the people that are most politically active online are more likely to form part of a floating support base, instead of becoming long term members of the party (see for example, Chadwick, 2007; Gibson, 2013; Karpf, 2012). As a result, they are less likely to attend meetings, fulfil more official roles on local branch executive committees or hold externally elected public office over the long term. This pattern appears to be reflected in the data that is used within this thesis, as externally elected public officials are less likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the Liberal Democrats. It suggests that it is important that the Liberal Democrats use a combination of online and offline volunteer mobilisation and membership recruitment techniques, so that the party can meet both its short term needs for labour within the local campaign and its longer term needs for internal office holders, candidates for externally elected positions, people to co-ordinate local campaigns and so on.

Additionally, the results of the survey show that 68.5% of respondents perceive that email is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers, whereas only 41.1% of respondents perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers and only 43.1% of respondents perceive that Twitter is a useful tool for mobilising volunteers. This indicates that expectation ten which suggests that email is perceived to be more useful for mobilising volunteers than Facebook or Twitter can be confirmed. The results of the ordered logit showed that those aged under 30 years are more likely to perceive that Facebook and Twitter are useful tools for mobilising volunteers.

These findings are important to the Liberal Democrats because they indicate that younger people, i.e. those under the age of 30 years, are most enthusiastic about

using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Similarly, Chapter Five confirms that younger people are most likely to use Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This emphasises the importance of younger supporters to the Liberal Democrats. It suggests that the party would find it much harder to reach online audiences without this enthusiastic group of Facebook and Twitter users.

Finally, the data shows that the majority of members do not perceive that there are differences in the usefulness of different types of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as tools for mobilising volunteers. The data generated from the survey indicates that 41.6% of respondents perceive that Facebook is either 'highly useful' or 'useful' as a tool for mobilising volunteers. This compares to 43.1% of respondents that perceive that Twitter is either 'highly useful' or 'useful' as a tool for mobilising volunteers. These are very small differences and as a result, it is not possible to confirm this expectation.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The main aim of this thesis was to explore the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation within the context of the English local election campaign. This study used a survey of Liberal Democrat members, alongside a participant observation and series of semi-structured interviews to address some of the unanswered questions derived from existing research. These questions included how Liberal Democrat members use Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, the predictors of using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and finally, the extent to which grassroots Liberal Democrat members perceive that Internet tools provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers.

The majority of existing studies have focused upon the link between the Internet-as-a-whole and political participation in general. Very few have focused upon individual Internet tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and email. Similarly, few have considered the mobilisation of volunteers in any level of detail. Therefore, existing datasets did not focus specifically upon these areas. As a result, it was necessary to generate new data. The use of a survey meant that it was possible to capture wider trends across the party and the use of qualitative techniques, such as a participant observation and series of semi-structured interviews meant that it was possible to build up a more detailed, nuanced picture of what may be happening.

Chapter Four compared the demographic characteristics of those that responded to this survey to those from a number of studies of politically engaged people, including two surveys of Liberal Democrat members and two surveys of council candidates (Rallings and Thrasher, 2010; Rallings and Thrasher, 2011; Seyd and Whiteley, 2004; Ward et al. 2002). Fortunately, this comparison showed that the respondents to the survey carried out for the purposes of this thesis were very similar in terms of age, sex, level of education, employment status and occupational status to the respondents of other surveys of political elites, thus providing an indication that any

inferences made from this survey may be used to provide an insight into the experiences and perceptions of a range of politically engaged individuals, but particularly those within the Liberal Democrats.

The demographic data from the survey was compared to a range of data relating to the population in general (for example, ONS, 2012, UK Census 2011a). As expected, it showed that Liberal Democrat members hold very different characteristics to members of the general population. This is not unexpected and is known to be the case within most UK political parties (see for instance, Cutts, 2004; Seyd and Whiteley, 2004). The data shows that women and younger people are underrepresented within the party, as is acknowledged by Russell and Fieldhouse (2005) and a range of others. It also shows that Liberal Democrat members are likely to be highly educated and perceive that they hold a professional occupation.

7.2 How Grassroots Liberal Democrat Members use Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers

Past research provides a useful insight into the link between the Internet-as-a- whole and political participation in general. It shows that the use of Internet tools is not associated with a large increase or decrease in electoral participation, as initially predicted by many, including Grossman (1995), Kraut et al. (1998), Negroponte (1995) and Nie and Erbing (2000). Despite this, many of the existing studies within this field have not focused upon individual Internet tools. Instead, they have focused upon the Internet-as-a-whole, which means that they may be limited because certain Internet tools are more likely to lead to different mobilisation outcomes (see for instance, Pasek et al. 2009) and also because certain Internet tools may be more deeply integrated into campaign mobilisation practices than others (see for instance, Nielsen, 2011). Furthermore, the majority have focused upon participation in general, instead of volunteer mobilisation. As a result, this study has investigated the link between three Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, and volunteer mobilisation.

Furthermore, existing studies have tended to focus upon mainstream political parties and not third parties. They have also mainly focused upon national elections instead of local elections. In addition to this, they have not generally focused upon the experiences of grassroots members and supporters. It could be argued that this group of people has the greatest level of engagement with local campaigning and can provide a detailed, rich insight into how Internet tools are used to mobilise volunteers within local elections. Therefore, this project focused upon how Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, are used within the Liberal Democrats' local election campaigning.

The results show that a greater number of members have used email, than Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Email is also more widely used for other activities, such as increasing membership, campaigning for votes in a local election campaign, continuous campaigning and fundraising. Facebook is the second most commonly used for each of these tasks and Twitter is least commonly used. This suggests that it is sensible to study individual Internet tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, instead of focussing upon the Internet-as-a-whole. This fits with research from Pasek et al. (2009) who suggested that some social media tools are more likely to encourage political participation than others. It also fits with findings from an ethnographic study of US congressional elections that suggest that email is more deeply integrated into volunteer mobilisation practices (Nielsen, 2011).

This finding is important because it provides evidence that email may also be more deeply integrated than Facebook and Twitter into volunteer mobilisation practices within English local election campaigns. This indicates that Nielsen's (2011) findings may be applicable outside of US congressional election campaigns. Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (1996) Scammell (1998), Swanson and Mancini (1996) and many others acknowledged that election campaign techniques are often 'exported' from the US, so it may be the case that this is the case with Internet tools. It also indicates that this trend may be observed within the mobilisation practices of a 'third party' with fewer resources than the two main political parties within the electoral system.

The data indicates that Liberal Democrat party members use email for non-party political purposes far more frequently than they use Facebook and Twitter. This adds weight to the argument that Facebook and Twitter are 'emerging' tools, as suggested by Nielsen (2011). As a result, it could be argued that future studies will be increasingly less likely to detect this difference in use because familiarity with social networking sites will increase over time and they will most likely become more integrated into volunteer mobilisation practices, as has been the case with email, which can be referred to as a 'mundane' tool, as a result of users' familiarity with the technology.

The findings also show that Liberal Democrat members are still more likely to join the party using an offline method than an online method. This was also the case within the Liberal Democrats in 2002, as illustrated by Ward et al. (2002). This finding is important because research has suggested that those that join a party online or volunteer as a result of online communication are less likely to remain involved with a party in the long term (Chadwick, 2007, Gibson, 2013 and Karpf, 2012). Instead, they are most likely to stay involved for one single issue campaign. This may be beneficial to the party in the short-term. However, these people are less likely to attend meetings, seek externally elected office or hold an internal position within the party, thus suggesting that if the Liberal Democrats were to focus most of their resources upon using online tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, then they may struggle to find people to run their local level election campaigns and also to field enough candidates in the long term.

7.3 Predictors of Using Facebook, Twitter and Email to Mobilise Volunteers

Chapter Five of this thesis identifies a number of the predictors of using Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers. This meant that it was possible to explore whether people with certain characteristics are more likely to use some Internet tools than others.

The results show that the variables that predict whether a respondent has used one Internet tool are not necessarily the same as the variables that predict whether they have used another. For example, youth, i.e. whether a respondent is aged under 30 years, is a significant predictor of whether they have used Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers, but it is not a predictor of whether they have used email to mobilise volunteers. Similarly, whether or not a person has held an externally elected public office is a predictor of whether they have used Facebook to mobilise volunteers, but it is not a predictor of whether they have used Twitter or email to mobilise volunteers.

The analysis shows that use of Internet tools for party political reasons at least once a week is a significant predictor of whether a respondent has used Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers, thus suggesting that those that use Internet tools for general political reasons are also more likely to use it to mobilise volunteers.

Whether or not a respondent is aged under 30 years and whether or not they are aged over 60 years is not a predictor of whether they have used email to mobilise volunteers, thus suggesting that email use transcends age groups. However, whether or not a person is aged under 30 years and whether or not a person is aged over 60 years are both significant predictors of having used Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Those aged under 30 years are more likely to have used Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers, whereas, those aged over 60 years are less likely to have used Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers.

This indicates that if the Liberal Democrats wish to mobilise younger volunteers or encourage younger people to join the party, then they may wish to target them via social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter because younger Liberal Democrat members have already shown a propensity to use these sites for volunteer mobilisation purposes. It also suggests that social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are 'emerging' tools, as they are newer and more likely to appeal to young people. It is likely that people will eventually become more familiar with Facebook and Twitter. This may mean that youth ceases to be a predictor of

whether a respondent has used Facebook or Twitter to mobilise volunteers and increase membership.

Whether or not a person is under the age of thirty is one of the strongest predictors of using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers. This is very significant because it suggests that if the party experiences a decline in the number of younger members then it is likely to struggle to disseminate its messages across social media platforms as much as it has previously, which may impact negatively upon the number of people that the party is able to communicate indirectly with. This fits with findings by Norris (2004), Norris and Curtice (2008), Shah and Scheufele (2006) and others who found that one of the key benefits of Internet tools lie with their potential for parties to communicate with the 'politically engaged', in order to encourage them to disseminate this information with friends, colleagues and neighbours or by encouraging them to volunteer to carry out offline activities, such as delivering leaflets or knocking on doors.

The survey results show that externally elected public officials, such as councillors, are less likely to use Facebook, Twitter and email to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. As previously mentioned, this fits with suggestions that people that are politically active online are often less likely to become involved in the day to day life of the party (Römmele, 2003; Schweitzer, 2005; Ward et al, 2003). It also provides further evidence to support Gibson's (2013) suggestion that people that join the Liberal Democrats online or volunteer as a result of the use of Internet tools are likely to have different characteristics to those that are mobilised via more 'traditional' offline methods. For instance, they are less likely to run for an externally elected public office. This has important implications for the Liberal Democrats and also the health of a democracy. It is also discussed in more detail in Section 7.5 of this Chapter.

In contrast to a number of previous studies that show that levels of education are linked to propensity to use Internet tools for political purposes, (see for instance, Katz et al. 2001, Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2008 and Wang, 2007),

whether or not a person holds a first degree is not a significant predictor of using Facebook, Twitter or email to mobilise volunteers. The qualitative data also suggests that this is the case, as people from a range of educational backgrounds reported using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers. It would be necessary to carry out further investigation to establish exactly why there is a difference between the results of this study and the aforementioned studies. However, it should be noted that each of the aforementioned studies was carried out over 7 years ago.

Therefore, it may be the case that as Internet access has become more widespread, the link between education and using Internet tools for political purposes, such as mobilising volunteers, has weakened.

7.4 The Extent to which Grassroots Liberal Democrat Members and Supporters Perceive that Internet Tools provide a Useful Means of Mobilising Volunteers

Grassroots members and volunteers can have a great deal of involvement in the local level campaigning of a political party. This is particularly true within the case of Liberal Democrats, as they are particularly reliant upon the work of local volunteers (see for example, Denver et al. 2005; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). Collectively, they spend a great deal of time delivering party political literature, door canvassing, telephone canvassing and engaging in related campaign activities. Therefore, it could be argued that it is useful to gain an insight into the extent to which this group of people perceives that Internet tools are a useful means of mobilising volunteers.

The data indicates that the majority of Liberal Democrat members do not perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Many of the respondents to the semi-structured interviews suggested that face-to-face communication with a party member or local politician had encouraged them to join the party. This is important to the party because it suggests that they should not rely heavily upon Internet tools for this purpose. Instead, they should continue to use a mixture of online and offline methods to increase party membership. The results of the ordered logit highlighted that people with certain characteristics are more likely than others to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging

them to join the party. For instance, respondents aged under 30 years are more likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party and respondents over 60 years are far less likely to perceive that this is the case, thus indicating that as the age of respondents increases, then the likelihood that they will perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the Liberal Democrats will decrease. Externally elected public officials are also less likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party.

It is particularly significant that externally elected public officials are less likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. This is because it fits with the findings of a number of related studies (see for example, Chadwick, 2007; Gibson, 2013; Karpf, 2012) that indicate that the people that are most politically active online are more likely to form part of a floating support base, instead of becoming long term members of the party. As a result, they are less likely to attend meetings, fulfil more official roles on local branch executive committees or hold externally elected public office over the long term. This pattern appears to be reflected in the data that is used within this thesis, as externally elected public officials are less likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the Liberal Democrats. It suggests that it is important that the Liberal Democrats use a combination of online and offline volunteer mobilisation and membership recruitment techniques, so that the party can meet both its short term needs for labour within the local campaign and its longer term needs for internal and external office holders, people to co-ordinate local campaigns and so on.

The survey data shows that respondents perceive that email is a more useful tool for mobilising volunteers than either Facebook or Twitter. Jackson (2007) found that email provided a useful means of mobilising volunteers within the context of the General Election campaigns of the Labour Party and Conservative Party. The findings of this project suggest that grassroots Liberal Democrat activists also perceive that email provides a useful means of mobilising volunteers within their

local election campaigns. It also supports the argument that analyses of the link between the Internet and mobilisation should break the Internet down into smaller categories, in order to build up a more detailed picture of this link.

The results of the ordered logit show that those aged under 30 years are more likely to perceive that Facebook and Twitter are useful tools for mobilising volunteers. These findings are important to the Liberal Democrats because they indicate that younger people, i.e. those under the age of 30 years, are most enthusiastic about using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Similarly, Chapter Five confirms that younger people are most likely to use Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This emphasises the importance of younger supporters to the Liberal Democrats. It suggests that the party would find it much harder to reach online audiences without this enthusiastic group of Facebook and Twitter users.

The data discussed in Chapter Six clearly shows that younger people are most likely to perceive that Internet tools are useful means of mobilising volunteers. It also shows that they are most likely to perceive that Internet tools played an important role in encouraging them to join the party. Similarly, the data discussed in Chapter Five clearly shows that younger people are more likely to use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and are also more likely to join the Liberal Democrats online. This suggests that younger people may be helping to lead the adoption of new technologies within the Liberal Democrat's mobilisation efforts. Chapter Five shows that it is not externally elected public officials or older people that are leading such efforts, as they are less likely to have either joined online or used Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This finding is important to the Liberal Democrats because it suggests that if the numbers of young people within the party fall, then so will the party's ability to share messages across Internet tools, particularly Facebook and Twitter. It may also mean that the party is unable to communicate with the sections of the electorate that spend more of their time using Internet tools than using more 'traditional' media, such as newspapers, radio or television.

Finally, even though the data shows that Facebook is more widely used than Twitter, it also shows that there is not a great deal of difference in the perceived usefulness of Facebook and Twitter as tools for mobilising volunteers. This suggests that it is not a widely held perception that Facebook is more useful than Twitter that is preventing more Liberal Democrat members from using Twitter to mobilise volunteers.

7.5 Practical Implications: The Use of Internet Tools to Mobilise Volunteers and Increase Membership

This research has a number of implications for practice, both in terms of the Liberal Democrats' online plans or strategies and also, their wider campaign activity and organisation. Firstly, the results show that different groups of people are more likely to use certain Internet tools. For instance, they show that younger people are more likely to use Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers, whereas older people are less likely to use Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers. Therefore, if the Liberal Democrats wish to encourage younger supporters to mobilise volunteers or increase membership, then they may wish to target them using Facebook or Twitter. It seems logical to suggest that targeting older people via Facebook and Twitter would be less beneficial to the party, as fewer older people use these tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. Similarly, the party may wish to target those that have joined online and encourage them to use social media to mobilise volunteers or increase membership amongst their existing networks.

As previously explained, the data shows that younger people are more likely than others to join the party online. Therefore, the Liberal Democrats may wish to build upon this propensity to use Internet tools to join the party and actively promote the online sign-up method when engaging with young supporters at events, on the doorstep and on the telephone. If the party wishes to use its limited resources to promote membership online, then it may be sensible to target younger people, given that they are more likely to sign-up in this way.

Similarly, the results show that the vast majority of people join the party offline and perceive that Internet tools did not play a very important role in encouraging them to join. As a result, it seems likely that any drive to increase membership is likely to take place offline. This also seems particularly sensible given that some scholars (see for instance, Chadwick, 2007; Karpf, 2012 and Gibson, 2013) have found that those that join the party online or volunteer as a result of online communication are less likely to remain involved with the party over the long term. If more people were to join online, then it is logical to suggest that the party would need to recruit more members, as people are more likely to fail to sustain their involvement.

The data indicates that email is the most widely used means of mobilising volunteers. Similarly, those that volunteer on an offline basis at least once a week are more likely to use email. Arguably, these grassroots volunteers are more involved in the campaign than their contemporaries and hold a range of experience of current political campaign techniques. This suggests that email is more deeply integrated within campaign practices than other Internet tools and therefore, it seems likely that in the near future the party will continue to focus the majority of its online mobilisation efforts within this area, instead of on emerging tools, such as Twitter or Facebook.

Finally, the data shows that externally elected public officials, such as councillors, are less likely to use all three Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, which fits with a more decentralised model of political campaigning. This means that those seeking election are more likely to rely upon a network of volunteers mobilised via a combination of Internet tools. A range of research has shown that these people hold different characteristics to those mobilised via 'traditional' offline methods. Those mobilised online are less likely to pay an annual membership fee, attend meetings, run for public office or volunteer for external roles. They are also less likely to remain involved over the long term. This means that if the party is to rely heavily upon Internet tools in order to recruit members, then they are more likely to struggle to find election candidates and volunteers to organise local election campaigns over the long term. If the party wishes to attempt to

counteract this trend, then they should also continue with offline, local level campaigning in the hope that those mobilised offline become more deeply involved and sustain this involvement over a longer period of time.

7.6 The Current Electoral Landscape and Liberal Democrat Members' use of Internet Tools

As previously explained, this thesis focused upon the experiences of Liberal Democrat members and supporters within local election campaigns. The most recent set of local elections coincided with the General Election in May 2015. The party performed poorly at the polls and received only 7.8% of the vote in the General Election, thus returning only 8 MPs to the House of Commons (Parliament, 2015), instead of the 57 MPs and the 23% that it received in 2010 (Parliament, 2015). This was the lowest share of the vote since the party's formation in 1988. Similarly, a high proportion of Liberal Democrat councillors lost their seats, which meant that the party lost 411 of the 1069 seats that it held in England prior to polling day (BBC News, 2015).

The data generation for this study was carried out in 2011, which meant that the Liberal Democrats benefitted from a greater level of national, local and European representation. This may have a number of implications for the party's use of Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. For instance, many of the members that joined in the run up to the 2010 General Election were younger voters that have since left the party for various reasons. Over half the party's youth wing are reported to have left between 2010 and 2012 (see for instance, Independent, 2012). As shown in Chapter Five, supporters under the age of 30 years are much more likely to use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership. This means that it is likely that fewer people will be using Internet tools to mobilise volunteers and increase membership, as this age group was most likely to do so. In addition to reducing volunteer and membership numbers, this may also mean that the party is less able to reach the type of voter or supporter that spends a

great deal of time using Internet tools, hence impacting upon the diversity within the party.

Furthermore, it is highly likely that the party can afford fewer campaigns staff and has fewer parliamentary staff following the results of the 2015 General Election and 2014 European Parliament Election. This may mean that the party no longer has the level of resources to focus upon 'emerging' or innovative tools and practices, such as running social media training sessions for candidates or designing templates for sharing across Facebook or Twitter. This may result in an increased focus upon 'mundane' tools such as email or a return to the more traditional campaign activity that is both familiar and popular amongst the party's older membership, such as telephone or door canvassing.

7.7 Paths for Future Research

The results of this project have shed light upon how Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, are used to mobilise volunteers within the Liberal Democrats, the predictors of using such tools and also, the extent to which members perceive that they provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers. However, they have also highlighted a number of paths for future research.

Firstly, as discussed within the Research Design Chapter, there are some issues with the representativeness of this survey. It is not a representative sample of Liberal Democrat members and therefore, only offers an indicative insight into this population of interest. However, the sample size is large enough to allow for analysis of sub-groups of the population. The demographics of the survey are also comparable to the results of other surveys of those involved with local level campaigning (see for instance, Cutts, 2004; Rallings and Thrasher, 2011 and Ward et al. 2002). Similarly, none of the findings diverged considerably from past research, thus suggesting that a measurement error is less likely to have occurred. There appear to be no existing datasets relating to the link between Internet tools and volunteer mobilisation amongst the Liberal Democrats. As a result, additional

research relating to this area would be useful, in order to build up a more detailed and reliable picture.

The results of this research fit with suggestions that those that are mobilised via Internet tools are less likely to become more deeply involved or remain involved over a longer period of time. It would be interesting to carry out a longitudinal study to assess whether there is empirical evidence to show that those that are mobilised online are less likely to run for externally elected public office, organise local election campaigns and attend meetings, amongst other activities, over a five to ten-year period. At present, email is perceived to be more useful than either Facebook or Twitter. This may be because it is older, more widely used and also more integrated with campaign mobilisation techniques than Facebook or Twitter. As claimed by Nielsen (2011), email is a 'mundane' tool, instead of an 'emerging' tool like Facebook and Twitter. A longitudinal study would also provide an insight into whether Facebook and Twitter are eventually perceived as more useful volunteer mobilisation tools, as they become older, more widely used and 'mundane'. It would also show whether the predictors of using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise volunteers change, as they become less novel and more commonly used.

Additionally, this project has focused upon local level campaigning within second order elections. The results have not differed vastly from studies that have focused upon first-order elections outside the UK. For instance, both this study and other studies have shown that different Internet tools are used in different ways and that some are more widely used than others, within the context of volunteer mobilisation. It would be useful to find out whether these findings hold within other contexts, such as first order elections within the UK, as party headquarters more tightly controls campaigning within these elections. Similarly, national issues are more likely to dominate the agenda and it has been argued that within this context the effects of local level campaigning are more difficult to detect.

Finally, other political parties within the UK have different campaigning cultures. As acknowledged earlier in this thesis, the Liberal Democrats are a 'third party' in UK

politics. They have fewer resources than the Labour Party and Conservative Party. Therefore, they are known to build up parliamentary representation by first winning local elections and using this as a stepping-stone to gaining national level representation (see for instance, Cutts, 2004; Fieldhouse et al. 2006; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). Therefore, at present, it could be suggested that this research only provides a very broad indication of how other members of other UK political parties may use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers, the predictors of whether they have used these tools to mobilise volunteers and also the extent to which they perceive that these tools provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers. Ward et al. (2002) carried out a study of Liberal Democrat members and online joining behaviours. They suggested that any trends in the use of Internet-tools amongst UK political parties are likely to be most noticeable amongst the Liberal Democrats because the party has a history of innovative Internet usage and a particularly decentralist ethos that promotes the involvement of grassroots members, hence suggesting that members may be more likely to use Internet-tools to campaign online. Therefore, it would be beneficial for future research to focus upon other UK political parties to find out whether these links between the Internet and volunteer mobilisation hold true within the context of parties that have not claimed to have taken such an innovative approach to new technologies and that are believed to hold a less decentralised ethos.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Coding Frame used within Analysis of Data from Participant Observation

Code	Meaning
A1	Participant uses Facebook as part of an attempt to mobilise volunteers
A2	Participant uses Twitter as part of an attempt to mobilise volunteers
A3	Participant uses mass email as part of an attempt to mobilise volunteers
B1	Participant makes positive comments relating to use of Facebook to mobilise volunteers
B2	Participant makes negative comments relating to use of Facebook to mobilise volunteers
B3	Participant comments that he or she is not sure whether Facebook provides a useful means of mobilising volunteers
B4	Participant makes positive comments relating to use of Twitter to mobilise volunteers
B5	Participant makes negative comments relating to use of Twitter to mobilise volunteers
B6	Participant comments that he or she is not sure whether Twitter provides

	a useful means of mobilising volunteers
B7	Participant makes positive comments relating to use of mass email to mobilise volunteers
B8	Participant makes negative comments relating to use of mass email to mobilise volunteers
B9	Participant comments that he or she is not sure whether mass email provides a useful means of mobilising volunteers
C1	Respondent uses Internet to discuss campaign with other supporters
C2	Respondent makes general campaign related post on Facebook, Twitter, or similar
D	Other comments or activities that are perceived as important to research project

Appendix 2: Illustration of how Key Areas of Observation relate to Research Questions

Research Question or Key Area of Interest	Areas for Observation
<p>How do grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters use Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers?</p>	<p>Which Internet tools are used? How frequently are each of these tools used? Are Internet tools used alongside 'traditional' offline activity, or to replace this activity? Are online, or offline tools used more frequently?</p>
<p>What are the predictors of whether or not grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters have used Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers?</p>	<p>What are the characteristics of the people that use Facebook to mobilise volunteers? E.g. length of membership, gender, age and so on What are the characteristics of the people that use Twitter to mobilise volunteers? What are the characteristics of the people that use mass email to mobilise volunteers? What are the characteristics of the people that respond to more 'traditional' offline appeals? What are the characteristics of the people that have responded to these appeals for volunteers?</p>

<p>To what extent do grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters perceive that Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers?</p>	<p>How useful does participant perceive Facebook to be for mobilising volunteers?</p> <p>How useful does participant perceive Twitter to be for mobilising volunteers?</p> <p>How useful does participant perceive mass email to be for mobilising volunteers?</p> <p>How useful does participant perceive more 'traditional' offline appeals to be for mobilising volunteers?</p> <p>How many volunteers appear to have been mobilised by such appeals (i.e. people that state that they have responded to such appeals)?</p>
<p>Specialist words, terminology, or events that are used throughout participant observation</p>	<p>Are any specialist words, or terms used to describe campaign, or party activity?</p> <p>Are there any other occurrences that may provide a useful insight into the research questions, or that can be used to inform the planning of the survey and semi-structured interviews?</p>

Appendix 3: Copy of Survey

This survey is part of a PhD study that aims to explore offline political activism in the age of the Internet. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

All responses are entirely anonymous and hence, confidential. Therefore, they will not be used to identify any individuals!

Those that would be happy to contribute further to this research will be given the opportunity to leave contact details at the end.

Thank you very much for your help - it is much appreciated! If you would like a brief summary of the results of this study, please contact the author on rt304@exeter.ac.uk

(1) How many years have you been a Liberal Democrat member? If you have been a member for less than one year please round up or down, as appropriate.

(2) To what extent did the Internet play an important role in your joining of the Liberal Democrats?

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Not important

(3) Did you join the party online?

- Yes
- No
- Cannot remember

(4) Have you ever renewed your membership online?

- Yes
- No
- Cannot remember

(5) Do you currently hold any of the following positions? Please select as many as applicable.

- Party volunteer or activist
- Council candidate
- Councillor
- Representative on Local Executive Committee
- Representative on Regional Executive Committee
- Representative on Liberal Youth Executive Committee
- Party intern
- Party employee
- Other (please specify)

(6) Have you ever held any of the following positions? Please select as many as applicable.

- Party volunteer or activist
- Council candidate
- Councillor
- Representative on Local Executive Committee
- Representative on Regional Executive Committee
- Representative on Liberal Youth Executive Committee
- Party intern
- Party employee
- Other (please specify)

(7) To the nearest 10%, how would you rate the intensity of your offline activity or activism? (With 0% meaning not active and 100% meaning highly active)

- 0%
- 10%
- 20%
- 30%
- 40%
- 50%
- 60%
- 70%
- 80%
- 90%
- 100%

(8) To the nearest 10%, how would you rate the intensity of your online activity or activism? Examples of online activism may include promoting or discussing the party on a social-media site, blogging, uploading memes, etc. (With 0% meaning not active and 100% meaning highly active)

- 0%
- 10%
- 20%
- 30%
- 40%
- 50%
- 60%
- 70%
- 80%
- 90%
- 100%

(9) How often do you use the Internet?

	Many times a day	Daily	A few times a week	Weekly	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never
At Home							
At Work							

(10) How often do you visit each of the following websites?

	Daily	Few times a week	Every week	Few times a month	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never
Local council(s)							
Government department(s)							
Parliament							
Online political news							
Pressure groups							
Trade unions							
National party website (own)							
Local party website (own)							
National party website (opposition)							
Local party website (opposition)							
Lib Dem Voice							
Lib Dem blogs							
Opposition blogs							
Political, non-partisan blogs							
Non-political blogs							

(11) How often do you use the following for personal, or non-party political reasons?

	Daily	Few times a week	Every week	Few times a month	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never
Facebook							
Twitter							
YouTube							
Email							

(12) How often do you use the following for party political reasons?

	Daily	Few times a week	Every week	Few times a month	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never
The Internet in general							
Offline media in general, e.g. newspapers, television, etc.							
Twitter							
YouTube							
Email							

(13) How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the national Liberal Democrat website?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It clearly shows how I can volunteer time or work for the party					
It clearly shows how I can donate funds to the party					
It clearly shows how I can donate funds to the party					
It clearly shows how I can renew my party membership					
It clearly shows how I can offer feedback, e.g. emails, polls, surveys					
It is interesting					
It is aesthetically pleasing					
Overall, it is useful					

(14) Why do you choose not to visit the Liberal Democrat website (please tick as many as appropriate)?

- Lack of time
- Prefer to use traditional media
- Does not meet my needs
- Not aware of it
- Other (please specify)

(15) Have you used Facebook for any of the following purposes?

	Yes	No
Campaign for votes in your own or a colleague's local election campaign		
Appeal for campaign volunteers, e.g. Focus deliverers, canvassers, tellers, etc.		
Increase membership of local constituency organisation		
Appeal for funds for local party		
Continuous campaigning, i.e. promoting "good" work of party outside of election campaign periods		

(16) How useful was Facebook for each of the following purposes?

	Highly useful	Useful	Neither useful nor not useful	Not particularly useful	Not useful at all
Campaign for votes in your own or a colleague's local election campaign					
Appeal for campaign volunteers, e.g. Focus deliverers, canvassers, tellers, etc.					
Increase membership of local constituency organisation					
Appeal for funds for local party					
Continuous campaigning, i.e. promoting "good" work of party outside of election campaign periods					

(17) Have you used Twitter for any of the following purposes?

	Yes	No
Campaign for votes in your own or a colleague's local election campaign		
Appeal for campaign volunteers, e.g. Focus deliverers, canvassers, tellers, etc.		
Increase membership of local constituency organisation		
Appeal for funds for local party		
Continuous campaigning, i.e. promoting "good" work of party outside of election campaign periods		

(18) How useful was Twitter for each of the following purposes?

	Highly useful	Useful	Neither useful nor not useful	Not particularly useful	Not useful at all
Campaign for votes in your own or a colleague's local election campaign					
Appeal for campaign volunteers, e.g. Focus deliverers, canvassers, tellers, etc.					
Increase membership of local constituency organisation					
Appeal for funds for local party					
Continuous campaigning, i.e. promoting "good" work of party outside of election campaign periods					

(19) Have you used email for any of the following purposes?

	Yes	No
Campaign for votes in your own or a colleague's local election campaign		
Appeal for campaign volunteers, e.g. Focus deliverers, canvassers, tellers, etc.		
Increase membership of local constituency organisation		
Appeal for funds for local party		
Continuous campaigning, i.e. promoting "good" work of party outside of election campaign periods		

(20) How useful was email for each of the following purposes?

	Highly useful	Useful	Neither useful nor not useful	Not particularly useful	Not useful at all
Campaign for votes in your own or a colleague's local election campaign					
Appeal for campaign volunteers, e.g. Focus deliverers, canvassers, tellers, etc.					
Increase membership of local constituency organisation					
Appeal for funds for local party					
Continuous campaigning, i.e. promoting "good" work of party outside of election campaign periods					

(21) How often do you use each of the following to keep in contact with party members and supporters?

	Daily	Few times a week	Every week	Few times a month	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never
Telephone							
Internet, excluding email							
Email							
Face-to-face meeting, or gathering							

(22) Have any of the following led to your engagement in any of the following activities (please tick as many as are applicable)?

	Contacting other members	Volunteering some time or work	Participating in a specific campaign	Contacting the party with views or comments	Writing to the media	Attending a local branch meeting	Attending a rally or demonstration	Donating funds	Other activity (please state)
Party website									
Emails from the national, or local party									
Facebook									
Twitter									
Letter from national, or local party									
Word-of-mouth									

(23) How comfortable do you feel using ICTs (i.e. computers) rather than traditional media for the following range of party activities?

	Much more comfortable using ICTs	More comfortable using ICTs	No preference	More comfortable using traditional media	Much more comfortable using traditional media
Receiving party political information					
Voting to elect officials					
Contacting the party					
Renewing membership					
Joining specific campaigns					
Discussing issues					
Getting to know other members and supporters					

(24) Which do you consider your area to be?

- Urban
- Rural
- Mixed

(25) What is your sex?

- Female
- Male

(26) What was your age last birthday?

(27) How would you describe your current or previous occupational status?

- Professional occupation
- Managerial and / or Technical occupation
- Skilled occupation, non-manual
- Skilled occupation, manual
- Partly skilled occupation
- Unskilled occupation

(28) Which of these best describes your current employment status?

- In full time paid employment
- In part-time paid employment
- Self-employed
- Permanently sick or disabled
- In voluntary occupation
- Registered unemployed
- Full-time student
- Retired
- Looking after home / family
- Other (please specify)

(29) What is your highest level of formal education?

- No qualifications
- GCSEs or equivalent
- "A" Levels or equivalent
- First degree
- Higher degree

(30) Comments - if you have any relevant comments in response to this questionnaire please use the space provided below.

Your help is greatly appreciated. If you would be willing to participate in further research in the form of a short informal interview about your experiences please provide your name and email address (or alternative contact details) in the space below.

	<p>(10) How often do you visit each of the following websites?</p> <p>(11) How often do you use the following for personal, or non-party political reasons?</p> <p>(12) How often do you use the following for party political reasons?</p> <p>(15) Have you used Facebook for any of the following purposes?</p> <p>(17) Have you used Twitter</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency • Frequency • Frequency • Frequency 	
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	<p>for any of the following purposes?</p> <p>(19) Have you used email distribution lists for any of the following purposes?</p> <p>(21) How often do you use each of the following to keep in contact with party members and supporters?</p> <p>(30) Comments - if you have any relevant commented in response to this questionnaire please use the space provided below.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency • Frequency • Frequency • No analysis, comments have been used for illustrative purposes 	
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<p>What are the predictors of whether or not grassroots Liberal Democrat members and supporters have used Internet tools, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and email, to mobilise volunteers?</p>	<p>(1) How many years have you been a Liberal Democrat member? If you have been a member for less than one year please round up or down, as appropriate.</p> <p>(2) To what extent did the Internet play an important role in your joining of the Liberal Democrats?</p> <p>(3) Did you join the party online?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. 	<p>Multinomial logistic regression was used to identify the predictors of how likely it is that an individual will use Facebook, Twitter and mass email to mobilise other volunteers. This was used alongside illustrative quotations from the participant observation and semi-structured interviews.</p>
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	<p>(4) Have you ever renewed your membership online?</p> <p>(5) Do you currently hold any of the following positions? Please select as many as applicable.</p> <p>(6) Have you ever held any of the following positions? Please select as many as applicable.</p> <p>(7) To the nearest 10%, how</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. 	
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	<p>would you rate the intensity of your offline activity or activism? (With 0% meaning not active and 100% meaning highly active)</p> <p>(8) To the nearest 10%, how would you rate the intensity of your online activity or activism? Examples of online activism may include promoting or discussing the party on a social-media site, blogging, uploading memes, etc. (With 0% meaning not active and 100% meaning highly active)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as dependent variable in multinomial logistic regression. 	
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	<p>(9) How often do you use the Internet?</p> <p>(10) How often do you visit each of the following websites?</p> <p>(11) How often do you use the following for personal, or non-party political reasons?</p> <p>(12) How often do you use the following for party political</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. 	
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	<p>reasons?</p> <p>(15) Have you used Facebook for any of the following purposes?</p> <p>(17) Have you used Twitter for any of the following purposes?</p> <p>(19) Have you used email distribution lists for any of the following purposes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a dependent variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a dependent variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a dependent variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a dependent variable in a 	
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	<p>(21) How often do you use each of the following to keep in contact with party members and supporters?</p> <p>(23) How comfortable do you feel using ICTs (i.e. computers) rather than traditional media for the following range of party activities?</p> <p>(24) Which do you consider your area to be?</p>	<p>multinomial logistic regression.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a 	
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	<p>(25) What is your sex?</p> <p>(26) What was your age last birthday?</p> <p>(27) How would you describe your current or previous occupational status?</p> <p>(28) Which of these best describes your current employment status?</p>	<p>multinomial logistic regression.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. 	
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	<p>(29) What is your highest level of formal education?</p> <p>(30) Comments - if you have any relevant commented in response to this questionnaire please use the space provided below.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • Used as a predictor variable in a multinomial logistic regression. • No analysis, comments have been used for illustrative purposes 	
<p>To what extent do grassroots Liberal Democrat grassroots members and supporters perceive that the Internet tools,</p>	<p>(2) To what extent did the Internet play an important role in your joining of the Liberal Democrats?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency 	<p>Each of the survey questions shown within this section was used alongside the response to the semi-structured interviews</p>

<p>i.e. Twitter, Facebook and email, provide a useful means of mobilising volunteers?</p>	<p>(16) How useful was Facebook for each of the following purposes?</p> <p>(18) How useful was Twitter for each of the following purposes?</p> <p>(20) How useful were email distribution lists for each of the following purposes?</p> <p>(22) Have any of the following led to your engagement in any of the following activities (please</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency • Frequency • Frequency • Frequency 	<p>to answer the first research question, which asks about the extent to which grassroots Liberal Democrat volunteers perceive that different Internet tools are a successful means of mobilising volunteers.</p>
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	<p>tick as many as are applicable)?</p> <p>(30) Comments - if you have any relevant comments in response to this questionnaire please use the space provided below.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No analysis, comments have been used for illustrative purposes	
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Appendix 5: Semi-Structured Interview Template

Before we begin, I'd really like to gain an insight into what initially promoted you to become a volunteer. The following questions are related to this.

How long have you been involved with the party?

Tell me a little about how you first became involved and the nature of your involvement.

How did you initially make contact with the party?

What is your current role within the organisation?

Do you use the Internet to seek information about the party, or engage with other supporters?

Did Facebook / Twitter / email play any role in encouraging you to further your involvement with the party?

Possible prompts: contacting other members, knocking on doors inside or outside of election time, telephone canvassing, delivering leaflets, volunteering some time, participating in a specific campaign, contacting the party with views or comments, attending local branch meeting, writing to local media, attending a rally or demonstration, donating funds. Why do you think that this is the case?

Do you believe that Facebook / Twitter / email has played any role in encouraging supporters to further their involvement with the party?

Possible prompts: contacting other members, knocking on doors inside or outside of election time, telephone canvassing, delivering leaflets, volunteering some time, participating in a specific campaign, contacting the party with views or comments, attending local branch meeting, writing to local media, attending a rally or demonstration, donating funds. Why do you think that this is the case?

On the whole, do you feel that Facebook / Twitter / email is a useful means of mobilising volunteers?

Prompt: If no, how do you prefer to mobilise volunteers? Why?

Does your local party use Facebook / Twitter / email to mobilise volunteers?

Prompt: Why, or why not?

Do you feel that these attempts have been successful?

Prompt: Why, or why not? I appreciate that it is very difficult to remember how many volunteers were mobilised, or how much time these people spent volunteering, but what would be your best estimate?

Thank you for your time. Do remember that if you wish to withdraw your responses at any time, then you can do so by contacting me via email, or telephone.

Appendix 6: Illustration of how Interview Questions relate to Research Questions

Research Question or Key Area of Interest	Questions to ask Respondents
<p>Opening questions designed to provide a context for the interview questions and also to build rapport with respondent</p>	<p>How long have you been involved with the party?</p> <p>Tell me a little about how you first became involved and the nature of your involvement.</p> <p>How did you initially make contact with the party?</p> <p>What is your current role within the organisation?</p>
<p>How grassroots members and supporters use Internet tools to mobilise volunteers</p>	<p>Do use the Internet to seek information about the party, or engage with other supporters?</p> <p>Possible prompts: Facebook / Twitter / email</p> <p>Does your local party use Facebook / Twitter / email to mobilise volunteers?</p>

	<p>Prompt: Why, or why not?</p> <p>Do you feel that attempts by your local party to use Facebook / Twitter / email to mobilise volunteers have been successful?</p> <p>Prompt: Why, or why not? I appreciate that it is very difficult to remember how many volunteers were mobilised, or how much time these people spent volunteering, but what would be your best estimate?</p>
<p>Predictors of using different Internet tools to mobilise volunteers</p>	<p>Much like within the participant observation, it is very difficult to identify predictors of using different Internet tools to mobilise other supporters. This is why a survey was carried out alongside the qualitative research.</p> <p>However, responses to the interview questions were cross-referenced with responses to survey questions, where necessary. The aim of this was to provide a relevant quotation, or example to accompany the discussion of quantitative results, as opposed to an attempt identify</p>

	<p>predictors of such behaviour by using qualitative data alone.</p>
<p>Perceived usefulness of different Internet tools within the context of volunteer mobilisation</p>	<p>Did Facebook / Twitter / email play any role in encouraging you to further your involvement with the party?</p> <p>Possible prompts: contacting other members, knocking on doors inside or outside of election time, telephone canvassing, delivering leaflets, volunteering some time, participating in a specific campaign, contacting the party with views or comments, attending local branch meeting, writing to local media, attending a rally or demonstration, donating funds. Why do you think that this is the case?</p> <p>Do you believe that Facebook / Twitter / email has played any role in encouraging supporters to further their involvement with the party?</p> <p>Possible prompts: contacting other members, knocking on doors inside or outside of election time, telephone canvassing, delivering leaflets, volunteering some time, participating in a specific campaign, contacting</p>

	<p>the party with views or comments, attending local branch meeting, writing to local media, attending a rally or demonstration, donating funds. Why do you think that this is the case?</p> <p>On the whole, do you feel that Facebook / Twitter / email is a useful means of mobilising volunteers?</p> <p>Prompt: If no, how do you prefer to mobilise volunteers? Why?</p>
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Appendix 7: Coding Frame used within Analysis of Data from Semi-Structured Interviews

Code	Meaning
A1	Respondent has been involved with the Liberal Democrats less than one year
A2	Respondent has been involved with the Liberal Democrats between one and five years
A3	Respondent has been involved with the Liberal Democrats for more than five years
B1	Respondent's first contact with organisation was online
B2	Respondent's first contact with organisation was offline and face-to-face
B3	Respondent's first contact with organisation was offline and not face-to-face
C1	Respondent is currently a Liberal Democrat volunteer
C2	Respondent is currently a Liberal Democrat staff member
C3	Respondent is currently a Liberal Democrat elected representative, such as MP, councillor, mayor (external representative, not internal,

	such as elected member of a party committee)
D1	Respondent uses Internet for political information seeking
D2	Respondent does not use Internet for political information seeking
D3	Respondent uses Internet to engage with other supporters
D4	Respondent does not use Internet to engage with other supporters
E1	Respondent perceives that Facebook played role in encouraging them to further their involvement with the party
E2	Respondent perceives that Facebook did not play a role in encouraging them to further their involvement with the party
E3	Respondent perceives that Twitter played role in encouraging them to further their involvement with the party
E4	Respondent perceives that Twitter did not play a role in encouraging them to further their involvement with the party
E5	Respondent perceives that mass email did played a role in encouraging them to further their involvement with the party

E6	Respondent perceives that mass email did not play a role in encouraging them to further their involvement with the party
F1	Respondent perceives that Facebook is a useful means of mobilising volunteers
F2	Respondent perceives that Facebook is not a useful means of mobilising volunteers
F3	Respondent perceives that Twitter is a useful means of mobilising volunteers
F4	Respondent perceives that Twitter is not a useful means of mobilising volunteers
F5	Respondent perceives that mass email is a useful means of mobilising volunteers
F6	Respondent perceives that mass email is not a useful means of mobilising volunteers
G1	Respondent believes that telephoning supporters is most effective means of mobilising volunteers
G2	Respondent believes that knocking on supporters' doors is most effective means of mobilising volunteers
G3	Respondent believes that asking supporters following a meeting or

	event effective means of mobilising volunteers
G4	Respondent believes that none of the aforementioned communication methods are the most effective means of mobilising volunteers
H1	Respondent's local party uses Facebook as part of their attempts to mobilise volunteers
H2	Respondent's local party does not use Facebook as part of their attempts to mobilise volunteers
H3	Respondent's local party uses Twitter as part of their attempts to mobilise volunteers
H4	Respondent's local party does not use Twitter as part of their attempts to mobilise volunteers
H5	Respondent's local party uses mass email as part of their attempts to mobilise volunteers
H6	Respondent's local party does not use mass email as part of their attempts to mobilise volunteers
I1	Respondent feels that local party's attempts to use Facebook to mobilise volunteers have been successful
I2	Respondent feels that local party's attempts to use Facebook to mobilise volunteers have not been successful

13	Respondent feels that local party's attempts to use Twitter to mobilise volunteers have been successful
14	Respondent feels that local party's attempts to use Twitter to mobilise volunteers have not been successful
15	Respondent feels that local party's attempts to use mass email to mobilise volunteers have been successful
16	Respondent feels that local party's attempts to use mass email to mobilise volunteers have not been successful

