

# **An analysis of the influence of social media usage on British voting behaviour in the 2015 and 2017 general elections**

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## Abstract

There is only a small body of existing research exploring the role of social media as an influencing factor in political campaigns and voting intentions. Social media started to play a role from around the year 2000 and only slowly integrated into politics. But nowadays social media is a dominant factor in our society and in politics as well. In this study the effect of social media usage on voting behaviour in the UK is analysed. This is done through the use of multinomial logistic regression models using data from the British Election Survey, that was conducted after the 2015 and 2017 elections. Having accounted for other socio-economic and demographic predictors of voting behaviour the study finds limited evidence that social media is an influencing factor. A possible explanation for this lack of an effect may relate to the fact that high social media usage is yet largely restricted to younger voters, who are themselves a relatively small share of the total voting population. However, as the literature suggests, social media may will be an important factor shaping political behaviour in the coming future, as its usage spreads and these younger cohorts ageing.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The effect of social media usage on voting behaviour in the U.K.

Social media dominates the young generations, started with the millennial generation (born in the 1980s/1990s), in their daily lives. In 2017 these generations spent an average of 135 minutes a day on social media (Statista, 2018). Moreover, it is a rapidly growing phenomenon, in 2012 young people spent only 90 minutes a day on social media (Statista, 2018). While older generations are still unlikely to engage in social media, it is hard to ignore the potential power of social media in affecting people's attitudes, engagement and behaviour in society. Indeed, the role of social media in society and politics has gained increasing attention both in the media and among academics (Stirland, 2008; Davis, 2010; Hendricks, 2013; Eilperin, 2014; Margetts & Bright, 2016; Nicole et al., 2017). There has also been increasing scientific interest in the effect of social media in politics (Effing et al., 2011; Booth & Hern, 2017; Murse, 2017). With that said, to this point the literature is not clear about the direction or strength of this influence. It is argued, for example, that Barack Obama won the elections (among other things as e-mail campaigns, TV-ads and his impressive speeches) thanks to social media (Stirland, 2008), while, at the same time, others suggested social media almost cost him the election (Eilperin, 2014). According to Eilperin (2014) the biggest threats during the campaign were on social media, via the creation of false rumours about Obama's personal background and tax policies. The story of Obama, and his unprecedented use of social media, is somewhat ironic since he is now arguing for regulations to be applied to social media in politics (Stirland, 2008).

With the role of social media in politics being of such contemporary interest, the aim of this research is to find out if social media does indeed effect the voting behaviour of people. It is argued that use of social media can strengthen politicians (Stirland, 2008) but, when used without the right strategy, it can be damaging (Eilperin, 2014). This study analysed different waves of the British Election Survey to compare the level of social media usage by voters and try to confirm (or falsify) the assumed relationship between those variables. By comparing the two different waves (2015 and 2017), the analyses whether social media usage is associated with changes in the party people vote for is made possible. More specifically, this study tries to explore whether high social media usage is associated with a transition to labour (2017) from conservative (2015), and vice versa. This movement is hypnotised since Labour is assumed to be the party which gains from using social media (Chadwick, 2017). In the end this research aims to find out if there is a correlation between use of social media and political choice, how strong this relationship is and to find out how this has or will change politics.

This will be investigated on the basis of the following research question:

***What is the effect of social media usage on the voting behaviour in the U.K.?***

This question is then divided into the following sub-questions:

1. *According to previous literature, what are the influencing factors shaping political preferences of people?*
2. *How did these factors and the voting behaviour with that change over time?*
3. *Is there a relationship between social media usage of political parties and changes in the party people vote for in the 2017 election (compared to the 2015 election)?*

## 2. Background theory

### 2.1 A brief historical analysis of voting behaviour

What factors predict voting behaviour? That is a question that keeps many academics busy and a lot of research has been done on this topic. There are three leading theories that have dominated over the past decades (Antunes, 2010): (1) The sociological model, (2) The psychosocial model and (3) the rational choice theory or economic vote model. The psychological model, mainly based on the research of Campbell et al. (1960), assumes that partisanship is crucial for voting behaviour. It means that people, who vote for a specific party, have some sort of psychological affinity, stable and lasting relationship with the political movement of this party. This doesn't necessarily mean that the person has a consistent link or even a membership with the party, but it does influence the vote choice at that moment (Campbell et al., 1960). The psychological model identifies partisanship as a cause, but it is itself linked to other factors, factors which cause the specific partisanship (like religion, socio-economic status, family/friends and age). This was actually a critique of Niemi & Weisberg (2001), but Campbell et al. (1960) also saw this themselves and argues that it is the job of other researchers to find those causing factors behind the model (Campbell et al., 1960).

The rational choice theory of Downs (1957) tries to find these factors within the economic theories of rational behaviour. In these economic choice theories, there are three parameters which together explain the individual choices made in the economic markets, these are: resources, goods and technology (Arrow, 1986). The thought of Downs (1957) here was that if the assumptions of rational decisions are able to explain the market, then they can explain the political functioning as well. But the rational choice theory of Downs (1957) has three quite strong assumptions. First it assumes that the political process, of both the voters and the political parties, is a rational process in which voters and politicians only act in the most beneficial way. This means that parties don't act ideologically (but only in the aim of winning the elections) and that voters weigh up their choice rationally. The second assumption is that democratic political systems implies a level of consistency. In other words, it assumes that politicians act responsibly and actually implement their promises (made in the campaigns) in their actual policy. The last assumption claims that there should be a level of uncertainty to allow different options for the voters (without a tunnel vision). Clearly, these assumptions are often not realistic (Antunes, 2010).

The sociological model is less theoretically rigid than the psychological and rational choice models and is justified through empirical testing, therefore it is often considered to be the most reliable model of voter choice (Antunes, 2010). This model is based on a research of Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) who analysed the voting behaviour of 600 voters in the United States. After several critiques Lazarsfeld, improved his research twice in the following decades (1954 and 1968) and works together with different academics. The strength of Lazarsfeld's research is in its methodology. Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) used a new method of successive interviews by creating two groups; a group of subjects and a control group. Besides this he took the survey seven times within three timeslots; before, during and after the political campaigns, so he was able to analyse the effect of the campaigns on the voting behaviour. After the third research, Lazarsfeld et al. (1968) concluded that most of the voting behaviour of people is shaped by the social group/class to which the person belongs (or feels a belonging to). Swales (2016) recently analyses the UK referendum on the Brexit and this fitted with Lazarsfeld's argument. The 'middle class liberals' voted almost universally (92%) to remain, while on the other hand the 'Economically Deprived Anti-Immigration' voted (95%) to leave the EU (Swales, 2016). These numbers strengthen the thought that being part of a social-economic class influences the voting behaviour of an individual. Pattie and Johnston (2001) confirm this class based voting

behaviour of people, but they argue that it is increasingly difficult to talk about determining factors of voting behaviour in a such a homogeneous way. This is because there is a high diversity between different groups/classes in society based on their attitudes, evaluations and their usual voting behaviour (Pattie & Johnston, 2001). While this may be so, Lazarsfeld et al. (1968) show that the division between social-economic groups is strongly present, and it is very rare to change political affiliation, only 8% of the voters changed their initial political position due to the election campaigns (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968). Whereas most of the people only will be influenced by the information which fits into their filter and the campaigns which didn't fit, will almost never reach them at all (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968). Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that the campaigns are useless, since they do convince the yet-undecided group and reinforce/return those who had some doubts: *'All campaigns do is bring you back to your original views--they don't change your views, just reinforce them. Campaign communications don't change minds, they attempt to reinforce pre-existing views.'* (Lazarsfeld, 1968).

Lazarsfeld et al. (1968) suggest three additional factors are also of importance by influencing electoral choices: socio-economic status, religion and area of residence. Since people are 'homo economicus', they are tended to vote for their own benefits. In order to improve themselves, people tries to develop their socio-economic situation. One of the most efficient ways to do this is through politics (Lewis-Beck 1990; Chappell & Viega, 2000; Johnston & Pattie 2000). According to Rosenstone (1982) this means that people who faces economic difficulties are likely to vote against the current government, because they often be blamed for their current situation. That means that they may be willing to give up their ideology for change and vote for the opposition (Rosenstone, 1982). Secondly, the influence of religion on voting behaviour has to be taken into account. Religious affiliation makes a significant difference in British elections, concluded Kotler-Berkowitz (2001). He analyses the British Household Panel Study and demonstrated that religious practices, beliefs and the religious composition of household affecting voting behaviour (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2001). Lazarfeld et al. (1968) added the fourth factor 'location of residence', which can be important because different social groups live spatially distributed (African-Americans, Hispanics and White Americans in the USA). According to Pattie and Johnston (1989) Great Britain also has a geography to its election behaviour, and this distribution is for decades the same. When zooming in, this geography reflects the uneven spatial distribution of different socio-economic classes. In the Northern industrial cities and towns and London, the most vote for Labour. The wealthier Southern suburban counties (surrounding London) are tended to vote Conservative (Pattie & Jonhston, 2000).

According to Pattie & Johnston (2000) these distribution is generally the same nowadays and this seems to be true looking at figure 1, which show the voters distribution of the 2017 Election.

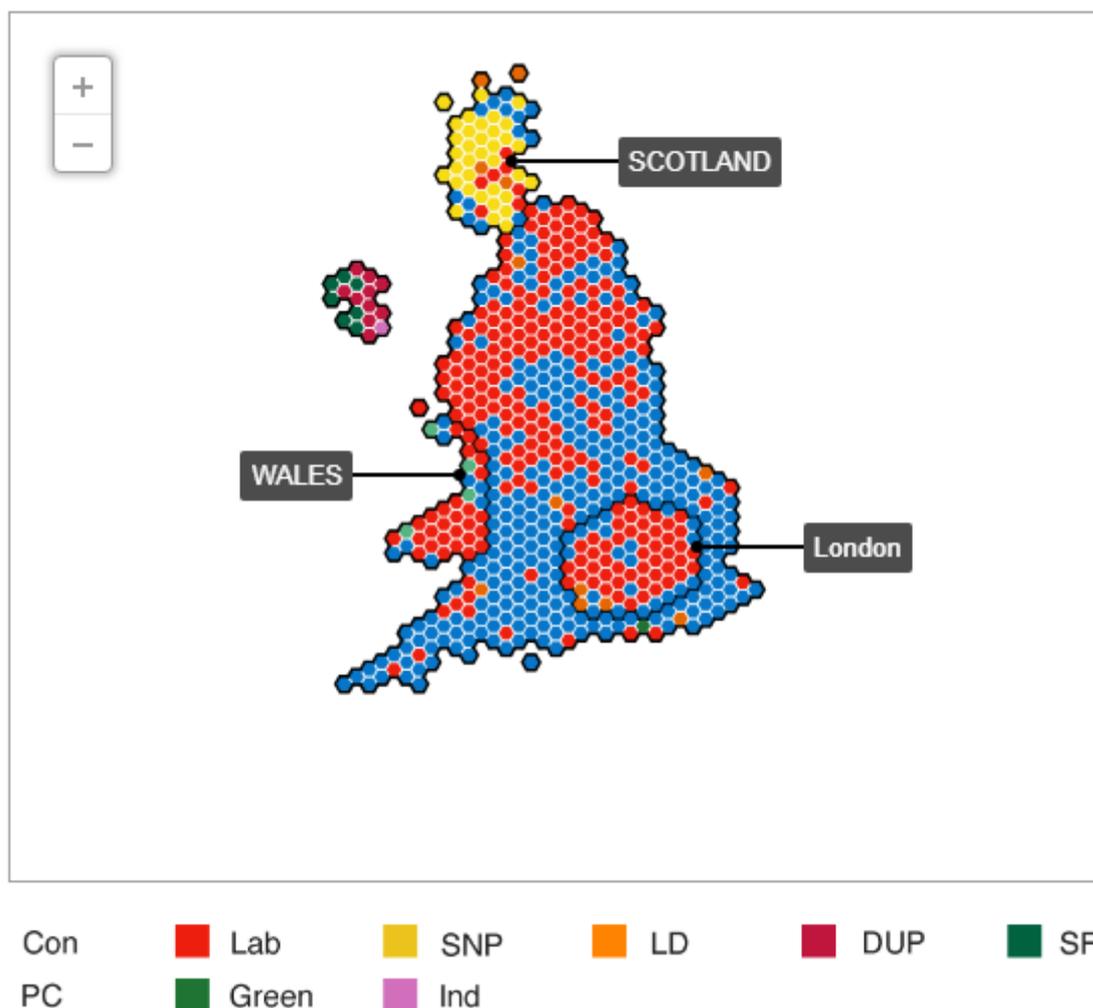


Figure 1, source: BBC, 2018

The spatial distribution of the voters in the UK is very strong related to someone's socio-economic class (Walton et al., 2017). The industrial regions of the UK (North-West and London) are predominantly inhabited by poor workers. Whereas the more rural and non-industrial regions in the South are mainly occupied by the wealthier and older British.

Lazarfeld et al. (1968) didn't included the factors age and gender, but these factors are known to be important. Gender has a strong influence on voting behaviour (Inglehart & Norris, 2000; Pattie & Johnston, 2001). According to the study of Inglehart and Norris (2000) women have a tendency to vote more liberal and left wing compared to men. Though Pattie and Johnston (2001) stress that this gender relationship is become weaker since the role of women in society has changed over the last decades. The role of age was clear in the last election in Great Britain, where Labour benefitted from strong support among the young. In 2010 Labour was seen by many as a dead party, losing the election and seeing a decline in its membership. However, since 2016 Labour seems to have recovered, with Labour engaging heavily with modern online campaigning that is said to have been successful in attracting young voters (Chadwick, 2017). During the General election of 2017, 63% of the voters between 18-34, voted for Labour, which is an extraordinarily high percentage according to Chadwick (2017).

So in conclusion, the traditional literature highlights six factors which are important correlates with people's voting behaviour. In the first place it is the social group you belong to, which creates someone's political filter and therefore is a strong mechanism in voting behaviour. Besides this, there are five additional factors influencing voting behaviour, being socio-economic status, religion, sex, gender and area of residence. Area of residence does not apply in this study, since this effect is captured by the 'class' variable.

## 2.2 How does social media influence voting behaviour

### 2.2.1 Politics has changed

*'After Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, 2016 will be remembered as the year of cataclysmic democratic events on both sides of the Atlantic.'* (Margetts, 2016)

One important notion has to be made to the research of Lazarsfeld et al. (1968), because the last update of the study is done in 1968 and since then the political field has changed. A new era, after an economic crisis, refugee conflicts and austerity policies, has arrived in which it seems that populist politics is on the rise: le Pen in France, Wilders in the Netherlands and Trump in the USA. The reason for these successes aren't just economic variables, nor national culture or history (Lochocki, 2018). Of course those aspects were important for the rise of populism (Mudde, 2017), but the key for its electoral success is, according to Lochocki (2018), the so called 'winning formula': *'For the nation, against the elite'*. This formula is feasible because these politicians use misleading political messaging which has far-reaching consequences in politics. This misleading messaging makes it easier to form 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles' where groups of like-minded people are insulated from contrary perspectives (Allcott & Genzkow, 2016). But, in contrast to what a lot of people think, this isn't a novel concept. In fact, the rise of extreme right parties since the 90's could be seen as some modest form of populism now. This were radical parties and their actions traditionally were (relatively) equal to the surprising behaviour of the populists these days (Mudde, 2017). To give some examples, it was actually Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972 who founded the French (extreme right) political party Front National. Whereas it is become a well-known populist party under the lead of Marie Le Pen (the daughter of Jean-Marie), she actually drives on the preparing work of her father. The Austrian elections in 1999 were interesting as well, since the Austrian Freedom Party gained 27% of the votes. This radical right party joined the coalition government the following year. In other words, the rise of populism (which was called extreme-right or left in the beginning) isn't a novel development but actually a process which started decades ago (Mudde, 2017).

The rise of populism for the last several years is, according to Mudde (2017), in some part related to the rise of social media. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, used by a big share of the society, relays content with no significant third party filtering, fact-checking or editorial judgment. This together with the enormous reach of social media platforms, an individual user with no track record or reputation can in some cases reach as many readers as Fox News or CNN, created the power of misleading messaging in the current politics (Allcott & Genzkow, 2016). Overall, academics agree that social media has an influence on politics and that this influence is growing for the previous decennia (Mudde, 2017). According to Shearer & Gottfried (2017), has social media grown from a distrusted source to one of the most important information sources in politics today. In 2017 67% of the adults in the USA got their (political) news from social media (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). This development creates a totally new playfield for politicians, since it faces a lack of a strict regulation and editorial filtering. This means that using social media platforms for your political campaigns could be an effective way to influence the public opinion, even when using fake-news and alternative facts (Mudde, 2017).

### 2.2.2 The ambiguous effect of social media

There is much discussion about the net effect of social media in politics. Murse (2018) concluded that there are different ways in which social media can change politics. Both positive (accessibility of politicians and a wide reach in a short time period) as well as negative (fake news and the overload of

information) influences of social media on politics are present. More interesting though is a third group in which it depends on the situation whether it has a positive or negative effect. The 'share' or 'retweet' function of social media for example, which makes posts on social media going viral, but it depends on that post whether this has a positive or negative effect. Another example of this is the fact that social media is open to feedback from everybody, of course in both ways (positive and negative). Especially this last group is interesting for politicians, since it depends on the tactics used by the politicians what the effect of social media is. The way politicians 'use' the online community seems decisive. Effing et al. (2011) made a distinction between the 'old' web and 'new' social media, which could explain the difference between the influences of online behaviour in politics. According to Effing et al. (2011) there is a distinction between content consumers (who were very dominant in the last decades) and the new rising group of content producers (so called 'prosumers'). The traditional content consumers show the same characteristics as the offline community, which actually means that only the political interested part of this group is sensitive to political campaigns. This political interested group turns out to be older, well-educated males with relatively high income (Effing et al., 2011). These people are easy to reach for politicians, whereas the less interested part of society (which is the majority) is hard to reach and for this group the attempts to influence their opinion are not that successful. It turns out that the new arising group (in the online society) has a different structure. The core concept of this difference is the level of participation. Whereas the old group of internet consumers were passive receivers of online political discourse we now see a growing group of the so called 'prosumers', who are very active on the web and participate in the online discussions (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). We go from a stage in which the passive users were dominating to a stage in which the active prosumers dominate. To give some examples Ren & Meister (2010) use the example of Obama's channel on YouTube; where people can create and share their self-made campaign video clips. But it is argued that this group of prosumers actually is a very small part of the total population and therefore not of great importance (Davis, 2010). According to Davis (2010) this active group is just a small elite section and he claims that most of society will not face this metamorphosis. In this case, the original (offline) strategies will remain more important. But Effing et al. (2011) note the fact that the use of social media is constantly increasing for the last decades and it is assumed that this growth will continue in the coming decades. This is expected to result in a fast growth of the prosumers. So the importance of influencing this group is increasing for political parties as well (Effing, 2011). Although it may also be that this development has a different effect, Moreira et al. (2009) claims that the current development could lead to, what is called an overload of information. It is possible that people lose the connection with this complicated information mass and it is also said that the structure of the online web has a 'boringness effect'; the constant availability of information can create an ignoring behaviour towards it (Moreira, 2009).

So our society moved from a stage of e-enabling to e-engaging in the online society and it seems (based on the current development) that this will and to a phase of e-empowering where internet users themselves produce the information on the internet (Macintosh, 2004). Taking into account that the opinion of this new group is mainly based on information from social media (where the other prosumers acts as sources of information), it is becoming increasingly important to reach and influence this specific group of society (Effing et al., 2011). This means that if you want to use social media in your advantage, you have to let to produce it the users themselves. The British Party 'Labour' has understood this development and they actually seems to benefit from it, according to Chadwick (2017). After the losses in the 2010 elections Labour was seen as a dead party, by a lot of experts. The number of members fell sharply and they were doing bad in the polls, but in the years after that Labour started with a new way of campaigning: 'The digital campaign'. This works, Labour is now a party with half a million plus members and is alive and kicking (Chadwick, 2017). What

becomes also clear when analysing a self-made map in which the location of residence of the respondents is linked to their answers to the questions if they use twitter and if they tweeted last month. This map (figure 2) shows the spatial distribution of Twitter users in the U.K.

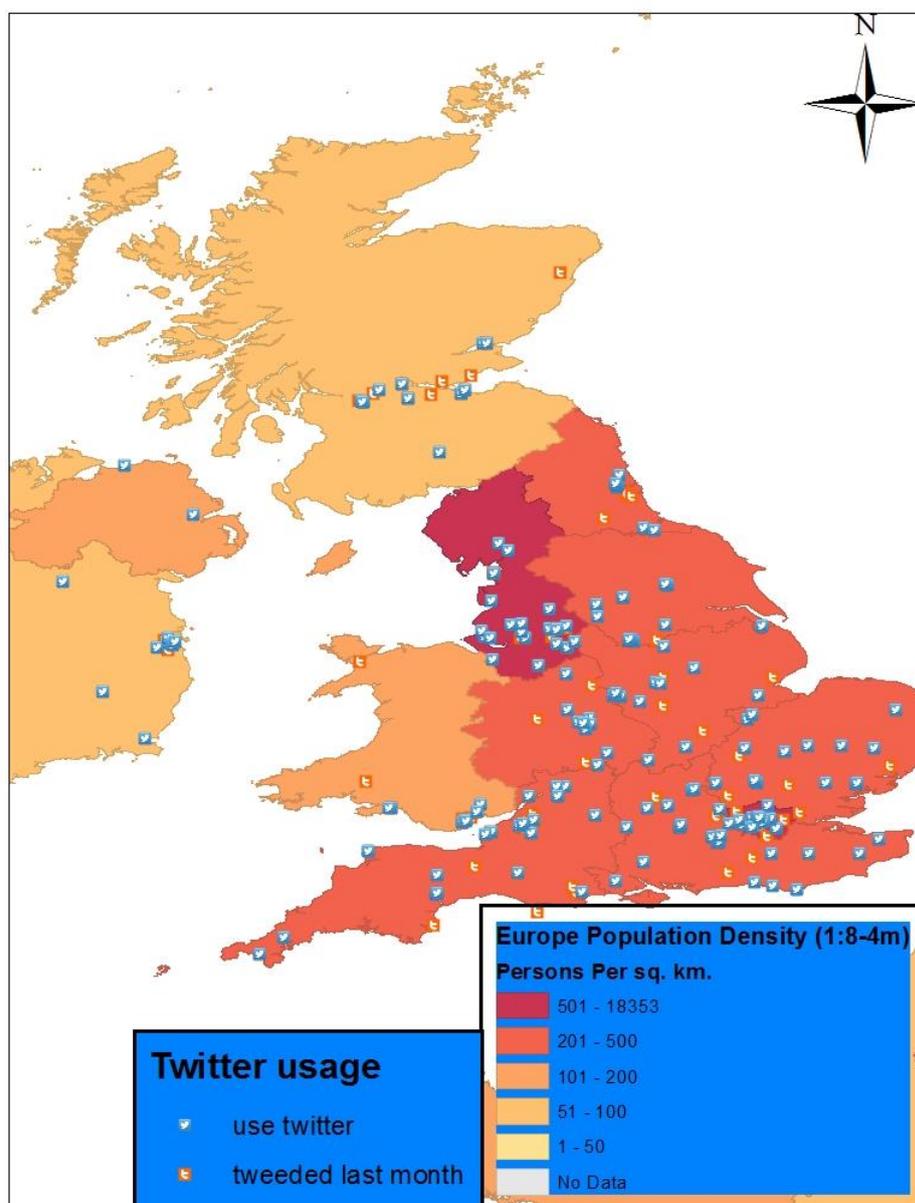
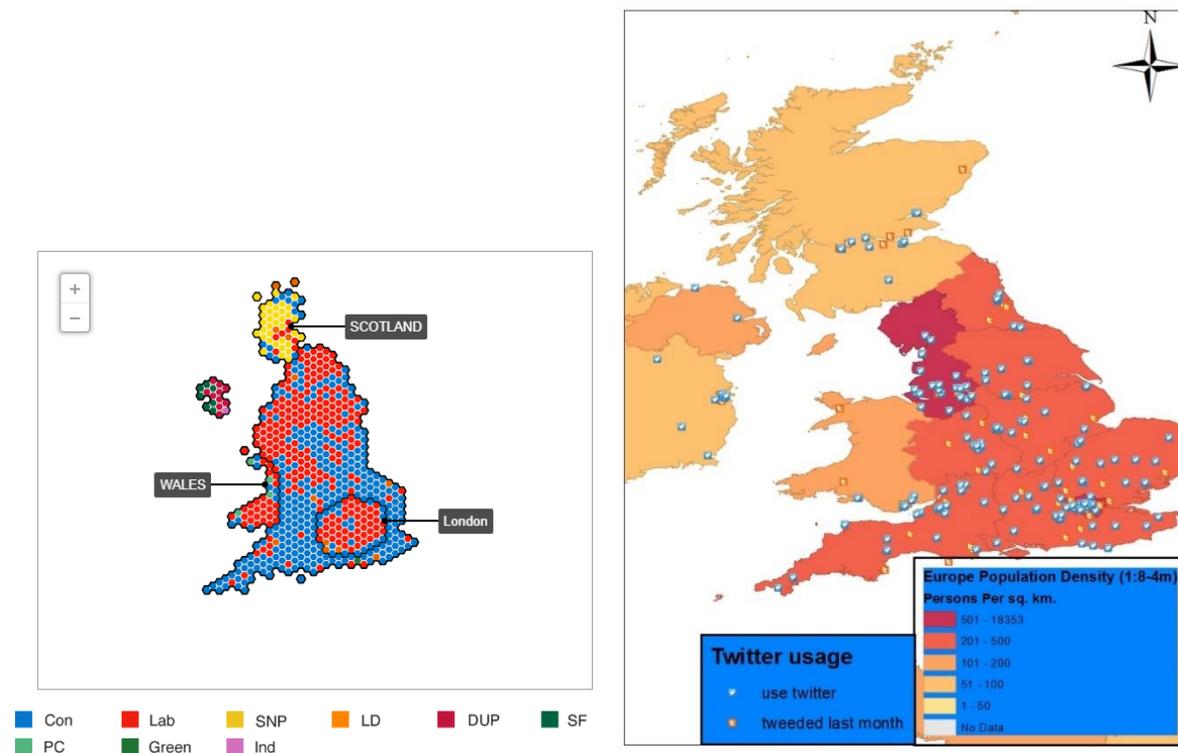


Figure 2, source: ESRI GIS, made by Camiel Stempels

The base map of figure two is a population density map, allowing you to link population density to Twitter usage. In itself no ground-breaking discovery, since there are just more people in the dense areas. But when combining this map with the voters distribution map used before (figure 1), some interesting observations can be made.



Figures 3 and 4, made out of figures 1 and 2

As shown in figure 3 and 4, the Twitter usage distribution is quite (although not completely) equal to the voters distribution. In other words, in the urban/industrial areas where Labour is dominant the people are active on Twitter as well. This is in line with the current political literature, since it's especially Labour which has discovered the power of social media in the British politics, stated Dutceac Segesten & Bossetta (2017). Conservative has been outside the digital developments for years, and this partly explains their loss in number of active supporters over the previous years (Chadwick, 2017). Nowadays also the Conservative party started to participate in the online campaigns, but loses this fight from Labour according to Dutceac Segesten & Bossetta (2017). Labour posted 547 times on Facebook in the 2017 campaign, twice as many as the number two and much more than the Conservatives (161 times). Labour also garnered three times more (over 1 million) shares of their posts as the Conservatives did. On Twitter Labour dominated as well; @jeremycorbyn to become the most retweeted and most mentioned political account, whereas the hashtag #VoteLabour was the highest political hashtag used in Great-Britain (Dutceac Segesten & Bossetta, 2017). It is interesting to see that most of the publicity isn't actually from the official producers itself, but the citizens who are sharing and promoting those campaigns. Dutceac Segesten & Bossetta (2017) claim that the power of social media is in hands of the 'prosumers', as explained in the previous section this are the people actively participating, following and producing on the online web. These people makes political columns, video's and fan pages, which actually get more support from the society then the official party pages itself (Dutceac Segesten & Bossetta, 2017). But this is the dangerous part of social media as well, since it is hard to find out what is true and what is fake and what the power of social actually is. Bakir & McStay (2017) thinks that the power of social media is underestimated and they show how important social media was already for Labour and the 'Vote Leave' in the Brexit campaign. Both used 'automated psychological profiling at scale' based on Facebook data, what enabled them to create emotional targeting campaigns (Bakir & McStay, 2017). This is a totally new way of campaigning since they conscious influencing our brain and this need a critical view:

*'technology platforms and companies are typically partisan, they have insight into what we think and feel, and this raises questions about scope for unhealthy and non-transparent influence.'* (Bakir, 2017).

Al though this new technology scares a lot of people, it doesn't mean the end of democracy (Chadwick, 2017). First, it actually strengthen democracy since previous elections shows that social media activate such large amounts of people where the old media are no longer capable of, according to Chadwick (2017). Besides this the new technologies do also have their limits; they don't work for the dedicated voters (Bakir & McStay). Which significantly nuances the power of the new technologies, whereas the dedicated voter represents by far the biggest part of the British voters (Bakir & McStay, 2017). In the 2017 general election, the estimated number of people voting according to digital ads was about 2% (Cummings, 2017).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 The British election survey

Even though the literature shows that social media is becoming an increasingly dominant factor, up until now the academics aren't clear about the direction or strength of social media effects in politics. What is the effect of the use of social media on the political behaviour of people today, is the question of this research. To answer that question this study uses data from the British Election Study (2018). This is a dataset based on a survey answered by thousands of British, it is a result of a collaboration of the University of Manchester University of Oxford and the University of Nottingham. For this research the '2017 Face-to-face Post-Election Survey Version 1.2.' dataset is used. The dataset contains post-election in-person survey data. It's composed by combined means of a mail-back survey and face-to-face interviews. It's repeated cross-sectional which provides information on both recent general elections (2015 and 2017), allowing for a comparison over time. The analytical sample in this analysis comprises 1,732 individual respondents, what is considered as a representative sample.

The aim of this research is to analyse if social media usage do influence the political behaviour (choice) of people. This is done by comparing two cases: the vote of the respondents in the general elections of 2015 and 2017. More specifically, the analysis will look at transitions in voting choice between the 2015 and 2017 elections, observing if labour voters move to conservative and vice versa. As noted in the previous section, Labour is far more active and innovative with their social media policy compared to Conservative. According to this difference in policies towards social media the expectations are that people who use social media would also be inclined to vote for Labour. To test if this is true, this research analyses the movement of voters from the general election in 2015. Looking at what those people vote in 2017, the potential differences of their votes can be analysed. In line with the expectations, an example could be one voting Conservative in 2015 votes Labour in 2017 (probably influenced by social media).

The literature suggests that it is important to account for belonging to a social group, your socio-economic status, religion, age and gender. After controlling for these characteristics, one is able to get a better idea of the influence of social media on voting choice. Social media usage itself, the main independent variable of interest, is measured using two questions: *'Do you use twitter'* and *'Do you use facebook'*.

The following variables are used for the analysis:

1. The factor 'belonging to a social group', translated into the variable *'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular class?'*
2. The factor 'religion', translated into the variable *'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?'*
3. The factor 'socio-economic status', translated into the variable 'Income (gross household)'
4. The factor 'Age'
5. The factor 'Gender'

The research scheme of the research will be as follows:

<p>Votes May 7<sup>th</sup> 2015 – <i>Thinking to the previous election held on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015, do you remember which party you voted for, or perhaps you didn't vote (if you do, for which party)?</i></p>	<p>→</p> <p><i>Independent variable: Use of social media</i></p>	<p>Dependent variable: Votes June 8<sup>th</sup> 2017 – <i>Which party did you for in the general election?</i></p>
	<p><i>extraneous variable: Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular class?</i></p>	
	<p><i>extraneous variable: Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?</i></p>	
	<p><i>extraneous variable: Income (gross household)</i></p>	
	<p><i>extraneous variable: Age</i></p>	
	<p><i>extraneous variable: Gender</i></p>	

Table 1, made by Camiel Stempels

The conceptual model is shown in figure 5. The independent variable ‘social media usage’ will be tested when accounted for the other variables.

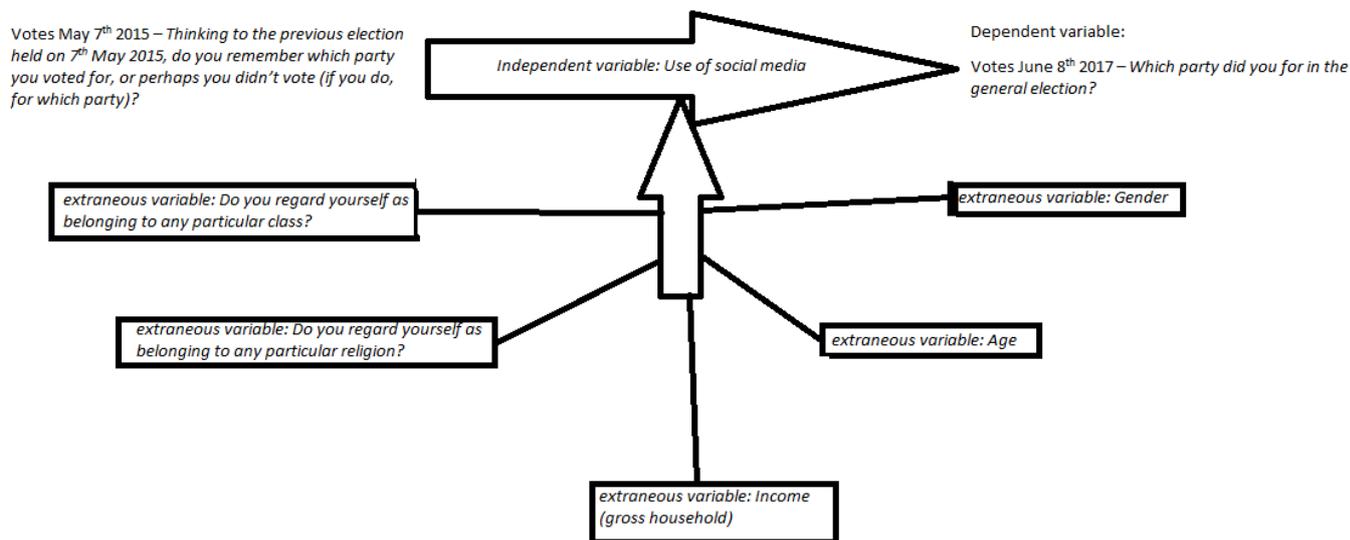


Figure 5, made by Camiel Stempels

To run the multinomial logistic regression the dataset is first cleaned up, all the missing values and unusable variables are deleted. Thereafter some of the variables were recoded (see appendix for the descriptive statistics of the variables):

- The variable 'gross household income' was initially distributed in 15 categories. After recoding this, there are 3 categories left; 'low' (<20.799), 'middle' (20.800 – 49.999) and 'high' (50.000>), all in pounds.
- For the variable 'age' the last three categories were put together as 65+, since those categories were all small in numbers and all the members of those categories can be considered as 'retired'.
- The variables 'do you use twitter?' and 'do you use Facebook?' were merged into the joined variable 'do you use social media?'.

Finally the input variable (general election 2015) and the dependent variable (general election 2017) were split into 3 independent categories; 'Labour', 'Conservative' and 'other' (all the parties except for Labour and Conservative). Then the 3 independent categories of the 2017 election were merged into a new joined variable 'combined general election outcome'. Now the changes of voters between 2015 and 2017 are visible. So for example it is possible to find out who voting Conservative in 2015, voted Labour in 2017.

### 3.2 Analysis

To start with the previous example, after running the multinomial logistic regression a number of interesting results have been found. In table 2 the election results of the people who voted 'Conservative' in 2015 are shown. The number zero stands for those who stayed Conservative, number one for those who moved to Labour (in the 2017 elections) and number two for those who moved to other.

**general elections combined<sup>a</sup>**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	,00	523	77,0	84,4	84,4
	1,00	60	8,8	9,7	94,0
	2,00	37	5,4	6,0	100,0
	Total	620	91,3	100,0	
Missing	System	59	8,7		
Total		679	100,0		

a. General election 2015 = conservative

Table 2, source: SPSS made by Camiel Stempels

As the figure shows, there isn't a lot of movement between the parties. Only 10% of the Conservative voters in 2015, has moved to Labour and the percentage for those moving to Other is even less. So actually most of the Conservative voters in 2015 stayed with Conservative in 2017 (84%).

When doing the same analyses for the Labour voters in 2015, now number one represents the movement from Labour to Conservative, two the people who stayed with Labour and number three the movement from Labour to other. Table 3 shows the results and the conclusion is quite equal.

**general elections combined<sup>a</sup>**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1,00	36	5,6	6,2	6,2
	2,00	511	79,2	88,4	94,6
	3,00	31	4,8	5,4	100,0
	Total	578	89,6	100,0	
Missing	System	67	10,4		
Total		645	100,0		

a. General election 2015 = labour

Table 3, source: SPSS made by Camiel Stempels

88% of the Labour voters stayed with Labour in 2017, only 6 % moved from Labour to Conservative and 5% to other.

The last analyses is the movement of people who voted other in 2015 (table 4). Which is on itself an interesting one, because these people don't know the partisanship as the Labour and Conservative

voters, as stated in the literature. Number two here represents the movement to Conservative, three to Labour and four the people who stayed with other.

### general elections combined<sup>a</sup>

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2,00	78	21,4	23,9	23,9
	3,00	79	21,7	24,2	48,0
	4,00	170	46,7	52,0	100,0
	Total	327	89,8	100,0	
Missing	System	37	10,2		
Total		364	100,0		

a. General election 2015 = other

Table 4, source: SPSS made by Camiel Stempels

Even though these numbers are a lot more distributed, which means that these people did move to another party, there isn't a strong pattern. Both, Labour and Conservative, get about 24% of the voters and 52% stayed with 'other'

After doing the multinomial logistic regressions for all the three categories (Labour, Conservative and Other in 2015), no significant relation was found. Only some of the age categories came out as a significant variable (see appendix for the multinomial models), but this is probable because of the unequal distribution of this variable; especially in the lower age groups were very few respondents (see appendix for the age distribution). Looking specific to the odds of the social media variable, this didn't show a strong relationship between Labour and Conservative either. Only the first two models (with the people vote for Labour and Conservative in 2015) show a relatively strong odds (0,589 and 0,519) for the move to 'Other' (for the social media variable), which means that people using social media are likely to move towards 'Other'.

After all, one can say that there isn't a significant relation between social media usage and voting behaviour based on this analysis. In a multinomial logistic regression in which the variable 'social media' usage was added, there is no significant influence of social media usage on the voting behaviour of people between 2015 and 2017.

## Conclusion

The existing literature emphasises how political behaviour can be influenced by such things as belonging to a certain social class, belonging to religion, one's level of income, age and gender. When taking these factors together one is able to analyse the general voting behaviour of people. However, in today's context, a growing body of literature is drawing attention to the potential role that social media has in influencing our daily lives and in some way also political behaviour. It seems that social media have strongly influenced both the general election of 2017 and the Brexit referendum. It is said that especially Labour have very active and innovative policies towards the use of social media and they won a lot of votes because of this. On the other hand, Conservative seems to have missed this development and faces difficulties to keep their party alive. Nevertheless, the statistical analysis in this research shows that social media is yet not significantly affecting changes in voting behaviour. Given the differences in policy towards social media between Labour and Conservative the expectations were that people who use social media would also be inclined to vote for Labour. Against these expectations, this investigation did not show that there was such a link between social media usage and voting behaviour. Possible explanations for this could be that the older generations (who tend to be those who actually go out and vote) are not engaged in social media and so the effects of social media are largely restricted to a relatively small (and young) subgroup of voters. Besides this, those young voters presumably already vote for Labour anyway. Furthermore it seems that this research was carried out too early in time, as a result of which social media is not yet part of the established order. Finally it is possible that the development of social media has just the opposite effect to what is expected. The constant availability and the overload of information could lead to an 'boringness effect' towards the information, making the positive effect of social media use disappear.

Nevertheless, social media is already very dominant among the youngest generations and it is expected that social media will soon gain power as an important (political) source of media. It has already played a major role in the most recent political spectacles and this is expected to be only the beginning of what it can be in the future. It will be interesting to see what the same kind of research as this one will show, when it is conducted over for example ten years. It is possible that, given the speed with which the usage increases, social media will then be one of the most powerful factors influencing political behaviour of people.

## Reflections and future research

This study had a number of restrictions that could be addressed in further research. The already discussed unequal age distribution, the relatively low number of respondents and the fact that there wasn't actually a direct question to social media usage (only to Twitter and Facebook) in this dataset are examples of this. This research was limited to the dataset which is used, even though it was a good dataset it restricted the research in its creativity and opportunities. For further research it would probably be better to collect own data so one can ask specific questions, to improve the quality and control the variables. In this way the personal family and friends, a very strong influencer of voting behaviour, of the respondent can be better investigated. Direct questions towards social media and someone's behaviour on social media can also be added. Allowing the differences between the groups acting on social media (consumers, producers and prosumers) to be analysed. Which is interesting because, according to some literature, there is a significant difference between those groups. Finally it would be very interesting to look deeper into the location of residence. This isn't done in this research for technical reasons, but as Pattie & Johnston (2000) stated, location of residence could be a very strong influencer of voting behaviour. It, for example, determines the friends and family you talk to the most, but it also shapes your lifestyle in different ways.

There can be done a lot of further research on this topic. Especially because social media is a young phenomenon and this study showed that the effect for the society as a whole isn't that strong yet. Nevertheless, since the use of social media is increasing and is expected to become one of the most influential media sources, it would be interesting to find out what the effect of social media in the future will be, how strong it is, how politicians can use social media for their benefits and how politics in general will change as a result of this. At the same time we should be very critical to this development as well, the way in which social media platforms (especially Facebook) act is at least questionable. Facebook uses personal ads, based on what we 'like', share and post. All the political ads in the Brexit campaigns were age, gender and postcode oriented and developed with technologies which are influencing the human brain (Bakir & McStay, 2017). In itself not necessarily a bad thing, but when realizing that the producers of 'fake news' and 'alternative facts' uses the same mechanisms it is something that requires a critical look. Even more, since there are some academics (Chadwick, 2017; Dutceac Segesten & Bossetta, 2017) claiming that this new digital democracy, isn't a democracy at all. According to them the new digital members of the political parties are 'clicktivists' who aren't prepared to help the party outside and doesn't see the value of the old-style political party structures and activities.

The last notion is about the realization of the period in which this study was conducted. While analysing the election results of 2015 and 2017, we must look critically at these results at the same time. In a period just after an economic crisis and the Brexit, we have to realize that such events do influence the attitude towards politics and the voting behaviour of people. Academics aren't clear about the specific effect of these events but it is crucial to keep this in mind when doing research. For further research it would be interesting to find out what those different potential effects of such events are and what different effects this have on the influence of social media usage (on voting behaviour).

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## Appendix

## Appendix 1, SPSS output

		Parameter Estimates <sup>a</sup>						95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
general election 2015 + 2017 <sup>b</sup>		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1,00	Intercept	-3,447	,615	31,463	1	,000			
	social media usage	,004	,280	,000	1	,990	1,004	,580	1,737
	gender	-,157	,329	,227	1	,634	,855	,449	1,628
	belonging to a religion	-,222	,339	,430	1	,512	,801	,412	1,556
	belonging to social class	,177	,327	,293	1	,588	1,194	,629	2,265
	[age=1,00]	2,988	,798	14,007	1	,000	19,838	4,150	94,842
	[age=2,00]	2,627	,595	19,467	1	,000	13,836	4,307	44,451
	[age=3,00]	2,339	,588	15,838	1	,000	10,369	3,277	32,807
	[age=4,00]	,875	,563	2,421	1	,120	2,400	,797	7,230
	[age=5,00]	,013	,690	,000	1	,985	1,013	,262	3,917
	[age=6,00]	0 <sup>c</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Income=,00]	,832	,496	2,814	1	,093	2,299	,869	6,079
	[Income=1,00]	,320	,383	,701	1	,402	1,378	,651	2,917
	[Income=2,00]	0 <sup>c</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
2,00	Intercept	-3,957	,713	30,838	1	,000			
	social media usage	,589	,302	3,813	1	,051	1,803	,998	3,257
	gender	,345	,382	,816	1	,366	1,412	,668	2,982
	belonging to a religion	-,082	,391	,044	1	,835	,922	,428	1,984
	belonging to social class	,005	,379	,000	1	,990	1,005	,478	2,112
	[age=1,00]	-18,286	,000	.	1	.	1,144E-8	1,144E-8	1,144E-8
	[age=2,00]	,991	,708	1,961	1	,161	2,695	,673	10,795
	[age=3,00]	1,248	,658	3,597	1	,058	3,483	,959	12,646
	[age=4,00]	,333	,601	,306	1	,580	1,395	,430	4,527
	[age=5,00]	,305	,594	,263	1	,608	1,356	,424	4,344
	[age=6,00]	0 <sup>c</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Income=,00]	,794	,587	1,826	1	,177	2,211	,700	6,990
	[Income=1,00]	,585	,463	1,597	1	,206	1,794	,725	4,442
	[Income=2,00]	0 <sup>c</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.

- a. General election 2015 = conservative  
 b. The reference category is: ,00.  
 c. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

## Appendix 2, SPSS output

		Parameter Estimates <sup>a</sup>					95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)		
		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
2,00	Intercept	1,767	,687	6,619	1	,010			
	social media usage	-,129	,319	,163	1	,686	,879	,470	1,644
	gender	-,414	,400	1,071	1	,301	,661	,301	1,448
	belonging to a religion	,267	,401	,443	1	,505	1,306	,595	2,866
	belonging to social class	,778	,400	3,777	1	,052	2,177	,993	4,773
	[age=1,00]	19,845	7234,345	,000	1	,998	415468630,660	,000	. <sup>c</sup>
	[age=2,00]	,291	,659	,196	1	,658	1,338	,368	4,870
	[age=3,00]	19,573	,706	768,790	1	,000	316651131,140	79376899,976	1263187890,708
	[age=4,00]	,212	,559	,144	1	,704	1,237	,413	3,701
	[age=5,00]	,133	,523	,065	1	,799	1,142	,410	3,184
	[age=6,00]	0 <sup>d</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Income=,00]	,532	,575	,855	1	,355	1,702	,551	5,255
	[Income=1,00]	-,081	,498	,027	1	,871	,922	,347	2,449
[Income=2,00]	0 <sup>d</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.	
3,00	Intercept	-1,221	,980	1,551	1	,213			
	social media usage	,519	,424	1,498	1	,221	1,681	,732	3,861
	gender	,338	,553	,374	1	,541	1,402	,474	4,145
	belonging to a religion	,044	,550	,006	1	,937	1,044	,356	3,067
	belonging to social class	,123	,550	,050	1	,823	1,131	,385	3,320
	[age=1,00]	,343	,000	.	1	.	1,409	1,409	1,409
	[age=2,00]	,339	,945	,129	1	,720	1,404	,220	8,957
	[age=3,00]	19,778	,000	.	1	.	388529738,039	388529738,039	388529738,039

[age=4,00]	-,355	,937	,144	1	,705	,701	,112	4,402
[age=5,00]	,676	,767	,778	1	,378	1,966	,438	8,833
[age=6,00]	0 <sup>d</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
[Income=,00]	,366	,754	,236	1	,627	1,442	,329	6,319
[Income=1,00]	-,364	,666	,298	1	,585	,695	,189	2,563
[Income=2,00]	0 <sup>d</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.

a. General election 2015 = labour

b. The reference category is: 1,00.

c. Floating point overflow occurred while computing this statistic. Its value is therefore set to system missing.

d. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Appendix 3, SPSS output

### Parameter Estimates<sup>a</sup>

		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
general election 2015 + 2017 <sup>b</sup>								Lower Bound	Upper Bound
3,00	Intercept	-,933	,705	1,752	1	,186			
	social media usage	,241	,311	,603	1	,437	1,273	,692	2,341
	gender	-,275	,382	,519	1	,471	,759	,359	1,606
	belonging to a religion	-,597	,385	2,397	1	,122	,551	,259	1,172
	belonging to social class	,324	,376	,742	1	,389	1,382	,662	2,886
	[age=1,00]	,743	1,039	,511	1	,475	2,102	,274	16,112
	[age=2,00]	2,029	,753	7,270	1	,007	7,607	1,740	33,251
	[age=3,00]	1,576	,717	4,833	1	,028	4,837	1,186	19,722
	[age=4,00]	1,019	,598	2,907	1	,088	2,771	,859	8,945
	[age=5,00]	-,130	,587	,049	1	,824	,878	,278	2,771
	[age=6,00]	0 <sup>c</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Income=,00]	,658	,554	1,412	1	,235	1,932	,652	5,723
	[Income=1,00]	-,056	,486	,013	1	,909	,946	,365	2,452
[Income=2,00]	0 <sup>c</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.	
4,00	Intercept	,356	,556	,410	1	,522			
	social media usage	-,098	,257	,146	1	,703	,906	,548	1,500
	gender	-,170	,311	,298	1	,585	,844	,459	1,553
	belonging to a religion	-,316	,314	1,018	1	,313	,729	,394	1,347
	belonging to social class	,221	,308	,514	1	,473	1,247	,682	2,281
	[age=1,00]	,019	,988	,000	1	,985	1,019	,147	7,073

[age=2,00]	,522	,703	,552	1	,457	1,686	,425	6,688
[age=3,00]	1,355	,609	4,947	1	,026	3,877	1,175	12,799
[age=4,00]	,306	,489	,392	1	,531	1,358	,521	3,540
[age=5,00]	,508	,399	1,619	1	,203	1,662	,760	3,635
[age=6,00]	0 <sup>c</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
[Income=,00]	,141	,464	,092	1	,762	1,151	,464	2,860
[Income=1,00]	,258	,412	,390	1	,532	1,294	,577	2,903
[Income=2,00]	0 <sup>c</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	.

a. General election 2015 = other

b. The reference category is: 2,00.

c. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

### Case 1 (2015)

	2015 vote	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Refused	46	2.10	2.10	
Don't know	60	2.73	4.83	
Did not vote	363	16.55	21.38	
Labour	645	29.40	50.77	
Conservative	679	30.95	81.72	
Liberal Democrat	138	6.29	88.01	
Scottish National Party	63	2.87	90.88	
Plaid Cymru	15	0.68	91.57	
Green Party	32	1.46	93.03	
United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	107	4.88	97.90	
British National Party (BNP)	3	0.14	98.04	
Other	6	0.27	98.31	
Not eligible/too young to vote	37	1.69	100.00	
Total	2,194	100.00		

### Case 2 (2017)

B2 Which party did you vote for in the general election?	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Refused	60	3.46	3.46
Don't know	11	0.64	4.10
None/No party	4	0.23	4.33
Labour	725	41.86	46.19
Conservatives	671	38.74	84.93

Liberal Democrats	117	6.76	91.69
Scottish National Party (SNP)	49	2.83	94.52
Plaid Cymru	23	1.33	95.84
Green Party	31	1.79	97.63
United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	37	2.14	99.77
Other	2	0.12	99.88
Independent	2	0.12	100.00
Total	1,732	100.00	

### Variable 1 (social class)

W1 Do you ever think of yourself as belonging to any particular class?			
	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Don't know	36	1.64	1.64
Yes, middle class	464	21.15	22.79
Yes, working class	825	37.60	60.39
Yes, other	14	0.64	61.03
No	848	38.65	99.68
Lower	5	0.23	99.91
Working middle class	2	0.09	100.00
Total	2,194	100.00	

### Variable 2 (religion)

Y6 Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?			
	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Refusal	5	0.23	0.23
No religion	1,024	46.67	46.90
Christian - no denomination	344	15.68	62.58
Roman Catholic	168	7.66	70.24
Church of England/ Anglican/Episcopal	391	17.82	88.06
Presbyterian/Church of Scotland	36	1.64	89.70
Methodist	36	1.64	91.34
Baptist	8	0.36	91.70

United Reform Church (URC)/Congregation	5	0.23	91.93
Other Protestant	8	0.36	92.30
Other Christian	3	0.14	92.43
Jewish	8	0.36	92.80
Hindu	26	1.19	93.98
Islam/Muslim	96	4.38	98.36
Sikh	7	0.32	98.68
Buddhist	10	0.46	99.13
Other non-Christian	14	0.64	99.77
Jehovah witness	5	0.23	100.00
Total	2,194	100.00	

### Variable 3 (Income)

Income - gross household	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Refused	232	10.57	10.57
Don't know	197	8.98	19.55
Under GBP 2,600	32	1.46	21.01
GBP 2,600 - GBP 5,199	54	2.46	23.47
GBP 5,200 - GBP 10,399	148	6.75	30.22
GBP 10,400 - GBP 15,599	198	9.02	39.24
GBP 15,600 - GBP 20,799	183	8.34	47.58
GBP 20,800 - GBP 25,999	174	7.93	55.52
GBP 26,000 - GBP 31,199	162	7.38	62.90
GBP 31,200 - GBP 36,399	119	5.42	68.32
GBP 36,400 - GBP 39,999	99	4.51	72.84
GBP 40,000 - GBP 44,999	79	3.60	76.44
GBP 45,000 - GBP 49,999	99	4.51	80.95
GBP 50,000 - GBP 59,999	109	4.97	85.92
GBP 60,000 - GBP 74,999	126	5.74	91.66
GBP 75,000 - GBP 99,999	106	4.83	96.49
GBP 100,000 or more	77	3.51	100.00
Total	2,194	100.00	

### Computed variable 'Income'

		income			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	low (<20,799)	615	28,0	34,8	34,8
	middle (20,800-49,999)	732	33,4	41,5	76,3
	high (50,000>)	418	19,1	23,7	100,0
	Total	1765	80,4	100,0	
Missing	System	429	19,6		
Total		2194	100,0		

#### Variable 4 (Gender)

Gender	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Male	1,001	45.62	45.62
Female	1,193	54.38	100.00
Total	2,194	100.00	

#### Variable 5 (Age)

Y10. Please can you tell me your age at your last birthday	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Refused	19	0.87	0.87
18-24	157	7.16	8.02
25-34	297	13.54	21.56
35-44	329	15.00	36.55
45-54	363	16.55	53.10
55-64	380	17.32	70.42
65-74	372	16.96	87.37
75-84	202	9.21	96.58
85+	75	3.42	100.00
Total	2,194	100.00	

**Computed variable 'age'**

		age			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	18-24	157	7,2	7,2	7,2
	25-34	297	13,5	13,7	20,9
	35-44	329	15,0	15,1	36,0
	45-54	363	16,5	16,7	52,7
	55-64	380	17,3	17,5	70,2
	65+	649	29,6	29,8	100,0
	Total	2175	99,1	100,0	
Missing	System	19	,9		
Total		2194	100,0		

**The 'social media' variable (Twitter + Facebook)**

K6 Do you use			
Twitter?	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Don`t know	5	0.23	0.23
Yes	366	16.68	16.91
No	1,823	83.09	100.00
Total	2,194	100.00	

K8 Do you use			
Facebook?	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Don`t know	2	0.09	0.09
Yes	1,252	57.06	57.16
No	940	42.84	100.00
Total	2,194	100.00	

**Recoded variable 'social media' (out of 'Facebook use' and 'Twitter use')**

**social media usage (facebook + twitter)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	none	896	40,8	40,9	40,9
	at least one of both	1293	58,9	59,1	100,0
	Total	2189	99,8	100,0	
Missing	System	5	,2		
Total		2194	100,0		