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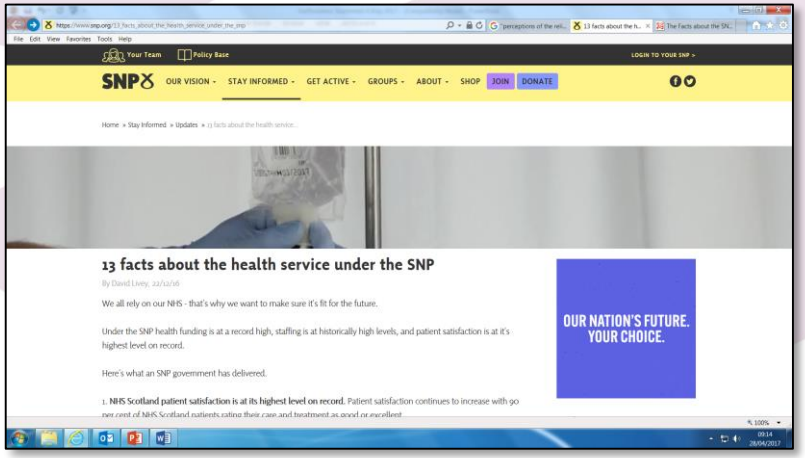
#alternativefacts?

Citizens' perceptions of the reliability of 'facts' presented online by political parties in Scotland

Staffordshire University Library Teachmeet, 4 May 2017



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Methodology

- **Online survey (526 responses at 28 April)**
- **23 electronically-assisted interviews with citizens in Aberdeenshire, North-East Scotland**

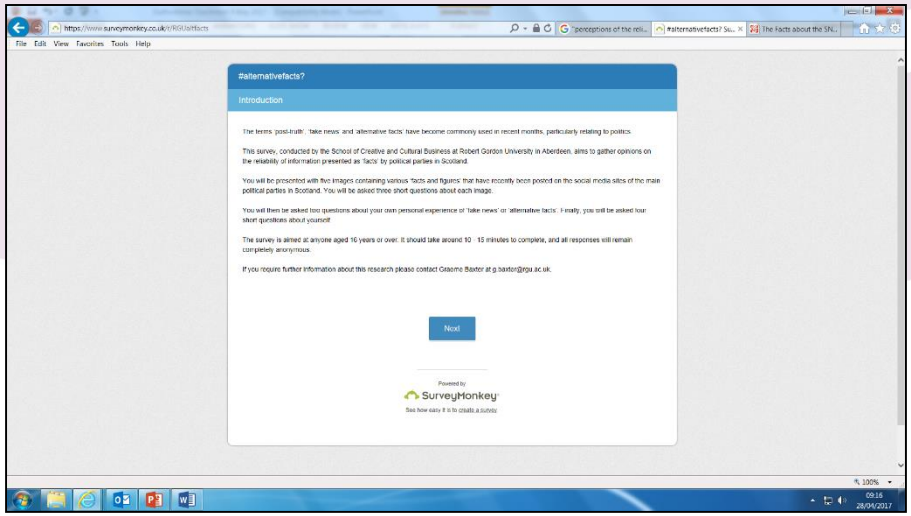

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Image 1 (Scottish National Party)

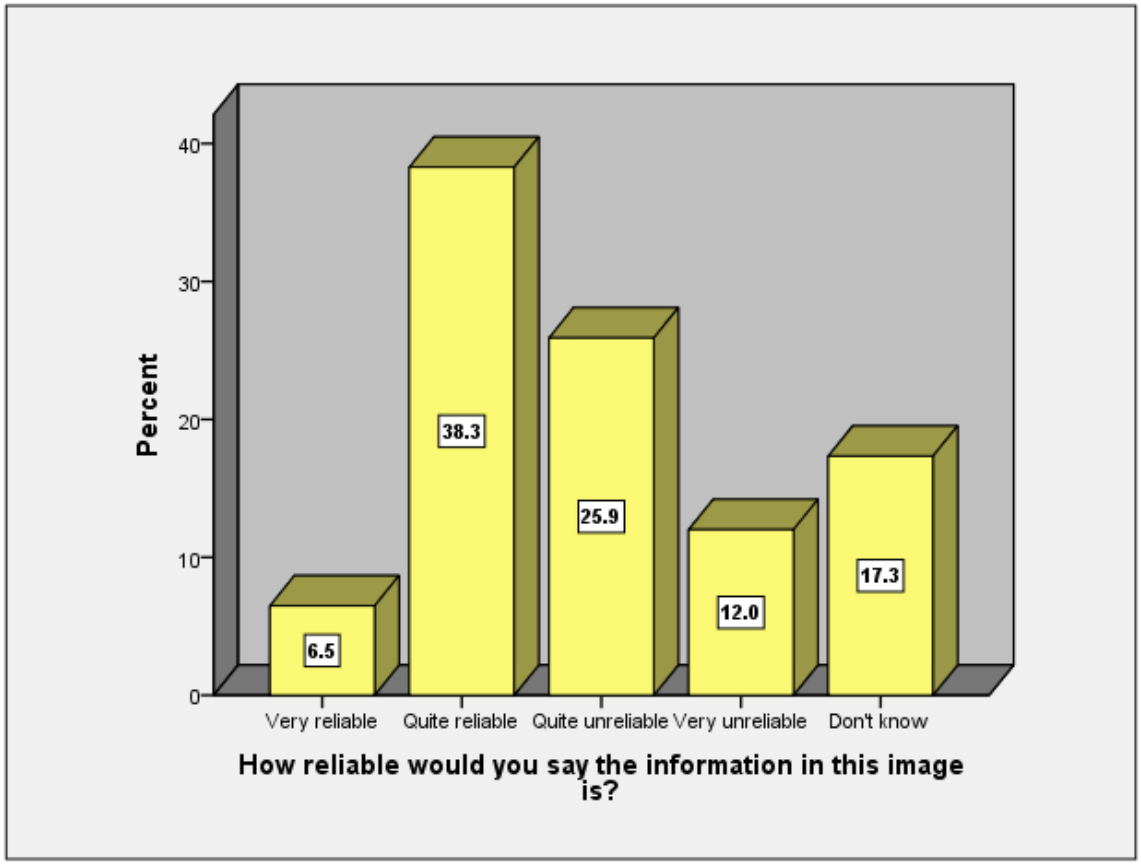
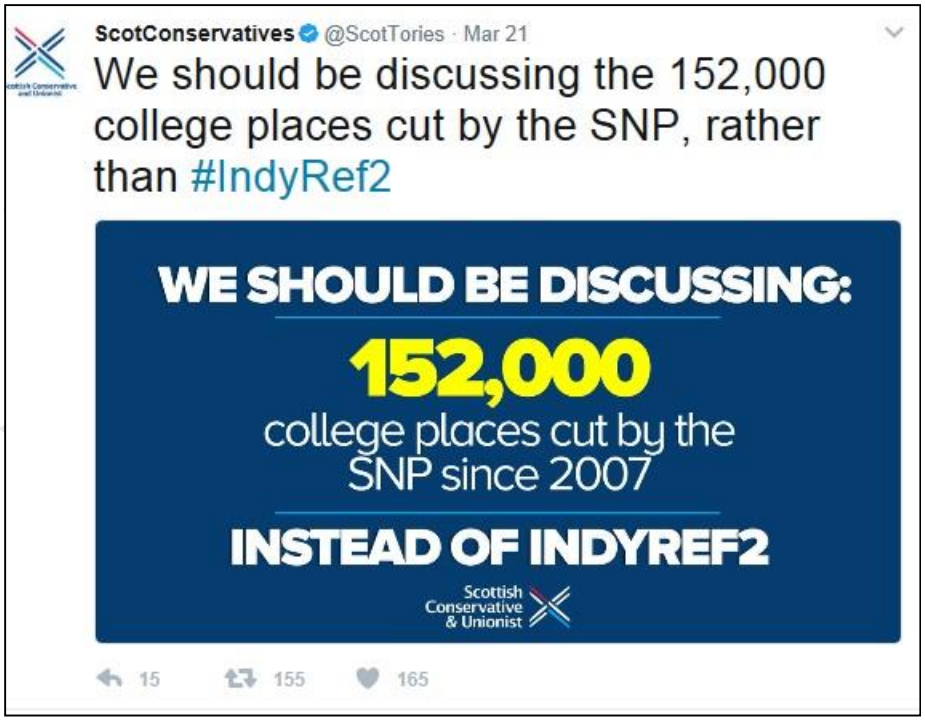


Image 2 (Scottish Conservatives)



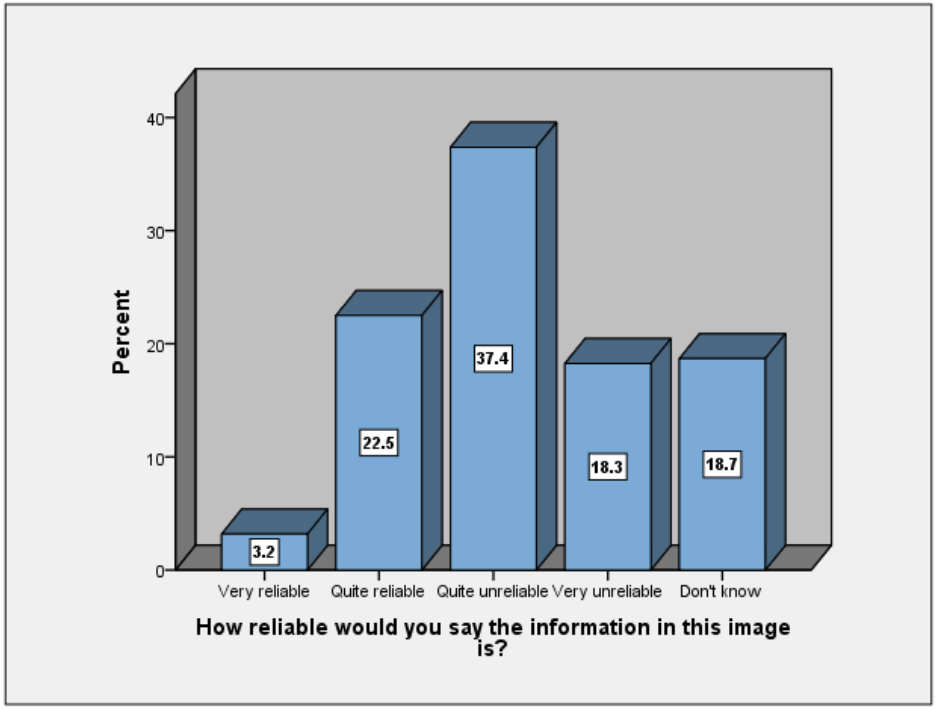


Image 3 (Scottish Labour)

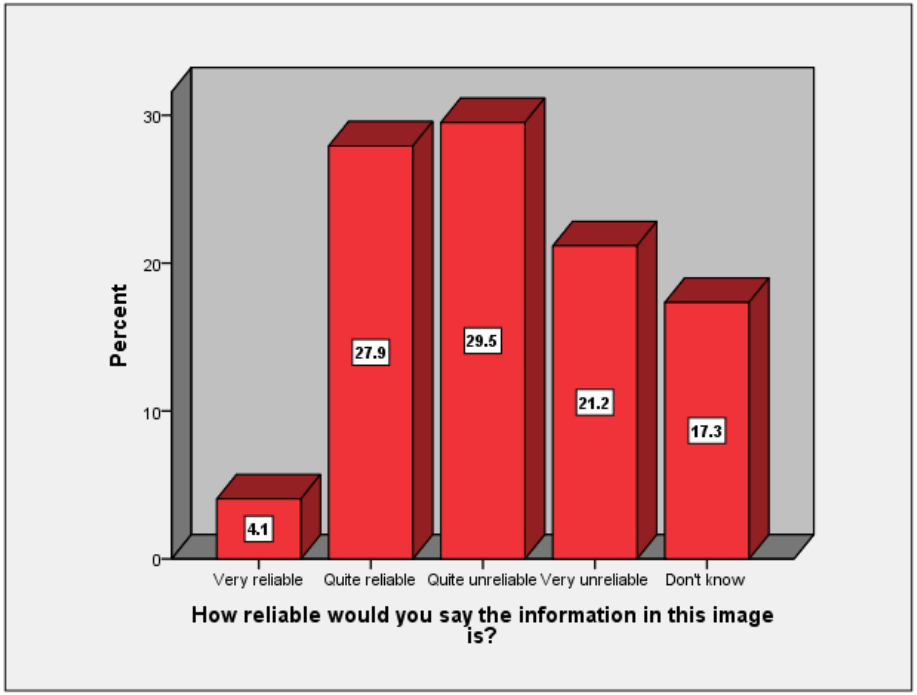


Image 4 (Scottish Greens)

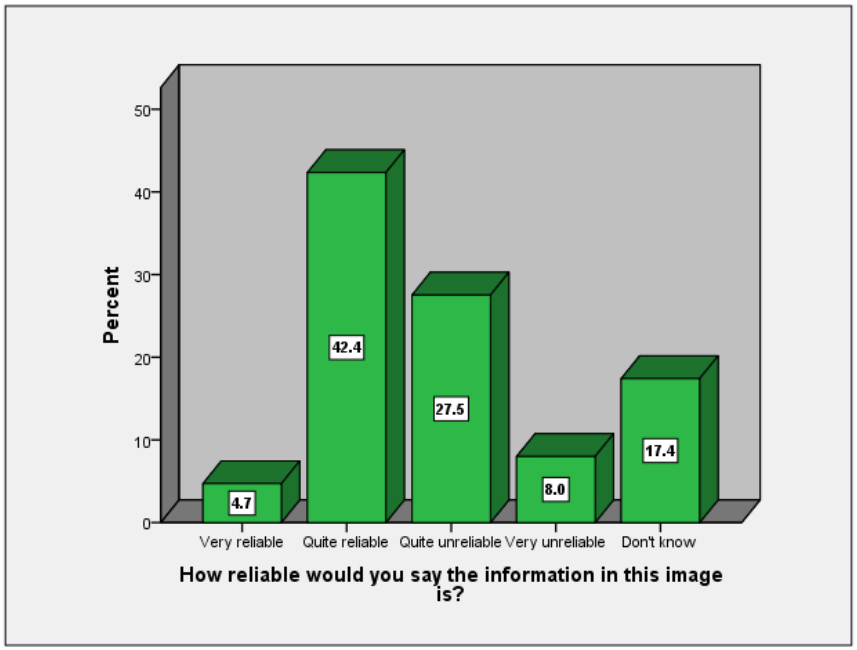
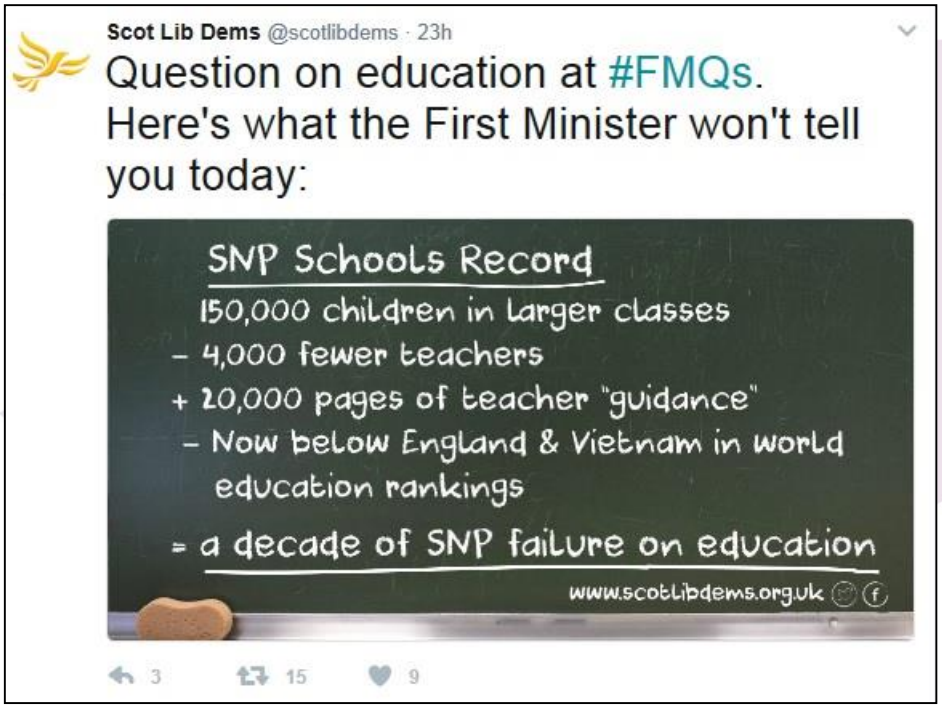
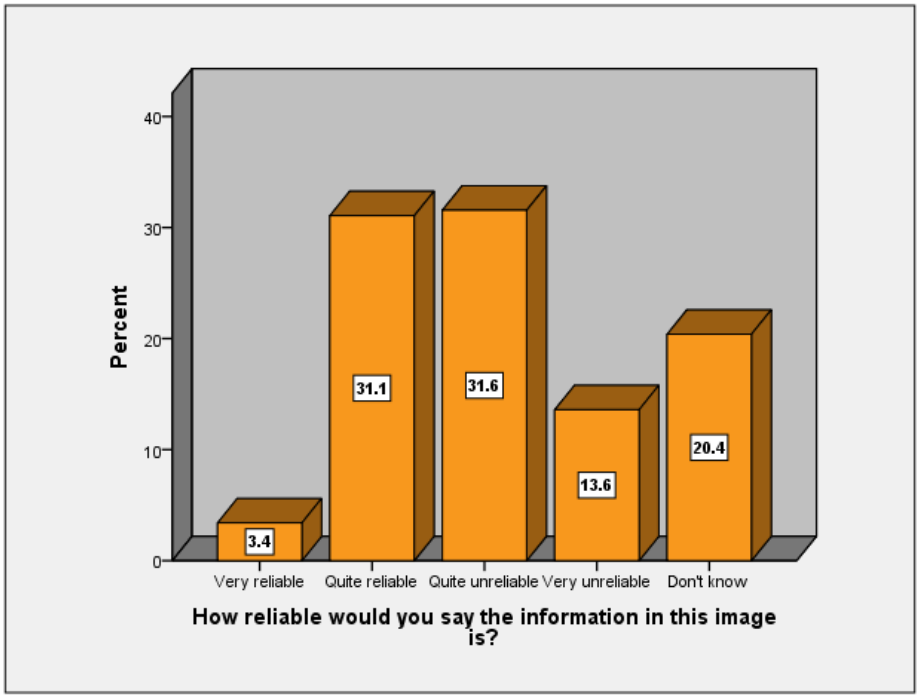
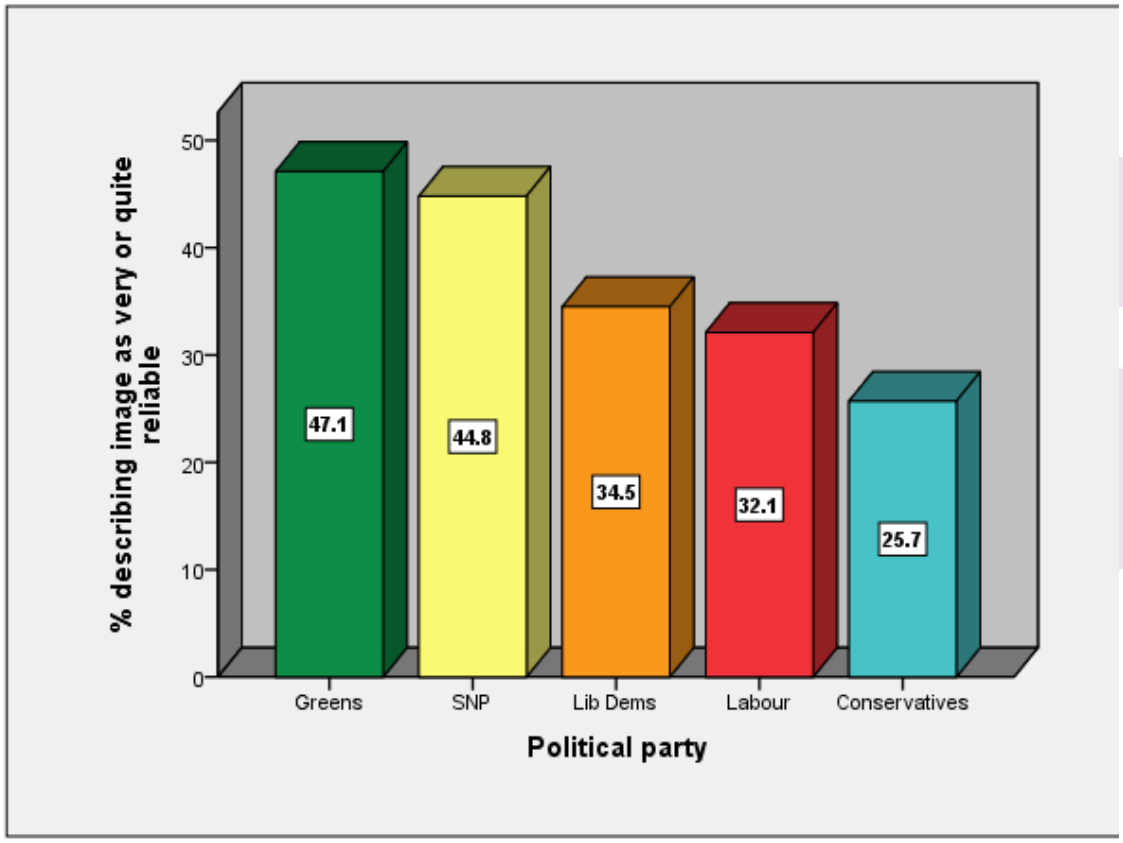


Image 5 (Scottish Liberal Democrats)





Cross-Party Summary:
% Describing Image as 'Very' or 'Quite' Reliable



Factors Affecting Trust in 'Facts'

- Levels of trust in politicians in general
- Levels of trust in specific politicians or parties
- Political allegiance – e.g. 74.5% of SNP supporters felt the SNP facts were very or quite reliable (cf. 44.8% of entire sample)
- Perception that 'facts' will be biased in some way, or subject to some form of 'spin'
- Whether or not the source of the 'facts' has been given
- Respondents' professional or personal experience, particularly in relation to education, healthcare and childcare

Likely Sources of Information to Verify or Debunk 'Facts'

- UK or Scottish Government websites
- Websites of government agencies, e.g. Audit Scotland, Office for National Statistics
- Universities or think tanks
- Third sector organisations and interest groups
- Newspaper and news media websites, e.g. BBC, ITN, Herald, Scotsman
- Use Freedom of Information legislation

- **But, emphasis on Google as first port of call**

Examples of ‘Facts’ Exposed as Falsehoods?

- Iraq and weapons of mass destruction
- Brexit bus
- US presidential campaign
  - inauguration attendance figures
  - ‘terrorist incident’ in Sweden
  - ‘Pizzagate’
  - Bowling Green ‘massacre’, etc.

Image: Huffington Post

Image: CNBC

And in Scotland…

- Scottish Government’s oil & gas revenue projections
- ‘The Vow’ of more devolved powers for the Scottish Parliament

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Personally Misled by ‘Facts’?

- **Very few respondents admitted to having been personally misled by political ‘facts’**

- **But a number gave examples of being misled by other ‘facts’, including:-**
  - **Food labelling**
  - **Purchase of endowment policies**
  - **Slimming tablets**
  - **April Fool jokes in the media**

Image: timeanddate.com

Thank you...

Image: NBC News