THESIS

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

THE CASE OF THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT

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It has been suggested by the media and scholars alike that social media might be a potential solution for problems of political participation. To test this hypothesis, this thesis examines the content of political participation by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) as reflected in its Twitter posts for the period of January 1, 2011 – December 31, 2011. Furthermore, I compare traditional sources of political participation in the MCB (i.e. newsletters and press releases) from the years 2005 and 2011, with the political participation through Twitter. The findings indicate that political participation over social media occurs with substantially more frequency, and with a significant change in tone, while traditional participation shows very little change in tone or frequency.

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Chapter One:

Introduction: Muslims, Europe, and the Press in the Age of Social Media

The 2011 uprisings in the Middle East served as an unprecedented use of new technology for organizing and expressing political participation outside of the more traditional routes. Men and women across the Middle East began expressing opinions through social media that challenged social and political norms, and the perceptions commonly held about themselves and their efficacy in the political system, eventually leading to the ousting of a number of leaders in the region including in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen (Fox 2011).

But the social media revolution is not exclusive to participation in the Middle East. Examples of how social media is used for participation in politics range from collective organization for non-violent participation like Occupy Wall Street to violent shows of collective uprising like the London riots and San Francisco subway mobs. All of these movements relied heavily on social media for expressing their political intentions (Fox 2011). This only gives further credence to the idea that there is power in this tool.

This has raised a multitude of questions about the circumstances of the events that occurred in the Middle East and across the globe, and the power that social media could have on political participation. Can some of the potential for social media that was harnessed during the social media revolution provide any insight into potential for social media to affect political participation elsewhere?

Answering this question is significant for a number of reasons. First, for the last several decades the questions as to what extent, if any, Muslims can adequately integrate into Western societies has been a pressing and challenging question. The answers have ranged from the issues

of compatibility between Islam and democracy, to whether Muslim communities will be able to adopt gender equality, secularism and tolerance (Abbas 2005). Scholars have concluded significantly different findings from one another in answering these questions, with some believing that Islamic traditions are inherently rigid and discordant with liberalism (Huntington 1984; Zartman 1992; Kedourie 1994), while others see Islam and democracy as not mutually exclusive categories (Voll 1994; Esposito and Voll 1996; Anwar 2006).

The prospects of Muslim integration have been further questioned publicly by leaders in Europe. Multiculturalism, an acceptance and promotion of many cultural identities within one nation, had been a noted policy goal of most European countries, including the United Kingdom, until 2010. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister David Cameron have both publicly stated that they feel that multiculturalism has failed (Reuters 2010). Prime Minister David Cameron commented in another public statement that the failure of multiculturalism is leading to further religious divisions and the increase in Islamist extremism within the U.K (MSNBC 2011). These statements are certain to have an impact on the large numbers of Muslim communities across the U.K.

Here, it is crucial to recognize the distinction between Islam and Islamism. The former, Islam, is the religious teachings of the Prophet Mohammed that comprise the basis of the Muslim religion. Islamism, or Political Islam, on the other hand is broadly defined as "the belief that Islam should guide social and political as well as personal life " (Berman 2003, 258). Subsequently, Islam and Islamism are not one in the same. Islam is a religion, while Islamism is a political ideology.

Second, uncertainty and questions about the direction of these trends have made many scholars and politicians aware of the potential danger that Islamism could pose to the West.

These questions have played out extensively in Europe as the tensions with Muslim immigrants are particularly high. “The specificity of the [Islamist] threat to Europe has been made clear by the attacks in London and Madrid as well as by the murder of Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh. These events drew attention to an ongoing process of self-recruitment and self-radicalisation…and European countries and the EU are increasingly aware of this phenomenon” (Coolsaet 2007, xvi). Tensions between the Muslim and the Judeo-Christian communities have been especially hostile in the last decade since 9/11, and terror attacks by a small extremist sect only serve to increase those tensions.

Third, answering this question is also significant especially in the case of the UK, because British Muslims comprise the second largest religious group in the UK. There are a large number of African and Asian immigrants, and UK citizens, who fall outside the Judeo-Christian typification for the majority population. Over 14 million citizens do not identify themselves as Christian or Jewish (Non-religious, Not stated, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Other), with close to two million citizens considering themselves to be Muslim (UK Census Data 2001).Even as the largest minority population in the UK, Muslims perceive themselves as having less of voice than the majority population. Professor Muhammad Anwar from the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick says:

> We need to look at the policies and treatment of Muslims. The current policies are inadequate and non-existent. Muslims don't have any legal protection and there needs to be something like a religious discrimination law… Only the views of a tiny, tiny minority are ever heard and put into the headlines. The vast majority is[sic] not heard. Also, Muslims are seriously underrepresented in decision making panels and when public appointments are made (Choudhury 2003, 1).

This is a common sentiment amongst Muslims across the UK and has led to increased tensions and more pronounced altercations with the government and members of the Christian community (Choudhury 2003).

This question is also important for a fourth reason, which is the tensions with the British Muslims are now particularly high due to recent events. For five days in August 2011, widespread riots erupted in cities across the UK. Thousands of people across the country took to the streets and began looting and setting fire to vehicles, buildings and structures. The official cause of the first riot was a violent community response to a police shooting of an unarmed man, but subsequent riots erupted in low income neighborhoods across the UK as people began further violent shows of unrest in response to high levels of inequality and deprivation. Within 4 days of the first riot, 3,100 people had been arrested, five people were killed, and more than £200 million in property was damaged (NCVO 2011).

The riots in August 2011 have only served to intensify ethno-religious tensions in the country, and further disenfranchise an already under-represented minority community. The source of the tensions appears to lie in two primary camps. There is outrage from politically conservative Judeo-Christian UK citizens who feel that Muslims are a dangerous threat to UK culture and safety, and outrage from Afro-Asian UK Muslims who feel that they are being unjustly targeted for social problems that spread far beyond the ethno-religious boundaries of their communities (Chazan 2011). Many anti-Muslim activists in the country blame the recent riots on Muslim incompatibility with democracy and distrust of UK authority, yet the socio-demographic make-up of the rioters crosses ethnic, religious and cultural boundaries; with most of those arrested being unemployed teens and young adults. Muslim communities also suffered

the most during the riots, with ruthless killings of many men who were standing guard, with little police assistance, against looters and vandals in their neighborhoods (Kain 2011).

Religions tensions are so high between UK locals and immigrants that every altercation has the potential to trigger a reactionary response. One especially poignant example of this debate falls on the death of three young Muslim men protecting a Birmingham neighborhood during the 2011 riots. A car full of looters crashed into a crowd of civilian patrollers in a close-knit Muslim neighborhood, and the resulting casualties ignited anger within the Muslim community. This prompted many locals to vow vengeance and demand reprisal. Despite cries from the victim's families for the neighborhood to peacefully mourn their deaths, one local man exemplified many of the other Muslims' sentiments when he said "There is going to be retaliation; an eye for an eye" (Chazan 2011, 1). Those kinds of reactionary statements simmered as over 300 community members came together for an impromptu discussion. Some Muslims wanted to march through the city and peacefully protest, while others disapproved saying that any protests wouldn't remain peaceful. In the end, peaceful heads prevailed and no further violence ensued. However, this incident is an example of the intensity in the levels of discourse that can be heard from Muslim communities in 2011 Britain (Lewis, Taylor, and Khalili 2011). Their political sphere is often very sentient in daily life.

Young Muslims in the UK are an especially tenuous population. They live in two worlds at once, and must try to find a balance for their Muslim heritage and British national identity. This is no easy task because:

> Young British Muslims are increasingly found to be in the precarious position of experiencing competing challenges: at the extremes, they are influenced by radical Islamic politics emanating from outside the UK on the one hand and negative

> developments to British multicultural citizenship at home on the other. As a consequence, there is a contestation between the forces of radicalisation, secularisation and liberalization impacting on the lives of young British Muslims. In the post-9/11 climate, British Muslims are at the centre of questions about what it means to be British or English. The basis of this rests in issues on the global agenda as well as local area concerns in relation to ‘‘community cohesion’’, citizenship and multicultural political philosophy (Abbas, 2007 290).

Exacerbated by the media reaction to the 2011 riots across the UK, what started out as a discussion of class-based tension, as teens and young adults across Britain were involving themselves in a revolt against the state, quickly turned into a discussion of ethno-religious clashes over perceived Muslim incompatibility with British ideology and culture (IHRC 2011). This was not a new trend in Britain. As previously mentioned, after a 2010 speech by Tony Blair that declared the failure of multiculturalism in the UK, news sources and national pundits began calling into question the fundamental differences between Muslim and Judeo-Christian cultural values. Still, Muslims have never before received such a central focus in British national media, the tone of which is more often than not quite negative and isolating. One string of which is a debate over the very fundamental value of democracy in Muslim culture (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010).

Thanks to the 2011 uprisings throughout the Middle East, social media has been suggested by some analysts as a revolutionary cure-all for expressing and organizing political speech among under-represented groups. Social media was reported to be the catalyst behind organizing protests in Tunisia, Bahrain, Qatar, and Syria. The idea that social media like

Facebook and Twitter could reinvent democratic expression has dominated press discussion of the events of the Middle East (Smith, C., 2011; Taylor, 2011).

Among the important debates in these discussions is the suggestion that social media has been used to make the democratic value of free speech and participation possible for populations under authoritarian rule. In this line of thinking, protestors were able to make the public aware of incidents of oppression or violence over new technologies like text messages and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Oftentimes exceptional, shocking, or poignant media went "viral"—meaning that videos, photos, or other media are made massively popular through quick dissemination on online social media—making the magnitude of the posted event affect a global, rather than local, population.

The UK Muslims are clearly in a different situation. Undoubtedly, they operate in an established democracy with institutional and social routes for political participation. But, what if they perceive those routes closed to them? As some scholars argue "British Muslims are increasingly constructed in terms of a hybridized threat to the ethno-national in-group" (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010, 289). Negative media influence and increasing islamaphobia have led to perceptions of increasing radical Muslim social influence and radical institutional changes. The vocal nativism from some extremist groups and increased media attention have placed British Muslims in an uncomfortable spotlight. Can the insights into the potential power of free speech and mobilization through social media in the Middle East teach us anything in the case of the Muslim Council of Britain? Will social media make them more or less participatory in the political sphere, and does it make them vocally more or less integrated? Does it even make a difference?

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was officially established on November 23, 1997 as a collaborative effort by over 250 Muslim organizations in the UK. The constitution that outlines the group structure and procedures cites its purpose as an umbrella organization serving the common needs of the UK Muslim community. This means that MCB does not limit themself to the regional and cultural distinctions that sometimes serve as divisions within the Muslim community, but rather they incorporate all cultural differences into their discourse and goal orientations. MCB also has stated objectives "to promote cooperation, consensus and unity on Muslim affairs in the UK… to establish a position for the Muslim community within British society that is fair and based on rights" and "to work for the eradication of disadvantages and forms of discrimination faced by Muslims" (Muslim Council of Britain constitution 2002, Section 2) among others. Group decisions are deliberated and decreed by a general assembly comprised of delegates from due paying member organizations. It acts as "the supreme policy-making and ruling body of the MCB" (Muslim Council of Britain constitution 2002, Section 4.1.2).

The purpose of this thesis will be to explore how political participation can change in tone and frequency over social media as compared to more traditional forms of political engagement. By analyzing the case of the Muslim Council of Britain, I aim to answer the question of what extent, if any, the use of social media can affect political participation, and by extension integration of a Muslim group into the political system. I will use content analysis to compare the group's political statements on the social media application Twitter between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2011, to statements made in their more traditional newsletter and press release publications during the years 2005 and 2011. In order to compare across two years, 2011 representing the most current traditional and social media data, and 2005 serving as

the pre-social media traditional data, I have created thirteen categories to classify their contents. These thirteen coding categories aim to identify how social media has changed political participation by the Muslim Council of Britain. This comparison will allow me to identify qualitative and quantitative differences between the traditional forms of political participation and that which is expressed over Twitter.

Social media provides its own unique challenges as a new technology with a limited timeframe from which to pull data. There are many social media options available. Examples of the largest and most popular social media sites in 2012 are: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterist, and FourSquare. The social media application that will be used in this analysis, Twitter, was started on July 15, 2006 (Arrington 2006). The future of social media began there. Since then membership to these sites has exploded in number. Twitter has over 400 million users worldwide(BBC News 2012). In the UK almost 15% of the population uses Twitter and more than 50% of those check their Twitter account every day (Guardian UK Technology Blog, 2010).

Social media sites provide an enhanced networking and discussion capability that is not inherently present in the standard uses for the internet. By definition alone, a social network is "a website where one connects with those sharing personal or professional interests, place of origin, education at a particular school, etc." (Merriam-Webster, 2011). As limited in this definition, a social networking site sounds no different than a blog or a web forum. However, social networking sites are quite different and more extensive than a website or a blog. In a blog or website there is limited connectivity between users. There is a user whose submissions can be accessed and commented on by other users, or vice versa, but the extent of the connectivity stops there.

Social media, on the other hand, provide that same service, but also digitally track and connect like people, interests, and information. Users on social media sites can join groups, see attendees for scheduled events, link others or be linked in pictures or postings, join community pages forums, indicate preferences, receive automated suggestions and much more. To make things simpler, let us think of social media as an infinite spider web with limitless connections to people, groups, interests, events and information. Every time a new interaction occurs, it connects and interacts with every connected strand in an increasingly complex and unpredictable fashion. Websites or blogs, on the other hand, look more like telephone wires. Multiple wires connect one person to the next but users are clearly defined units with limited input and output capabilities. It becomes difficult to connect multiple people or groups together in the unique way that social networking has achieved.

Social media is a relatively new medium with many unanswered questions. In the wrong context, it is not impossible to believe that governments will and are using this tool for censorship, cataloging, or propaganda. There are also reports of Social Networking Sites providing a resource for terrorist, rebel, militia, and pirate networks (Jaspal and Cinnerella 2010). It is important then that Social Networking Sites be viewed as a tool for constructive and deconstructive purposes. This is simply a technology with relatively unknown ramifications that deserves cautious reserve when assessing its potential.

Twitter: What exactly is it?

Twitter is an online social media application that allows people to connect to one another through Twitter's online space. Each statement is limited in length to 140 keyboard characters, i.e. no more than 140 letters, numbers, symbols, or spaces, and it reads like a collection of short

statements from the people, groups, and connections that a person chooses to follow. For example, the MCB has 7,739 people following them as of May 2012 (MCB Twitter page 2012). This means that when the MCB posts statements to twitter, that 7,739 people will see that message show up in their main twitter screen—or 'newsfeed'. Users can also post, read, and share links, pictures, and videos.

Twitter can be accessed through the computer, cell phones, and a multitude of other capable devices. It is free to all users, and users can use the application as much or as little as they like. It is clear from Table 3.2 that the MCB chooses to use the application many times a day.

Glossary of Twitter Terms	
Term	**Description**
Followers	People that are digitally connected to a user via Twitter. Currently the MCB has 7,416 followers (MCB Twitter, 2012).
Hashtag	Words or phrases prefixed with the symbol #. They are used to identify and search within groups and topics
News Link	A hyperlink within a message to a news article posted on another website.
Newsfeed	A collection of a user's twitter posts assembled in one place (lined up chronologically on a webpage).
Twitter Post	A short message specific to the Twitter website. Text posts are limited in space to 145 keyboard characters (meaning that messages cannot contain more than 145 letters and spaces). In addition to text, tweets can also contain pictures or links to other websites or videos.

Chapter Outline

This thesis consists of five chapters. This introductory chapter introduced the difficulties facing Muslim integration into Western societies, and the questions poised about the efficacy of social media for making people more participatory in the political system. The second chapter reviews the literature that explores past scholarly work in studies of online participation. Based on their findings, I have identified two primary schools of thought within the discussion. The earliest online scholars represent a school of Skeptics that concluded that the internet did not make people any more participatory, with some concluding that it made people less participatory and isolated. The second and current predominant school of thinking is the Utopians. These scholars find the internet and social media to be an instrument of increased participation and integrating in nature.

In chapter three, I will discuss the case selection, research design, and methods used in data collection for this research. In chapter four I will present the data and analysis. And in chapter five I will discuss the findings and implications of this research, and address any weaknesses to the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Skeptics and Utopians

Does the use of social media affect the way that groups participate politically? Does it have an integrating or isolating effect on the group? The media buzz has suggested that there is something about social media that makes groups more vocal and participatory. A variety of scholars, across many fields of study, have explored questions from internet and social media use to minority and group participation in politics. The basis for any study of social media is certainly an interdisciplinary one because new technologies affect many social sectors simultaneously. Therefore it is important to acknowledge findings in multiple fields of social science and technology. After examining scholarly work in multiple disciplines including political science, sociology, communications, law, and computer technologies, I will categorize the literature into two categories of perspectives: Skeptics and Utopians.

The terms 'Skeptics' and 'Utopians' denote a normative philosophical underpinning to the perspectives, because as with all social science, the theoretical framework with which a problem is approached is critical to understanding how and why a scientist reaches their conclusions. Skeptics are quick to dismiss theoretical frameworks that include openings for technological determinism because that would imply that the technology itself will dictate how it is to be used. True to their name, Skeptics are scholars that are careful to frame their perspectives within the boundaries of the known, and are thusly skeptical of studies that imply technology in and of itself is anything other than a tool.

Utopians, on the other hand, come from a philosophical perspective that embraces technological potential. These scholars are driven by the possibility that could arise from advances in modern technology, and are thus open to conclusions that may fall outside that

which has already been discovered. Utopian scholars are willing to explore hypotheses that the technology itself shapes how people participate politically.

This chapter explores the major works in both of these perspectives, as well as the implication of these results for studying group political participation through online social media. I will divide the following literature review into three sections that cover: definitions of participation, Skeptic and Utopian perspectives on internet and social media participation, and group participation in politics. The intention of this chapter is to make clear that the theoretical background used in framing this study is thoroughly researched and well-discussed.

What is political participation?

The term "participation" in this research study shall be considered broad enough to include political speech and electronic dissemination of political information. In the context of participation that occurs over social media, it is necessary to use a definition of participation that moves beyond simply referring to direct electoral behavior. When considering how social media will play into the discussion of participation, it is imperative that the definition of participation be broad enough to include political speech and dissemination of political information. A survey of the existing literature on participation suggests that it can be defined quite broadly in most circumstances.

If the narrowest definition is adopted, then participation is only those acts which directly affect the political system. Accordingly, under this definition the extent to which people live in a democracy is dependent solely on whether they are able to vote in free and fair elections. In other words, democratic participation is limited to and synonymous with electoral participation. Many political scientists who study democracy and participation would find this definition too narrow

(Arendt 1963, Verba and Nie 1972, Dahl 1998, Shapiro & Hacker-Cordon 1999, Beetham et al 2002). This definition leaves out other forms of participation that are crucial to democratic engagement.

Verba and Nie (1972) assert that political participation, specifically democratic participation, is broadly an "attempt to influence the authoritative allocation of values for a society" (2) and "emphasizes flow of influence upwards from the masses" (3). This understanding of political participation goes beyond electoral participation to include indirect participation tactics such as "attempts to influence the voting behavior of others, being active in organizations involving community problems, working with others to try and solve a community problems, forming a group or organization to solve community problems, and being a member of a political organization" (31).

Although Dahl (1996) focused specifically on electoral impact, he would enhance Verba and Nie (1972) by expanding the range of necessary participation to equal opportunities for effective participation and full inclusion for all groups. For the most part, this is something that the UK already strives to do. They provide universal suffrage, encourage free speech, tolerate peaceful protests, and allow minority candidates opportunity to participate in elections (Beetham et al. 2002).

The politics in the UK, however, are susceptible like all other modern Western democracies to hegemonic and commercial bias (Papacharissi 2010). What this means is that hegemonic political and commercial business influences provide a rather narrowly construed agenda that dominates political discussion and leaves little opportunity for alternative viewpoints and topics. This leaves minority groups, such as the Muslim Council of Britain, in a somewhat disenfranchised position. Because the majority population in the UK is so homogenous, and the

cultural difference between some aspects of the Muslim community and the average UK population can be so distinct, the political agenda is rarely open to issues that are of the greatest importance to the Muslim community (Muslim Women's Network 2009).

According to communication theory, traditional media is largely undemocratic because it is targeting the mainstream population and rarely feels pressured to address minority issues. Therefore, with traditional routes closed, minority political movements turn to alternative forms of media for access to a public forum (Downing 2001). Although researcher John D. H. Downing refers to radical media as an umbrella term for "…media in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities and perspectives" (2001, 8) social media clearly falls under that purview.

If one considers the argument made in Miller et al. (1981) in reference to minority participation in the United States, then it should be acceptable to also include in our list of democratic political participation the discussion of politics, expressing a political view, support/participation in a political campaign, cooperative political goals, contacting a government official, and signing a petition either for or against actions taken by the government (Miller et al. 1981). This also uses a broader than electoral understanding of participation.

Communication theorist, Christopher Weare (2002), identifies four types of participation that can occur online. 'Conversation' is a one-on-one dialogue with another person about politics. 'Information aggregation' is when many people unidirectionally address a single source—such as constituents in a district emailing a representative. When the direction is reversed and one source unidirectionally addresses many people, this is known as 'broadcast'. Lastly, when many people interact simultaneously in a conversation it is called 'group dialogue'.

Social media has the capability to facilitate all four types of communication participation as outlined by Weare (2002), while also falling within the purview of acceptable boundaries for definitions of political participation by most in the political science community. That ability to foster every type of communication request, makes it especially unique among its media predecessors (Papacharissi 2010). Print media, radio, and television were simply conduits for broadcast communication, the one direction transfer of information from one place to many people. The only conversation and information aggregation capabilities available to communicate with media sources, before the internet, were postal delivery of written communication or telephone communication. After the invention and mass connection of the internet—and subsequently social media—in developed nations and their populations, media became available to most people. Within the decade between 2000 and 2010, the styles of political communication have perceptively changed as the result of social media popularity. But how?

Internet and Political Participation

Although studies on the internet and political participation do not specifically measure social media, as it did not exist yet, they are important for laying the basis for how the social media studies were approached. It is possible to benefit from the research on the role of previous technologies in affecting levels and styles of political participation, because we can easily perceive the internet and social media in terms of their common information and communication capabilities rather than as distinct technologies. In this way, considering research on the internet and political participation can be as valuable to this study as research that focuses specifically on social media.

The following review of scholarly research on the internet and social media has been separated into two categories of scholars for each topic: Skeptics and Utopians. These categories represent the primary perspectives dominating the literature in this subject area. The primary assumption differentiating the perspectives lies in the complicated question of whether technology is a tool or a force in-and-of itself. Skeptics represent a school of scholars that have findings indicating that the internet and social media function as a tool that reinforces existing political behavior, and Utopians have findings that indicate that the internet and social media function to increase participation through new capabilities present in the technology.

Skeptics

Skeptics came out of the first wave of studies on the internet and political participation during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The primary thesis that is argued by internet skeptics is that the internet has a limited effect on political participation and will be normalized into behaviors – i.e. people will simply incorporate internet use into their set routine, like other forms of media – and that the internet is a neutral medium and does not inherently change or affect interests. Their skepticism resulted from findings indicating that internet use seemed only to reinforce existing political participation habits, or that any effect was weak and short in duration. Internet users who were already politically active offline could also be found participating politically online, and internet users who were already disinterested in politics offline also chose not to pursue political engagement online (Bimber 1999, Shah et al 2001).

Additionally, online participation showed little tenacity or resolve. The value placed on the online speech, according to skeptics, is considered less important than the value placed on offline speech because it is believed that online forms of participation are fleeting and impulsive.

The research data from this first wave showed limited effect on most political tendencies, and it was clear that younger age groups had higher efficacy with the internet than older age groups, and therefore explained the disproportionate propensity for increased use by younger people to use the internet as a political resource (Bimber 1999, Shah et al 2001).

Bimber (1999) conducted one of the first large scale surveys of internet users, and his conclusions were skeptical that the internet had any effect on increasing or decreasing political participation. In this study, he defined participation as contacting a political or government entity and/or voting. Bimber felt that these were clearly defined parameters with which to assess an increase or decrease in participation. Bimber uses a random digit phone survey, coupled with a year-long internet survey, to aggregate data to determine the likelihood and frequency of internet use for political participation. His findings indicate that the standard models for analyzing political participation amongst people offline—i.e. comparing across education, gender, political interest etc.—appear to be adequate indicators of political participation online as well. The only obvious distortion came from the age group of the online political participants, with the younger age groups being significantly more represented in online participation than older age groups. Bimber, however, accounts for this by stating that "not all people are equally familiar with the internet and how to use it politically, and also from the fact that government offices themselves are unevenly adept with technology" (Bimber 1999, 424). These were clear conclusions for Bimber that the internet did not have any clear relationship with behavior changes for a majority of its users.

Shah et al (2001) followed suit in the skeptic arena with their study of internet use and social capital. Their findings indicate that the text based, impersonal nature, of the internet causes a decrease in social capital. Social capital is a related sociology concept that gives value

to perceptions of control and effectiveness in social situations. Political participation, or participation in any civic context, is assumed to be directly related to a desire for social capital through the individual desire to participate in a social arena. Thus, according to Shat et al, the internet operates as a medium for which social capital is lost, rather than being gained. In their model, when users engage in online social behavior, they are only gaining limited online social capital. But, contrary to initial assumptions that online social capital could translate into offline social capital, heavy internet users were actually shown to become less active in offline social/civic groups because they became less connected with the offline world. Shah et al do concede that users who already showed an interest in civics were likely to express this interest both online and offline, but emphasize that users who only expressed interest in civic information online were unlikely to express offline interest.

Shah's team used a large mail survey of over 3000 respondents to gauge level of internet use and subsequent effects on civic engagement and social capital. They concluded that when relationships do exist between the internet and participation in politics, their highly contextual nature makes them difficult to isolate. They also concluded that relationships between the internet and participation are weak, but hesitantly project that this relationship could strengthen as the internet becomes a more mainstream medium.

It is important to note that the first wave of skeptics were conducting their research in the early 2000s, the first years of home internet availability. Data from a 2003 national usage survey showed that only 59% of the UK general population was using the internet out of their home (ITU 2003). This percentage has increased significantly with each subsequent survey, but this signified a great sociodemographic disparity in the use of the internet that was referenced by all the authors as a significant determinant of likelihood for using the internet as a resource. At the

turn of the millennium, the internet was only just starting to be normalized into everyday life. Limited populations had access to a personal computer at home or work, and the generational gap for computer use was substantial.

Utopians

The second wave of research on the internet and political participation was a reaction to the first wave of skeptics. These Utopian authors dismissed the Skeptic's conclusions that the internet was nothing more than a tool to reinforce existing political behavior. Utopians conclude that the internet as a media uniquely fosters increased participation, and most of these arguments set wider standards for their interpretations of internet use and participation. Instead of simply focusing on electoral behavior as indicators of internet affectation, they included various forms of political speech and alternative behaviors—such as protests, campaigning, etc.—that do not fall under the limited scope of simple electoral participation (Wellman et al 2005, Gennaro and Dutton 2006, Gibson 2005). This is an important expansion in the literature, and the scholarly evolution of this notion is what makes my particular study of social media possible.

Utopians also acknowledge the sociological element to group behavior known as social capital. Social capital is the esteem, pride and influence associated with being a successful and recognized member of a social group. In the lens of this research, social capital serves as a motivator for the member of a social group to continue actions that elicit positive response in the group. Civic and political participation are activities that create social capital, and the two concepts are intimately related when discussing how media can affect human behavior. So, in this context, Utopians assume that the technology promotes increased social capital where it otherwise was not appealing ((Wellman et al 2005, Gennaro and Dutton 2006, Gibson 2005).

One compelling academic assessments of this phenomenon came from Wellman et al (2005), who responded to Skeptics' studies—those that found that online social activity supplements face-to-face and telephone communication without increasing or decreasing it—by showing that "heavy internet use is associated with increased participation in voluntary organizations and politics" (436). Wellman et al. used an online survey of visitors to the National Geographic website to conclude that casual internet use fits the thesis, but they are quick to state that they also found that heavy internet political participation positively correlated to offline political participation. In other words, people who occasionally used the internet might read about politics or engage politically online if they were already inclined to do so, but that people who were highly active in online political discussion and online political organizations were more likely to conduct offline political acts to reinforce online political statements and online social capital created by their heavy participation in online political networks. In this way, the social capital created in online political networks produced higher incentives for offline political engagement in people who had previously shown little or none (Wellman et al 2005).

In the same vein, Gennaro and Dutton (2006) used national survey and interview data to assess how the UK public is using the internet. The surveys and interviews conducted by Oxford University in 2003, and again in 2005, included many questions related specifically to the use of the internet for purposes of political information and participation. Their findings assert Utopian answers too many important questions about the internet: Who uses it, why and how often? Gennaro and Dutton conclude from their data that young adults are more likely to engage in online political searches and activities than offline searches and activities. This lends credence to the Utopian sentiments that new media technologies help young people become more engaged politically. Gennaro and Dutton also expand on that assumption by showing how their data

supports a more significant claim that experience and confidence in using new media technologies is the primary indicator of whether someone will use the internet to search or engage politically. Thusly, it would make sense that young people are more likely to use this tool than older generations, because they are more confident and experienced in its uses. Gennaro and Dutton even go so far as to claim that experience and confidence with the internet is the most significant indicator of online political searches or engagement *regardless* of age, gender, or socio-economic level. Education level, however, was indicative of online participation, but Gennaro and Dutton believe this has more to do with literacy and comfort with the levels of reading involved for internet use (2006).

Gennaro and Dutton's findings are significant to this field of research in several ways. These findings establish that experience with technology is more indicative of online political participation than any pre-existing interest in politics. This could indicate that social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are likely or expected tools of engagement for any people proficient in the use of those technological mediums (Gennaro & Dutton, 2006). This could also be used to suggest that social media might spur political engagement amongst proficient users who were not otherwise interested in politics.

Gibson et al (2005) are also clearly Utopians. Their research is a direct response to Skeptics' normalization thesis—the theory that the internet will be incorporated into life but have no significant effect on interests or behavior—and they conclude that the internet does alter interests and behavior, and that it can increase political activity. What is most important to take away from this research are the findings that the internet was most effectively used by groups that are typically inactive or less active in offline politics.

Using a national survey of UK adults, Gibson et al (2005) expanded the traditional conceptions of political participation to include "looking for political information, visiting a political website, signing up for an online newsletter, discussing politics in a chat group, signing an online petition, sending an email to the government or a political group, donating to a political cause, and joining a political group" (568). This expansion of the traditional definitions of political participation serves a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it acknowledges that the multi-faceted operations of the internet do allow new routes of participation to exist. Secondly, it gives a better understanding of how people are actually using the internet when exploring political interests. By using an expanded definition of participation, Gibson et al were able to tap into sources of political participation being used by groups less commonly found to use traditional routes of participation, and thusly conclude that the internet can and does contribute to increased levels of political participation.

Overall both of these schools of thought have advanced discussion and understanding of how the internet affects political participation. Skeptics, base their findings on unequal access to and the internet, and the conformity of use for this tool on political interest and participation. Their most popular theory, the normalization thesis, was criticized and eventually rejected by the scholarly community as internet access expanded and proved to be more interactive and affective than initially anticipated. The strength of the Skeptics' argument lies mainly in their criticism of access. This is becoming less significant as access expands, but a technology that cannot be used by everyone does provide gaps in the available data. Utopians, on the other hand, conclude that the internet use is indeed correlated to an increase in political participation. The innovative new methods for participating that can be found on the internet provide new routes for communicating and researching, that appear to be more popular than Skeptics initially predicted.

Utopian scholars find that the internet itself fosters participation behavior in people that otherwise would not.

Social Media and Political Participation

Skeptics

These next authors fall into a third wave of internet discussion that focuses solely on the impact of social media. In the late 2000s a wave encompassing both skeptics and utopians began to take interest in social media. The limited timeframe with which this phenomenon has appeared leaves little time for scholarly consensus. Yet, the internet as a medium has become so institutional in daily life that 77% UK citizens now have access to the internet in their homes, and of those internet users 45% of them now use the internet on their cell phones (ONS Internet Access Survey, 2011). This is up 20% from 10 years ago and signifies just how quickly the internet has been incorporated into daily life.

Social Media also appears to be following a similar pattern. In 2011 Facebook was used by 49% of the UK population (Social Baker Marketing, 2012), and Twitter was used by 14.2% (Sysomos Marketing, 2012). These numbers have steadily increased since these social media programs became public in 2006, and the significance of half the UK population creating a social media account in the course of 5 years is certainly research worthy.

Also of important consideration is that social media provides a more intimate network from which to participate politically than primitive internet attempts could offer. The traditional internet forms of political participation were primarily one-way communications, such as an email to an individual in government, or political forums and chat rooms filled with strangers and anonymous individuals. Social media, on the other hand, surrounds the user with a network

of friends that are, more often than not, known to the user in a real world context. This creates an entirely different online social dynamic.

Social media Skeptics are not just rehashing the same concerns that were expressed by the first wave internet Skeptics. These researchers are part of a new wave of skepticism that focuses on the quality, rather than simply quantity, of political participation. Instead of deeming any politically related activity as participation, social media Skeptics are concerned that the *quality* of news, information, and discourse is substantially less meaningful and effective than traditional offline or online political participation.

Baumgartner and Morris (2010) typify the social media Skeptic. These researchers conducted an internet survey of young adults to assess the impact of social media web sites, specifically Myspace and Facebook, on civic engagement and political participation. The results of Baumgartner and Morris' findings indicate that the types of political news shared on social networking sites is reactionary and generally uninformative, and that "users are no more inclined to participate in politics than are users of other media" (Baumgartner and Morris 2010, 24).

Baumgartner and Morris conclude that online political participation is fleeting and not indicative of intent to participate offline, and that meaningful offline participation was considerably less likely than online participation.

The participation variable, in this study, was categorized into two branches. The first, internet participation, was comprised of posting a message, signing an online petition, or forwarding a political link. The second, offline political participation, was measured by whether the users had written or called a politician, expressed an opinion in offline media (TV, radio, newspaper), or signed a hardcopy of a petition.

Pasek et al (2009) conclude, similarly, that "though social networking site users report much higher levels of civic engagement than non-users, they do not demonstrate additional political knowledge, and actually say that they are less trusting of others" (15). Using a large survey sample of telephone interviews, Pasek et al measured social media users' likelihood to engage in civic activities, trust in other users, and political knowledge. Civic participation was the frequency with which they participated in a club or activity, and political knowledge was the aggregation of scores on six general political questions about the U.S. system.

This research is a stated continuation of internet Skeptic Shah et al's (2001) social capital analysis. Social capital gained through social media, according to Pasek et al, does have the ability to transfer offline in the form of increased participation in civic activities. This would seemingly put Pasek et al in the social media Utopian category, except for the negative findings surrounding political knowledge. These inconsistent findings, and a pessimistic outlook for future findings, place Pasek et al safely in the Skeptic category.

Utopians

Social media Utopians, currently fewer in number, present very different conclusions about social media and political participation. Social media Utopians criticize the claims made by Skeptics that political participation on social media is weak or fleeting, and emphasize that there is a research-worthy significance to the increase in quantity of political participation amongst users of social media. Some social media Utopians even conclude that political participation in social media results in increased offline political participation.

Vitak et al (2011) present findings that place them firmly in the Utopian perspective. Using an internet survey of college students, Vitak et al conclude that a positive relationship

exists between social media and political participation. Their research indicates that the social impact of seeing political participation by friends on social media actually increases the likelihood of participation in users. They also conclude that "results from the regression suggest that as the number of political activities people engage in on Facebook increases, so does political participation in other venues, and vice versa" (112). This is the most compelling of the research conclusions from this article.

Vitak et al also use a very open definition of political participation. In addition to the standard forms of offline participation, they include 14 different ways in which to participate politically on social media. Without getting too technical, these forms of participation are adding/deleting political information from their profile page, liking a candidate or political group, discussing politics in a message/instant message/wall, posting a status message/photo/link related to politics, RSVPing to a political event, or joining a political group. By allowing all of these facets of social media sites to operate as forms of self-expression, Vitak et al are able to assess a more thorough understanding of how users participate politically on social media.

Park et al (2009) also find merit in social media as a tool for increased political participation. According to their findings, social media use correlated to information seeking and political action. Their survey of students across two universities resulted in data that indicated that involvement in political groups on social media correlated to increased political participation online and offline, but that this is most common amongst users who were highly active in those groups. "Diverse Facebook groups provide platforms through which young adults who are not interested in social or community services and politics in general can socialize with others on the basis of social issues and common interest" (733). These findings also support Vitak et al's

claims that seeing friends engaged in political activities and discourse promotes similar engagement amongst both interested and disinterested users.

All of the authors in this review have contributed distinct and important findings that together create an extensive pool of research in this area. What is still missing from this discussion is how groups respond to access to the internet and social media. Because the case for this thesis research is the national group Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), it is necessary that we also consider research that have focused on groups and participation. The following section will examine a few cases that can offer valuable insight into the study at hand.

Groups and Political participation

Shirky (2011) presents a review of current events and seeks to answer a very similar question to this thesis. With each of the cases outlined in the paper, Shirky examines how social media changed the way each case interacted within society and towards what democratic end. The most poignant revelation from the Shirky study is his discussion of why social media presents such a unique media space for political groups states:

> In a famous study of political opinion after the 1948 U.S. presidential election, the sociologists Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld discovered that mass media alone do not change people's minds; instead, there is a two-step process. Opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then they get echoed by friends, family members, and colleagues. It is in this second, social step that political opinions are formed. This is the step in which the Internet in general, and social media in particular, can make a difference. As with the printing press, the Internet spreads not just media consumption

but media production as well — it allows people to privately and publicly articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views (33).

It is this conceptual understanding of why social media like Twitter and Facebook can have such a significant impact on the way a group communicates over social media. Shirky is quick to point out, though, that long-term fundamental changes in the way that groups participate politically over social media will take decades or more to take root and become consistently stable enough for serious research.

Della Porta and Mosca (2005) did a case study of The Movement for Global Justice, a global organization, and concluded that "The internet empowers social movements in: (a) purely instrumental ways (an additional logistical resource for 'resource-poor'actors), (b) a protest function (direct expression of protest); (c) symbolically (as a medium favouring identification processes in collective actors) and (d) cognitively (informing and sensitizing public opinion)" (165). Their main assertion is that computer mediated communication gives social movements more possibility of communicating outside the censorship of hegemonic influence and to communicate their true message, but that it does not necessarily make them more heard than they were before.

In their 2005 study, Della Porta and Mosca were able to conduct interviews with group members and administrators at two large protest events, and also had access to their group forums and email newsletters. They found that the internet forum and email capabilities allowed their group to speak more openly and uncensored to their members and the public than they could through traditional media routes or even face-to-face conversations. They found through their interview data that the group was often constrained by what the news media would be willing to discuss and what they could fit into the time-constraints of a face-to-face conversation.

The internet forum and email newsletters were able to provide venues for honest and lengthy discussion of the issues that were important to them.

Merry (2008) findings are similar to Della Porta and Mosca. She finds that the internet and social media serve three important functions for political interest groups. The first is easier means of fundraising. Online communications "offer a tremendous value-added benefit, whereby messages reach an expansive population at no additional cost" (14). This is very similar to Della Porta and Mosca's findings that the internet provides low-cost communication for resource-poor groups. Merry's second point are that her findings indicate the internet can increase mobilization efforts because it "enhances the speed and scope of mobilization efforts at a minimal cost" (15). The last of Merry's findings discuss the effects of internet on coalition-building between interest groups. She finds that the internet makes it easier for like-minded interest groups to gather together online to form larger coalitions. While the example in Merry's book points to a coalition of environmental groups. We can see a parallel in the Muslim Council of Britain which serves as an umbrella coalition of the many Muslim organizations already operating within the United Kingdom.

Livingstone (2006) expands on this discussion by noting that groups can be strengthened by all the benefits of online media (as discussed by Della Porta and Mosca 2005, and Merry 2008). She finds that "it's probably more appropriate to think of online interaction as complementing physical communities… the very growth and intensity of online communities may well speak to the perceived decline in real communities, as humans seek out social support and interaction online. Indeed, there are several case studies showing that small communities have been reinvigorated through online communication" (107). Although she only briefly mentions social media, Livingstone's analysis of online communication is still relevant.

A research paper issued by the Canadian Library of Parliament (2010) on social media and its political implications used interviews with interest group leaders to analyze their experiences with social media use. The background paper found that social media may enable political interest groups to become more effective political actors through ease of access for people searching for groups to join. They also found that interest groups have higher trust in public institutions and figures that interact with them over social media. They also acknowledge that many groups may not have the resources to use social media at its maximum effectiveness. With social media becoming as widespread as it is, most national level interest groups must hire a full or part time administrator to manage the social media account.

Remenyi (2007) would agree with the Canadian Library study, but would add that there are more technological concerns associated with social media and internet administrators than just whether or not someone can be working full time on the website or social media site. Remenyi finds that the diversity of performance among various online interest groups is also associated with the level of technical knowledge held by the administrator of the online accounts. Noting that online technology is constantly changing, Remenyi's research shows how some groups can afford online administrators that can also write and program their own codes, thus creating new online media choices that are not available to groups whose administrators are familiar only with existing technology. Some administrators, especially with the smallest and resource-poor groups, are not even fully familiarized with the options available in existing online spaces (161-163).

These are but a few studies representative of research into group use of social media. The common link between them is the acknowledgement that social media offered each group greater

access to community and discussion where it otherwise had traditionally been more costly and less efficient. What none of these studies cover, however, is how social media changed the content of the groups broadcasted political speech (if it did). These studies focus on how group members speak to each other, rather than how the group speaks to public. This thesis research aims to augment the existing theory in this area with an exploration of the content of the broadcasted political speech of a group before and after social media use.

The previous sections of this chapter have introduced scholarly definitions of participation, a lengthy discussion of literature representing both Skeptics and Utopians from internet and social media scholarly debates, and a brief exploration of the literature on groups and political participation online. The Skeptic category consists of authors who feel that the internet and social media have little to no effect on political participation, or that where participation exists it is negative and isolating in nature. This is rooted in their assumptions about the in-validity of technological determinism. Utopians disagree with this argument and assert that the internet and social media make people more participatory and inclusive, because people behave differently in the face of new technology.

The television and print attention that social media have recently received paints a picture that internet utopians would likely support. Social networking has the potential to enhance political participation and better engage disenfranchised communities, creating a more complete and functional democracy. For this study, I would like to explore whether this connection has a positive impact on democratic participation.

In this chapter I have established the scholarly basis for conducting research in this area. Based on the scholarly works that dominate the fields of internet and social media political participation, I have identified two primary opposing viewpoints. The Skeptics take a cynical

view of internet and social media political participation by arguing that these mediums have little to no effect on participation, or that when they do it is negative and isolating. The Utopians take a different approach and argue that internet and social media do increase political participation and that the nature of online participation makes it inherently positive in and integrating. In the next chapter I will discuss the case selection, research design and methods to be used in conducting this research.

Chapter 3:

Case Selection, Research Design, and Methods

As discussed in the previous chapter, scholars from internet and social media literature are separated into two categories: Skeptics and Utopians. Skeptic scholars believe that social media participation is negative and isolating. Utopian scholars, on the other hand, believe that social media has a significant impact on political participation and that it serves a positive and integrating function. This third chapter will outline and explain the case selection, followed by the research design and methodology used in gathering the data. The last section will describe some of the unique characteristics of Twitter that make analyses of social media revolutionary and challenging.

Case Selection

It is possible to answer the question of whether social media impacts political participation with the examination of an appropriately chosen case study. The case in this study will look at the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). The MCB is located in London with chapters all over the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom was chosen as my area of research for several reasons. First, the UK has the third largest population of Muslims in Europe. 2.9 million Muslims live and work within the boundaries of the UK (Pew Research Center 2010). Although Germany and France have a higher Muslim population than the UK, the language barrier makes a study of this complexity difficult to conduct. Second, the UK has 76% of its population with access to the internet at home or on their cell phone (Ofcom 2011). This makes accessibility of online content easier to retrieve and more comprehensive. Third, the UK provides an excellent example of a country that struggles to integrate its large Muslim population into their culture and

politics. The UK government has publicly criticized its policy of multiculturalism and social integration of Muslims, making analysis of political speech easier to evaluate as it undoubtedly elicits a variety of responses from within the British Muslim community.

I have chosen The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) as my case study because it serves as an example *par excellence* through which to assess the impact of social media on political participation. MCB was chosen as the single case for this study, first, because of its extensive use of the social media application Twitter. Although MCB can be found using several different social media applications, Twitter is used significantly more often than any of the others. Second, because it is a national organization of Muslims representative of all socio-cultural distinctions within the broader UK Muslim community. Both Middle Eastern and Afro-Asian sects of the Muslim community interact with and claim membership under MCB. Third, the MCB has established constitutional goals of enhancing participation, equal rights, and diminished discrimination for Muslims in British society. This makes the goal of assessing political participation and integration more focused in line with the stated goals of the group.

All of these factors together served to influence and guide my selection of the MCB as my ideal choice for answering my question: Does social media use result in a change in quantity and/or quality of political participation? It is imperative that my choice of group for study has a pressing interest in taking a public political stance on various issues, and the MCB creates the ideal types and quantity of data needed for this comparison. The MCB has over a decade of public materials available, as well as more than one active social media account.

Research Design

The purpose of qualitative research has always been to illuminate the intricacies and

nuance that quantitative studies simply cannot tease out with statistics and theory alone. It provides data that speaks to cultural and ethnographic distinction and changes. It allows researchers to gain tacit knowledge and identifications that are necessary for a more complete analysis of events. Since qualitative research delves into complexities and processes, it is perfect for researching political behavior and innovative technology—in this case, social media—and answering those yet unanswered questions.

I will be using the MCB as a case to study the impact of social media on the political speech issued by the group. This should not be confused with examining the impact of the messages of the group on its members or the public. While an interesting question, it falls outside the scope of this research. According to Yin (2003), an explanatory model is most fitting for my design because this type of study is used when seeking an answer to a question with presumed causal or correlational links in that are too complex for quantitative or descriptive analysis. A single-case model is also preferable in this design because of the copious quantities of data necessary for this analysis (Yin, 2003). The sheer volume of social media data makes using multiple cases difficult and prohibitive for the scope of this research.

Twitter is being used in this study as a representative of social media, however it is only a sample of the many types of social media available. To keep the comparison as simple as possible, other social media—such as Facebook, YouTube, etc.—are excluded. The 4,446 messages issued by MCB on Twitter, during the period between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2011, will be compared with data gathered from two traditional offline sources which have been released regularly for the last 10 years. The traditional data consists of all newsletters and press releases for the years of 2005 and 2011. Figure 3.1 shows a visual representation of the quantity of data issued for the years that have been chosen for this research, and Table 3.2 shows

an accurate numerical count of the total speech items issued for each year. The newsletters, while only 2 issues were released for each year of consideration, are reflective of over 100 speech items per issue. This is shown most clearly in Table 3.2 below.

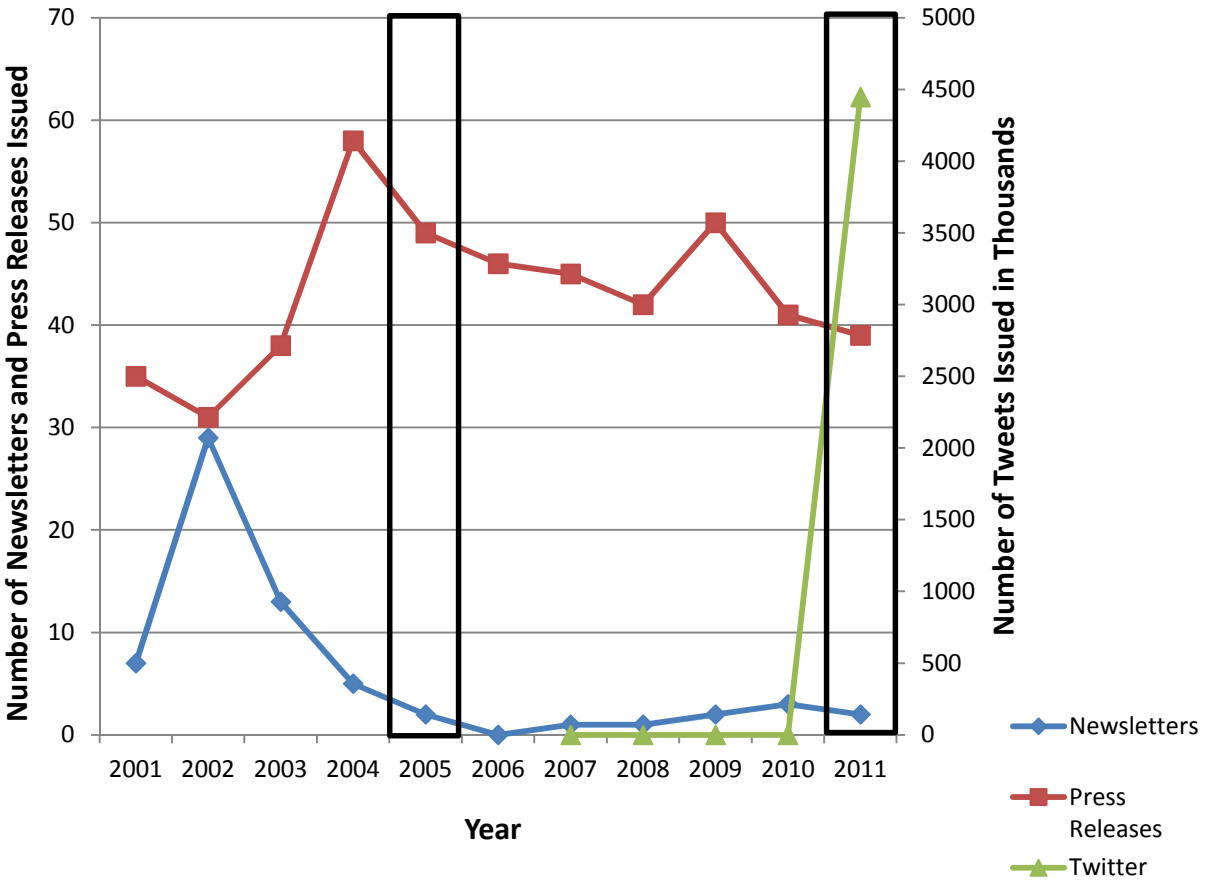

Figure 3.1: Quantity of Data Issued per Year

Table 3.2: Quantity of Speech Items Issued		
Data Source	**Year 2005**	**Year 2011**
Newsletter Topics	130	121
Press Release	49	39
Twitter Posts	0	4446

The two specific years of MCB data focused on in this study are the result of careful consideration. 2011 was chosen because it provides a complete year of social media data from the MCB Twitter account, along with newsletter and press releases. Complete social media data could not be retrieved for all of 2010 and 2012, thus 2011 was the de facto option available. The comparative year, 2005, was chosen specifically because it represents the last full year of newsletter and press release data before MCB started using social media in 2007. These two years will provide sufficient data to establish whether social networking has changed political communication by MCB.

Methods

The case study, as a method, serves a valid a research strategy of empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within a context. It can contain both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, the findings of which seek to explain the behavior of the subject of inquiry (Yin 2003). In this research MCB is the case, and newsletters, press releases and Twitter posts serve as the sources for both qualitative and quantitative data.

I will test both categories of data—social media, newsletter, and press releases—with content analysis. The predominant definitions for content analysis are that it is a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 2004). Content analysis is a study of speech, written or verbal, for context clues on the meaning, tone, and intent of the message. This is the categorization and analysis of the statements made by the subject of study, in this case the MCB, through creation of coding categories. These categories help distinguish statements from one another on the basis of the distinctions that speak to the research being conducted (Seal 2004).

Scholars of content analysis see language as a social practice (Seale 2004). In much the same way, this research is built upon the understanding that political speech is as important an action as any other in the political participation spectrum. Without conversation and discourse, there is no substantive way for the MCB to express a political thought or platform to the members and the public. In this way, content analysis is vital to understanding whether the substance of what they are saying has changed as a result of social media.

This technique is underrepresented in the literature and could serve to contribute to a gap in the theory. What they are saying and how it has changed is equally as important as how often it gets said. The MCB has extensive speech output in the form of press releases, newsletters, and their social media account on Twitter. These sources combined are ample for an exhaustive examination using the content analysis method.

A list of thirteen coding categories has been created to identify the tone and intent of each MCB communication on Twitter, and in the newsletters and press releases. These coding categories, listed in Table 3.3, were chosen because they separate the different speech items into political and non-political categories, with additional provisions for the tone of the political speech items being publicized by MCB. A combined 4,446 tweets, 88 press releases, and 4 lengthy newsletters for the years of 2005 and 2011 will be coded during this analysis.

The categories needed to account for tone as well as content so that change could be tracked over time between the traditional and social media data. This is why there are categories distinguishing between integrating and isolating opinions and news links. The other categories represent the predominant content in the traditional and social media data. These categories will allow for consistent assessment of whether or not Twitter alters the quantity and quality of

political communication. It should also allow us to tease out whether the tone of political communication has changed as a result of the change in communication medium.

The coding results will show the qualitative impact of social media on political speech issued by MCB. The coding percentages for each year will then be analyzed so that 2005 and 2011 data are compared to one another. This should provide important insight into any changes in political communication since MCB started using social media in conjunction with the newsletters and press releases.

Table 3.3: Coding Categories and Descriptions

	Category	Description
1	Integrating Opinion	Communicating an opinion that sounds like it is intended to show Muslim integration into western/British society
2	Isolating Opinion	Communicating an opinion that sounds like it is intended to show Muslims feeling isolated from or incompatible with western/British society
3	Group Event Political	Communication advertising/advocating a political event
4	Group Even Non-Political	Communication advertising/advocating a non-political event
5	Religious Support	Communication that supports a religious group or sends a religious message
6	Charity Support	Communication that supports a charity
7	Advertisement	Anything commercial in nature. “Buy from this business”, etc.
8	Group Information	Communicating basic information about changes in group membership, leadership, awards received, etc.
9	Discrimination by State News Link	News link/item that shows discrimination against British Muslims by the state
10	Discrimination by Individual News Link	News link/item that shows discrimination against British Muslims by an individual
11	Integration by State News Link	News link/item that shows integration of British Muslims into the state
12	News link Other	News item that does not fall into one of the above categories
13	Anything Else Not Listed	Anything else that does not fall into one of the above categories

Expectations

The previous chapter illustrated, through a literature review, that internet and social media scholars have two distinct sets of views on the role of social media on political participation. This thesis research is designed to test which side of the debate on this issue is correct. Based on their approaches, Skeptic scholars would argue that my research will yield limited findings. They would expect that the Muslim Council of Britain is experiencing a phenomenon in its use of social media that might indicate increased political participation by the group, but that the substance and content of the participation is negative in tone. Utopian Scholars, on the other hand, would argue that my research will yield findings that indicate that the Muslim Council of Britain's use of social media has expanded the breadth of political conversations, facilitated a more positive tone, and increased considerably the incidence of political participation by the group.

These approaches have led me to identify four primary expectations (hypotheses) for my research:

Expectation 1: Use of social media by this group has led to an increase in the quantity of political participation.

This would fulfill the Utopian expectation that by instituting social media as one of the means of communication with the public, the Muslim Council of Britain has increased its quantity of political speech. Twitter will have provided a new medium through which to disseminate information and express opinions across a spectrum of topics important to MCB, including politics, and immediate re-posting of current news events.

Expectation 2: Use of social media by this group has led to an increase in the quality of political participation.

This would also fulfill the Utopian expectations by showing a positive change in tone of the speech issued by MCB. An increase in the percentage of speech on Twitter that shows integration into the British community would be indicative of a social media specific change in tone towards more integrating opinions and information. Twitter will have operated as an interactive real-time public forum to facilitate an increased sense of community.

Expectation 3: Use of social media by this group has not led to an increase in the quantity of political participation.

Skeptic scholars would suggest that there will be no change in the quantity of political participation. And, that where participation exists through social media, a deficit will be seen in the traditional forms of communication. The implication is that political statements are simply occurring through social media in place of traditional media, or that the social media is simply not being used that often.

Expectation 4: Use of social media by this group has not led to an increase in the quality of political participation.

This would also fulfill the Skeptic expectations by showing a negative change in tone of the speech issued by MCB. An increase in the percentage of speech on Twitter that shows isolation from the British community would be indicative of a social media specific negative change in tone. Negative tone could be considered indicative of an isolating effect by social media.

In this chapter, I outlined and explained the methodological choices that were made in designing this research. I began with an explanation of why I chose the UK and MCB, followed by the research design and methodology used in gathering the data. In Chapter Four, I will describe the data and explain my analysis.

Chapter 4:

Data Analysis

In the first three chapters, I addressed the problem that British Muslims face as they are discriminated against in British society. Their perceptions of efficacy in the political system are low, and social media has been suggested as a potential cure-all for problems of participation. The scholarly literature in this area suggests that there are two primary schools of thought regarding social media and participation: Skeptics and Utopians. Using the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) as a case study, I will use content analysis and data comparison to test the expectations I created based on Skeptic and Utopian theoretical approaches. In this chapter I will present my findings.

As discussed in the methodology section, the thirteen coding categories (Table 3.3) have been applied to all three of the data sources—newsletters, press releases, and social media. I have separated the data into Traditional Data—newsletters and press releases, and Social Media Data—Twitter posts. Two distinct years of data are pulled from content analysis of the 2005 Traditional Data, and the 2011 Traditional Data and Social Media Data from the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). The following results will show that not only has the quantity of political participation increased, due most significantly to the volume of Twitter posts issued, but that the quality or tone of the discourse has also changed.

The graphs and tables found below will show the 2005 Traditional Data results compared to each other, and then compared to the 2011 Traditional Data results. These will be followed by a comparison of the aggregate 2005 and 2011 Traditional Data to the 2011 Social Media data. The results of the discourse data will be supported by a table identifying the change in opinion across data sources, a table identifying the number of total speech items issued in each opinion

category, and a graph representing the number of Twitter posts released per week and the identification of the issues that caused any surges or spikes in that timeline.

Traditional Data: 2005 Press Releases and Newsletters

In 2005 MCB released 49 press releases and two newsletters that were comprised of 130 statements or topics. When analyzing both the press releases and newsletters from that year, it was important to identify the percentage of statements released by MCB in each coding category. It is clear from Figures 4.1 and 4.2 (below) that the bulk of the statements fall into two primary coding categories, Integrating Opinion and Isolating Opinion. The 2005 data did not have enough variety to fill each coding category, so as a result, some coding categories remain empty.

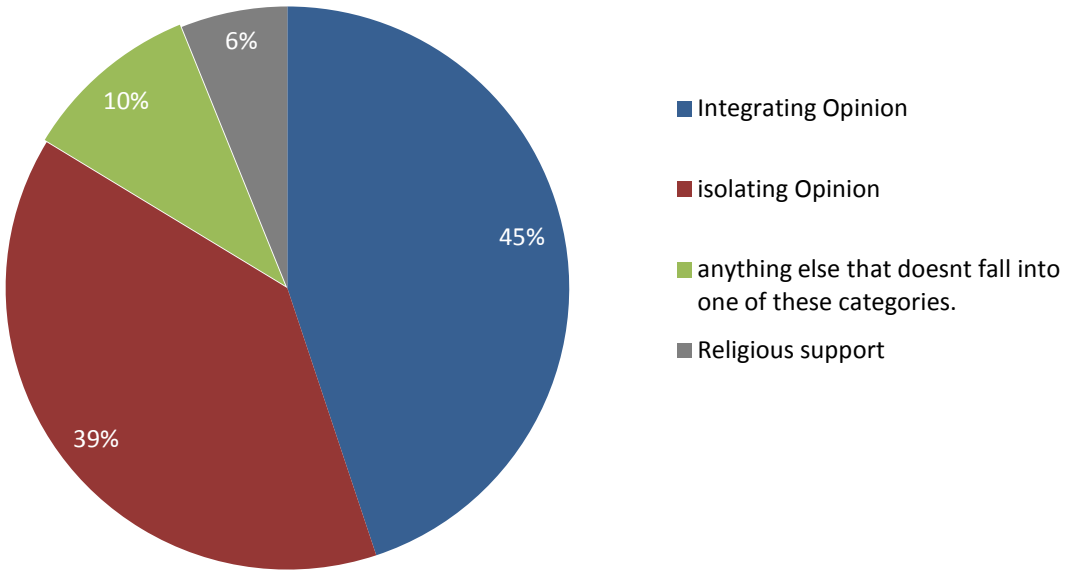

Figure 4.1: Press Release Data 2005

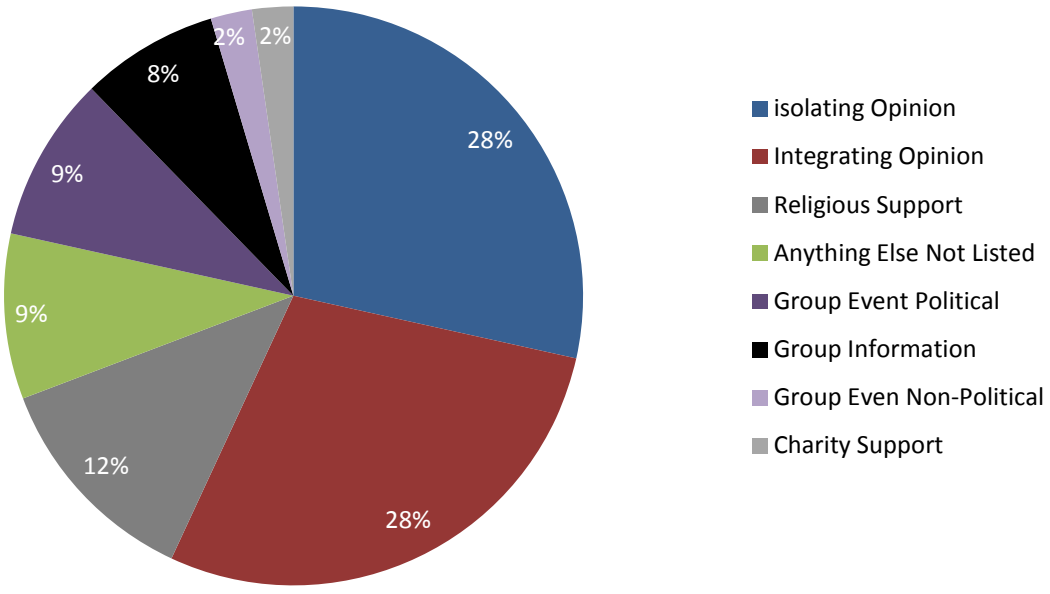

Figure 4.2: Newsletter Data 2005

For the year of 2005, the newsletters were a more diverse outlet for communication by MCB than the Press releases, which is shown by the difference in the number of categories of statements present in the newsletters versus the press releases. However, this does not seem to affect the rank of highest percentage categories, with Isolating and Integrating Opinion comprising 89% of press release statements and 56% of newsletter items. In sum, as Figures 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate, the 2005 data for newsletters and press releases are mostly dominated by Isolating and Integrating Opinion categories, while many of the existing categories are unfilled.

Traditional Data: 2011 Press Releases and Newsletters

2011 Data shows slightly different results when comparing press releases to newsletters. The number of press releases and newsletter items issued stayed relatively consistent at 39 press releases and 121 newsletter items (in two issues) respectively. Nonetheless, as figures 4.3 and 4.4

illustrate below, it is evident that not only have press releases expanded the categories with which they address, but that newsletters have also increased categories and changed focus considerably.

The bulk of statements in the 2011 press releases still fall within the same two main categories as 2005, Integrating and Isolating Opinion, although the percentage of these statements has been reduced from 89% in 2005 to 62% in 2011. This drop in opinion percentage in the press releases can be attributed to the inclusion of three additional categories of statements, specifically the inclusion of Political and Non-Political Events, and Group Information.

The newsletters have shown a significant change in focus between the two years of data. Without being able to interview the administrator of the newsletters, however, it is difficult to say why this change has occurred. In 2005, the newsletter data was primarily dominated by opinion and religious support, with group events representing only 11% of the material in the newsletters. The 2011 Newsletters show a marked change in focus, and group events are clearly the dominant topic at 60% of the presented materials. Opinion statements dropped from 56% in 2005 to just 15% in 2011.

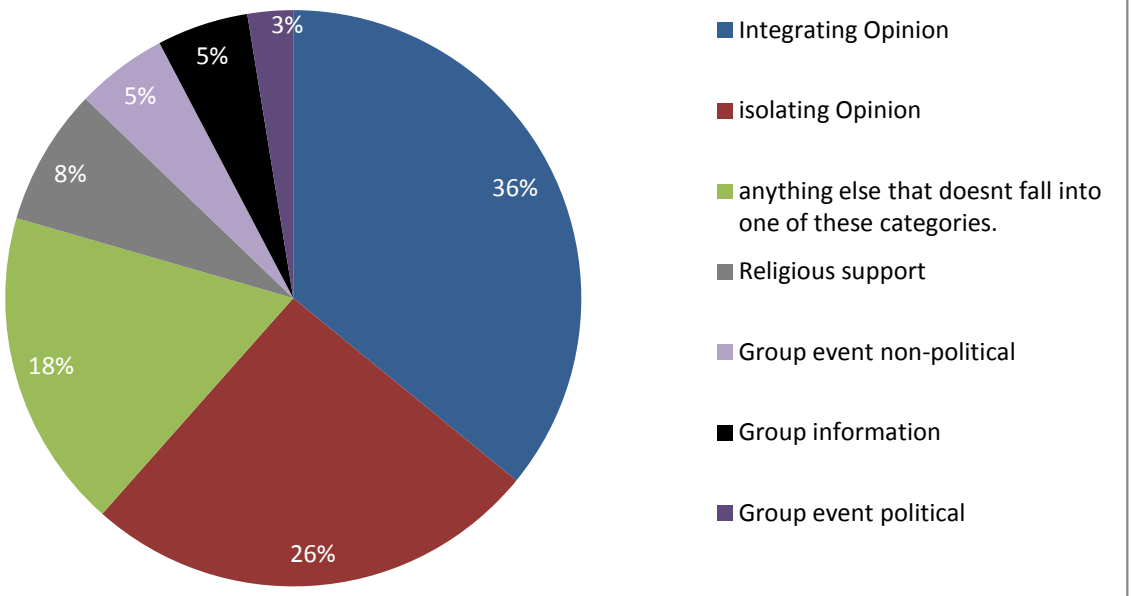

Figure 4.3: Press Release Data 2011

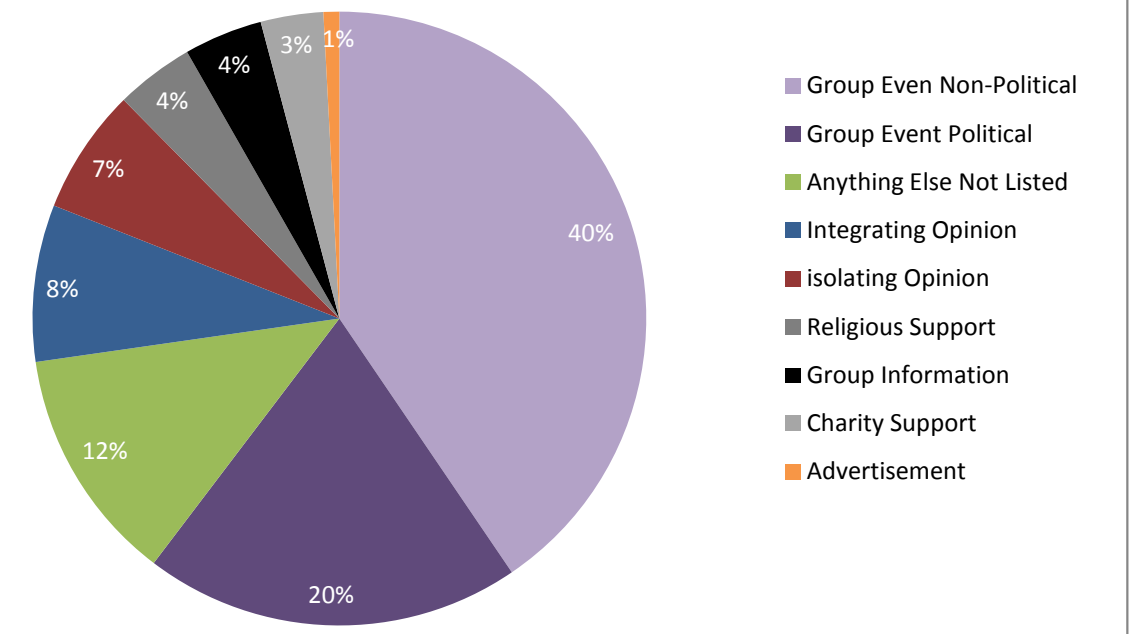

Figure 4.4: Newsletter Data 2011

Traditional Data: Aggregate 2005 and 2011 Press Release and Newsletter Data

The combined data for each dependent source will give a more accurate overall qualitative picture of the pre-existing methods of communication for the MCB. Figures 4.5 and 4.6 below represent the combined coding results for the 2005 and 2011 data from the press releases and newsletters. The results of this comparison yield similar, but not identical, results.

The press release aggregate data confirms that the press releases are the predominant method of communicating a political opinion within the Traditional Data. With 74% of the press releases falling into the integrating or isolating opinion category, 41% integrating and 33% isolating, it is clear that a majority of the press releases are indicative of political participation through speech. The remaining 26% represents Religious Support, Group Events (political and non-political), and other.

The aggregate newsletter data shows an obvious combination of the 2005 data, which was predominantly opinion, and the 2011 data, which was predominantly group events (political and non-political). The combination of these two years resulted in a relatively even split, with the top four categories each representing approximately 20% of the content. Opinion statements comprised 37% of the content, 19% integrating and 18% isolating, yet the Group Events categories were very close with 35% of the content.

The important information to take away from the aggregate individual Traditional Data is that, although each represents a significant amount of opinion data, the diversity of categories is relatively low considering that there are thirteen categories. This will be of significant consideration after reflection upon the data results from the independent variable, Twitter posts, in the next section.

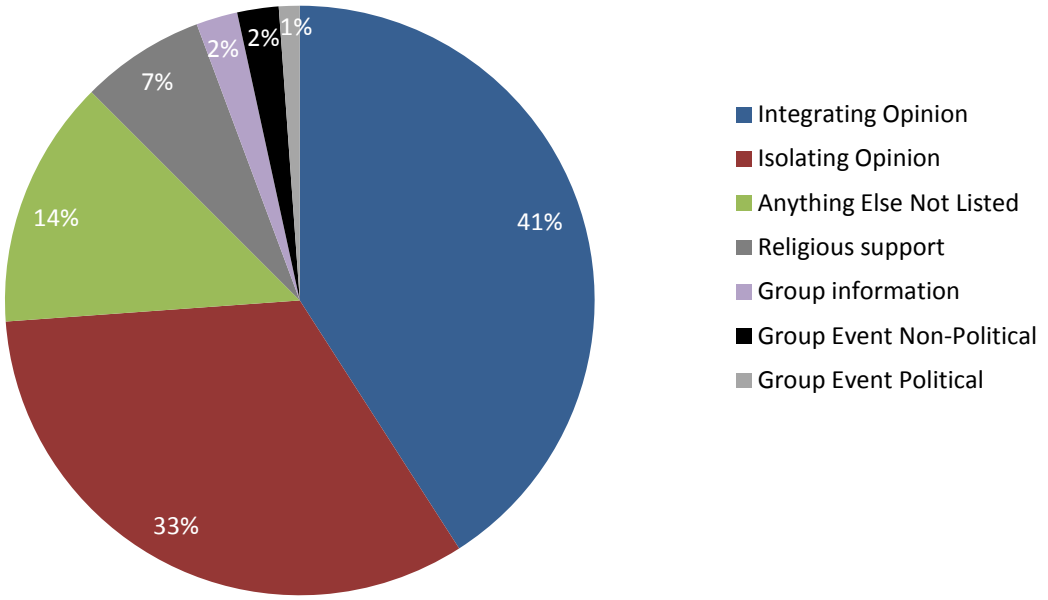

Figure 4.5: Press Data Aggregate 2005 & 2011

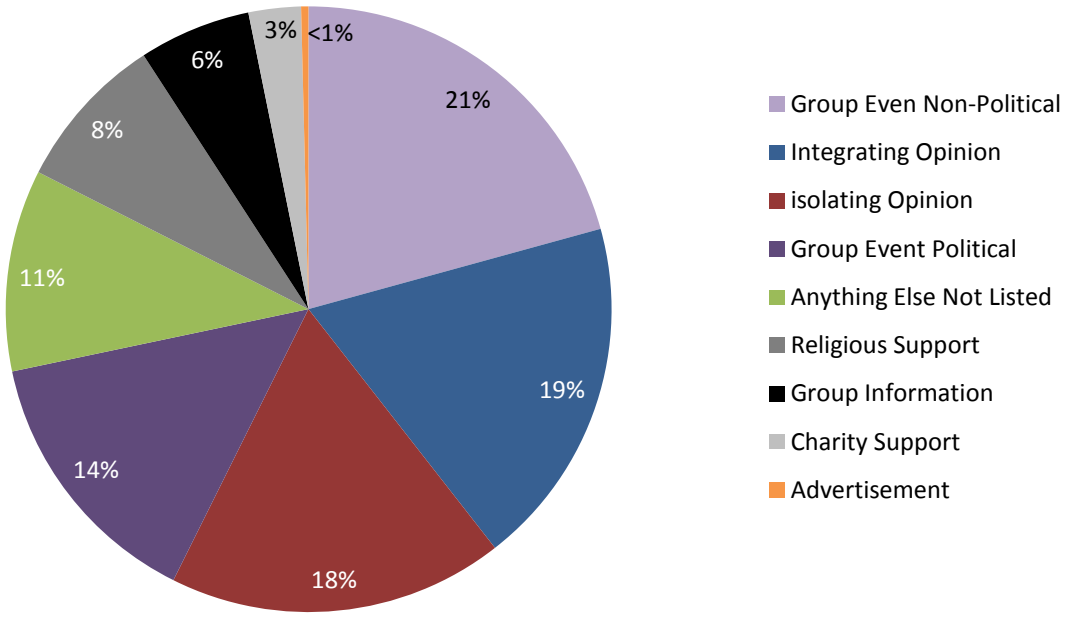

Figure 4.6: Newsletter Data Aggregate 2005 & 2011

Social Media Data: 2011 Twitter Posts

It is immediately apparent from Figure 4.7 below, that the Twitter data shows a marked departure from the trends in results that we saw from the Traditional Data. Not only is there a clear increase in diversity of categories present, but four specific categories appear in this data set that were not present in previous comparisons. All four of these additional categories represent news links of various tones.

News links posted by MCB on Twitter comprise 52% of the categorized findings from this source. These news links have been separated into 4 categories: Discrimination by the State, Integration by the State, Discrimination by Individual, and News Link Other. They represent four of the five predominant discourse categories from Twitter, with Discrimination by the State and Integration by the State taking the top two slots.

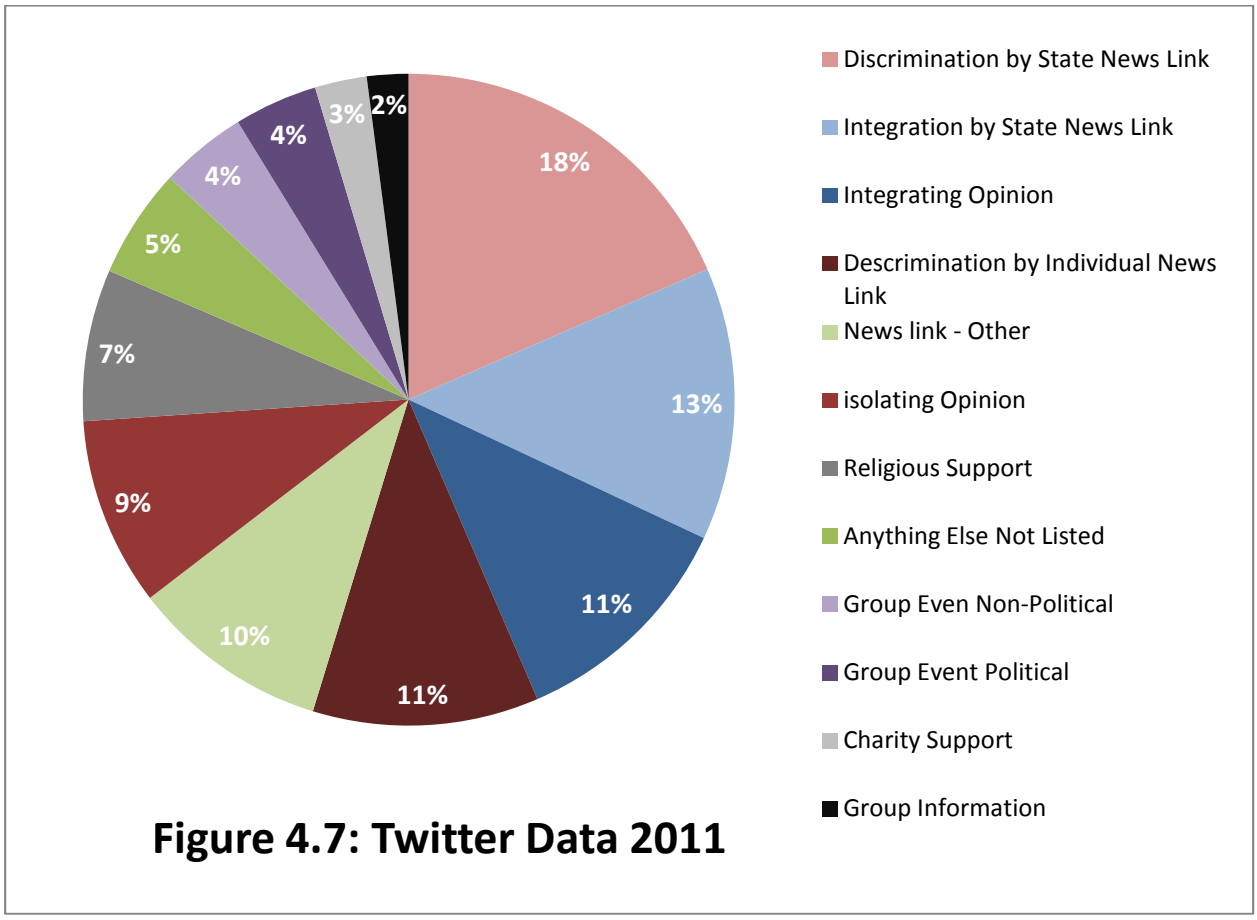

Figure 4.7: Twitter Data 2011

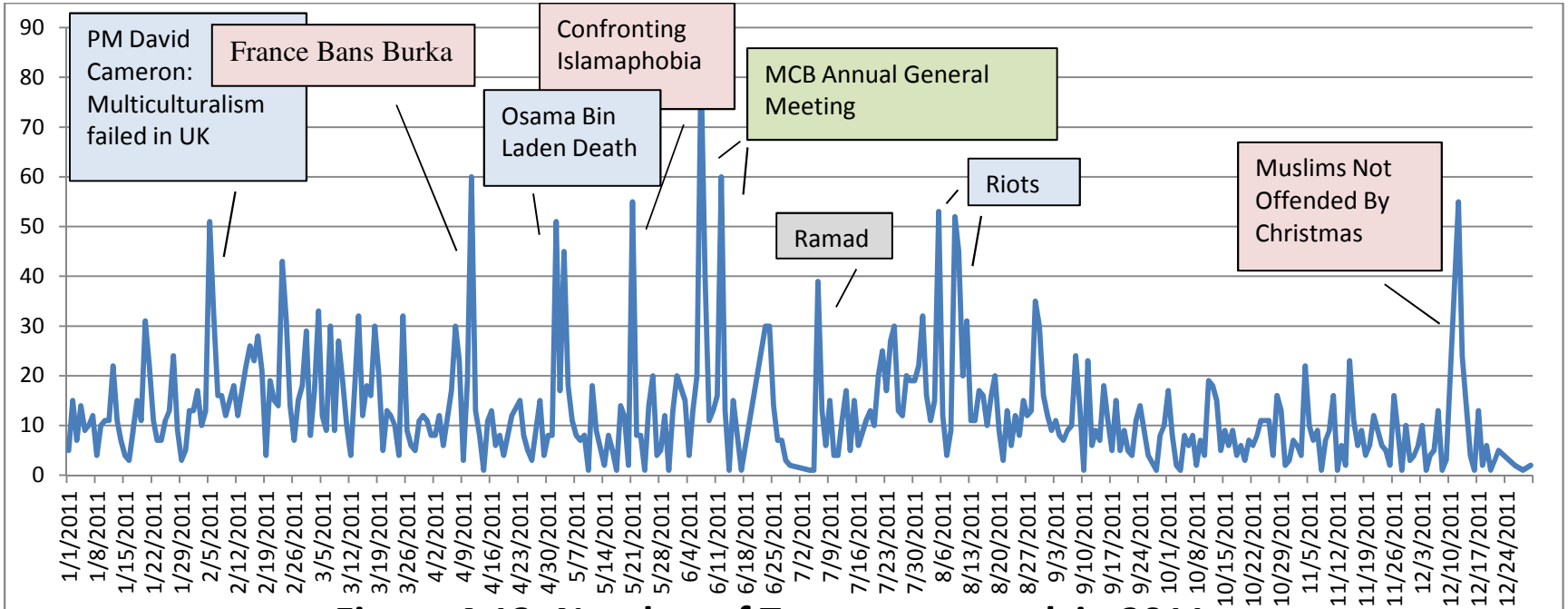

Figure 4.13: Number of Tweets per week in 2011

When the Twitter findings are compared with the aggregate dependent variables in Figure 4.8, one can begin to see how the four additional categories present in the Twitter data represent a change in the type and quality of discourse usually present in the standard dependent variables. Although Integrating and Isolating opinions still represent 20% the Twitter data, with Integrating Opinion 11% and Isolating Opinion 9%, these opinion categories are represented more significantly in the dependent variables with 46% of the press release and newsletter data forming opinion statements, 24% Integrating and 22% Isolating.

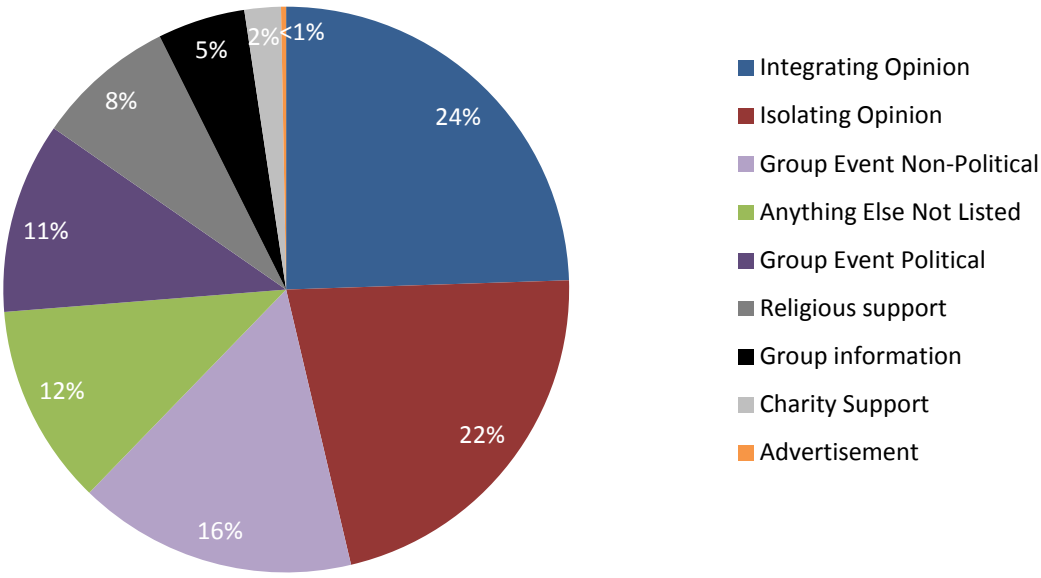

Figure 4.8: Aggregate Press Release and Newsletter Data 2005 and 2011

It is also important to note that the percentage of Twitter posts allotted for promoting political events is less than the percentage allotted by newsletters and press releases. The aggregate dependent data indicates 11% of the statements are related to political events, whereas the Twitter data shows only 6% of the posts related to these events. As will be apparent in Figure

12 however, despite the percentage of political events in Twitter only representing 6% of the posts, the sheer number of Twitter posts made in 2011 makes that 6% representative of significantly more statements about political events than the 11% of statements from the dependent data.

Data Analysis

To simplify this comparison, Figures 4.9 and 4.10 below have been created to show exactly which categories are of the most importance to this analysis. Because the Twitter data includes the four additional categories of news links, three categories of which are important to the qualitative analysis, it is easier to view these with the irrelevant categories blacked out. As discussed in the methodology section, the News Link categories have been included into the politically integrating and isolating speech categories.

The Traditional Data represented in Figure 4.9 shows 24% integrating opinion and 22% Isolating opinion. This is a larger percentage of opinion than is reflected in the Twitter posts in Figure 4.10, Integrating Opinion 11% and Isolating Opinion 9%, until you include the relevant news link categories as well. After including the news link categories for Discrimination by the State and Discrimination by an Individual with the Isolating Opinion category, the total Isolating Opinion category comes to represent 38% of the statements made on Twitter. Similarly, when the Integration by the State category is combined with the Integrating Opinion category, the total Integrating Opinion category becomes representative of 24% of the statements made on Twitter.

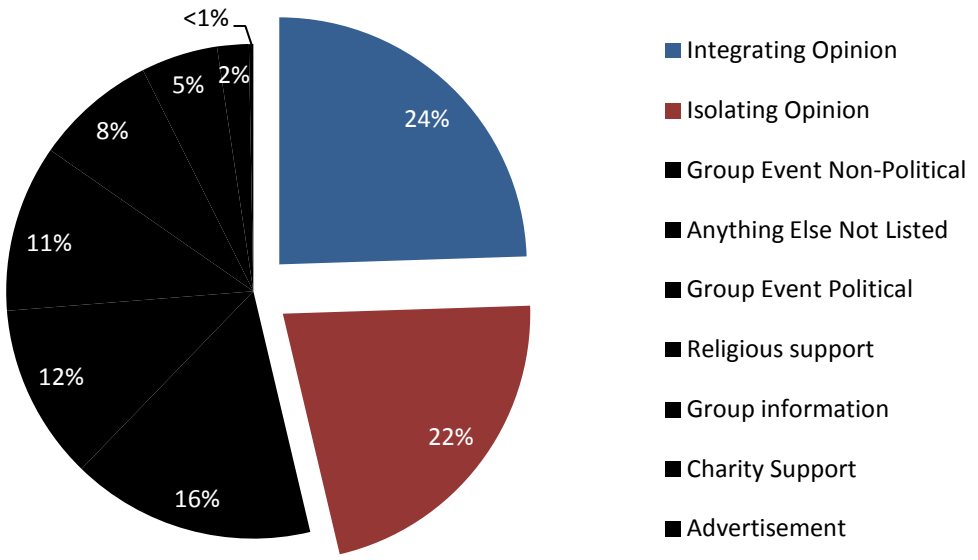

Figure 4.9: Press Release and Newsletter Data Combined Integrating and Isolating Focused Graph

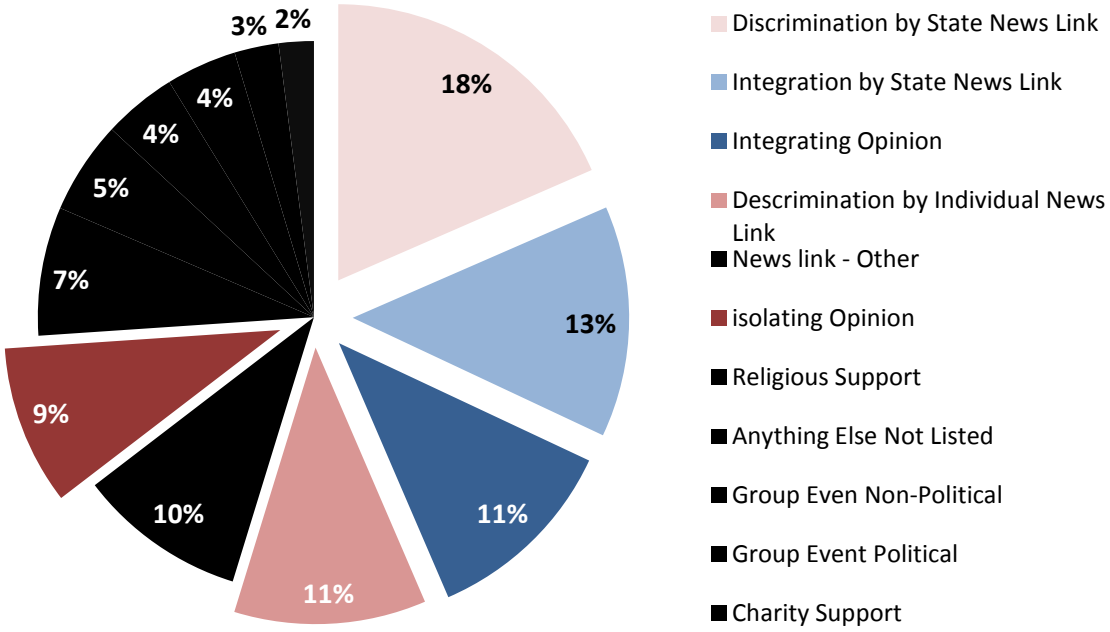

Figure 4.10: Twitter Integrating Isolating Focused Graph

When these categories and percentages are laid out in the table, Table 4.11 below, it can be seen that Twitter represents a 16% increase in isolating opinions as compared to the dependent data. The integrating opinion data stayed consistent with the percentages found in the dependent data, but as can be seen in Table 4.12 below, the sheer number of posts made on Twitter significantly outnumber the dependent variables in every category.

Table 4.11: Qualitative Opinion Percentage Change Table

Data Source	Integrating Opinion	Isolating Opinion	Total Opinion Points
Press and Newsletters	24%	22%	46%
Twitter	24%	38%	62%
Percent Difference	0%	**16%**	

Table 4.12: Quantitative Opinion Change Table

Data Source	Integrating Opinion	Isolating Opinion	Political Events	Total Number of Posts
Press and Newsletters	81 Statements	75 Statements	37 Statements	193 Statements
Twitter	1,067 Posts	1,689 Posts	267 Posts	3,023 Posts

So what does all this mean in plain terms? The findings are two-fold. First, the data suggests that the utopians were correct in expecting that social media does increase the quantity of political participation. The quantity of participation is evident from Table 4.12, which shows a 15x increase the number of participatory posts, with 3,023 posts on Twitter vs. 193 statements made in the dependent sources. The quality of participation has also changed, albeit a somewhat negative change. Second, the data suggests that the Skeptics were also correct in expecting that the use of social media might increase feelings of isolation. Table 4.11 identifies a 16% increase in isolating opinions on social media vs. traditional routes of political speech for MCB.

Does this mean that social media is changing MCB in a negative way? Not necessarily. Although 38% of the Twitter posts are isolating in tone, there is still 24% that are integrating in

tone and 48% of the posts that are unrelated to politics. What could be of more concern that the negative tone of some of the messages, is that the messages may be lost entirely in the many thousands of Twitter posts that are issued annually. Unless a member of the public is habitually checking the Twitter messages from MCB, she or he may not be aware of the difference in tone between social media and the traditional sources of MCB speech. Because, while a 16% change in discourse tone might be statistically significant, more research would be needed to assess if this change is registered in the perceptions of the public who follow MCB statements/posts.

In this chapter I presented a comparison of data collected using content analysis from traditional and social media speech issued by the MCB. What I found is that social media does indeed change the quantity and quality of political participation by the MCB. Use of social media by MCB increases substantially the incidence of political participation, and makes the tone of that participation 16% more negative than the participation found in the traditional data. The fifth and final chapter will discuss the implications of this research, explore the weaknesses, and make suggestions for future research in this area.

Chapter 5:

Discussion and Conclusion

In the first chapter, I discuss the problems of Muslim tension and perceived ineffectiveness in British politics. It has been suggested by the media and scholars alike that social media might be a potential solution for problems of participation. The second chapter reflects the scholarly literature in this area. I identify two primary schools of thought regarding social media and participation: Skeptics and Utopians. In the third chapter, I submit the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) as a case study, and outline the data and comparative methods to be used in analysis. In the fourth chapter, I use content analysis and data comparison to test expectations based on Skeptic and Utopian theoretical approaches. The findings that I present indicate that political participation by MCB over social media, specifically Twitter, occurs exponentially more often than through traditional sources of communication like newsletters and press releases. I also found that the tone of MCB participation is 16% more isolating and negative through social media than the traditional sources. In this last chapter I will discuss the implications and limitations of my research, and make some recommendations for future studies in this area.

Implications of This Study

What do the implications of this research mean for the larger questions at hand? Can social media be used to alleviate tensions with Muslims in Western societies? Can social media assist in growing Muslim perceptions of inefficacy in the political system? What I can see on some level is that concerns about Muslim integration into Western politics have some basis in

truth. Based on the quality of statements made through social media, there is a clear indication of an increase in isolating speech by the MCB. However, this finding should not automatically result in a conclusion that Twitter is likely to affect the group to isolate itself rather than integrate, as the question of integration is much more complicated and involves a number of factors. A significant factor in the integration of Muslims, or any other minority group, is their treatment at the hands of the majority. Examining both the traditional and social media data has allowed me to fully perceive the magnitude of discrimination that is going on in British society. Discrimination along with fear, dissent, and religious intolerance is like swimming against the current, and fuels isolation rather than integration.

The implicit connectedness and integration that Utopian scholars thought would occur through social media does not appear to be an inherent trait. On this front the Skeptics concluded correctly that social media appears to function as a neutral platform to be filled up with and operated as what the user chooses. Utopians presented arguments that asserted social media would make politics more inclusive, rather than exclusive. Since that did not appear to be the circumstances in this case, I wonder if social networking may be allowing groups to participate in niche politics that do not necessarily resonate throughout the entire public sphere.

And what of the Skeptics' other argument that social media will not amount to an increase in political participation, but rather that people will simply use social media in place of traditional sources? Clearly, this is not the case with MCB. The amount of political speech by MCB in the traditional sources did not change significantly, but the amount of participation over social media outnumbered the traditional sources by thousands. Whether MCB perceives an increase in efficacy cannot be determined within the scope of this study, but the level of participation that is expressed by them through social media shows promise for truth in that

statement. Further research is necessary to determine whether this trend holds true for other groups who use social media, but in the case of MCB, the Utopians appear to right on that accord.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations: 1) The case study method; 2) the lack of access to MCB; 3) the weaknesses in the coding categories and a lack of significant coder-reliability; and 4) the multitude of challenges in studying a new technology like social media. Each of these limitations will be discussed below.

First, this study relies on a case study method which is limited in two important areas. Case studies are not useful for generalizing results (Marshall et al. 2011, 60). While findings in this research are significant for understanding how the MCB uses media tools to operate within British politics, they do not supply sufficient evidence to confidently generalize results in other cases. In the instance of a single-case study, limited access can also create barriers to understanding behavior patterns (Yin 2009, 23). Without intimate first-hand accounts of the thought processes behind actions taken by the group, I can only speculate as to the reasons those actions were chosen.

Second, this thesis only examines the political speech by the group, but does not examine its impact. This decision was, in part, because interview and survey access was not granted by the MCB. With more cooperation from the MCB, I would have interviewed the social media administrator to get an insider account and perspective of any changes that have occurred with group communication as a result of social media use. It would also be pertinent to know if the social media administrator has unilateral control over the content that is posted, or whether there

are guidelines used to decide on content. What prompts them to post more often on some days and weeks than others? Are the sources of media content online, such as news links, different or the same as the sources of content for the newsletters and press releases. These are insights that can only be provided through conversation with the staff at MCB.

Without MCB consent, I could not survey the followers of MCB either. We don't know the impacts of social media participation on the members, because it's not in the scope of this study. For the impact to be there the followers must be paying close attention, and there's no way to gauge interest and comprehension without a survey of MCB's Twitter followers, or perhaps intimate access to the technical records held by Twitter for the MCB followers. The latter of which has legal implications for violating privacy and civil rights.

Third, with the power of hindsight, I would also suggest some changes to the coding categories that I used. I would have expanded my categorization of political events to account for the tone of the event. As it stands, in this study I was unable to include the political events into the discussion of tone, because I did not have separate categories for integrating and isolating political events. I would also include separate categories for messages posted by users that were forwarded to the entire group by MCB. These were included in MCBs opinion count because by forwarding these opinions to the group, MCB is explicitly supporting the message. But, it would be interesting to know how much of that makes up the content that is posted on Twitter, or how these messages would be categorized for tone.

One aspect of this study that provides a considerable weakness is the lack of a substantive coder-reliability check. In a short reliability check of 50 twitter posts. A non-academic, impartial coder did not consistently arrive at the same coding categories that I assigned for the same twitter posts. When questioned, the reliability coder asserted insecurity with understanding the political

issues. The more obvious coding assignments remained consistent between the reliability coder and myself. Subtle distinctions in content and tone, however, were more significant to me and went unnoticed by the reliability coder. If this study were to be repeated, then I would suggest a collaboration by two or more researchers who can provide coder-reliability for one another and feel confident that their level of knowledge on the subject matter is consistent and broad.

Fourth, as with any new technology, there are challenges to measuring its use and effectiveness. In the case of Twitter, its servers will only retain online data up to a certain storage limit. Without speaking to a Twitter administrator, I cannot say what that limit is. But in the case of the MCB Twitter account, the Twitter servers would only retain Twitter posts going back about 9 months. The timespan spent collecting data for this thesis gave me access to one full calendar year of Twitter posts, but a study across a longer timeframe would allow for a more complete understanding of social media trends over time.

Recommendations for Future Research

What I have discussed in this research is just the tip of the social media iceberg. Not only are there thousands of other questions to answer about social media as it exists today, but the evolution of this technology is in its earliest stages. Will social media be controlled through censorship? How do other groups respond under similar examination? Do social media sites compete with one another for attention from the same viewer base? Would the results look the same if this research had used Facebook instead of Twitter? Do other Muslim groups in Europe share similar results?

One particular aspect of Twitter that fell outside the scope of this research was the common use of the hashtag in a majority of Twitter posts. A #hashtag is an aspect of Twitter that

provides a unique dimension deserving further study. On Twitter, the addition of a # sign—or "hashtag"—before a word or phrase causes that word to be tracked by Twitter. When searched, a hashtag allows all posts using the exact same hashtag to be compiled in a list for easy viewing. This creates instant connections for Twitter users wishing to connect over an issue, event, person, place, etc. For example, a post might read "I love this city! #Manchester". Twitter will read '#Manchester' as a keyword to use to suggest this posting to anyone else who searches for the hashtag #Manchester in a post. In this way, users will be connected to one another over their mutual interest in Manchester, even if they have no other similarities.

This #hashtag phenomenon is especially interesting to study because the connections being made through a hashtag posting or search are quite arbitrarily related to the use of keywords, but can connect people across interests and social networks. This means that people can form connections and find information that they were not even necessarily looking for. The implications for this and political participation are as yet unknown, but this is certainly a manifestation of techno-culture that deserves attention. How does #hashtag affect the individual user's social media experience? Does the use of a hashtag expand it by displaying posts from people and groups that a user might be unfamiliar with, or does it narrow it by allowing people to search for things that they are most likely to want to see? Unfortunately, these are not questions that this research will answer, but I hope to see research that includes this element in their discussion.

Conclusion

2011 has proven to be a trying year for British Muslims. Much progress has been made in the Middle East for democracy and civil rights, but British Muslims have received less than open

arms into the UK political system. It was my sincere hope that the Utopian scholars were right, and that social media inherently makes communities more inclusive. But, although my findings show MCB to be exponentially more participatory in political speech, social media appears to make them more isolated and negative in tone. Perhaps continued research will show that 2011 was just a spike in the timeline and that overall social media does more good than harm.

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