



FLEISHMANSM
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS
HILLARD

 European Parliament
Digital Trends

May 2009

Content

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Introduction

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Introduction

It is with great pleasure that we present the results of our research into the digital behaviour of European parliamentarians.

The results shed light on how Members of the European Parliament are using the internet as a tool to reach out to voters and as a source of information to inform their legislative work.

110 MEPs (14% of the EP) responded to our questionnaire during April 2009. The statistics are indicative of the actual use of digital tools by MEPs.

The results of our research seek to shed light on how Members of the European Parliament are using the internet as a tool to reach out to voters and as a source of information to inform their legislative work.

We hope that this summary of the main results will help provoke debate amongst policymakers and stakeholders about the impact of the internet on Brussels politics and public affairs.

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Summary of results

➤ Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) recognise that EU citizens go online and that they therefore need a web presence. However, the majority of MEPs do not currently take full advantage of **social media** tools as a means to engage with voters and drive them to their websites (see pages 9 to 13).

- 75% of MEPs use a personal website extensively.
- 62% of MEPs have either never heard of Twitter or have no plans to use it.
- 24% of MEPs use a blog extensively but only 26% of MEPs who blog comment on other blogs once a week or more.

➤ MEPs believe that TV remains the most effective way to communicate to voters. A lack familiarity with **social media** may be leading MEPs to underestimate the effectiveness of the internet as a means of reaching out to their electorate (see pages 14 to 17).

- 80% of MEPs believe websites to be either very effective or effective in communicating to voters, making websites as effective as one-on-one meetings.
- 51% of MEPs believe blogging or micro-blogging to be very effective or effective in communicating to voters compared to 81% for writing a newspaper column.
- 33% of MEPs believe online advertising to be either a very effective or effective way to communicate to voters compared to 57% for TV advertising and 45% for print advertising.

➤ SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media means online tools and digital platforms used to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives, such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs.

Summary of results

➤ MEPs use internet resources on a regular basis to understand legislative issues. A variety of online tools are used as part of normal working life for this purpose (see pages 18 to 22).

- 93% of MEPs use search engines daily to understand legislative issues. 54% use Google.com while 41% use national versions of the same search engine.

- 74% of MEPs visit online versions of traditional newspapers on a daily basis, while 38% visit online EU specialist media each day.

- 65% of MEPs visit Wikipedia style tools at least several times each week to understand legislative issues, while 36% visit blogs in the same period.

➤ MEPs are increasingly adopting digital tools for both research and outreach, but information from websites and blogs is currently less important in informing their thinking than information gathered from off-line sources (see pages 23 to 28).

- 87% of MEPs believe personal contact with representatives of groups of voters to be very important or important.

- 42% of MEPs believe coverage in national media to be very important in informing their policy thinking, more than twice the number who stated coverage in online EU specialist media to be very important.

- 32% of MEPs who blog believe blogs to be important or very important in informing their policy thinking, compared with 17% of MEPs who do not blog.

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How are MEPs using digital tools to reach out to voters?

Websites are a must-have for MEPs, but that's it



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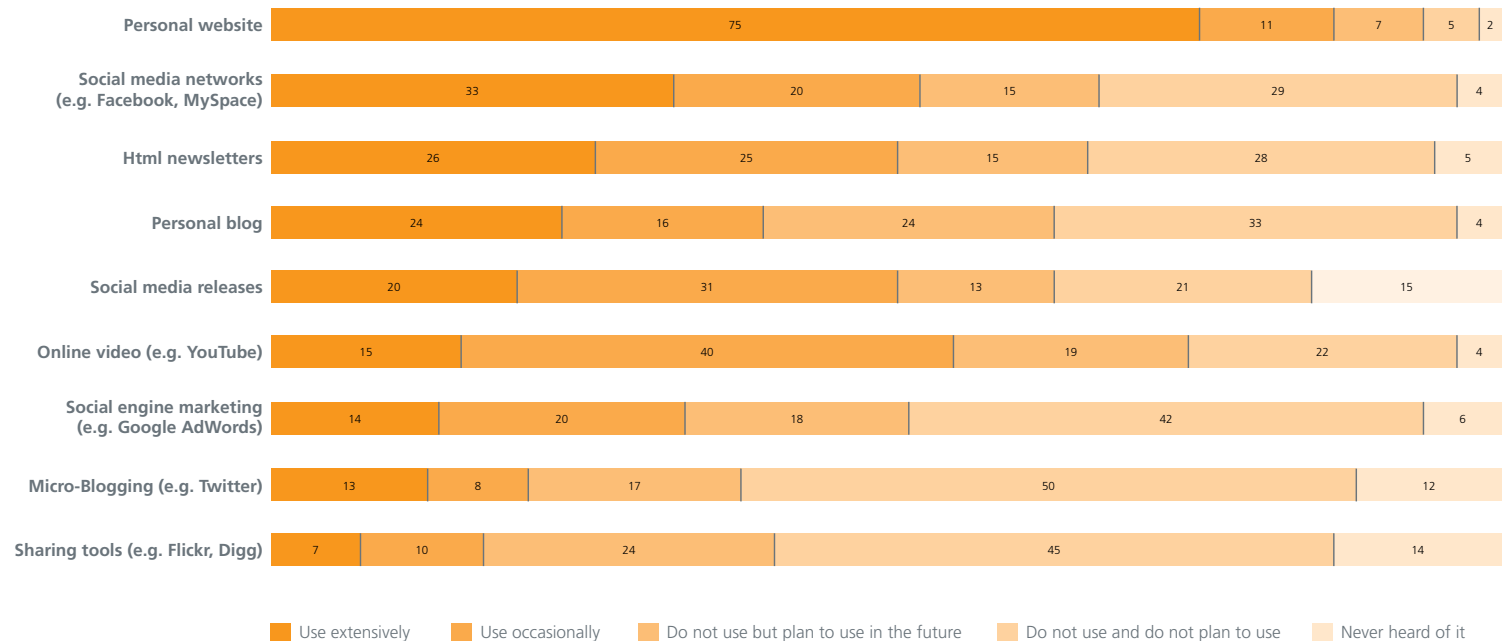
How are MEPs using digital tools to reach out to voters?

The online tools being used to communicate with voters

MEPs have recognised the importance of having a strong web presence in communicating with voters with 75% of respondents claiming to use a website extensively for this purpose. Whilst there are a number of early adopters who have demonstrated an understanding of how to leverage additional digital tools for effective communication and campaigns, a majority of MEPs do not venture beyond a website in their efforts to communicate with voters.

The number of MEPs who use *occasionally* or *plan to use in the future* social networks, personal blogs, html newsletters, social media releases or online video suggests that there is an opportunity for growth in the use of these tools. Over half of all MEPs are likely to turn to Web 2.0 in the coming years.

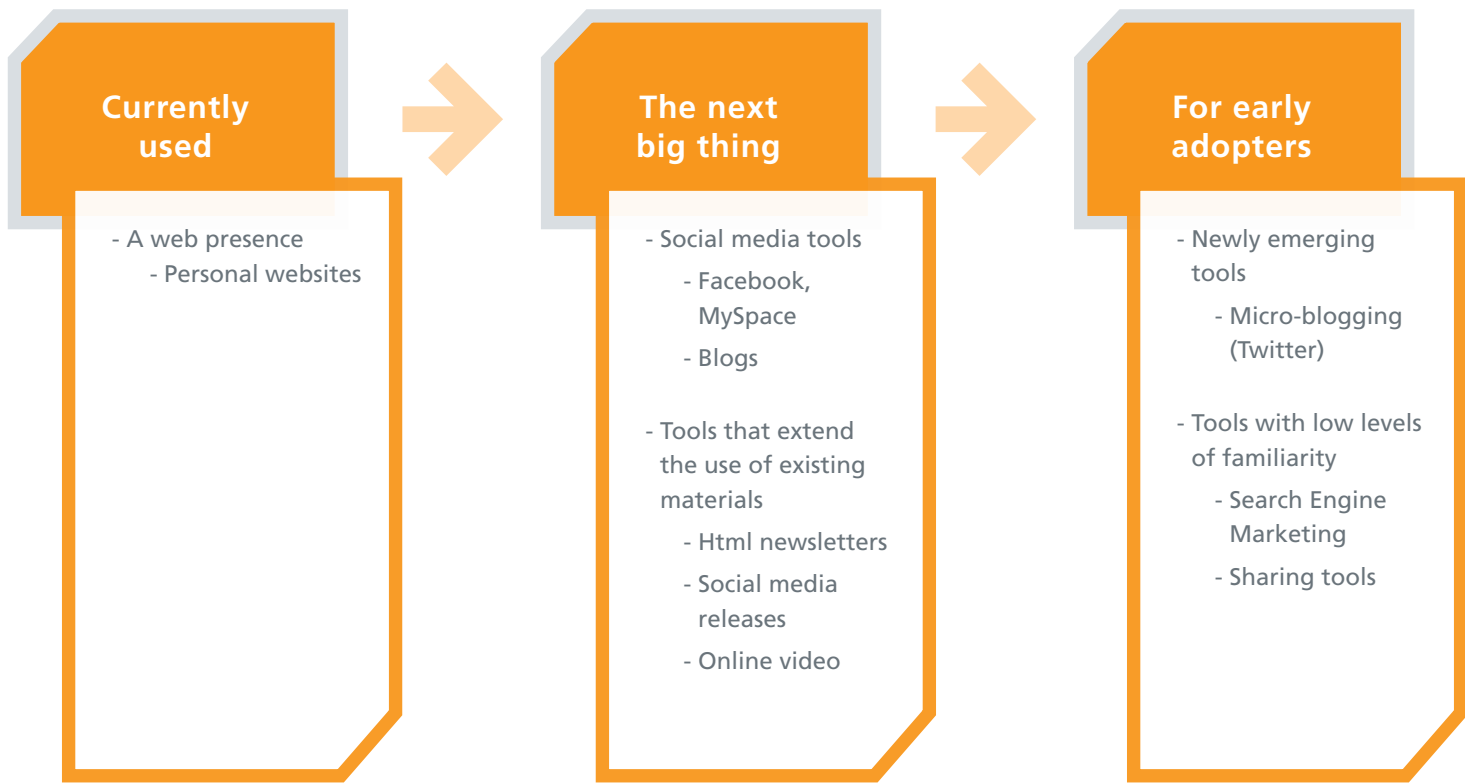
Which of the following online tools do you use to communicate to voters and other interested parties? (%)





How are MEPs using digital tools to reach out to voters?

The digital progression of MEPs



While MEPs are currently not using the full range of online communications tools, our research suggests that it is a matter of time before increasing numbers of MEPs move towards using a wider range of social media tools to reach voters.

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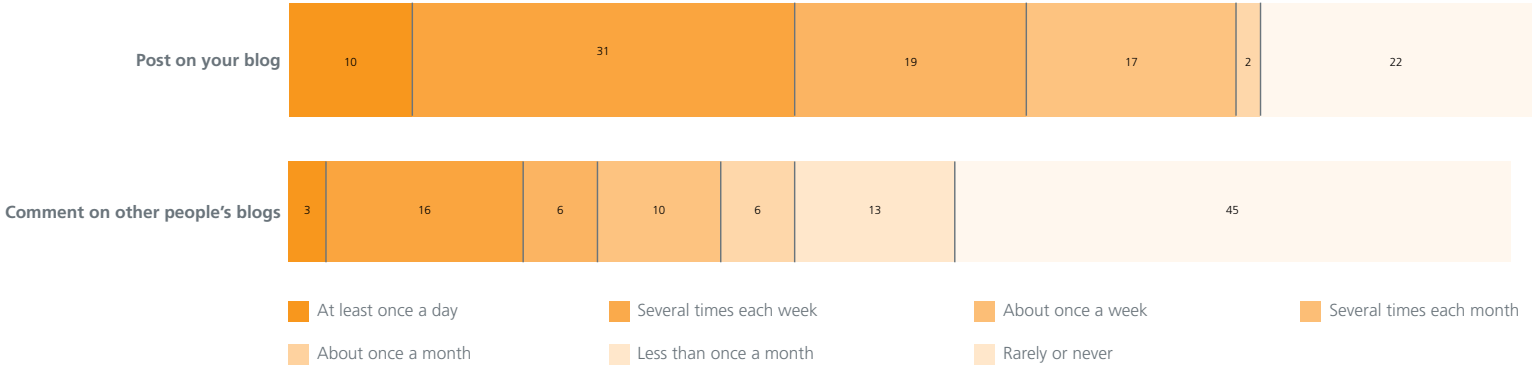
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How are MEPs using digital tools to reach out to voters?

MEPs use blogs to push out information

How often do MEPs with blogs write or comment on others? (%)



Blogs are most effectively used to engage in a conversation with an online network of individuals. However, the survey suggests that MEPs may well be using blogs as a broadcast medium. Of the 40% of MEPs who blog either *extensively* or *occasionally*, 41% post more *at least once a day* or *several times each week* yet only 19% are actively commenting on others blogs during the same period – a sure sign of being part of such a network.

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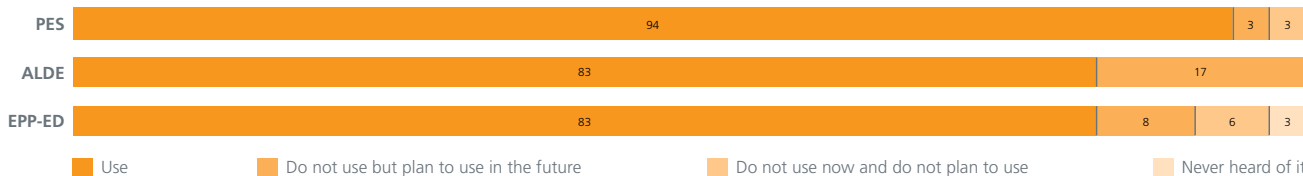
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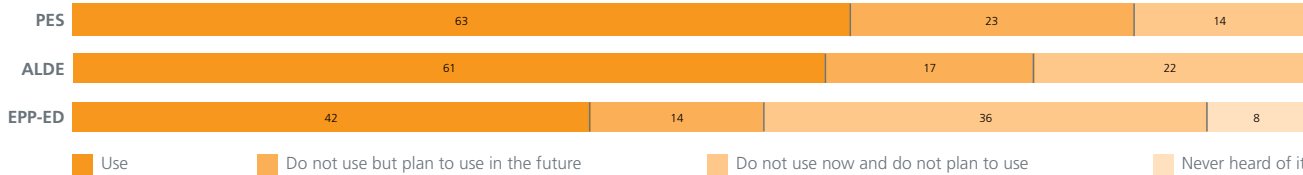
How are MEPs using digital tools to reach out to voters?

Which political group leads the way online? (%)

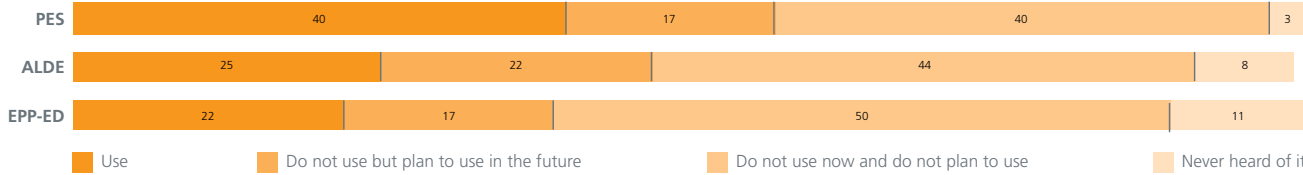
Use of websites by MEPs



Use of online video by MEPs



Use of Search Engine Marketing



Socialist (PES) MEPs lead their Liberal (ALDE) and centre-right (EPP-ED) colleagues in terms of online activity. They are more likely to have a website, use online video or engage in activities such as Search Engine Marketing.

Indeed, Socialists lead the way across seven out of nine of the tools.

Other groups are very active online, but the survey response was not sufficient to make accurate comparisons.

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How do MEPs view the effectiveness of different tools in helping them reach out to voters?

MEPs still focus on TV and newspapers to reach out to voters



How do MEPs view the effectiveness of different tools in helping them reach out to voters?

MEPs still believe that TV remains the most effective single way to communicate to voters

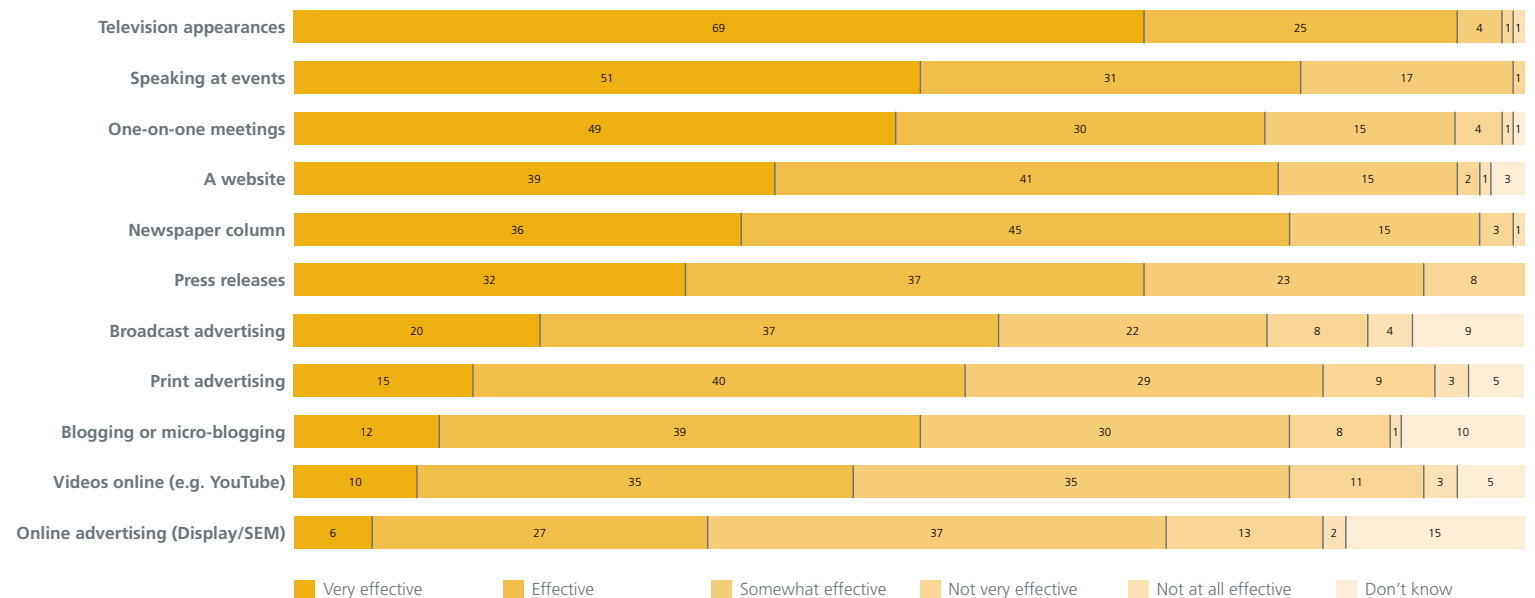
Fleishman-Hillard’s previous research* suggests that Europeans spend more time online than using other media and that the information they find there has more impact than information from other sources. Yet MEPs don’t rate online tools as effective in reaching out to voters as other media. This disconnect means that 69% find TV appearances *very effective* but only 10% find online videos *very effective*.

However, a personal website is seen as being as effective in reaching out to voters as other ‘earned’ opportunities such as personal contact with voters via events or one-on-one meetings and having a newspaper column.

Other forms of online engagement such as blogging or micro-blogging, online video and online advertising are seen as some of the least effective tools. This may be due to a lack of familiarity with these tools.

*Fleishman-Hillard Digital Consumer Influence Index 2008 – www.fhdigital.net/influenceindex

How effective do you believe the following activities to be in communicating to voters and other interested parties? (%)



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How do MEPs view the effectiveness of different tools in helping them reach out to voters?

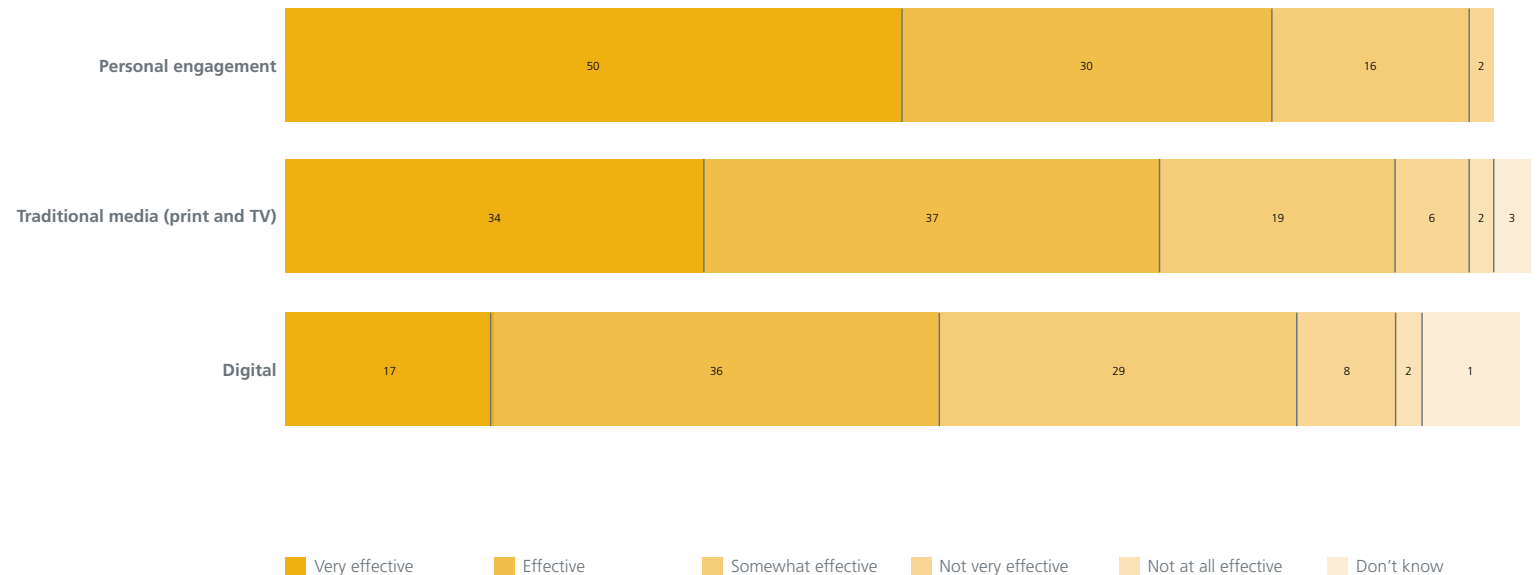
MEPs find personal contact more effective than digital

The perceived effectiveness of all digital forms of communication is underlined when one takes an average of responses across the three categories of tactics surveyed.

Only 17% of MEPs perceive digital tools (websites, online advertising, online videos, blogs) to be *very effective* and in fact 10% say that they are *not very effective* or *not at all effective*.

These results may reflect the time during which MEPs have had access to these tools and to gain familiarity with them. At the time of the 2004 European elections, YouTube and Twitter did not exist and Facebook was open to select US university students. In such a short space of time, it is in part amazing that these forms of communication rank so highly.

How effective do MEPs perceive digital communications to be in reaching out to voters compared with personal engagement and the use of traditional media? (%)



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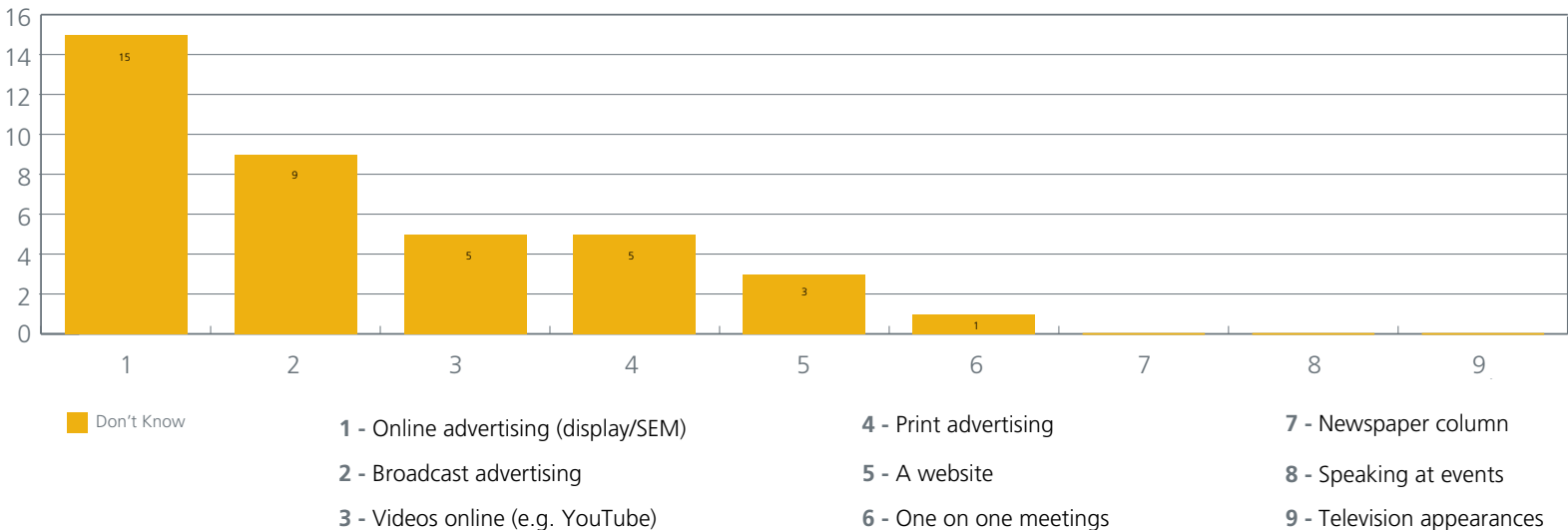
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How do MEPs view the effectiveness of different tools in helping them reach out to voters?

A lack of familiarity with online tools is making MEPs hesitant

The percentage of MEPs stating that they did not know the effectiveness of the communication tactic listed (%)



When asked to rate the effectiveness of communications tactics, MEPs answered, *I don't know* for digital communications in larger percentages than any other category. In fact, more than 10% of MEPs said that they *Don't know* the effectiveness for only two categories: online advertising and micro-blogging (Twitter).

This suggests that MEPs need to become more familiar with these tools before their perceived effectiveness increases.

For example, MEPs rank Search Engine Marketing and other forms of online advertising well below other forms of advertising despite this tool's ability to connect with interested audiences in geographically defined areas.

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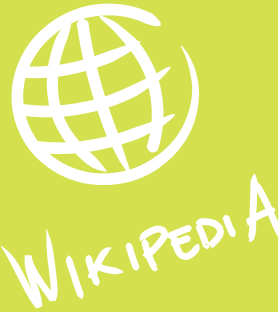
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How are MEPs using the internet to understand legislative issues?

The internet informs MEPs' daily legislative work





How are MEPs using the internet to understand legislative issues?

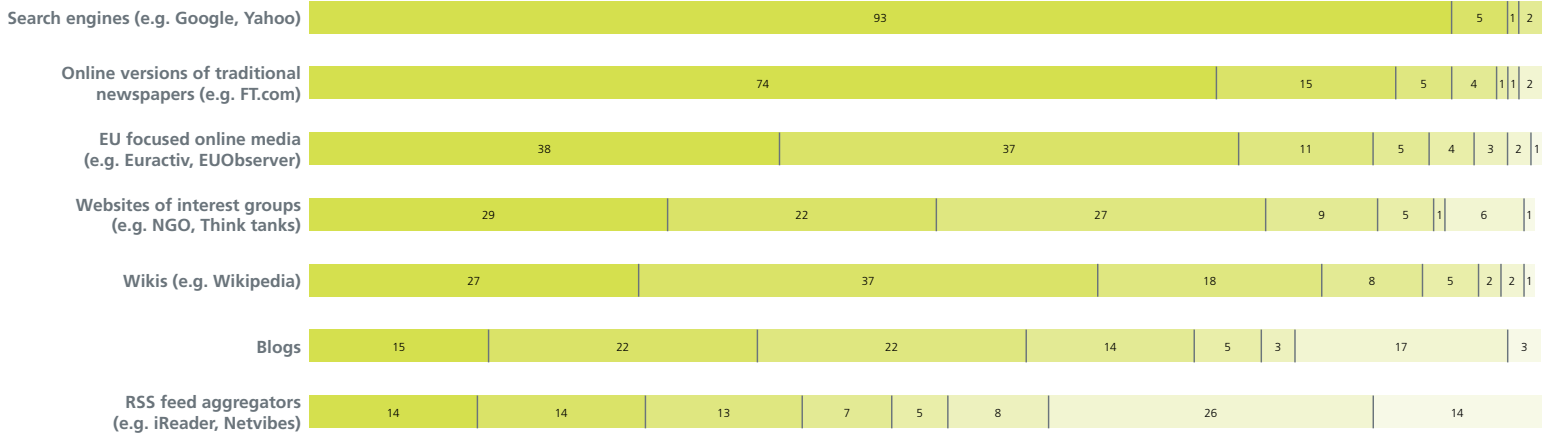
MEPs use the internet on a daily basis in their legislative work

When MEPs need to research something, like most of us, they tend to google it. 93% of MEPs claim to use search engines for their daily legislative work. 65% visit Wikipedia style tools *once a day* or *several times each week* to understand legislative issues, while 36% visit blogs in the same period.

MEPs are using the internet to access traditional media. They check online versions of traditional newspapers on a daily basis, making it nearly twice as read as on specialist EU media.

While internet tools, such as RSS aggregators, that collect and sort information for the user may be a great way to save time in the online world, it would appear that MEPs still rely on others to filter content for them.

How frequently do you, or your staff on your behalf, use the following online tools/resources in your daily legislative work? (%)



■ At least once a day
 ■ Several times each week
 ■ About once a week
 ■ Several times each month
■ About once a month
 ■ Less than once a month
 ■ Rarely or never
 ■ Never heard of it

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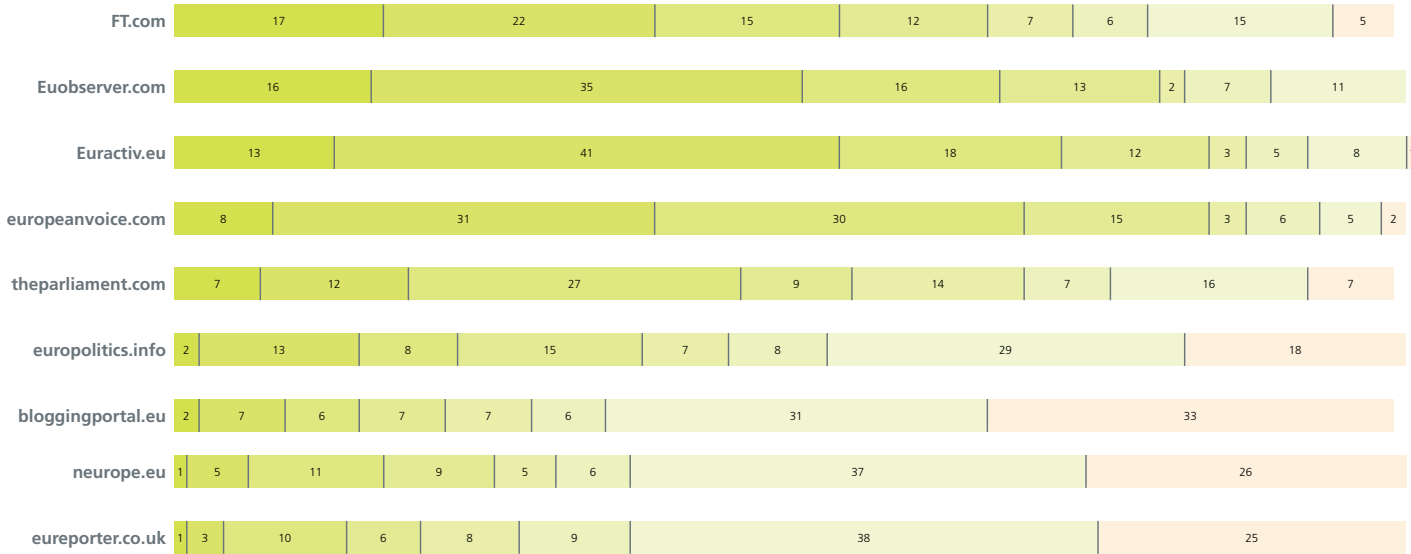
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How are MEPs using the internet to understand legislative issues?

EU online media versus traditional press

17% of MEPs state that they go online to read the FT.com at least once a day, making it the leading online news source covering EU matters for the Parliament. However, more MEPs claim to read EUObserver.com, Euractiv.com and Europeanvoice.com at least once a day or several times each week. Euractiv is the outlet with the most MEP readers per week. Such differences may reflect the use of the FT.com as a source of daily news rather than the more policy focused offering of the other online resources.

How frequently do you, or your staff on your behalf, read the following EU focused online media? (%)



■ At least once a day
 ■ Several times each week
 ■ About once a week
 ■ Several times each month
■ About once a month
 ■ Less than once a month
 ■ Rarely or never
 ■ Never heard of it

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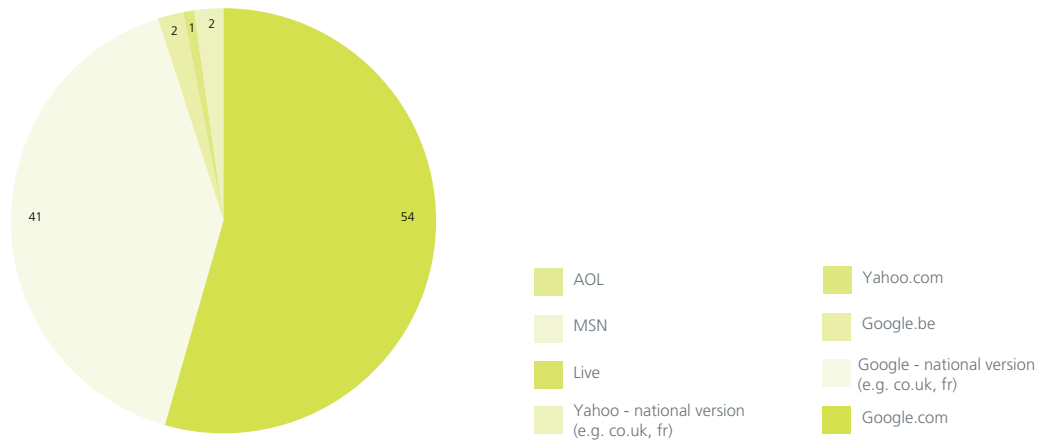
How are MEPs using the internet to understand legislative issues?

For MEPs, it's Google vs Google

While Google reigns supreme as the search engine of choice for MEPs, there is competition between the .com version of the site and the national versions. 52% of MEPs state that they use Google.com and 41% of respondents state that they use a national version of the popular search engine.

The choice of national versus international version impacts the results returned for a search.

Which search engine do you, or your staff on your behalf, use most often when looking for information on the internet? (%)



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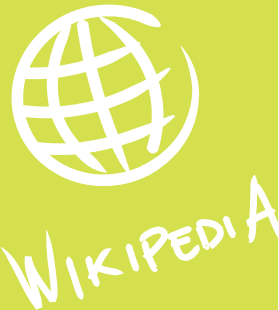
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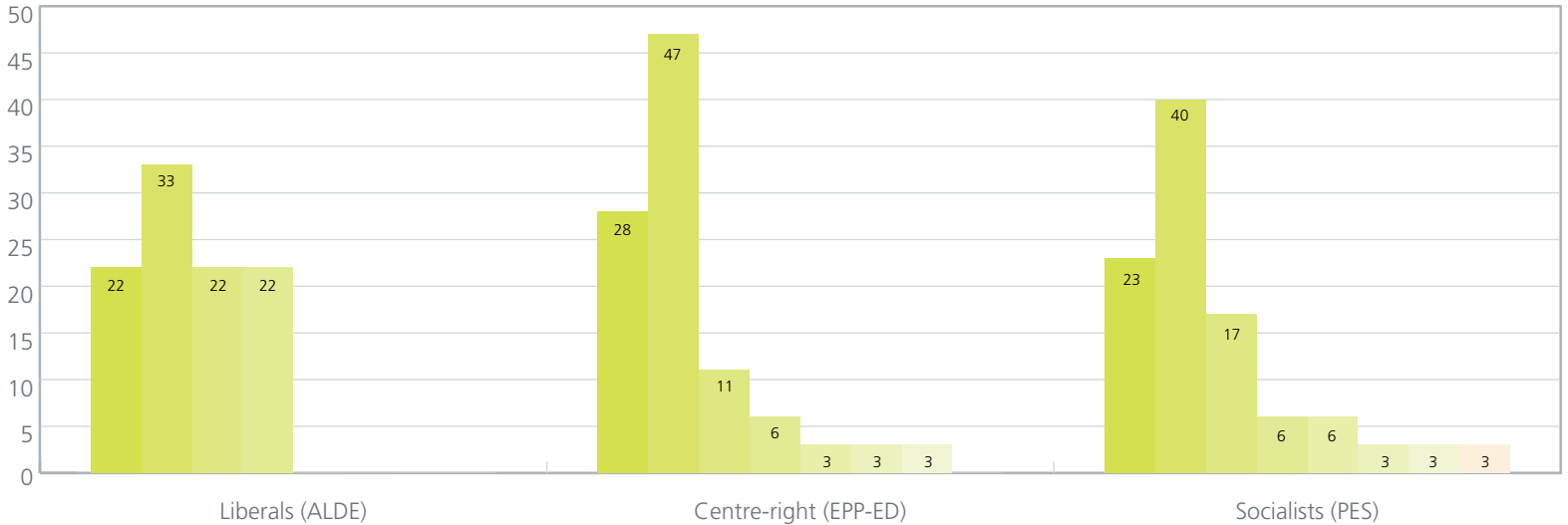


How are MEPs using the internet to understand legislative issues?

Is the centre-right addicted to Wikipedia?

Members of all three main political groups are using Wikipedia in their daily legislative work, but it is EPP-ED MEPs who rely on it the most. 75% of EPP-ED MEPs visit wikis at least *several times* each week, compared to 63% of PES MEPs and 55% of ALDE MEPs.

How often do MEPs use wikis to inform their legislative work? (%)



- At least once a day
- Several times each week
- About once a week
- Several times each month
- About once a month
- Less than once a month
- Rarely or never
- Never heard of it

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How important are digital tools in informing MEPs' thinking on policy issues?

Despite their daily use of digital resources, MEPs still prefer personal contact and written communications





How important are digital tools in informing MEPs' thinking on policy issues?

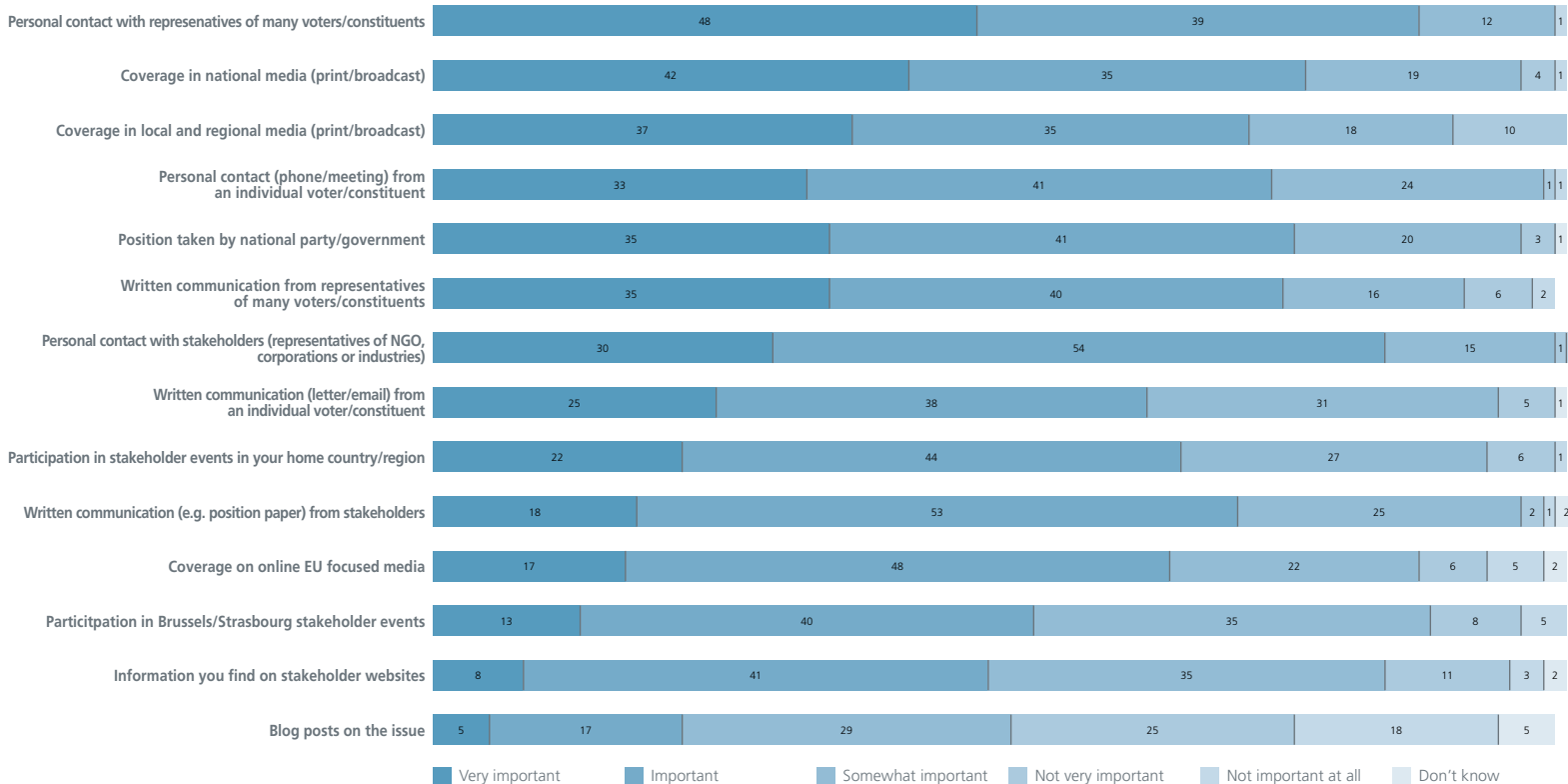
Digital contact is making inroads as a trusted information source

Personal contact is the most influential form of interaction according to MEPs, followed by media coverage, written communication, events and then digital forms of communication.

Personal contact with stakeholders (e.g. lobbyists) ranks as the second most informative form of contact if *very important* and *important* scores are added together.

While information found on stakeholders websites was considered to be one of the least important information sources, 48% of MEPs still felt it to be an important or very important source of information in informing their thinking on policy issues.

The importance of the following activities in informing MEP thinking on policy issues (%)



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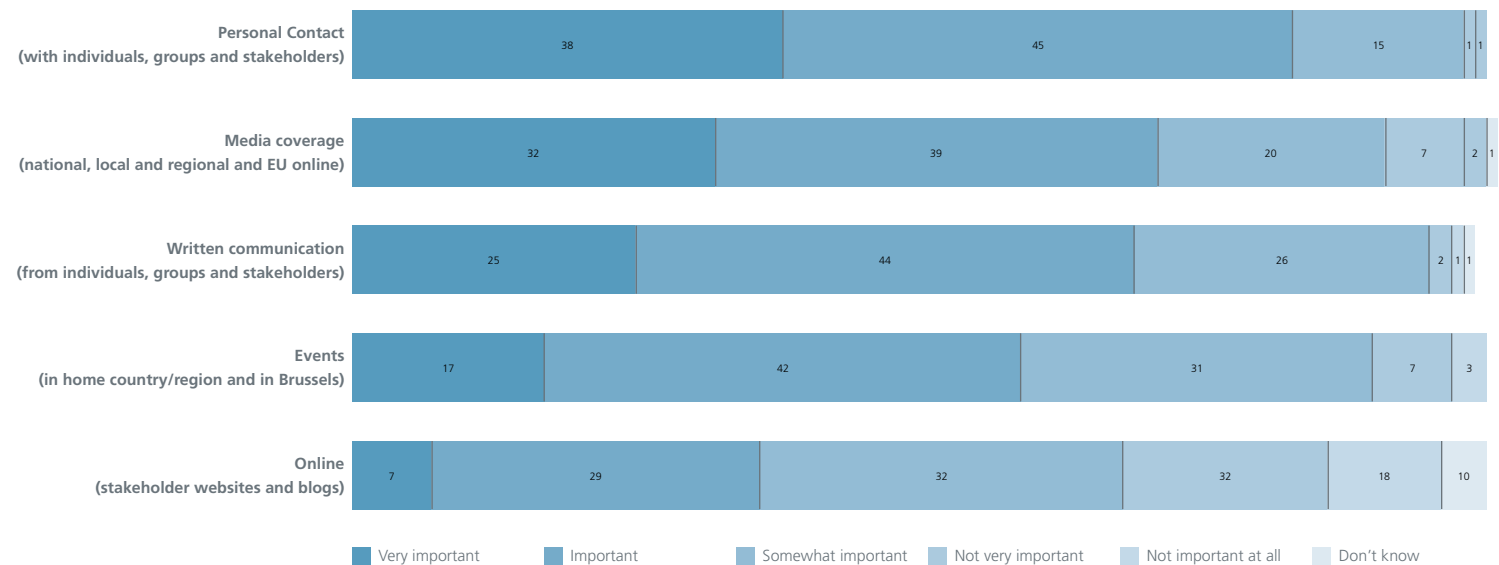
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How important are digital tools in informing MEPs' thinking on policy issues?

Phone calls are better than letters

The importance of the following types of activities in informing MEP thinking on policy issues (%)



Using an average across the different tactics across types of communication, digital communications are clearly ranked less important than other forms of communication on legislative issues. One may speculate that other forms of communication may provide information that is more targeted (i.e. focused on specific legislative dossiers) or more personal (i.e. comes from a known individual or group) than information found on blogs or stakeholder websites. Information found on stakeholder websites and blogs may be policy relevant but in the sense that it provides background information.

However, an increase in online engagement by MEPs in their communication with voters may well lead to an increase in the perceived importance of online information sources in legislative work.

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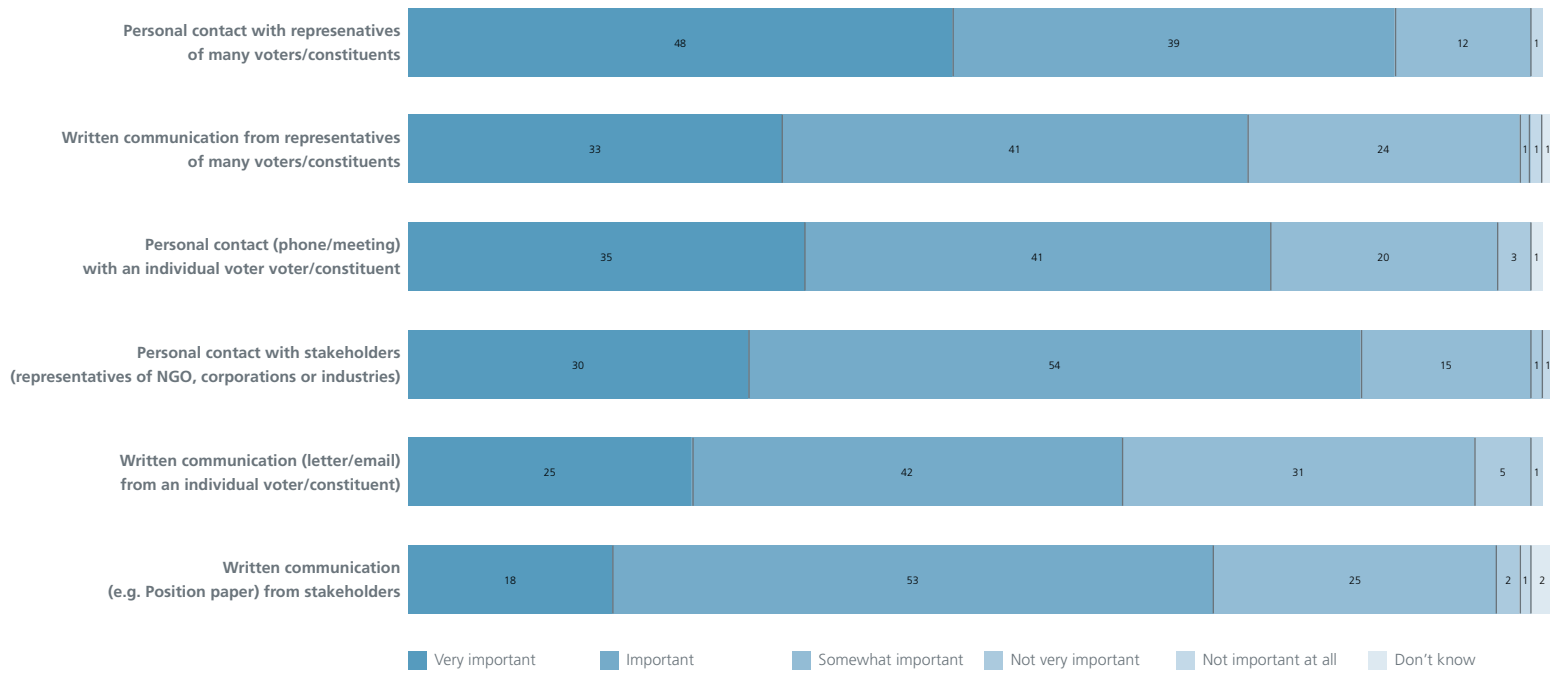
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How important are digital tools in informing MEPs' thinking on policy issues?

The spoken word is more important than the written word

Importance of personal contact versus written communication in informing MEPs thinking on policy issues (%)



Personal contact (meetings/phone calls) is clearly more important than written contact irrespective of the actor. Communication from representatives of groups of voters (local community and business leaders, local elected officials) has more weight than contact from stakeholders or individual voters.

Perhaps unsurprisingly there is little difference between political groups on this point.

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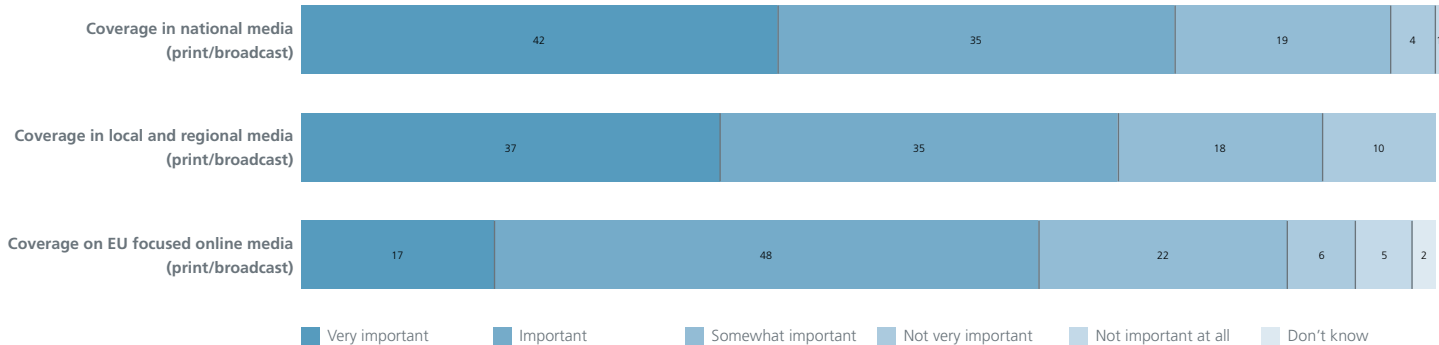
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How important are digital tools in informing MEPs' thinking on policy issues?

Media relations need to be local, national and European

Different media and their importance for MEPs in policy thinking (%)



National, local and regional media coverage are more important than coverage in EU online specialist media. All politics is local! MEPs pay more attention to policy debates in the areas they represent than the debate in online media at an EU level. More than twice as many MEPs think national media is *very important* compared to EU online media.

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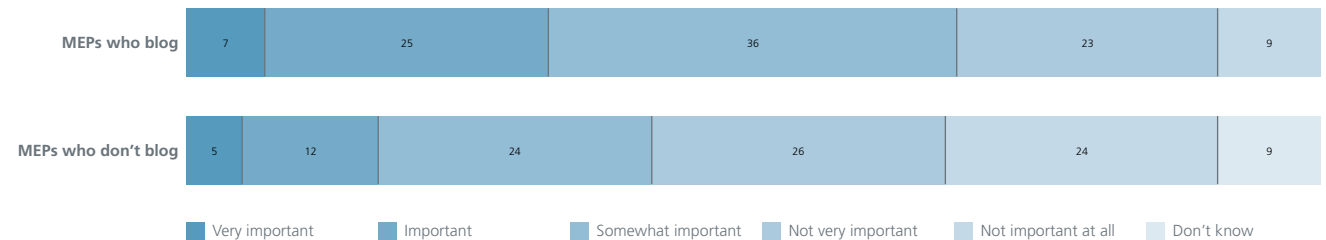
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How important are digital tools in informing MEPs' thinking on policy issues?

MEPs' own digital activity increases the importance of information found online in their policy thinking

Importance of blogs in informing MEP thinking on policy issues? (%)



MEPs who blog themselves find blogs far more important in informing their policy thinking than MEPs who don't.

As more MEPs go online, the data suggests that they may increasingly value information gathered from digital sources in informing their policy thinking.

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For MEPs

With the European electorate spending an increasing amount of time online, MEPs need to make sure that they are communicating in this space in order to remain relevant. The internet can offer a cost-effective and personal way to reach out to voters and can increase the effectiveness of traditional forms of communication.

- 1 - Understand and use the full range of tools available to get the same message out in different ways. Much of what you are already producing can be reused online.
- 2 - Embrace social media as a cost-effective means to make personal connections to voters who are likely to carry your message to others.
- 3 - Investigate Search Engine Marketing as a cost-effective means to target voters in geographically defined areas who are already interested in the issues you wish to address.

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For Public Affairs Practitioners

As MEPs increasingly go online for information about policy issues, the industry's practitioners need to consider digital communications as an integral part of any effective public affairs strategy. Digital will cease to be an optional extra and will become a central part of any campaign which reaches out to policymakers.

- 1** - Ensure your messages on key policy issues are easily found on search engines and reflected in key sites like Wikipedia and European online specialist EU media.
- 2** - Investigate Search Engine Marketing as a cost effective means to ensure MEPs get your key messages on important legislative dossiers for the time these issues are debated in Parliament.
- 3** - All politics is local. Build and leverage national and local networks for direct advocacy and media coverage to complement your Brussels-based outreach.

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More details available online

You can download this survey and comment on the results at:
www.epdigitaltrends.eu

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Methodology



Methodology

- The data was generated from qualitative research with eight multiple choice questions on an internet based survey tool.
- 110 Members of the European Parliament responded.
- The sample represents 14% of European Parliamentarians largely representative of groups and nationalities in the 6th legislature.
- Fleishman-Hillard carried out fieldwork between 1 April and 1 May 2009.
- The statistics used in this report are only indicative of the actual use of digital tools by MEPs. However the sample size and spread of MEPs is large enough for interesting conclusions to be drawn.

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Main questions

- 1 - Which of the following online tools do you use to communicate to voters and other interested parties?
- 2 - How effective do you believe the following activities to be in communicating to voters and other interested parties?
- 3 - How frequently do you, or your staff on your behalf, use the following online tools/resources in your daily legislative work?
- 4 - How important are the following in informing your thinking on policy issues?

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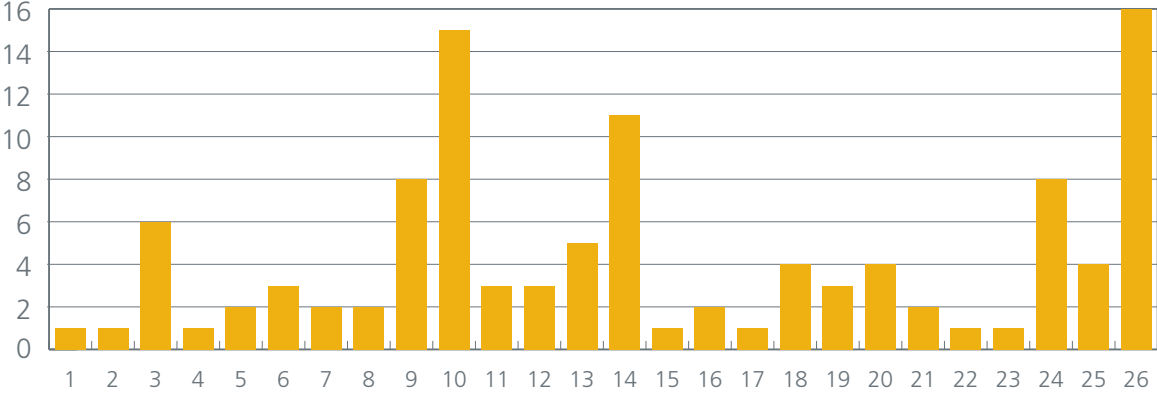
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Respondents

Every national delegation except one (Luxembourg) responded, and the respondents reflect the composition of the Parliament (current EP representation in brackets)

- 🚩 UK 14.5% (9.9%)
- 🚩 Germany 13.6% (12.6%)
- 🚩 Italy 10% (9.9%)
- 🚩 Spain 7.27% (6.5%)
- 🚩 France 7.27% (9.9%)

Survey respondents by nationality (%)



- | | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1 - Austria | 5 - Czech Republic | 9 - France | 13 - Ireland | 17 - Malta | 21 - Romania | 25 - Sweden |
| 2 - Belgium | 6 - Denmark | 10 - Germany | 14 - Italy | 18 - Netherlands | 22 - Slovakia | 26 - United Kingdom |
| 3 - Bulgaria | 7 - Estonia | 11 - Greece | 15 - Latvia | 19 - Poland | 23 - Slovenia | |
| 4 - Cyprus | 8 - Finland | 12 - Hungary | 16 - Lithuania | 20 - Portugal | 24 - Spain | |

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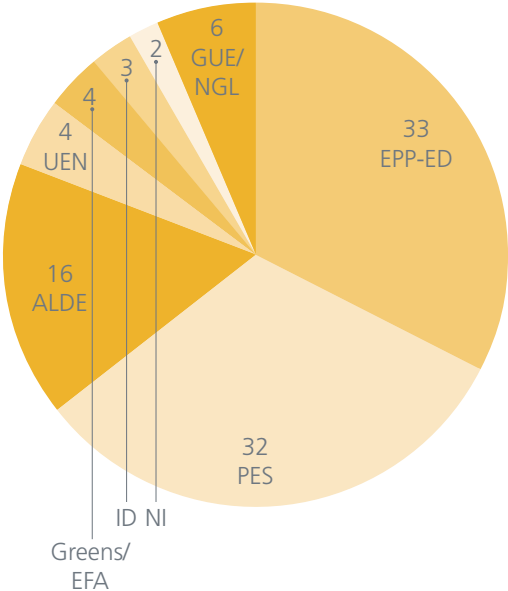
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Respondents

The three main political groups responded to the survey in numbers similar to their actual group size (percentage of members of European Parliament in brackets)

- EPP-ED 32.7% (36.7%)
- PES 31.8% (27.6%)
- ALDE 16.4% (12.6%)

Survey respondents by political group (%)



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Fleishman-Hillard made a donation to these two charities for every response received from a Member of the European Parliament.



One Laptop per Child is a charity that seeks to create educational opportunities for the world's poorest children by providing each child with specially designed laptops, thus ensuring they are better connected to each other, to the world and to a brighter future.

For more information please visit: www.laptop.org/en/



Fulda-Mosocho Project is a charity, which was set-up in 2002 to overcome female genital mutilation among the Kisii ethnic Community of Kenya.

For more information please visit:

- Official website:

<http://www.weibliche-genitalverstuemmelung-ueberwinden.com>

- "Kenya - end of female genital mutilation":

http://www.weibliche-genitalverstuemmelung-ueberwinden.com/Dateien/Fulda_Mosocho_Video_ENG



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Thoughts from MEPs



“As more and more of our voters go online for their information, MEPs have a great opportunity to connect with their constituents on the net. Back in 2004, I was the only candidate in Germany to have campaign posters with just a URL on them; in the 2009 election I may be one of the few to use the full range of internet tools. As the EP Digital Trends survey shows we have a long way to go to catch up with our US colleagues but a great deal to gain.”

Alexander Alvaro MEP
(ALDE, Germany)



“The Internet can only bring citizens and MEPs closer together. It has proved a valuable medium for trying to bridge the gap between Brussels and Tallinn. Blogging, the website, my YouTube channel and most recently Twitter have all been useful when trying to reach out to the constituents.”

Katrin Saks MEP
(PES, Estonia)



“MEPs struggle for column inches at the best of times and yet more and more of our voters go online for their information. I have taken my campaign online and I would encourage my colleagues to do the same.”

Christofer Fjellner MEP
(EPP-ED, Sweden)

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Blog n. Also *Web log*.

A journal-style Web site on which an individual or group enters text, called “posts,” resulting in a running conversation displayed in reverse-chronological order. Derivative: flog – fake blog created for sales purposes and often misleading; *splog* – spam blog.

Digital communications n.

Myriad of outbound communications tactics that leverage digital technology to deliver messages: e-mail, video, text messaging, online advertising, paid search, optimized press releases, podcasts, vodcasts, etc.

Online monitoring n.

The act of formally tracking progress toward agreed-upon goals for Web-based communications activities, such as online conversations/blogs, search-marketing campaigns, and search-engine optimization.

Online advertising n. Also *online media buy, banner ad campaign*.

Web-based equivalent of traditional advertising. Advertisers purchase Web site real estate, typically from online advertising networks, for the purpose of displaying brand messages. Purchasing models vary including impressions, clicks, or click-throughs to a given site and conversions; defined as downloads, purchases, etc.

RSS n. Acronym for Really Simple Syndication.

Plug-and-play technology, typically called a “reader,” which allows nontechnical Web users to easily “feed out” or “pull in” (by way of subscription) select Web content to or from a proprietary Web property.

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Search engine marketing (SEM) n. Also *paid or sponsored search*.

Advertisers participate in a competitive online auction to bid for and purchase the optimal rank or position within search-results listing. Bidding models vary, including pay per click (PPC), in which advertisers are charged only when a searcher clicks on their purchased term.

Search engine optimization (SEO) n.

Act of editing or altering Web site content, including text, graphics, and interactive assets, to improve a Web site's natural visibility and rank or prominence in the results listing for top search engines, such as Yahoo!, Google, MSN, and AOL.

Social bookmarking n. Also, *folksonomy, tagging*.

Popular method of classifying, sharing, and storing electronic content to facilitate easy sorting or search. The bookmarks, or tags, help users identify relevant content, as well as rank content based on the number of viewers, relevance, etc. Examples: Digg, Reddit, Newsvine, StumbleUpon.

Social media n.

Online tools and digital platforms used to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives. Includes blogs, message boards, podcasts, wiki sites, and vlogs. Messages can be delivered via text, images, audio, and video.

Viral marketing n. Also *buzz, word-of-mouth communication*.

The sharing of information, especially recommendations or endorsements, in an informal, person-to-person manner rather than by mass media or traditional marketing. Includes verbal communications but also expanded Web dialogue, such as blogs, message boards, and e-mail. See Word-of-Mouth 101, www.womma.org.

Web 2.0 n.

A term coined to loosely describe Web-based services such as wiki sites and social networks that emphasize online collaboration and content-sharing among users.

Wiki n. From the Hawaiian word *wikiwiki*, meaning “fast.”

A Web environment that allows visitors to quickly and easily support, refute, add to, or otherwise openly edit the content. Collaborative content development and publishing. See Wikipedia.

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Fleishman-Hillard at a Glance

➤ About Fleishman-Hillard in Brussels

Fleishman-Hillard EU is one of Brussels' leading public affairs and communications consultancies. Our staff of over 45 multinational and multilingual consultants has first-hand experience of the European Union institutions, national governments, business and journalism across all industry sectors and areas of EU policy. Our office acts as a hub for Fleishman-Hillard's public affairs practice in the European Union, providing centralised management for our clients' public affairs activities across the continent.

We offer a full range of public affairs and communications services from direct advocacy to media relations. We lead the way in integrating digital tools in Brussels into a wide range of campaigns. Public Affairs 2.0 [<http://pagoesdigital.wordpress.com>] is our blog on the use of digital in politics, public affairs and communications in Europe. You can also follow us on Twitter @eurotwittering / <http://twitter.com/Eurotwittering>.

➤ FH Digital

Our digital team helps clients with the whole range of digital communications including strategy (online reputation management, strategic planning, audits), online engagement (blogger relations, social networking, search engine optimization and marketing), as well as content and technical development (website development, web writing, social media releases, metrics/analytics, widgets, RSS, etc.)

For more information, visit our Brussels website, <http://eu.fleishmaneuropa.com>

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Our Public Affairs Services

Strategy & Planning - Issue Mapping & Prioritisation
Communications Materials – Training

One-on-one advocacy (legislative, regulatory, M&A/competition)
Issue monitoring and political intelligence

Media relations
Issue advertising (online/offline)

Websites
Online outreach
Search Engine Optimisation/Search Engine Marketing

Events - Speaking programmes

Third party mobilisation
Stakeholders - Opinion-leaders - Grassroots

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European Parliament Digital Trends

www.epdigitaltrends.eu

Fleishman-Hillard Brussels
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