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MPS ON STANDBY:

REPRESENTATION AND REPAIR IN EVERYDAY MP-CONSTITUENT PERFORMANCES

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICS

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Shu Wen Nikki Soo, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

MPs enact crucial institutional functions as representatives at the crossroads of important flows of public discourse. Previous scholarship have established MPs are doing more than ever in the constituency, and sought to understand their motivations through a rational choice approach. How the process is carried out remains unknown. This dissertation fills the research gap by investigating the contemporary British constituency service process, an area often overlooked as a conventional routine.

Drawing on Alexander (2010, 2011), Goffman (1959) and Foucault (1972), I develop an approach that illuminated how MPs perform their roles on their everyday activities. I argue MPs interpret their roles as being constantly on standby, i.e. ready and willing to address their constituents' needs. In doing this, MPs employ discursive formations of accessibility, visibility and repair in their relationships with constituents to maintain performative power and legitimacy. My interpretive analysis is based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork with MPs during their constituency service in English constituencies, as well as semi-structured interviews, from December 2014 to May 2016.

My findings firstly indicate MPs are driven by a sense of answerability, having to be reactive to relevant stimuli coming from their political and constituency environments. However, MPs vary in their approach and findings experiences. While all MPs I studied agreed on the importance of being physically accessible, recently elected MPs especially strove to ensure their accessibility was publicly known. Secondly, MPs integrate traditional media and digital tools in different ways and based on different strategy, and my fieldwork provides a holistic description of how these tools are used in conjunction with physical co-presence. Thirdly, MPs struggle to balance between constituent demands and Parliamentary responsibilities. This problem is exacerbated by increased use of digital media by both representatives and constituents, placing additional demands on MPs that they struggle to meet.

This dissertation contributes a rich description of the contemporary constituency service process. The outcome of this research and its interpretive approach will impact future research in legitimation procedures, representation and citizenship.

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Constituency Man

Les Gibbard, 1982

“Certainly, gentlemen, it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents.”

— Edmund Burke, *Speech to the Electors of Bristol*

Table of Contents

1 BRITISH MPS AND CONTEMPORARY CONSTITUENCY SERVICE 11

1.1 THE PUZZLE 11
1.2 QUESTIONS TO ASK IN RESEARCH 16
1.3 WHY IT MATTERS 18
1.4 ARGUMENT AND CONTRIBUTION 21
1.5 PLAN OF THE THESIS 23

2 TOWARDS AN EVERYDAY PERFORMATIVITY OF THE CONSTITUENCY SERVICE 27

2.1 INTRODUCTION 27
2.2 HOW OTHERS DID IT 32
2.3 WHY IT IS OUTDATED 37
2.4 DEVELOPING AN APPROACH TO EVERYDAY PERFORMATIVITY 40
2.5 CONCLUSION 50

3 METHODS TO EXPLORE MPS IN THE CONSTITUENCY 53

3.1 INTRODUCTION 53
3.2 METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION 56
3.3 RESEARCH ETHICS 64
3.4 DATA STORAGE 65
3.5 CONCLUSION 65

4 WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU? STAYING ACCESSIBLE 67

4.1 INTRODUCTION 67
4.2 PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY 69
4.3 AUGMENTED ACCESSIBILITY 80
4.4 THE PRIORITISATION OF ACCESSIBILITY 93
4.5 CONCLUSION 95

5 TO SEE AND BE SEEN: BEING VISIBLE 98

5.1 INTRODUCTION 98
5.2 PHYSICAL VISIBILITY 100
5.3 AUGMENTING VISIBILITY 114
5.4 CONCLUSION 140

6 WE INTERRUPT YOUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING… MP ROUTINES AND REPAIRS 143

6.1 INTRODUCTION 143
6.2 ROUTINES AND RITUAL-LIKE INTERACTIONS IN CONSTITUENCY SERVICE 145
6.3 THE ADVICE SURGERY REPAIR PROCESS 149
6.4 THREATS TO AUTHENTICITY: CONFLICT, DISRUPTIONS AND BROKEN ROUTINES 153
6.5 THE PURSUIT OF REPAIR 169
6.6 CONCLUSION 181

7 PERFORMATIVE POWER AND SEEKING RE-FUSION 183

7.1 INTRODUCTION 183
7.2 PERFORMING POWER 184
7.3 THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LIMITS 204
7.4 THE QUEST FOR RE-FUSION 207
7.5 CONCLUSION 213

8 A METHOD TO THE MADNESS? MPS ON STANDBY 216

8.1 KEY FINDINGS 216
8.2 CONTRIBUTIONS 220
8.3 DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 224

9 REFERENCES 225

10 APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM 240

11 APPENDIX 2: DETAILS OF DATA COLLECTION 241

1 British MPs and Contemporary Constituency Service

1.1 The Puzzle

What does the process of representation involve? Do Members of Parliament (MPs) care about their constituencies after elections are over? What is constituency service and how do MPs carry this out? How do meanings of representative acts emerge between official responsibilities in Parliament, what is expected of MPs as they solve constituency problems in everyday life? Does the existence of digital tools render traditional constituency interactions redundant? This dissertation is about the process of political representation, focusing specifically on the British constituency service – an area often overlooked as a conventional and self-serving routine. Most of us have a general idea that MPs are occasionally in their constituency and that their help can be sought if needed. On the surface, it may seem like these actions are not particularly important to the process of representation, and that they don't matter very much to the MPs. Furthermore, despite constituents being able to seek help from MPs when faced with problems, such as housing matters, MPs are not often viewed in a positive light. Following this, this dissertation will show how important these constituency interactions are to the process of representation, and the understanding of the constituency service.

MPs enact crucial institutional functions as representatives at the crossroads of important flows of public discourse. Observable growth in the constituency services and shifts in the way modern MPs carry out their representative responsibilities have resulted in scholars seeking to understand this important parliamentary link between government and citizen. The British tradition of putting theory into practice through a representative government centers on the transferal of opinion between the "political nation" and its governors within the House of Commons (Judge, 1999: 15). At its simplest, representation of the constituency refers to the representation of a specific territorial area. Theoretical studies on representation can be grouped into two general foci, one on representative style (i.e. how they act), and another on representative focus (territorial area, specific groups) (Judge, 1999: 149). In practice, representation is

not mono-dimensional and simultaneously involves an amalgamation of the two domains. Nevertheless, the fundamental basis of representation remains territorial as political representatives keep their attention within this imagined boundary as they carry out their responsibilities (Judge, 1999: 149).

MPs have been found to be spending more time than ever in the constituency, indicating changes in the way MPs approach responsibilities and activities in Westminster and the constituency (Gay, 2005; Norris, 1997; Norton, 2007). Historically, the representative role of the MP relates closely to Parliament's medieval role in redressing grievances, where MPs served as an important link between citizens and the state by mediating and ensuring that constituent rights were maintained (Judge, 1993: 7; Gay, 2005: 57; Norris, 1997: 29). It was previously common for MPs to visit their constituencies only once a year, and to focus predominantly on their work in Parliament (Radice et al, 1987: 102). Members now spend at least a third of their week in their constituencies, with many of them maintaining a residence there (Ibid). By the end of the 1960s, over 90 per cent of MPs carried out regular surgeries in their constituency (Gay, 2005: 58). How MPs chose to divide their time and allocating resources has been the subject of many studies, resulting in the identification of various MP roles and motivations (Radice et al, 1987; Gay, 2005; Norris, 1997; Norton and Wood, 1993; Searing, 1985; Rush, 2005). Many studies on British MPs can be found by referring to Searing's (1985; 1994) extensive study on legislative roles taken on by MPs, which is anchored in Parliament as an institution. These roles include being an information provider, local dignitary, advocate and promoter of constituency interests among others (Norton, 1994). The majority of these tasks include and are not limited to educating, problem solving, issue advocacy, legislative scrutiny, administrative oversight and receiving elector views (Norton, 2007: 367). Choices of activities and motivations of British MPs were found to interact with characteristics of the House of Commons to produce four roles: Parliament man, ministerial aspirant, policy advocate and constituency member. These roles are not mutually exclusive, but MPs often exhibited preferences or goals towards roles they valued. The intersection between the ancient parliamentary role and the needs of the modern welfare state explains why the majority of MPs, even

those holding high ministerial positions, carry out at least a small amount of constituency work (Searing, 1985: 350). Thus, a significant emphasis on the constituency on the part of the MP can be observed.

Interaction and engagement between citizens and political representatives form a substantial and indispensable component of a healthy democracy. The tenacity of political participation as an imperative part of democracy, attributed to the archetypal Greek model of democracy, is often discerned as ideal (Graber, 2003: 143). Thus, ensuring open channels of communication between MPs and their constituents is the cornerstone of constituency service (Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Williamson, 2009; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). Representatives are generally understood and increasingly expected to fulfill a number of constituency-related tasks, but their role lacks a job description or any sort of formal rules (Norton, 2007: 354). Constituents have the option of contacting their representative in writing, most commonly through letters. In the UK, an indicator worthy of mention is the growth in correspondence found in the flow of letters between MPs and constituents, and in consequence, between MPs and ministers (Norton and Wood, 1993; Radice et al, 1987; Norris, 1997; Gay, 2005). Between the 1920s and 1960s, MPs were found to reply to at least 50 constituent letters a week, with the number of letters received increasing tenfold between 1950 and 1980 (Jennings, 1957: 27; Barker et al, 1970; Norton and Wood, 1993: 43). This trend continued to rise, with 80 per cent of MPs receiving more than 100 letters a week, half receiving more than 200 and nearly a fifth receiving more than 300[1] (Hansard Society, 2000) In response to changes in the media environment, MPs have also increased the number of communication channels they use, especially by embracing the internet. Correspondence and communication with constituents have increased as a result as interactions no longer have to take place face-to-face in public or private spaces, but can be carried out in online forums allowing for a myriad of interactive features and a seemingly endless list of topics. Many parliamentarians use email; share their activities and thoughts through their

[1] These surveys do not include emails and written responses through other means, such as comments left on MP blogs, websites and social media profiles.

websites, blogs and Facebook pages; and have Twitter accounts for short and quick updates (Norton, 2007; Williamson, 2009; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Tromble, 2016; Umit, 2017). For example, 546 out of 650 Members of Parliament are presently on Twitter (Tweetminster, 2017). In essence, MPs have seemed to become omnipresent.

Despite evidence indicating that more time and resources are being spent on the constituency service than in previous years, the attention given to MPs is largely negative in nature. Public trust has been, and still is, consistently low, with numerous opinion polls reflecting unfavourable views of representatives. Politicians remain the least trusted profession by the British public, with only 21 per cent of those surveyed trusting them to be truthful (Ipsos MORI, 2016). Public trust in politicians has not exceeded more than a quarter of the population since 1983, with the lowest trust score of 13 per cent recorded in 2009 in light of the expenses scandal (Ibid). In 2016, only 29 per cent of the British public was satisfied with MPs (Hansard Society, 2016). Previously, the Audit of Political Engagement revealed that 67 per cent of the citizens surveyed were of the view that MPs "don't understand the daily lives of people like me" (Hansard Society, 2014). Given the increased effort and resources spent on understanding their constituency needs and attending to constituent demands, why are representatives still viewed so negatively?

The puzzle of this research lies within this conundrum. Previous scholarship has established that MPs are doing more than ever in the constituency, and yet this effort does not seem to be received positively by the public. Evidently, traditional authority voices cannot depend on audiences to be listening in deference (Coleman, 2013: 5). For these constituency interactions to achieve shared and credible meaning, the actor's actions and the audience's interpretation must share the same perception. According to Alexander's theory of cultural pragmatics, pre-modern societies were simple (2010, 2011). Symbolic meaning and cultural meanings were fused through rituals based on shared beliefs and direct physical interactions (2010; 2011). Ancient Athenians addressed their citizens intimately at face-to-face meetings, they utilised rhetoric shaped by skill and

instruction alongside rational argumentation (Alexander, 2010: 13). However, modern societies have become more complex, with fragmented populations, diverse and differentiated shared beliefs, and less immediate communicative interaction. Cultural de-fusion between these performance elements occurs, resulting in a breakdown in common cultural understanding. To be effective in an increasingly complex society, MPs are now challenged to infuse meaning by re-fusing constituency performance seamlessly (Alexander, 2011: 27). That is, what is being said and the images being conjured by political performers must reach constituents and resonate with them deeply. Representatives thus invest great effort into image control, making sure their constituents are not only aware of how to reach them and that they are there for them, but also that they are representing them in the best manner possible, even if they are not always physically in the constituency.

Hence, central to my dissertation is the belief that it is not the volume or categorisation of constituency service activities we should be concerning ourselves with, but *how* MPs are carrying them out. Reducing representation to mere statistics and black-and-white boxes only serves to answer the questions we deign to fit them into. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, existing scholarship relies on quantification to explain constituency service and its increase. While useful, these numbers can never relate the full story. By zooming in on MPs' practices and activities within their constituency and with their constituents, this research sets out to understand MPs and constituent voices on new terms by exploring their memories, practices and embarrassments as if they really matter. Trying to make sense of these situations necessitates the *dis*acknowledgement of taken-for-granted routines surrounding the MPs, their activities and their relationships within the constituency, such as the MP surgery, for example, and considering them as one would an exotic and unfamiliar ritual (Coleman, 2013: viii). It is only through "the blur of unfamiliarity [that] the unexpected contours of the seemingly self-evident become truly vivid" (Ibid). Thus, I embark on this study with the possibility of finding the intriguing in the mundane as its point of departure.

In this dissertation I provide a thick description of the contemporary British constituency service process, but also a novel perspective when considering representation and power. My analysis of contemporary constituency service is based primarily on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork with MPs during their constituency service, in English constituencies from December 2014 to May 2016. Close inspection of this noteworthy first hand evidence provides fresh insights into the representation process and how contemporary constituency service is carried out through a number of communication strategies and engagement practices. I discuss my methodology and data collection further in Chapter 3.

In the next section, I present the questions I seek to answer in this dissertation, having discussed the puzzle at hand. Following that, I shed light on the significance of my investigation into the contemporary constituency service process between MPs and their constituents, and why it matters. I then discuss the dissertation argument. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with an outline of the dissertation.

1.2 Questions to Ask in Research

We are aware that Members conduct political communication primarily through activities that take place within their constituencies. Members help with constituent concerns and casework, usually solicited through the holding of weekly or fortnightly "surgeries" (also known as the advice bureau) (Cain et al, 1987; Gay, 2005; King, 1974; McAllister, 2015; Wood and Norton, 1992). These usually take place in local municipal offices, village halls and community areas such as the library (King, 1974; Radice et al, 1987). Information about the surgeries, with their location and timing, can usually be found on the MP's website and is also advertised locally in public areas such as the library. Casework can be described to consist of cases from individual constituents, civic groups and local organisations seeking aid from their representatives for bureaucratic intervention, or local government assistance (Gay, 2005; Johannes et al, 1981; Norris, 1997). For constituents who are unsure how to go about trying to solve their problems, or who feel like they have exhausted all their known channels of support, seeing their MP is usually considered their last hope. Interacting in

circumstances such as this usually achieves a certain level of intimacy by producing "contact with constituents, generally those having some request, grievance, or other claim vis-à-vis the government" (Cain et al, 1984: 114). Members also interact with constituents on behalf of the local party. It is common for the MP to carry out other party-related face-to-face meetings. This includes walkabouts in different wards of the constituency and attending local functions in schools, religious institutions and charitable organisations. However, we are still unaware how these interactions are carried out, leading to this dissertation's main research question: How are MPs carrying out the process of contemporary constituency service?

MPs are not only spending more time in the constituency, but they are doing more while there too. Shifts in constituent demands and expectations of their representative have resulted in increases in constituency correspondence and interactions. The volume and immediacy of communication have not only expanded with the use of internet tools, but the very nature of communication, conversation and engagement have changed. Furthermore, due to the complexities of their responsibilities, their finite amounts of time and financial resources, along with changes in the communication landscape, it is also imperative we ask: What are the challenges MPs face during the contemporary constituency service process?

Political performances in the constituencies do not only take place on the ground in the form of walkabouts and advice surgeries, but are also transmitted through the media. Since this dissertation is focused on the contemporary constituency service process, it must consider how various communication tools are used. Therefore, I also ask the question of how MPs use traditional media and digital tools to engage with constituents. This includes local, regional and national newspaper articles, interviews on television, updates and blog posts on their personal websites, Facebook and Twitter. Tensions arise as parliamentarians are increasingly aware of the importance of making visible what they do, but they are also aware of the need to ensure that the image they present of themselves is consistent. The changes technology introduces in our lives are not merely in *how*

we interact with each other, but also in *where* we interact with each other. MPs now find themselves in contact with many constituents and other members of the public through multiple forums and outlets. These merged face-to-face interactions and the combined situations of electronic media are relatively lasting and inescapable, resulting in greater effects on social behaviour and the overlapping of many social spheres that were once distinct (Meyrowitz, 1985: 5).

1.3 Why It Matters

Political representatives are observed to rely on varying political communication practices in the constituency, based on perceived interests, existing knowledge and skills, available resources and the communications environment they work within. Understanding the MP's performance in the constituency, its features, the tools utilised and how it is structured, matters for two reasons. Firstly, there remains a perpetual imbalance between attention to macro-level trends and forces and micro-level situations and experiences characterising much of social science scholarship (Coleman, 2013: vii). Indeed, much of what interests political scientists in constituency representation is asking the question of why, rather than how, do MPs carry out constituency service? The relationship between constituency service and its electoral benefits dominates scholarly discussion, indicating that parliamentarians are incentivised to carry out these constituency activities to win the personal vote, subsequently affecting campaign outcomes (Fenno, 1978; Cain et al, 1984; Norton and Wood, 1994; Norris, 1997; Wood and Norton, 1992). This preoccupation with motivation has shaped the way scholars thinking about constituency service carry out their research. I discuss, in detail, previous studies carried out on the constituency service in Chapter 2. The increase in constituency service, observed especially in backbenchers, is not novel, but "is in fact a new version of a very old role which has been neglected for some time" (Searing, 1994: 123). It is of no surprise then, that investigation of this longstanding symbolic process has received little scholarly interest. After all, nothing seems to have changed.

Another major reason for this neglect is the dominance of the research being conducted on one end of the representative-constituency: in the world of

legislative combat (Fenno, 1978: xiii). Constituency relations are often considered in relation to Westminster. When that is a context far removed from the one in which constituency relationships are created and nurtured, discussion of a representative's political communication and relationships in the constituency could produce a distortion of perspective, i.e. "me-in-the-constituency", rather than "me-and-the-constituency" (Fenno, 1978: xiii). To answer questions on how political power and legitimacy is achieved, projected, inhabited, maintained and lost, a position in close proximity to the action is necessary (Mast, 2016: 2051). With a study of representatives' perceptions of their constituencies whilst in their constituencies, this dissertation offers a privileged vantage point for observing representation in action. This is vital, as representation is a pivotal component of democratic practices (Plotke, 1997).

Secondly, opinion polls are clearly not an accurate reflection of what is being done in the constituencies. As discussed previously, public trust in politicians is lower than ever, despite the visible increase in constituency efforts demonstrated in previous studies. MP Samuel Pollock shares, "From the politician's point of view, I don't think there has been a generation of politicians trying harder to be in touch with their constituents" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). This dissertation provides detailed explanation of these communication efforts, what MPs are doing on the ground and the work that is channelled through their performances to engage with, gain trust from, represent, and be viewed as authentic by their constituents. This contemporary depiction of MPs is not often reported in the news, or discussed in research, due to its lack of action and drama. This dearth of journalistic attention, along with the competitive attention economy, is partly what drives MPs and their constituency service practices (Nielsen, 2012: 15).

In some ways it is unexpected that MPs are investing more time and resources into the constituency service. We live in a society where the abundance of communication and digital tools leave us spoiled for choice, shrinking distances, allowing us to be anywhere anytime. We are inundated with multimedia convergence, round-the-clock news, the ubiquitous use of computing and emails,

and the proliferation of mobile devices. These digital technologies are domesticated as they are steadily assimilated into the various domains of our everyday lives and routines (Berker et al, 2006; Dahlgren, 2009: 150). This technological shift has also been recognised and incorporated in parliamentary life. A consolidated Parliamentary ICT service (PICT) was implemented on 1 January 2006 in the House of Commons, with legislation introduced in 2007 to ensure that ICT provision is streamlined and managed by a joint department (Norton, 2007: 355). MPs and their staff are equipped with the necessary technology required to facilitate online communication within and without the Commons. The ease of use and ability to reach a large audience makes digital tools a seductive option in place of meeting face-to-face, making it almost counterintuitive that representatives are choosing to personally connect with their constituents in person. After all, networked technologies were first and foremost designed to share information, but were taken up as technologies of relationship instead (Turkle, 2011: 161). With the plethora of digital tools available, why are MPs carrying out more constituency services than before? How are MPs integrating these digital tools into their existing, traditional constituency communication?

Representatives perform these meaning constructions regularly and eagerly before constituent-audience, delivered in an attempt to build understandings and images of subjects such as themselves as representatives, their political party, opposition parties, Parliament, threats to their legitimacy, principles and policies affecting their constituency and the public at large (Alexander, 2010, 2011; Mast, 2016). I demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5 how representatives are consciously making efforts in constituent communication and the constituency service through discourses of accessibility and visibility.

Finally, although findings from this dissertation are not generalisable and may not reflect all British MPs, it seeks and provides answers to whether MPs understand what constituents go through, if they are concerned about constituency issues, and details of what they actually do during the constituency service. The specifics may differ from constituency to constituency, but as I

demonstrate and evaluate in the following chapters, how MPs seek to nurture relationships with and within the constituency can be observed through their performative actions.

1.4 Argument and Contribution

In this dissertation I address the mechanisms of the contemporary constituency service process. I do so by rejecting prevailing concepts of social reality and assumptions surrounding MPs and the constituency service. My contention is that MPs do care about the constituency, and are doing more than they are given credit for. An MP is the visible representation through which the institution's interpretive and constitutive work is channelled. Constituency service activities consist of symbolic acts performed by the MP-actor fervently and passionately to constituent-audiences. These performatives take place both on the ground, such as advice surgeries, and via digital tools such as personal websites, Facebook and Twitter. I analyse these in great detail, not to assess the impact on the personal vote, but to identify the ramifications of constituency service practices and the impact of these on how we understand processes of representation, how we understand these interactions themselves and what it means to take part in the representative process. Through a robust and detailed analysis of these acts, I show how symbolic actions, discourse and process come together to create the conditions for an authentic, meaning-centred perfromance between the MP and their constituent-audience. I discuss my methods and data collection further in Chapter 3.

I argue that MPs perform the constituency service as part of their overall parliamentary responsibilities by being *on standby*. I define the concept of MPs on standby as representatives who maintain regular constituency communication through traditional and digital tools, keep themselves abreast of constituency affairs, and are prepared to react on behalf of constituents and their constituency, should circumstances warrant. I demonstrate in detail how MPs perform their representative constituency duties through performative acts to symbolically "construct" meaning, projecting and maintaining the image that they are reliable, honourable and hardworking. Being on standby is a framework that MPs draw on

as they negotiate the relationship between institution and constituency. It guides their performance's script as an immediate referent for action that presents and sustains the continued manifestation of actions, expectations and feelings. Logistically, it is unrealistic for MPs to meet every single constituent in person once, let alone multiple times. With other parliamentary responsibilities in place, MPs are not able to proactively seek out constituency issues. Instead, MPs rely on being *reactive*. Thus, throughout their parliamentary and representative responsibilities, MPs seek to present themselves as a stable, omnipresent presence in the constituency, primed and ready to solve personal constituent predicaments, community problems and policy issues if needs arise. As they carry out their performatives, constituents with issues or concerns are able to bring these to their action, initiating a reaction in which MPs are prepared to do what they can to assist in problem solving or, on occasion, policy impact.

In this dissertation, I contribute in this dissertation a new theoretical approach to the study of MPs and the constituency service. To do so I draw on Alexander's (2010; 2011) theory of cultural pragmatics, Goffman's (1959) presentation of self, and Foucault's (1952) notion of discursive formations to develop my own cultural approach. I identify, describe and analyse how the framework of being "on standby" consists of three discursive formations. Three significant patterns discursive formations emerged during my observations of these performatives. Firstly, MPs ensure that constituents are able to *access* them. Outlets of accessibility include constituency offices, telephone details and emails. Secondly, MPs rely on the use of posters, news articles and digital tools such as social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) and e-newsletters to amplify the *visibility* of their actions. Thirdly, as MPs react to their constituent and/or constituency problems, they aim to *repair* them. This includes providing advice, writing letters on their constituents' behalf, and debating in Parliament. As MPs perform their constituency acts by enacting these discourses, they are attempted in order to re-align official meaning with popular opinion. MPs draw on these discursive formations and other elements of social performances to portray legitimacy and power. I discuss these findings further from Chapters 4 to 7.

Thus, I also contribute in-depth detail of constituency interactions and dynamics between MP and constituent, bringing what is usually not obvious to light. Over the course of my study of the constituency service and MPs within contemporary representation, I observed as a broad range of MPs made time to meet their constituents, hailing from all walks of life, including (but not limited to) workers from booming industries, residents from a local estate, patients from a failing medical clinic and disgruntled parents complaining about their children's schools. Representatives usually carry out these visits weekly, usually over the weekend. My practice was to sit quietly in the room during these meetings, talks and visits with permission from the participants. This included the MP, on occasion a caseworker, and the constituents. As Goffman notes, many crucial facts "lie beyond the time and place of interaction or lie concealed within it" (1959: 13). Thus I also paid close attention not only to what is presented in front of constituents, but also to pre-meeting planning and preparation, backstage reactions and private comments that are made when audience-constituents are not around. I also interviewed MPs, and collected all forms of constituency communication disseminated over the time of my fieldwork, such as e-newsletters, flyers, posters and digital media posts.

1.5 Plan of the Thesis

In the pages that follow I investigate the process of contemporary British constituency service. Immediately after this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 explores the current and relevant literature available in the field related to MPs, the constituency service and political communication with constituents. These include available research on roles and behaviour of MPs, and how the constituency service has grown since the 1950s. Studies on how and why MPs have adopted the use of online tools to communicate with their constituents is also considered. Following this, disparities in the available research will be addressed before discussing how a change of perspective to one of everyday sensibility is necessary to deepen our understanding of contemporary representation. Being closer to the action by paying attention to social performances unfolding in real time allows the bigger story to be imaginatively identified in smaller details. I then continue by explaining the conceptual

framework I developed from the theories of Alexander's (2011) theory of symbolic action, Goffman's (1959) conception of presentation of self and Foucault's (1972) notion of discursive formation. This conception underpins my research analysis and my findings over the course of my dissertation.

I discuss my methodology and data collection in Chapter 3. To shape my own investigation I first considered the ways previous studies had carried out their research. After analysing their advantages and disadvantages, I select three methods that will enable me to pursue a closer, everyday sensibility of the constituency service beyond the electoral contexts. To identify and interpret signs, symbols and discourse in the performances of the constituency service in relation to the political and media environment MPs navigate and perform in, I draw on and explain my experiences during my fieldwork, carrying out ethnography, semi-structured interviews and political discourse analysis on transcripts and secondhand data collected. I also discuss research ethics and how I safely store sensitive data.

Chapters 4 to 6 focus on the empirical research and findings to support my argument for the standby MP. Each of these chapters describes one discursive formation I have identified through my fieldwork, and how they projected and organised to present the framework of being on standby. With examples from my fieldwork, I also show how MPs augment these discursive formations with the use of digital tools in varying methods, integrating them with existing communication practices already in place.

In Chapter 4 I address the discursive formation of accessibility. I demonstrate how MPs ensure physical accessibility through management and amplification, drawing from a range of existing research, conversations, anecdotes, images and allusions observed during my fieldwork, showing how these evidence suggest a cumulative impact on the MP-constituent interaction as a social performance. The chapter also evaluates how MPs expand their accessibility through traditional methods and integration of digital tools. I go on to analyse variances in the significance of accessibility by MPs. The discursive formation and the

details identified in this chapter will set the scene for the next chapter as integral elements within a re-fused script, action and the performative space.

In Chapter 5 I turn to discuss the discursive formation of visibility. I show how MP's seek to see and be seen in their constituency through sustaining and amplifying their visibility. I reveal the value of face-to-face interactions by scrutinising performative acts between the MP and their constituents, describing in detail how and why they are doing it, I demonstrate how MPs integrate traditional media and digital tools in contemporary constituency service to symbolically connect with their constituents in their performance. Through my analysis, I show that despite the availability and ease of these digital methods, MPs indicate varying preferences in integrating them with physical visibility.

In Chapter 6 I analyse the various challenges MPs face during their constituency performances that are often unseen, and contemplate their crises management skills. In the discursive formation I term "repair", I begin by unfolding the eight stages that form the interaction process between MP and constituent, and how its successful delivery contributes to the re-fusion of the MP's constituency performance. I discuss how MPs react to constituent problems, and the stress that MPs face when their routine interactions are interrupted. In particular, I focus on face-to-face advice surgeries, where constituents come to seek help, support or advice. Due to the interactive nature of these meetings, reactions during surgery cases can often be unpredictable, occasionally resulting in agitated and distressed audience-constituents. With examples from my casework, I demonstrate and examine how interruptions in various stages of the interaction result in a struggle by the MP to continue symbolising as a competent representative. I also demonstrate how MPs overcome these demands to prevent further fracture between actor and performer.

In Chapter 7 I address the performative aspects of the MP-constituent interaction, by showing how MPs draw on existing discursive formations and other elements of social performance to portray legitimacy and power as an MP on standby. Along with the motivation and argument that I show in chapter and

Chapter 2, I study the aspects of accessibility, visibility and repair and demsonstrate how these symbolically construct meaning between MP and constituent, culminating in performative power. I then analyse the expression of these symbolic guises through *delivery*, where I discuss features of performances and how they are delivered by MPs to project power. This includes drawing legitimacy from Westminster, how they exert their power and, lastly, the acknowledgement of limits to their power. Following that, I relate the discursive formation of power to the authenticity of MPs' constituency performances, suggesting that re-fusion has not been completely achieved.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, concludes by presenting the three key findings emerging from my analysis of the contemporary constituency service. First, MPs do care, and rely on being *reactive* to constituency issues. Second, MPs were found to unanimously agree that face-to-face co-presence was their preferred method of interaction, considering it the best way to deepen the symbolic connection between the MP-actor and constituent-audience in their pursuit of performance re-fusion. Thirdly, MPs struggle with the contemporary constituency service, finding it difficult to balance and multitask between constituent demands, resource management and consistent performances, finding that their responsibilities are exacerbated by the increase in digital tool usage. I also relate my analysis of how MPs pursue their constituency service contributes to the study of wider challenges in contemporary representation. Finally, I conclude the thesis by offering ideas for future research.

2 Towards an Everyday Performativity of the Constituency Service

2.1 Introduction

British MPs were not usually swamped with constituent requests in the first few decades of the 20th century (Norton and Wood, 1993; Norton, 1994). The increase in constituency services by MPs is a post-Second World War phenomenon, stimulated by the expansion of government services and a shift towards optional welfare payments in the 1960s (Gay, 2005; Norris, 1997). The origins of MPs and their constituency roles reveal they arose from the need to represent constituencies in Parliament. This undertaking can be traced back to medieval times. Spokespeople were sent to Parliament from different boroughs, counties and cities in order to redress local grievances and petition for favours (Bogdanor, 1985; Gay, 2005; Norris, 1997; Richards, 1972; Searing, 1985; Rush, 2005). The fit between this antediluvian parliamentary role and the needs of the modern welfare state explains why nearly all MPs, even those in the highest ministerial offices, do at least a little constituency service (Searing, 1985: 350). Furthermore, the financial capability to pursue constituency casework through the introduction of travel and secretarial allowances in 1969 meant that Members were able to develop a necessary but basic infrastructure to cope with increasing casework (Norton and Wood, 1993: 42). This observable shift in the way modern MPs carry out their roles in Westminster and their constituencies has resulted in scholars seeking to understand this important parliamentary link between government and citizen.

Previous research studies have explored the *what*, *when* and *why* questions surrounding political representatives in relation to their constituencies, placing emphasis on impacts on legislative duties such as policymaking or electoral benefits such as the personal vote. Although some scholars do not entirely neglect to discuss the process of constituency service in their investigation, details of these processes are often under-theorised and studied. Furthermore, the majority of these studies employ the rational choice approach, that is, seeking to understand if MPs are seeking electoral benefits. In this chapter I discuss the

three dominant research areas scholars have sought to understand in relation to behaviours of MPs and their communication with constituents. Following this, I demonstrate why there remains a distinction between identifying *why* MPs are motivated to spend a large portion of their time and resources in constituency service and explaining *how* this process takes place.

The research encircling MPs and the constituency service falls largely into three categories. Firstly, the development and changes of British MP roles have been acknowledged as important and worthy of investigation, and are well documented in the literature, especially since MPs have no defined role. As MP for Grimsby from 1977 to 2015, Austin Mitchell, succinctly describes, "He is handed a build-you-own-job kit and a salary, and left to get on with it. He finds his own feet, usually by observing his fellow Members and then doing the same" (1982: 60). These research accounts are detailed and historical, producing typologies classifying constituency roles and theorising changes in constituency behaviour alongside career progression (Fenno, 1978; Norton and Wood, 1990, 1994; Norton, 1994, 1997; Radice et al, 1987; Richards, 1972). Radice et al (1987) and, more recently, Crewe (2015) have sought to answer the question of what exactly MPs do, what roles they perform and how they have emerged in the Commons. Focusing on backbencher MPs, Radice et al argue that the job of the MP (both in Parliament and the constituency) has altered considerably between the 1970s and 1980s (1987). Though dated, previous studies provide useful historical context, revealing how MP attitudes towards constituency service resemble those in medieval times, and how this history has influenced contemporary constituency activities (Searing, 1985; Norton, 1985, 1997; Rush, 2005).

These studies also demonstrate an observable change in the nature of MPs in relation to their opinion of the constituency service and where they are in their career path. Norton and Wood (1990, 1993) argue that the amount of constituency work is driven by other factors that have transformed the attitudes and approaches to the job as an MP, and is derived from a cost-benefit calculation in terms of how much time and energy can be spent. They further

developed a two-stage career management model, drawing from Fenno (1978) and Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina's (1987) work. The first stage is known as the *expansionist* stage – where newly elected MPs invest most of their time and work into expanding their constituency support, in an effort to establish a personalised home style. This is also done with the rational premise that this will build up a reservoir of personal votes that may be drawn upon in later elections. This is followed by the *protectionist* stage, where the need to gain further personal support decreases, usually due to the prioritisation of other party or parliamentary responsibilities and duties.

Secondly, the general consensus that Members are increasingly spending more time in the constituency and on constituency work has resulted in a great proportion of the literature being focused on a rational choice approach to legislative behaviour. In other words, identifying the motivations behind this phenomenon (Barker and Rush, 1967; Cain et al, 1984, 1987; Dowse, 1963; Herrera and Yawn, 1998; Norris, 1997; Gay, 2005). Scholars have disagreed on the results, with many indicating the personal vote as the primary driving factor, and some, like Norris, arguing that psychological rewards present a stronger case (Cain et al, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1990; Norris, 1997). The personal vote refers to the segment of a candidate's electoral support that derives from their personal characteristics, qualifications, activities and record (Cain et al, 1984: 111). It is argued to be a source of motivation for MPs to persist in constituency activities, especially in marginal seats, by building a reserve of votes (Norton and Wood, 1990; Radice et al, 1987; Fiorina, 1977). This is in part due to the Member being at liberty to decide how involved in the constituency they would like to be, and which roles to devote themselves to. Navigating a beneficial balance between competing constituent demands and MP incentives in the constituency is challenging, along with growing obligations to keep constituents abreast of activities and meetings carried out. The idea of a personal vote driving the electoral win in Britain has also been suggested to be a form of political marketing, as we move away from periodic electoral campaigning towards what Blumenthal (1980) labelled the "permanent campaign" (Butler and Collins, 2001). This is an outcome strongly found in American congressional systems and not in

Britain (Cain et al, 1984; Gregory, 1980: 79; Munroe, 1977; Norris, 1997). There is an overwhelming propensity in the UK for electors to vote for the party rather than the candidate, resulting in MPs largely tied to the fortunes of their parties (Gregory, 1980: 79; Studler et al, 1996; Rose, 1974).

Thirdly, more recent research on parliamentarians has focused on how digital tools have been integrated in their communication with constituents, in response to changes in the media environment. The question of how various types of digital tools and the internet have been adopted by MPs to improve communication with their constituents is a research area that has continued to receive ample attention from scholars. Since the 2000s, numbers of MPs adopting the use of the internet and digital tools as part of their constituency political communication have expanded, with the use of email ubiquitous and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter more prevalent (Norton, 2007; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Williamson, 2009; Umit, 2017). Early research on MP use of digital tools such as websites and weblogs articulated a focus on information dissemination, the tools being mono-directional to a great degree (Coleman and Spiller, 2003; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Jackson, 2003, 2006; Jackson and Lilleker, 2004; 2009, 2011). MP websites are akin to electronic brochures, whereas weblogs are used to bring attention to their political work and current affair perspectives (Francoli and Ward, 2008; Jackson and Lilleker, 2004, 2009).

Later research looked to the adoption of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, investigating the purpose of using digital tools, and if further interaction was desired between performer-Member and constituent-audience. Information flow on these platforms can transpire one-way – where the MP primarily uses these channels to disseminate contact and policy information as well as carry out promotional activity for themselves and their party – or two-way, with the use of interactive capacities such as comment forms, "shout-boxes" and responses to tweets. Research on British MPs and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) carried out by Norton (2007) revealed that MPs who use their websites to assert views independent of their party and seek to engage with site visitors are rare, and that there is little to no evidence of MPs

using the internet or other forms of technology to gather constituent views in a manner to influence their behaviour, with 80% of MPs' websites having little or no interactivity (2007: 364).

Rather than seeking views or engagement, MPs have been found to predominantly use digital tools to win the personal vote in their constituencies, and as a professional tool for impression management and marketing (Butler and Collins, 2001; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Norton, 2007; Williamson, 2009; Jackson and Lilleker, 2004, 2011). Despite the adoption of these tools, results from these large N studies also indicated that the tools were mostly utilised for one-way communication, with the MPs disseminating information, rather than initiating participation or encouraging constituent engagement (Jackson, 2003; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, 2011; Norton, 2007; Umit, 2017; Williamson, 2009: 519). Ideally this means that MPs are able to maintain control over the message they send, without the risk of having too much feedback or comment on policy suggestions, all carried out while potentially boosting their image and visibility. This behaviour is not unique to the UK. For example, embracing the internet as an aid to extend their reach and augment the services provided was initially met with some resistance and hesitance by American electoral candidates (Stromer-Galley, 2000). Questions on how these tools work in conjunction with older communication methods, and as part of the constituency service as a whole, remain.

These studies provide a solid foundation in our understanding of the constituency service and communication with normative and empirical impacts. Studies on the development of the constituency service have been conducted within the confines of MPs' roles in Parliament. These include a dissection of the many MP duties carried out, and the questioning of their representative role in impacting democracy (Norton and Wood, 1990, 1993; Norton, 1997; Searing, 1985, 1994). For many scholars, the increase in constituency services has led to research emphasis on whether these local efforts actually have the potential to impact electoral outcomes (Herrera and Yawn, 1998). More recently, alongside the growth in digital tool use, many scholars have placed emphasis on the

participatory nature of constituency communication and e-representation (Coleman and Spiller, 2003; Larrson and Moe, 2013; Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2013; Norton, 2007; Stanyer, 2008). Throughout this thesis I both draw from and challenge many of these works to craft a more detailed portrayal and analysis of the constituency service.

The rest of this chapter will provide an overview of how previous research on MPs and the constituency service was carried out. I examine how these researchers privilege methodological approaches that generate statistical generalisability, before an explanation of methodical and analytical limitations. I then discuss how I built my approach towards an everyday sensibility based on the gaps identified in the literature by drawing on the following theories: Foucault's discourse, Alexander's theory of cultural pragmatics and Goffman's representation of self. I detail these theoretical perspectives and then explain how I have developed an interpretive perspective, applying it in the range of meanings produced between political performers (in this case MPs) and constituent-audiences.

2.2 How Others Did It

Research on the constituency service unanimously uncovered that political representatives are not only spending more time being in the constituency, but are specifically devoting more time to casework and resolving constituent concerns. Three main methods were used to investigate this increase and its possible impacts – namely large N surveys supplemented with interviews, ethnography and coding and content analysis of digital outputs (e.g. websites, blogs and social media platforms).

Large N Analyses

Research investigating constituency behaviour predominantly employed large N studies, through the use of surveys, qualitative surveys, or, most commonly, a combination. Barker and Rush (1970: 177) surveyed 111 British MPs, with results pointing to a broad belief that personal reputations and constituency activities impacted the vote positively. Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1983) interviewed 69

MPs who stood for re-election in their study on the personal vote, whereas Norton and Wood's study drew from open-ended interviews with 131 Conservative and Labour MPs, structuring the sample by office-holding, tenure, marginality and region.

In their comparative study between American and British constituency service and the personal vote, Cain et al (1984) analysed data from four election surveys carried out by the Centre for Political Studies and British Gallup, followed with interviews with administrative assistants, MPs and party agents that might have fallen out of sampling range. Radice, Vallance and Willis (1987) analysed data from a questionnaire and interviews with MPs, whereas Norris (1997) also drew on a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, using data from the British Candidate Survey of 248 British MPs, and supplemented the analysis with detailed qualitative interviews with a sub-sample, finding that psychological reward, rather than the personal vote, is the primary reason behind increased constituency work. Searing's (1994) study proves to be the most comprehensive, with open-ended interviews conducted with 521 Members between 1972 and 1973. These studies, though comprehensive, are dated and may not reflect the workloads of contemporary MPs and their constituency behaviour, in light of the expansion of the constituency service.

We can observe that many scholars have chosen to draw on the use of large N surveys, supplemented by interviews, to study the motivations behind MP constituency behaviour. These have often depended on a small fraction of the MP population, restricting the analysis of sub-groups within the sample of members and limiting the reliability of the sample. Additionally, unresolved questions about legislative behaviour remain, partly because different measures of constituency service were used. Thus, studies exploring which MP motivations contributed to the increase of constituency service have resulted in inconsistent answers, with little known about the constituency process itself (Cain et al, 1979, 1983, 1987; Johannes and McAdams, 1981; Fiorina, 1977; Herrera and Yawn, 1998; Gregory, 1980; Mayhew, 1974).

Ethnography

A handful of studies of representatives and their constituency service sought to understand the work of MPs through the use of ethnography. These studies provided rich, descriptive details of MP activities on the ground. In *Home Style*, his seminal 1978 study of US House Members in their districts, Fenno reveals that districts are perceived in a manner that enables congressmen and women to understand the context in which they pursue electoral support, with four concentric constituencies – geographic, re-election, primary and personal. Legislators are likely to seek a diverse set of goals and activities for each constituency, in order to find a home style that suits their district. These include the presentation of self (with regards to person-to-person and issue oriented components), service to the constituency as a whole, allocating resources and explaining their behaviour and work in Washington. Through the process of representation, nearly everything that occurs within the district (i.e. the representative's home style) is done with the overall goal of gaining support and winning future elections.

In the context of the UK, Munroe (1977) carried out an in-depth study of a single Midlands constituency over a period of six months, revealing that although the MP held a monthly advice bureau and received casework through other channels of communication such as letters, the telephone and a personal call, only a very small proportion (14%) of the constituency communicated with the MP in any form. The MP's success in dealing with a constituent's problem had little bearing on how many visits were made by complainants. The study also revealed that the Member had to manage a wide range of cases and complaints from various social classes in the constituency during the advice bureaux, rather than the generally assumed working-class majority (Munroe, 1977: 587). Although it can be argued that a singular constituency case is not generalisable enough to apply to the rest of the UK, a subsequent extensive study by Searing (1985) of 338 backbench MPs revealed similar results. Re-election incentives did not appear important. Rather, internal psychological rewards such as a sense of competence and sense of duty were found to be dominant forces driving constituency service.

More recently, Crewe (2015) carried out an anthropological ethnography on what British MPs do in Parliament. Crewe's ethnographic study of MPs at work provides rich, descriptive detail of what the life of an MP is like today from the MPs' perspectives. Akin to watching creatures in their natural habitat, approximately a year was spent in the Commons observing MPs going about their day, participating in parliamentary debates in the main Chamber and Westminster Hall, attending All Party Parliamentary Group meetings and engaging in a host of private conversations (Crewe, 2015: 5). Observations were supplemented with formal interviews with 44 MPs, and 21 Commons staff, ranging from MP caseworkers to journalists. In particular, Crewe shadowed six MPs in their constituency during their advice surgeries. She affirms MPs now use a mix of technological tools not only to communicate with and represent their constituents, but also to represent themselves. MPs post updates on their activities, policy concerns and causes they support not only to let constituents know what they are doing on a regular basis, but also, with the next election in mind, merging this pursuit with regular canvassing. Observing these processes has resulted in further affirmation that integration of technology into MPs' constituency activities is not merely an individual-level phenomenon.

(Digital) Tool-Specific Impacts

Scholars investigating the use of digital tools in constituent engagement primarily concentrate on singular tool adoption (Jackson, 2003, 2006; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Umit, 2017). Early studies on MPs and digital tools focusing on the use of websites and weblogs drew on content analysis of data posted, analysing them with a coding scheme. This is a method that is found in the majority of studies on MPs and digital tools, including those by Jackson (2003) and Ward and Lusoli (2005). In his study of 186 British MPs' websites, Jackson (2003) found the vast majority provided the same information across all mediums used, with the website remaining a one-way communication tool from MPs to constituents. Similarly, carrying out a thorough study on more than 460 UK MPs' websites (approximately 71% of all serving MPs), Ward and Lusoli (2005) found that websites are more likely to be set up for marginal than safer constituencies, indicating the professionalisation of the MPs' role to include

a significant campaign commitment outside of the electoral period. To provide context, they also carried out interviews with 35 MPs.

Research focusing on the use of emails and e-newsletters has found similar results. Emails are now a routine form of communication. The number of parliamentary email accounts increased by 52.9% from 2002 to 2006. The most recently available literature, in a survey of 168 MPs, revealed that email was a valuable tool to keep in touch with constituents (Williamson, 2009: 517). Further research on the combination of emails and websites used by newly elected MPs in Britain did not exhibit inclinations towards promoting symmetrical interactions (Jackson and Lilleker, 2004). Similarly, research on the use of e-newsletters by seven MPs found that despite being topical and of interest to the constituent, this form of communication was not utilised to forge closer relations with constituents (Jackson, 2006). More recently, in a large N coding analysis of MPs' (including national representatives such as the Welsh Assembly) use of e-newsletters, Umit (2017) found that MPs from marginal seats and newly elected MPs were more likely to send e-newsletters to their constituents, supporting the argument for electoral motivation.

The few scholars that have started to include multiple digital tools in their studies, including the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, have also drawn on content analysis of updates. In their study of 42 weblogs and 37 social networking profiles, Jackson and Lillker (2009) found little fundamental change in how representatives communicate with their constituents. MPs are observed to mostly use their weblogs and social network platforms as a megaphone, to emphasise their activities rather than encourage interactions. Similarly, in a content analysis of 51 UK MPs and the use of Twitter, Jackson and Lilleker (2011) found that Twitter is predominantly used as an impression management tool for MPs to self-promote, as well as bringing attention to constituency activities.

These studies indicate novel use of technology to widen communication with constituents, yet display persistence in conserving asymmetrical communication

techniques. However, with the majority of studies on singular tool adoption drawing from large N content analyses, explanations of why this is so do not take into consideration institutional design, or time or cognitive demands of the representatives. Furthermore, this also restricts the evaluation of digital tools in relation to the MP's constituency communication as a whole, and its integration into the Member's everyday political activities.

2.3 Why It Is Outdated

Although the available literature has generated a great deal of important insights, it privileges analysis of the MP role in the constituency from the perspective of Westminster, how it is carried out during electioneering and its subsequent impact on the personal vote. The literature provided a comprehensive definition and description of MP constituency roles, along with which activities they busied themselves with locally (Cain et al, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1993; Radice et al, 1987; Searing, 1994). It also uncovered motivations behind the increase in constituency service including MPs using local activities as an opportunity to gain the personal vote and psychological rewards (Norris, 1997). These are useful places to begin my investigation. However, there is markedly little analytical discussion about the actual interactions that go on between the MPs and their constituents despite the modest range of discussion around the increase of constituency service. Much of the available literature fails to interpret the interactions and their outcomes, assuming that these are more or less the same across MPs. Finally, while it is generally acknowledged across the literature on British parliamentary representatives that they are spending more resources and efforts locally, the studies cannot explain why trust in representatives is still low.

Methodologically, previous research widely favours the large N approach, mixing quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. These are useful in identifying patterns of behaviour, but result in disjointed descriptions of vital and complex interactions that unfold in an MP's everyday life (Back, 2015). Actions carried out by MPs appear to need clear categorisation, cleanly organised into tidy black-and-white roles, supplemented with data from interviews (Alexander, 2010: 11). However, polled opinion measuring the average sentiment usually only

represents one prevailing viewpoint, reducing a spectrum of meanings, feelings, actions and discourses into a singular generalisation. Studies of this type undoubtedly provide thought-provoking insights, but result in intricate and unique behaviour being lost in the midst of quantifiable data. Furthermore, very few scholars that draw from these large data sets explain in detail how the roles developed or why the MPs think this occurred (Norris, 1997). As such, the literature lacks a compelling and cogent contemporary account of how MPs perform their roles, how challenges are averted or managed, and the nature of the power they wield. As a result, in this research I veer away from aggregating statistics to interpret MP behaviours in their constituencies.

In addition, with the most current work on British constituency service carried out in the late 1990s, there is little mention of how MPs use the internet and digital tools in their constituency work. While there is a fair amount of literature debating the impact of digital tools on the representative process and impression management, the analytical approaches tend to focus on the use of a specific tool. This results in scholars posing a narrow set of questions about digital political communication in the constituency (Norton, 2007; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, 2011). Research on the use of digital tools and constituency communication also espoused the use of large N analyses coding data scraped from websites and profiles, resulting in the lack of context.

Studies that do include a range of digital tools employed by MPs lack analytical depth, referring only to the type of information disseminated on websites or emails, rather than how it shapes political practice (Norton, 2007; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). This segment of the literature grapples with analysis of digital tools by aggregating data from websites and other social platforms, followed up with typical methods such as content analysis (Ibid). This approach assumes that the use of digital tools is similar to other forms of mediated communication. It is conceptually inadequate to merely insert new technologies into existing paradigms of mediated communication and their spaces (Dahlgren, 2013: 168). There is also strikingly little discussion on how these tools work in conjunction with other, offline, tools.

Lastly, the few ethnographic studies on MPs and the constituency service provided descriptive insights into how constituency activities were carried out, what was being said and what was being felt. This fraction of the research not only allowed readers to experience the political process, but also its "inherent liveliness and its time signatures" (Back, 2015: 821). However, with Fenno's (1978) and Munroe's (1977) studies carried out almost five decades ago, they are unlikely to reflect contemporary constituency communication. Crewe's (2015) study on British MPs was carried out fairly recently, with digital tools incorporated into her observations, making it a relevant, contemporary account. However, with the primary focus on the overall parliamentary life of an MP, there remains a lack of detail about the process of an MP's constituency activities. Furthermore, as an anthropological study, it offered a rare insight into the hectic lifestyle of Members, but, with its interpretive analysis critically thin, is ultimately a recount and explanation of MPs' parliamentary life.

This dissertation bears on these questions and previous research by using an analytical and methodological approach that interprets MP-constituent interactions and reveals discourses in their political performances. As mentioned above, existing scholarship lacks detail on the constituency service, leaving unresolved questions regarding the meaning-centered process and the symbolic actions it consists of. The portrayal of most of this scholarship is that representatives pursue constituent interactions based on their political ambitions, or personal feelings of duty. We are made aware that this action takes place and of its ramifications on policymaking, but have no updated, detailed explanation of how this political process occurs, the symbolic actions it encompasses and the meanings its produces. A distinction needs to be made between *what* constitutes this behaviour and *why* (an outcome easily derived from survey results), and identifying *how* MPs are choosing to communicate, what tools they are using to do so, and how these are incorporated into the roles they are embodying. Moving forward to successfully develop a realistic and nuanced contemporary reflection of MPs in the constituency meant reliance on similar theoretical and analytical approaches to those found in previous research had to be avoided. In the following pages I demonstrate my analytical approach,

expounding how I interpret the action from an intimate stance to gain insights about how political actors construct and perform the representative processes within a symbolic structure of discursive formations to their constituent-audiences.

2.4 Developing An Approach to Everyday Performativity

This discussion on the literature has resulted in much to consider. Various studies have convincingly demonstrated that parliamentarians are increasingly spending more time in the constituency, and on constituency work, providing a useful historical mapping of MP roles within the constituency, and how they have altered over the years. An obvious and logical explanation, strongly argued by scholars, is the advantage of a personal vote during elections (Cain et al, 1987; Fiorina, 1977; Munroe, 1977). However, it is clear that these studies have not generated sufficient up-to-date knowledge of the constituency service *from the perspective of the constituency*. The distanced approach in large N surveys and interviews means that the particularities of each representative's performance beyond the electoral period, the reactions from their constituents and the everyday bedlam this may create is lost to the view. Through each Member's performance and constituent-audience's reception – advice surgery appointment, speech at a school, meeting residents at a local coffee morning – the MPs undertake acts that fulfill a component of their responsibilities in a regular manner that forms an order that almost seems rule governed (Mast, 2016: 242).

The argument for adopting an everyday sensibility lies in the strength of understanding how events unfold in everyday life. Getting closer to the action by paying attention to social performances unfolding in real time and engaging with them allows the bigger story to be imaginatively identified in smaller details (Back, 2015). This is not merely an exercise in embellishing what we already know through large N interviews and surveys with details. We know that there is a consensus in the aforementioned studies on the spending of more time in constituencies, the receipt of more constituent correspondence and escalating amounts of casework (Gay, 2005; Jennings, 1957; Norris, 1997; Norton, 1994, 1997, 2007; Norton and Wood, 1993). Yet the reductive nature of these studies has

resulted in a flattened understanding of representation, largely without feeling. A robust contemporary discussion of British representatives in their constituencies requires an investigation of representation's unspoken realities. By this I am referring to the assaults MPs endure in their everyday responsibilities and demands, ranging from the increasing correspondence they receive; the representation of constituent and constituency interests; the expectation of an almost instantaneous response to emails, tweets and comments; to the increasing requirement to be omnipresent within the constituency. It is these interactions that allow me to delve further into their role as a cog within the larger institutional mechanism. What actions do representatives undertake among these challenges to make representation meaningful and convincing to their constituents? With society increasingly becoming more fragmented and complex, the struggle to understand modern political representation and engagement means that one must interpret and explain the structured meanings upon which these constituency actions draw.

In order to make sense of these social performances, the MPs constituency service will be examined by cultivating a sociological sensibility, to "develop *attentiveness* to what is easily *discarded as unimportant*" [italics in original] (Back, 2015: 822). Thus, in this dissertation I engage innovatively with the taken-for-granted interactions between MPs and constituents, considering them as completely alien occurrences that are not understood or obvious. What appears as social reality needs to be refracted and reinterpreted (Alexander, 2011: 275). To develop my cultural approach, I turn to Alexander's (2010, 2011) cultural pragmatics as a conceptual apparatus to interpret constituency interaction processes as a performance, one in which the form, process and symbolic content are pivotal in my analyses. Interpreting the representative process as an everyday social performance means viewing parliamentarians as continually engaging in constitutive and interpretive performative acts (Mast, 2016: 242). This involves the identification of actors, audiences, symbols, staging and variants of power; concepts which are then analysed individually, before investigating how they integrate during times of actual performances (Alexander, 2010, 2011; Mast, 2016).

When these elements appear fused together is when the moment seems most powerfully channelled and made visible (Ibid).

The focus is not on the consistent reproduction of these seemingly ordered events or schedules, but on how legitimacy and power is projected, preserved and lost. It is imperative for power to be expressed through symbolic means (Kertzer, 1988: 174). To achieve this, MPs have to communicate through a set of performative skills that weave meaning and structure. For the purpose of this study I define power as performative. To maintain a sense of legitimacy MPs have to project power deftly to invoke feelings of recognition and identification in the audience, linking the representative with the represented (Alexander, 2010, 2011; Mast, 2016). To convince their constituents of their commitment to the constituency, representatives must cultivate and utilise performative power (Alexander, 2010; Mast, 2016).

Thus, it is my contention that these interactions are legitimation procedures in which the MP-actors and constituent-audiences arbitrate the development of meanings and project and maintain their power, and through which Members transform from being distant political enigmas uninterested in local predicaments into authentic constituency advocates who are present and capable of resolving personal or community problems. To avoid entitling the political performer and rendering citizens as passive audience members, this dissertation will use Alexander's post-Weberian conceptualisation of performative power and legitimacy, privileging meaning-making but allowing that audience interpretations may differ greatly from what performers intended to develop (Mast, 2016; Alexander, 2013).

These performative acts consist of any activity MPs, as actors, are carrying out with the intention to influence (in any way or magnitude) the audience – constituents – by projecting their power. These can take place face-to-face, where individuals are in each other's immediate physical presence, or on digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and emails, where the individuals negotiate meaning developments through speaking and reacting with each other (Mast,

2016: 243). If an established pattern of action taken during a performance can be identified, it can be considered a routine (Goffman, 1959: 27).

In my investigation I also draw heavily from the works of Goffman (1959) and Foucault (1972) to detect and analyse a range of meanings produced by the political performers to their citizen audiences during the constituency service. Both scholars pioneered a rethinking of how interactions, scripts and symbolic actions produce the powerful and durable meanings that shape expectations and sustain perceptions. Goffman's prominent dramaturgical approach places detailed focus on how actors present their performance before others, and the unspoken impression given off. Dissection of the performance itself allows the excavation of meanings from this attempt at impression management, including techniques employed by the actor to sustain this impression, the script being performed and stage management. To make sense of the spectrum of meanings from a variety of actions produced in these performative acts, I draw on Foucault's conception of discourse from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to describe how a system of knowledge-containing statements, termed a discursive formation, are produced to result in rules of formation that structure the very discursive that is discussed (1972).

My aim here is not to evaluate the success of the MPs' constituency efforts in the eyes of the constituents, nor is it to predict the impact on the MPs' personal vote. My aim is to contribute a strong, detailed approach that explains how symbolic content, discourse and process play crucial roles in creating the conditions in which MPs craft their performances to their constituent-audience. The following section demonstrates why cultural pragmatics serve as a necessary conceptual tool to answer questions in this dissertation, followed by a discussion of how my analyses draw from Goffman and Foucault.

Cultural Pragmatics and Symbolic Action

Interpreting the constituency interactions as a social performance requires viewing political representatives as actors continually engaging in interpretive performances (Mast, 2016: 241). To fully interpret the meanings behind MP-

constituency interactions as a social performance it is necessary to situate the action within the backdrop in which it takes place, identify audiences, decode the meanings concealed in political and physical staging and detect if material or symbolic resources are drawn from existing power systems (Mast, 2016: 244). Drawing from Alexander's approach of cultural pragmatics, the meaning and influence of culture structures (such as institutions) can only be recognised through successful performative actions undertaken by concrete social actors (Alexander, 2010, 2011). The simpler the collective organisation, the less its social and cultural components are differentiated. The *fusion* of social performances is easily achieved by actors through rituals based on shared beliefs and direct face-to-face interaction. This is applicable to tribes and smaller communities in the past. Rituals are a primordial form of human social organisation, recurrent and simplified episodes of cultural communication in which the actor and the audience within the social interaction share a belief in the interaction's symbolic contents, in turn validating the ritual, resulting in effect and affect (Alexander, 2011: 25). However, growth in societies, alongside technological advances, has caused significant fragmentation and segregation of communities, resulting in a context of societal complexity. Traditional voices of authority can no longer rely on the compliance of their listeners (Alexander, 2010). Contemporary societies still strive to achieve fusion, but the context for performative success has altered, as observed through factors such as population growth and diversity of interests.

The British population, currently estimated to be 65.1 million, increased by 15.8% between 1975 and 2015 (Office of National Statistics, 2017). It is projected to surpass 70 million people in the year 2026 (Ibid). As an example of differentiation, we can consider the types of voluntary organisations in the UK. As of 2015, there are 165,801 voluntary organisations (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2017). This spans interests that fall into various categories, including 14,357 religious, 5,922 environmental and 6,710 health bodies (Ibid). The enlarged population and variegation makes it harder for representatives to successfully bring meaning during MP-constituent interactions that would appeal to multiple groups of people likely to have conflicting interests. Friction over these differences might result in broken and unconvincing

performances. Goffman alludes to a similar idea by referring to a disruption of performance, suggesting that events that might occur during the interaction between performer and audience might throw doubt on the entire performance (1959: 23), reducing its chances of being deemed authentic. This complexity in societies often leads to fractures in performances, as the social and cultural elements become more and more *de-fused*. The potential threat of disruptions will be further explored in Chapter 6, where we discuss the process of the MP-constituent interaction in depth.

For these political performances to achieve success, re-fusion between actor and audience must be achieved. How MPs perform and react within these interactions requires the carving of fluid, action-specific scripts from the background of broad cultural meanings constituents are familiar with (Alexander, 2011: 3). To do so, MPs must rely on ritual-like performative acts that allow audiences to experience ritual as it seamlessly stitches the disconnected elements of performances together, engaging in a state of *re-fusion* to infuse meaning. These are moral, emotional and existential concerns that actors are usually motivated by, determined by the patterns of the social and cultural worlds in which the actors and audiences live. Actors then present these collective elements to spectators through resources, materials and other forms of expressive equipment, attempting to project meaning through emotional and textual patterns (Alexander, 2011; Goffman, 1959). These cultural performances are reflexive and strategic, featuring managed forms of symbolic communication (where background collective representations are activated), the existing mechanisms of power, and how the meanings lurking in the staging, or mise-en-scène, are decrypted. Audiences then have to decode what actors have encoded in their performance of cultural texts, a process that is dependent on whether audiences are able to identify with the actors on stage. Furthermore, audiences may range from bored to attentive, be of varying social status and may not experience the emotional connection required for them to believe in the performance.

It is in this spirit I analyse MP performative acts with and for constituents during activities carried out during the constituency service. Alexander's interpretive conceptualisation reveals how representatives in a position of power rely on performances to make the institution meaningful while seeking to project legitimacy. Interpreting the constituency process as a social performance means viewing representatives as actors who are continually making a conscious effort to engage in interpretive performances consisting of symbolic action. I determine ordinary face-to-face advice surgeries, walkabouts in the constituency, updates on websites, blogs and social media platforms on the Member's activities to be routine social performances that strategically energise the participants involved. MPs carrying out their performatives intentionally design the structural hermeneutics of the moment, crafting scripts in the hopes that they will resonate more compellingly with their constituents and convince their constituent-audience of their purpose, legitimacy and power. Successfully carried out, these re-fused routine interactions have the potential to have a ritual-like effect for the constituents in attendance. Here, ritual-like interaction refers to "simplified cultural communication where the participants and observers of the social interaction share a mutual belief in the validity of the communication's symbolic subject matter, accepting its veracity" (Alexander, 2011: 25). This results in constituent audiences being convinced of the act's authenticity, having experienced the representative process. Deepening their identification with symbols as successful performatives energises them (here we refer to the government and related institutions), strengthening their loyalty to and legitimises the MP and/or political party's position (Alexander, 2011: 25).

However, while MPs have to assess the situation as well as rely on certain scripts and background symbols, how they perform in the process to overcome fragmentation as they seek to effectively communicate with their constituents through re-fusion also determines the success of the performance. Thus, my argument is also driven by Goffman's presentation of self approach, which I discuss next.

Presentation of Self

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach allows for the excavation of meanings through the details of everyday interactions and social performances observed during MP constituency activities. This allows for a hermeneutic analysis of how individual MPs presents themselves and their activity, as they strive to guide audiences to the best impression possible. When an individual presents themselves before others, different motives drive the desire to control the impression that is given to the audience. This includes what might or might not be said during the performance. There is also an implicit request for the audience to take seriously the impression the performer is trying to give off.

During any performance, Goffman postulates that there is a distinct division between the frontstage and backstage region. The front is where the performance is presented and consists of a number of elements. This includes the setting (décor and other physical props that help set the scene) and the personal front (items that are related to the performer themselves such as appearance and manner). As with theatre, backstage is where the performance is prepared. Language used backstage significantly contrasts with that used frontstage, consisting of reciprocal use of first names; collaborative decision-making; profanity; complaints and shouting; smoking; relaxed sitting or standing postures among others. The frontstage behaviour can be taken to be the opposite. Backstage conduct permits minor acts that might easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy, while frontstage conduct disallows potentially offensive mannerisms. Access is usually controlled in order to prevent audiences from seeing what occurs backstage, and to ensure outsiders do not see what is not meant for them. Ultimately, prior preparation and separation between regions are done to ensure that the moral ideals and values portrayed in the performance are aligned with the audience, where both performer and audience contribute and agree on the overall definition of the performance (Goffman, 1959: 21). Like any performer, MPs strive to control the image they portray in front of their audiences, and in doing so have a need to maintain divisions between front and backstage. This is made especially challenging with the use of digital media to interact with constituents. The MP's image has to be successfully integrated and portrayed

across the online and offline, in order to effectively direct the activity of their audience in a convincing and believable manner (Goffman, 1959: 234).

Goffman refers only to the performer's interactional speech context, and not the culture or history of the performance that is taking place. Thus, to achieve a comprehensive cultural approach to the MP's constituency service process, I turn to Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse in order to make sense of background scripts, script, symbolic actions, audience reactions and physical settings, by situating it within the institutional context. While it cannot be assumed that the same rituals and practices generally exist among MPs and their constituents across the UK, from the observation of these ordinary everyday interactions within the context of British political culture, history and relationships will emerge an understanding of why and how these practices exist, through the understanding of meanings, symbols and rituals.

Discursive Formations

My analysis is also guided by Foucault's concept of discourse in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) [1974]. This conception of discourse is not to be confused with the method of discourse analysis that concerns itself with the study of a linguistic system (*langue*). Foucault postulates the analysis of discursive formations as a method that facilitates the formulation of a meaningful relationship between statements, symbols and objects by first questioning and disregarding existing groupings, normative rules and reflexive divisions that we have become very familiar with (Foucault, 1972 [1974]: 22). To develop a pure description of discursive events requires studying the speech act out of isolation, and relating it meaningfully to other statements that might have been made at events of varying natures. Note that statement does not refer to merely a sentence or a speech act, but to signs that belong to a function of existence. Discursive formations can be enunciated, or repeated, with a sense of temporal permanence. They are revealed as statements are used, circulated, disappeared and allowed in various fields of use again and again. I argue that these discourses have existed in some form over constituency service since its emergence. For example, previous research has indicated that MPs in the 1960s considered their role in remedying constituent

grievances an extension of their role as the parliamentary ombudsmen, despite the nationalisation of political parties forcing MPs to support national directives rather than local issues (Gay, 2005: 58). The existence and consistent holding of MP advice surgeries across almost all constituencies today demonstrate that these surgeries are an object in the discursive formation of accessibility.

Objects, modalities of enunciation, concepts and thematic choices are conditions, or rules of formation, that shape a discursive formation. These features do not just constitute discourse, but are also constituted by way of the subject. This complements my cultural approach, where elements that make up discourses are also shaped by the discourse itself. In this vein, I reveal how the discursive formations of accessibility, visibility, and repair structure the performances MPs carry out on standby as they seek to wield performative power. I discuss these in detail in Chapters 4 to 7.

This may consist of elements across their constituency service activities, such as face-to-face and online interactions. Accessibility as a discursive formation, for example, possesses the attributes described by Foucault. It is a system of statements which contains what is said to demonstrate an MP's accessibility, a protocol of how and where constituents can or cannot reach the MP. This includes times of meetings, places to meet at and various digital outlets where the MP can be reached. Objects produced within the discursive practice, according to Foucault, are items (not necessarily physical) that are related to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse (1974: 48). Objects produced in the accessibility discourse include website updates, tweets, emails and newsletters. Modalities of enunciation refer to roles that take place in various sites, positions occupied and statuses held in reference to the formation of a discourse, which in accessibility results in roles such as MP, caseworker and constituent. Finally, I identify the rules of formation pertaining to accessibility as guidelines MPs employ to justify their actions and explain their choices. These include finite resources such as time and finances.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed previous studies examining MPs and the constituency service, evaluated how they were carried out and put forth my argument for a renewed perspective on constituency and representation research. I have established that the majority of research studies lean towards the rational choice approach, seeking to understand if the MPs were motivated by the possibility of benefits, such as the personal vote (Barker and Rush, 1967; Cain et al, 1984, 1987; Dowse, 1963; Herrera and Yawn, 1998; Norris, 1997; Gay, 2005). Scholars who do discuss the process of constituency service in their investigation often under-theorise details of the interactions that take place. Three categories of research encircling MPs and the constituency service can be found, the first being the classification of constituency roles and changes in constituency behaviour (Fenno, 1978; Norton and Wood, 1990, 1994; Norton, 1994, 1997; Radice et al, 1987). Another area of research that a number of scholars have presented considerable interest in is the MP motivation behind carrying out the constituency service (Norris, 1997; Cain et al, 1979, 1983, 1984; Buck and Cain, 1990). Lastly and more recently, in response to changes in the media environment there has been a considerable growing interest in how parliamentarians have adopted the use of digital tools in their communication with constituents. Research on MP use of websites and weblogs articulated a focus on information dissemination, and were mono-directional to a great degree (Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, 2011). Later research looked to the adoption of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, investigating the purpose of using digital tools, and if further interaction was desired between performer-Member and constituent-audience. MPs in the UK have been found to use digital tools passively, mostly to share information, rather than initiating participation or encouraging constituent engagement (Jackson, 2003; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, 2011; Norton, 2007; Williamson, 2009: 519; Umit, 2017).

I have also discussed the methods employed in these studies, and demonstrated why they are outdated. The majority of research investigating constituency behaviour drew on data from large N surveys and interviews (Barker and Rush,

1970; Cain et al, 1983, 1984; Norris, 1997; Searing, 1994). These surveys often relied on a small sample of the MP population, restricting the analysis of sub-groups and limiting the reliability of the sample. Furthermore, unresolved questions about legislative behaviour remain, in part due to different measures of constituency service being used. A small segment of studies on representatives and their constituency service drew on ethnography, providing vibrant details of MP activities on the ground, but were either dated in the case of Fenno and Munroe, or more descriptive than explanatory in the case of Crewe (Fenno, 1978; Munroe, 1977; Crewe, 2015). Lastly, scholars investigating the use of digital tools in constituent engagement primarily concentrated on the singular adoption of tools, utilising content analysis of data posted, analysing them with a coding scheme, resulting in the loss of situational context (Jackson, 2003, 2006; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Umit, 2017).

Overall, these studies have insufficient up-to-date knowledge of the constituency service *from the perspective of the constituency*. The distanced approach through the use of large N survey and interviews means the detail of each representative's performance, constituent reactions and the daily chaos they may encounter is lost. Therefore, in this dissertation I have chosen to consider and reinterpret social reality, by studying usually taken-for-granted interactions between MPs and their constituents as unfamiliar events that are not understood or obvious (Alexander, 2011: 275). I use Alexander's (2010, 2011) cultural pragmatics as a conceptual apparatus to interpret constituency interaction processes as a performance, focusing on how legitimacy and power is projected, preserved and lost. The meaning and influence of culture structures such as institutions can only be recognised through successful performative actions undertaken by actors (Alexander, 2010, 2011). Thus, in this dissertation I contend that these constituency interactions are legitimation procedures in which the MP-actors project and maintain their power to constituent-audiences as they negotiate meaning-making. It is through performance that Members transform from being distant political enigmas uninterested in local predicaments into authentic constituency advocates who are present and capable of resolving personal or community problems. I also draw heavily from the works of Goffman (1959) and

Foucault (1972) to detect and analyse a range of meanings produced by the political performers for their citizen audiences during the constituency service. Goffman's dramaturgical approach enables the excavation of meanings from the actor's performance as they seek to manage impressions. I then employ Foucault's conception of discourse to identify discursive formation from the spectrum of meanings and variety of actions produced in these performative acts (1972).

In sum, I have demonstrated the need for a complete rethinking of the constituency service and how this can be achieved by interpreting the representative process through the lens of an everyday performativity. In the next chapter, I discuss the development of my research methodology and data collection as I seek empirical evidence and details of how political performers and constituent-audiences battle in the meaning-making process.

3 Methods to Explore MPs in the Constituency

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss how I developed my research methodology and collected my data. I sought to retrace and extend existing studies discussed in the previous chapter to develop an updated understanding of MPs in their constituencies. To this aim, my fieldwork focused on how MPs choose to carry out their constituency service beyond the electoral context. Specifically, I identified and interpreted signs, symbols, discourse and performances of the constituency service in relation to the political and media environment MPs navigate and perform in, guided by the analytical and hermeneutic tools articulated by Alexander, Goffman and Foucault.

Fieldwork was conducted outside the range of election time. Therefore, the constituency party affiliation of MPs in this study is not considered to be a factor that will affect study of the constituency service. The MPs in this study were from three major political parties representing constituencies in England (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat), aimed at generating a cross-study analysis. I do not claim that the cases are in any way representative of what occurs in the rest of the constituencies in the UK as there are too many microcosms within each constituency to establish a generalisation (Nielsen, 2012: 191). As I articulated earlier, my aim is not to explain the success of constituency efforts. Rather, this dissertation aims to contribute a robust and detailed explanation of how symbolic actions, discourse and process come together to create the conditions for an authentic, meaning-centred process between the MP and their constituent-audience.

To shape my investigation into contemporary constituency service I first looked to how previous studies had carried out their research. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there is a significant amount of scholarship studying the increase in constituency service and political communication. These studies employ a series of different methods with three distinguishing features.

Firstly, findings are generalised and generated from a large N sample data gathered through questionnaires, surveys or interviews (Cain et al, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1993; Radice et al, 1987). This is observed in Searing's (1994) Westminster's World, derived from 521 interviews with Members of Parliament, and surveys in the manner of Norris (1997), where she drew data from the 1992 British Candidate Survey of 248 MPs, supplementing them with qualitative interviews. However, polled opinion measuring the average sentiment usually only represents one prevailing viewpoint, diminishing a wide scope of meanings, feelings, actions and discourses into rudimentary generalisations.

Secondly, while the studies on the constituency service I refer to over the course of my research have resulted in extensive data collected, the majority were undertaken during the 1980s and 1990s, making them unreflective of contemporary constituency service. As these studies took place prior to the mass adoption of digital tools, the methods utilised do not take into account changes brought about by the internet and digitisation.

Thirdly, studies that did consider the adoption of digital tools either largely placed focus on how they were employed as part of campaign communication (Cantijoch et al, 2016; Lee, 2014; Graham et al, 2016; Stromer-Galley, 2000), or on single medium use of specific outlets, such as Twitter (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Margaretten and Gabour, 2014), email (Vaccari: 2014), e-newsletters (Umit, 2017) or websites (Joshi and Rosenfield, 2013; Ward and Lusoli, 2005). Few scholars analysed multiple types of digital technology outside of electoral time.

Pursuing a closer perspective to the action has been acknowledged in previous ethnographic work, such as that by Fenno (1978) and Nielsen (2012) in the United States, and by Munroe (1977) and Dowse (1963) in the UK. By capturing the 'obvious', as in these studies, the various actors and multitude of perspectives of the audiences will be better understood, allowing for the maintenance of holistic and significant attributes of reality during my research (Yin, 1989: 14). Fenno's landmark ethnographic study of eighteen Congressmen in their districts allowed the identification of the Congressmen's goals, how they viewed their districts and

how these views affected their political behaviour, resulting in the cultivation of trust in constituents. As Fenno explains, "soaking and poking" may make participant observation research unamenable to statistical analysis, but it was a deliberate decision to prioritise analytical depth over analytical range (Fenno, 1978: 249–50).

Similarly, Nielsen's ethnographic work on political campaigning on the ground exposed the importance of face-to-face contact despite the use of digital tools. Nielsen explains the choice to make ethnography the centerpiece of his fieldwork stemmed from the lack of research on the day-to-day workings of contemporary American campaigning on the ground (Ibid: 190). Spending ten months of participant observation in two competitive congressional districts during the 2008 elections, his work enabled him to observe how contemporary political organisations operate, generating an argument for people as media for political communication and the reinterpretation of campaign field operations.

Guided by the analytically rich ethnographic work of Fenno and Nielsen, I chose ethnography as the first method. This allowed me to investigate the interactions and communication between MPs and their constituents, and closely observe the intimate details that set some MPs apart from others. Ethnography requires the researcher to "go native", to participate in and observe the phenomenon they are trying to study, while maintaining a professional distance so their analysis is not coloured by personal feelings. It is a "written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)", bringing to surface what is often neglected (Van Maanen, 1988: 1). The interdependence of theory, research methods and the knowledge of social phenomena this research technique yields a data-rich and insightful understanding of the MP within his or her constituency (Ellen, 1984: 27). Facial expressions, verbal inflections and reactions to unexpected emotional effusions are often missing in thin descriptions produced in mass observation accounts (Savage, 2010). As quotes and descriptive vignettes in this dissertation will show, this method has enabled me to thoroughly observe the process of each interaction before it takes place, during and after it is over. Using ethnography, I was able to understand choices made by the MP, shed light on how disruptions

are repaired, and capture an area of politics that is not often considered or understood by those not physically present.

To build a structure, understand the importance of constituency interactions and supplement my observations, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with MPs as the second method. By engaging in a qualitative semi-structured interview, I gently encouraged Members towards a unique, extended discussion in the form of a conversation that elicited understandings or meanings, as well as described and portrayed specific events or processes during constituency interactions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 5). Unlike structured interviews, this technique embraces that each interview and its outcomes are unique by establishing a responsive conversational partnership. It is a dynamic and iterative process, and not a prescriptive set of tools to be applied regardless of the context (Ibid: 15).

As the third method, to fully understand how the internet and digital tools are integrated into the MP's communication with his or her constituents, political discourse analysis was conducted on their communication outputs. Drawing from Van Dijk's definition, the study of discourse "should not be limited to the structural definition of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures" (Van Dijk, 1995: 15). This may provisionally include parameters such as participant characteristics such as their roles and purposes, as well as properties of a setting, such as time and place.

The rest of this chapter will detail the methodological approaches in my data collection and discuss how the data was analysed. I will also explain how I preserved research ethics and stored my data safely.

3.2 Method and Data Collection

To seek an understanding of how discourses are brought to life by active processes of symbolic communication, we need to turn to methods that enable the interpretation and explanation of structured meanings from which political speech and actions draw (Alexander, 2010: 282). A simple act such as an MP-

constituent advice surgery is not merely a means to an end, but a performative act that brings the constituent into the MP's preserve, persuading the constituent of the MP's ability and desire to help and encouraging the constituent to feel that they are on the same side. Thus, my method involved observing, identifying and interpreting signs, symbols, narratives and performances guided by the hermeneutic and semiotic tools illuminated by Goffman, Foucault and Alexander, with the use of ethnography, semi-structured interviews and political discourse analysis.

My data consisted of text, talk and performances that took place between the MP and his or her constituents. An ethnography of MPs' constituency service activities (such as the advice surgery, walkabouts and town hall meetings), semi-structured interviews with MPs, MPs' communication outputs such as flyers, emails and posts on social media and texts chronicling an MP's life in detail served as my data sources. To allow for flexibility during data collection, I began fieldwork before the UK Parliament dissolved on 30 March 2015. Data collection resumed as quickly as possible after the UK General Election on 7 May 2015, and continued for 24 months until 13 May 2017.

I started the project by approaching MPs from three major British political parties for the opportunity to shadow them in their constituency. Carrying out an ethnography allowed me intimate access to complex episodic interactions between MPs and their constituents. I primarily focused on the interaction between MP and constituents during the advice surgery, which I sat in on as an observer, as long as the constituent was comfortable with me doing so. I also followed MPs as they presented speeches in town halls, attended local council meetings and went on walkabouts in the constituency. I carried a small notebook around with me, recording my field notes in as much detail as possible between meetings and individual interactions, rather than during the meetings. This was deliberately done so that constituents, MPs and caseworkers would feel comfortable and natural during meetings. Notes were then typed up and stored electronically after every trip in the field.

Carrying out an ethnography involves the full-time involvement of the participant-observer (in this case, myself) over a period of considerable length and demands the interaction with the study of chosen human subjects in their natural environment (Van Maanen, 1988: 1–2). In view of time constraints I shadowed MPs representing constituencies in close proximity to London (where I live), with a travel journey of up to three hours each way. In total I shadowed ten MPs, from Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat, across constituencies in England for a minimum of three weeks each. As most of these constituency activities took place from Friday to Sunday, I shadowed up to three MPs simultaneously, depending on their schedules.

This method is particularly appropriate for unpacking a "difficult-to-define or multifaceted political phenomena" by providing a "thick description of the social and political lives of the informants", with high levels of internal validity (Halperin and Heath, 2012: 290–98). The biggest advantage is the capacity to recount and unearth the culture of a population or an organisation (Dobbert, 1982: 39). It is this immersion that allowed me to uncover symbols, discourses and processes utilised by the MP as they carried out their everyday representative duties in the constituency. Unlike the use of large N surveys, being in the field allowed me to be fully immersed in the daily life and activities of the MPs being observed (Ellen, 1984: 68), ultimately culminating in a "written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)" (Van Maanen, 1988: 1). As a participant-observer during these interactions, I gained an insight into the quotidian social and welfare work carried out and faced by MPs. Shadowing an MP over the course of a day permitted me to experience and adopt the perspective of the MP, for whom these activities were an essential component of their responsibilities. It also enabled me to observe how constituents reacted to the MP's performance. The choice to engage with the MP can result in varied interactions, depending on the nature of the case, the disposition of the constituent and the subsequent reaction of the MP.

While the detailed observation and investigation of these performances proved to be analytically rich, they also served as window onto how and when various

digital tools were employed and integrated in contemporary constituency service. As detailed in my empirical work, digital tools such as social media platforms were mostly viewed favourably. These platforms gave MPs the means to enact their standby discourse, facilitated their accessibility and enhanced their visibility with regular updates on activities carried out in and on behalf of the constituency.

The second method I used during data collection was semi-structured interviews with MPs. This technique allowed me to qualitatively understand experiences and reconstruct past events from the actors involved (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 3). These interviews were an opportunity to uncover unseen dynamics between the MP and the constituent from the MP's perspective, illuminate the dialectics between what people say, what they say they do, and what they actually do. After all, categories of meanings in cultures, how a perception compares with another and what values are regarded as important, are components which will subsequently inform behaviour (Agar, 1980: 107; Fetterman, 1989: 48). The data collected during the interviews supplemented and enriched the evidence gathered in the ethnography by allowing the MP to describe in their own words and terms how they view the constituency service and what they choose to do in the constituency. It also gave structure and meaning to the importance of face-to-face interactions, and its relevance in the management of political communication between the MP and their constituents. I interviewed eighteen MPs, including the ten MPs I shadowed. I asked these MPs for recommendations for whom I should speak to. Some offered to introduce me to other potential interviewees, and this contributed to a snowball effect of increasing my sample. I also interviewed three constituency workers at the start of my fieldwork. This allowed me to get a broad sense of how the constituency offices operated, and how they completed the MP's parliamentary office.

This method was favourable as it also enabled my personality to be incorporated, bringing about an interview exchange that was comparable to a conversation rather than an stuffy interrogation. It was also flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and different dispositions. Certain MPs carried

themselves more causally than others, allowing me to probe further in a more informal manner. For instance, during her interview former MP for Wells Tessa Munt conducted herself like a friend, made jokes with her caseworker and I, as well as offered me a slice of cake with a cup of tea. She spoke openly about how she did not consider herself is "a normal politician," unlike "them," referring to other MPs (personal communication, 8 June 2015).

As I carried out this process repeatedly with different MPs and their staff, my interviewing technique was constantly refined as I reflected on the conversation after every meeting. Discovering that interviewees found different aspects of the research focus more important than the study's original objectives provided me with an opportunity to further improve my research questions. For example, question 2 was added after the first two MPs interviewed brought into the discussion how their responsibilities were organised into a weekly routine. The interviews were structured around the following questions:

1. As an MP, apart from your responsibilities in Westminster, what other components do you think are significant in your role?
2. Can you describe a typical day for you?
3. How important is face-to-face interaction with your constituents to you?
4. How many surgeries do you carry out a month? How did you come up with that number?
5. How do you think the internet changed the way you interact with your constituents?
6. Having used both methods, are there any advantages/disadvantages? Which do you prefer/find more effective, and why?
7. Are you satisfied with the relationship you share with your constituents? How would you describe your relationship with your constituents?
8. What do you think can be improved and how?
9. How do you feel about online petition websites such as 38 degrees?
10. Are there any other MPs or people you believe I should speak to?

I developed these questions with an aim to uncover how MPs perceive their relationship with the constituency and their constituents, and how they manage their constituency service. Over the course of the interview, these questions invoked discussion on how the involvement of media and use of digital tools resulted in increased awareness of MP presence in the constituency, such as during neighbourhood walkabouts. Depending on the MP's schedule, most of these interviews took place at Portcullis House, with a few conducted at the MP's constituency office.

Apart from the MPs, I informally spoke to as many people as possible involved in the surgery interactions to enhance and verify the credibility of my ethnographic findings by reflecting a variety of perspectives (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 67). These included constituency caseworkers and relevant MP parliamentary staff. Speaking to them gave me an insight into the MP's behaviour from another point of view, and contributed to my construction of the context in which these interactions take place.

Part of my ethnographic work also involved collecting data from MP communications that were produced and disseminated in the constituency. I collected papers that were distributed in person, and also gathered what was posted on online media. These included flyers advertising surgery dates, monthly newsletters that described what the MP had done, posters with contact details, emails with constituency updates, e-newsletters, news articles written by the MP and updates on social media platforms. I collected flyers, newsletters and took photos of posters when I was in the constituency shadowing the MP. To narrow down the collection of data online and to ensure its relevance to the period of time the MP was shadowed, I only collected data posted online within a day of the constituency shadowing (one day before, the day of and the day after). This included posts on Twitter, Facebook, MPs' websites and blog updates. I also monitored local news websites for coverage on MPs' constituency activities and constituency issues discussed during interactions.

Transcripts of first hand data collected include the interviews I conducted with MPs in conjunction with quotes from my fieldwork during observation of their surgeries. In addition, the content of their tweets, Facebook and website updates that were made on the days before and after each surgery were analysed. Other relevant communication outputs from MPs directed towards citizens including personal letters or notes to address key issues were also included in the analysis. With this, a comprehensive snapshot of the surgery can be obtained. It will enable offline discourse to be observed and reveal how it is affected by or results in content produced online.

To further enrich and supplement the data collection with a broader perspective, I also drew on second hand data. I turned to accounts of contemporary MPs and the constituency service to supplement my observations, extracting and analysing excerpts containing their constituency experiences. These were published between 2012 and 2016, the period during which I conducted my data collection. These included memoirs written by MPs, such as *How to be an MP* by Paul Flynn (2012), MP for Newport in Wales, and *An Unexpected MP: Confessions of a Political Gossip* by former political representative for Harlow in Essex, Jerry Hayes (2014). I also gathered attitude survey reports and results such as the Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement, and monitored newspaper articles for relevant mentions of MPs I had shadowed and interviewed.

To classify the data collected, I used the data computational software NVivo. I developed a list of nodes (also known as grouping words), drawing key words from the literature, my interview questions and research questions. All the data I collected – transcripts, images of flyers, handouts and newsletters, tweets, Facebook posts – were uploaded into the software, where I manually coded relevant data to each node. Clusters of nodes revealed patterns in performance, which I then hermeneutically reconstructed in my identification and analysis of discourses in the MP constituency service.

To analyse the content of performances and how it relates to the MP presenting him or herself as an intelligent, competent and caring constituency

representative, I adopt Foucault's (1972) characterisation of discourse to describe how a system of knowledge-containing statements, termed a discursive formation, are produced to result in rules of formation that structure the discursive practice. As explained in the previous chapter, discursive formations feature objects, modes of statement, concepts and thematic choices, and can be observed in the constituency service. In this way, I reveal how discourse enables and structures the interactions MPs carry out in the constituency service. Accessibility as a discourse, for example, possesses the features described by Foucault. It is a body of knowledge which contains what is said to demonstrate accessibility, such as times of meetings and where the MP can be reached. Accessibility as a discourse also results in roles such as MP, caseworker and constituent. Objects produced in the accessibility discourse include blog or website updates, tweets, a political address or talk and news articles. Finally, rules pertaining to accessibility, while not clearly defined by Foucault, I identify as rules that MPs employ to justify their actions and explain their choices. These include resources such as time and finances.

To perceive meaning from the speech acts, I draw on Van Dijk's political discourse analysis, which suggests the various participants in groups acting within a political context as well as considering communication outputs from politicians (1995: 15). Thus, speech acts by politicians outside political contexts are not included in my research, but dialogue by citizens who participate and engage in the political events and processes are. Here, I refer to the spoken or written element of what is being said, rather than Foucault's discursive formation. This method of analysis complements my theoretical framework, which includes the context of the MP-constituent performance within the examination of the interaction itself. Unlike abstract discourse analysis, political discourse analysis ensures that the context is considered by looking beyond the verbal aspects of the interaction (Pomerantz and Fehr, 1997: 64). Differences in how actors in interactions perform in various contexts can result in differences in the production, understanding and analysis of discourse. Discourse is being produced, understood and analysed relative to such context features, where discourse is described as taking place or as being accomplished "in" or "out" of a

social situation (Van Dijk, 1998: 11), or, in Goffman's analogical terms, frontstage or backstage (1959).

As the empirical chapters will demonstrate, my analysis unveils how discursive practices are part of a larger organisation of meaningful conduct by people in society as they construct meanings through the production, dissemination and consumption of various forms of activities, actions, events, objects, etc., rather than how language and talk are organised as analytically separable phenomena (Halperin and Heath, 2012: 311; Pomerantz and Fehr, 1997: 65). There is a difference in emphasis between speech (*parole*) and language (*langue*), in order for spoken language to be understood in its totality (i.e. parole *and* langue) (Alexander 2011: 10). In this sense not only is what being said matters, but how it is related to and is understood matters as well. This distinction is key when comparing data between spoken interaction and written text.

3.3 Research Ethics

In order to adhere to my university's ethical standards as well as the University of London's, great care was taken to ensure that research ethics were maintained, especially during fieldwork. Prior to beginning fieldwork the project was approved by the department's research committee.

Consent forms (see Appendix I) were provided for all MPs who were shadowed. This not only created a sense of rapport and trust between myself as the researcher and the MPs, but also with the MP's caseworkers. I also signed confidentiality statements provided by the representative's offices, ensuring that nothing incriminating and sensitive would result in the identification of the constituent or the MP (should they choose to be anonymous).

Constituents were informed about my research, as well as my presence during the meeting, as the meeting began. In the event they were uncomfortable, I would leave the room. Over the course of my research, most of the constituents were comfortable with my presence. This excludes a constituent encountered during William Morgan MP's surgery. Discussed in further detail in Chapter 6,

she was uncomfortable with having anyone, caseworkers included, in the room except for the MP. She chose not to share the problem that brought her to see MP Morgan, and left.

Apart from MPs comfortable to be named, all other names (included staffers and constituents) are pseudonyms. To further protect the anonymity of the people involved, specific details of locations are intentionally obscured.

3.4 Data Storage

Data collected (both fieldwork and analysis) is kept safe to protect the identities of the participants involved, as well as the sensitive information discussed during these meetings. All information collected during the shadowing and interviews is kept safe both in the hard drive of my laptop, and as a hard copy, including notebooks where field notes were taken down. The data kept on my computer hard drive and external hard drive is password protected. On the occasion that the hard drive might be corrupted a second copy of information is also kept on a Cloud drive and password protected. Furthermore, electronic devices that I have used to access these data files are encrypted. The physical copy of my handwritten field notes and the notebooks used during note taking will be kept in a safe place and locked after information has been typed up electronically.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed how I pursued the study of MP constituency work outside the electoral context in detail in my fieldwork. I began by discussing and evaluating methods scholars have chosen to investigate MPs in their constituencies in previous studies. Existing literature studying the increased emphasis on the constituency service predominantly draw data from large N surveys and structured interviews. These are useful in providing a generalisable outline of MPs' constituency roles and motivations, but reduce a spectrum of meanings, feelings, actions and discourses to reflect the prevailing point of view. Furthermore, as these works focusing solely on the constituency service are outdated, they do not take into account changes brought about by the internet

and its tools, nor do they demonstrate the integration of these tools into local political communication strategies carried out by MPs.

I sought methods to identify and interpret signs, symbols, discourse and performances of the constituency service in relation to the political and media environment MPs navigate and perform in, using analytical and hermeneutic tools put forth by Alexander, Goffman and Foucault. Guided by analytical works on the ground by Fenno and Nielsen, I chose to begin my investigation by way of an ethnography. I supplemented and structured my understanding of the constituency service and interactions through semi-structured interviews with eighteen MPs, including the ten I shadowed. My ethnographic data collection also included communications that were produced and disseminated in the constituency and to constituents. I collected papers that were distributed in person, local newspapers, flyers and also gathered what was posted on online media by following the MPs on their social media accounts, websites and blogs. To supplement the data collection, I also drew on second hand data, such as accounts of contemporary MPs and the constituency service, as well as attitude survey reports and results such as the Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement. Finally, I used the data computational software NVivo to analyse the data collected against a list of nodes I developed, as well as Van Dijk's political discourse analysis, to guide my analysis of speech acts. Research ethics were adhered to strictly throughout the fieldwork process. Consent forms were provided to all participants involved.

In the following chapter I will demonstrate how MPs are "on standby" by enacting the discourse of accessibility, drawing on the combination of data collected during my fieldwork. I provide examples of the various techniques MPs apply to establish their accessibility, and discuss how newly elected MPs are more likely to accentuate the accessibility discourse in comparison to re-elected MPs.

4 What Can I Do For You? Staying Accessible

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I begin my argument for the standby MP by discussing the discursive formation of accessibility from the perspective of the constituency. These discursive formations, much like stories, not only inform us about the life that goes on around us, but also give shape and form to that life – temporal and spatial orientation, articulacy, meaning, purpose and boundaries (Frank, 2010: 2). As demonstrated in Chapter 2, continued emphasis on Members of Parliament carrying out constituency service apart from their responsibilities in Westminster is observed in the literature. The knowledge that MPs carry out regular meetings with their constituents seems innate, and the established existence of the phenomenon is taken for granted. With thousands of constituents in a single constituency, what exactly do we know about how this MP-constituent process, and how does it happen? Why is it meaningful? How has this action become symbolic to the actors, texts and audiences involved?

This chapter, and those that follow, does not set out to challenge accounts of the constituency service. It acknowledges the works that have already been carried out, and builds upon them through closer inspection of actual constituency interactions. Accessibility, as I argue in this chapter, is a discursive formation enacted as part of the MP's standby performance to their constituent-audience. I define accessibility as *the opportunity of being able to reach and interact with the MP at one's convenience when desired*. This is an opportunity provided by the MP, for constituents to reach them both offline and/or online. Along with other discursive formations that structure the MP's standby framework, it shapes public expectations with the help of accumulated public knowledge and memories, with MPs engaging with their constituents out of seemingly natural, subconscious habit. Unlike campaigning, where candidates engage with their constituents for a pre-determined period of time with an end date, Members have to sustain this interaction during their tenure. Thus, discursive formations useful in this meaningful relationship are formed through shared and credible

interactions. Democracy can only be achieved if there is a typical, widely understood and recognisable social performance (Coleman, 2013: 5).

Per my argument, MPs strive to seek performance re-fusion and authenticity in the constituency service by enacting discursive formations. These formations include their scripts, settings and performances. At the core of the constituency service are pursuits that enable constituents and MPs to meet, listen and interact. The 2017 Audit of Political Engagement indicated 47 per cent of the public polled thought MPs should spend the most time representing local constituency issues in the Commons, rather than national problems, with 52 per cent indicating they would contact an MP with their views (Hansard Society, 2017). These statistics not only demonstrate how constituents consider local issues of greater importance, expecting MPs to do the same, but that they would reach out to the MP. Thus, for the interaction between MP and constituent to transpire, accessibility is key. These interactions can vary wildly and can come about in different ways. In this chapter I analyse how the diverse elements come about to produce the discursive formation of accessibility. Relying on the analytical framework discussed in Chapter 2, this chapter will show how accessibility is part of the MP's everyday performativity. Interviews and evidence from my fieldwork will be discussed to demonstrate the development of these meetings as MPs strive to be accessible. I reveal how MPs produce a body of knowledge to ceaselessly allow constituents access, how objects such as flyers, posters and e-newsletters are produced, and how MPs' activities result in roles such as the caseworker. I argue that to understand this, it is necessary to distinguish analytically between what are staple forms of access, augmented variants of access, the rationale and significance behind access outlet choices and how they are prioritised by MPs. Accessibility tends to be bi-directional in nature, as dialogues take place during the interaction. Physical accessibility is provided when the constituent is able to meet the MP face-to-face, usually though advice surgeries, local events and while the MP is out and about in the constituency. Depending on when and where they take place, these can be fleeting moments, a brief conversation or perhaps an in-depth discussion. These points of access can result in more face-to-face interaction, and more recently, due to the emergence

and widespread adoption of the internet and social media, online interaction as well. MPs agree there is a role for technology to maintain accessibility and to assist them in carrying out their constituency service. As the details of accessibility emerge, I demonstrate how they work together to develop a foundation upon which to establish a relationship with the interaction's intended audience-constituents. These efforts also allow the significance of the constituency service and its meaningfulness to be understood and analysed. As I will show in this chapter, while access is a pivotal element of constituency service activities, perspectives on the importance of carrying them out are not homogenous.

I begin the chapter by looking at how MPs ensure physical accessibility through management and amplification. I draw from a range of existing research, conversations, anecdotes, images and allusions observed during my fieldwork that suggest a cumulative impact on the MP-constituent interaction as a social performance. The chapter will then evaluate how MPs expand their accessibility both through traditional methods and integration of digital tools. I go on to analyse variances in the significance of accessibility by MPs. The discursive formation in this chapter and the details identified here will set the scene for the next chapter as integral elements within a re-fused script, action and the performative space.

4.2 Physical Accessibility

Accessibility, or the provision of access to the MP, emerges as an important aspect during the MP-constituent performative. Quite simply, it forms the foundation of the representative relationship. Being physically present is valued highly and facilitates the legitimisation process and production of authenticity (Mast, 2016: 266). One of the primary and most common ways for MPs to provide accessibility to their constituents is by holding advice surgeries. This essential role is related closely to the medieval task of redressing grievances in Parliament (Gay, 2005: 57). These surgeries, having drawn their name from the doctor's surgery (Searing, 1994), have increased in number along with the expansion of the constituency role in the mid-1960s (Norris, 1997: 30). Approximately 80 per

cent of MPs held surgeries in 1960; 90 per cent by 1970; with proportions estimated to be even higher today. Now considered a core component of the constituency service, nearly if not all MPs hold surgeries (Searing, 1994: 126). Aligned with previous research, all of the MPs I spoke to held regular surgeries. Dependent on their schedules, demand and personal choice, MPs tend to hold around two to four advice surgeries a month. One former Liberal Democrat MP, Tessa Munt, held up to 11 surgery meetings a month during her time as representative for Wells in Somerset. These sessions usually last two to three hours, but can sometimes run longer if there are many cases. In the following section I discuss two main traits in the ways MPs establish physical accessibility – *management* and *amplification*.

Representatives are clearly extremely busy people. Making time to be physically accessible not only requires commitment, but management of time, resources and priorities. According to the MPs I met, the importance of accessibility cannot be overstated. Some consider it not merely fundamental to their job as representative, but necessary to be effective in their position. William Morgan MP, a Conservative representative for a suburban constituency just outside London, remarks, "To be an effective MP, you have actually got to speak to as many people as you can to appreciate what their concerns are. You have got to address them, even if you don't agree with them, you have got to, sort of you know, be able to speak to them, and let them truly believe they are, that they can influence decision-making, that you're not just someone who ignores them, through casework and surgeries… People have immediate problems" (personal communication, 29 July 2015). Being a representative of a constituency requires the knowledge that comes directly from the constituents. MPs have a responsibility to represent the entire constituency, despite its diversity and differences, but making time to connect also benefits the Member, providing a more comprehensive picture of constituency issues.

To manage the pressures of responsibilities and time constraints, MPs delegate common constituent concerns to their caseworkers to make time for atypical and unfamiliar issues during advice surgeries. Common sources of trouble are

immigration and visa application problems. MP Henry Green, for example, prefers not to meet constituents with immigration problems as it is much swifter for his office to manage these with the right information: "There are a lot of people who think they have to come to a surgery for me to help them… I try not to see immigration or housing cases at my surgery because it is much quicker for me to help them, certainly to sort out a problem with a passport or sort out a visa issue, it is much easier for them to give me their name, Home Office reference number, bare details, the facts, and I can get on with it" (personal communication, 7 July 2015). Harry Grove MP, a Labour MP who represented a constituency in the Midlands, held separate immigration-only surgeries fortnightly, which he did not attend. His caseworker carried out the immigration-only meeting as it was predominantly administrative. Thus, he was able to concentrate his efforts on the other advice surgery meeting he conducted personally. Here we observe that accessibility is not merely organised for the sake of it, but managed to be as efficient as possible.

Jacob Marshall, who was elected MP for an area of Cornwall in 2015, explains the importance of accessibility to him, and how he manages his strategy to be as reachable as possible within the context of his constituency and their key problems. "Before the election I set out four priorities, around housing, health, skills and jobs. So I try and work my diary in the constituency to focus on those areas… For example, I visit a school, every single week. So I go to a different school in the constituency, primary or secondary, and talk about, first I want to give them the access to an MP, for them to ask me anything they'd like… I got this ambition to be the most accessible MP out of everybody. But one thing I've done, and I've done 45 of these so far, is where I just find a venue, for 60 minutes, and I'll, well, all over the place, village halls, pubs, supermarkets, wherever what have you really, and let people know that I'm there for them to come talk to me. So they come to talk to me about a particular problem, or it might just be they want to know my opinion about something, or they have a view about something that is more general. So I do that. Obviously time is limited. But I do that, and well I've done 45 so far, since May last year, so it's almost one a week" (personal communication, 4 May 2016).

This extract displays in a nutshell MP Marshall's overall plan to be accessible within his constituency and how he manages to do so despite time constraints. He addresses the social problems the constituency faces, such as housing, and how his understanding of these problems shapes his approach. Comparison with his colleagues in the Commons can also be observed as MP Marshall says he aims to be the "most accessible MP out of everybody". By his revealing this desire, we are made aware of how he prioritises being accessible and how important *he* thinks it is to do so. Furthermore he says, "But one thing I've done…". There is an implicit assumption that he is doing more than or going beyond what he thinks or knows other MPs are doing to be accessible. This is then demonstrated by making room in his schedule for his weekly efforts to hold drop-in meetings at local businesses and cafes. He continues to explain the importance of making accessibility key: "I refer to it as the currency of the job. If I… Whether it is a fete or a coffee morning or meeting a resident's group, it is the only way you can really feel, or can really keep in touch with your patch. There is a real danger in London that you feel removed. It is a good six hours' journey during the daytime or night, during the evenings. If I got quickly so busy here, I will soon not be able to keep on top of what is going on in my patch. So I think, I enjoy it, but I think it is really important to be out and about. You just understand what matters to people". Here MP Marshall refers to the distance from his constituency to London ("it is a good six hours' journey"), and how being physically away from his constituency and constituents has disadvantages. There is the possibility of being out of touch, an outcome he wants to avoid. Again, the importance of being accessible, and generally being in the constituency, is stressed, with him making the effort to travel to and fro on a weekly basis, despite the distance.

Distance is recognised as a factor influencing accessibility, with MPs striving to go beyond regularly held surgeries and meetings in an effort to overcome detachment by amplifying physical accessibility through convenience. Peter Kyle, who became MP for Hove and Portslade in 2015, explains that being accessible was a goal he has striven for right from the start of his experience as an MP, even as a candidate: "For me it was always, from the second I was selected as a candidate, I wanted to be as accessible as possible. So I fundraised and got a shop

right on the high street, in Hove, so that means that people can come in at any time. They can feel like it's an interaction like any other [shop] on the high street. It has its frustrations, because it means that you get a lot of people, a lot of people turn up every single day, and it has become part of their social thing. Particularly elderly people who don't have a good routine they will just come in and tell you what's on their mind that day. But then there are other people who just turn up because they know it's there" (personal communication, 25 November 2015).

There are several significant elements emerging during this process of meaning making between the MP and the constituent. Within this quote we are able to see MP Kyle refer to accessibility as an interaction that consists of social relations between the participants (Fairclough, 2003: 75). Social relations can vary across "power" and "solidarity", or, in this case, social hierarchy and social distance (Brown and Gilman, 1960). For example, global organisations that operate at large distances from individuals are likely to run into issues such as legitimacy and alienation (Fairclough, 2003: 76). MP Kyle's aim to be "as accessible as possible" has led him to rent a shop on the high street, demonstrating him taking action with the purpose of minimising the gap between himself and his constituents, so that they "can feel like it is an interaction like any other". As indicated in Images 4.1 and 4.2, doing so means he is quite literally putting himself within reach, placing himself in a position of accessibility, and subsequently becoming part of his constituent's daily life. There is also a contextual understanding that MPs are receiving an increasing number of cases and correspondence. MP Kyle demonstrates existential assumption by assuming that people would like to see him for a variety of reasons, and would like to ensure that "people can come in at any time".

(Images 4.1 and 4.2: Peter Kyle's Constituency Office in Hove, taken 22 April 2016)

MP Kyle makes his presence on the high street obvious. The signboard above the shop front is bright red, the colour associated with the Labour Party. His name is clearly printed on the shop signboard. His name can also be found on the door, and on a pro-EU campaign poster featuring a large photo of himself. Constituents are not only made aware of his accessibility through the use of a shop front as his constituency office, but are given his contact details and social media handles, all of which are printed clearly on the window. In addition, the office's opening hours are provided. Awareness of the complexities of modern society can be observed. In the event constituents might not have the time to pop in for a face-to-face interaction, they are made aware of other communication channels through which they are able to reach MP Kyle, enabling a quasi 24/7 accessibility.

Understanding his choice to be accessible and his subsequent actions (such as his shop front) are key in comprehending MP Kyle's efforts to make interacting with him part of his constituents' everyday activities. Akin to running errands or buying groceries along the high street, constituents will become more aware of

his accessibility. According to his caseworker, Estelle, they receive approximately 10 to 12 drop-ins daily. Having worked for an MP before, she terms MP Kyle's office arrangements "a unique set-up" and reiterates how important accessibility is to him (personal communication, 22 April 2016). Constituents are not only more likely to view interacting with him as a close social relation, but view him as more accessible based on convenience. I observed this accessibility in action as I shadowed MP Kyle in early May 2016. His surgeries were generally held on Fridays. Timings varied according to his schedule availability, but were often held in the mornings or early afternoons. Commuting from London, I arrived at the office approximately half an hour before surgery appointments were arranged. I used this time to speak to his staff or generally observe them as they went about their day. On this particular day MP Kyle was in a meeting with a council leader when constituent Alice came in approximately 10 minutes before the surgery – it was meant to begin at 2pm. She was walking her dog along the high street when she decided to pop into the office. She apologised to Estelle, "I know I don't have an appointment, I did not realise it is appointment only on Fridays." She explained she had had no response to an email she sent about clamp fines and taxes she had received from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). Estelle welcomed Alice in, offering to check on it for her. After a quick look on the computer, she explained that another caseworker was meant to follow up on Alice's case. She invited Alice to sit down as she went through her case details with her. In summary, Alice had been fined and taxed three times due to the DVLA having her wrong address. Her final deadline to pay was that particular Friday itself, and she was unwilling to pay more than she needed to. She appeared agitated as she explained that she did not want to pay more than the initial fine. Estelle nodded in understanding and said, "Quite a few people have come in with this issue." She advised Alice to pay off the fine before it accumulated, but arranged to ring her the following week after she had checked with the DVLA. Alice seemed satisfied with the outcome as she said, "Okay I will pay it, and if you could give me a ring on Tuesday to have a chat about it. I am sorry for busting in," before leaving.

Why is this interaction significant? Notice this particular constituent did not have a chance to meet MP Kyle face-to-face. However, being able to pop into the office to ask for help as she was walking her dog was precisely the accessibility MP Kyle hoped to provide, and successfully so. Despite not having a surgery appointment, Alice received an update on her case, and advice on how she should proceed. As a constituent Alice had her political efficacy confirmed as her encounter with her MP led to the support and answers she was seeking.

Other MPs widen their physical accessibility through methods such as broadening the scope of areas where they can interact with their constituents, encouraging ease of access. In essence, MPs seek to minimise the physical distance between them and the constituent. MP William Morgan explains that apart from his scheduled surgeries with constituents, which are appointment only, he arranges several drop-in surgeries in restaurants around his constituency (personal communication, 29 July 2015): "You've got a corner of a restaurant, you've got a banner with the MP just sitting there. And if anyone just wants a moan, um… Because if you have an appointment and you have a surgery, people often come to you with a specific [case]… it's like going to the doctor's. You make an appointment and then you wait to go see them. So it's usually pretty important… But actually, if you just want to have a little bit of a whinge: your bin hasn't been collected or something like that, or the state of the world, you might bang off an email but you are not going to wait two weeks to see your MP… Yeah so you if you make yourself available, it allows people to… Vent their frustrations, which is just as important, frankly." MP Morgan demonstrates an existential assumption that constituents will have dissatisfaction or some form of unhappiness that they would like to share with their MP. He differentiates between meeting face-to-face and a mediated response such as "bang off an email", indicating that waiting another two weeks makes constituents less inclined to meet him. By arranging for a more casual setting, he provides his constituents with the opportunity to get things off their chests with little to no effort. Being accessible for constituents to raise concerns allows MP Morgan to facilitate the democratic representative process as a safety valve for political discontent. Here the social distance is minimised with MP Morgan physically

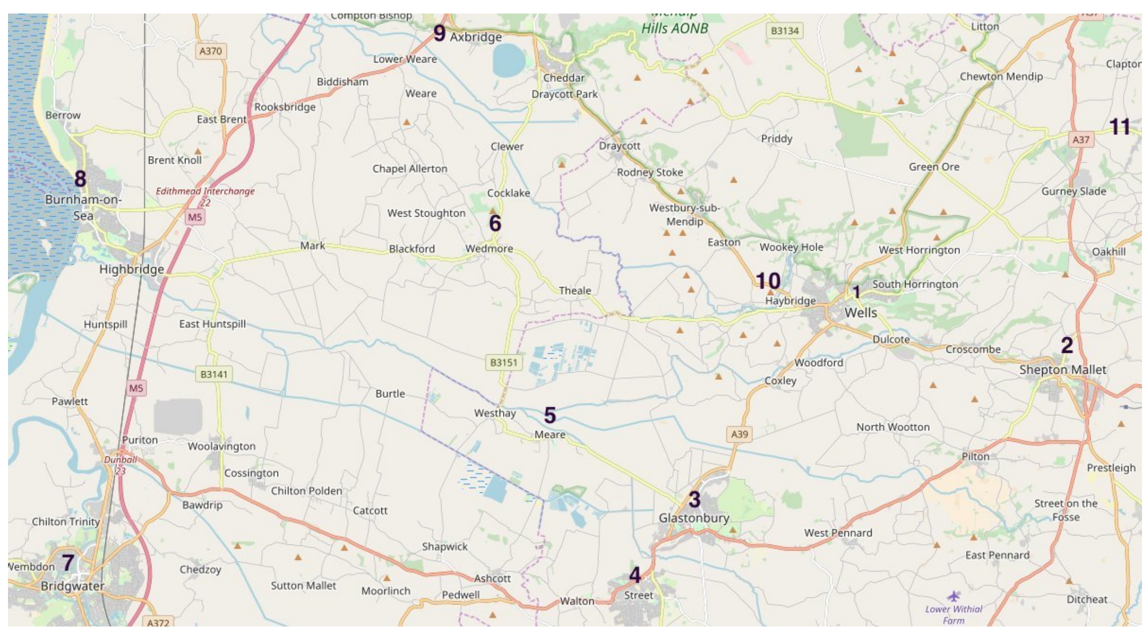
closing the gap by *going* to his constituents at the places they will be. Or, more specifically, the places they will eat!

Tessa Munt (former MP for the constituency of Wells, Somerset[2]) widened her accessibility by organising more constituency activities. For example, she carried out at least 11 surgeries a month. This number was unusually high compared with other MPs I shadowed, who usually held four surgeries a month. This meant that she had to carry out at least two, or sometimes three, surgeries over the course of one weekend. She explained that her constituency is rural and occupies a large geographic space of approximately 215 square miles. This posed challenges to accessibility in a number of ways. Firstly, because the public bus service is irregular and the only routes are along main roads, constituents might run into difficulty reaching her surgeries. This includes the elderly, who might have physical difficulties leaving their homes, as well as others who do not drive. Secondly, Wells is an area plagued with poor mobile and internet signal. MP Munt made this one of her campaigning priorities when she was in office, raising questions[3] during Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) and co-organising a Parliamentary Debate on Management and Delivery of Broadband[4]. Poor internet and mobile service meant that compared to urban constituencies, constituents in Wells were less likely to contact Tessa using communication technologies. It also meant that fewer people would be aware of Tessa's efforts to be accessible, exacerbating existing barriers to access Tessa herself.

To combat these problems, MP Munt held meetings in larger areas of her constituency such as the City of Wells, Glastonbury and Burton-on-Sea. She also held them in smaller towns and villages such as Wedmore, Chilcompton, Street and Shepton Mallet. Image 4.3 is a map of the constituency of Wells with the numbered villages and towns indicating where regular surgeries were held. These took place in diverse locations, from cafes (e.g. La Terre Café in Glastonbury), village halls (e.g. Chilcompton Village Hall) and village pubs (e.g. The Bell Inn in

[2] Tessa Munt was the MP for Wells from 2010 to 2015. She lost her seat during the 2015 General Election. Research was carried out with her between December 2014 and May 2015.
[3] This took place on 25 February 2015.
[4] This Parliamentary Debate took place on 4 March 2015.

Shepton Mallet), to post offices (e.g. Meare Post Office). Given the extensive size of her constituency, she explained she regularly rotated between towns and villages in her constituency, and held roving surgeries in extremely rural hamlets to be as accessible as possible to those who wanted to see her. There was no need to make an appointment. Constituents were seen on a first-come-first-served basis, with no one being turned away. Everyone who came would be seen. She also made time for home visits on Sundays, a service she provided for constituents who were unable to come to her surgeries in person, usually due to personal or health reasons (personal communication, 4 December 2014).



(Image 4.3: Map of Surgery Meetings in Wells, Somerset. Legend: 1: Wells, 2: Shepton Mallet, 3: Glastonbury,4: Street, 5: Meare, 6: Wedmore, 7: Bridgwater, 8: Burnham-on-Sea, 9: Axbridge, 10: Haybridge, 11: Chilcompton)

MP Munt employed a series of offline techniques to communicate her accessibility to constituents. Posters with details of advice surgeries and her full contact information were placed on noticeboards of churches, public libraries, village halls and places where surgeries were held. Cards with MP Munt's contact details were also given out to constituents when she met them during her surgeries (see Image 4.3), at local community events and to constituents who came to the constituency office for help. Like MP Scully, she minimised the geographical distance between herself and her constituents by extending her physical access. She held a larger number of constituency surgeries compared to

other MPs, and visited constituents at home. Online, her efforts were less extensive. Digital tools were employed to further draw attention to her accessibility, albeit in a limited manner. Although MP Munt was also accessible and fairly active on Facebook and Twitter, she did not use these channels of communication as a primary means to inform her constituents of how she may be reached. Surgery dates were advertised on her personal website clearly. However, these were not mentioned on her Twitter and Facebook pages. The poor mobile and broadband signal in her constituency of Wells rendered this a less effective way of communicating. As I discussed earlier, mobile and broadband signals are poor in Somerset, thus making it more effective for MP Munt to advertise through more traditional methods. To be reached by her constituents face-to-face was clearly a priority for her, and there was heavy emphasis on using offline means of communication. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter on visibility and the use of digital tools by MPs, this was especially important within the context of her rural constituency and compromised communication channels. A native of the area, she shared that she has personally experienced these communication and transport challenges. She demonstrated this understanding as she strategically organised her advice surgeries to reach as many areas within her means, as often as possible.

Physical accessibility can be enhanced by the MP's personal disposition during the performance. If the MP's performance during the face-to-face meeting is wooden, awkward or contrived, constituent-audiences will not be convinced by the meaningful symbolic actions, and the action will lose its authenticity. An MP's capacity to be accessible may be reliant on time and resource management, but amplifying this capacity by being open not only encourages constituents to see them, but to be candid about their feelings. Discussing her representative position during a lull at one of her surgeries in Glastonbury, MP Munt remarked, "Not to sound immodest, but I think people see me as smiley, friendly and approachable. Rather than as an MP or politician, they see me as a friend. They open up, and can come speak to me" (personal communication, 4 December 2014). Contrary to what other MPs may think or feel is appropriate or necessary, MP Munt is observed to consider social relations between her and her

constituents to be closer than a typical representative-constituent relationship. Her quip about being seen "as a friend" explicitly discloses how she views herself as "one of them", an ordinary person, claiming she believes herself to be accessible and trusted amongst her constituency. By making reference to not being treated as "an MP or politician", she refers to the commonly expressed notion that constituents feel distant from their MPs and do not trust them. As pointed out earlier, British MPs have consistently been found to be the least trusted of all professions (Ipsos MORI, 2016). Although making reference to sounding immodest, MP Munt implicitly suggests that her perceived approachability is her strength, setting her apart from her colleagues. In this sense she claims that her personal qualities, rather than functional qualities, allow her to amplify her accessibility beyond that of other MPs.

In this section I have demonstrated how MPs make arrangements to be physically accessible as they carry out the constituency service. As I have shown, this is established through management and amplification, facilitating the performance's legitimisation process and production of authenticity. Making time to meet constituents face-to-face not only requires commitment, but management of time, resources and priorities. In the pages that follow, I show how MPs make constituents aware of these options. These efforts not only enhance awareness of the MP's accessibility, but also contribute to accessibility as outlets of communication themselves.

4.3 Augmented Accessibility

Apart from being physically accessible, MPs are observed to inform constituents about additional ways of accessibility through a number of other communication channels. Being accessible does not merely refer to being able to reach the MPs in person, but increasingly means being able to reach the MP easily and through a variety of communication outlets. In this section I analyse how MPs call attention to their accessibility, and how they encourage further interaction beyond physically meeting by emphasising their wide range of means of access. This continuation of accessibility includes the use of *traditional* forms of communication such as flyers and contact cards, and *digital* tools such as email

and social media platforms. As I will demonstrate in the following, this continuation can be implemented in the following ways: offline to offline, offline to online, online to offline and online to online.

Traditional Methods

MPs draw on a number of methods to make their outlets of accessibility known in highly creative ways. MPs may exhibit their accessibility by establishing their presence prominently in the community. MP Peter Kyle chose to showcase his accessibility in the most obvious manner he could think of – to use a storefront on the high street. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, while it is not guaranteed that constituents who drop in have an opportunity to see MP Kyle, they are promised a face-to-face interaction with one of his staff. Other methods include the production and distribution of newsletters, posters and name cards. Constituents are made aware that these access outlets include phone calls, writing letters, attending events the MPs will be at, and, more recently, emails. Andrew Smith MP's contact card is designed in a functional, straightforward fashion (Image 4.4). It features a small photo of him so that constituents can identify him, followed by a section where constituents are able to contact him by writing with their questions or problems. Details of MP Smith's surgeries and other methods of contacting him are also clearly visible on the right of the card. Constituents can send this contact card directly to MP Smith without paying postage, as it is freepost. Postage is paid for by MP Smith's office. Constituents are able to contact MP Smith at no personal financial cost, and yet are able to reach him for help, making the card itself an outlet for access.

(Image 4.4: Andrew Smith MP Flyer, 2015)

The deployment of additional resources also encourages further interaction beyond the initial meeting. To further establish the relationship, MPs inform constituents of the various ways they are able to keep in touch. This includes writing letters, attending another advice surgery, sending an email or through the social media platforms the MPs might use. I observed this in action as Tessa Munt MP ensured that every single one of her constituents knew that they could contact her after their meeting was over, handing them a flyer with a full range of her contact details (Image 4.5). During one of her surgeries in December 2014, held in the small market town of Axbridge in the local pub The Lamb Inn, MP Munt met Mr Daniel Howard. He was a victim of a fraudulent investment scheme, and had been swindled of thousands of pounds. With a troubled expression on his face Mr Howard explained that he had a family and two children. As he described how the fraud had occurred, MP Munt requested permission to record the conversation with her phone. Explaining she was working with Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, MP Vince Cable[5] as his Parliamentary Private Secretary[6], having this recording allowed her

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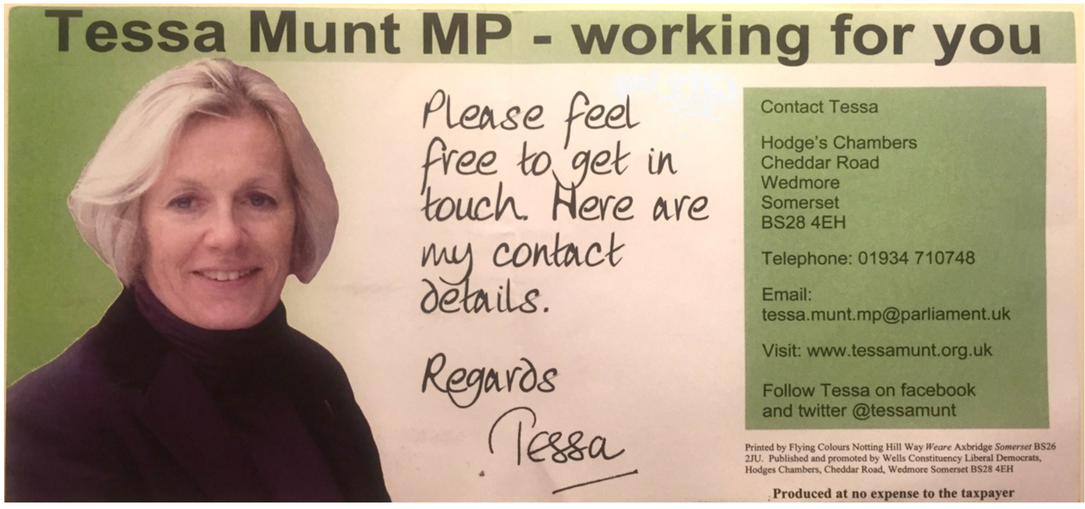
[5] Vince Cable represented Twickenham from 1997 to 2015. He lost his seat in the 2015 General Election.

to “suss out different people who are set up to take him [the fraudster] down.” Mr Howard agreed, then proceeded to describe how the situation unfolded as MP Munt listened sympathetically, leaning in closer to hear better. Offering him support, MP Munt told him, “You can contact me anytime. I’ll give you my card… I’m here every month.”



(Image 4.5: Tessa Munt MP Flyer, 2014)

This interaction between MP Munt and Mr Howard highlights several components of accessibility. Firstly, the issue Mr Howard shared was of a highly sensitive and serious nature. It was important that he was able to access someone who was equipped to provide him with the help he required. With MP Munt making herself physically accessible, Mr Howard was able to seek advice on the matter in question by going to one of her advice surgeries. Furthermore, he was also made aware that she would continue to be accessible beyond the face-to-face meeting they had. Secondly, mentioning MP Vince Cable and her position in Parliament (apart from being an MP) revealed a different aspect of accessibility on Tessa’s part. Here she drew her legitimacy from Westminster, and this was an apparent display of power (Fenno, 1978). Furthermore, MP Munt boosted her power and standing as an MP by being able to closely access the Secretary of State, and working alongside him as a parliamentary aide. The concept of power

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[6] Tessa Munt resigned from this position on 25 January 2015 due to disagreement over fracking policies.

and how MPs draw from Westminster as they carry out their representative role will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

MPs approach enlarging their accessibility in various ways, some visually, some by way of ease and some choose to demonstrate their personality. MP Munt extended her accessibility by providing Mr Howard with her contact card, furnishing him with details on how to continue communicating with her. Her contact card (Image 4.5), at first glance, resembles a personally written note. The font chosen is similar to her handwriting, creating a sense of closeness, as if she herself had written to each individual constituent. She begins her note with "Please feel free to get in touch", encouraging constituents to approach her. To the left of the note is a photo of MP Munt. This not only puts a face to the name but also symbolically places MP Munt directly in the line of communication with the constituent, even if they are not face-to-face.

Even though both contact cards are used to emphasise and extend the MP's accessibility, different approaches to communication can be seen. MP Smith's constituents are informed of the communication channels through which he is accessible, and are also able contact him directly using the surgery card. The card is not only a useful tool detailing his points of access, but a tool of accessibility itself, allowing it to achieve a bi-directional flow of communication. MP Munt's surgery card only allows for mono-directional communication, with the information flow directed to her constituents from her. Differences in how MPs use this opportunity to present their personality as they inform constituents about how they can be accessed can also be observed. Compared with MP Smith's contact card, MP Munt's is equally informative but relatively informal. This style is congruous with her previous statement of herself as convivial, being a friend to her constituents rather than a politician. MP Smith's contact card does not demonstrate any personal touches, but instead is purely informative and practical.

On two occasions in March 2016, I observed as Labour MP George Watson, representative of a constituency in northwest London, publicised his online

accessibility to his constituents by providing them with his contact details by way of a card. MP Watson walked his constituents out of the room at the end of every appointment and would ask if they had his contact details, “Have you got one of my cards?” He would hand them a card regardless of their answer to ensure they were able to contact him if necessary, reiterating that they were able to email anytime they required assistance. The card itself was the size of an envelope, with a red and white-coloured theme aligned with the colours of the Labour party. An image of MP Watson smiling adorned the front, with his name and slogan (“From [Constituency A], for [Constituency A]”) in bold, capital letters next to it, and a detailed contact list, composed of his email, constituency office phone number, website, Facebook and Twitter links.

Quite clearly, MPs are displaying behaviour which encourages further communication. MPs Munt and Watson seek to enhance their physical accessibility by providing contact details after their face-to-face interactions. This enables a *continuation* of accessibility after the meeting has taken place. The MP contact cards I have discussed included a variety of ways the MP could be accessed, including their constituency office details, phone numbers, email addresses, website links and any further digital platform information such as Facebook and Twitter. In the case of MP Munt, she reminded Mr Howard that he was able to contact her anytime, as she passed him her card. This parting further strengthens her message of accessibility. She has proven that she can be reached face-to-face during the surgery meeting; that she can continue to be accessed afterwards; and she also assures him of this verbally. Andrew Smith MP’s contact card informs his constituents how he may be accessed, but also creates an opportunity for accessibility with freepost included. As seen in Images 4.1 and 4.2, MP Kyle exhibited a similar practice of encouraging further forms of access by putting similar information on his constituency office window. The continuation of access sustains the MP’s symbolic actions during the performance. The consistency of accessibility deters constituents from thinking that these interactive episodes are merely an orchestrated act, contributing to the portrayal of authenticity, and re-fusion of the performative act.

Digital Tools

This provision of choice denotes a sense of 24/7 accessibility, encouraging interaction. It not only implicitly sends the message that the Member is widely accessible, but that the constituent is able to access the MP through a method that suits them. With one in two of those polled indicating they will contact their MP or representative on issues, MPs have to go beyond meeting face-to-face to ensure they can be reached (Hansard Society, 2017). This section will identify and analyse further accessibility methods facilitated by the use of digital tools such as email, Twitter and Facebook.

Apart from being physically accessible, MPs have always received constituency correspondence by way of letters. Traditionally, this was the primary form of constituents' access to their representative, with MPs not always frequently visiting their constituencies (Jennings, 1957). The amount of mail MPs received quadrupled between 1964 and 1997, with the numbers of letters sent to the Commons rising from 10,000 to 40,000 (Gay, 2005: 58). In recent times, with the use of digital tools, the use of email is increasingly common (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009; Williamson, 2009). MPs I encountered over the course of my fieldwork have indicated that they receive emails more than they do handwritten letters. Using email makes accessing MPs much easier. Labour MP Samuel Pollock, who has represented a West Midlands constituency since 2005, shares that, "An awful lot of constituency correspondence now comes via email of course, rather than traditional paper post. This is convenient for the constituents and it is good" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). Thus, while it is clear Members are receiving even more communication, measurements of correspondence are harder to determine. With the statistics of average emails unavailable, I turned to MPs I interviewed for estimates of email quantities received as they shared the use of email as an additional outlet for access. Five of the MPs I spoke to had been MPs for at least 10 years, and had personally experienced how the changes in digital tools and the increase in communication choices had had an impact on their constituency correspondence. Henry Green MP, of the Conservative Party, describes how things have changed since he was first elected to represent his West London constituency in 2005, "We're increasingly seeing that more and

more people write to us, via email rather than a letter, about any problem… Well I arrived here [in Westminster] in 2005, no one would email about a problem. Now I think about 70 per cent of the people email their problem" (personal communication, 7 July 2015). Similarly, James Williamson, a Conservative MP who has represented a constituency in southeast England for 18 years, explains that when he was first elected he was managing his workload and correspondence mostly on his own, but now "there is actually quite a substantial amount of correspondence to be dealt with every week," resulting in him having to delegate more. He receives approximately 300 letters and emails a week that need to be processed, and keeps track of these with the help of his staff. He acknowledges that there might be an increase in demands on the MP, but largely attributes this to more people wanting to communicate with their MP. Digital communication technology means that constituents are able to contact their MP as and when they desire, "It's now easy. You just go online and send an email. You raise your points, and clearly they need a response. If someone writes to me about, say taking military action in Syria, they are entitled to a response" (personal communication, 7 January 2016).

Others also notice that constituents are communicating with them more, making email a credible tool in their accessibility performance. Labour MP George Watson, who has represented his northeast London constituency for the last 15 years, notes that when he was first elected the main contact was by post, "Email has transformed that, and social media is beginning to change the interaction… it's beginning to be a way for people to get in touch" (personal communication, 22 September 2015). Fellow Labour Party MP Logan Woodward, who has represented a predominantly rural constituency in the Midlands for the last 15 years, comments on how he thinks the internet has changed constituency communication, "They communicate with me more. That's the biggest difference. So people email… It is quicker and simpler. There are far more emails than there are letters" (personal communication, 1 July 2015).

Thus I have shown that the increasing use of email to access MPs is evident. Veteran Members describe differences between their initial experiences in office

with what they are presently going through. They also indicate that more constituents are actively getting in touch with them, whether it is about a personal problem, policy or event, enabling constituents not only to easily access their MP for help, but to engage their MP in conversation. MPs Watson, Woodward and Williamson have observed that constituents are reaching out to them more. This growth is aligned with the streamlining of digital tools in Parliament. A unified Parliamentary ICT service (PICT) was implemented on 1 January 2006, with legislation introduced in 2007 to ensure that ICT provision was managed by a joint department (Norton, 2007: 355). MPs and their staff are now equipped with the necessary technology to facilitate online communication within the Commons as well as outside. As the use of the internet and email proliferated, parliamentarians were able to use it as a direct mode of communication with their constituents.

In terms of constituency-related matters, maintaining communication online has increasingly become an important way for MPs to engage with their constituents, and remain accessible outside of the office as much as possible. MPs have embraced the use of digital tools (in addition to emails) to establish an online presence, such as creating a website outside of their party's. In 2003 only approximately 28 per cent of MPs had websites (Jackson, 2003: 126). This number continued to grow and most, if not all, MPs in Britain now have an accessible website, although the quality of them may vary (Norton, 2007). I discuss MP adoption of websites further in Chapter 5.

Subsequent adoption of digital tools includes the use of blogs (Francoli and Ward, 2008), e-newsletters (Jackson, 2006) and social networking platforms (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). Social media such as Twitter and Facebook have become staples in an MP's digital communication toolkit. Currently, 546 out of 650 British MPs are on Twitter (Tweetminster, 2017). I will discuss how MPs are using these tools in further detail in Chapter 5. In the following section my analysis will show how MPs have increasingly started using digital tools to accentuate their accessibility – to interact with, but also garner views from, their

constituents – and how they are no longer using digital tools in a top-down information distribution manner.

Twitter's limit of 140 characters per Tweet poses questions of how useful it can be in extending the MP's accessibility. MPs have indicated that the use of Twitter as a platform of access is not an outlet they actively seek to grow, but rather has become an access point because of constituents reaching out. Henry Green MP remarks that Facebook and Twitter are platforms where constituents reach out for general discussion rather than to discuss personal problems (personal communication, 7 July 2015). Reflecting on his Twitter use, MP Harry Grove says, "I don't get much direct messaging. But I will sort of re-tweet civic events and local activities, and interesting things" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). However, it is possible that constituents may be encouraged by the MP's presence on Twitter, and so contact them through that outlet. Labour MP George Watson, who predominantly uses Twitter as his social media platform of choice, shared, "I am noticing that I am getting casework through Twitter, people wanting to get in touch… They might try and ask for a surgery appointment via Twitter… And sometimes if they are contacting me about particular events in Parliament they me to go to via Twitter as well" (personal communication, 22 September 2015). He goes on to say that he usually responds with his constituency email address so that constituents are able to provide further details, as well as verify that they are indeed constituents, demonstrating online to online communication.

In a reversal, some MPs have used Twitter to access constituents' opinions. Christopher Lewis is a Conservative MP for a constituency in Lancashire, England. During our interview, he said that the internet and use of Twitter specifically has allowed him to have a greater reach across demographics in his constituency. He admits his scepticism about social media when he first started to campaign for his seat in 2010. He now finds Twitter and Facebook effective platforms to keep in touch with his constituents, and give them insights into a day in the life of an MP. Between the two platforms he is more partial to Twitter, and uses it as an "online diary" to "[keep] constituents informed about what I am

doing." According to MP Lewis, he enjoys using Twitter as an avenue to poll for opinions as he finds that most of his followers are local (personal communication, 17 October 2014). For example, he has used Twitter previously to run a quick poll on Iraqi air strikes, and to share his experience in Parliament when he debated and voted for Palestinian recognition. He said that he received many comments and responses to the speech he made, including to two photos of him on television.

Facebook, on the other hand, has the potential for constituents to access the MP with detailed discussions about their issues. Although cases are sent to them via Facebook and its messaging facilities, MPs are still keen to direct constituents to email as it allows them to confirm that those who message are indeed constituent residents, as well as keep a record of the correspondence. MP Samuel Pollock states, "They do they use it like email which is a bit of a challenge, because... It's a public forum. We then usually direct them to email if it is an individual problem" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). Similarly, MP William Morgan is very active across his Facebook and Twitter accounts but shares that although he receives many messages regarding casework from constituents, he directs them to email instead (personal communication, 1 August 2015).

Through the use of these digital tools, accessibility extends to building an understanding between MP and constituents, and a personal relationship. MP Lewis is observed to be trying to do this as he shares his experiences and polls his followers for their views. Peter Kyle MP shares his life and experience as an MP with his constituents. He does that through a few methods, but has said that he prefers to use Facebook as it allows him to write long, expressive posts, similar to how one would on a blog (personal communication, 22 April 2016). An example of this would be Peter Kyle MP celebrating and sharing a reflection of his first year as an MP. This anniversary occurred on Friday 6 May 2016 (and would be the same for all MPs elected for the first time during the 2015 General Election). I happened to be shadowing him that day. His office manager Jon had prepared a cake and a large silver "1" balloon to celebrate his achievement, an event that was tweeted and shared online on both Jon's and MP Kyle's accounts.

Later in the weekend (on Sunday 8 May 2016) MP Kyle published a long Facebook post titled, "1 Year As Your MP!" This was also available on his website (www.peterkyle.co.uk). The article is approximately 1,200 words long, accompanied with a photo of MP Kyle speaking in the House of Commons. He tries to encapsulate his experience in this heartfelt piece that describes how he adjusted to life in Parliament while retaining his pre-parliamentary beliefs to remain the same person his constituents voted for. Accessibility is addressed right at the beginning of the article, in the second line of the opening paragraph ("I meant that I would do my best to be accessible"), highlighting its importance to him, and more importantly, to his constituents. Describing his experiences and emotions, both positive and negative, he acknowledges in detail the difficulties he has had, such as his first time speaking in the chamber. He also brings up the stereotypes and concerns people have about him disappearing up to London and turning "into one of them", once again referring to the distance between the Commons and the constituency, as well as the possibility of becoming out of touch with his constituents.

By sharing intimate experiences and demonstrating vulnerability, MP Kyle not only allows access into more personal territory, but presents himself as someone who goes through similar experiences and feelings to any ordinary person. The post received 213 'likes', eight 'loves', three 'wows', one 'flower' and one 'angry' reaction, 16 shares and 71 comments. The majority of these comments were positive, with constituents thanking MP Kyle for his hard work, and for providing an insight into his life as an MP, something they would ordinarily not have access to. Constituent Michael Armstrong wrote, "A fascinating insight and a great read – thanks for sharing and keep up the great work." In another comment, Marina Edwards acknowledged the gap between the constituent and Parliament, stating that MP Kyle's approach allowed her greater understanding of his views and, more importantly, how he carried out his job representing his constituents: "Thanks Peter. That was a really interesting account. I think you've been doing a great job throughout your first year. You are definitely one of the most dedicated, conscientious and hardworking MP's. I like that whenever an issue is contentious, you explain your views about it here, so that even if we, your

constituents, might not always agree with you, we can understand how you've reached your conclusion and have a better understanding of the parliamentary process. Keep up the good work." Jordan Russell's comment demonstrated appreciation of MP Kyle's openness, "What a great update. Congratulations on your first year, from everything I see you are doing a great job. So refreshing to see an MP being so open!" These responses demonstrate a direct response to MP Peter Kyle's performance of accessibility. Although it cannot be determined how the rest of his constituents feel, or if they think he has become "one of them", the use of Facebook in this way enables him to be accessible. Reaching constituents and providing access to his experience as an MP elicited responses recognising these very features. There were also a number of neutral and negative comments made, but it must be pointed out that they were not in response to the post itself, but were attacking MP Kyle for alleged party disloyalty[7]. Despite the negative comments received, the post achieved the goal of allowing his constituents access into a lifestyle that is not often revealed, while also giving them the opportunity for access to him personally. Constituents were able to react, speak, question and, in some cases, even insult.

In this section I have demonstrated how MPs augment their accessibility through traditional means such as flyers and contact cards, where a plethora of contact information can be found, with some, such as MP Andrew Smith, using the contact card itself as a point of access. I have shown how MPs are drawing on digital tools, particularly email, as an integral component of expanding their accessibility, having replaced written letters. Furthermore, social media is not only used by MPs to share information on where they can be reached physically (one-way communication), but is increasingly used by constituents to

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[7] This post was put up when MP Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party was questioned. An article in the Daily Mail (Brendan Carlin, 14 May 2016, "Moderate Labour MP in storm after blasting Corbyn as a 'losing leader' and calling for focus on winning elections" http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3590949/Moderate-Labour-MP-storm-blasting-Corbyn-losing-leader-calling-focus-winning-elections.html#ixzz4PjKo9yUQ) quoted MP Peter Kyle out of context, resulting in a number of unhappy remarks about his character and lack of leadership support. He took the opportunity to thank them for their comment, before responding politely.

communicate problems to the MP, resulting in two-way communication. I have also found that extending accessibility is not simply an exercise in increasing the number of outlets the MP can be reached through, but encourages a continuation of access beyond the initial meeting, which MPs prefer to take place face-to-face. The following section will discuss how MPs prioritise accessibility and its different components.

4.4 The Prioritisation of Accessibility

Through my observations, interviews and the discussions above, I have demonstrated that MPs clearly make an effort to enact the discursive formation of accessibility within their constituency service by being accessible to their constituents, and letting their constituents know where and how they can access them. In this sense, MPs are informing and reminding their constituents that they are there for them, if the constituents so require. This interaction has to be sustained during their tenure as MP in order to establish a meaningful relationship formed through shared and credible interactions. These are carried out in the context of their constituency needs, but also within the House of Commons. MPs recognise their role as being provided by their constituents, a representational role that has been externally allocated (Norton, 1997: 17), and that has continued to develop in the last 50 years. To put current MPs' workloads in context, MPs in the 1950s were not expected to live in the constituency, and carried out what one might refer to as a purely representative role – that is, one in Westminster. MP Desmond Hill, representing a West London constituency, affirmed this change, sharing a story of his colleague: "A Labour MP who won their seat unexpectedly in 1997 was handed over the entire casework file which was just 12 typed letters, typed by the MP himself, on a typewriter. And that was less than 20 years ago, and that same MP tells me that within his first term he had 10,000 cases, so you can see that difference in approach" (personal communication, 27 January 2015). Not only do MPs have to be accessible representatives, but they have to be available to listen, help and provide assistance. As Searing found in one of his interviews, "The aim is to be available always: 'I'm always available on the phone, at home, to my constituents. I personally don't believe in Members of Parliament being ex-directory… It may be

inconvenient at times to be too readily available, but I think this is one of the prices of the job'" (Searing, 1994: 127). Through my observations and interviews, I found all the MPs to hold the view that being within reach was a key component of their constituency role, and they strove to balance this with their responsibilities.

As I demonstrated, MPs have acknowledged accessibility as a cornerstone of their constituency service. As William Morgan MP mentioned earlier in this chapter, him making himself available allows people to vent their frustrations to him, which he thinks is just as important as helping them with their problems (personal communication, 29 July 2015). And yet, being accessible, as I will demonstrate in the following section, is a discursive formation that is not always perceivable. Henry Green MP, who has represented a West London constituency since 2005, states, "[Accessibility] *is* very important, there is a whole other area where that is very important, which is being seen to be in the community. Being seen to be standing up for the local community about larger planning issues, about transport issues, about education issues, it is very important" (personal communication, 7 July 2015).

However, I found that among the 18 MPs in my study, there were variations between experienced and recently elected MPs (in 2015). For instance, recently elected representatives such as Jacob Marshall MP, William Morgan MP, Peter Kyle MP and Barnaby Wright MP strove to not only be physically accessible, but also to ensure their accessibility was made known. On the other hand, experienced MPs such as Andrew Smith MP and Desmond Hill MP concentrated their efforts on being physically accessible. One possible reason for this could be the need for newly elected MPs to make themselves known amongst the community as well as to be available, whereas experienced MPs choose to focus on supporting constituents and their problems instead.

Some MPs, in particular two experienced Labour representatives, did not find accessibility particularly important. Rather, it was withholding the expectation that one had to be accessible that drove their decisions to maintain a minimal

level of accessibility. Marie Moore, a Labour MP who has represented a constituency in northeast England since 2010, felt that surgeries were important but were “a pain” to carry out. She explained that they take up too much time, and ultimately felt that many of the cases could be solved without her help. Having been a constituency office manager for her predecessor before becoming an MP herself, she explained that it was never easy to satisfy constituents when they came to her for help. She finds this to still be true. When probed further about why she still held surgeries, she stated bluntly that she “would be slated otherwise” (personal communication, 19 November 2014). MP Woodward shared a similar point of view. He held a weekly surgery where constituents were able to come and see him should they wish, but felt these face-to-face interactions were viewed as more important than they actually were (personal communication, 1 July 2015). Furthermore, with approximately 110,000 constituents in his constituency, he explained that there was limited opportunity for face-to-face interaction.

With both MPs, their negative impression of maintaining these interactions and accessibility was made apparent. Both of them reacted to the questions in a brusque manner and maintained controlled expressions, further reinforcing what was said, and how they felt about the need for surgeries and face-to-face meetings. This clearly reveals a mutual relationship of conditional influence between events (in this case surgeries) and their contexts (to be accessible) (Van Dijk, 2016: 4). The need to carry out surgeries is not just a product of being accessible, but is a key tool to enact the accessibility discursive formation.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the question of how MPs are carrying out their constituency service process by identifying and shedding light on the discursive formation accessibility. I have demonstrated that accessibility is part of the MPs’ everyday performativity as they seek to establish and sustain a meaningful relationship formed through shared and credible interactions. Through my observations, interviews and the discussions above, I have shown that MPs clearly make an effort to be as accessible as possible, while balancing this with

their other responsibilities. I have demonstrated how MPs produce a body of knowledge to ceaselessly allow constituents access, how objects such as flyers, posters and e-newsletters are produced, and how roles such as the caseworker arise. Through these efforts, MPs seek to portray and emphasise the idea "I am always available." I have shown that physical accessibility – such as providing face-to-face meetings like advice surgeries – is carried out by every MP in my sample. Being physically present forms the very foundation of the representative relationship, as it facilitates the legitimisation process and production of authenticity (Mast, 2016: 266).

MPs use advice surgeries to help constituents with problems pertaining to immigration, education and health. I discussed two main traits in the ways MPs establish physical accessibility – *management* and *amplification*. Distance is recognised as a deciding factor, with MPs striving beyond regularly held surgeries and meetings in an effort to overcome detachment by amplifying physical accessibility through convenience. Peter Kyle MP chose to use a shop front on the high street in Hove as his constituency office to "put" himself closer to the constituents, whereas former Wells representative Tessa Munt chose to hold more advice surgeries as her constituency was rural, large in size, had poor transportation links and patchy mobile and broadband signal. Making time to meet constituents face-to-face not only requires commitment, but management of time, resources and priorities.

I also found that MPs augment their accessibility through a combination of traditional and digital tools, to make constituents aware of these options and further establish their relationship. These efforts not only enhance awareness of the MP's accessibility, but also contribute to accessibility as outlets of communication themselves. I showed how the use of these additional resources encourages further interaction beyond the initial meeting, indicating that MPs demonstrate an array of communication choices to denote a sense of 24/7 accessibility. This continuation of interaction can be implemented four ways: offline to offline, offline to online, online to offline, and online to online. These

communication choices encourage interaction and the constituent is able to access the MP through a method that suits them.

Finally, I showed that although I found all the MPs to hold the view that being within reach was a key component of their constituency role, and that they strove to balance this with their responsibilities, variations across experienced and recently elected MPs (in 2015) can be found. Recently elected MPs were keen to be known to be accessible, both physically and through other traditional and digital tools of communication. However, experienced MPs preferred to focus on physical accessibility, suggesting that recently elected MPs had to publicise their accessibility in order to establish a relationship with the constituents.

As I have alluded to in this chapter, MPs have to balance a variety of responsibilities in their performance as an MP on standby. This tension between Westminster, their constituency and the management of resources can often mean that they are not always able to do everything or be everywhere in the constituency. This can mean that constituents may not be aware of what their MPs are doing. As I have pointed out, trust in British MPs is low. In the next chapter I discuss how MPs seek to make visible what is unseen through the discursive formation of visibility.

5 To See and Be Seen: Being Visible

5.1 Introduction

The goal of a Member's performance, as they communicate and interact with their constituents, is to create an emotional and persuasive connection between actor and text, resulting in conditions to project cultural meaning from performance to audience (Alexander, 2011: 53). Chapter 4 has uncovered that MPs draw on the discursive formation of accessibility to engage with their constituents, establishing a relationship between actor and audience. For this performance to take place also requires presence. However, in our large modern societies, there can be substantial distance between actor and audience – in this case between Westminster and the constituency. This distance can often impair what symbolic actions constituents see (or don't see) their representatives performing, further fragmenting the performance's authenticity. Since it is unfeasible for MPs to be seen by more than a small percentage of their constituents at any given time, how do MPs ensure that what they do is being seen? What tools do they utilise in order to be seen, or to appear to be everywhere? This chapter seeks to build on Chapter 4 by posing the question of how MPs strive to seek re-fusion and authenticity in the constituency service by performing the discursive formation of visibility. I define visibility as *being seen or perceived to be seen by constituents, while within the constituency*. Unlike accessibility, it is a mono-directional form of communication that focuses on the dissemination of information.

Visibility is the cornerstone of an effective constituency strategy (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987: 27). Unless an MP served as the prime minister, or held a position in the cabinet, the possibility of being well known by their constituents is low. For constituents to be aware of who MPs are and what they do, being visible is indispensable. Holding office for a long time in the same constituency might build a reputation, based on the accumulation of past activities and publicity efforts, resulting in heightened visibility (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987: 31). In order to be visible, one has to been seen. As I have expressed earlier in the dissertation, successful performances have become increasingly difficult to

deliver as societies become more complex and segregated, making it clear that being visible to their constituency population requires effort by the MP beyond striving to see as many constituents as possible. In this chapter I show how MPs construct their performance by putting on show what they do to represent the constituency as part of their portrayal of being on standby. I reveal how the discursive formation of visibility comprises the production of knowledge (specifically updates on when and what MPs are doing for and around the constituency); roles such as MP, office or communication manager (in charge of updating websites, digital tools and MP schedules); objects such as newsletters, e-newsletters, Facebook posts and Twitter tweets; and abiding by rules such as consistent updates in a "drip feed" (Flynn, 2012: 141).

On the surface it might seem that there is not a clearly defined distinction between the discursive formations of accessibility and visibility. Similar to accessibility, being visible can take place through physical presence or through the utilisation of traditional and digital communication tools. Its components are not mutually exclusive, as how an MP enables accessibility (such as arranging and tweeting about an upcoming advice surgery) may also promote their visibility. As the discussion on visibility continues in this chapter, an overlap that occurs in the tools MPs use to enact these discursive formations will be demonstrated. However, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, the mono-directional characteristic of visibility means that this might not always result in increasing accessibility. In this sense, it must be made clear that the performance of increased visibility may not lead to accessibility.

Physical presence occurs when the MP and constituent are in the same place or able to see each other. To understand this, I argue that it is necessary to analytically perceive the ways MPs seek to articulate and sustain the discursive formation of visibility, and their rationale behind doing so. I also demonstrate and interpret everyday constituency interactions, allowing the significance of being seen to emerge through visibility routines carried out by the MP. Through details of my observations and interviews, I show how MPs go to great lengths in order to make the invisible visible. With the ubiquity of digital tools such as the

internet, email and social media platforms in everyday lives, being seen in person is no longer the only way constituents are able to know what MPs are doing, in or out of the constituency. I discuss how MPs integrate the use of these tools with traditional means to provide a structure, or symbolic scaffolding, as MPs seek to portray authenticity and re-fuse their constituency performances. Through the range of my detailed observations and interviews, my findings suggest that MPs convey the visibility discursive formation to *prompt* constituents about their efforts and presence, while simultaneously *accentuating consistency* throughout their social performance of being on standby. Additionally, although evidence suggests that while all MPs agree on the importance of visibility and do seek to be seen, the use of digital tools to augment accessibility is still met with trepidation. I analyse how and why MPs choose between traditional media and digital tools or some combination of both, arguing that the choice of how visible they want to be is not necessarily a binary decision, but one that occurs along a continuum.

I begin with examining the visibility discursive formation by analysing what the MPs can be seen to be doing, and how the MPs are making known what they are doing. I show how this can be observed in two ways – physically, where I analyse the significance of face-to-face visibility and the MP's constituency routine, and augmented visibility, facilitated by use of traditional and digital tools. Finally, I also analyse variances across the ways MPs choose to manage their image and portray visibility. This extends and develops the dissertation's argument of MPs on standby, establishing centrality of visibility as a component of the framework MPs portray as they seek to re-fuse their performances and be perceived as authentic by their constituents.

5.2 Physical Visibility

Visibility means what can be seen and perceived by one's sense of sight. Within the context of everyday lives, it is linked to being physically present and the use of our physical capabilities. This strand of visibility is situated where those people who are visible to us within our field of vision (*sans* the use of technical devices such as binoculars) share the same spatial-temporal locale (Thompson, 2005: 35). In theory visibility should also be reciprocal, where those we are able to see

should be able to see us. Thompson terms this "the situated visibility of co-presence" (2005: 35). Physical visibility in the constituency refers to MPs carrying out constituency activities, visits with local schools and businesses, media appearances, casework surgeries and other appropriate affairs which require them to be physically situated in the constituency.

Prior to the 1960s, visibility in the constituency was not a prime concern for Members as they focused on parliamentary life and duties in the Commons. With limited budgets for travelling and hiring of staff, it was not unusual for Members to have little contact with their constituents, and casework was not a priority (Norton and Wood, 1990: 197). As the emphasis on constituency work grew, MPs became increasingly visible in their constituencies as they spent more time locally. Increased budgets in the Commons also meant that MPs were in a position to travel to and from their constituencies more often, as well as hire a few members of staff to manage the growing constituency work (Ibid). As MP James Williamson shared in Chapter 4, as a neophyte he managed constituency casework and letters on his own, but the increase in cases required him to delegate some constituency-related tasks to members of his staff (personal communication, 7 January 2016). Despite the increase in casework and need to balance their workload with responsibilities in the Commons, all 18 of the MPs in my fieldwork indicated that they were of the view that it was necessary to make time for face-to-face interactions. In the following section I trace how an MP's physical visibility in the constituency is driven by two attributes: a need *to be seen* and the *demonstration of interest*.

Evidence in my data indicates that being seen in the constituency is indispensable – a non-negotiable. MPs emphasise the importance of presence, which not only minimises the distance between the actor-representative and the audience-constituents, but establishes the MP's position in the constituency as the constituents' representative. This then contributes to their performances being regarded as authentic and credible. After all, a lack of visibility means that Members are unable to have independent standing in the electorate's collective mind (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987: 27). The more MPs engaged in

constituency work, the more they were able to build a reputation within the constituency to create a reserve they could draw on when they were looking to be reelected. Previously carried out activities and publicity could accumulate and result in currently higher visibility (Cain, Ferejohn and Moirina, 1987: 30). These economic metaphors, "reserve" and "accumulate", suggest that visibility is akin to an item of value that can be exchanged for something else. As I demonstrate in the following paragraphs, visibility of the constituency service is significant to the MP on standby because it intensifies the symbolic connection between the MP-actor and constituent-audience in their pursuit of performance re-fusion.

The Importance of Being Seen

That time is a finite resource in an MP's arsenal is evident. Managing a variety of responsibilities is typically overwhelming enough, but MPs still insist on making time for face-to-face meetings. Preceding the development of print and digital media, the visibility of political rulers largely required their physical appearance before others in the contexts of co-presence (Thompson, 2005: 36). Their interactions were primarily carried out between political leaders and a group of political elites. From the constituent's viewpoint, occasions where they were able to be co-present with political leaders happened infrequently. Rare public event occasions when leaders appeared before a wider audience were usually full of ceremonial splendor, with the leaders still maintaining distance from their audience while being in a context of co-presence (Thompson, 2005: 36). I find that the awareness of distance between MPs and their constituents is a paramount concern regarding visibility. Physically, the distance between the constituency and Westminster gives rise to the risk of constituents de-personalising the Member (as they are not in the context of co-presence), and not considering the MP as part of the local community. MPs indicate a common understanding across different political orientations that the risk of distance affecting their perspective is very real, and of the value of emphasising their visibility. In a conversation with newly elected MP Jacob Marshall, from Cornwall, he referred to face-to-face interaction as "the currency of the job" (personal communication, 4 May 2016). Note his use of "currency" as a metaphor to describe the value of face-to-face interaction, and how it is used in exchange

for a better understanding of what is going on in the constituency. "It is the only way you can really feel, or can really keep in touch with your patch. There is a real danger in London that you feel removed… You just understand what matters to people". Similarly, Conservative MP James Williamson, a Member since 1997, elucidated his experience on this matter: "Some people have a very old-fashioned idea of what MPs do. So oddly enough, they have expectations of the MP that in terms of the MP's aloofness, or his style of life, or what he does here (House of Commons), that are a million miles from reality. A lot of people think that MPs don't come to their constituencies very often… I keep on finding this rather extraordinary! They are a little surprised when they discover how much time I am spending in the constituency, along with the volume of correspondence even if they are contributing to it… I realise that with the internet" (personal communication, 7 January 2015). MP Williamson was emphatic and spoke in a firm and concise manner as he described the importance of an MP's visibility. He acknowledged that the view of MPs that prevails is one where they are de-personalised and detached due to the distance between Westminster and the constituency, but asserted that this is untrue. Similarly, Labour MP Samuel Pollock explains, "It is very, very important that people can see you face-to-face. They can speak to you, look at you in the eye. If you're just an electronic presence, that's not good enough… Different people do different things. It is that curiosity, that sharing of information, and making sure you're visible" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). Situating the importance of face-to-face interactions within the context of the internet, it is suggested that the value of face-to-face interactions and being physically present simply cannot be replaced by the use of digital tools. Thus, MPs seek to challenge their constituents' existing notions through regular face-to-face contact, as much as their schedules allow. I also demonstrate further in this section that ensuring and maintaining a "sustained contact" through routine visibility is key to MPs successfully establishing a reputation in the constituency. This is the rule that shapes the construction of visibility as a discursive formation.

These face-to-face interactions are distinguished within the two contexts of formal and informal physical settings. The constituency activities MP Grove

partakes in have a varying number of audiences. During formal interactions such as the advice surgery the MP engages with a select number of constituents with problems, whereas something informal such as a literary festival will involve meeting and being seen by a larger group of constituents. The mix of interactions implies that he is able to encounter different sections of his constituency, broadening his visibility not only to a greater number of people, but also constituents across diverse demographics. MP Grove also demonstrated belief in the part that he is playing while interacting within his constituency. He draws the legitimacy of his position as a representative from Westminster, an association that also arms him with the power he requires to carry out his duties (Fenno, 1978). During my opportunities to shadow MPs in their constituencies, mentions of Westminster and the Commons would continually manifest. I discuss this performative power in chapter 7, where the management of power relations by MPs will be examined in detail.

Maintenance of their image is also an aspect that MPs are concerned with as they ensure their visibility. To be seen in the way they would like to be requires some form of management. Twice during that particular snippet (which took place over a few minutes' conversation) MP Grove describes being "always 'on'" and being aware that he is in "'Member of Parliament' mode," explicitly revealing that he is deeply aware of how he is projecting himself as he interacts with his constituents. Here we can draw from Goffman (1959)'s presentation of self to better understand what being 'on' and having a mode means. Being 'on' a mode is akin to being frontstage, where one is carrying out the MP performance. On the other hand, being 'off' meant that they were backstage, and no longer performing. Politicians, as actors in a performance, speak to, interact with, and act before their audiences in order to draw legitimacy and support from. This allows them to develop a political relationship (Fenno, 1978: 54). This is especially key for MPs who rely on visibility to inform their constituents on what they do. Conservative MP James Williamson describes face-to-face contact as crucial, especially with the growth of the internet and its tools: "Oh I think it is very important – I realise it with the internet. Things may have changed, but I think ultimately, face-to-face contact with constituents is very important. And

MPs will have different approaches as to how they, in a sense publicise their own activities… With 18 years of being an MP, it is quite plain to me that maintaining a reputation for providing a service is intimately dependent on sustained contact with people. And if you do it for long enough, then people will probably see" (personal communication, 7 Jan 2016). MP Williamson demonstrates a preference, recognising the different performances one might experience while being 'on' in the co-presence of constituents, and being 'on' all the time online, which he does not believe is particularly useful. I delve deeper into this later in the chapter.

The importance of being seen is also observed across varying workloads. My local MP Justine Greening, whom at the time I spoke to her was Secretary of State for International Development, explained that being visible was a challenge due to the demands of her ministerial position. Travels abroad were frequent and she tried to be around for her constituents as much as she could. Unable to always see her constituents face-to-face it was important that her constituents were kept aware of what she was up to as, she said, "[MPs' service] stops being useful when it is not about the people and becomes about themselves" (personal communication, 24 October 2014). What emerges from this conversation is an acknowledgment that being able to spend time physically in the constituency matters, but that there is also a need for the work she does to be seen, even if she is not physically present. MP Samuel Pollock shared a similar sentiment: "I think face-to-face is really important. You know, if I go to the constituency… And I spend all my time in meetings and not being out there in some way, that's not a good use of time" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). As time is a finite resource, MPs have to decide what they want to do with it, and what they hope to procure in exchange for time spent. Although MP Greening and MP Pollock have different parliamentary responsibilities and workloads, when it comes to constituency work, enhancing their visibility while being out and about is a common and clear priority. More specifically, MP Pollock explicitly emphasises the value of being out in the constituency and that he sees this as a "good use of [his] time" (personal communication, 30 June 2015).

MPs also suggest that being visible not only informs constituents about their presence, but also projects a sense of interest in constituents' lives. This lends a sense of credibility to their desire to represent the local area and its people. MP James Williamson remarks, "In one sense you could argue, that role is done by presence, more than anything else. Clearly, the presence of a local MP, at charitable fundraising events, opening of fetes in the summer, a whole range of charitable and voluntary activities, is plainly valued! … They may want the Member of Parliament to take an interest in their lives, and in the lives of the local communities, and to show that, by being there, even if by being there he isn't performing any specific function" (personal communication, 7 January 2015). Similarly, MP Henry Green says, "There is a whole other area where that is very important, which is being seen to be in the community… Being seen to stand up and campaign for constituents on issues is sometimes what the local council won't do… You're seen as one of the faces of local civic society. So it's quite important for people to see that you know, as much as you want them to take an interest in you at voting time, you should be taking interest in them throughout the whole five years. And being seen at these things builds up a credibility that you're interested, that you understand the issues, that you're embedded in the local community" (personal communication, 7 July 2015). Here it can observed that being physically visible not only prompts constituents to realise that the MP is around the local area carrying out their duties, but further establishes and naturalises the social relationship between actor and constituent as part of the local community. In this sense, the physical distance between Westminster and the constituency will no longer impede the constituent's awareness of the MP's presence.

Furthermore, although not the main aim of being visible, a convenient advantage of making efforts to be visible is that it also results in greater understanding of the constituency and its problems. Conservative MP William Morgan, who represents a constituency in Greater London, opines that seeing his constituents face-to-face is of crucial importance, and is what makes an MP effective. As he carries out activities within his constituency on behalf of his party, such as door knocking and campaigning, MP Morgan considers these prime moments to pick

up more casework and unearth local issues. By not being out and about, one was not only putting oneself at a disadvantage by not being seen, but "if you didn't do it, you wouldn't know what's happening just by sitting in one organisation. You might not hear about something on the street, in the far corners of the constituency" (personal communication, 29 July 2015). Similarly, MP Niles Perry, representing a constituency in Yorkshire, says, "[It] happens all the time, on the streets, in the coffee shops, when I'm doing my shopping. I always pick up cases. It was last week that I only walked from the sandwich shop to my office and I picked up three new bits of casework along the way. People stop you and go, 'Can you do this, can you that?'" (personal communication, 30 October 2014). Not only does being out and about enable the MP to be seen, but also to observe what is occurring in the constituency. As with my argument on MPs being on standby, being out and about not only serves as a visibility instrument, but also builds on the MP's knowledge of the constituency. This may seem passive, but monitoring the constituency allows MPs to be prepared, react and repair their performance. In the next chapter I discuss how problems and disruptions may erupt, and analyse how MPs repair them.

While meeting these constituents in person nurtures the personal relationship between the MP and those they meet, it is not visible to everyone in the constituency. How else can an MP employ the visibility discursive formation? MPs draw attention to these activities in a number of ways. Four out of the 10 MPs I shadowed would hold a number of their surgeries in public places that were not only accessible, but also allowed them to be seen by their constituents. Conservative MP Christopher Lewis says that he conducts supermarket surgeries regularly, as it gives a face to the name for his constituents. He explains that, "It shows [constituents] that you really care, even if no one comes, it is important to continue doing so" (personal communication, 17 October 2014). Interacting with constituents who need help, or want to speak to the MP is not the only objective when holding a surgery in a public place – being seen by their constituents is equally critical. For MPs to be viewed by constituents putting in the time to show up in a public place demonstrates sincerity, and can be considered a form of self-presentation. Former Wells MP Tessa Munt held most of her surgeries in cafes or

pubs within wards of her constituency. Posters advertising these surgeries were prominently displayed in the windows or doors of these cafes. Prior arrangements were made with the establishments ahead of time, so that the staff would know when to expect her. MP Munt often used the same tables to meet her constituents, with the café or pub usually reserving them for her. As she carried these meetings out, those who were not there to meet her were able to see and watch her in action. When she was not holding her surgeries, the posters advertising her advice surgeries could be seen by customers going in and out of the stores. It can be observed that holding her surgery and having her poster in a public place where there was plenty of human traffic, contributed to enhancing her visibility. In a similar fashion, MP Peter Kyle's decision to have his constituency office on the high street was not merely made to be more accessible, but the office was also strategically positioned for maximum visibility. He explained that there was a bus stop directly in front of his office that served as a main transport artery along the town centre. There were buses coming and going frequently, approximately every minute or two. As people got off the bus, or looked out the window, they were able to catch sight of him or his staff "doing things", "communicating, and talking and discussing and helping people" (personal communication, 25 November 2015). Apart from wanting to be easy to find, MP Kyle acknowledged that he would like his constituents to see him (and his staff) as they carried out their everyday duties. These seemingly simple decisions were not taken lightly, and express the MPs' explicit desire to put their work *in plain sight*.

In this section I have demonstrated the importance of physical visibility to MPs. What occurs as they make themselves visible can be deciphered utilising Goffman's (1959) concept of the presentation of self – that is, the MPs are positioning themselves in the direct presence of others as they make a presentation of themselves to their audience, in this case, their constituents. As Members make choices about what they do and say around their constituencies they can, to a degree, control how they present themselves, and subsequently the image their constituents have of them (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987: 31). I have showed how face-to-face interaction not only serves to establish their

presence in the constituency, but also projects a sense of interest into the lives of constituents, further establishing the social relationship between MP and constituent. I have also revealed how knowledge of the constituency can be gained, preparing MPs on standby to react if necessary. Finally, I also show how MPs draw attention to their constituency activities by making visible what they do in plain sight. In the following section, I show how these components of physical visibility are crucial to the MP's representative routine and what a typical week is like for them.

Routine Visibility

Life as an MP requires a full time commitment and is often unpredictable. Unlike MPs of the past who might have held other positions alongside their responsibilities as a Member, contemporary MPs have had their role considered to be a full time position since the 1970s. Although MPs have distinctly different routines when they are in Parliament and when they are in their constituencies, it is a priority for MPs to keep constituents aware of what they are doing for the constituency, even if it is a "Westminster day". As I show in this section, MPs perform and accentuate the discursive formation of visibility consistently through delegating resources to the constituency office. I also reveal how MPs sustain their visibility in the constituency by spending at least three to four days in the constituency every week. I analyse the outline of these routine schedules, describing what each day in the constituency is like.

Much of the action in an MP's life takes place in the House of Commons. It is where parliamentary debates in the Chamber, policy discussions and party meetings take place. While these issues may impact constituencies and constituents, they are usually discussed on a national level. Members are assigned their office in the Commons, with several newly elected MPs sometimes having to share one larger office due to a lack of space. Often they hire a number of staff members to help manage their workload. How they choose to allocate their resources, whether directing them to Westminster or in the constituency is entirely their prerogative. The number of staff members they would like to hire, or where to place them, differs from MP to MP. Having staff is increasingly

necessary for MPs to manage their mounting workload. For instance, Andrew Smith MP of Oxford East does not have any staff in Westminster. When I arrived at Portcullis House for my appointment to interview MP Smith (1 July 2015), I was surprised to see that he had arrived to pick me up from the reception himself. This was unlike the other interviews I had, where I was usually met with an office manager or caseworker first, before being sent to the MP's office. At the beginning of the interview MP Smith explained that he makes taking up individual constituents' concerns a priority, which is why "I have no staff here. All my staff are in the constituency" (personal communication, 1 July 2015). MP Samuel Pollock shared a similar idea on resource allocation, "The staffing allowance for MPs allows us to employ about four people. So I have three people in the constituency, and one here in Parliament. So most of my staffing allowance is people working in the constituency, not people working here in Parliament" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). There is an increasing emphasis on not only spending time on constituency service and being in the constituency, but also allocating a larger proportion of resources to constituency service.

The marked increase in MPs spending time in the constituency is not a revelation. As discussed earlier, it was previously common for MPs to visit their constituencies annually, with the focus of their efforts placed on Parliament (Radice et al, 1987: 102). However, this is no longer the case. Members are keen to spend at least a third of their week in their constituencies, with many of them maintaining a residence within the constituency itself. To function effectively in Westminster, serve their party and country usefully, Members need to be well aware of what goes on within their constituency. As I pointed out earlier, being visible serves not only to show constituents that the representatives are present, but is also an opportunity to inspect and monitor the constituency. "They act as two-way channels of information, to the government, and the party policymakers on what the nation thinks and will tolerate, and to the electorate on how government and party policies are to be understood and justified" (Radice et al, 1987: 103–04). In fact, it is through this sense of understanding of what is on the ground, empowered by the knowledge of their constituents' opinions shared

through personal meetings, correspondence or interactions on various platforms, that Members will be able to make a powerful impact on policy changes.

Thus it is clear that ensuring a routine visit back to the constituency every week is important to MPs. As we have discovered through the enactment of discursive formations in the previous chapter, being accessible and visible in the constituency forges a strong foundation in the MP-constituent interaction. Routine is culturally embedded, appearing naturalised, and with that comes a sense that nothing else could happen (Coleman, 2013: 57). The portrayal of legitimacy and authenticity in the MP's performance requires constituents to know that their MP has a reasonably sound understanding of local issues and concerns. Therefore, being seen and noticed is significant for MPs representing constituencies far from London. They cannot afford to be noted "as absentee MPs always in London", a point raised by many of the MPs I had spoken to, including MPs Jacob Marshall and Peter Kyle (Radice et al, 1987: 102–03). Maintaining routine visits to the constituency is therefore part of their weekly schedule.

Most MPs spend a good part of their week in the constituency, usually from Thursday nights to Sundays (or even Monday morning). That's approximately 50 per cent of their time in a week spent locally, with the other half of their time spent in the Commons. It has become increasingly common for MPs to maintain a local residence in their constituency. As we observed in snippets of interviews with the MPs above, the constituency activities include weekly engagaments around the constituency, carrying out of advice surgeries and walkabouts around various wards. Over the course of my fieldwork I interviewed and shadowed MPs who represented constituencies with varying distances from Westminster. For example, Liberal Democrat MP Tessa Munt, who represented the constituency of Wells, had to commute a distance of 130 miles from London. Much like the other MPs who commute over long distances, she would drive down from London on Thursday night, driving back to London on Sunday night or Monday morning. These included MPs who represented areas in London. The distance has little effect on how MPs divide their days between parliamentary and constituency work. As the following examples will demonstrate, regardless of the commute,

MPs spend approximately half the week in their constituency or on constituency-related events, and the other half on parliamentary responsibilities.

MP Christopher Lewis provides an elaborate description of his schedule in the constituency, explaining that the commute between his constituency in North West England and London is a distance of approximately 250 miles. The journey can take him up to five hours by car or train depending on traffic. He explains that Parliament begins at 2.30pm on Mondays, to allow MPs to travel across the UK. Mid-Mondays till Thursday evenings are spent in London, where he attends to a series of commitments. These include voting on policies, sitting in on Committee meetings discussing Statutory Instruments or a Bill, attending Prime Minister's Questions, leading or contributing to Westminster Hall and Chamber debates. Furthermore, increased responsibilities as a Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) mean that MP Lewis has other engagements and meetings that do not pertain directly to his constituency. Throughout the day there is also a need to regularly stay on top of correspondence, especially his emails. The use of a smartphone enables him to respond to urgent matters quickly between meetings. Apart from these, constituent correspondence is continuously read, researched and replied to, with him mailing several hundred letters a week on a wide range of concerns. Fridays and Saturdays are designated constituency days, and their schedules are very much alike. MP Lewis says unless a particularly important Private Members Bill needs to be supported on Friday, he is certain to be in the constituency. Unusually, MP Lewis has two constituency offices. Splitting his time between them, he also visits local schools, hospitals, businesses and community events. If time permits, he selects a part of the constituency he has not visited in a while to knock on doors and proactively engage residents. Twice a month, MP Lewis holds advice surgeries on Saturdays, where constituents can book a meeting slot to discuss a problem with him. He states that they are always oversubscribed. Constituents who are unable to secure a meeting, have pressing issues, or have difficulty attending these meetings in person, will be ensured an alternative time slot. Sundays are kept free, to allow himself some personal time. Yet it is often that there are community events he is expected to attend, such as a village fete or church services.

Labour MP Samuel Pollock, whose constituency is 140 miles away from Westminster, has a similar weekly routine. Spending Fridays and Saturdays in the constituency, carrying out local duties and interacting with the constituents. Advice surgeries are always held on the weekends, when people are less likely to be working. To be as available to the most constituents as possible, coffee mornings are held in residential estates or community centres, usually on a Friday or Saturday morning. As part of his routine, he regularly spends most Fridays during the academic year outside school gates at the end of the school day. Firstly, he will meet the Head Teacher to have an informal discussion about how things are going in school. This usually lasts for about 20 minutes. As students begin to drift out into the schoolyard, MP Pollock will start speaking with parents, asking if there are any concerns they would like to raise. Surgery cards with his full contact details (as discussed in Chapter 4) will be handed out. He ardently explains that this is not in any way a political exercise. Rather, "it is just 'Here I am as your local MP. Here are my surgery cards if you want to come and see me'" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). He considers this activity part of what he needs to do within the constituency to keep his ear to the ground.

No distinct differences in routines and schedules between MPs representing constituencies further or closer from Westminster can be detected. While MPs representing constituencies in or near London maintain residences in London, they share a similar schedule when spending time in their constituencies. Conservative MP Henry Green, who represents a constituency in suburban West London, spends all day Fridays and Saturdays, and Monday mornings in his constituency. He ensures that unless he has other parliamentary commitments, Fridays are always spent in the constituency. Unlike MPs Lewis and Pollock, MP Green does not have to travel a long distance to Westminster. Despite this, he maintains a similar routine within the constituency. This was also found to be the case for MPs William Morgan, George Watson, Desmond Hill, David Miller and James Williamson, who represent constituencies 25 miles or less away from Westminster. It is possible that the time spent travelling might not be considered

"lost" or "wasted" if that time is used to work, as an MP would do if they were living in or near London, or, in the case of MP Jacob Marshall, to sleep.

In this section I have demonstrated how MPs ensure regular visibility through weekly routine visits to the constituency, spending at least half their week there. There is no observable difference in routine schedules between MPs representing constituencies in London and those representing constituencies outside of London, suggesting that the time used to travel is still spent on similar work, such as emails. In the following section I discuss how MPs draw further attention to what they do on behalf of the constituency when not physically present with the constituent-audience.

5.3 Augmenting Visibility

It is also necessary for MPs to devise ways to continue performing the discursive formation that they are out and about beyond being seen in person. Work MPs carry out behind-the-scenes, or pertaining to a small group of constituents, is not often discussed or exposed. Constituency population sizes of the MPs I spoke to ranged approximately from 85,000 to 110,000, spread over geographical areas of varying sizes (Parliament UK, 2017). Realistically, it is unfeasible for MPs to physically meet all their constituents face-to-face. The MPs I was in contact with over the course of my fieldwork not only acknowledged this limitation on their visibility, but demonstrated strategies to make the invisible visible. New means of communication, the growth of the internet and proliferation of digital tools meant that Members were able to acquire a kind of visibility detached from their physical appearance before a group of people (Thompson, 2005: 36). This following section will show how MPs enhance the visibility discursive formation through accentuating the consistency of their focus on the constituency. This is achieved by drawing on a mix of traditional tools such as print media and, more recently, digital tools, such as personal websites and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Traditional Methods

Flyers, letters and monthly newsletters are also used in order to inform and share what they do, enabling MPs to forge a self-image that could also be conveyed to others in distant places (Thompson, 2005: 36). These are sent to voters who are on the registry, or posted to houses within the constituency. They are also distributed at surgeries, and other constituency meetings where appropriate. Below (Image 5.1) is an example of an annual newsletter former MP Tessa Munt published in 2014.

(Image 5.1: Magazine VIEW, Tessa Munt MP, 2014)

Several elements of the cover stand out. The title is in large type font, with many possible interpretations here of "view". Firstly, it is view in the present tense, of what MP Munt is doing now in the constituency. The subtitle "Part of the 'awkward squad'" refers to this current work. Secondly, the magazine provides a "re-view" with the use of the past tense ("Thousands helped"), demonstrating that she is using the magazine as an opportunity to update audiences on what she and others have been doing, with "More to do" implying a pre-view, a projection into the future. We can observe as past, present and future come

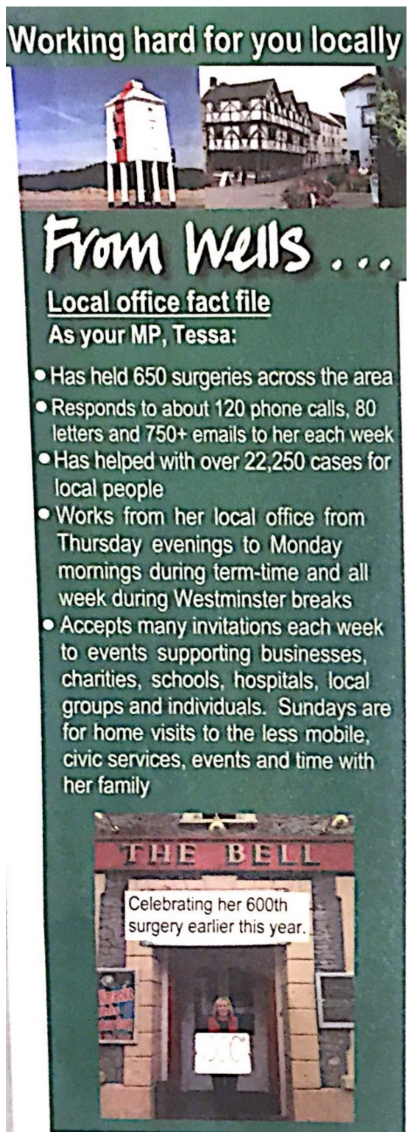
together for the visibility discursive formation to emerge, composed carefully through a multimodal text.

A closer study of the image used on the cover reveals a spatial representation of power relations. MP Munt features prominently on the cover, making her visible to the reader and drawing attention to the magazine. As Wells is a rural constituency with a large farming community, posing with a cow could indicate her understanding and interest in the dairy industry in the constituency. Furthermore, with her hand firmly on the cow's face, her body language visually indicates a steady grip on what is occurring locally. Specifically, MP Munt is looking up at the camera from a lower position, suggesting that she is not afraid of getting her hands dirty to achieve results for the constituency. The bottom left corner has the written text "Standing again" which suggests a vertical concept, something MP Munt does when she is "up", despite being "down" in this photo. The references to various directions suggest how she is able to accomplish and fulfill her responsibilities everywhere, whether it is "up" in Parliament or "down" in the constituency.

Her name is also on the cover twice, firstly just below the masthead and secondly on the main cover line, clearly identifying who she is, and her role as MP. Notice that the main title heading says "Tessa reports back". Here the use of her first name suggests a familiar relationship, as between friends. As discussed in Chapter 4, this is a notion that MP Munt has herself pointed out. She shared how her constituents were more likely to view her as a friend rather than as a politician. Additionally, the use of "report" implicitly demonstrates a sense of accountability to her constituents. The coverline that follows also has a similar tone. "After another busy year as your Member of Parliament" not only tells the readers how much work Tessa is doing, it also emphasises that she is doing all this work for them specifically through the use of "your". It is also made explicit that this magazine was not created at the expense of taxpayers, an issue that has become sensitive since the MPs' expenses scandal in 2009. Right at the bottom is a dark strip reminiscent of a ticker-tape, a re-mediation of what one would usually find on a news channel (Botler and Grusin, 1999).It highlights key

updates, drawing the reader's attention to look inside and finding out more about what MP Munt has done.

On pages 2 and 3, Tessa provides a summary of the work she has done. Firstly, she discusses what she has done locally, starting with the headline "From Wells…" (Image 5.2). The decision to do this is especially significant, because she is making clear that constituency work is her priority and focus. The left column is highlighted in green to draw the reader's attention. The list of facts begins with the number of surgeries she held in 2014, informing constituents that she has done 650 surgeries that year. It is also accompanied with a photo at the bottom, where she celebrated her 600th surgery that year. On page 3, on the right hand of the page is a continuation of the column titled "to Westminster" (Image 5.3), providing further information on what Tessa has accomplished within the Commons. In the middle of these two pages there is an elaboration of specific incidents and policies she has pursued on behalf of the constituency. These include "Revenge evictions by rogue landlords" and "Update: cancer treatment". These details are showcased not only to recognise Tessa's efforts and accessibility but also to bring them to the forefront. Published by her and her office, the news stories shared are positive in tone, and paint Tessa in a good light.

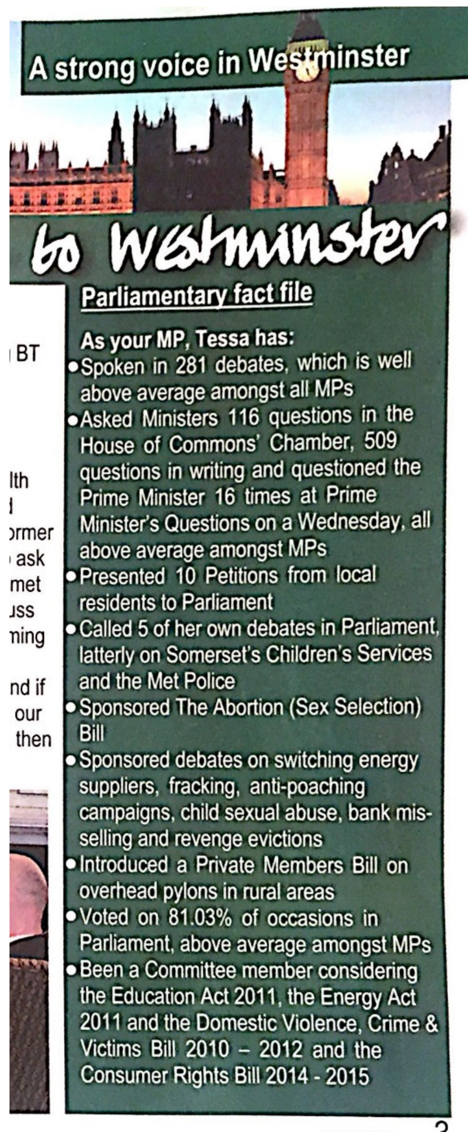

Working hard for you locally

From Wells ...

Local office fact file

As your MP, Tessa:

- Has held 650 surgeries across the area
- Responds to about 120 phone calls, 80 letters and 750+ emails to her each week
- Has helped with over 22,250 cases for local people
- Works from her local office from Thursday evenings to Monday mornings during term-time and all week during Westminster breaks
- Accepts many invitations each week to events supporting businesses, charities, schools, hospitals, local groups and individuals. Sundays are for home visits to the less mobile, civic services, events and time with her family


A strong voice in Westminster

to Westminster

Parliamentary fact file

As your MP, Tessa has:

- Spoken in 281 debates, which is well above average amongst all MPs
- Asked Ministers 116 questions in the House of Commons' Chamber, 509 questions in writing and questioned the Prime Minister 16 times at Prime Minister's Questions on a Wednesday, all above average amongst MPs
- Presented 10 Petitions from local residents to Parliament
- Called 5 of her own debates in Parliament, latterly on Somerset's Children's Services and the Met Police
- Sponsored The Abortion (Sex Selection) Bill
- Sponsored debates on switching energy suppliers, fracking, anti-poaching campaigns, child sexual abuse, bank mis-selling and revenge evictions
- Introduced a Private Members Bill on overhead pylons in rural areas
- Voted on 81.03% of occasions in Parliament, above average amongst MPs
- Been a Committee member considering the Education Act 2011, the Energy Act 2011 and the Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Bill 2010 – 2012 and the Consumer Rights Bill 2014 - 2015

VIEW MAGAZINE 3

(Image 5.2: Magazine VIEW, Page 2, Tessa Munt, 2014)

(Image 5.3: Magazine VIEW, Page 3, Tessa Munt, 2014)

Similarly, Conservative MP Christopher Lewis begins his four-page monthly newsletters with a cover story that draws attention to a local constituency event or issue that MP Lewis has participated in. The title, "[Constituency B] Matters", plays on the word "matters" by not only reporting on the goings on in the constituency, but reminding the audience that it matters, and is of importance to the MP. For example, October 2014's newsletter features a headline "HUGE INVESTMENT IN OUR LOCAL NHS" in bold white type, with a subheading describing how MP Lewis has "championed" protecting the local NHS in his constituency. Focusing on what is likely to be a valued update for his constituents on the front page, the words of "huge" and "championed" indicate MP Lewis' victory, as well as the hard work that must have been devoted to the cause.

Subsequent pages continue to report a mix of constituency and parliamentary news. Like MP Munt, MP Lewis begins with a local story, suggesting to constituents and readers that they are indeed first and foremost in MP Lewis's work representing the local constituency. He also draws attention to what he has achieved, not only making it visible, but spotlighting his capability in achieving it.

Another way that MPs are able to extend the visibility discursive formation is through news media. MPs can offer opinions, quotes or write articles to appear in local media, usually to discuss local matters. MP Williamson occasionally writes articles for his local newspaper. On one occasion while I was shadowing him and he was waiting for his constituents to arrive, he asked his party agent if the article he was asked to write for the local press had been published yet. He explained that he was asked to write a 900-word opinion piece on his Brexit stance three weeks prior, and had not seen it since. He looked annoyed as he looked through the local papers, a habit he had as he waited for the next appointment. "I'm a bit miffed. If you asked me for it, what happened to it?" (personal communication, 8 April 2016). His agent offered to check in with the newspaper on his behalf, and he appeared placated. Another example of MPs appearing in their local news to provide an opinion occurred during my meeting with Andrew Smith MP at his office in the House of Commons. At the end of my interview with him he was finishing a paragraph to be emailed to his local newspaper, and he requested that I wait for a few minutes while he sent it out so that he could walk me out. Apart from it being reported what he does in Westminster, he shared that he is regularly contacted by local media in Oxford to provide quotes, sharing his opinions on policies and incidents that may have an effect on the constituency. On this particular occasion he was writing a paragraph on the opening of a new addiction recovery centre in Blackbird Leys, a council district in his constituency Oxford East (*The Oxford Times*, 3 July 2015).

MP Smith and MP Williamson do not rely on digital tools to enhance their visibility but acknowledge that digital tools are an option they could possibly utilise. MP Williamson does not believe in the use of digital tools to

communicate or enhance his visibility as he considers them "a form of propaganda", preferring his work to speak for itself (personal communication, 7 January 2016). Although he uses email regularly, to be accessible to his constituents, he does not use it to augment his visibility. Rather, as observed, he relies on articles published in the local press to make him visible within his constituency. Looking out for his article and following up on it implies that it matters to him that it is published and thus that he is visible. Furthermore, it suggests that he would like his opinions to be seen by his constituents. However, it must be pointed out that these news articles are also updated on the local newspaper's website, making it digitally visible as well. Interestingly, this dichotomy between what is positive (physical and traditional visibility) and negative (the use of digital tools such as social media) suggests that MP Williamson prefers the communication type over which he has the most control.

MP Smith, on the other hand, does maintain a website, and accounts on Twitter and Facebook. However, he feels "we could do more [online]", and that "there's a limit to how much time you've got for all this stuff though, and my office staff as well. I don't think it's really changed the way I interact with people face-to-face, but it's supplemented it" (personal communication, 1 July 2015). Thus, although Andrew Smith MP uses traditional and new media, it is clear that digital tools are used in addition to physical visibility, which he suggests is core in his constituency performance. To ensure that they are able to maintain a visibility discursive formation without the use of digital platforms, these MPs place importance on appearing in other media. Using traditional media to increase the visibility of the MP is advantageous, as it allows the most control over the message they are trying to send and the image they are trying to portray.

Some MPs feel the need to find more ways to augment their accessibility, but are unsure of how to proceed effectively. MP Marshall, who was elected in 2015 and aims to be the most accessible MP in the Commons, discloses he has not been able to successfully develop a media strategy ("I haven't got a strategy!"), and that he finds that this negatively affects his visibility. Prior to being elected, he "literally just delivered pieces of papers through people's doors. I didn't do

anything on social media" (personal communication, 4 May 2016). Now that he has been elected, he would like to ensure that his constituents know what he is doing for the constituency: "I do get people that come and see me, wanting to know what I am doing. And when I explain it, they want to know why it is not in the local media" (personal communication, 4 May 2016). This indicates that his constituents are aware of how to access him, but imply that they would like information about what he does on behalf of the constituency, and that this information should be easily found. Constituents have some information, but are not consistently informed. Thus, in this case, unlike MPs Smith and Williamson, MP Marshall's lack of strategy online and offline has masked what he does in the constituency, resulting in a partial visibility discursive formation to his disfavour.

Although MPs Williamson, Smith and Marshall are not actively using digital tools to augment their visibility, some MPs have demonstrated that using digital media to produce objects of visibility has become more common. Indeed, there are now more ways to communicate than ever before, creating new fields of action and interaction which involve distinct forms of visibility, with power relations shifting quickly and unpredictably (Thompson, 2005: 34–35). This has made it easier for MPs to publish news, share information and interact with their constituents if they want to. In the next section, I analyse how MPs are drawing on the use of digital tools to augment their visibility discursive formation through the use of what I term the MP digital toolkit.

The MP Digital Toolkit

Apart from relying on print media to augment their visibility, MPs also turn to digital tools. Visibility enabled by digital tools is amplified and more complex. Distance is no longer an issue as large amounts of information and symbolic audio-visual content can be transmitted quickly and simultaneously (Thompson, 2005: 37). Within the context of mediated visibility, "the making visible of actions and events is not just the outcome of leakage in systems of communication and information flow that are increasingly difficult to control: it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be a weapon in the struggles they wage in their day-to-day lives" (Thompson, 2005:

31). Even though they are not always able to see it physically, MPs would like their constituents to be aware that they are qualified, responsible and working for them, doing the job they have been voted to do. This is crucial as MPs relate their visibility to projecting and maintaining their image. Rather than letting their efforts go unnoticed, some of the MPs reveal how they use communication media to create new forms of information exchange and interaction, resulting in distinctive forms of mediated visibility (Thompson, 2005: 34).

The more information constituents have access to, the more visible their local MP becomes to them. Apart from carrying out face-to-face interactions, increased constituency demands have reinforced the need for MPs to not only be available on a medley of platforms, but also to appear to be constantly "on-the-go". Having control over some of the messages they send out about their work allows them to augment their visibility, present themselves to the community and, for some, challenge the entrenched MP stereotype of being out of touch. MP Marshall acknowledges that his constituents are not privy to the work that is carried out, and he has to consider drawing on communication tools in order to make it more visible, "I feel personally committed to let them know what is going on… I may find in time, a different medium for getting information out, because I wonder how… It is not just me having to read the comments, the problem is it's the other people on it. So I wonder how much I want to expose how much of the stuff that goes on there… I won't say I am satisfied because there are lots of challenges and we are doing lots of work. A lot of it is unseen and I do need to find a way to communicate with the people more honestly about what's going on and what the challenges are" (personal communication, 14 May 2016). Here MP Marshall discloses his commitment to sharing what he does as a form of responsibility, but also alludes to the challenges that come along with being visible, particularly online. Not only does he open himself up to attacks by being online, but it is possible that comments made by visitors, who may or may not be constituents, on his digital accounts – positive or negative – will impact how other constituents view him.

Previous research on MPs' use of internet and communication tools have revealed that British MPs use internet-driven tools with their party agenda in mind, with minimal expression of individuality (Norton, 2007: 367). Trends in MP roles and behaviours point towards increased individualism, although party loyalties and career professionalism constrain the scope for independence (Ward and Lusoli, 2005: 60). MPs can (and have) elementarily adopt technologies to improve the efficiency and professionalism of their traditional duties and roles. These include the use of email and personal websites. Furthermore, the development of digital tools such as Twitter and Facebook has enriched MPs' abilities to establish two-way interactive relationships with their constituents (Ward and Lusoli, 2005: 60). As MPs tap into the potential of digital tools to facilitate the visibility discursive formation within their constituencies, an interaction between the online and offline can also be observed.

Email

The use of emails has become ubiquitous in our everyday lives, and this has permeated other areas of society, especially in politics. As explored previously, in Chapter 4, emails have become one of the easiest ways for constituents to access MPs for help, an occurrence that is slowly becoming the norm (Jackson and Lilleker, 2004: 525). Drawing on the same ease of use and minimal drain on resources as with email, MPs can extend their visibility discursive formation beyond face-to-face through the use of e-newsletters. These provide constituents in their contact database updates on what their MP has been up to. How often e-newsletters are sent varies. Out of the 18 MPs I approached, only one did not promote an e-newsletter on their website, which suggests that it is a common, cost-effective and convenient manner in which to share constituency information. The MPs who use e-newsletters do so as an opportunity to make visible what they do for the constituency. MP George Watson says, "I try to keep in touch with those constituents who want to via email. I have an email newsletter I send that out to 4- or 5,000 people now. I arrange for that once a month or once every couple of months, different times, and tell them what I am up to so they get a sense of how busy I am" (personal communication, 22 September 2015). MP Watson's comments suggest that he uses e-newsletters to

maintain an image of "a busy MP", not unlike Paul Flynn MP's suggestion for MPs to, "Never stop working. The alternative is to organise the day to give the impression of a perpetually working MP" (2011: 141). Thus we observe how MP Watson uses this digital tool to keep in touch with his constituents and demonstrate that he is indeed working hard for them. The inconsistent and infrequent sending of e-newsletters suggests that this is not a digital tool primarily utilised by MP Watson. Elaborating further he says, "I think your [sic] constituents want to know that they are getting their value for money". The economic metaphor once again denotes an exchange of goods, one where MP Watson is portraying his visibility in exchange for what seems like his constituents' contentment with his performance.

The use of e-newsletters to augment an MP's visibility is also unlikely to establish a political relationship between MP and constituent on its own. MP Jacob Marshall, who represents a constituency in Cornwall, states, "The other thing I do is an email bulletin about once a month, or I tend to. And that goes to about 8,000 people, and that is all… I don't get any notice from that. I might get five people saying um, raising an issue. Generally speaking, when I see people they appreciate it" (personal communication, 1 July 2016). Here we observe as MP Marshall seems slightly disappointed at the lacklustre response to his email bulletin, but also notices that constituents do inform him that they are appreciative of it when they see him. While it is unclear how many constituents have come up to him to say that, it indicates that the email bulletin is read, thus MP Marshall being able to make visible what he is doing in the constituency, strengthening the symbolic connection between him and the constituents.

Similarly, Labour MP Desmond Hill says, "I've got like maybe 15,000 people on email who [sic] I can write to every week if I want to. I probably don't write them every week they will get sick of it. But I might write to them every fortnight or every month and give them half a dozen things about what I'm doing, or issues I'm interested in, but also things that happen in the constituency and that's brilliant. But you don't want to disenfranchise those people who don't have email" (personal communication, 27 January 2015). Compared to MPs Watson

and Marshall, MP Hill has a significantly larger database of emails. In addition, the e-newsletters are sent out more frequently than for the other MPs, suggesting his efforts at a consistent symbolic construction and sustainment of the discursive formation of visibility. His awareness that these e-newsletters do not reach all of his constituency audience demonstrates his understanding that e-newsletters alone are insufficient, indicating that he is aware that he needs to use a combination of methods to be visible.

The use of e-newsletters for visibility is asynchronous, allowing the MP to sustain interaction with a bigger group of people, while giving the sender time to manage their self-presentation more strategically (Baym, 2010: 7–8). With e-newsletters, MPs have the opportunity to carefully select the stories that portray them in the best light, rather than simply listing everything they have done. While the MP does not necessarily get a reply from those on the mailing list, they are able to promote themselves on their terms, and remind their constituents of their presence. It is also evident that e-newsletters are not used in isolation, but in conjunction with other methods of providing visibility.

Personal Websites

Prior to 2000, it was not common for British MPs to have their own websites. There were only 97 accessible Member sites in 2000, and this increased to only 186 in 2002 (The Guardian, 2000; Jackson and Lilleker, 2004: 524). In a survey of 168 MPs carried out in 2008, 85% of respondents have their own websites (Williamson, 2009: 518-9). At last count, approximately 370 MPs have personal websites (Parliament UK, 2017). Across all sites, party affiliations are clearly displayed on the main banner in colours that are normally associated with each party[8]. Background information on each MP can be found on their site, including their policy interests, activities and the various channels through which constituents are able to get in touch (Campbell et al, 1999). As an extension of what they already do offline, Members also use their website to promote their

[8] Websites for Labour Party MPs have red banners, Conservative Party MPs blue and Liberal Democrat MPs yellow with green details.

own causes (as well as their parties'), press releases, speeches that were made and further MP details (Williamson, 2009: 3; Norton, 2007: 367). Given the tribal nature of British politics, it is unsurprising to find that MPs do not appear motivated to use their sites to engage with and seek views (Norton, 2007: 367). Similarly, previous research on American electoral candidates resisting the interactive nature of the internet revealed the need to tightly control the information disseminated to residents (Stromer-Galley, 2000). The nature of the internet makes trying to control the flow of symbolic content within it problematic, subsequently making it harder for those in power to ensure that the images and information circulated are those they want to be disseminated (Thompson, 2005: 38). Using interactive components of the internet possesses the potential for messages to be misinterpreted by target audiences, and the possibility of impacting the candidate's image. In other words, personal sites are used primarily to disseminate information on the Member and their party in a mono-directional manner.

Individualistic elements and innovative methods of encouraging interactivity with constituents on MP websites can be observed. All 18 of the MPs I interviewed and shadowed maintained a website separate from their main party's sites, displaying many of the elements highlighted above. Information on how to reach the MP is provided. This includes the MP's email address, a phone number, the address of the constituency office and links to social media accounts. Through the personalisation of their websites and approaches, MPs manifest their desire to control their message and image portrayed to their constituents. Although some MPs have recognised the importance of using some form of bi-directional communication, I have found that MPs still seek to control their message, preferring to engage with constituents symbolically. MP David Miller, who has been representing a suburban constituency in greater London since 1997, uses his website to seek constituent views on the latest policy issues in the form of an e-survey. The e-survey is promoted clearly on the website with a hyperlink on the navigation bar. According to MP Miller, he has carried out this e-survey annually over the last 12 years, with over 700 constituents taking part in the survey in 2013. At the time of my fieldwork there was a link to his "20 Seconds

Survey" displayed prominently on his website. This survey consists of four succinct multiple-choice questions. Respondents are asked about their local concerns, national concerns, thoughts on their MP and whom they would vote for if there was an election tomorrow. At the end of the survey respondents are asked for their name, email address, postcode and phone number (optional). MP Woodward also uses online (along with paper-based) surveys regularly, citing response rates of about 30 to 70 per cent (personal communication, 1 July 2015). Encouragement of interaction online not only allows the MP to appear more accessible, and garner useful views from constituents, but also to engage with citizens who might not be politically active offline. By keeping his surveys short, MP Miller makes it easy for constituents on his website to quickly share their views. During our interview, MP Miller also mentioned that results from these e-surveys help him monitor concerns within the constituency (personal communication, 26 June 2015). Although it is unclear how frequently these results are tabulated and how much they are used to implement changes in the constituency, the dissemination of e-surveys itself indicates a symbolic form of visibility. MPs are seen to be showing interest in the constituency and what constituents have to say, thus strengthening the discursive formation of visibility.

Some MPs also use their sites to make personal blog posts (as demonstrated by Peter Kyle MP's anniversary post on his personal website and Facebook account discussed in Chapter 4), to share sentiments on certain policy outcomes they might have disagreed with or explain why they voted in a particular direction in the Commons. It is a platform for drawing attention to causes they are passionate about, or providing an explanation for actions undertaken. When MP Tessa Munt resigned as Parliamentary Private Secretary to then Business Secretary Vince Cable MP over her opposition to the extraction of shale gas (also known as fracking)[9], a blog post was immediately uploaded to her website and her Facebook page, explaining her actions to her constituents (Image 5.4). This matter was controversial, with MP Munt standing firm on her views against the party line, citing the negative environmental impact that fracking would have on

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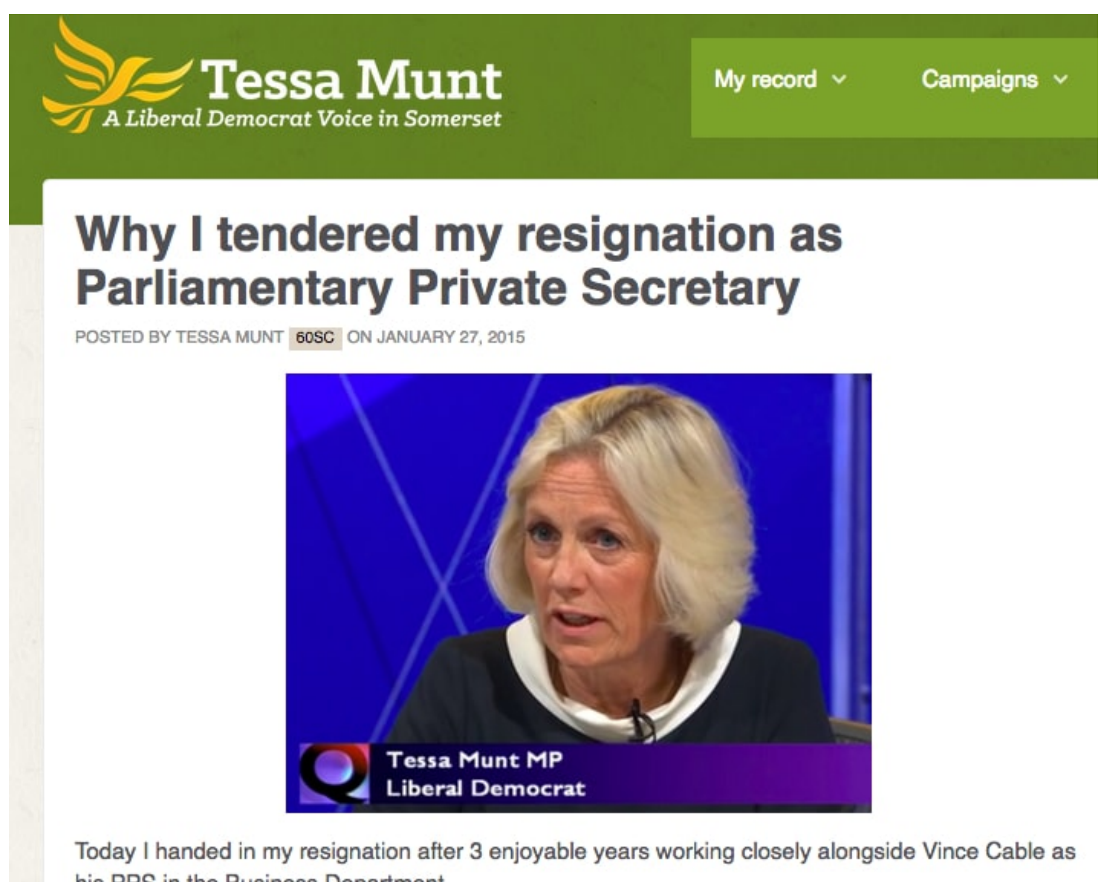
[9] Tessa Munt's resignation took place on 27 January 2015.

her constituency. Although it is unclear how many of her constituents read the post, it serves as an official statement from MP Munt amongst the news articles reporting her resignation as Parliamentary Private Secretary. Using her website as a space to post her own thoughts visibly, she was able to challenge and preemptively respond to possible negative attacks on her.



(Image 5.4: Tessa Munt, www.tessamunt.org, 27 January 2015)

I shadowed MP Munt in her constituency the weekend after her resignation, as she carried out her surgeries as scheduled on the weekend of 30 January 2015. She held two surgeries in Shepton Mallet and Chilcompton on Friday, and two other surgeries in Glastonbury and Meare on Saturday. An A4-sized pale green poster with MP Munt's name and photo was placed on the window or door of each café and pub where advice surgeries were held. These surgeries were labelled 'Can We Help' Advice Centres, and a schedule of dates and contact details were listed clearly. During these surgeries, 27 constituents came to seek help, with 10 of those mentioning her resignation over the course of their meeting with her. These statements were made positively, generally commending her for standing

up for their community. The following vignettes from these particular surgeries highlight instances of constituents approaching MP Munt, broaching the subject of fracking and her resignation from her parliamentary role.

Tom, 77, sought MP Munt's help during her surgery in Shepton Mallet. He explained that his wife suffered from the advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease. As her primary caregiver, he lacked the resources to meet her care needs, and required help in applying for financial support. Tessa Munt MP emphathised, as her own stepfather's mother suffered from the same illness. She took Tom's details down and as he prepared to leave he said, "I commend everything you have done, especially to do with fracking". MP Munt laughed as she thanked him, then asked if he voted for her during the last election in 2010. He stated that he was a former Tory voter, and said "I did, and I think I will be voting again. Well done on fracking" (personal communication, 30 January 2015).

Another resident came up to the table to greet MP Munt between cases. Greeting her, MP Munt shook her hand, as the constituent leant in to whisper, "Thank you for doing all you can about fracking. We are terrified of pollution" (personal communication, 30 January 2015). MP Munt thanked her, saying "I was doing all I can till the very last minute I tell you".

Jane and Steve Reynolds were next in line to see MP Munt about their neighbour next door. According to the Reynolds, the house had been in decay since their neighbour's husband died. MP Munt offered to come by the house to have a look. The Reynolds thanked her and brought up her "tough week", referring to her resignation. MP Munt was cheerful in her response as she talked about her personal story fighting against fracking, "That is alright! I feel so much better".

Following this surgery another one was held at the village hall in Chilcompton. MP Munt's caseworker Bianca was with us. As we made our way there in the car, MP Munt referred to the response she had received from her constituents on her anti-fracking petition and her resignation. She described the feedback received as positive, with many people congratulating her. She also updated us on her plans

to write an article to be published in *The Telegraph*[10] "about this fracking malady. I just want to say I did by my best principles".

On Saturday at her Glastonbury surgery, MP Munt spoke with a constituent she recognised from a previous surgery. The constituent, Nadia, provided an update on her case, and mentioned that she "really came to say congrats on your stand on fracking. It must have been really difficult". MP Munt admitted, "It really was. But I am still the MP and I am standing again". She also went on to tell Nadia that she had done an interview about fracking, approximately 10 minutes long, with the Russia Today programme *Going Underground*, which would be airing that week. Nadia took note and said, "I just wanted to say thank you and well done".

Apart from these surgery interactions, I observed as constituents stopped MP Munt to greet her as she walked around the four towns and villages between surgeries. Most of them called out to her by name, demonstrating an awareness and recognition of their local MP. Although it cannot be determined where these constituents read or heard about MP Munt's resignation, it can be observed that she extended her visibility by informing constituents about other media appearances she would be doing or had done. It is possible that the resignation in itself made her more visible to her constituents, but by choosing to discuss it online, she capitalised on the exposure it had provided her, extending her visibility both online and offline.

Social Media

Adoption of social media by MPs has increased significantly over the last 15 years (Coleman, 2007; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). Other than making the MP more accessible, they are used as tools to make visible information on what an MP is busy with (both within the constituency and in Westminster) and local goings on. More significantly, these digital tools are synchronous, enabling MPs to

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[10] The article she referred to during this interaction cannot be found. It is not certain that it was published, but an opinion piece by MP Munt was found in *The Mirror* that weekend (published 30 January 2015).

communicate and interact with their constituents in real time, within online spaces. The most commonly used social media platforms by MPs in this study were Facebook and Twitter, with some MPs venturing into other communication channels. MP William Morgan brought up the possibilities of using other media platforms to communicate and share with constituents, including photo-sharing application Instagram and business-networking site LinkedIn (personal communication, 29 July 2015). MP George Watson raised the possibility of using text-messaging application WhatsApp. Inspired by the National Childbirth Trust (he disclosed that he recently had a baby with his partner), he said that he thought it might be useful for constituents to gain access to him should they require help (personal communication, 22 September 2015).

MPs hold varying views when it comes to running their own social media accounts. MP Christopher Lewis emphasises the importance of personally managing his social media channels, as he believes the public can tell that he is the one communicating. On the other hand, some MPs rely on the help of their staff to manage their accounts. MP Harry Grove uses both Twitter and Facebook. He uses Twitter to "retweet civic events and local activities, and interesting things. I have a Facebook account, and I don't run it". He also mentions that he does not usually receive direct messages on these platforms. Three other MPs in my study also mentioned having help with managing their social media accounts.

Since its inception in 2004, Facebook and the number of its users have grown rapidly. At present, there are an average of 1.32 billion daily active users, and 2.01 billion monthly users on the largest global social media platform (Facebook, 2017). In the UK, 60 per cent of the population are on Facebook, a statistic that makes adopting Facebook as a means of communication practical and fairly straightforward for MPs (Internet World Statistics, 2017). In 2005 only 3 per cent of British MPs were on social networking sites, increasing to 23 per cent in 2009 (Williamson, 2009: 39). Initial use of Facebook and other social media platforms was limited to information sharing as the predominant online strategy (Lilleker and Koc Michalska, 2013: 192). This is increasingly no longer the case, with MPs demonstrating use of Facebook's interactive architecture to not only make visible

their activities, but, in some cases, bring up policies and enter into discussions (Ibid). Image 5.5 is an example of how MP Miller not only makes visible what activities he has carried out, but touches on issues the constituency is facing and his role in the solution, and shares his own emotions.

(Image 5.5: David Miller MP Facebook Update, 25 June 2015)

The increased visibility enabled by use of digital tools has also resulted in subsequent interactions offline. An instance of this occurred while I was shadowing Conservative MP Barnaby Wright in his constituency in Essex. He met his Westminster parliamentary assistant and me at the train station to drive us to the location where the surgery was going to be held. After coming into the station, he went to the station coffee stall and bought himself breakfast, while chatting to the barista. As this occurred a constituent, who had just disembarked a train, approached to discuss an update that MP Wright had posted on Facebook and his blog the night before. The constituent, John, also talked about how he had commented on the post, which concerned train improvements in the constituency. John was an engineer working in London. His job required shift work, which meant that he occasionally missed the last train home, or had trouble getting to work on the weekends due to engineering repairs to the train lines. In this incident we can observe face-to-face communication about digital communication, and the ways in which one enables or reinforces the other.

MPs also demonstrate preferences for various social media platforms. For example, Andrew Smith MP puts “stuff out on Twitter… To a lesser extent on Facebook”, demonstrating his preference for Twitter over Facebook. On the other

hand, Peter Kyle MP prefers Facebook over Twitter as it allows him the capacity to share detailed posts. Describing the strength of Facebook, he says "If you go to my Facebook account, and then to my Twitter account, you will see instantly that I love Facebook and that I find Twitter quite difficult. I used to love Twitter when I was a campaigner, because you just get punchy things out there and it lands and you get quoted in the papers and that sort of thing. But when you want to actually make a sophisticated argument, it's difficult. Facebook has the potential to have emotional intelligence… The way you post, the way you lay out your stall in each individual post, and also in the way you interact with people after it. You give people the opportunity to do so back to you." MPs show awareness that the affordances and features of different platforms enable different kinds of dialogue, and seek ways to use these for maximum persuasion or engagement.

Twitter is the largest microblogging platform in the world (Tromble, 2016: 7), with 328 million monthly active users globally (Forbes, 2017). As I discussed in Chapter 4, 84 per cent (546 out of 650) of MPs have a Twitter account. It has become an easy and popular method for MPs to let their constituents know about what they are occupied with, in bite-sized 140 character-long updates. Having a Twitter account has steadily become the rule rather than the exception for politicians in Western democracies (Burson-Marsteller, 2014). Apart from the ability to post individual updates, Twitter also allows several mechanisms for user interaction, including basic retweeting (where user reposts the original message content without changes), modified retweeting (part of the original message content is reposted with changes made by the user), -@ mentions (where users are able to contact or acknowledge another user within the content) and -@ replies (where users directly respond to another's tweet) (Tromble, 2016: 7). Previously carried out research on politicians' use of Twitter reveals it is primarily used as a tool for political marketing and impression management rather than interaction with other users (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Larsson and Moe, 2013).

However, more recent research has found that politicians are increasingly utilising Twitter's interactive features (Enli and Skogerø, 2013; Larsson and Ihlen, 2015). More specifically, in the case of the UK, Graham et al's (2013) study of the

use of Twitter by politicians during the 2010 General Election indicates that the majority of British politicians used Twitter to distribute information, with a small group of politicians displaying interactive behaviour with voters.

(Image 5.6: Tweet by Peter Kyle MP, 14 May 2016)

Within the scope of this study, it is observed that many MPs do use Twitter as part of their everyday activities to disseminate information mono-directionally. As demonstrated in Image 5.6, Peter Kyle MP uses Twitter to update his constituents on what he has done within the community. As an object produced as part of the discursive action, this photo of him in action further reinforces his visibility. Similarly, we can see David Miller MP tweeting about his surgery (Image 6.7) below. I was present as he carried out the surgery mentioned and note that he chose to send this tweet after the surgery had ended, and not while it was still going on, as mentioned. He expressed that it was important to him to

maintain his personal security while remaining visible, so he preferred not to provide real time updates (personal communication, 26 June 2015). As I will demonstrate in Chapter 6, physical and verbal assaults do occur, disrupting the advice surgery. I will also show how MPs repair the interaction.

(Image 5.7: Tweet by David Miller MP, 26 June 2015)

Twitter's 140 character limit and ease of use has earned the site MP enthusiasts. MP Christopher Lewis really enjoys using Twitter because it means he can update his constituents on meetings, parliamentary debates and local issues quickly and easily. He also finds that Twitter allows him to reach out to constituents across various demographics. For him, Twitter is less political and more of an online diary as he uses it to "keep constituents informed about what I am doing". This is a similar use to MP Miller's tweets about his surgeries, above. MP Lewis asserts that the nature of his tweets is not especially political, and finds that most of his followers are local. Unlike MPs who only use Twitter to share information, he likes to use it as an avenue to ask for his constituents' opinions, in order to stay accountable. He said that once he was in a pub to meet his constituents and was unable to be seen because he was physically blocked out of view by the people around him. However, through Twitter -@ mentions and tweets about his presence by those he was visible to, constituents were informed about where he was in the pub and were able to meet him (personal communication, 17 October 2014). This is a clear example of how the offline and online can interact with each other within a hybrid media environment. There is an almost collaborative nature to this episode, where tweets shared by his constituents helped with the visibility of MP Lewis in person.

Similarly, William Morgan MP says that although all online and offline tools are useful to him, he prefers Twitter as it is easy for him to update. Having worked when he was younger as a parliamentary assistant for an MP who did not use any

form of digital tool, he is aware of how much the job has changed, and he considers social media to play a "huge" role in the lives of MPs (personal communication, 29 July 2015). However, he is cautious and aware that reliance on Twitter might result in slight laziness on his part, "I mean, if you put everything on Twitter, then you think 'Oh everybody has heard you', and you forget about all the other things. You forget about the other people" (personal communication, 29 July 2015). It is evident that the convenience of Twitter appeals to MP Morgan. While he acknowledges how useful it can be, he also demonstrates an awareness that relying on it for visibility would result in the neglect of non-Twitter users in his constituency. Furthermore, there is the uncertainty of how many of his followers are indeed constituents. As I will show in the following paragraphs, he is not alone in his concerns about social media.

Analysing Concerns and Differences

Some MPs do express concern that use of digital tools, especially social media, may overshadow the primary responsibilities of MPs, despite their potential for positively impacting MPs' visibility. Using social media as a barometer for the concerns of the constituency is likely to result in misconceptions of what is really going on, on the ground. MP Samuel Pollock agrees that almost every MP has an online presence, and has a Twitter account, a Facebook page and a website. Out of these digital tools he believes that the majority of his constituents look at his Facebook and Twitter pages the most, rather than use his website. He discloses, "I slightly worry that in Parliament we are spending more time on Twitter and Facebook than we should" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). Speaking specifically about Twitter, he agrees that MPs are very active on that platform, and discloses that he is "in two minds about that". While he thinks that it is positive to share information about visits and policy stances, he worries about the risk of Twitter being an echo chamber. He fears that as people seek out other accounts with similar views to their own, these views will be reinforced rather than challenged. He considers this possibility "a political danger". He also demonstrates concern about the message only being received by a small percentage of his constituents. At the time of the interview, he estimates he has

about 10,000 Twitter followers[11]. He raises the question of how many of his followers are actually one of the approximately 61,000 voters in his constituency. Although he is not certain, he speculates that constituents only constitute a small minority of his followers, and raises the need to be careful about considering Twitter a form of mass communication when in reality it is not. This suggests he is of the opinion that the public sphere should be regulated or monitored, to prevent the possibility of filter bubbles or echo chambers leading to groupthink.

MP Williamson, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is insistent about not using Facebook and Twitter. He does, however, maintain a web presence by way of a website, and uses email regularly to respond to constituent problems. He considers the use of Twitter for self-promotion and image management a form of political propaganda. As MPs choose to promote themselves and heighten their visibility through these channels, he vehemently expresses his view that being seen physically is how he prefers to be judged. Saying that it is a personal choice, he does not see any advantages to its use, but in fact thinks, “there are quite serious drawbacks to doing it, which I can pick up from colleagues”. He espoused face-to-face interaction as more crucial than ever, especially in light of the internet. Elaborating, he says, “I have to say I am not overwhelmingly impressed with it as a means of communication because it seems to me that all communications are a form of propaganda: ‘I am now going to visit, you know, X School, in my constituency’ and ‘This is where I am at the present moment’. And I think it can become a treadmill, that’s my personal view… What you’re doing, is with a, let’s face it, an intention of trying to put the best possible image forward about your proactivity. Well I think I prefer people to judge me on my proactivity on what they actually in reality see and experience! And I think actually there is a risk if you do that, at the end of the day people are going to say that’s rather shallow.” MP Williamson is observed to contest the very idea of MPs “artificially” making visible what they do in the constituency. As he stated earlier in this chapter, he believes that his presence in the constituency during constituency activities is more than enough visibility for him to be a successful representative.

[11] He presently has 16 900 followers on his Twitter account (2017).

In this sense, the same Twitter feed would be considered by MP Lewis to be an online diary, but by MP Williamson to be propaganda.

Thus, it is evident that not only are MPs viewing traditional media and digital tools differently, but how they use these tools within the process of contemporary constituency service varies as well. MPs Pollock and Williamson are aware that their colleagues in the Commons make use of an array of digital tools, but are wary of these tools for different reasons. MP Williamson, while agreeing that being seen is important, thinks that it is important to do so in a fashion that does not come across as political spin. Rather than self-promote his activities, he prefers to rely on physical visibility and face-to-face interactions with his constituents. However, as I have shown earlier with the example of his opinion piece, MP Williamson's effort to resist digital tools as propaganda is not as unambiguous as he claims it to be. MP Pollock, on the other hand, demonstrates concern that overreliance on social media platforms will result in MPs not only mimicking each other in terms of policies and issues at hand, but in them neglecting issues that might concern only their constituents. Despite this apprehension, MP Pollock is still active on his social media accounts. Is MP Pollock's performance less authentic than MP Williamson's, as he uses social media despite recognising its pitfalls?

As I have demonstrated, an MP's visibility is not always evident, nor is it well-defined, to an observer. On one end of the spectrum, some MPs, such as MPs Williamson and Pollock, believe that only co-presence, through physical visibility, will allow for portrayal of authenticity in the representation performance. The use of digital tools is unrealistic and unnatural as it is not the MP's "real self". This in turn might have further ramifications such as the establishment of an echo chamber that is unrepresentative of the constituency. Thus, physical visibility is kept separate from any use of digital tools as they try to preserve the core image of themselves as a single entity. In the middle of the spectrum of use of digital tools are MPs like Andrew Smith MP and Harry Grove MP, whom emphasise physical visibility, but use digital tools to supplement their visibility. Their use of digital tools, especially social media platforms, is basic.

Meandering between co-presence and digital tools means their efforts are slightly divided, with more effort placed on co-presence. On the other end of the spectrum, Christopher Lewis MP, Peter Kyle MP and William Morgan MP have remarked on the importance of digital tools as they seek to portray authenticity with as much transparency around their actions as possible. Their use of social media to symbolically construct their visibility is just as pertinent as what they do physically, fluidly moving from physical presence to traditional media and digital tools with ease. Thus, it is found that MPs are integrating co-presence with traditional media and digital tools in the discursive formation of visibility along a continuum, from low to no integration emphasising co-present visibility, to average integration with an emphasis on co-presence, to high integration with equal emphasis on additional tools and co-presence.

Baym (2010: 51) suggests that digital media should be considered "a new and eclectic mixed modality that combines elements of face to face communication with elements of writing, rather than a diminished form of embodied interaction". As MPs strive to maintain an everyday visibility discursive formation, they demonstrate an awareness of the range of digital tools they are able to tap into. This gives rise to questions of how authentic these self-presentations are, and if offline behaviour is consistent with what online behaviour. Enli theorises a concept of "mediated authenticity", referring to authenticity as a currency in the communicative relation between producers and audiences (2015: 1). Despite the benefits of digital tools, there are disadvantages when compared with physical, face-to-face interactions. Face-to-face interactions are typically "dialogical", characterised by a two-way flow of information and communication (Thompson, 2005: 32). When one person speaks to another person or group, the audience can reply, resulting in a dialogue. This exchange encompasses a varying choice of words; changes in vocal intonation; symbolic cues; and facial expressions that convey and interpret. However, when visibility and interactions take place via the use of other tools or media, some of these social cues are lost in varying degrees (Baym, 2010: 9). Unlike physical visibility, mediated visibility is not situated within a shared physical space. Examples of this include MP David Miller's online survey and MP Samuel Pollock's concerns about

how many of his Twitter followers are his constituents. In the case of MP Grove and his "on"/"off" modes for instance, the absence of social cues in these tools throws doubt on what is being presented, making it impossible to tell when he is "on" or "off". There is also the risk that the selves we portray through digital media do not line up with those presented face-to-face, calling into question the authenticity of our identities, relationships and practices (Baym, 2010: 3).

In addition, whilst MPs Williamson and Pollock express doubts about reliance on digital media, there is evidence that MP-constituent interaction is no longer limited to either offline or online. Significantly, we observe that MPs not only supplement their visibility and existing relationships with their constituents online but are able to build offline relationships that may have started online. Although online interactions may have sparser social cues than face-to-face interactions, they focus on issues that personally impact the constituents and can have a positive effect on relationship development offline. Mediated meeting challenges our conventional comprehension of relationship building as we are used to evaluating people and their nonverbal cues in person (Baym, 2010: 103). Furthermore, the extension of visibility takes place beyond the physical space where the interactions can take place. We observed as MPs Munt and Wright were approached in public by constituents only *after* said constituents had viewed or interacted with them online, demonstrating the fluidity between the situated spaces where these visible interactions can take place. Thus, it can be said that making a choice between visibility facilitated by co-presence, the use of digital tools, or both, is not binary. In the hybrid media system these interactions take place in, these choices fall along a continuum. It is not a matter of which tools of visibility MPs choose to use, but how much they choose to use them.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to build on my question of how MPs are carrying out the process of the contemporary constituency service. MPs acknowledge the difficulties faced as they strive to be seen by their constituents. The distance between Westminster and their constituencies, keeping up with the challenges of technological advances and adoption of various social media platforms and the

desire to prioritise their constituency needs, amidst other responsibilities, have been cited as some reasons for these difficulties. Sustaining visibility is significant to the MP on standby because it intensifies the symbolic connection between the MP-actor and constituent-audience in their pursuit of performance re-fusion. Significantly, my findings suggest that MPs convey the visibility discursive formation to prompt constituents about their efforts and presence, while simultaneously accentuating consistency throughout their social performance of being on standby.

As Members make choices about what they do and say around their constituencies they can, to a degree, control how they present themselves, and subsequently the image their constituents have of them. Through details of my observations and interviews, I have demonstrated the lengths MPs go to to make the invisible visible. I have shown how physical presence occurs when the MP and constituent are in the same place or able to see each other. MPs indicated a common understanding across different political orientations that the risk of distance affecting constituent perception of the MP is very real, and of the value of emphasising one's visibility. MPs also suggested that being visible not only informs constituents about their presence, but also projects a sense of interest in their lives, lending credibility to their position as a representative. In addition, MPs are able to use these opportunities to be seen to monitor their constituencies, adding to their arsenal of knowledge on standby. I also revealed how MPs sustain their visibility in the constituency through constituency routines in their weekly schedules.

With the ubiquity of digital tools such as the internet, email and social media platforms becoming staples in our everyday lives, being seen in the flesh is no longer the only way constituents are able to know what MPs are doing, in or out of the constituency. The use of communication media has lead to the creation of novel forms of action and interaction, resulting in changing visibility. Thus, I also sought to understand how MPs used traditional media and digital tools in their constituency service. I discussed how MPs integrate the use of these tools with traditional means of increasing visibility to provide a structure, or symbolic

scaffolding, as MPs seek to portray authenticity and re-fuse their constituency performances. Furthermore, evidence suggests that while all MPs agree on the importance of visibility and do seek to be seen, the use of digital tools to augment accessibility is still met with mixed responses. I make the argument that the choice of how visible they want to be is not necessarily a binary decision, but one that occurs along a continuum. My findings indicate that MPs integrate the use of traditional media and digital tools along a spectrum of low to no integration, emphasising co-present visibility, average integration with an emphasis on co-presence and high integration with equal emphasis on additional tools and co-presence. The nature of the media environment within which these interactions take place also indicates that the online and offline spaces are not separate entities, thus resulting in my finding that deciding not to engage in any form of digital presence is a false choice, for there is no decision to be made.

Lastly, it must be said that visibility itself does not guarantee a positive performance re-fusion. The positioning of themselves in the constituency, when and how they want to see and be seen, implies that MPs have complete control over how and when they choose to be visible. With more channels for interactions, problems such as inauthenticity, inconsistency and lack of control over messages and images may arise. Furthermore, the proliferation of media and communication tools, and the blurring between the private and public, has meant that events such as political scandals and unsavoury incidents might make their way into the public eye more often (Thompson, 2000; 2005). On the proliferation of digital tools for visibility, Jerry Hayes MP states that, "Social media is a serious nightmare. If MPs think that they have so many followers because of their personal popularity, they are in need of a prefrontal lobotomy. Journalists, opponents and all-round loons are just hoping for them to say something really daft" (2014: 298). As I will address in Chapter 6, politicians may encounter people they did not expect to meet, possibly derailing their plans, thus requiring repair to overcome the disruption.

6 We Interrupt Your Regularly Scheduled Programming… MP Routines and Repairs

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I delve into deeper detail about the performance between MP and constituents, and the challenges MPs face, by discussing the discursive formation of repair. Close probing of the patterns of these performances in Chapters 4 and 5 has allowed us to understand how MPs perform the process of contemporary constituency service through accessibility and visibility – forming the foundation of my standby MP argument; the integrative relationship between traditional media and digital tools used to advance these discursive formations; and how MPs divide their resources and time to work in Westminster and the constituency. In Chapter 5, I discussed how even if the nature of each event or issue is not always the same, a sense of general routine to an MP's week can be observed. Recurrent elements of this routine can be detected, such as the carrying out of advice surgeries, weekly walkabouts in the constituency and regularly planned industry meetings. Routines are an integral part of how discursive formations are experienced by those involved in their emergence. They are carried out by default, an innately known phenomenon that seems to be unquestioned, where "the strength of its influence lies in its latency" (Coleman, 2013: 57). For instance, advice surgeries are usually held on a weekly or fortnightly basis, and are a keystone of the constituency service. Looking deeper into these schedules, the discursive formation of repair can be detected. During these performances, MPs are expected to help constituents solve their problems and repair any negative impressions of themselves, the party and Westminster. This discursive formation consists of a body of knowledge, in which constituents are made aware of the MP's ability as a means to obtain help; the production of roles such as constituency caseworker as well as the MP as a safety valve and social worker; creation of objects such as written letters on behalf of constituents; with rules such as limits on the MP's jurisdiction within their own constituency in place.

While routines and patterns can be observed in the MP's work, what happens when the performance of repair does not go according to plan? For example, the emergence of a global event with significant political ramifications has the potential to alter an MP's schedule at the last minute, impacting work in the Commons and the constituency. Constituents intending to see MPs about their difficulties will be unable to do so, potentially further enlarging the gulf between actor and audience. Performances in the constituency are also privy to erratic interferences, with the real possibility of danger and assault. Jo Cox, Labour MP for Batley and Spen in Yorkshire, was on her way to her advice surgery on 15 June 2016 when she was fatally stabbed by one of her constituents (*Guardian*, 15 June 2016). This attack on an MP is not an isolated incident. It is not uncommon for MPs to be assaulted or attacked by their constituents during surgeries. Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham, was stabbed twice in the stomach while carrying out a constituency surgery on 14 May 2010. Previous MPs attacked during their constituency service include Liberal Democrat Peer Lord Nigel Jones MP in 2000 and Ulster Unionist MP Robert Bradford in 1981 (*Guardian*, 16 June 2016). MPs have also been at the receiving end of death threats (*Guardian*, 30 August 2015). Thus it is understandable that MPs can feel unsafe while out in their constituencies, in comparison to Westminster, where security measures are higher (*Financial Times*, 23 March 2017). Furthermore, recent research has exposed that four out of five MPs are victims of intrusive or aggressive behaviour (James et al, 2016).

Changes in schedule, unhappy constituents, differences of opinions and occasional hostility can mean that the MP-constituent interaction is not a pleasant or smooth sailing affair. Thus, I argue that actors seek successful performances even in the seemingly ordinary everyday interactions they carry out repeatedly as part of a routine. I discuss how regular constituency activities such as the advice surgery are routine performances in which MPs seek to successfully portray legitimacy and achieve authenticity. I demonstrate over the course of my empirical evidence that the unpredictability of their field of work is continually emphasised by MPs and their caseworkers. In this chapter I argue that as MPs react to these unexpected incidents while on standby, they spring into action,

seeking to resolve these issues and achieve performance re-fusion. To this purpose, I extend existing literature on constituency service interactions by analysing a specific routine performance – the MP surgery – to their constituent-audience. I address challenges faced during the contemporary constituency service process, first by analysing how a routine performance between the MP-actor and audience-constituent takes place when repair advances smoothly, when and what type of challenges and interruptions occur and how they are overcome as MPs react to these obstacles. Overcoming disturbances successfully requires tact and finesse on the part of the MP. I analyse how MPs rely on three techniques: the use of logic; exertion of authority; and counselling, to overcome these breakdowns in their symbolic performance as quickly as possible and return to routine process. Finally, I assess performative differences across various stages of repair.

The rest of this chapter will begin by discussing routines in the constituency service, followed by an analysis of how a typical MP advice surgery episode is performed. I outline a framework of this MP-constituent interaction process and the steps it includes. Then, I draw on my fieldwork observations to examine when interruptions occur over the course of the process, and the nature of these interferences. Lastly, I deal with the skills MPs exhibit to overcome these interruptions, and the performative differences detected between backstage and frontstage behaviour exhibited by MPs over the course of the repair process to re-fuse their performances. As I suggest here and investigate more fully in the next chapter, the symbolic work in the repair discursive formation, along with those of accessibility and visibility, contributes to construction of meaning, projection and maintenance of power, as part of the MP's performance of being on standby.

6.2 Routines and Ritual-like interactions in Constituency Service

There is an institutional need for Members to straddle responsibilities between Westminster and their constituency. Some responsibilities are location specific, such as parliamentary votes, debates and Early Day Motions, and occur only as part of their Westminster face. As a conduit between Westminster and constituency, constituency service activities carried out by the MP could be

considered a performance of democracy in action. These processes often include regularly carried out repetitive actions that can be considered to be part of the MP's performative routine. Within a simpler social setting, such as a village, the authenticity of one's performance is not often questioned. A smaller society means that there are fewer gaps between what people know and recall within a shared memory (Connerton, 1989: 17). Modern society does not merely mean a larger audience within an enlarged physical space, but a change in audience demographics. As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, technological advances and the complexity of modern society have resulted in the de-fusion of social and cultural elements in performances, resulting in them being viewed as inauthentic. Rifts might occur, resulting in disbelief in the interaction. Much of this depends on how receptive the audience is to the actor. The success of the interaction is at once an enactment and experience of a set of meanings that is already socially established, as actors in complex societies seek to overcome these fractures by creating fluidity and achieving authenticity through their performances (Alexander, 2011: 55). As audiences become more involved in the interaction, and more invested in what the actor has to say or do, the performance is able to encourage them out of "demographic and subcultural niches into a more widely shared universalistic liminal space, to sustain collective belief" (Alexander, 2011: 77). For a successful performative action, the actor must be able to communicate the meanings of their actions that they consciously or unconsciously want their audiences to understand and believe (Kertzer, 1988). Only then will it sanctify the existing system and those in power within it.

Routines and rituals are terms that are often used interchangeably. Before exploring details of the interaction process, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by routine, ritual-like and ritual, and how they fit within the analytical framework I put forth in Chapter 2. On a superficial level, it may appear that there is not much of a distinction between the three terms. They allude to repetition of conventional, taken-for-granted gestures. Yet a difference emerges between the three; a distinction that is vital to the argument within this chapter as we discuss performances in the constituency. Routine refers to a repeated act that is culturally embedded to the point of appearing naturalised and has an

instrumental function (Coleman, 2013: 57). It serves a purpose, much like a means to an end, and does not usually involve a performance of meaning.

Unlike routine, ritual performs a displacement function, allaying anxieties about what might otherwise happen (Coleman, 2013: 57). A general investigation into the meaning of the term ritual has resulted in a number of interpretations, with a consensus that ritual connects the past to the present, as well as the present to the future, giving meaning to the world around us. Durkheim (1915) takes on a systematic worldview on rituals, arguing that rituals are needed to support social solidarity. Nations are not dissimilar from simple hunter and gatherer groups, as they present themselves to people through symbolic representations of the collectivity (Kertzer, 1988: 64). Rituals can bring people together either by identifying a common allegiance through these symbols and making them feel as one, or through a negative solidarity such as a witch hunt, which reaffirms national purposes and forging of national solidarity through action (Ibid). Kertzer, on the other hand, takes a middle path when defining the role of ritual in politics, between "an overly restrictive definition, which would limit ritual to the religious sphere and identify it with the supernatural, and an overly broad definition, labelling as ritual any standardised human activity" (Kertzer, 1988: 8). He considers ritual as an analytical category that allows us to understand the chaos of human experience within a coherent framework (Ibid). Repetitive, standardised action bereft of symbolisation is merely a specimen of habit and not ritual. Symbolisation gives ordinary action much more important meaning. It is through the use of ritual that beliefs about the universe come to be acquired, reinforced and eventually changed. Ritual not only gives meaning to the universe, it becomes part of the universe as well.

Similar to Kertzer's definition, I consider ritual a successful formal, structured action often enacted at certain places and times. Its success as a ritual, as opposed to a routine, occurs by portraying symbolic meaning that is understood by both actor and audience. The manifestation of a successful performance is, quite simply, the absence of the performance itself. The signifiers seem to become what they signify, with no evidence of relying on scripts, props, power or

audiences (Alexander, 2011: 55). In essence, flow is achieved. Alexander draws from Bourdieu's concept of "becoming natural" – where a performance has achieved its aim of "an experience of aesthetic grace" (2011: 55). "When performance is successful, social powers manifest themselves not as external or hegemonic forces that facilitate or oppose the unfolding performance but merely as sign-vehicles, as means of representation, as conveyors of the intended meaning" (Alexander, 2011: 55). Within this context in particular, the success of the routine is not merely in achieving the goal of problem resolution. Successful performance of the process invigorates the system of representation and institutions, strengthening the belief that it does work. This is exactly how a ritual and routine differ. However, while it is clear that the central processes in complex societies are symbolic and sometimes societally integrative, these interactions and repair processes are not rituals in the traditional sense (Alexander, 2011: 27).

For the citizen-audience, participation in institutional routines has the potential to symbolise meaning going beyond routine. This hinges on the representative's performance being deemed as authentic by the citizen, energising them and attaching them firming to each other, and the symbolic meaning produced during the interaction. Only then can re-fusion be said to have occurred, producing ritual-like effects. Participating in these interactions enables the citizen of the modern state to identify with the larger political focus only experienced by way of a symbolic silhouette. This simplified, general outline of the world allows them to understand what is going on as they participate in a political ritual (Kertzer, 1988: 1). While I am not assessing the success of the routine performance in this chapter, I argue that its performative success is considered ritual-like, as its effervescence is short lived. The MPs might carry out these ritual-like performances regularly, but often they do not meet the same constituents again.

Thus, for the purpose of this research, I define carrying out a constituency surgery as routine for the MP involved. It is carried out on a regular basis to enact the discursive formation of repair. If successful, these symbolic actions allow

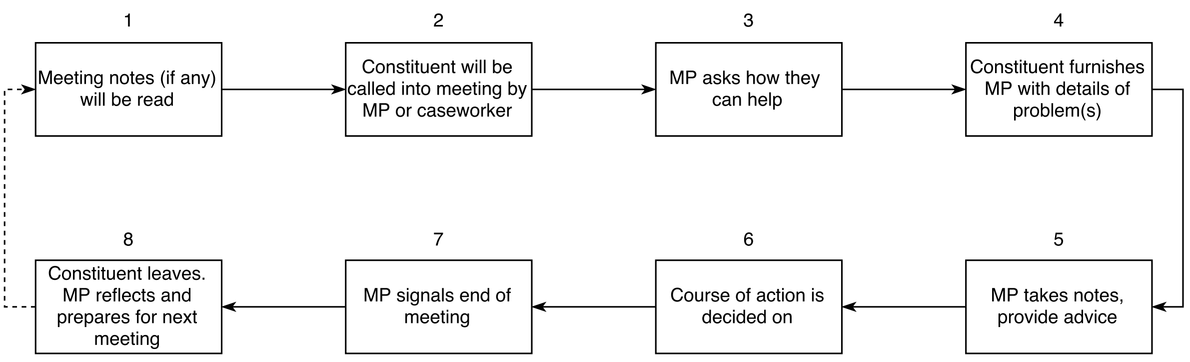
constituents to understand abstract political entities, providing a means of identifying with them, and structure an understanding of their position within the political world and the public's attitude to the various political actors that propagate it (Kertzer, 1988: 13). Unlike large-scale performances, where there is an audience-performer gulf, constituents have direct contact with the MP during the advice surgery. Fusion of audience and performer is not marred by physical distance. However, the possibility of audience diversity might result in broken performances, which we will explore later in this chapter. This re-fusion of performance does not merely rely on the dissemination of a shared background script that includes shared symbols, but is enacted through a strategic use of performances that consist of discursive formations as mechanisms to communicate the meaning and influence of the routine. The difficulty in achieving a seamless interaction is not simply a reflection of social structure and demographics. It is also a matter of interpretation. Audience interpretation is a process and does not happen automatically (Alexander, 2011). This will occur if the MP's performance is considered authentic, and re-fusion has been achieved. It reinforces the process and legitimacy of the MP as a representative. Its success means reaffirmation of the constituent's trust in them, the institution and the democratic process. For the constituent, if this interaction is successfully carried out, it could be considered ritual-like. With this concrete understanding of the terms routines, ritual-like and rituals, the following section examines the process of how advice surgeries are carried out, observed over the course of my fieldwork. I show how the volley between the MP and constituent encompasses eight formal steps.

6.3 The Advice Surgery Repair Process

Within the context of constituency service, advice surgery routines in the constituency may be perceived as ordinary, technical and practical. As MPs carry out these meetings, they provide guidance on personal problems such as public housing applications and benefit claims, amongst others. If constituents question the government's stance on certain policies, the MP will then be able to furnish them with more details, while answering the constituents' questions. In the event that a problem in the constituency has escalated and requires the attention of

Parliament, the MP may then consider speaking or debating about it with their colleagues in the Commons. The repetitive arranging and carrying out these meetings are far from being mere instruments of political representation, but constitute the actual exercise and actions of the discursive formation of repair, where MPs strive to overcome fractures in their performances to the constituent-audience. Furthermore, the success of this ritual-like performance will re-embed the role of the standby MP within the government's institutional organisation.

Specifically, when MPs carry out surgeries, they hold each appointment in a formal manner with clearly defined steps that make up the entire process from start to finish. If the performance goes according to plan, the conversation tends to flow fairly naturally, with the MP navigating the direction it should go. Dependent on the MP's choice, sometimes a caseworker is present during the surgery to take down notes on behalf of the MP, as well as providing a bit of information support. There are eight distinct stages during this process, starting from before the meeting, to during and after. Figure 6.1 below demonstrates a framework of how the process takes place.



(Figure 6.1: The MP-Constituent Surgery Process)

The first stage of the eight-stage process occurs even before the MP interacts with the constituent. Akin to Goffman's idea of staging talk, this takes place backstage (1959: 174). Questions on the cases or notes are raised and clarified; the environment where the meeting takes place is prepared to receive the audience; the character of constituents are discussed; past and likely difficulties are talked about. Performance scripts are adjusted to suit the situation in hand, while remaining in accordance with the MP's presentation of self.

Prior to each actual meeting, MPs quickly read through the notes prepared by their caseworkers and caught up on other work. Andrew Smith, former MP for Oxford East, often used this time between meetings to sign letters that his caseworkers had prepared. On occasion, if the constituent was running late, the MP would use this time to check if they were indeed turning up. This was usually by way of a telephone call, which also encouraged the constituent to try to arrive as quickly as possible. During a surgery with David Miller MP, held at a local church in July 2015, the constituent who was meant to arrive at 11am had not done so. Five minutes past the arranged time, MP Miller rang her on the number she provided, telling me "I ring them to embarrass them really". This was especially the case if the meeting was appointment-based, with the constituent having communicated with the MP's office beforehand. With subsequent meetings arranged back-to-back, one meeting running late would result in a delay for everyone else. The majority of surgery meetings were arranged when caseworkers were unable to manage the case themselves due to its complexity. On occasion, constituents insisted on meeting their MPs as a first point of contact. Notes comprised an outline of the constituent's concern, a copy of prior correspondence (such as email printouts and/or handwritten letters) and relevant paperwork that might be useful in providing context to the problem at hand.

Actual interaction between MP and constituent(s) occurs in Stage 2. Almost all of the MPs in my study (apart from one, due to a health problem) would personally fetch the constituent from the waiting area, directing them to the room or area where the meeting was being held. As they took a seat, constituents were greeted with a typical opening line (Stage 3). MPs began the interaction with a variant of similar lines, such as "How can I help?", "What can I do for you?" and "What is the issue here?" I observed as the MPs consistently used the same lines, much like an actor would a script. Constituents then proceeded to explain what their concerns were, and what help they hoped to receive from their MP (Stage 4). Although they already had a general understanding of what the issue is about from the case notes, it was common for MPs to let the constituents describe the

situation at hand, before delving into what help they needed, and what the MPs could do to help.

Notes were taken over the course of the conversation, either by the MP or the caseworker, if present. Often, MPs would ask a few clarifying questions before proceeding to suggest how they may be able to help. Depending on what the constituent wanted, or how they reacted during the meeting, a course of action was decided on (Stage 6). Apart from providing advice, or directing constituents to other local government bodies for further information or action, an offer to write a letter was the typical course of action. MPs would usually ask for their constituents' permission (through a signed letter) to represent them in writing to the respective councils and companies. Once a decision was made on what their next steps would be, MPs also reminded their constituents that there was no guarantee on what outcomes they would provide.

As a conclusion was reached, the end of the meeting was usually signalled by the Member, saying that they would be in touch, asking if there were any other questions or help needed (Stage 7). Sometimes a hint was necessary, especially if the constituent was particularly chatty. In this case, MPs would either stand from their seat, thanking their constituents for coming, or indicate that the meeting was over by saying that there was another appointment waiting. For example, MPs George Watson and Desmond Hill would let constituents know that there were other constituents with appointments waiting, and that they had to go. The MPs then thanked the constituent for coming to see them, before standing up, and walking the constituent to the door.

After each meeting, it was typical for the MP to reflect on the case they had just helped with. If a caseworker was there, a small discussion may have ensued (Stage 8), mulling over the reception to the last performance, in what were sometimes called "post mortems". Simultaneously, "wounds are licked and morale is strengthened for the next performance" (Goffman, 1959: 174). The MP then proceeded to read through the next meeting's notes, before fetching the next constituent. The process then continued from Stage 1 again. With this

understanding of how the interaction process takes place, we now turn to understanding how conflicts or disruptions can undermine the performance's authenticity.

6.4 Threats to Authenticity: Conflict, disruptions and broken routines

As I raised earlier in this chapter, the repair process is a performance that does not always go smoothly. As with any everyday interaction, there are bound to be disagreements and interruptions. During turbulent moments, it is possible that a new set of motives may suddenly emerge and the established social distance between the audience and performer may sharply increase or decrease. It is then when "a portrayed character 'forgets himself' and blurts out a relatively unperformed exclamation" (Goffman, 1959: 167). As the crisis is overcome it is likely the previously working consensus will be re-established, albeit with some reticence (Ibid). As this section will demonstrate, crises have been observed to erupt at different stages of the process. This results in conflict that may threaten how the interaction proceeds and, ultimately, whether the repair routine achieves the performative re-fusion required to be considered authentic.

Over the course of the actual meeting (from Stages 2 to 7), it was common for MPs to correct misconceptions of what constituents thought they were able to do on their behalf. I observed multiple times as MP Peter Kyle repeatedly explained that he did not have jurisdiction or the power to do what constituents were hoping he was able to do, explaining that "I can be a voice that can cause a rethink" (personal communication, 22 April 2016). MP James Williamson is noted to say, "Let me see what I can do," demonstrating how he will work within his abilities as an MP. This acknowledgement of limits initially seems like a lack of power, but can be considered as strength on the part of the MP. I discuss this further in Chapter 7 where I investigate the discursive formation of power. For this section, we will look at how each stage in the process outlined in Figure 6.1 has the potential for interference, thwarting repair.

How MPs successfully manage and react when these routines are disrupted is usually contingent on the mood of the constituent, the MP's skill and experience

and the general disposition of the MP. Reactions during surgery cases can often be unpredictable, occasionally resulting in agitated and distressed constituents. When managing the situation at hand, MPs often have to go beyond their parliamentary representative capacity to embody a number of different roles, such as being a welfare counsellor or a legal adviser. The following section will begin by analysing various stages during the process when conflicts may occur, how MPs behave during conflicts and techniques utilised to resolve them.

Disruption during Stage 1

Disruptions in the process can occur as early as backstage, during Stage 1, as the MP prepares for the meeting. This may be due to the challenging nature of the topic to be discussed, lack of preparation or through previous interactions (either in person or via other forms of correspondence) with the constituent. With the MP expecting the meeting ahead to be difficult, this inadvertently sets the tone for interaction to come. It is only natural that the MP will seek to present themselves in a manner they believe will allow them the most control over the reparative process, and subsequently the performance's outcome. When two sides present themselves to each other for the first time for the purposes of interaction, the members of each side tend to maintain the line that they are what they claim to be, and strive to stay in character (Goffman, 1959: 166).

With this disruption in Stage 1, the MP will perform their role as a representative, with the need to overcome the disruption adjusted in their script, prior to speaking to the constituent. I had the opportunity to observe this a handful of times over the course of my fieldwork. As MP Barnaby Wright read through his meeting notes during a surgery in November 2014, before his constituent was called in, he exclaimed, "Aghh! I wish I had known about this beforehand! I would have brought a print out of the government's policies", referring to a constituent who had made an appointment to see him about firemen's pensions. Having a copy of the printout would have been a useful performance prop, enabling him to stay on script suitably.

His constituency caseworker, Margaret, reminded him that all surgery appointment details were made available on his calendar, to which he replied, "I know, I just haven't had time to look at it". MP Wright retained an annoyed expression on his face as he looked through his notes, explaining to me that the policy on firemen's pensions was a contentious issue that he had received several constituent letters about. This sense of defence continued into the meeting. As the constituent, Mr Robert Wells, a fireman, broached why he had come (Stage 3), MP Wright responded firmly, "We have been on top of it, I know all about it." The interaction continued smoothly as the fireman shared a pension policy he had drawn up based on calculations he had made. MP Wright listened to the suggestion as he took notes, interjecting periodically with specific knowledge from parliamentary debates. As the meeting came to a close, MP Wright showed appreciation for Mr Wells's efforts by asking for a copy of the policy plan. He also assured Mr Wells that a letter would be sent, updating him on the debate's progress.

I observed a similar episode with MP Peter Kyle, in April 2016, as he carried out his weekly surgery meetings. Meetings were usually held on the second floor of his office, housed in a shop front along his constituency's high street. Constituents waited downstairs in the waiting area for their turn. MP Kyle prepared by reading case notes before the start of the next meeting, speaking to his caseworker Estelle at the same time for any updates that he might have missed. He then proceeded to fetch his appointments from downstairs.

On this occasion, Estelle briefed him quickly on his second appointment after his first appointment of the day left. The second appointment was with a lady named Natalie who was approximately 70 years old. Estelle spoke in conspiratorial tones as MP Kyle listened carefully with a serious look on his face. They had a brief discussion on how to manage Natalie, following which MP Kyle made his way downstairs to fetch the constituent. With a slight laugh, Estelle hurriedly filled me in on the details, saying, "This lady is a bit mad, according to her GP." Natalie's local council and the police have also been in touch with the doctor, reiterating the severity of her mental health problems. Estelle speaking to MP

Kyle before the meeting allowed him to prepare himself for the meeting, as well as acquaint himself with the severity of the situation. The case's difficulty proved to be true, as I show later on at Stage 4.

Prior interaction with constituents may also result in the MP establishing an idea of what the interaction will be like. In March 2015, I shadowed MP Desmond Hill during his surgery, where he was scheduled to meet four constituents. After walking his third appointment to the door, MP Hill read through his notes to prepare for his final appointment of the day. As he did so, MP Hill made an uncomfortable face. As he prepared to fetch the last constituent, he explained to me that the last constituent was rather "eccentric", and that it was "best not to stay". While he did not go on to explain further, his facial expression and remark divulged he did not believe that the meeting would go smoothly and would be challenging, prior to even meeting the constituent.

MPs Wright, Kyle and Hill demonstrate how the MP-constituent interaction process can be disrupted from Stage 1. As the MPs proceeded from Stage 1 to 2, there was a need to manage the issue in as smooth a manner as possible right from the start. Adjusting the script to suit the interaction ensured that the MP stayed within the image he hoped to portray. The example of MP Wright firmly telling Mr Wells that his team was on top of the firemen's pensions illustrates an attempt to control the performance to his favour. Successfully doing so not only shows the constituent that he is able to help, but also presents MP Wright positively in the performance. By being "on top of it", MP Wright is clearly confident as he goes into the discussion, further reassuring the constituent of his capabilities, adding to the possibility of the constituent being convinced of his performance, hence achieving re-fusion and authenticity.

Disruption during Stage 2

A disruption that occurs during Stage 2 is not common, with the constituent having just entered the room to the meet the MP. Over the course of my fieldwork, I only observed this to happen on one occasion. MP William Morgan's first appointment of the day, constituent Lynette Walker, arrived early at the

public library where the surgery was held, having made an appointment to see him. I noticed as she waited at the library's reading area for her name to be called. MP Morgan and his caseworker Michael arrived just before the scheduled surgery time, directing me to where meetings were to be held, in a large, private conference meeting room accessible only by code. The conference room had an imposing oval-shaped walnut table in the middle, with approximately 20 matching chairs around it. It was plainly decorated, with several scenic paintings adorning the walls. MP Morgan and Michael spent some time preparing for the surgery, first by deciding where they should sit. MP Morgan decided to sit near the head of the table with Michael to his left, in order for his constituents to sit next to him on his right.

MP Morgan proceeded to leaf through prepared case notes and paperwork as Michael provided him with a brief description of Ms Walker's appointment reasons, a typical exchange during Stage 1. Michael then left the room to walk Lynette to the meeting room. MP Morgan, who had started signing letters while waiting for her to enter, stood up to greet her with an outstretched hand. Lynette took his hand as she asked if it was possible to speak to the MP on her own, citing the sensitive nature of her problems. According to her, one of her in-laws was a fairly prominent person in the City, and she would prefer if her discussion with the MP was kept between as few people as possible. MP Morgan repeatedly assured her that all information shared amongst the group was strictly confidential, giving her his word that nothing said during the meeting would leave the room. He further explained that his caseworker's presence was necessary to ensure his general safety from possibly distraught constituents. Ms Walker looked increasingly uncomfortable as she heard this. Unconvinced by his explanation, she chose to leave the room instead of continuing with her appointment.

This interaction between MP Morgan and his constituent Ms Walker is a unique example, but also highlights the increasing importance of personal security. Not only was the meeting disrupted during Stage 2, but this resulted in an incomplete performance. Ms Walker's discomfort and ultimate decision to leave indicates

distrust in MP Morgan's performance and his reasoning. As she was not convinced by MP Morgan's reassurance and explanation, this repair routine was unsuccessful.

Disruption during Stage 3

During Stage 3, the MP proceeds to ask how they able to help the constituent. An interruption during Stage 3 might occur as the MP is disrupted or preoccupied before they ask the constituent about their issue and why they have come. This is a situation that can have many variations. During an advice surgery with Tessa Munt MP in Glastonbury, Somerset, constituent Mr Pradeep Singh was ushered to take a seat. This took place in a local café along the high street. A table at the back of the café was reserved for MP Munt whenever she was scheduled to hold her advice surgeries, usually once a month at this particular place. On this day, she was accompanied by her caseworker Matthew. The first constituent to meet MP Munt was Mr Singh, who had just taken his seat across from MP Munt when a portly gentleman came to the table to greet her. MP Munt looked delighted as she stood to kiss his cheek in greeting. The gentleman turned out to be town council employee Mr Harold Steiner. They spoke in lowered voices, a conversation that lasted about five minutes. Matthew maintained a slightly awkward nonchalance as he waited with Mr Singh, who had an extremely annoyed expression on his face. Mr Steiner and MP Munt hugged each other goodbye, and she returned to her seat at the table. MP Munt then shuffled through some casework papers she brought with her. Exhaling loudly with a frown, Mr Singh continued to wait, but his impatience was obvious. MP Munt finally looked up from her papers, and started asking him for updates about his business problems, indicating she was prepared and familiar with his problem. Mr Singh finally relaxed his brow as he showed MP Munt a letter he received, and the interaction proceeded from Stage 3 to 4.

This performance between MP Munt and her constituent describes how MP Munt's attention was diverted away from the script, resulting in what Goffman terms the forgetting of oneself (1959: 167). MP Munt momentarily forgot the line she was meant to be saying next, and what she was in the middle of doing,

resulting in the disruption. This was further demonstrated as she turned her attention away from the interaction, to something else, in this case speaking to Mr Steiner. The process was stalled as the constituent was made to wait, running the risk of further interruption of the process should the constituent get upset, or express further displeasure. It is also a possibility in such a situation that the MP may have difficulty returning to the performance's dynamic, especially if the disruption lay with their action.

Disruption during Stage 4

Dissatisfied or distressed constituents often use the surgery as an outlet to express their disappointment and anger at the party, institution and, on occasion, the MP themselves. While this can occur any time over the process, my fieldwork observations indicate that this occurs primarily at Stage 4, just after constituents are asked to expound on what is bothering them. This opportunity to vent can feature extreme emotional reactions. As demonstrated in the following two examples, tricky disruptions can be difficult to manage once constituents are given the floor to express themselves.

During a surgery meeting in January 2016, I observed as a constituent directed his frustrations with policy changes and migration towards MP William Morgan and his caseworker Stuart. The surgery took place at the local Conservative Association, with meetings held at one of the tables in the café area of the building. Constituents milled around the entrance as they waited, where there were a few chairs and tables available. Between each appointment, Stuart and MP Morgan went through the case notes, before MP Morgan walked to the waiting area to meet the constituent. During this particular meeting, British Army veteran and constituent Patrick McNeal expressed acute frustration at the number of migrants in Britain, blaming them for putting a strain on the government's financial resources. Approximately 70 years old, Mr McNeal was dressed sharply in a dark brown tweed suit, and was aided by a walking stick. Mr McNeal was particularly aggrieved at the government's changes in healthcare policies, especially when it came to older people. "Why are you not helping the old people? I don't want to pay for my healthcare. Why can't they go back to the

old system?!… It's a bloody invasion! Let's call it what it is." MP Morgan demonstrated familiarity with this constituent's rants and did not show visible facial reactions. He said, "I know we have talked about it last time." Mr McNeal continued to rant for a few minutes, while MP Morgan remained quiet until the rant was over. MP Morgan then used the opportunity to draw on local neighbourhood examples to disprove Mr McNeal's point of view, such as the owners of the curry house who were of Indian origin. He referred to them as local business owners trying to make an honest living, constituents who did not deserve to be looked at negatively. Mr McNeal was stubborn, getting increasingly aggressive upon MP Morgan's response. He insisted the UK's financial situation was not as bad as the government made it out to be. Rather, the money was "in all the wrong bloody places." Patiently, MP Morgan remarked, "Patrick, tell me. You keep coming back asking me what I am doing for old people, but I cannot go back to a system that never worked… It won't work the same way it used to." Mr McNeal slapped his hand loudly on the table in a show of irritation. His anger was evident as he proceeded to express argumentative anti-Muslim sentiments with a disclaimer, "You're going to say it's racist but it is not!" With knitted eyebrows and crossed arms, MP Morgan's face conveyed frustrated exasperation as he told Mr McNeal that his view was "bigoted". He indicated that his appointment was over by telling him that other constituents were waiting their turn. Mr McNeal did not stand from his seat, and attempted to continue the meeting by speaking about military pensions. Without acknowledging his statement on pensions, MP Morgan repeated plainly that they had the next constituent waiting. Annoyed, Mr McNeal grunted and said, "Try and sort it out. It is getting stupid." Stuart stood up and came towards Mr McNeal to help him with his walking stick, while repeating that there was another constituent waiting. Mr McNeal conceded that his time was up, and left.

The next example saw constituent Anna Wesley arriving at the constituency office with her young daughter, Lila, in tow in March 2016. MP George Watson first gave his attention to Lila, asking her name and how old she was. Around five years of age, she replied to MP Watson's questions shyly, nodding her head intermittently. "I'm going to talk to your mum. You're going to sit there yes?" Ms

Wesley looked visibly distressed as MP Watson turned his attention to her, asking how he could help. She loudly explained the local council had made intentionally homeless, with a possession order on her home. Her agitation was escalating as she started to shout, "It's ridiculous, it is not our fault this is happening!... I can't cope with this. I'm getting depressed. I'm actually going crazy!" Clarification revealed she had lived in a council flat for the past nine years, which she managed to purchase from the council. However, a need to rebuild had meant that the council had asked her to vacate her flat and move. MP Watson took down notes as he enquired about approaching the council. According to Ms Wesley, all her attempts to receive help had been unsuccessful. When asked if she had evidence of correspondence with the council so that MP Watson could have a better idea of what was being said, the constituent retrieved a stack of letters from her tattered canvas tote, hurling them across the table towards the MP. She slouched in her chair and looked away angrily as the MP leafed through them.

Frustration is a common emotive theme running through the examples of disruption in Stage 4. It is observed that constituents are not only expressing unhappiness directed at their personal situation but also specifically relate these situations to policy issues and government decisions. Each constituent can be seen in their speech to consider the government – "them" – as the source of their problems. As an elected representative, the MP is put in the position of tackling these issues head on. This usually involves correcting misconceptions, providing a clear explanation of the government's policy position, and how the process works, as observed in the case between MP Morgan and Mr McNeal. The act of coming to see their MP is not only an exercise in their political rights, but also demonstrates an understanding of the MP as a representative of the political institution and system. Regardless of the interaction's outcome, we can observe that constituents are aware of the MP as a means of obtaining help through the body of knowledge produced in the discursive formation of repair. Taking part in the routine further serves to influence and shape ideas of political events, public policies and concepts of what appropriate political leadership is like to

constituents and of how well the world around them measures up to those standards (Kertzer, 1988: 79).

Disruption during Stage 5

As the MP listens to the constituent explain their problem, what they need help with is not always highlighted or made immediately clear. This could be due to the sensitive nature of the issue, the difficult nature of the constituent or the constituent hoping that the MP is able to go beyond the typical institutional boundaries to resolve their issues. It is often difficult for the MP and constituent to come to a consensus, as this not only requires adjustment of the script to suit the issue's context, but also convincing the constituent of the MP's solution. This step is made even more intricate depending on the MP's belief in being able to help. As we observed in the previous stage, with MP Morgan and Mr McNeal, a problematic disruption could also mean that Stage 5 is not reached, terminating the process of repair. MPs tend to approach Stage 5 cautiously as providing advice. Discussing solutions before deciding on a course of action is therefore not always a straightforward affair, making the transition from Stage 5 to Stage 6 especially fraught with the possibility of disruption. The two examples below demonstrate how the MP's suggestions and advice can result in fractures in the interaction.

MPs might find providing advice and help challenging if they do not emphathise with the constituent's problem. During a surgery on 10 October 2015 at the local library, MP William Morgan had an appointment with a constituent, Mrs Germaine Wolfson, who had come to see him about her prescription for gluten free (GF) products and request to be referred to a homeopathic hospital. As Mrs Wolfson described her case, she also shared photocopies of previously sent letters to her GP. According to her, she and her son had been prescribed a GF diet for approximately 20 years. This was to help with her son's celiac disease (a gluten-sensitive condition) and his asthmatic symptoms. For herself, she used the GF diet to manage and alleviate her anxiety and depression. She had no doubt that it was effective, insisting on its importance. Having a prescription allowed her to purchase GF groceries at a discount, but for the last three years she had not been

given this prescription. She was unable to afford the higher cost, and she was of the opinion this resulted in health complications of which her son passed away from as a result. Presently, she found her own day-to-day life negatively impacted and reiterated her desire to see a homeopath. Listening to her intently, MP Morgan looked unsure of how to proceed, revealing he had never heard of this prescription subsidy before. He took his phone out to look it up, while questioning her as to why these prescriptions were no longer provided. Mrs Wolfson explained that she was not sure, as her efforts to find out had been for naught. She was instead prescribed a pill to help with her anxiety, which she no longer wanted to rely on.

Nodding his head, MP Morgan explained, "Homeopathy is not something I particularly support the NHS spending money on." He further explained that he was willing to write a letter to the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in charge of her case in support of her doctor's prescription, but only if updated medical tests were undertaken and a psychiatrist's letter was provided. His caseworker Megan was then also instructed to look up the NHS and party position on homeopathy. Megan handed Mrs Wolfson a consent form to fill out. The form would allow MP Morgan to represent her when writing about her health. She provided her consent then asked if he was able to write an additional letter to the Health Secretary about the reduction of subsidies for those who require a GF diet. MP Morgan did not immediately react to what she said, but continued to research prescribed GF bread on his mobile phone. "Isn't it more expensive to get it on prescription? I know GF bread is more expensive, but isn't it like, say five quid now?" Mrs Wolfson gave MP Morgan a long look, saying she was not sure. Still looking at his mobile phone, MP Morgan said, "You can get the GF bread at any Morrisons." This volley continued until MP Morgan attempted to wind the meeting down by assertively asking her, "What is the exact treatment you need it for? Is it just for the anxiety or is it something more? Is it psychosis?" She provided a brief summary of what had already been said, before leaving the meeting when assured that a letter to her local CCG and another to the Health Secretary enquiring about the NHS position on homeopathy will be written on

her behalf. It was emphasised that he was not able to promise her any kind of outcome.

In another incident, constituent Tom Sidney approached his local MP Tessa Munt in January 2015 to speak about the assistance that primary caregivers received from the government. MP Munt met him at the local pub in Shepton Mallet during one of her regularly scheduled meetings. She listened as he explained in detail the challenges he faced as his wife's sole caregiver. Approaching his 80s, he had had to give up driving due to his age. The severity of his wife's Alzheimer's condition meant that she could not be left alone for more than an hour, making caring for her incredibly taxing. For instance he was unable to take her to her medical appointments and any errands would take more than an hour, as he would have to use the public bus, which ran infrequently. He had not been able to get help as hiring an additional carer at £18 an hour was beyond his budget. Appearing incredibly exasperated as he reached the end of his explanation, he raised his voice and exclaimed with teary eyes, "I don't think the government recognises this plight and aren't doing a damned thing about it!" In a conciliatory tone MP Munt said, "I don't think that's true", then offered to provide some pamphlets for groups his wife could join. Mr Sidney rebuffed her offer, saying his wife disliked group activities with strangers. His disappointment was obvious, and MP Munt noticed. Her expression empathetic, she explained she understood his circumstances well as her own stepfather suffered from Alzheimer's for 24 years before he passed away. Her own mother, as his primary carer, received her monthly allowance only after 20 years. She then asked Mr Sidney sympathetically yet straightforwardly, "What do you want me to do?"

We can observe that both MPs use this stage to clarify what the constituents have shared with them, before giving advice. In the interaction between MP Morgan and Mrs Wolfson, his uncertainty over her case is demonstrable. His unfamiliarity with her claims and medical needs have rendered any script he might have had impractical. Instead a swift adjustment to the script was required, facilitated with the use of his mobile phone. In addition, he made clear that his stand on homeopathy contrasted with Mrs Wolfson's. The disruption in this case

did not necessarily result in anger or unhappiness, but it did not allow Stage 5 to proceed smoothly to Stage 6. MP Morgan's lack of belief in what the constituent was saying emerged through his occasional silences (such as when she asked for an additional letter), and his thoroughly trying to understand her story by asking specifically worded questions (such as "What is the exact treatment you need it for?"). Asking questions in this manner not only enabled him to build a clearer picture of the entire issue, but also narrowed down what the constituent wanted out of the meeting. Clarity results in better script adjustment, subsequently resulting in a higher chance of overcoming the disruption and achieving re-fusion. This could be seen with MP Morgan, as he agreed to write the letters on Mrs Wolfson's behalf.

Furthermore, we can see that both MPs provided suggestions, but these were initially refused by the constituents. This negotiation stage, which links Stage 5 to Stage 6, not only reveals what the constituent really wants the MP to help them with, but also is an indication of what sort of help the MP is able to provide. On occasion, the constituent might not be clear or upfront about what they would like from the MP. This is occasionally due to embarrassment or timidity, sensitivity about their problems or even a lack of trust that the MP is able to help. Their questioning indicates that the MP is trying to restore equilibrium in the interaction as soon as possible, but also finding out key elements of the constituent's specific problems that they could integrate into their existing script.

In MP Munt's case, we can observe her struggles during this stage as she attempts to provide suggestions to Mr Sidney. His disillusionment with institutions and their ability to help is evident. As discussed in Chapter 5, MP Munt here draws on her personal experience to appear accessible to her constituent. She enacts the use of this narrative to not only draw a connection with Mr Sidney, but also to demonstrate that she's an institutional representative who understands his plight. Here a new script has erupted out of the old one: from "a representative", to "a representative like him" – someone who understands what he is going through. This revamped script allows MP Munt to continue with the performance.

Disruption in Stage 6

As discussed in the previous section, a disruption in Stage 5 can result in delays in progress to Stage 6. Advice and opinions that are shared by the MP in Stage 5 might not necessarily result in a course of action that is mutually agreed on by both MP and constituent. MPs are able to trigger disruptions in this stage by prematurely ceasing their performance. This usually occurs when the MP does not believe that they able to help, or disagrees with the constituent's request. An example of this occurred during my shadowing of Conservative MP James Williamson in April 2016. His advice surgeries took place every Friday at his local Conservative Association office, a convenient location about 15 minutes' walk from the local train station. The constituent in question, Mr Randall Hill, had child support issues with which he wanted to seek MP Williamson's help. He had fathered a number of children with different women and was unable to afford to pay child support fees, resulting in a large debt of £15,000. Previous help sought from MP Williamson culminated in a child support payment plan of approximately £120 per month. Recalling Mr Hill and his case, MP Williamson sustained a fair tone during the meeting, asking what Mr Hill hoped to attain in this meeting. Mr Hill bullishly revealed that he found the monthly payment unviable and that Child Support Services was "only interested in money". He hoped to lower the amount he had to pay. Listening intently, MP Williamson recalculated the monthly payment plan, arriving at the same amount. He also pointed out that the amount had already been reduced in light of Mr Hill's inconsistent salary and was calculated with the minimum amount in mind, "You're going to have to pay it off, I'm sorry. I can't do more for you." MP Williamson then stated that it was best that Mr Hill left, terminating the repair process.

Hammering out what constituents want to be done about their problems and negotiating a plan of action can also take some time, possibly resulting in disagreements. As I have pointed out previously, it is not uncommon for constituents to have unrealistic expectations of what the MP can do for them. Legislative limitations dictate the extent of an MP's influence and ability to help,

and it is often during Stage 6 that this emerges. I perceived how MPs avoided disruptions by firmly asserting a solution within the remit of the constituent's request. As demonstrated in the case of MP Morgan and Mrs Wolfson in Stage 5, MP Morgan agreed to write a letter to her local CCG and the NHS as she requested. However, he did not intend to request that she be given a prescription, but to write to enquire what their position on homeopathy was.

As observed in these examples, decisions made in Stage 6 may not be the outcomes sought by constituents, and can be disruptions in themselves. While the performative act is aimed at repair, decisions made in Stage 6 are not always able to achieve successful re-fusion.

Disruption in Stage 7

Disruptions that occur in Stage 7 are uncommon. This is the stage in which the constituent and MP part ways, after the performative routine is over. Over the course of my fieldwork, I observed as interactions were disrupted in earlier stages of the process, before escalating to levels where the constituents were asked to leave. At this point they were often indignant, and could exhibit stubbornness. Waiting to still be heard, they sometimes obstinately continued sitting in their seats, until the MP had to persistently inform them that the meeting was over. Other times, subtler approaches could be taken. Body language such as the tidying of paperwork or standing up ready to go were actions that MPs and their caseworkers undertook to indicate that an interaction was over.

However, as I have pointed out, these disruptions do not begin in Stage 7, but continue through till Stage 7 after beginning in an earlier stage. In Stage 7 the MP is getting ready to say a goodbye greeting and thank the constituent for coming. Hypothetically, this interaction may turn sour if the MP accidentally upsets the constituent by saying something out of place just before saying goodbye, such as that they have low faith in certain cases given to them.

Disruption in Stage 8

At Stage 8 of the process, the constituent is no longer taking part in the interaction. The performance is over, but the possibility of disruption still exists. Despite the MP being in the same area as before, any type of backstage behaviour can transform the frontstage into the backstage. To provide an example, we can return to the interaction between MP Morgan and Mrs Wolfson described in my discussion of disruptions during Stage 5. After Mrs Wolfson and MP Morgan agreed on a course of action, Mrs Wolfson was escorted out of the room by caseworker Megan as MP Morgan looked through the notes on the case. When Megan returned, he looked up the name of the white pill Mrs Wolfson said she was given in place of her original GF prescription, discovering that that medication is used to treat severe mental health problems, including schizophrenia. "It's bloody dangerous to give homeopathic medicine!" he exclaimed in angry disbelief. He went on to emphasise the strain on taxpayer's money that alternative medicine creates.

Backstage behaviours not only reveal how the MP really feels, but enable a comparison with the frontstage. MP Morgan's continued research indicated scepticism of the benefits of a gluten-free diet, as well as what his constituent was telling him. Although it could not be assumed that the constituent was given the pill as she suffered from mental health issues, the possibility was enough to shock MP Morgan, disrupting the interaction at this late stage. Although it was uncertain how much this affected MP Morgan's decision to help, as a representative he had made clear that he could put aside his personal thoughts for the benefit of his constituent. It is possible that the letter could be crafted to temper his lack of enthusiasm, while keeping the constituent's needs in focus.

Although this is the end of the process, hypothetically there is a possibility of further disruption if the MP and the caseworkers start discussing the case disfavourably when they think the constituent has left. If the constituent has not fully left the building and happens to overhear what is being said, there is a high possibility of the constituent storming back into the room to confront the MP. Other disruptions in this stage could occur if there is a realisation that

information provided by a constituent was incomplete or untrustworthy. I discuss this further in the following section.

6.5 The Pursuit of Repair

Performative success in the discursive formation of repair is dependent on the overcoming of disruptions and unexpected interruptions in as natural a manner as possible. The above examples illustrate how routine advice surgery meetings are subject to a range of interruptions across various stages of the process, as all MPs seek to achieve repair regularly in their constituency service. In this section I identify and analyse the techniques utilised by MPs to overcome disruptions in their symbolic actions, such as remaining calm, being a source of comfort and exerting dominance. Drawing from Goffman's (1959) presentation of self, I also demonstrate performative differences between backstage and frontstage across the stages of the repair process.

As discussed in Chapter 1, general trust in British politicians has been consistently low. The Hansard Society's 2016 Audit of Political Engagement revealed that just 32 per cent of those surveyed were satisfied with how the UK Parliament worked, and only 29 per cent were satisfied with how MPs were doing their jobs (Hansard Society, 2016). These numbers indicate that trust in the institution is below public expectations. Interestingly, 35 per cent of those surveyed in the same poll indicated satisfaction with how their own MPs were doing. The importance of the representative as a link between constituent and government is reflected in the slightly higher percentage of trust that constituents have in their own MPs. Thus, this suggests that most, if not all, MPs place importance on the pursuit of repair, seeking to portray legitimacy and authenticity. By engaging the constituent in the usually emotionally charged interaction, this ritual makes the symbols more salient, nurturing a bond between MP and constituent (Kertzer, 1988: 37).

As described in Chapter 2, with societies becoming larger and more differentiated, audiences are no longer easily convinced by performances from their MPs. By being accessible and visible, MPs' constituency performances are

always liable to disruptions. This keeps the performative acts in the state of de-fusion, making it harder for re-fusion to be achieved. Within the MP surgery itself, MPs are almost always enacting the discursive formation of repair. This occurs even in the seemingly innocuous moments where constituents come to merely have a chat about government policies, such as the episode observed between Tessa Munt MP and constituent Mr Arun Menon. He had come across her website the night before, and sought her out to hear an explanation of the British involvement in the Iraq War, as well and wanting to find out more about MP Munt. Although he did not speak about anything constituency related, he saw these as personal issues as he held spiritual beliefs that were against nuclear weapons and warfare. MP Munt was required to repair the situation by explaining the government stance, but she also shared her personal opinions on the war. In other circumstances, constituents arrived at this meeting often obviously in despair, as demonstrated by the examples and quotes I have drawn attention to. Despite the varied constituents and the diverse reasons for seeking out their MP, I show in the following section similar conflict management techniques MPs utilise to manage and overcome these disruptions.

Crisis Management Mechanisms

MPs evidently face numerous challenges during their constituency interactions and are subject to a range of interruptions across various stages of the process. I have also analysed how MPs react to obstacles, manage the conflict, and ultimate attempt to achieve re-fusion. Through my analysis I perceive a series of crisis management mechanisms MPs rely on during their reaction. The following section will discuss three primary techniques I have observed MPs draw on to overcome these disruptions in routine.

1. *Remaining calm*

   Upset constituents are often emotionally distraught. As MPs probe further into what ails the constituent, reactions such as crying, shouting, or in more critical cases, physically abusive behaviour may result. Staying calm is often the first step in the course of action as many MPs displayed as such. It also prevents emotions from escalating. As observed in the cases such the one

between MP George Watson and his constituent Ms Anna Wesley in Stage 4, frustration and stress often results in constituent being overcome by their feelings. On another occasion in August 2015, David Miller MP representing a Greater London constituency interacted with an antagonistic constituent, Mr Archie Butler. MP Miller explains that I am an observer, to which he says to me, "Give up, they're all corrupt! Even this one." He has come to discuss his pension, disclosing he believes his advisor is lying to him. He shows MP Miller the letter he received, commenting brusquely, "I'm not sure you can do anything about it!" Now that he is getting older and unemployed, he also insists the government is only doing the minimal of what they can for the elderly "in order to make the books look good." MP Miller maintains composed as he articulates clear statements saying, "I don't think that's a valid statement. I don't think it's fair to say it is just part of the government. If you like I certainly can ask a parliamentary question about it." Delicately managing and mitigating the conflict is of paramount importance. In order not to incite the constituents further, MPs are perceived to not outwardly react to their constituents' outbursts. The MPs in both cases and other adverse interactions I have observed tend to keep constituents focused on the matter at hand. Maintaining a neutral tone of voice while speaking alleviates the potential for further angry debates, encouraging the process to carry on.

2. *Being a source of comfort*

Frustration and distress are often at the root of constituent's disruptive behaviour, and can result in tears. By embodying the role of a social worker (Norton, 1995, 1997), a sympathetic listening ear and providing comfrot is required to overcome the disruption. Although many MPs I observed demonstrated sympathy when listening to their constituent's problems, not everyone exemplified it in the same way. Some, such as Tessa Munt MP and Andrew Smith MP, would reach over and physically comfort through either through a pat on the hand or the back. For example, MP Munt gave support to her crying constituent Mr Daniel Howard, during an advice surgery in Axbridge, Somerset in December 2014. He had been duped in a Ponzi scheme, losing a significant portion of his savings. A father of three, he explained that

his finances are stretched, with this incident placing further stress on him and his family. Furthermore, his attempts at reclaiming the money and contacting the fraudster have led nowhere. MP Munt moved closer to sit next to the constituent, placing her hand over his and said in a gentle, low voice, "I'm so sorry." She suggests a number of ideas, including checking Facebook for any groups of those who had been implicated in the same scheme. She also offers to speak to Liberal Democrat MP Vince Cable, who at that time was Secretary of State for Business, Innovations and Skills. As the interaction came to an end she reiterates that he can contact her anytime, provides additional contact information and reminds him that she can be found at this pub (where the surgery was held) every month. Being reassuring enabled MP Munt to calm the constituent down, subsequently being able complete the repair process successfully.

Others, such as James Williamson MP and Barnaby Wright MP, preferred to show their empathy through a form of practical compassion. While they do express regret at their constituent being upset, they would prefer to point out what can actually be done to resolve the problem at hand. During a meeting with frustrated parents in April 2016, MP Williamson was sympathetic to Mr and Mrs Smith as they struggled to put their autistic son Leo in a mainstream school in Buckinghamshire, which had for no good reason rescinded their offer. They describe Leo's condition as mild, citing improvements in his behaviour with the help of therapy. In tears, Mrs Smith expressed her desire for Leo to have a chance at normalcy and attend school with her brother. MP Williamson remarks, "The fact that the school rescinded their offer sounds a serious bureaucratic cockup." He tells Mr and Mrs Smith openly that he will write further letters to the local district council and the school, reminding them that there is no guarantee of the outcome. He also directs them to acquire a pediatrician's letter in support of their son's condition. It is clear that MP Williamson disapproves of what Mr and Mrs Smith are going through, but offers comfort through practical suggestions on what can be done.

3. *Exerting dominance*

To advance the repair process, MPs are observed to steer the conversation in more productive directions in order to come to a conclusion, or reach a course of action. As we observed in the interaction between MP Barnaby Wright and his constituent in Stage 1, concerned over how the conversation over firemen pensions would turn out, he demonstrated control over the situation by preemptively stating he was aware of the situation. More problematic constituents require an overt expression of dominance on the part of the MP in order to achieve this. In the discussion of Stage 4 I showed how MP William Morgan remained calm in light of his outbursts. As aggressive comments continued, he then firmly portrayed his control over the situation by addressing the reasons why Mr McNeal's repeated visits will not trigger the result he wanted. Furthermore, he did not shy away from telling Mr McNeal that he was in fact, behaving like a bigot, before suggesting the meeting was over.

Extremely challenging processes may also break out right from the start of the meeting, where overcoming the conflict is never managed. Here, with the routine performance incomplete, re-fusion has failed to be achieved. It is usually when the constituent is being particularly difficult, and does not happen relatively often. This is not the same as the MP not being able to help the constituent, or does not want to, but rather the tension within the situation was not able to dissipate, and remained challenging. An MP-constituent interaction not only involves the MP trying to overcome the disruption, but also involves the constituent's accord to reach a conclusion together. As I have demonstrated earlier in this chapter, constituent-audiences at the receiving end of the actor's performance have to find it convincing before any form of disruption can be resolved. Disruptions can only be overcome if the other party accepts what is being told, and chooses to be part of the resolution.

Exceptionally challenging interactions do not occur often as cases are usually screened by the MP's caseworker before an appointment is made, but over the course of my fieldwork I was privy to a particularly challenging case in February

2015. A particularly difficult meeting Labour MP Desmond HIll encountered with his constituent Mr Jerermy Langdon is significant. These weekly meetings either take place every Monday morning, in his constituency office or at an advice centre in West London. On this particular day it is held at his constituency office, which occupies the ground floor of a red house along a quiet row of houses. I am let into the constituency office by MP Hill's staff member Jonathan, and told to wait in the seating area, where there are a number of plastic chairs arranged in a row near the door. Just in front of the seated and to the left is a kitchenette area. MP Hill's staff members are seated upstairs on the first floor, whereas the party staffers are seated in a large room at the end of the ground floor. The advice surgery takes place in a small room on the ground floor, between the stairs and the party office. The walls are plain, and there is a small, square white table set in the middle of the room. There is a large black office chair, with three other plastic chairs around the table. There is a window to the left of the room, providing natural lighting. MP Hill is dressed smartly in a dark navy suit and tie, with shiny black brogue shoes. At the beginning of the sessions MP Hill comes into the room with a small stack of paper folders, each labelled with the names of constituents he would be seeing, prepared for him by his parliamentary staff. Each folder contained printed emails between the constituent and his office, as well as a short summary of the issue the constituent is seeing MP Hill for.

Mr Jeremy Langdon was the last constituent of the day to see MP Hill. After a brief look at his notes, MP Hill proceeded to the waiting area to call on them. He appeared to be in his mid-sixties, suffers from lupus, and is also very hard of hearing. He required the use of two walking sticks as he walked into the surgery room, and brought a friend Rosie along with him, who was carrying a number of bags and boxes. Mr Langdon begins the conversation by talking about Rosie, whom he considers a well-trusted close friend and confidante and happens to be an expert witness. MP Hill begins by asking him to explain what he needed help with. Mr Langdon's expression changed immediately. Distraught, he said MP Hill should be well aware of his issues if his emails have been read. MP Hill goes on to explain they have been read, but would like him to explain it in his own words, and describing how he could help. Taking a deep heave, he is silent for a moment

before beginning to explain that his home has been burgled on numerous occasions. Due to his profound deafness, he is often unable to hear movement in the house and only discovers that items are missing on random occasions. Additionally, items of value such as his mobile phone and laptop are never stolen, suggesting that this was a case of distraction theft. He explains that he has tried to seek help from the local police. However they have been very unhelpful, and have classified him as a 'time-waster'. Over the course of the conversation with Mr Langdon which spanned approximately 45 minutes, MP Hill repeatedly tries to steer the conversation back to three key points: 1) his general safety, 2) attempting to identify and perhaps find the stolen goods and 3) speaking to the local police on his behalf. However Mr Langdon keeps asking MP Hill to 'use your power' to make the police believe him and to do their jobs. MP Hill explains that he does not have that sort of power, and further explains that what he is asking of him is undemocratic, making him no different from the police who did not do their jobs correctly.

Mr Langdon looks exasperated and agitated as he hears MP Hill's response. He takes a plastic sandwich bag filled with balls of dark hair out of a box. Asking MP Hill if he understands what lupus sufferers go through, to which he explains he does, as a very good friend of his also has the same disease. Ignoring the response, he proceeds to open the bag and place the ball of her hair on the table. Growing slightly hysterical, he explains the condition worsens with stress, causing chronic hair loss, and that this is the amount of hair he has lost in the last few weeks. MP Hill calmly explains that he understands that it must be difficult, but it is limited in terms of what he can do. He then has Rosie place a dusty storage box with wheels on the table, reaching in to take out a dusty comforter cover with holes all over. Raising his voice further he shouts that burglars have stolen his expensive threadcount sheets, leaving him to use this destroyed set. At this point MP Hill stands up to say, "Okay. I'm afraid you better leave. We are getting nowhere today." Rosie agrees and starts to help Mr Langdon with his items. It takes some time for the pair to leave the room as Mr Langdon continues to speak loudly about how MP Hill should be using his power and position to help him.

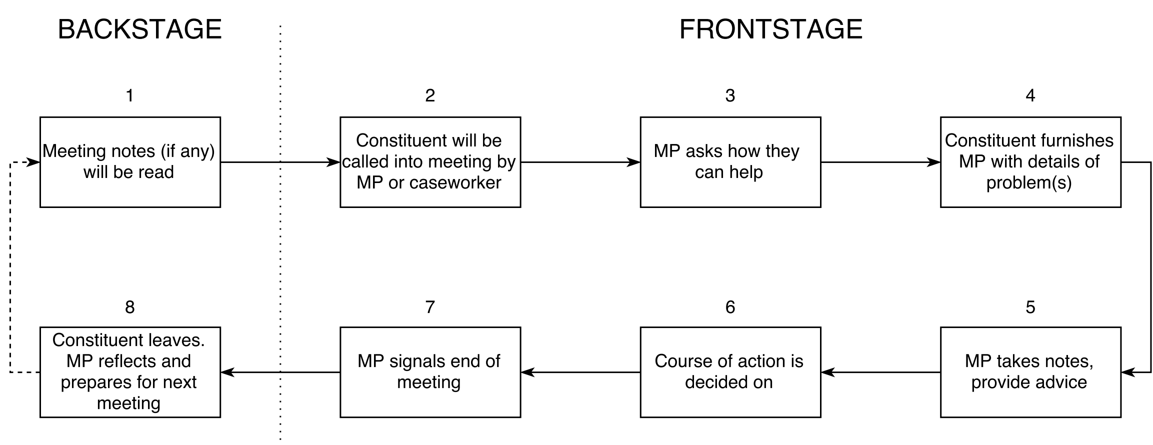
As he wraps up the surgery by tidying up the table, MP Hill explained he did not manage his time very well this week. He usually allocates twenty minutes per appointment. This time, what should have been a two hours long session ended up being three hours long. Although he does not like to keep constituents waiting, he often likes to allow them the time they need to speak about the problem at hand. This is especially since meetings with constituents are only arranged when they have problems more challenging and unique to tackle. In addition, he only sees cases his caseworkers are not able to manage such as this on, he prefers to gives them the time they need to explain what is going on. Looking exhausted, he also made it a point to explain that meeting hysterical constituents such as Mr Langdon was an anomaly that very rarely occurs.

As observed clearly in this exchange, MP Hill's efforts at remaining calm and showing sympathy for Mr Langdon's situation was futile. His hysterics such as bringing a bag full of bodily effects and destroyed duvet show was unexpected and extreme. Attempts to steer the conversation back to his safety and the burglary was met with unreasonable retorts, eliciting a forceful termination of the process. MP Hill's explanation after the surgery appointments were over reveals tensions he experiences in managing these meetings while keeping in mind his time in limited. In addition, evaluating his time management and disclosure of how rare a disruptive constituent like Mr Langdon is demonstrates backstage behaviour that I have found to occur in Stage 8. The following section will discuss the emergence of performative differences during the advice meeting process.

Performative Differences

Just like actors would on stage, MPs often demonstrate differences in behavior between when they are in front of their constituents and when they are not. Presenting themselves in a professional and approachable manner is key when interacting with their constituents. This presentation of self results in a marked difference in behaviour when they are frontstage (Stages 2 to 7) and backstage (Stages 1 and 8), revealing when the MP is performing and when they are not. "The individual projects a definition of the situation when he appears before

others”, wishing to control the way people think of him, or for them to think that he thinks highly of them, or perceive how he feels towards them (Goffman, 1959: 15). This control is achieved “largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan” (Ibid). The ideal routine of how an MP conducts their surgery meetings, or any other interaction with constituents, is one where they are presenting their ideal self. Front stage, how they behave sets the tone for the meeting as they hope to exert control over what their audience thinks of them, or what they believe their audience thinks of them.



(Figure 6.2: The Expanded MP-Constituent Surgery Process)

Backstage behaviour is often less restricted, with actors revealing what they feel or think. This is often what is left unsaid during the formal, front stage interaction. The following example demonstrates how this takes effect. Conservative MP Barnaby Wright exhibited front and backstage personas clearly during his surgeries. I shadowed him in November 2014, during a surgery he held at the Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB) located in his constituency. The room where the surgery was held was small, neat and functional. The room was furnished with a desk with four chairs, and was enclosed with partially tinted glass. It was located in a newly equipped office (the CAB had moved to these new premises a few months earlier). On this occasion MP Wright was accompanied by his senior caseworker (stationed at his constituency office) Margaret, his

parliamentary assistant Laura (who had travelled to the surgery from London with me) and myself. A middle-aged woman, Margaret, scheduled the appointments with the constituents and prepared a brief outline of the issue at hand. The schedule and meeting preparation notes were available to be read prior to the actual surgery by MP Wright and his other assistants, but Margaret also provided him with updates between each meeting. Before he began the advice session, he made it a point to put his blackberry on silent mode, before asking us all if our mobiles were turned off. He then placed his phone on the table and announced that we ought to start. The procedure was as follows – Margaret or Laura would call for the constituents in the CAB waiting area and bring them into the room. MP Wright would stand up as he saw them, shake their hands, introduce himself, invite them to sit and start each appointment off by asking, "What can I do for you?" During this observation we are able to see how MP Wright prepares himself backstage, with the agenda clearly set with the silencing of our phones, as the process shifts from Stage 1 to Stage 2.

Issues that are raised during these surgeries were fairly mixed and ranged from personal to broader issues, such as local business initiatives, firemen's pensions and immigration policies. Only six of the eight appointments showed up that Friday. A particular case, where a constituent sought MP Wright's help in hopes of getting her grandson a place in a specific primary school in the area – Greenfields Primary School – is worth discussion. As per their routine, Margaret briefed MP Wright on the case prior to calling Mrs Sotheby in. Margaret emphasised to MP Wright that everything had been done to assist the constituent and her grandson, whose mother suffered from severe bouts of depression. MP Wright nodded and asked Laura to fetch the constituent into the office. Mrs Sotheby aggressively explained her situation to MP Wright. She claimed that his attendance at Greenfields was the only way she could get her grandson to school with the help of a neighbour (whose son also attended the school), as Mrs Sotheby worked full-time. She also pulled out a newspaper article from the *MailOnline*, saying, "I want to help you change this policy". The article, "Teachers are struggling to cope with 'influx of migrant children'", accused migrant children of being the cause of the insufficient number of places in

primary schools and inundating the country's resources (*MailOnline*, 29 October 2014).

Mrs Sotheby expressed that her grandson was going through these enrolment difficulties as he was born during a baby boom year, a fact that the hiring policies of teachers in primary schools had not catered for, a clear neglect on the part of the government. MP Wright did not visibly react to her aggression, but responded by asking her patiently about getting her grandson into other schools in the area. She was adamant that not enough had been done to help her situation, delving into how difficult her daughter's life was with depression, an illness that she had battled since the age of 17. Margaret interrupted to ask whether a doctor's letter had been given as proof to support Mrs Sotheby's case. MP Wright took over in a firm tone, "Margaret, let me handle this." This unyielding tone carried on to the end of the meeting, where a decision was taken to write another letter of support. As Mrs Sotheby left, MP Wright shook her hand with a "God bless", as he did with everyone constituent who came to his surgery. I later discovered that MP Wright was a devout Christian who attended church every week. As soon as Mrs Sotheby was out of the room, he turned to us immediately and stated plainly, "She just wants him to go to the better school". This sparked a short but fiery discussion, with a consensus being reached by all three that it was irresponsible for her daughter to have a child in the first place – given her severe depressive state. Laura made a face when she brought up the *MailOnline* article, revealing how she felt about the news source, and about the constituent for referencing it in the meeting. The surgery was wrapped up with the MP asking to speak to Laura outside, while Margaret and I tidied up the room as we left. Differences in backstage and frontstage behaviour were obvious on the part of MP Wright and his parliamentary assistant Laura. There was an evident shift in the mood of the room as Mrs Sotheby left. There was a lack of formality as MP Wright discussed the case with his staff. His need to control his mood and tone also dissipated, and he mentioned what he really thought of the case to his staff.

In the example with MP Williamson discussed in Stage 6, stark peformative differences in behaviour could be observed between the performance and after the constituent left. Although MP Williamson maintained a fairly neutral tone during the meeting, he expressed his inability to help Mr Hill the way he expected, terminating the repair process by suggesting that he leave. After he did, MP Williamson looked incredulous at the constituent, saying he must have “a way with women” as he had evidently fathered children with numerous women to be having such a problem. Actors usually present themselves as motivated by emotional and moral concerns guided by the environment they share with their audience (Alexander, 2011: 29). In this exchange we observe as MP Williamson’s moral judgement guides his performance. In this instance achieving repair was not his goal.

Although backstage behaviour usually occurs in Stages 1 and 8 of the advice surgery process, backstage behaviour can turn any region into the backstage. For example, as I shadowed Tessa Munt MP during her surgeries in Wells, I would often be given a lift in her car between surgeries. During these car journeys, cases would continue to be discussed between MP Munt and her caseworker beyond the surgery meeting, with them sharing thoughts and opinions. MP Munt’s opinions of the constituents and the cases were revealed in these instances, whether this was pity, empathy or moral judgement.

Garfinkel (1967) discusses the idea of making trouble during familiar and quotidian scenes. How one reacts to a conflict denaturalises these interactions, and this enables us to understand how these “structures of everyday activities are ordinarily and routine produced and maintained” (Garfinkel, 1967: 38). When an interaction with a constituent does not go according to plan, MPs need to react quickly and appropriately to manage the situation as they seek to return the interaction back to the process of repair. The demonstrated differences in behaviour depending on if they are in front of their constituents or not indicates not only the presence of performance but also the struggle MPs face as they seek to overcome performative fractures.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought deeper understanding of the performance between MPs and constituents by questioning the contemporary challenges they face in the process. I addressed this question firstly by analysing how a routine performance between the MP-actor and audience-constituent takes place when repair advances smoothly, and secondly by analysing when and what type of challenges and interruptions may erupt. Lastly, I interpreted how these conflicts and interruptions are overcome, delving into the performative differences between frontstage and backstage behaviour.

Analysing the interaction process of an advice surgery, I argued that MPs rely on the discursive formation of repair as they react to issues raised by constituents. This consists of a body of knowledge, in which constituents are made aware of the MP as a resource for help; the production of roles such as constituency caseworker as well as the MP as a safety valve and social worker; creation of objects such as written letters on behalf of constituents; with rules such as limits on the MP's jurisdiction within their own constituency in place.

Dissecting the advice surgery process, each appointment was found to go through eight clearly defined steps that make up the entire process, starting from before the meeting, to during and after. However, sudden schedule changes, disgruntled constituents, clashing opinions and potential hostility can mean that the MP-constituent interaction is not straightforward or simple. I have argued that as MPs react to these unexpected incidents while on standby, they spring into action, seeking to resolve these issues and achieve performance re-fusion. To this purpose, I interpreted how the MP advice surgery is carried out as MPs seek to successfully carry out the repair discursive formation, in order to portray legitimacy and achieve authenticity. I extended existing literature on constituency service interactions by analysing a specific routine performance and the challenges that may occur in each stage of the process. Findings indicate that MPs consistently encounter many stressful situations, and are often faced with challenging constituents. The unpredictability of their field of work was emphasised throughout this chapter as I showed how disruptions can occur

during any stage of the advice surgery. Overcoming disturbances successfully requires tact and finesse on the part of the MP. Through my interpretative analysis, I identified that MPs rely on three techniques: the use of logic, exertion of authority and counselling, to overcome these breakdowns as quickly as possible to return to routine process. Furthermore, MPs often demonstrate differences in behaviour depending on if they are in front of their constituents or not. Evidence demonstrates a marked difference in behaviour when they are frontstage, which occurs from Stages 2 to 7, and backstage, in Stages 1 and 8. This indicates the presence of performance, and allows the struggle MPs face as they seek to overcome performative fractures to be revealed.

Successfully overcoming these breakdowns indicates the possibility of ritual-like effects, an outcome that is often sought as it contributes to the MP's legitimacy as a representative of the institution. While I am not concerned with this evaluation of performative success, it validates my analytical argument of MPs seeking re-fusion through the discursive formation of repair. Thus, the next chapter will explore how MPs perform their representative constituency roles through performative acts that consist of discursive formations of accessibility, visibility and repair to symbolically "construct" meaning, projecting and maintaining their power. I also discuss how MPs exemplify power by the way they present themselves to constituents, exert power and draw reference to London and Westminster.

7 Performative Power and Seeking Re-fusion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I address the performative aspects of the MP-constituent interaction, by showing how MPs draw on existing discursive formations and other elements of social performance to portray legitimacy and power as an MP on standby. Prior to becoming MPs, political candidates struggle for power through the process of trying to convince voters to vote for them, by giving a performance that resonates with the voters. Once they have secured the position as political representatives for their constituencies, MPs are in positions of power, but have to continue successfully performing to their constituents in order to convince them of their legitimacy. Rather than asserting this legitimacy loudly and verbally, a lasting impression is best achieved through the staging of a dramatic presentation, or what I termed a legitimation procedure (Kertzer, 1988: 40). The goal of constituency performances is to create an emotional connection between the actor-MP and constituent-audiences, and the script results in the conditions for projecting cultural meaning from performance to audience successfully (Alexander, 2011: 53). The actor and their action will only be considered authentic if the elements of the performances have overcome fragmentation by achieving flow and re-fusion. Authenticity is attributed to the actor's ability to stitch the seams of distinct and separate elements seamlessly and convincingly. Alexander's epigrammatic description captures this struggle and its elements. "It depends on skill and fortune, on commanding an effective stage, on media interpretations, on shifting historical constellations, on audiences being prepared and responding in felicitous ways. The discourse of civil society creates the vocabulary for political speech, but it is flesh-and-blood actors who make this script walk and talk, who speak the words, form intonations, create tropes and time rhetorical flow" (Alexander, 2011: 102). It is this ability to deliver a successful performance that determines the projection of power and legitimacy. Thus, through my interpretative approach of the constituency service process, I look closely at elements of the interactions themselves to show they are being delivered.

This chapter also builds on the argument and motivation that has already been discussed at length in Chapters 1 and 2, and draws from the discussions in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 to show how these symbolically construct meaning between MP and constituent, culminating in performative power. How do MPs convince constituents of their legitimacy and power? In the context of political representatives, they have to demonstrate their power through symbolic actions guided by scripts, replete with appropriate symbols, settings and, in some cases, a cast of supporting actors. Yet a performance's success is never guaranteed, depending not only on the actor's performance, but also the audience's understanding and interpretation. As a result, constituent audiences remain unconvinced that what they see or hear is valid and true, and may find the presence of emotional and moral traits lacking in the political performances they experience. Thus, authenticity and legitimacy become out of reach. In a nutshell, the struggle to re-fuse the actor and their audience, connecting them with the script's discursive formations and the backgrounds that define it, encapsulates this struggle for power. As I have demonstrated in the earlier chapters, MPs enact each of the discursive formations in some form or another. However, my findings indicate that MPs face challenges of social performance that indicate performative failure. This includes the challenge of being natural, the challenge of means of symbolic production and the challenge of reception. Thus, the gap between actor and performer cannot be overcome and re-fusion cannot be achieved.

I then analyse the expression of these symbolic guises through *delivery*, where I discuss features of performances and how they are delivered by MPs to project power. This includes drawing legitimacy from Westminster, how they exert their power and, lastly, the acknowledgement of limits to their power. Following that, I relate power to the authenticity of MPs' constituency performances, suggesting that re-fusion has not been completely achieved.

7.2 Performing Power

As I have examined earlier in this chapter, discursive formations of accessibility, visibility and repair are integral to the MP's portrayal of power. These discursive

formations give structure and meaning to their constituency performance, but the success of re-fusion also lies in the delivery of the performative act. Convincing constituents of their power, capabilities and sincerity is also dependent on how the MP's performance is delivered. Demonstration and exercise of performative power can be observed as MPs interact with their constituents. Having control over the interaction as they project power is a prime opportunity for the MP to have their legitimacy established as they emphasise their accessibility, prompt their visibility and overcome disruptions during repair. Thus, in the following section I show how MPs cultivate control over their performance in order to convince their constituent-audiences through their delivery. This control comes by drawing legitimacy from Westminster, projecting power through the use of digital tools and through means of symbolic production.

Explanation of Power

During a performance, power can be communicated to constituents as MPs explain an abridged version of how power is distributed within the political system. It is an opportunity to provide the constituent audience a better conceptualisation of the Member's own power and how the Member is able to exercise this power. As Fenno (1978) described in *Homestyle*, each MP, especially experienced and returning Members, usually has a well-practiced spiel about what the job of an elected political representative entails. This may take the form of a speech, much like something from a politics and civics class, where the MP explains the three aspects of their role (party, government and local). Sometimes it is enlivened with the occasional "inside scoop" into what life is *really* like in the Commons, or, most frequently, an explanation of what a day in their life is really like. As the MP explains their power to their constituents, a key purpose is to convey the perception that they possess thorough knowledge about the system and policies in place, and are "comfortably conversant with its procedural intricacies" (Fenno, 1978: 137). During a surgery interaction between Oxford East Labour MP Andrew Smith and his constituent Mr Patrick Eccles in July 2015, I observed as MP Smith explained how a policy is passed and implemented. Enquiring about child tax credit changes, Mr Eccles sought MP Smith's help in

helping him understand what could be done to stop the changes, and whether the House of Lords had the authority to reject any policy changes. MP Smith explained the Labour Party's position on this matter, and then the process of policymaking in detail. Mr Eccles nodded as he took detailed notes and clarified his doubts. MP Smith answered these with ease, after which Mr Eccles thanked him, and left shortly after. In this episode MP Smith is observed to swiftly and proficiently provide a thorough explanation of the process, demonstrating knowledge as a party representative and a parliamentary representative. This interaction proceeded simply, with Mr Eccles satisfied with the answers he received.

The explanation of power as a sustenance to legitimacy is especially pronounced when MPs want to relay their ability to "get something done", and present themselves to be qualified to do so. MPs are increasingly required to become a one-stop hub for local problem solving, and, as I showed in the discussion of disruptions in Chapter 6, a shoulder to lean on. Demonstrating they possess this know-how not only speeds up the repair process, but also conveys a sense of competence that is more than likely to instill confidence in the audience. For instance, it was common to see MPs assuring their constituents during advice surgeries that they were able to help by being familiar with the local government bodies and their standard operating procedures. Constituents who have issues dealing with several problems through the various agencies are often at their wits' end when they decide to approach the MP. As the last resort, constituents are often hoping that the MP will be able to help them through their struggles. The ease they display when being able to provide or suggest a solution further legitimises the MP's position of power, which contributes to a smooth performative process.

In particular, having dealt with the same local agency before meant that the MP was confident in knowing how to handle the situation, and who to contact. During a surgery in February 2015, West London Labour MP Desmond Hill met with constituents Mr and Mrs Raymond Marshall, who had come in due to problems with the floorboards in their building. Mr Marshall, aged approximately

60, had mobility issues and walked with the help of a cane. The couple had been placed in their current first floor studio flat as part of the benefits they received. They pointed out to MP Hill that they were grateful to have a place to stay, but were experiencing difficulties with the location of the flat (a ground floor flat would be more suitable), and, more importantly, the poor quality of the floorboards. They explained that even the briefest of movements would result in loud squeaks that could be heard by the people in the floor below. Mr Marshall explained that they, along with their neighbours upstairs, had tried to use carpets and rugs to minimise the sounds, but with little effect. Tranquility Housing, the housing association in charge of managing their council flat, had been notified, but the situation was yet to be remedied. MP Hill nodded his head and said, "I'm not surprised. We have had problems with them before. I deal with this all the time. Tranquility is well aware of these problems." He took notes and explained that he would write to Tranquility Housing on the couple's behalf, if they would like him to. Mr and Mrs Marshall thanked MP Hill, before he walked them out. Here we observe as MP Hill demonstrates power by exhibiting familiarity with local issues, cases and/or specific policy areas. Being able to respond quickly with advice and help navigating the local government circuit enables the MP to not only be a conduit, but also to inspire constituents' confidence in them, and in the system itself.

This display of knowledge is further intensified if MPs are able to advise their constituents on how they should best proceed, down to the most minute of details. The specificity of the next steps to take further cements the portrayal that the MP is not only present to help, but also that they possess the extensive knowledge to do so. In a surgery in September 2015, MP George Watson met with Mrs Natalya Milton, who arrived promptly for her appointment. Offering her a seat, he proceeded to sit across the table from her, asking how he was able to help. Mrs Milton, who had called the constituency office every day to make an urgent appointment, explained that her house was severely flooded due to the recent heavy downpour. The drainage system had always been problematic, "a real issue" according to her, and significantly more so recently. Using her mobile phone, she showed MP Watson and his caseworker Eloise photos of the flooding,

to which MP Watson exclaimed, "Crikey!" Pollution and sewage from the drain had travelled up as it flooded, with her home and estate filled with garbage. The garden was also completely destroyed. MP Watson looked thoughtful, then proceeded to give Mrs Milton detailed, step-by-step instructions. "I will tell you what I need you to do, then I will tell you what I am going to do." He instructed Mrs Milton to write him a detailed email, explaining what had occurred, specifically mentioning the rubbish from the sewage, and attaching the pictures she had just shown him. The first email she would receive from his office would be an automated reply, he said. MP Watson then explained he would write to the local council and Thames Water informing them about her situation, as "they are always fighting with each other as to who is to blame." Winding up the advice session, he asked Eloise to check if the next appointment had arrived. He then recommended that Mrs Milton send an email to him as soon as possible so that they would be able to start the process of repairing the sewer and her home. Mrs Milton expressed concern that writing emails might not be effective, but MP Watson reassured her, saying, "Well, they have to reply to me." He prompted her to write as soon as possible, informing her that it might take up to about five weeks before she could expect any information.

This incident illustrates MP Watson's portrayal of power in a few ways. Firstly, his methodical approach to Mrs Milton's problem speaks of confidence. "I will tell you what I need you to do, and then I will tell you what I am going to do", is a very assertive line, with the use of "I" signify him taking charge, making the problem his to solve. Secondly, the step-by-step explanation illustrates how he is able to successfully signpost constituents to places or agencies to receive the help they require. He also makes clear what information the constituent needs to include in her letter, so that he may pass it on to the respective agencies. A belief in the power he boasts can also be observed, as he states bluntly that the agencies he contacts have no choice but to respond to him. In this respect, he is privileged and possesses the power to control the reaction of the institutions. While he is not able to assure Mrs Milton of the type of response he will be receiving, he expresses confidence that he will certainly get one.

Similarly, during an advice surgery at the local community centre in July 2015, MP Andrew Smith spoke to troubled constituent Serena Khan. The meeting took place in an empty multifunctional hall, where a table and four chairs were set up in the middle of the room. Approximately 50 years of age with a slight frame, Ms Khan looked worried as she approached MP Smith at the table. When asked how he was able to help, she explained that her daughter had been undergoing rehabilitation at an addiction treatment centre just outside of Oxfordshire. She had not received any news from her daughter in recent months, and was unsure if the last contact number she was given was still in use. Confidentiality clauses meant that the treatment centre was unable to release any further information. Visibly distraught, her eyes started to water as she explained that her son had passed away a few years ago, making it especially important for her to find her daughter. MP Smith reached over the table and placed a hand over hers, comforting her. In a show of empathy, he shared his own experience, as his wife Val had recently passed away. As the constituent calmed down, she continued to provide MP Smith with details of the centre. He offered to write to the treatment centre, reassuring her by saying, "They will let an MP talk to her, don't worry".

In both these instances, we are able to observe the MP drawing on power as a representative of Westminster. MP Smith's statement, "They will let an MP speak to her, don't worry", describes the authority he believes he possesses. Clearly, he considers that his position allows him the power to circumvent conventional data protection measures.

On another occasion, MP Barnaby Wright spoke with an upset constituent about the large amount of homework her children were receiving in school. The surgery took place in a tidy, medium-sized office at the local Citizen's Advice Bureau. MP Wright was dressed in a navy suit, white shirt, matching tie and polished brown brogues. Mrs Sonia March looked sharp in a white blouse, black trouser suit and court shoes. When called in, Mrs March strode into the room purposefully and took her seat. All three of her children (aged between seven and 11 years old) were attending the same local primary school. She described her children as constantly miserable, "coming home crying", and loudly opined that the stress the school

was putting her children through was unnecessary. Her efforts to speak to their teachers and school principal had not led anywhere, resulting in her approaching MP Wright. She hoped he was able to wield influence on the education policy that was currently in place. He listened to her intently while taking note of the primary school's details. He asked her a few questions about the school principal, before proposing to have a word with then Secretary for Education, Nicky Morgan MP. According to him, his Westminster office was across the hallway from hers. The close proximity allowed him convenient access to reach out to her, but he made sure to remind Mrs March that it was not his place to promise anything, but that he would do his best.

Within this exchange, presentational and explanatory elements can be observed (Fenno, 1978: 137). Firstly, it is evident that MP Barnaby Wright exhibits confidence as he provides Mrs March with an explanation and a suggestion. By checking that she had exhausted the typical avenues, he was then able to suggest another course of action. His offer to speak to the Secretary of Education demonstrated a capacity to be able to do so, a key to inside power (Ibid). Here, it is plain to see that "power is partly discourse, and discourse is partly power" – the statement condensed the power available in the process, while strengthening the discursive formation of power itself (Fairclough, 1995: 4). MP Wright uses this opportunity to strengthen his power within the office he holds, but also presents himself as drawing on the power he holds from Westminster to speak on behalf of Mrs March.

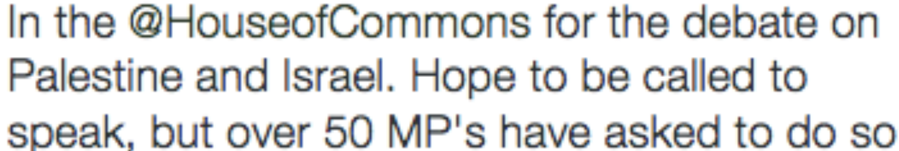
MPs also use speaking up in Parliament during opportunities such as Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) as a method of demonstrating how they are able to influence policymaking. Over the course of my observations, MPs offered to raise questions during PMQs to draw attention to cases they were not able to directly help with, in the hope of influencing policy. While I was shadowing Andrew Smith MP in July 2015, one particular case stood out. This meeting took place at the local pool and leisure centre, in a meeting room that was plain, quiet and away from the main centre area. The first appointment of the day, constituent Micah Rannells and his wife Jemima, arrived at the advice surgery with an urgent

matter about which they had previously written to MP Smith. Upon their arrival, MP Smith invited them to have a seat, saying, "Tell me about it. I mean, I know what it is about briefly, but tell me about it in your own words." The Rannells' son had been imprisoned in Thailand for a number of years, due to what they believed was a misunderstanding. Contact with him was limited, largely due to the language barrier and the minimal rights he received while in prison. MP Smith looked contemplative as he listened. As the Rannells' son was imprisoned overseas, MP Smith did not have legal jurisdiction over the case. He suggested Mr and Mrs Rannells research similar cases through the House of Commons Library, to find out how cases of imprisoned nationals abroad were managed by the government. "The other thing I could do is, ask a parliamentary question. I could mention him by name, but only if you want me to." MP Smith went on to explain that doing so would send a signal to the Embassy of Thailand. To prevent any damage being done to the Embassy's reputation, there was the possibility that they would take action on the case a little faster. However, if the Rannells were not comfortable with that, he suggested the possibility of raising a more general question during PMQs, such as "How many British nationals are awaiting trial abroad?" This would bring attention to the case, as well as solicit some helpful advice.

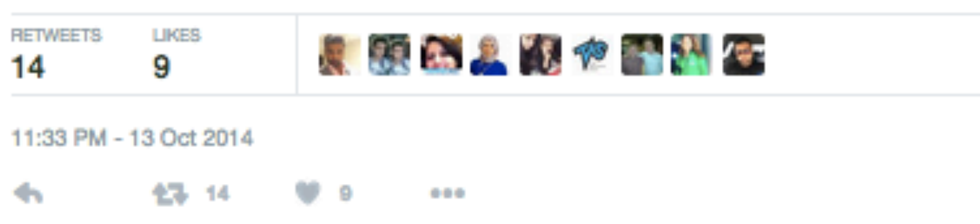
Digital Power

As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, the MPs I observed sought visibility along a continuum that integrated physical co-presence with traditional media and digital tools. This ranged from low to no integration, emphasising co-present visibility, to average integration with an emphasis on co-presence, to high integration with equal emphasis on additional tools and co-presence. Those who included digital tools and social media platforms in their communication arsenal were able to demonstrate to their constituents the power they drew from their position in Westminster. Utilising platforms such as personal websites, Facebook and/or Twitter, MPs were not only able to maintain visibility to their constituents, but also exhibit themselves wielding power within the Commons.

As these posts were being generated and posted, those in positions of power sought to promote the image of themselves they would like the audience to have, subsequently maintaining their place as power holder (Kertzer, 1998: 40). Images 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 are three consecutive tweets from Conservative MP Christopher Lewis. He tweeted updates before and after a parliamentary debate that took place on 13 October 2014, where he presented a speech on recognising Palestine. A link to the speech transcript was also tweeted the day after (14 October 2014) the speech took place. The tweets, and intention behind the tweets, can be interpreted to be serving multiple purposes. Firstly, they were informative. Audiences were kept up-to-date with what the MP was doing in the Commons, along with how he would be voting. As a topic of a sensitive political nature, this openness not only allowed MP Lewis to share the experience with his followers, but also to reveal the magnitude of the decisions he had to make in his position as an MP. Secondly, the interactive nature of Twitter provided the opportunity for audiences to respond, if they so wished. The tweet in Image 7.1 received six retweets, seven likes and 11 responses, whereas the tweet in Image 7.2 received 14 retweets, nine likes and four responses. Responses to the tweets contained a mix of support, opinions and opposition. It is, however, uncertain if these responses were made by constituents living in the constituency.

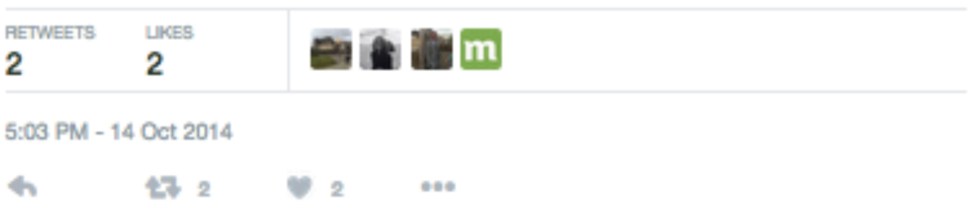


(Image 7.1: Tweet by MP Christopher Lewis, 13 October 2014)



(Image 7.2: Tweet by MP Christopher Lewis, 13 October 2014)

Image 7.3 displays a later tweet by MP Lewis with a link to the transcript of his speech. It reminded audiences about the speech he had made in Parliament the day before, and his voting choice, and was transparent about the content of his speech. It provided a form of accountability to the audience – ensuring that they had access to what had been said. The use of Twitter enabled a percentage of MP Lewis' audience to catch up on what had been said, engaged audiences in the process of policy making and, once again, drew attention to the MP having the power to carry out his duty as a representative.

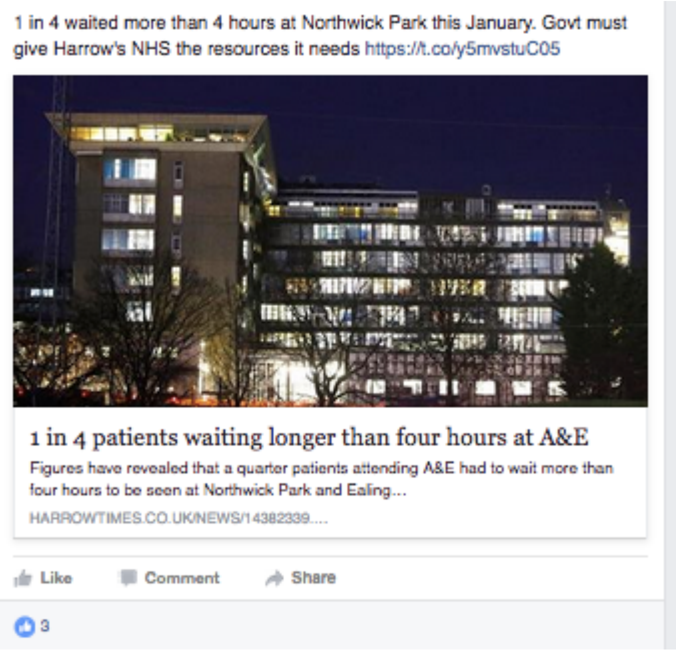


(Image 7.3: Tweet by MP Christopher Lewis, 14 October 2014)

MP George Watson, who represents a constituency in Harrow, demonstrates in the Facebook updates below (Images 7.4 and 7.5) how he spoke in the chamber about how budget cuts in the health service would directly impact his constituents and sick patients in his constituency. This opportunity and the use

of this outlet enables him to present his presence in Parliament, and his power as a political representative to potentially impact policy that could help his constituency.

(Image 7.4: Facebook update by MP George Watson, 22 March 2016)



(Image 7.5: Facebook update by MP George Watson, 24 March 2016)

Here we observe that the presence of MPs online has been a way for them to demonstrate not only what they are doing in Parliament as well as in the constituencies, but also being in the position of power to possibly effect significant policy changes. Some MPs believe that they also have the power to influence and encourage constituents, as their representative. While shadowing Conservative MP Barnaby Wright, who represents a commuter constituency in Essex, I observed as he attempted to wield his power by tweeting and updating his status on Facebook to encourage his constituents to ring into a local news radio show. As I discussed in Chapter 5, on this particular day MP Barnaby Wright picked his parliamentary assistant, Marina, and me up from the local train station to drive us to the advice surgery that was to take place at the local Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB). During the drive to the CAB, MP Wright discussed interactions he had had with constituents that morning at the train station, including Mr Oppenheimer. We arrived at the location a little ahead of schedule, so we sat in the car while MP Wright finished his breakfast, with BBC Essex playing in the background. The morning radio news show was on and the host, Dave Monk, was preparing to interview the local Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). This prompted MP Wright to react loudly. Asking Marina for her opinion, he considered tweeting to "instigate" discussion about illegal squatters, a problem that had been plaguing his constituency. MP Wright and Marina discussed the matter angrily. The local police had not been helpful, and none of the other local institutions seemed bothered about the influx of squatters, despite them exhibiting anti-social behaviour such as being rude and abusive to residents. MP Wright implored constituents who had experienced this abuse to call in by tweeting twice, updates that were also cross-posted to his Facebook page, before we left to start the surgery. The tweets were worded similarly, retweeted four and five times each, with one of them liked twice.

Within half an hour of shadowing MP Wright, I had observed as he demonstrated his power online in more than one example. Similar to MP Christopher Lewis, MP Wright used his Facebook page and blog to demonstrate his power as a representative, and spotlight on what he had done in his position of power. There was also evidence that he believed he had the power to influence his constituents

to call into the radio programme by tweeting about it. Describing his action as an instigation points to a provocation of sorts, evoking a less than positive meaning behind his actions. It is evident that he had hoped that the PCC would be faced with questions from constituents, and would be held accountable for not having done anything to improve the situation.

Means of Symbolic Production

As actors and audiences interact within the same environment, the dynamism within the interaction also involves the objects around it, or what Alexander (2010, 2011) refers to as the means of symbolic production. What Goffman (1959: 34) terms "standardised expressive equipment" includes clothes, physical places where the performance takes place and any other prop that would assure the successful performance to an audience. These objects and spaces help to dramatise and make vibrant the invisible intentions they are trying to represent (Alexander, 2011). These are details most intimately identified with the performer that can often be lost in oversight. Dressing in a certain manner, especially professionally, having a neatly coiffed hairstyle, the manner in which one carries oneself and the physical places where performances take place are details that come together to allow symbolic projections to be made (Alexander, 2011: 31). Just as one would dress in a costume and prepare theatre sets for a performance, the way MPs dress and the places where meetings with their constituents take place also contribute to setting the scene, their impression management and their projection of power.

To further illustrate the importance of these subtleties, Sahlins (1976) argues that the American system of clothing is like the structure of language. Much like language, the rules surrounding the types of clothes one wears map a cultural entity, complete with a set of rules on what to wear, when and who. Clothes are produced to suit specific categories: genders; night or day; to lounge about at home or to go out; for the adult or youth. These in turn generate classifications of time, place, occasion and status in relation to the combinations and textures of the clothing, denoting numerous statements about the relations between persons and situations within the system in place. Furthermore, Connerton points out

that 19th-century Victorian clothing, for example, not only indicated to the world what type of roles the wearers were expected to perform, but also was central in reminding the wearer themselves of the responsibilities and constraints of their role (1989: 33). Men wore dark coloured, sharply silhouetted clothing, which emphasised broad chests, with minimal embellishments that allowed the wearer free reign to move easily. This denoted that men were meant to be serious, strong, aggressive and active. Women, on the other hand, were expected to embody frivolity; to be delicate, inactive and submissive. Corseted dresses were pastel-coloured, adorned with frills and ribbons, were constricting and accentuated the idea of a small waist and sloping shoulders (Ibid).

Within the modern day context, the language of clothing is still persistent, though less tethered to strict rules. Women's clothing is no longer as restrictive, and inspiration is drawn from menswear (e.g. boyfriend jeans and the trouser suit). Colours and patterns have been introduced to the male wardrobe. Despite these relaxations in language rules, the subtle nuances that accompany what type of clothing is worn during specific occasions still exist. These include the implicit signals that are tied to attire and the setting of the interactions. For instance, professional working attire often alludes to a sense of formality during an interaction between the performer and the audience. I observed the MPs' clothing from the standpoint of the perceiver, and not the performer wearing it (Connerton, 1989: 33). Five of the male MPs I shadowed during their advice surgeries were always dressed in fairly formal fitted suits. When I shadowed MP Barnaby Wright in November 2014, he wore a well-tailored navy suit, pressed white shirt, an expensive-looking navy silk tie, polished brown oxford shoes, complete with a Mont Blanc ball point pen tucked into his suit pocket. Conservative MP William Morgan and Labour MPs George Watson and Desmond Hill wore similar clothing permutations when meeting their constituents during surgeries. They would usually wear a dark grey suit, a pressed white or light blue shirt paired with a dark coloured silk tie and gleaming black court shoes. They would carry a backpack or folder containing casework and letters. It was plain to see that MPs Morgan, Watson and Hill dressed to maintain a sense of formality between them and their constituents.

Conservative MP James Williamson's presentation of self proved to be particularly interesting. I had the opportunity to shadow him for a full day around his constituency on 8 April 2016. The day started from his commute from London to his constituency, located in Buckinghamshire. Gretchen, his long-time office manager, informed me that MP Williamson had offered to drive me to his constituency, an offer I accepted. I was reminded to arrive at his West London home promptly at 9am, and was emailed precise instructions from Gretchen (including a location map) the day before. I arrived on time as instructed, and met MP Williamson outside the door of his townhouse. He was dressed in the same outfit I observed him wear the previous two Fridays I had shadowed him. He paired a brown, green and blue tweed jacket with matching trousers tailored to suit his frame, a sky blue shirt, a knitted navy tie and a forest green Barbour waxed jacket. As before, his feet were clad in woollen blue socks and polished brown brogues. Gold-rimmed glasses were perched on his nose, and his blond hair was neatly brushed. A transparent box folder, filled with surgery case notes, was tucked under his arm as he directed me to one of his two cars, calling it his "small constituency car". The dingy grey car looked rather messy, and, as he described, was indeed a modestly-sized sedan. He stated that he drove into the constituency all the time, and did not get his transport costs reimbursed.

From this episode we are able to observe how MP Williamson sought to control his image in the constituency. Always dressed impeccably and well-groomed, MP Williamson also ensured that he drove a specific car (out of the two he owned) to his constituency. It was the less showy of the two, as it was small, modest and fairly dated. His use of this car demonstrated that he was doing what he thought he should be doing, contributing to how he was perceived by his constituents. There was a sense that he ensured his image was maintained in a consistent manner in order to minimise the dissimilarity between himself and the constituent.

In typical everyday life, there is a straightforward awareness that first impressions are significant (Goffman, 1959: 22). These five MPs illustrated how the role of an MP, in their perspective, required them to dress as working professionals. Much

like those in professions that require specific dress codes, such as a financial position in the City, these MPs were observed to dress well. This observation is aligned with arguments that the job of an MP has increasingly become professionalised, with a growing trend towards the career politician (King, 1981; Riddell, 1993; Cairney, 2007). The suits worn by the MPs functioned as a stimuli, signifying the performer's status, as well as the performer's temporary ritual state – whether they were engaging in a formal social activity, work or a recreational affair (Goffman, 1959: 34). As they engaged with constituents in the constituency as representatives, they were conducting meetings as part of their remit as an MP. Care had clearly gone into how these MPs presented themselves. However, it must be pointed out that this ran the risk of performance failure, should constituents be reminded of the varying social powers between themselves and the representative and leave the performative interaction thinking the MP was unlikely to understand their plight.

In terms of settings, these performances took place in a variety of office-like settings depending on the day. These included but were not limited to a room in the local party office (MPs Williamson, Watson, Hill and Morgan), a room at a charity office (MP Wright) or meeting rooms in the local library (MPs Miller and Morgan). These meetings areas were secure and quiet, allowing private issues to be discussed comfortably. Several chairs and a table were often set up in the middle of the room, with the MP and their caseworker (if present) usually sitting on one side of the table. As constituents were called in by the MP, much like in a doctor's surgery, they were invited to sit down and talk about their problem. Looking professional, and working within an office-like space, coalesces to present a setting where the MP is prepared to solve the constituent's problems, and ultimately where performance re-fusion can take place.

Making decisions on what expressive equipment was standard for themselves was not always straightforward for the MPs. MP Peter Kyle spoke to me about how, as a politician, he felt the need to dress more formally than he ever had previously, a revelation that was at odds with his own sense of comfort and self. He expressed how the clothing he wore directly impacted not only how he felt, but how he

acted. This open, honest conversation provided further understanding of how the expressive equipment can affect the way MPs project their power. This clothing allowed him to perform his role to his constituents as authentically as possible, resulting in a re-fused performance. He described in detail how dressing in a suit rather than in jeans and a sports jacket made him feel: "… You have to dress a certain way as a politician. Obviously in the Chamber you have to wear formal stuff, you have to wear suits. I can really understand why people say, 'I voted for him, or her, and now look at 'em. That's not the person I voted for.'… I didn't own a tie until I was 35, so dress is very important for me… The world doesn't fall apart if you're in jeans and a jacket. And it is amazing… part of that is about me, and allowing me, because dress is very important, and it is. It's about me being able to feel comfortable in my own skin, and if I am more comfortable, then I am able to act more comfortably, and it will come across more as, as my personality because I am more comfortable in my own skin and my environment" (personal communication, 25 November 2015). Here, we observe as he alludes to how authenticity requires cohesion between means of symbolic production.

From his interview excerpt above, MP Peter Kyle demonstrates his passionate belief that he was his most authentic self when dressed comfortably, in what he preferred. Similar sentiments were also shared in a Facebook post describing his first year as Hove's representative (8 May 2016). This post described various dimensions of his role as an MP, his hopes for the rest of his tenure, as well as the challenges he had faced. He also used this occasion and outlet to draw attention to his image and appearance, relating it to the kind of clothes he felt he had to wear, depending on the occasion. In his post, he mentions "Loads of people said, 'once you get elected you'll disappear up to London and turn into one of them'. I know what they mean and I'm very conscious of it. It's something I really struggle with because if you're in the Commons what you wear, the language you use and even your vocabulary is regulated… It's really tough to appear 'normal' because the situation I'm in now is often abnormal. I try my best though and I do things like change into clothes I'm comfortable in once I'm finished in the chamber for the day, it's something I'm still working on" (Peter Kyle MP Facebook, 8 May 2016).

This explanatory excerpt illuminates the stark contrast between what his constituents think of MPs in the Commons, and what they think of MPs in the constituency. MP Kyle expounds on this by discussing how what he wears and how he speaks differs depending on whether he is in the Commons or not. Referring to being out of his comfort zone when wearing a suit, he is making clear that he feels stifled in the formal situation he is now part of, while trying to retain his identity as the person who has been voted in by his constituents. Declaring that "dress is very important to me" further cements his assertion that clothing has a large impact on the way he feels, and therefore on how he performs. He suggests that this sense of authenticity would be perceived by his constituents during their interactions.

Like MP Peter Kyle, there are some MPs who prefer to dress informally when meeting with constituents. While wearing a suit might project a sense of professionalism and formality, for these MPs this might be precisely the reason why suits or more formal attire are avoided. Some prefer to maintain their approachability by wearing smart-casual or even casual clothes, akin to what their constituents might wear to their meetings. This included MPs Tessa Munt and David Miller. MP Munt was often observed in her constituency with a well-groomed blonde bob, dressed in dark blue jeans and a long-sleeved polo top or jumper, knee-high leather boots, a navy gilet and a large red leather purse. Furthermore, her outfit was practical for moving around a large, rural constituency like Wells, where she often had to drive to various villages and towns to meet her constituents. Her advice surgery meetings were often held in local cafes, pubs and community halls, thus creating a cohesive synthesis between the means of symbolic production. Similarly, MP Miller usually sported a polo neck t-shirt, beige cargo trousers or slacks, and a pair of sports trainers. On a particular Saturday surgery, MP Miller dressed in a similar combination, and rode his bicycle to the meeting that took place within a local church hall. It was a casual, open plan area, where the parishioners walking in and out of the church were able to pop their head into the office to say hello to MP Miller, and

ask if he required anything. His casual outfit, presentation of self and the typical everyday environment were cohesive, presenting the image of a relatable MP.

Recall that the goal of these performances is to overcome social and cultural fragmentation, to create flow and to ultimately achieve re-fusion. Re-fusion is reliant on all the separate elements of performances coming together so seamlessly they appear to be indivisible and invisible (Alexander, 2011: 55). Symbolic signifiers such as the actor, background, culture, mise-en-scène, audience and means of symbolic production must all seem to come easily together. Another facet relating to presentation of self is the manner in which we carry ourselves. Manner may be taken to "refer to those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation." (Goffman, 1959: 35). In other words, how does the performer behave, in light of their script and setting? As I have just demonstrated, MPs often have a "confirming consistency", between their appearance and their manner (Ibid). For example, a well-dressed and groomed representative within a neat and clean office (such as MP Desmond Hill), behaving with an air that demonstrates that they are aware of what they are doing, presents a harmonious, cohesive image that becomes the backdrop of the performance that takes place. However, the performance's success is also dependent on the manner in which the MP carries themselves.

During a surgery with Barnaby Wright MP, whom I have described earlier as being well dressed and groomed, it could be observed that his manner was consistent with his self-presentation. Control over the situation was demonstrated as he ensured we had turned our mobiles to silent mode before the first meeting began. As the surgeries proceeded, he continued to establish his authority. During the surgery appointment with Mrs Sotheby, as discussed in Chapter 6, she was visibly aggressive towards MP Wright in hopes of getting her grandson a place in Greenfields Primary School. Recall she also pulled out a newspaper article from the *MailOnline*, saying, "I want to help you change this policy". The article, "Teachers are struggling to cope with 'influx of migrant children'", accused migrant children of being the cause of the insufficient number

of places in primary schools and inundating the country's resources (*MailOnline*, 29 October 2014). MP Wright did not visibly react to her aggression, but responded by asking her patiently about getting her grandson into other schools in the area. She was adamant that not enough had been done to help her situation, delving into how difficult her daughter's life was with depression, an illness that she had battled since the age of 17. Margaret interrupted to ask whether a doctor's letter had been given as proof to support Mrs Sotheby's case. MP Wright took over in a firm tone, "Margaret, let me handle this." This unyielding tone carried on to the end of the meeting, where a decision was taken to write another letter of support and Mrs Sotheby leaves.

MP Wright can be observed to control the setting as much as possible, ensuring that there would be no interruptions from mobile phones. His authority was further demonstrated during the interaction with Mrs Sotheby, when he assertively told his caseworker Margaret, when she tried to ask questions, to "let me handle this." This command was clear in content and delivery. While Margaret might have been trying to be helpful, but MP Wright saw her question as an interruption, and wanted to move past it so that the advice surgery process would be able to carry on.

In another example, during an advice surgery with Andrew Smith MP in July 2015, it was revealed that he had strategically arranged for constituent Mrs Madeleine Dillon to meet him as the first appointment so that would be able to ask her to leave if he needed to. She had come to see him a few times already, and insisted on doing so even though "[MP Smith couldn't] really do anything more." Over the course of the interaction, which lasted approximately 10 minutes, MP Smith listened attentively as Mrs Dillon talked about her dogs and how she hoped MP Smith could help her advocate for them, "I live for my dogs, you know." He reminded Mrs Dillon that he was unable to do anything further for her. Disappointed, she tried to engineer other ways to discuss her plight but MP Smith stood up and said, "Well, it was nice to see you again" as he indicated the meeting was over. MP Smith established control over the interaction with an exit strategy in place. Over the course of the meeting he was also able to direct the

flow of the conversation politely while reminding Mrs Dillon that he was not in a position to do anything more for her. Although repair was not achieved in this interaction, as a legitimation procedure, MP Smith succeeded in giving the constituent his time and going through the process of repair cordially and respectfully. However, he also acknowledged his limits, which I will discuss in the next section.

7.3 The Art of the Possible: Acknowledgement of Limits

Being a representative of the people does necessitate the possession of some power, but often there are things that are beyond the MP's capacity. As much as they would like to assist, there are instances that indicate their power to so is limited. Over the course of my observations, variants of the line, "I cannot promise anything but I will do what I can" were often the parting words MPs gave before signalling the end of the advice surgery meeting. This acknowledgement of their limits might be conceived as a lack of power, but I demonstrate in this section why the contrary is true. Unlike a performance disruption, as I have analysed in Chapter 6, the grasp of one's capabilities can be considered a form of power in itself. By knowing and communicating their limits, they are managing their constituent's expectations; maintaining the line that they are trying to do their best, while also possibly avoiding potential disruptions.

During the advice surgery where I shadowed MP William Morgan in August 2015, two interactions with constituents demonstrated this clearly. Ms Malindi Dalakoti, aged approximately 35, arrived at the local Conservative Party office to discuss her immigration problems. Originally from Pakistan, she explained that she had lived in the UK for over 10 years, mostly on a Tier 4 student visa. During this time, she got married to her husband, and they now had a seven-year-old son. Her application for permanent residency had been declined and she would have liked MP Morgan's help in her appeal. As she did not have a clear visa status, she had also not been able to find a job, resulting in financial difficulties for her family. MP Morgan agreed to write a letter to support her appeal, but reminded her openly that he was unable to "wave a magic wand", and "[couldn't]

guarantee [her] anything". She appeared to understand, and gratefully thanked him for his help.

The last constituents of the day (out of 10), Mr and Mrs Willoughby, were seeking MP Morgan's help with regards to their son, who suffered from acute mental health difficulties. Mrs Willoughby emotionally explained that they had struggled with medical professionals at the care home where he lived, over healthcare decisions, and that this had been detrimental to their son's recovery. Mr and Mrs Willoughby were both healthcare professionals, and were familiar with decision-making procedures as his parents. However, doctors had blamed them for his health complications, and had denied them the right to make medical choices on his behalf. Furthermore, they believed that he ought to be sectioned. Helpless, they hoped that MP Morgan would be able to suggest possible solutions. MP Morgan listened intently while his caseworker took notes. After some clarification of the issue at hand, he suggested that their lawyer contact the Minister of State for Health. He cautioned them, "Truth be told I'm not sure that will help. He will just push it on to someone else." MP Morgan admitted that he was not familiar with the care home they spoke of, but said that he would acquaint himself with the necessary information, ending the meeting by saying, "I can't promise anything obviously, but I will write these letters."

Members emphasise their desire to help, but explain that their influence on constituency matters does not necessarily help change decisions already made by other bodies. In one example, MP Peter Kyle was observed to explain numerous times to constituents that wanted him to change decisions already made by the Housing Council that he was unable to do so: "I'm afraid that this is not within my jurisdiction… I am a voice that can cause a rethink."

Both examples above demonstrate clearly how MP Morgan was keen to help, and had some idea of what to do, yet was aware that power on his part to change any decisions made was limited. On both occasions he was quick to remind constituents that he was unable to guarantee a favourable outcome. Why is this significant? If we consider the position of the MP as a conduit between the

government and the people navigating the rough seas of public administration, it is important to recognise that the constituents have chosen to seek the MP out for assistance. Regardless of the outcome, the MP is present to assist constituents. Going through the routine itself is an acknowledgement of the MP's position of power, in the hopes that they will be able to provide some sort of help.

In another instance, MP Desmond Hill met his constituent Weston Pope during an advice surgery that took place in July 2015. Mr Pope revealed that a large financial transaction he had made online through his bank's website had been fraudulently intercepted. Despite writing a complaint to the bank, and contacting the financial ombudsman, the bank he used had not been able to help him. Frustrated, he explained that the bank had been using their data and client protection policies as a shield against helping him acquire his money back. The situation, in his opinion, was "downright bizarre". MP Hill listened intently as he shifted in his seat, taking notes and asking a few questions. Tapping his finger on his temple, MP Hill suggested that Mr Pope consider calling into the Moneybox programme on BBC Radio 4 to seek advice, stating, "I think this is about all I can bring to the table." He continued to suggest that going to the media (here he referred to the news media) might be the best option, if the typical methods did not seem to be leading anywhere. MP Hill proposed the possibility of passing the matter to the Treasury Select Committee, but such a request would take some time to be processed and its success unlikely. "Hopefully I won't have to do any of these things. Don't let the fact that I'm dealing with this stop you from dealing with it too." MP Hill continued to explain that it might be useful to use the media as a threat, "probably be effective if you say that you met with your MP, and that he is horrified, and might speak about it to the media. Let's push all their buttons and see what happens."

MP Hill's advice to Mr Pope proves unique but no less presentational when it comes to him explaining his power. Although he acknowledged his limits about being unable to help in his position as an MP, his unique advice to approach a radio programme while mentioning his name suggests MP Hill's belief that this

would bring prominence to Mr Pope's plight. It also demonstrates belief in the part he is playing – that is, using his name would serve to greater influence an outcome to emerge. His advice indicates an understanding of the media and how it could work in their favour, possibly from his experience as an MP since 2005.

In this section I have demonstrated how MPs acknowledge the limits of what they are able to do in their position of power. While this might be initially conceived as a lack of power, I have demonstrated how the grasp of one's capabilities can be considered a form of power in itself, as MPs manage their constituent's expectations and maintain that they are doing their best, while also possibly avoiding potential or further disruptions. In the next section I draw an analysis between these performative deliveries, the discursive formations in the standby MP framework discussed throughout the dissertation, and the quest for re-fusion, to complete my discussion of the contemporary constituency service process.

7.4 The Quest for Re-fusion

Per my dissertation argument set forth in Chapter 1, seeking to overcome societal fragmentation and stratification to achieve authenticity is the goal of MP performances. MPs as power-holders seek to promulgate the view of the political situation (in this case the work being carried out in the constituency service and on behalf of the constituency) they would like their constituency audience to hold (Kertzer, 1988: 41). As MPs and their constituents interact at a micro level with the influence of institutions and cultures present, it is observed that this struggle for power is not over once the MPs have been voted in. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, with modernity comes growth of communities and societal stratification (new or the exacerbation of existing fractures). With these changes come repeated challenges to power. The success of a re-fused performative action where one is considered authentic only occurs when an individual or a collective actor is able to communicate the meanings of their actions they want their audiences to believe, within the context of the socio-cultural structure in place. Demonstration and exercise of power with the help of symbolic guises is observed as MPs present themselves to constituents, exert

power when faced with challenges and draw references to Westminster and Parliament (Kerzer, 1988: 174). This not only legitimises the MP's position within the constituency, but also is an opportunity for the power hierarchy to be displayed between the actor-MP and audience-constituent. The struggle for power within these interactions is not so much a struggle to be the next head of a tribe or the political leader but, rather, the struggle for successful performance re-fusion.

To complete my investigation of the contemporary constituency service process I will first briefly restate the criteria for a successful performance as set out by Alexander's (2010; 2011) theory of cultural pragmatics. Recall that the goal for any performance, regardless of whether it takes place on a stage or in society, is to nimbly create a believable, masterful, affective connection with the audience that will result in the projection of cultural meaning. For successful performative re-fusion to occur, actors must seek to overcome social and cultural fragmentation in the most natural way possible to recover a momentary ritual-like effect, in which all the performative elements fuse together frictionlessly (Alexander, 2011: 55). The performance's success is determined by its verisimilitude and the inability to detect the performance at all (Alexander, 2011: 56).

Through my analysis of the constituency process in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I have determined how the discursive formations of accessibility, visibility and repair form the framework of the MP's constituency service performance, which I termed "on standby". In this section I will bring to bear challenges to performative re-fusion observed through my earlier analyses of accessibility, visibility, repair and the manifestation of power in the constituency service performances by MPs that indicate the possibility of performative failure. These include the challenge of the means of symbolic production, the challenge of being natural, and the challenge of reception. When faced with these challenges the gap between actor and performer cannot be overcome and re-fusion is not achieved.

The Challenge of Means of Symbolic Production

A key aspect of a performance's success is whether its means of symbolic production is appropriate and sufficient. In a smaller society access to these means is not usually complicated. However, in a larger, differentiated complex society, the means of symbolic production required for a performance to not just a variety of people, but a large number of them can prove to be a challenge. These performative spaces, or stages which the actors use to project their messages, need to be a suitable base on which symbolic production can take place. They are often configured to suit the performance about to take place. These configurations include decoration, rearrangements and costumes. Although it is possible to critically interpret each aspect of these elements even further (e.g. criticism of these aspects from their respective professional institutions), as my study of the constituency service process is a close inspection of the micro-level process, I will focus on the elements as they appear.

In the context of the MP and the constituency, this means that not only do MPs have more than one stage on which to perform, but cohesion between these components must also be achieved. To be accessible, MPs have to choose performative spaces in which they are able to successfully perform to their constituents. Stages MPs have selected include spaces that allow for both face-to-face and mediated interactions, such as their own constituency offices, local party office, local cafes, pubs, town halls, their Facebook and Twitter feeds and personal websites. These chosen performative stages then have to be suitably furnished and perhaps even decorated. For example, MP George Watson's advice surgeries took place in his local constituency office, which had a large name board with his name on it hanging above the office entrance. Several chairs were arranged in the main corridor of the party office to serve as a waiting room area. Labour Party imprinted posters and contact cards tastefully decorated the waiting area, and MP Watson was dressed in a suit. MP Watson was dressed appropriately to match the formality of hosting the meeting at his local party office. However, the large room he used as his office and meeting space had awkwardly arranged furniture, mismatched chairs and random stacks of papers on the floor. While there was a general cohesion between the choice of clothes,

the way he presented himself and the office space, there was the possibility of MP Watson's performance being challenged by the disjointed impression of professional yet disorganised. He may have seemed to be able to "get things done", but when would this be executed? Would it be lost in the pile of papers? On the online stages of Facebook and Twitter, MP Watson demonstrates similar inconsistencies. As one of the many MPs in my study who fell into the middle of the continuum I expounded in Chapter 5, he viewed his use of digital tools as an accompaniment to face-to-face interactions, which were "absolutely critical" (personal communication, 22 September 2015). However, his updates on Facebook and Twitter were often sporadic, showing little to no engagement with comments made on posts. MP Watson possessed the means of symbolic production across offline and online performative spaces, but there was a lack of cohesion within each and across all of the performative acts. As a consequence, this may cause confusion in his portrayal of legitimacy and performative power. Along with means of symbolic production, it is also necessary for MP-actors to play the part convincingly, which I will discuss next.

The Challenge of Being Natural

Even if there are adequate means of symbolic production, a carefully crafted script that draws on collective representations, and the act is choreographed step by step, the performance's success rests on the actor's ability to act it out believably. This is often the most difficult component of the performance. Unlike professional actors, political performers already occupy a position within the social performance, but their ability to maintain their role has always been subject to ceaseless scrutiny (Alexander, 2011: 71). In the case of the MP, although already in the position of power, they have to be able to convincingly perform their role within the constituency. It is possible that the MP's speech and actions may be communicated as insincere, fake or for the sake of publicity. For instance, just as MP James Williamson perceived MP updates on digital tools such as Facebook and Twitter to be propaganda, it is not unconceivable that constituent-audiences reading their MP's updates might view them in the same light.

Thus, this challenge of being natural is being made even more intricate as it occurs across the various tools and methods MPs choose to employ as they perform their constituency service activities. Additionally, as Chapter 4 revealed, MPs encourage continual interactions beyond the initial performative act. The need to be natural and consistent across offline and online communication tools has never been more relevant. Constituent-audiences may not believe in their MP's accessibility or willingness to help if it does not appear genuine on any outlet they choose to seek out their representative. MP Peter Kyle recognises this challenge, having expressed difficulty in being consistent across different communication media (traditional and digital) and face-to-face, "You have got to be that [same] person regardless of what medium you're communicating on. So that person that they meet on their doorstep, because I still do a lot of work in communities, has to be the same person, or has to be recognisable to the one they see on television. And to me that is a very, very difficult thing to do" (personal communication, 25 November 2015). MP Kyle's comprehension of the situation may provide him with an advantage when it comes to his performances, but no matter how experienced or exceptional the actor-MP is, there is no guarantee that the constituent-audience will decipher a performance the way it was intended.

The Challenge of Reception

The challenge of reception occurs when the performative text and audience are unable to achieve re-fusion. This means that what is being projected is not decoded the way it was intended to be. Previous cultural and pragmatic theories, including Goffman's (1959) presentation of self, neglect to include the role of audience reception in the performative projection. This perspective entitles the political performer and renders citizens passive audience members. Earlier, in Chapter 2, I drew on Alexander's post-Weberian conceptualisation of performative power and legitimacy: privileging meaning-making but allowing that audience interpretations may differ greatly from what performers intended to develop (Mast, 2016; Alexander, 2013). To maintain legitimacy, MPs have to project power skillfully to invoke feelings of identification in the audience,

linking the representative with the represented (Alexander, 2010, 2011; Mast, 2016).

Along with the social and cultural complexity that makes these performances challenging for MPs, it must be recognised that constituent-audiences are in no way a homogenous population. Within the group of constituents the MP interacts with at a town hall meeting, or the various appointments across a day's worth of advice surgeries, are internally segmented groups of people. For instance, these constituents are likely to possess varied political orientations, personal interests and socio-economic backgrounds. Audiences do not simply view the world through a straightforward perspective of their cultures. Furthermore, re-fusion of performances is also a matter of interpretation. Thus, even as political representative strive to keep their finger on the pulse to ensure their scripts and performances involve collective background representation to incite re-fusion (as we have perceived from MPs Jacob Marshall and William Morgan), audience interpretation is simply not automatic. The very same performance projection could be interpreted in diametrically contrasting ways (Liebes and Katz, 1990).

Similarly, as my findings showed in Chapter 5, MPs possess varying preferences for and views on they integrate physical co-presence, traditional media and digital tools in the visibility discursive formation. Thus, an MP who primarily emphasises physical presence with a low amount of other tools may potentially be interpreted by the audience as inconsistent and doing little on behalf of the constituency, when in reality, the MP has chosen to invest their resources in ensuring they could help as many constituents as possible in the repair process. Another constituent may appreciate the face-to-face meeting, and be glad that the MP was not wasting time online. Furthermore, comparisons may be made with existing sources of knowledge, such as what the previous MP might have done, or their personal preferences for specific styles of interaction. Consequently, this will impact how a constituent-audience reacts to the performance and how they experience the symbolic connection the MP is trying to make.

In this section I have discussed how challenges to re-fusion result in actors having difficulty overcoming the social and cultural fragmentation of an audience. Together with my discussion of performing power earlier in this chapter, I have demonstrated three challenges to performative re-fusion, supported by my earlier analyses of accessibility, visibility and repair, indicating the possibility of performative failure. These include the challenge of means of symbolic production, the challenge of being natural, and the challenge of reception. I will conclude my discussion in the next section.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the performative aspects of MP-constituent interactions. I revealed how MPs draw on existing discursive formations and other elements of social performances to portray legitimacy and power as an MP on standby. Although MPs are in positions of power, it is necessary for them to continue to successfully perform to their constituents in order to convince them of their legitimacy. The discursive formations I discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 give structure and meaning to the constituency performance, but the success of re-fusion also lies in the delivery of the performative act. I have discussed how control over the interaction is a prime opportunity for the MP to have their legitimacy established as they emphasise their accessibility, prompt their visibility and overcome disruptions during repair. I have shown how MPs cultivate control over their performance in order to convince their constituent-audiences through their delivery by the explanation of power. They do this by drawing legitimacy from Westminster, projecting power through the use of digital tools and means of symbolic production. MPs draw legitimacy from Westminster as they speak about Parliament and the Commons, but also through a combination of explanatory and presentational elements which display that they are indeed “qualified” to be in the position of power. These links to Westminster provide them with a foundation of power they are able to wield during other meetings. MPs who include the use of digital tools and social media platforms in their performance toolkit are able to use these to demonstrate power to their constituents from their position in Westminster. Utilising platforms such

as personal websites, Facebook and/or Twitter, MPs are not only able to maintain visibility to their constituents, but also exhibit themselves wielding power within the Commons as they debate and develop policy.

I have also demonstrated how MPs manage constituents' expectations and the outcome of the interaction by acknowledging their limits. Unlike a performance disruption, as I have analysed in Chapter 6, the grasp of one's capabilities can be considered a form of power in itself, as MPs manage constituent's expectations while also avoiding potential disruptions.

Finally, I discussed challenges to performative re-fusion observed through my earlier analyses of accessibility, visibility and repair, and the manifestation of power in the constituency service performances by MPs on standby. Modernity and societal changes in audiences bring repeated challenges to power. My analyses indicate the possibility of performative failure lying in: challenges in means of symbolic production, where elements of performative stage, presentation of self and any other tools that are required for the performance do not come together smoothly; being natural, where the actor-MP's performance is not convincing and seamless; and the reception, in which the constituent-audience do not decipher the act the way the actor intended them to, usually due to comparisons with prior experiences.

The discussions in this chapter have demonstrated how a performance's success in a complex and differentiated audience is dependent on many interconnecting factors. Furthermore, a performance's success is never guaranteed. In the context of the MP and the constituency, cohesion between the MP's performances, how they choose to wield power and integration between performative components must not only be achieved during a single legitimation procedure, but consistently across the various performative spaces they choose to utilise. If not, constituent-audiences not only remain unconvinced that what they see or hear is valid and true, but are not symbolically connected with the political performances they experience, resulting in authenticity and legitimacy being out of reach. In short, the struggle to re-fuse the actor and their audience, connecting

them with the script's discursive formations, and the backgrounds that define it, encapsulates the MP's constituency service process. In the next chapter, I conclude this dissertation by summarising the aims and findings, before suggesting future research ideas.

8 A Method to the Madness? MPs on Standby

> "It is fashionable for commentators to argue for politicians to 'speak human'. This really is the most dreadful nonsense. What the electorate want is for politicians to *be* human."
>
> – Jerry Hayes, *An Unexpected MP*

8.1 Key Findings

Contemporary constituency service is instrumental to British representation, and is an important component of how citizens experience democracy in action. As established earlier in the dissertation, we know it commonly takes place, that almost every MP carries it out, but how? This dissertation has been driven by the question of *how* contemporary constituency service is carried out. By extension I also sought answers to the challenges of contemporary constituency service faced by MPs, and the integration of traditional and digital communication tools. To answer the question, I have traced the process of the contemporary constituency service closely by following 18 MPs across three political parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat) as they carried out their constituency service activities. Through my fieldwork I was privy to intimate features of an MP's life in the constituency, unexceptional details that are often lost in the larger scheme of things. However, it is precisely these particularities that reveal so much about the contemporary constituency service. I observed as MPs made conscious decisions to prioritise meeting constituents as they struggled with tensions between responsibilities in Westminster and the constituency, and unsteady navigation of the challenging digital environment. MPs were inundated with assaults in their everyday responsibilities as they navigated through the complexity of the contemporary constituency service.

This dissertation has revealed the significance of the constituency service to MPs and the process by which they choose to carry it out. Members across political parties are distinctly aware of their negative reputation. Recall MP Peter Kyle discussing his fear of becoming "one of them", meaning an MP who was so focused on the Commons they had lost sight of what was going on on the ground

(personal communication, 25 November 2015). MP Jacob Marshall found the distance between London and his constituency "a real danger" (personal communication, 4 May 2016). MP Samuel Pollock acknowledged that politicians are out of touch with the public, yet recognised that "[there has not] been a generation of politicians trying harder to be in touch with the constituents" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). This is representative of most MPs, and is a suitable starting point for my answer to the question I asked in this dissertation. MPs are "on standby" as they carry out the process of contemporary constituency service by prioritising regular face-to-face interactions in the constituency. In routine performative acts, such as advice surgery meetings, MPs seek to keep abreast of constituency knowledge and make symbolic connections to portray legitimacy and authenticity. The use of traditional media and digital tools, integrated with their face-to-face meetings, varies, but these tools are predominantly used to draw attention to what MPs do on behalf of their constituents, depending on personal preference, knowledge and resources. When approached by constituents about personal, community or national problems, MPs are ready to react and repair, redressing and overcoming these problems with the knowledge they have accumulated.

Contemporary constituency service is about the production of meaning and symbolic connections with constituent-audiences, in which the outcomes are largely determined by how well the MP-actor performs and crafts these acts. However, as I have discussed in Chapter 7, the actor's ability to control the outcome of their performance is never guaranteed. These performative acts consist of a variety of advice surgeries, neighbourhood walkabouts, speeches made at schools and meeting residents at a local coffee morning, to name a few. Through my thick description of experiences in the constituency, I have shown how these performances are legitimation procedures in which MP-actors and constituent-audiences arbitrate the development of meanings, where MP-actors project and maintain their power and seek to connect with their constituent-audience, transforming from distant political enigmas into authentic constituency advocates who are present and capable of resolving personal or community problems. Depending on how they are being used, these

performances can take place face-to-face (where individuals are co-present), via traditional media such as newsletters or digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and emails, where the participants negotiate meaning developments through images, words, speaking and reacting with each other (Mast, 2016: 5022).

Three key findings emerge from my analysis of these performances. Firstly, it is clear that despite the negative press and opinion polls, MPs *do* care. Unlike previous literature suggesting the personal vote and psychological rewards as primary motivations for MPs to carry out the constituency service (Cain et al, 1987; Norris, 1997), my findings suggest that MPs are driven by a sense of answerability and personal stimulus. Logistically, it is impossible for MPs to meet every single constituent over the period of their tenure. With other parliamentary responsibilities in place, MPs are not able to proactively seek out constituency issues. Instead, MPs rely on being *reactive*. To do so requires them to be accessible. MPs across varying experiences, political orientations and constituency size have demonstrated the importance of the constituency service and concern for their constituents, and are observed to do as much as possible for constituents. This is primarily achieved by establishing a relationship with their constituents by being accessible. Being accessible in the constituency is imperative, as they strive to overcome physical distances to be closer to and convenient for constituents. Keeping constituents informed of their accessibility is a priority for MPs as they remind constituents that they are there for them, if they so require. MPs establish the discursive formation of accessibility through management of resources and priorities, as well as amplification by convenience, and through a combination of traditional media and digital tools to encourage further interaction beyond the initial meeting, securing the relationship with the constituent. My findings also indicate variations across MPs with varying experiences. While all MPs emphasised the need to be physically accessible, recently elected MPs strove to ensure their accessibility was made known. A possible reason for this could be the need for newly elected MPs to make themselves known amongst the community as well as being available, whereas experienced MPs may already be known in the constituency. MPs keep themselves accessible in order for constituents to easily seek them for help

whenever they need to. On standby, they are ready to react and repair, armed with knowledge about local and other common issues, such as immigration.

Secondly, despite suggestions by digital positivists that digital tools will allow for greater engagement between MPs and their constituents, MPs were found to unanimously agree that face-to-face co-presence was their preferred method of interaction, terming it "absolutely paramount", "huge" and the "currency of the job". Traditional media and digital tools are considered valuable and are integrated into the MP's arsenal of communication tools, but to varying degrees. My findings indicate that MPs strive to maintain some form of everyday visibility, but demonstrate differences in how they choose to do so. As the goal of performance re-fusion is also one of authenticity, MPs are of the view that being face-to-face allows them the best opportunity to intensify the symbolic connection between the MP-actor and constituent-audience in their pursuit of performance re-fusion. Although MPs agree that digital tools are useful to elevate their visibility and could be initial points of access, integration of digital tools to boost visibility is met with some apprehension. My findings show that MP use of traditional media and digital tools falls along a spectrum of low to no integration emphasising co-present visibility, average integration with an emphasis on co-presence and high integration with equal emphasis on additional tools and co-presence. However, the nature of the contemporary media environment means that offline and online spaces are no longer disparate, with MPs no longer able to make a true decision of how much of a digital tool they would like to incorporate in their performances, thus putting forward my finding that making a decision not to engage in any form of digital presence is a false choice.

Thirdly, although previous research has indicated specific roles and motivations that make up the constituency service (Norton and Wood, 1993; Norris, 1997; Searing, 1994; Gay, 2005), MPs find the contemporary constituency service challenging as demands made of them are no longer as specific and are twice as many. The struggle to balance and multitask between constituent demands, resource management and consistent performances is exacerbated by the increase in digital tool usage. This hampers their pursuit of re-fusion because

performing consistently between all the various communication tools and physical co-presence is difficult to project and sustain. This difficulty has gone undocumented as previous studies are outdated, and any mention of online technologies refers only to the use of email or websites (Jackson, 2003; Williamson, 2009), or focuses on single tool usage (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Jackson, 2006). It is easy to assume that a strategy is in place, and much of the updates are deliberate and carefully crafted, much like the ones during their campaign electioneering, developed to maximise the impact of the MP's updates. However, this is not the case. My findings indicate that MPs do not have a specific strategy that incorporates and synthesises physical co-presence, traditional media and use of digital tools. Instead, MPs draw on the framework of the three discursive formations identified – accessibility, visibility and repair – in order to do as much as they can to respond to constituents' requests for help; staying aware of constituency events while ensuring their constituents are aware of their presence. Chapter 6, in particular, reveals how MPs are consistently faced with stressful and occasionally dangerous situations as they seek to overcome numerous types of disruptions to repair their performance within the advice surgery process. My findings indicate the use of logic, exertion of authority and counselling as methods to overcome disruptions and achieve repair. In this sense, being on standby is not necessarily a strategy but a response to the increased challenges MPs face in the contemporary constituency service process.

8.2 Contributions

Through this dissertation I contribute to the existing literature a new theoretical approach that calls for a refraction of perspective by rejecting previous assumptions held about the constituency service (which are generally outdated) and consolidates all types of communication and activities carried out in the constituency under one umbrella. While many scholars have identified and confirmed the increase of constituency service interest and activities by MPs, they often hold these activities to the same roles and top-down perspectives that were set forth in previous studies, such as Searing's 1994 study *Westminster's World*. While that study's comprehensive data and results cannot be denied, it is imperative to realise that the context in which these activities and interactions

take place have changed, thus requiring a shift in perspective. Drawing on Alexander's (2010; 2011) theory of cultural pragmatics, Goffman's (1959) presentation of self and Foucault's (1952) notion of discursive formations I have developed a cultural approach of everyday performativity *from the perspective of the constituency*. I have demonstrated a refreshing notion in understanding how these constituency service processes take place, and how they are developed and perpetrated. From this theoretical point of view and with the support of my empirical research, I have built a case for getting closer to the action, paying attention to performative acts occurring in real time, and engaging with them to allow the bigger stories to be imaginatively identified and expressed with intricate details (Back, 2015).

The theoretical approach guiding my work thus contributes to the way we think about representative processes and those who carry them out. One major implication of this contribution is that it prompts a rethink of how we approach studies of representation and citizenship. This theoretical approach demonstrates that it is not that meaning no longer matters or does not exist between MP and constituents, but, rather, the context for meaning-making is no longer the same. Power can no longer be forced or bound by the view of rational-legal legitimacy or existing culture structures, but needs to be meaningfully defined and portrayed through successful re-fused performances. Thus, by rejecting the assumption of social reality this dissertation contributes a new lens through which we can view the constituency service, its process and how it relates to concepts of representation. Remember that this is not merely an exercise in embellishing what we already know through large N analyses and qualitative typologies with details but a re-examination of a process we know already exists, in order to understand its unspoken realities.

As I have demonstrated, these MP-constituent performances are not in any way sanitised interactions but meetings that involve real people with significant problems. As I showed in Chapter 2, while scholars do not entirely neglect to discuss the process of constituency service, details of these processes are often under-theorised and under-studied. Much of the previous literature is reductive

in nature, treating these meetings as purely procedural by generalising them; losing the affective, aesthetic and cognitive dimensions in the process. Thus, it is unreflective of what occurs on the ground. Most importantly, this dissertation shows that these interactions are rich experiences full of symbolic meaning, more than the typical rational choice approach that dominates the studies in the field recognises them to be. By addressing how the process of the contemporary constituency service takes place, this dissertation has contributed a new viewpoint to the studies of representation and how MPs deal with constituents. I have also contributed in-depth details of constituency interactions and dynamics between MP and constituent, bringing what is usually not obvious to light. I also extended existing literature on constituency service interactions by analysing the advice surgery, and the challenges and disruptions that may occur in each stage of the process. Through these details I have also contributed a holistic understanding of how MPs integrate traditional media and digital tools in their constituency service.

My dissertation reveals a tension that exists between MPs' responsibilities and their resources. The struggle to manage this tension is not often captured, thus resulting in a simplistic understanding of how resources are delegated and utilised, possibly leading to superficial solutions of communication improvement. For instance, studies on MPs and the use of digital tools such as Twitter place their focus on the output, using discourse analyses to seek answers about what MPs use these tools for (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). As my approach demonstrates, MPs may use these tools as a form of impression management, but the choice to do so is no longer binary, and is integrated with existing practices. Furthermore, I suggest that it is precisely this tension that is preventing re-fusion of performance from occurring. Thus a narrow perspective on how MPs draw on digital tools needs to be avoided.

This dissertation does not provide solutions to how tensions between MPs' Westminster and constituency responsibilities should be managed. This tension is acknowledged throughout the dissertation, and provides an opportunity for us to reflect on what is not ideal about the circumstances under which MPs have to

perform their constituency service activities. While differences between constituency characteristics and MPs' communication practice preferences make developing a protocol that would suit all MPs unrealistic, it might be possible to make an effort to effectively include these variations as a contextual background in future work on the constituency service.

On a related note, this dissertation also reveals a gap between social expectations of what MPs should do, and the reality of what MPs are actually doing locally. This is aligned with previous research that suggests trust in individual local MPs (51 per cent) is higher than trust in British MPs overall (21 per cent) (Ipsos MORI, 2013). This supports the case for looking closer at national and macro-level phenomenon by balancing them with an approach of everyday performativity, for what is often assumed in rational choice approaches is narrow and unreflective of what occurs on the ground.

In addition, as I have shown in the empirical fieldwork, MPs face many challenges as they carry out demanding responsibilities. I observed how they spend their weeks, often having little time for their families and personal lives. Some MPs shared that they often ended up working on Sundays, simply because there was always something to do, or a constituency event to attend. MP James Williamson said that he rations the weekend time he spends working because he needs to spend time with his family and would not see them otherwise (personal communication, 7 January 2016). Paul Flynn elucidates that most of an MP's personal relationships are destroyed by the "excessive demands of the parliamentary workload" (2011: 159). This begs the question of whether MPs are being forced to undergo this extremely stressful way of life for little to no benefit to themselves, and possibly only slightly to the institution. Perhaps a rethinking of what effective constituency service means is required. As a response to the quote from Jerry Hayes MP I have placed at the start of the chapter, MPs *are* human, after all.

8.3 Directions for Further Research

To conclude this dissertation, I will propose two research questions for further academic research based on the findings I have discussed in this chapter. Firstly, my research sought to understand how the process of contemporary constituency service was carried out. Conducted over the MP's shoulder, I was able to observe and analyse decisions made as part of the MP's performance and how they sought to make symbolic connections and portray legitimacy to their audiences. As I discussed in Chapter 7, a performance's success is dependent on the audience's reception, which I did not have an opportunity to pursue due to resource constraints. Thus, an opportunity emerges for a possible research agenda, where further understanding of the performance's success can be sought, investigating if it achieved its goal of re-fusion, by looking at how constituent-audiences receive and interpret these performative acts. This would enable further understanding of the constituency service process, and has important implications for developing a suitable constituency service protocol for MPs.

Secondly, in my discussion of the discursive formation of visibility in Chapter 5, I showed how some MPs drew on a number of different traditional and digital tools to augment their visibility. In particular, my analysis of MP Tessa Munt's newsletter "Magazine VIEW" demonstrated the work she carried out on behalf of the constituency locally, which was always a priority, and in Parliament, with creativity and finesse, to showcase her power and legitimacy. Apart from MP Munt, only two other MPs in my sample gave out physical copies of their newsletters, with the remaining MPs relying on email or e-newsletters to keep their constituency updated on their activities. Thus, another research agenda opportunity emerging from my work is to systematically observe patterns in MPs' newsletters, and investigate whether similarities can be found between those of MPs in government and those of MPs in opposition, as well as front and backbenchers.

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10 Appendix 1: Consent Form

Royal Holloway
University of London
Egham, Surrey
TW20 0EX

Department of Politics and International Relations
www.royalholloway.ac.uk

CONSENT FORM

Royal Holloway, University of London is committed to ethically conducting research. This project has been ethically approved by the Department of Politics and International Relations.

If you are happy to allow Nikki Soo (RHUL) to shadow you, please complete and sign the form below.

Please tick

• I confirm that I have the read the information sheet on the above project, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have them answered satisfactorily.	
• I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time.	
• I understand that any information that may identify me will be altered to protect my anonymity.	
• I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.	
• Please tick here if you would like your name to be anonymised.	

I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date

11 Appendix 2: Details of Data Collection

Interviews and Fieldwork

Name of MP	Party Affiliation	Gender	Date Interviewed	Date(s) Shadowed and Details
Christopher Lewis	Conservative	Male	17 October 2014	N/A
Justine Greening	Conservative	Female	24 October 2014	N/A
Niles Perry	Conservative	Male	31 October 2014	N/A
Barnaby Wright	Conservative	Male	14 November 2014	14 November 2014
Marie Moore	Labour	Female	19 November 2014	N/A

Tessa Munt	Liberal Democrat	Female		• 29 November 2014
				  o Glastonbury
				• 5 December 2014
				  o Burnham-on-Sea
				  o Axbridge
				• 6 December 2014
				  o Wells, Somerset
				• 17 January 2015
				  o Cheddar
				• 30 January 2015
				  o Shepton Mallet
				  o Chilcompton
				• 31 January 2015
				  o Glastonbury
				  o Meare
				• 28 February 2015
				  o Glastonbury

Desmond Hill	Labour	Male	27 January 2015	• 16 February 2015 • 9 March 2015 • 6 July 2015 • 13 July 2015
David Miller	Liberal Democrat	Male	26 June 2015	• 26 June 2015 • 3 July 2015 • 7 August 2015
Samuel Pollock	Labour	Male	30 June 2015	N/A
Harry Grove	Labour	Male	30 June 2015	N/A
Logan Woodward	Labour	Male	1 July 2015	N/A8
Andrew Smith	Labour	Male	1 July 2015	• 10 July 2015 • 17 July 2015 • 19 July 2015 – Door-step knocking sessions
Henry Green	Conservative	Male	7 July 2015	N/A

William Morgan	Conservative	Male	29 July 2015	• 1 August 2015 • 10 October 2015 (Whole day session, with 3 times the number of usual surgery attendees) • 28 January 2016
George Watson	Labour	Male	22 September 2015	• 24 September 2015 • 23 October 2015 • 24 March 2016
James Williamson	Conservative	Male	7 January 2016	• 28 Feb 2016 • 11 March 2016 • 8 April 2016 (Attended a talk, meeting and surgery with him)
Peter Kyle	Labour	Male	25 November 2015	• 22 April 2016 • 6 May 2016 • 13 May 2016
Jacob Marshall	Conservative	Male	4 May 2016	N/A

Image and Digital Tools Data Collected on Fieldwork

Note: Per the request of MPs who wished to be anonymised, details have been changed.

Chapter 4

Images 4.1, 4.2	Peter Kyle MP's Office, Hove, Sussex. Taken 22 April 2016.
Image 4.3	Map of Surgery Meeting in Wells, Somerset from OpenStreetMap <https://www.openstreetmap.org/node/304611#map=10/51.2082/-2.6395>, edited to show points of meetings.
Image 4.4	Andrew Smith MP, Contact Card. Collected 17 July 2015.
Image 4.5	Tessa Munt MP, Contact Card. Collected 5 December 2014.
Samuel Pollock MP	Samuel Pollock MP, Contact Card. Collected 30 June 2015. Samuel Pollock MP, Leaflet on Local Surgeries. Collected 30 June 2015.
Christopher Lewis MP	Christopher Lewis MP

Chapter 5

Images 5.1, 5.2, 5.3	Tessa Munt MP (2014), Magazine VIEW. Collected 5 December 2014.
Image 5.4	Munt, Tessa (27 January 2015) Why I tendered my resignation as Parliamentary Private Secretary [Website Blog Post] Retrieved from <www.tessamunt.org.uk/why_i_tendered_my_resignation_as_parliamentary_private_secretary>
Image 5.5	David Miller MP Facebook Update. Collected 25 June 2015.
Image 5.6	Peter Kyle MP Twitter Update. Collected 14 May 2016.
Image 5.7	David Miller MP Twitter Update. Collected 26 June 2015.
Andrew Smith MP Article	Smith, Andrew (2015, 3 July) Centre for addicts has promising start. *The Oxford Times.* Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/13367603.Centre_for_addicts_has_a_promising_start/>
Tessa Munt MP Russia Today Media Appearance	Russia Today (2015, 31 January) Tessa Munt talks fracking, succession in Saudi Arabia, and Syria smeared? (E168), *Russia Today,* Retrieved from <https://www.rt.com/shows/going-underground/228127-uk-housing-crisis-protest/>
Tessa Munt MP Mirror Article	Munt, Tessa (2015, 30 January) Why I resigned from ministerial job over Cameron's plan to frack in Somserset. *The Mirror.* Retrieved from <www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/resigned-ministerial-job-over-david-5071025>
Christopher Lewis MP Newsletter	Christopher Lewis MP, Constituency B Matters [Newsletter] October 2014. Collected 17 October 2014.

Chapter 6

Barnaby Wright MP Surgery (Mrs Sotheby)	Mctague, Tom and Daniel Martin (2014, 29 October), Teachers are struggling to cope with 'influx' of migrant children, warns Chief Inspector of Schools Sir Michael Wilshaw. *Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2813035/British-schools-need-help-cope-influx-immigrant-children-says-Ofsted-chief-Sir-Michael-Wilshaw.html>

Chapter 7

Image 7.1, 7.2	Christopher Lewis MP Twitter Updates. Collected 13 October 2014.
Image 7.3	Christopher Lewis MP Twitter Update. Collected 14 October 2014.
Image 7.4	George Watson MP Facebook Update. Collected 22 March 2016.
Image 7.5	George Watson MP Facebook Update. Collected 24 March 2016.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Shu Wen Nikki Soo, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Shu Wen Nikki Soo

Date: 18 September 2017

Abstract

MPs enact crucial institutional functions as representatives at the crossroads of important flows of public discourse. Previous scholarship have established MPs are doing more than ever in the constituency, and sought to understand their motivations through a rational choice approach. How the process is carried out remains unknown. This dissertation fills the research gap by investigating the contemporary British constituency service process, an area often overlooked as a conventional routine.

Drawing on Alexander (2010, 2011), Goffman (1959) and Foucault (1972), I develop an approach that illuminated how MPs perform their roles on their everyday activities. I argue MPs interpret their roles as being constantly on standby, i.e. ready and willing to address their constituents' needs. In doing this, MPs employ discursive formations of accessibility, visibility and repair in their relationships with constituents to maintain performative power and legitimacy. My interpretive analysis is based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork with MPs during their constituency service in English constituencies, as well as semi-structured interviews, from December 2014 to May 2016.

My findings firstly indicate MPs are driven by a sense of answerability, having to be reactive to relevant stimuli coming from their political and constituency environments. However, MPs vary in their approach and findings experiences. While all MPs I studied agreed on the importance of being physically accessible, recently elected MPs especially strove to ensure their accessibility was publicly known. Secondly, MPs integrate traditional media and digital tools in different ways and based on different strategy, and my fieldwork provides a holistic description of how these tools are used in conjunction with physical co-presence. Thirdly, MPs struggle to balance between constituent demands and Parliamentary responsibilities. This problem is exacerbated by increased use of digital media by both representatives and constituents, placing additional demands on MPs that they struggle to meet.

This dissertation contributes a rich description of the contemporary constituency service process. The outcome of this research and its interpretive approach will impact future research in legitimation procedures, representation and citizenship.

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Finally, to Alexander Mitchell, thank you for always doing the dishes.

Constituency Man

Les Gibbard, 1982

"Certainly, gentlemen, it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents."

— Edmund Burke, *Speech to the Electors of Bristol*

Table of Contents

1 BRITISH MPS AND CONTEMPORARY CONSTITUENCY SERVICE 11

1.1 THE PUZZLE 11
1.2 QUESTIONS TO ASK IN RESEARCH 16
1.3 WHY IT MATTERS 18
1.4 ARGUMENT AND CONTRIBUTION 21
1.5 PLAN OF THE THESIS 23

2 TOWARDS AN EVERYDAY PERFORMATIVITY OF THE CONSTITUENCY SERVICE 27

2.1 INTRODUCTION 27
2.2 HOW OTHERS DID IT 32
2.3 WHY IT IS OUTDATED 37
2.4 DEVELOPING AN APPROACH TO EVERYDAY PERFORMATIVITY 40
2.5 CONCLUSION 50

3 METHODS TO EXPLORE MPS IN THE CONSTITUENCY 53

3.1 INTRODUCTION 53
3.2 METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION 56
3.3 RESEARCH ETHICS 64
3.4 DATA STORAGE 65
3.5 CONCLUSION 65

4 WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU? STAYING ACCESSIBLE 67

4.1 INTRODUCTION 67
4.2 PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY 69
4.3 AUGMENTED ACCESSIBILITY 80
4.4 THE PRIORITISATION OF ACCESSIBILITY 93
4.5 CONCLUSION 95

5 TO SEE AND BE SEEN: BEING VISIBLE 98

5.1 INTRODUCTION 98
5.2 PHYSICAL VISIBILITY 100
5.3 AUGMENTING VISIBILITY 114
5.4 CONCLUSION 140

6 WE INTERRUPT YOUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING… MP ROUTINES AND REPAIRS 143
6.1 INTRODUCTION 143
6.2 ROUTINES AND RITUAL-LIKE INTERACTIONS IN CONSTITUENCY SERVICE 145
6.3 THE ADVICE SURGERY REPAIR PROCESS 149
6.4 THREATS TO AUTHENTICITY: CONFLICT, DISRUPTIONS AND BROKEN ROUTINES 153
6.5 THE PURSUIT OF REPAIR 169
6.6 CONCLUSION 181
7 PERFORMATIVE POWER AND SEEKING RE-FUSION 183
7.1 INTRODUCTION 183
7.2 PERFORMING POWER 184
7.3 THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LIMITS 204
7.4 THE QUEST FOR RE-FUSION 207
7.5 CONCLUSION 213
8 A METHOD TO THE MADNESS? MPS ON STANDBY 216
8.1 KEY FINDINGS 216
8.2 CONTRIBUTIONS 220
8.3 DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 224
9 REFERENCES 225
10 APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM 240
11 APPENDIX 2: DETAILS OF DATA COLLECTION 241

1 British MPs and Contemporary Constituency Service

1.1 The Puzzle

What does the process of representation involve? Do Members of Parliament (MPs) care about their constituencies after elections are over? What is constituency service and how do MPs carry this out? How do meanings of representative acts emerge between official responsibilities in Parliament, what is expected of MPs as they solve constituency problems in everyday life? Does the existence of digital tools render traditional constituency interactions redundant? This dissertation is about the process of political representation, focusing specifically on the British constituency service – an area often overlooked as a conventional and self-serving routine. Most of us have a general idea that MPs are occasionally in their constituency and that their help can be sought if needed. On the surface, it may seem like these actions are not particularly important to the process of representation, and that they don't matter very much to the MPs. Furthermore, despite constituents being able to seek help from MPs when faced with problems, such as housing matters, MPs are not often viewed in a positive light. Following this, this dissertation will show how important these constituency interactions are to the process of representation, and the understanding of the constituency service.

MPs enact crucial institutional functions as representatives at the crossroads of important flows of public discourse. Observable growth in the constituency services and shifts in the way modern MPs carry out their representative responsibilities have resulted in scholars seeking to understand this important parliamentary link between government and citizen. The British tradition of putting theory into practice through a representative government centers on the transferal of opinion between the "political nation" and its governors within the House of Commons (Judge, 1999: 15). At its simplest, representation of the constituency refers to the representation of a specific territorial area. Theoretical studies on representation can be grouped into two general foci, one on representative style (i.e. how they act), and another on representative focus (territorial area, specific groups) (Judge, 1999: 149). In practice, representation is

not mono-dimensional and simultaneously involves an amalgamation of the two domains. Nevertheless, the fundamental basis of representation remains territorial as political representatives keep their attention within this imagined boundary as they carry out their responsibilities (Judge, 1999: 149).

MPs have been found to be spending more time than ever in the constituency, indicating changes in the way MPs approach responsibilities and activities in Westminster and the constituency (Gay, 2005; Norris, 1997; Norton, 2007). Historically, the representative role of the MP relates closely to Parliament's medieval role in redressing grievances, where MPs served as an important link between citizens and the state by mediating and ensuring that constituent rights were maintained (Judge, 1993: 7; Gay, 2005: 57; Norris, 1997: 29). It was previously common for MPs to visit their constituencies only once a year, and to focus predominantly on their work in Parliament (Radice et al, 1987: 102). Members now spend at least a third of their week in their constituencies, with many of them maintaining a residence there (Ibid). By the end of the 1960s, over 90 per cent of MPs carried out regular surgeries in their constituency (Gay, 2005: 58). How MPs chose to divide their time and allocating resources has been the subject of many studies, resulting in the identification of various MP roles and motivations (Radice et al, 1987; Gay, 2005; Norris, 1997; Norton and Wood, 1993; Searing, 1985; Rush, 2005). Many studies on British MPs can be found by referring to Searing's (1985; 1994) extensive study on legislative roles taken on by MPs, which is anchored in Parliament as an institution. These roles include being an information provider, local dignitary, advocate and promoter of constituency interests among others (Norton, 1994). The majority of these tasks include and are not limited to educating, problem solving, issue advocacy, legislative scrutiny, administrative oversight and receiving elector views (Norton, 2007: 367). Choices of activities and motivations of British MPs were found to interact with characteristics of the House of Commons to produce four roles: Parliament man, ministerial aspirant, policy advocate and constituency member. These roles are not mutually exclusive, but MPs often exhibited preferences or goals towards roles they valued. The intersection between the ancient parliamentary role and the needs of the modern welfare state explains why the majority of MPs, even

those holding high ministerial positions, carry out at least a small amount of constituency work (Searing, 1985: 350). Thus, a significant emphasis on the constituency on the part of the MP can be observed.

Interaction and engagement between citizens and political representatives form a substantial and indispensable component of a healthy democracy. The tenacity of political participation as an imperative part of democracy, attributed to the archetypal Greek model of democracy, is often discerned as ideal (Graber, 2003: 143). Thus, ensuring open channels of communication between MPs and their constituents is the cornerstone of constituency service (Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Williamson, 2009; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). Representatives are generally understood and increasingly expected to fulfill a number of constituency-related tasks, but their role lacks a job description or any sort of formal rules (Norton, 2007: 354). Constituents have the option of contacting their representative in writing, most commonly through letters. In the UK, an indicator worthy of mention is the growth in correspondence found in the flow of letters between MPs and constituents, and in consequence, between MPs and ministers (Norton and Wood, 1993; Radice et al, 1987; Norris, 1997; Gay, 2005). Between the 1920s and 1960s, MPs were found to reply to at least 50 constituent letters a week, with the number of letters received increasing tenfold between 1950 and 1980 (Jennings, 1957: 27; Barker et al, 1970; Norton and Wood, 1993: 43). This trend continued to rise, with 80 per cent of MPs receiving more than 100 letters a week, half receiving more than 200 and nearly a fifth receiving more than 300[1] (Hansard Society, 2000) In response to changes in the media environment, MPs have also increased the number of communication channels they use, especially by embracing the internet. Correspondence and communication with constituents have increased as a result as interactions no longer have to take place face-to-face in public or private spaces, but can be carried out in online forums allowing for a myriad of interactive features and a seemingly endless list of topics. Many parliamentarians use email; share their activities and thoughts through their

[1] These surveys do not include emails and written responses through other means, such as comments left on MP blogs, websites and social media profiles.

websites, blogs and Facebook pages; and have Twitter accounts for short and quick updates (Norton, 2007; Williamson, 2009; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Tromble, 2016; Umit, 2017). For example, 546 out of 650 Members of Parliament are presently on Twitter (Tweetminster, 2017). In essence, MPs have seemed to become omnipresent.

Despite evidence indicating that more time and resources are being spent on the constituency service than in previous years, the attention given to MPs is largely negative in nature. Public trust has been, and still is, consistently low, with numerous opinion polls reflecting unfavourable views of representatives. Politicians remain the least trusted profession by the British public, with only 21 per cent of those surveyed trusting them to be truthful (Ipsos MORI, 2016). Public trust in politicians has not exceeded more than a quarter of the population since 1983, with the lowest trust score of 13 per cent recorded in 2009 in light of the expenses scandal (Ibid). In 2016, only 29 per cent of the British public was satisfied with MPs (Hansard Society, 2016). Previously, the Audit of Political Engagement revealed that 67 per cent of the citizens surveyed were of the view that MPs "don't understand the daily lives of people like me" (Hansard Society, 2014). Given the increased effort and resources spent on understanding their constituency needs and attending to constituent demands, why are representatives still viewed so negatively?

The puzzle of this research lies within this conundrum. Previous scholarship has established that MPs are doing more than ever in the constituency, and yet this effort does not seem to be received positively by the public. Evidently, traditional authority voices cannot depend on audiences to be listening in deference (Coleman, 2013: 5). For these constituency interactions to achieve shared and credible meaning, the actor's actions and the audience's interpretation must share the same perception. According to Alexander's theory of cultural pragmatics, pre-modern societies were simple (2010, 2011). Symbolic meaning and cultural meanings were fused through rituals based on shared beliefs and direct physical interactions (2010; 2011). Ancient Athenians addressed their citizens intimately at face-to-face meetings, they utilised rhetoric shaped by skill and

instruction alongside rational argumentation (Alexander, 2010: 13). However, modern societies have become more complex, with fragmented populations, diverse and differentiated shared beliefs, and less immediate communicative interaction. Cultural de-fusion between these performance elements occurs, resulting in a breakdown in common cultural understanding. To be effective in an increasingly complex society, MPs are now challenged to infuse meaning by re-fusing constituency performance seamlessly (Alexander, 2011: 27). That is, what is being said and the images being conjured by political performers must reach constituents and resonate with them deeply. Representatives thus invest great effort into image control, making sure their constituents are not only aware of how to reach them and that they are there for them, but also that they are representing them in the best manner possible, even if they are not always physically in the constituency.

Hence, central to my dissertation is the belief that it is not the volume or categorisation of constituency service activities we should be concerning ourselves with, but *how* MPs are carrying them out. Reducing representation to mere statistics and black-and-white boxes only serves to answer the questions we deign to fit them into. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, existing scholarship relies on quantification to explain constituency service and its increase. While useful, these numbers can never relate the full story. By zooming in on MPs' practices and activities within their constituency and with their constituents, this research sets out to understand MPs and constituent voices on new terms by exploring their memories, practices and embarrassments as if they really matter. Trying to make sense of these situations necessitates the *dis*acknowledgement of taken-for-granted routines surrounding the MPs, their activities and their relationships within the constituency, such as the MP surgery, for example, and considering them as one would an exotic and unfamiliar ritual (Coleman, 2013: viii). It is only through "the blur of unfamiliarity [that] the unexpected contours of the seemingly self-evident become truly vivid" (Ibid). Thus, I embark on this study with the possibility of finding the intriguing in the mundane as its point of departure.

In this dissertation I provide a thick description of the contemporary British constituency service process, but also a novel perspective when considering representation and power. My analysis of contemporary constituency service is based primarily on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork with MPs during their constituency service, in English constituencies from December 2014 to May 2016. Close inspection of this noteworthy first hand evidence provides fresh insights into the representation process and how contemporary constituency service is carried out through a number of communication strategies and engagement practices. I discuss my methodology and data collection further in Chapter 3.

In the next section, I present the questions I seek to answer in this dissertation, having discussed the puzzle at hand. Following that, I shed light on the significance of my investigation into the contemporary constituency service process between MPs and their constituents, and why it matters. I then discuss the dissertation argument. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with an outline of the dissertation.

1.2 Questions to Ask in Research

We are aware that Members conduct political communication primarily through activities that take place within their constituencies. Members help with constituent concerns and casework, usually solicited through the holding of weekly or fortnightly "surgeries" (also known as the advice bureau) (Cain et al, 1987; Gay, 2005; King, 1974; McAllister, 2015; Wood and Norton, 1992). These usually take place in local municipal offices, village halls and community areas such as the library (King, 1974; Radice et al, 1987). Information about the surgeries, with their location and timing, can usually be found on the MP's website and is also advertised locally in public areas such as the library. Casework can be described to consist of cases from individual constituents, civic groups and local organisations seeking aid from their representatives for bureaucratic intervention, or local government assistance (Gay, 2005; Johannes et al, 1981; Norris, 1997). For constituents who are unsure how to go about trying to solve their problems, or who feel like they have exhausted all their known channels of support, seeing their MP is usually considered their last hope. Interacting in

circumstances such as this usually achieves a certain level of intimacy by producing "contact with constituents, generally those having some request, grievance, or other claim vis-à-vis the government" (Cain et al, 1984: 114). Members also interact with constituents on behalf of the local party. It is common for the MP to carry out other party-related face-to-face meetings. This includes walkabouts in different wards of the constituency and attending local functions in schools, religious institutions and charitable organisations. However, we are still unaware how these interactions are carried out, leading to this dissertation's main research question: How are MPs carrying out the process of contemporary constituency service?

MPs are not only spending more time in the constituency, but they are doing more while there too. Shifts in constituent demands and expectations of their representative have resulted in increases in constituency correspondence and interactions. The volume and immediacy of communication have not only expanded with the use of internet tools, but the very nature of communication, conversation and engagement have changed. Furthermore, due to the complexities of their responsibilities, their finite amounts of time and financial resources, along with changes in the communication landscape, it is also imperative we ask: What are the challenges MPs face during the contemporary constituency service process?

Political performances in the constituencies do not only take place on the ground in the form of walkabouts and advice surgeries, but are also transmitted through the media. Since this dissertation is focused on the contemporary constituency service process, it must consider how various communication tools are used. Therefore, I also ask the question of how MPs use traditional media and digital tools to engage with constituents. This includes local, regional and national newspaper articles, interviews on television, updates and blog posts on their personal websites, Facebook and Twitter. Tensions arise as parliamentarians are increasingly aware of the importance of making visible what they do, but they are also aware of the need to ensure that the image they present of themselves is consistent. The changes technology introduces in our lives are not merely in *how*

we interact with each other, but also in *where* we interact with each other. MPs now find themselves in contact with many constituents and other members of the public through multiple forums and outlets. These merged face-to-face interactions and the combined situations of electronic media are relatively lasting and inescapable, resulting in greater effects on social behaviour and the overlapping of many social spheres that were once distinct (Meyrowitz, 1985: 5).

1.3 Why It Matters

Political representatives are observed to rely on varying political communication practices in the constituency, based on perceived interests, existing knowledge and skills, available resources and the communications environment they work within. Understanding the MP's performance in the constituency, its features, the tools utilised and how it is structured, matters for two reasons. Firstly, there remains a perpetual imbalance between attention to macro-level trends and forces and micro-level situations and experiences characterising much of social science scholarship (Coleman, 2013: vii). Indeed, much of what interests political scientists in constituency representation is asking the question of why, rather than how, do MPs carry out constituency service? The relationship between constituency service and its electoral benefits dominates scholarly discussion, indicating that parliamentarians are incentivised to carry out these constituency activities to win the personal vote, subsequently affecting campaign outcomes (Fenno, 1978; Cain et al, 1984; Norton and Wood, 1994; Norris, 1997; Wood and Norton, 1992). This preoccupation with motivation has shaped the way scholars thinking about constituency service carry out their research. I discuss, in detail, previous studies carried out on the constituency service in Chapter 2. The increase in constituency service, observed especially in backbenchers, is not novel, but "is in fact a new version of a very old role which has been neglected for some time" (Searing, 1994: 123). It is of no surprise then, that investigation of this longstanding symbolic process has received little scholarly interest. After all, nothing seems to have changed.

Another major reason for this neglect is the dominance of the research being conducted on one end of the representative-constituency: in the world of

legislative combat (Fenno, 1978: xiii). Constituency relations are often considered in relation to Westminster. When that is a context far removed from the one in which constituency relationships are created and nurtured, discussion of a representative's political communication and relationships in the constituency could produce a distortion of perspective, i.e. "me-in-the-constituency", rather than "me-and-the-constituency" (Fenno, 1978: xiii). To answer questions on how political power and legitimacy is achieved, projected, inhabited, maintained and lost, a position in close proximity to the action is necessary (Mast, 2016: 2051). With a study of representatives' perceptions of their constituencies whilst in their constituencies, this dissertation offers a privileged vantage point for observing representation in action. This is vital, as representation is a pivotal component of democratic practices (Plotke, 1997).

Secondly, opinion polls are clearly not an accurate reflection of what is being done in the constituencies. As discussed previously, public trust in politicians is lower than ever, despite the visible increase in constituency efforts demonstrated in previous studies. MP Samuel Pollock shares, "From the politician's point of view, I don't think there has been a generation of politicians trying harder to be in touch with their constituents" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). This dissertation provides detailed explanation of these communication efforts, what MPs are doing on the ground and the work that is channelled through their performances to engage with, gain trust from, represent, and be viewed as authentic by their constituents. This contemporary depiction of MPs is not often reported in the news, or discussed in research, due to its lack of action and drama. This dearth of journalistic attention, along with the competitive attention economy, is partly what drives MPs and their constituency service practices (Nielsen, 2012: 15).

In some ways it is unexpected that MPs are investing more time and resources into the constituency service. We live in a society where the abundance of communication and digital tools leave us spoiled for choice, shrinking distances, allowing us to be anywhere anytime. We are inundated with multimedia convergence, round-the-clock news, the ubiquitous use of computing and emails,

and the proliferation of mobile devices. These digital technologies are domesticated as they are steadily assimilated into the various domains of our everyday lives and routines (Berker et al, 2006; Dahlgren, 2009: 150). This technological shift has also been recognised and incorporated in parliamentary life. A consolidated Parliamentary ICT service (PICT) was implemented on 1 January 2006 in the House of Commons, with legislation introduced in 2007 to ensure that ICT provision is streamlined and managed by a joint department (Norton, 2007: 355). MPs and their staff are equipped with the necessary technology required to facilitate online communication within and without the Commons. The ease of use and ability to reach a large audience makes digital tools a seductive option in place of meeting face-to-face, making it almost counterintuitive that representatives are choosing to personally connect with their constituents in person. After all, networked technologies were first and foremost designed to share information, but were taken up as technologies of relationship instead (Turkle, 2011: 161). With the plethora of digital tools available, why are MPs carrying out more constituency services than before? How are MPs integrating these digital tools into their existing, traditional constituency communication?

Representatives perform these meaning constructions regularly and eagerly before constituent-audience, delivered in an attempt to build understandings and images of subjects such as themselves as representatives, their political party, opposition parties, Parliament, threats to their legitimacy, principles and policies affecting their constituency and the public at large (Alexander, 2010, 2011; Mast, 2016). I demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5 how representatives are consciously making efforts in constituent communication and the constituency service through discourses of accessibility and visibility.

Finally, although findings from this dissertation are not generalisable and may not reflect all British MPs, it seeks and provides answers to whether MPs understand what constituents go through, if they are concerned about constituency issues, and details of what they actually do during the constituency service. The specifics may differ from constituency to constituency, but as I

demonstrate and evaluate in the following chapters, how MPs seek to nurture relationships with and within the constituency can be observed through their performative actions.

1.4 Argument and Contribution

In this dissertation I address the mechanisms of the contemporary constituency service process. I do so by rejecting prevailing concepts of social reality and assumptions surrounding MPs and the constituency service. My contention is that MPs do care about the constituency, and are doing more than they are given credit for. An MP is the visible representation through which the institution's interpretive and constitutive work is channelled. Constituency service activities consist of symbolic acts performed by the MP-actor fervently and passionately to constituent-audiences. These performatives take place both on the ground, such as advice surgeries, and via digital tools such as personal websites, Facebook and Twitter. I analyse these in great detail, not to assess the impact on the personal vote, but to identify the ramifications of constituency service practices and the impact of these on how we understand processes of representation, how we understand these interactions themselves and what it means to take part in the representative process. Through a robust and detailed analysis of these acts, I show how symbolic actions, discourse and process come together to create the conditions for an authentic, meaning-centred perfromance between the MP and their constituent-audience. I discuss my methods and data collection further in Chapter 3.

I argue that MPs perform the constituency service as part of their overall parliamentary responsibilities by being *on standby*. I define the concept of MPs on standby as representatives who maintain regular constituency communication through traditional and digital tools, keep themselves abreast of constituency affairs, and are prepared to react on behalf of constituents and their constituency, should circumstances warrant. I demonstrate in detail how MPs perform their representative constituency duties through performative acts to symbolically "construct" meaning, projecting and maintaining the image that they are reliable, honourable and hardworking. Being on standby is a framework that MPs draw on

as they negotiate the relationship between institution and constituency. It guides their performance's script as an immediate referent for action that presents and sustains the continued manifestation of actions, expectations and feelings. Logistically, it is unrealistic for MPs to meet every single constituent in person once, let alone multiple times. With other parliamentary responsibilities in place, MPs are not able to proactively seek out constituency issues. Instead, MPs rely on being *reactive*. Thus, throughout their parliamentary and representative responsibilities, MPs seek to present themselves as a stable, omnipresent presence in the constituency, primed and ready to solve personal constituent predicaments, community problems and policy issues if needs arise. As they carry out their performatives, constituents with issues or concerns are able to bring these to their action, initiating a reaction in which MPs are prepared to do what they can to assist in problem solving or, on occasion, policy impact.

In this dissertation, I contribute in this dissertation a new theoretical approach to the study of MPs and the constituency service. To do so I draw on Alexander's (2010; 2011) theory of cultural pragmatics, Goffman's (1959) presentation of self, and Foucault's (1952) notion of discursive formations to develop my own cultural approach. I identify, describe and analyse how the framework of being "on standby" consists of three discursive formations. Three significant patterns discursive formations emerged during my observations of these performatives. Firstly, MPs ensure that constituents are able to *access* them. Outlets of accessibility include constituency offices, telephone details and emails. Secondly, MPs rely on the use of posters, news articles and digital tools such as social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) and e-newsletters to amplify the *visibility* of their actions. Thirdly, as MPs react to their constituent and/or constituency problems, they aim to *repair* them. This includes providing advice, writing letters on their constituents' behalf, and debating in Parliament. As MPs perform their constituency acts by enacting these discourses, they are attempted in order to re-align official meaning with popular opinion. MPs draw on these discursive formations and other elements of social performances to portray legitimacy and power. I discuss these findings further from Chapters 4 to 7.

Thus, I also contribute in-depth detail of constituency interactions and dynamics between MP and constituent, bringing what is usually not obvious to light. Over the course of my study of the constituency service and MPs within contemporary representation, I observed as a broad range of MPs made time to meet their constituents, hailing from all walks of life, including (but not limited to) workers from booming industries, residents from a local estate, patients from a failing medical clinic and disgruntled parents complaining about their children's schools. Representatives usually carry out these visits weekly, usually over the weekend. My practice was to sit quietly in the room during these meetings, talks and visits with permission from the participants. This included the MP, on occasion a caseworker, and the constituents. As Goffman notes, many crucial facts "lie beyond the time and place of interaction or lie concealed within it" (1959: 13). Thus I also paid close attention not only to what is presented in front of constituents, but also to pre-meeting planning and preparation, backstage reactions and private comments that are made when audience-constituents are not around. I also interviewed MPs, and collected all forms of constituency communication disseminated over the time of my fieldwork, such as e-newsletters, flyers, posters and digital media posts.

1.5 Plan of the Thesis

In the pages that follow I investigate the process of contemporary British constituency service. Immediately after this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 explores the current and relevant literature available in the field related to MPs, the constituency service and political communication with constituents. These include available research on roles and behaviour of MPs, and how the constituency service has grown since the 1950s. Studies on how and why MPs have adopted the use of online tools to communicate with their constituents is also considered. Following this, disparities in the available research will be addressed before discussing how a change of perspective to one of everyday sensibility is necessary to deepen our understanding of contemporary representation. Being closer to the action by paying attention to social performances unfolding in real time allows the bigger story to be imaginatively identified in smaller details. I then continue by explaining the conceptual

framework I developed from the theories of Alexander's (2011) theory of symbolic action, Goffman's (1959) conception of presentation of self and Foucault's (1972) notion of discursive formation. This conception underpins my research analysis and my findings over the course of my dissertation.

I discuss my methodology and data collection in Chapter 3. To shape my own investigation I first considered the ways previous studies had carried out their research. After analysing their advantages and disadvantages, I select three methods that will enable me to pursue a closer, everyday sensibility of the constituency service beyond the electoral contexts. To identify and interpret signs, symbols and discourse in the performances of the constituency service in relation to the political and media environment MPs navigate and perform in, I draw on and explain my experiences during my fieldwork, carrying out ethnography, semi-structured interviews and political discourse analysis on transcripts and secondhand data collected. I also discuss research ethics and how I safely store sensitive data.

Chapters 4 to 6 focus on the empirical research and findings to support my argument for the standby MP. Each of these chapters describes one discursive formation I have identified through my fieldwork, and how they projected and organised to present the framework of being on standby. With examples from my fieldwork, I also show how MPs augment these discursive formations with the use of digital tools in varying methods, integrating them with existing communication practices already in place.

In Chapter 4 I address the discursive formation of accessibility. I demonstrate how MPs ensure physical accessibility through management and amplification, drawing from a range of existing research, conversations, anecdotes, images and allusions observed during my fieldwork, showing how these evidence suggest a cumulative impact on the MP-constituent interaction as a social performance. The chapter also evaluates how MPs expand their accessibility through traditional methods and integration of digital tools. I go on to analyse variances in the significance of accessibility by MPs. The discursive formation and the

details identified in this chapter will set the scene for the next chapter as integral elements within a re-fused script, action and the performative space.

In Chapter 5 I turn to discuss the discursive formation of visibility. I show how MP's seek to see and be seen in their constituency through sustaining and amplifying their visibility. I reveal the value of face-to-face interactions by scrutinising performative acts between the MP and their constituents, describing in detail how and why they are doing it, I demonstrate how MPs integrate traditional media and digital tools in contemporary constituency service to symbolically connect with their constituents in their performance. Through my analysis, I show that despite the availability and ease of these digital methods, MPs indicate varying preferences in integrating them with physical visibility.

In Chapter 6 I analyse the various challenges MPs face during their constituency performances that are often unseen, and contemplate their crises management skills. In the discursive formation I term "repair", I begin by unfolding the eight stages that form the interaction process between MP and constituent, and how its successful delivery contributes to the re-fusion of the MP's constituency performance. I discuss how MPs react to constituent problems, and the stress that MPs face when their routine interactions are interrupted. In particular, I focus on face-to-face advice surgeries, where constituents come to seek help, support or advice. Due to the interactive nature of these meetings, reactions during surgery cases can often be unpredictable, occasionally resulting in agitated and distressed audience-constituents. With examples from my casework, I demonstrate and examine how interruptions in various stages of the interaction result in a struggle by the MP to continue symbolising as a competent representative. I also demonstrate how MPs overcome these demands to prevent further fracture between actor and performer.

In Chapter 7 I address the performative aspects of the MP-constituent interaction, by showing how MPs draw on existing discursive formations and other elements of social performance to portray legitimacy and power as an MP on standby. Along with the motivation and argument that I show in chapter and

Chapter 2, I study the aspects of accessibility, visibility and repair and demsonstrate how these symbolically construct meaning between MP and constituent, culminating in performative power. I then analyse the expression of these symbolic guises through *delivery*, where I discuss features of performances and how they are delivered by MPs to project power. This includes drawing legitimacy from Westminster, how they exert their power and, lastly, the acknowledgement of limits to their power. Following that, I relate the discursive formation of power to the authenticity of MPs' constituency performances, suggesting that re-fusion has not been completely achieved.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, concludes by presenting the three key findings emerging from my analysis of the contemporary constituency service. First, MPs do care, and rely on being *reactive* to constituency issues. Second, MPs were found to unanimously agree that face-to-face co-presence was their preferred method of interaction, considering it the best way to deepen the symbolic connection between the MP-actor and constituent-audience in their pursuit of performance re-fusion. Thirdly, MPs struggle with the contemporary constituency service, finding it difficult to balance and multitask between constituent demands, resource management and consistent performances, finding that their responsibilities are exacerbated by the increase in digital tool usage. I also relate my analysis of how MPs pursue their constituency service contributes to the study of wider challenges in contemporary representation. Finally, I conclude the thesis by offering ideas for future research.

2 Towards an Everyday Performativity of the Constituency Service

2.1 Introduction

British MPs were not usually swamped with constituent requests in the first few decades of the 20th century (Norton and Wood, 1993; Norton, 1994). The increase in constituency services by MPs is a post-Second World War phenomenon, stimulated by the expansion of government services and a shift towards optional welfare payments in the 1960s (Gay, 2005; Norris, 1997). The origins of MPs and their constituency roles reveal they arose from the need to represent constituencies in Parliament. This undertaking can be traced back to medieval times. Spokespeople were sent to Parliament from different boroughs, counties and cities in order to redress local grievances and petition for favours (Bogdanor, 1985; Gay, 2005; Norris, 1997; Richards, 1972; Searing, 1985; Rush, 2005). The fit between this antediluvian parliamentary role and the needs of the modern welfare state explains why nearly all MPs, even those in the highest ministerial offices, do at least a little constituency service (Searing, 1985: 350). Furthermore, the financial capability to pursue constituency casework through the introduction of travel and secretarial allowances in 1969 meant that Members were able to develop a necessary but basic infrastructure to cope with increasing casework (Norton and Wood, 1993: 42). This observable shift in the way modern MPs carry out their roles in Westminster and their constituencies has resulted in scholars seeking to understand this important parliamentary link between government and citizen.

Previous research studies have explored the *what*, *when* and *why* questions surrounding political representatives in relation to their constituencies, placing emphasis on impacts on legislative duties such as policymaking or electoral benefits such as the personal vote. Although some scholars do not entirely neglect to discuss the process of constituency service in their investigation, details of these processes are often under-theorised and studied. Furthermore, the majority of these studies employ the rational choice approach, that is, seeking to understand if MPs are seeking electoral benefits. In this chapter I discuss the

three dominant research areas scholars have sought to understand in relation to behaviours of MPs and their communication with constituents. Following this, I demonstrate why there remains a distinction between identifying *why* MPs are motivated to spend a large portion of their time and resources in constituency service and explaining *how* this process takes place.

The research encircling MPs and the constituency service falls largely into three categories. Firstly, the development and changes of British MP roles have been acknowledged as important and worthy of investigation, and are well documented in the literature, especially since MPs have no defined role. As MP for Grimsby from 1977 to 2015, Austin Mitchell, succinctly describes, "He is handed a build-you-own-job kit and a salary, and left to get on with it. He finds his own feet, usually by observing his fellow Members and then doing the same" (1982: 60). These research accounts are detailed and historical, producing typologies classifying constituency roles and theorising changes in constituency behaviour alongside career progression (Fenno, 1978; Norton and Wood, 1990, 1994; Norton, 1994, 1997; Radice et al, 1987; Richards, 1972). Radice et al (1987) and, more recently, Crewe (2015) have sought to answer the question of what exactly MPs do, what roles they perform and how they have emerged in the Commons. Focusing on backbencher MPs, Radice et al argue that the job of the MP (both in Parliament and the constituency) has altered considerably between the 1970s and 1980s (1987). Though dated, previous studies provide useful historical context, revealing how MP attitudes towards constituency service resemble those in medieval times, and how this history has influenced contemporary constituency activities (Searing, 1985; Norton, 1985, 1997; Rush, 2005).

These studies also demonstrate an observable change in the nature of MPs in relation to their opinion of the constituency service and where they are in their career path. Norton and Wood (1990, 1993) argue that the amount of constituency work is driven by other factors that have transformed the attitudes and approaches to the job as an MP, and is derived from a cost-benefit calculation in terms of how much time and energy can be spent. They further

developed a two-stage career management model, drawing from Fenno (1978) and Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina's (1987) work. The first stage is known as the *expansionist* stage – where newly elected MPs invest most of their time and work into expanding their constituency support, in an effort to establish a personalised home style. This is also done with the rational premise that this will build up a reservoir of personal votes that may be drawn upon in later elections. This is followed by the *protectionist* stage, where the need to gain further personal support decreases, usually due to the prioritisation of other party or parliamentary responsibilities and duties.

Secondly, the general consensus that Members are increasingly spending more time in the constituency and on constituency work has resulted in a great proportion of the literature being focused on a rational choice approach to legislative behaviour. In other words, identifying the motivations behind this phenomenon (Barker and Rush, 1967; Cain et al, 1984, 1987; Dowse, 1963; Herrera and Yawn, 1998; Norris, 1997; Gay, 2005). Scholars have disagreed on the results, with many indicating the personal vote as the primary driving factor, and some, like Norris, arguing that psychological rewards present a stronger case (Cain et al, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1990; Norris, 1997). The personal vote refers to the segment of a candidate's electoral support that derives from their personal characteristics, qualifications, activities and record (Cain et al, 1984: 111). It is argued to be a source of motivation for MPs to persist in constituency activities, especially in marginal seats, by building a reserve of votes (Norton and Wood, 1990; Radice et al, 1987; Fiorina, 1977). This is in part due to the Member being at liberty to decide how involved in the constituency they would like to be, and which roles to devote themselves to. Navigating a beneficial balance between competing constituent demands and MP incentives in the constituency is challenging, along with growing obligations to keep constituents abreast of activities and meetings carried out. The idea of a personal vote driving the electoral win in Britain has also been suggested to be a form of political marketing, as we move away from periodic electoral campaigning towards what Blumenthal (1980) labelled the "permanent campaign" (Butler and Collins, 2001). This is an outcome strongly found in American congressional systems and not in

Britain (Cain et al, 1984; Gregory, 1980: 79; Munroe, 1977; Norris, 1997). There is an overwhelming propensity in the UK for electors to vote for the party rather than the candidate, resulting in MPs largely tied to the fortunes of their parties (Gregory, 1980: 79; Studler et al, 1996; Rose, 1974).

Thirdly, more recent research on parliamentarians has focused on how digital tools have been integrated in their communication with constituents, in response to changes in the media environment. The question of how various types of digital tools and the internet have been adopted by MPs to improve communication with their constituents is a research area that has continued to receive ample attention from scholars. Since the 2000s, numbers of MPs adopting the use of the internet and digital tools as part of their constituency political communication have expanded, with the use of email ubiquitous and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter more prevalent (Norton, 2007; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Williamson, 2009; Umit, 2017). Early research on MP use of digital tools such as websites and weblogs articulated a focus on information dissemination, the tools being mono-directional to a great degree (Coleman and Spiller, 2003; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Jackson, 2003, 2006; Jackson and Lilleker, 2004; 2009, 2011). MP websites are akin to electronic brochures, whereas weblogs are used to bring attention to their political work and current affair perspectives (Francoli and Ward, 2008; Jackson and Lilleker, 2004, 2009).

Later research looked to the adoption of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, investigating the purpose of using digital tools, and if further interaction was desired between performer-Member and constituent-audience. Information flow on these platforms can transpire one-way – where the MP primarily uses these channels to disseminate contact and policy information as well as carry out promotional activity for themselves and their party – or two-way, with the use of interactive capacities such as comment forms, "shout-boxes" and responses to tweets. Research on British MPs and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) carried out by Norton (2007) revealed that MPs who use their websites to assert views independent of their party and seek to engage with site visitors are rare, and that there is little to no evidence of MPs

using the internet or other forms of technology to gather constituent views in a manner to influence their behaviour, with 80% of MPs' websites having little or no interactivity (2007: 364).

Rather than seeking views or engagement, MPs have been found to predominantly use digital tools to win the personal vote in their constituencies, and as a professional tool for impression management and marketing (Butler and Collins, 2001; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Norton, 2007; Williamson, 2009; Jackson and Lilleker, 2004, 2011). Despite the adoption of these tools, results from these large N studies also indicated that the tools were mostly utilised for one-way communication, with the MPs disseminating information, rather than initiating participation or encouraging constituent engagement (Jackson, 2003; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, 2011; Norton, 2007; Umit, 2017; Williamson, 2009: 519). Ideally this means that MPs are able to maintain control over the message they send, without the risk of having too much feedback or comment on policy suggestions, all carried out while potentially boosting their image and visibility. This behaviour is not unique to the UK. For example, embracing the internet as an aid to extend their reach and augment the services provided was initially met with some resistance and hesitance by American electoral candidates (Stromer-Galley, 2000). Questions on how these tools work in conjunction with older communication methods, and as part of the constituency service as a whole, remain.

These studies provide a solid foundation in our understanding of the constituency service and communication with normative and empirical impacts. Studies on the development of the constituency service have been conducted within the confines of MPs' roles in Parliament. These include a dissection of the many MP duties carried out, and the questioning of their representative role in impacting democracy (Norton and Wood, 1990, 1993; Norton, 1997; Searing, 1985, 1994). For many scholars, the increase in constituency services has led to research emphasis on whether these local efforts actually have the potential to impact electoral outcomes (Herrera and Yawn, 1998). More recently, alongside the growth in digital tool use, many scholars have placed emphasis on the

participatory nature of constituency communication and e-representation (Coleman and Spiller, 2003; Larrson and Moe, 2013; Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2013; Norton, 2007; Stanyer, 2008). Throughout this thesis I both draw from and challenge many of these works to craft a more detailed portrayal and analysis of the constituency service.

The rest of this chapter will provide an overview of how previous research on MPs and the constituency service was carried out. I examine how these researchers privilege methodological approaches that generate statistical generalisability, before an explanation of methodical and analytical limitations. I then discuss how I built my approach towards an everyday sensibility based on the gaps identified in the literature by drawing on the following theories: Foucault's discourse, Alexander's theory of cultural pragmatics and Goffman's representation of self. I detail these theoretical perspectives and then explain how I have developed an interpretive perspective, applying it in the range of meanings produced between political performers (in this case MPs) and constituent-audiences.

2.2 How Others Did It

Research on the constituency service unanimously uncovered that political representatives are not only spending more time being in the constituency, but are specifically devoting more time to casework and resolving constituent concerns. Three main methods were used to investigate this increase and its possible impacts – namely large N surveys supplemented with interviews, ethnography and coding and content analysis of digital outputs (e.g. websites, blogs and social media platforms).

Large N Analyses

Research investigating constituency behaviour predominantly employed large N studies, through the use of surveys, qualitative surveys, or, most commonly, a combination. Barker and Rush (1970: 177) surveyed 111 British MPs, with results pointing to a broad belief that personal reputations and constituency activities impacted the vote positively. Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1983) interviewed 69

MPs who stood for re-election in their study on the personal vote, whereas Norton and Wood's study drew from open-ended interviews with 131 Conservative and Labour MPs, structuring the sample by office-holding, tenure, marginality and region.

In their comparative study between American and British constituency service and the personal vote, Cain et al (1984) analysed data from four election surveys carried out by the Centre for Political Studies and British Gallup, followed with interviews with administrative assistants, MPs and party agents that might have fallen out of sampling range. Radice, Vallance and Willis (1987) analysed data from a questionnaire and interviews with MPs, whereas Norris (1997) also drew on a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, using data from the British Candidate Survey of 248 British MPs, and supplemented the analysis with detailed qualitative interviews with a sub-sample, finding that psychological reward, rather than the personal vote, is the primary reason behind increased constituency work. Searing's (1994) study proves to be the most comprehensive, with open-ended interviews conducted with 521 Members between 1972 and 1973. These studies, though comprehensive, are dated and may not reflect the workloads of contemporary MPs and their constituency behaviour, in light of the expansion of the constituency service.

We can observe that many scholars have chosen to draw on the use of large N surveys, supplemented by interviews, to study the motivations behind MP constituency behaviour. These have often depended on a small fraction of the MP population, restricting the analysis of sub-groups within the sample of members and limiting the reliability of the sample. Additionally, unresolved questions about legislative behaviour remain, partly because different measures of constituency service were used. Thus, studies exploring which MP motivations contributed to the increase of constituency service have resulted in inconsistent answers, with little known about the constituency process itself (Cain et al, 1979, 1983, 1987; Johannes and McAdams, 1981; Fiorina, 1977; Herrera and Yawn, 1998; Gregory, 1980; Mayhew, 1974).

Ethnography

A handful of studies of representatives and their constituency service sought to understand the work of MPs through the use of ethnography. These studies provided rich, descriptive details of MP activities on the ground. In *Home Style*, his seminal 1978 study of US House Members in their districts, Fenno reveals that districts are perceived in a manner that enables congressmen and women to understand the context in which they pursue electoral support, with four concentric constituencies – geographic, re-election, primary and personal. Legislators are likely to seek a diverse set of goals and activities for each constituency, in order to find a home style that suits their district. These include the presentation of self (with regards to person-to-person and issue oriented components), service to the constituency as a whole, allocating resources and explaining their behaviour and work in Washington. Through the process of representation, nearly everything that occurs within the district (i.e. the representative's home style) is done with the overall goal of gaining support and winning future elections.

In the context of the UK, Munroe (1977) carried out an in-depth study of a single Midlands constituency over a period of six months, revealing that although the MP held a monthly advice bureau and received casework through other channels of communication such as letters, the telephone and a personal call, only a very small proportion (14%) of the constituency communicated with the MP in any form. The MP's success in dealing with a constituent's problem had little bearing on how many visits were made by complainants. The study also revealed that the Member had to manage a wide range of cases and complaints from various social classes in the constituency during the advice bureaux, rather than the generally assumed working-class majority (Munroe, 1977: 587). Although it can be argued that a singular constituency case is not generalisable enough to apply to the rest of the UK, a subsequent extensive study by Searing (1985) of 338 backbench MPs revealed similar results. Re-election incentives did not appear important. Rather, internal psychological rewards such as a sense of competence and sense of duty were found to be dominant forces driving constituency service.

More recently, Crewe (2015) carried out an anthropological ethnography on what British MPs do in Parliament. Crewe's ethnographic study of MPs at work provides rich, descriptive detail of what the life of an MP is like today from the MPs' perspectives. Akin to watching creatures in their natural habitat, approximately a year was spent in the Commons observing MPs going about their day, participating in parliamentary debates in the main Chamber and Westminster Hall, attending All Party Parliamentary Group meetings and engaging in a host of private conversations (Crewe, 2015: 5). Observations were supplemented with formal interviews with 44 MPs, and 21 Commons staff, ranging from MP caseworkers to journalists. In particular, Crewe shadowed six MPs in their constituency during their advice surgeries. She affirms MPs now use a mix of technological tools not only to communicate with and represent their constituents, but also to represent themselves. MPs post updates on their activities, policy concerns and causes they support not only to let constituents know what they are doing on a regular basis, but also, with the next election in mind, merging this pursuit with regular canvassing. Observing these processes has resulted in further affirmation that integration of technology into MPs' constituency activities is not merely an individual-level phenomenon.

(Digital) Tool-Specific Impacts

Scholars investigating the use of digital tools in constituent engagement primarily concentrate on singular tool adoption (Jackson, 2003, 2006; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Umit, 2017). Early studies on MPs and digital tools focusing on the use of websites and weblogs drew on content analysis of data posted, analysing them with a coding scheme. This is a method that is found in the majority of studies on MPs and digital tools, including those by Jackson (2003) and Ward and Lusoli (2005). In his study of 186 British MPs' websites, Jackson (2003) found the vast majority provided the same information across all mediums used, with the website remaining a one-way communication tool from MPs to constituents. Similarly, carrying out a thorough study on more than 460 UK MPs' websites (approximately 71% of all serving MPs), Ward and Lusoli (2005) found that websites are more likely to be set up for marginal than safer constituencies, indicating the professionalisation of the MPs' role to include

a significant campaign commitment outside of the electoral period. To provide context, they also carried out interviews with 35 MPs.

Research focusing on the use of emails and e-newsletters has found similar results. Emails are now a routine form of communication. The number of parliamentary email accounts increased by 52.9% from 2002 to 2006. The most recently available literature, in a survey of 168 MPs, revealed that email was a valuable tool to keep in touch with constituents (Williamson, 2009: 517). Further research on the combination of emails and websites used by newly elected MPs in Britain did not exhibit inclinations towards promoting symmetrical interactions (Jackson and Lilleker, 2004). Similarly, research on the use of e-newsletters by seven MPs found that despite being topical and of interest to the constituent, this form of communication was not utilised to forge closer relations with constituents (Jackson, 2006). More recently, in a large N coding analysis of MPs' (including national representatives such as the Welsh Assembly) use of e-newsletters, Umit (2017) found that MPs from marginal seats and newly elected MPs were more likely to send e-newsletters to their constituents, supporting the argument for electoral motivation.

The few scholars that have started to include multiple digital tools in their studies, including the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, have also drawn on content analysis of updates. In their study of 42 weblogs and 37 social networking profiles, Jackson and Lillker (2009) found little fundamental change in how representatives communicate with their constituents. MPs are observed to mostly use their weblogs and social network platforms as a megaphone, to emphasise their activities rather than encourage interactions. Similarly, in a content analysis of 51 UK MPs and the use of Twitter, Jackson and Lilleker (2011) found that Twitter is predominantly used as an impression management tool for MPs to self-promote, as well as bringing attention to constituency activities.

These studies indicate novel use of technology to widen communication with constituents, yet display persistence in conserving asymmetrical communication

techniques. However, with the majority of studies on singular tool adoption drawing from large N content analyses, explanations of why this is so do not take into consideration institutional design, or time or cognitive demands of the representatives. Furthermore, this also restricts the evaluation of digital tools in relation to the MP's constituency communication as a whole, and its integration into the Member's everyday political activities.

2.3 Why It Is Outdated

Although the available literature has generated a great deal of important insights, it privileges analysis of the MP role in the constituency from the perspective of Westminster, how it is carried out during electioneering and its subsequent impact on the personal vote. The literature provided a comprehensive definition and description of MP constituency roles, along with which activities they busied themselves with locally (Cain et al, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1993; Radice et al, 1987; Searing, 1994). It also uncovered motivations behind the increase in constituency service including MPs using local activities as an opportunity to gain the personal vote and psychological rewards (Norris, 1997). These are useful places to begin my investigation. However, there is markedly little analytical discussion about the actual interactions that go on between the MPs and their constituents despite the modest range of discussion around the increase of constituency service. Much of the available literature fails to interpret the interactions and their outcomes, assuming that these are more or less the same across MPs. Finally, while it is generally acknowledged across the literature on British parliamentary representatives that they are spending more resources and efforts locally, the studies cannot explain why trust in representatives is still low.

Methodologically, previous research widely favours the large N approach, mixing quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. These are useful in identifying patterns of behaviour, but result in disjointed descriptions of vital and complex interactions that unfold in an MP's everyday life (Back, 2015). Actions carried out by MPs appear to need clear categorisation, cleanly organised into tidy black-and-white roles, supplemented with data from interviews (Alexander, 2010: 11). However, polled opinion measuring the average sentiment usually only

represents one prevailing viewpoint, reducing a spectrum of meanings, feelings, actions and discourses into a singular generalisation. Studies of this type undoubtedly provide thought-provoking insights, but result in intricate and unique behaviour being lost in the midst of quantifiable data. Furthermore, very few scholars that draw from these large data sets explain in detail how the roles developed or why the MPs think this occurred (Norris, 1997). As such, the literature lacks a compelling and cogent contemporary account of how MPs perform their roles, how challenges are averted or managed, and the nature of the power they wield. As a result, in this research I veer away from aggregating statistics to interpret MP behaviours in their constituencies.

In addition, with the most current work on British constituency service carried out in the late 1990s, there is little mention of how MPs use the internet and digital tools in their constituency work. While there is a fair amount of literature debating the impact of digital tools on the representative process and impression management, the analytical approaches tend to focus on the use of a specific tool. This results in scholars posing a narrow set of questions about digital political communication in the constituency (Norton, 2007; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, 2011). Research on the use of digital tools and constituency communication also espoused the use of large N analyses coding data scraped from websites and profiles, resulting in the lack of context.

Studies that do include a range of digital tools employed by MPs lack analytical depth, referring only to the type of information disseminated on websites or emails, rather than how it shapes political practice (Norton, 2007; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). This segment of the literature grapples with analysis of digital tools by aggregating data from websites and other social platforms, followed up with typical methods such as content analysis (Ibid). This approach assumes that the use of digital tools is similar to other forms of mediated communication. It is conceptually inadequate to merely insert new technologies into existing paradigms of mediated communication and their spaces (Dahlgren, 2013: 168). There is also strikingly little discussion on how these tools work in conjunction with other, offline, tools.

Lastly, the few ethnographic studies on MPs and the constituency service provided descriptive insights into how constituency activities were carried out, what was being said and what was being felt. This fraction of the research not only allowed readers to experience the political process, but also its "inherent liveliness and its time signatures" (Back, 2015: 821). However, with Fenno's (1978) and Munroe's (1977) studies carried out almost five decades ago, they are unlikely to reflect contemporary constituency communication. Crewe's (2015) study on British MPs was carried out fairly recently, with digital tools incorporated into her observations, making it a relevant, contemporary account. However, with the primary focus on the overall parliamentary life of an MP, there remains a lack of detail about the process of an MP's constituency activities. Furthermore, as an anthropological study, it offered a rare insight into the hectic lifestyle of Members, but, with its interpretive analysis critically thin, is ultimately a recount and explanation of MPs' parliamentary life.

This dissertation bears on these questions and previous research by using an analytical and methodological approach that interprets MP-constituent interactions and reveals discourses in their political performances. As mentioned above, existing scholarship lacks detail on the constituency service, leaving unresolved questions regarding the meaning-centered process and the symbolic actions it consists of. The portrayal of most of this scholarship is that representatives pursue constituent interactions based on their political ambitions, or personal feelings of duty. We are made aware that this action takes place and of its ramifications on policymaking, but have no updated, detailed explanation of how this political process occurs, the symbolic actions it encompasses and the meanings its produces. A distinction needs to be made between *what* constitutes this behaviour and *why* (an outcome easily derived from survey results), and identifying *how* MPs are choosing to communicate, what tools they are using to do so, and how these are incorporated into the roles they are embodying. Moving forward to successfully develop a realistic and nuanced contemporary reflection of MPs in the constituency meant reliance on similar theoretical and analytical approaches to those found in previous research had to be avoided. In the following pages I demonstrate my analytical approach,

expounding how I interpret the action from an intimate stance to gain insights about how political actors construct and perform the representative processes within a symbolic structure of discursive formations to their constituent-audiences.

2.4 Developing An Approach to Everyday Performativity

This discussion on the literature has resulted in much to consider. Various studies have convincingly demonstrated that parliamentarians are increasingly spending more time in the constituency, and on constituency work, providing a useful historical mapping of MP roles within the constituency, and how they have altered over the years. An obvious and logical explanation, strongly argued by scholars, is the advantage of a personal vote during elections (Cain et al, 1987; Fiorina, 1977; Munroe, 1977). However, it is clear that these studies have not generated sufficient up-to-date knowledge of the constituency service *from the perspective of the constituency*. The distanced approach in large N surveys and interviews means that the particularities of each representative's performance beyond the electoral period, the reactions from their constituents and the everyday bedlam this may create is lost to the view. Through each Member's performance and constituent-audience's reception – advice surgery appointment, speech at a school, meeting residents at a local coffee morning – the MPs undertake acts that fulfill a component of their responsibilities in a regular manner that forms an order that almost seems rule governed (Mast, 2016: 242).

The argument for adopting an everyday sensibility lies in the strength of understanding how events unfold in everyday life. Getting closer to the action by paying attention to social performances unfolding in real time and engaging with them allows the bigger story to be imaginatively identified in smaller details (Back, 2015). This is not merely an exercise in embellishing what we already know through large N interviews and surveys with details. We know that there is a consensus in the aforementioned studies on the spending of more time in constituencies, the receipt of more constituent correspondence and escalating amounts of casework (Gay, 2005; Jennings, 1957; Norris, 1997; Norton, 1994, 1997, 2007; Norton and Wood, 1993). Yet the reductive nature of these studies has

resulted in a flattened understanding of representation, largely without feeling. A robust contemporary discussion of British representatives in their constituencies requires an investigation of representation's unspoken realities. By this I am referring to the assaults MPs endure in their everyday responsibilities and demands, ranging from the increasing correspondence they receive; the representation of constituent and constituency interests; the expectation of an almost instantaneous response to emails, tweets and comments; to the increasing requirement to be omnipresent within the constituency. It is these interactions that allow me to delve further into their role as a cog within the larger institutional mechanism. What actions do representatives undertake among these challenges to make representation meaningful and convincing to their constituents? With society increasingly becoming more fragmented and complex, the struggle to understand modern political representation and engagement means that one must interpret and explain the structured meanings upon which these constituency actions draw.

In order to make sense of these social performances, the MPs constituency service will be examined by cultivating a sociological sensibility, to "develop *attentiveness* to what is easily *discarded as unimportant*" [italics in original] (Back, 2015: 822). Thus, in this dissertation I engage innovatively with the taken-for-granted interactions between MPs and constituents, considering them as completely alien occurrences that are not understood or obvious. What appears as social reality needs to be refracted and reinterpreted (Alexander, 2011: 275). To develop my cultural approach, I turn to Alexander's (2010, 2011) cultural pragmatics as a conceptual apparatus to interpret constituency interaction processes as a performance, one in which the form, process and symbolic content are pivotal in my analyses. Interpreting the representative process as an everyday social performance means viewing parliamentarians as continually engaging in constitutive and interpretive performative acts (Mast, 2016: 242). This involves the identification of actors, audiences, symbols, staging and variants of power; concepts which are then analysed individually, before investigating how they integrate during times of actual performances (Alexander, 2010, 2011; Mast, 2016).

When these elements appear fused together is when the moment seems most powerfully channelled and made visible (Ibid).

The focus is not on the consistent reproduction of these seemingly ordered events or schedules, but on how legitimacy and power is projected, preserved and lost. It is imperative for power to be expressed through symbolic means (Kertzer, 1988: 174). To achieve this, MPs have to communicate through a set of performative skills that weave meaning and structure. For the purpose of this study I define power as performative. To maintain a sense of legitimacy MPs have to project power deftly to invoke feelings of recognition and identification in the audience, linking the representative with the represented (Alexander, 2010, 2011; Mast, 2016). To convince their constituents of their commitment to the constituency, representatives must cultivate and utilise performative power (Alexander, 2010; Mast, 2016).

Thus, it is my contention that these interactions are legitimation procedures in which the MP-actors and constituent-audiences arbitrate the development of meanings and project and maintain their power, and through which Members transform from being distant political enigmas uninterested in local predicaments into authentic constituency advocates who are present and capable of resolving personal or community problems. To avoid entitling the political performer and rendering citizens as passive audience members, this dissertation will use Alexander's post-Weberian conceptualisation of performative power and legitimacy, privileging meaning-making but allowing that audience interpretations may differ greatly from what performers intended to develop (Mast, 2016; Alexander, 2013).

These performative acts consist of any activity MPs, as actors, are carrying out with the intention to influence (in any way or magnitude) the audience – constituents – by projecting their power. These can take place face-to-face, where individuals are in each other's immediate physical presence, or on digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and emails, where the individuals negotiate meaning developments through speaking and reacting with each other (Mast,

2016: 243). If an established pattern of action taken during a performance can be identified, it can be considered a routine (Goffman, 1959: 27).

In my investigation I also draw heavily from the works of Goffman (1959) and Foucault (1972) to detect and analyse a range of meanings produced by the political performers to their citizen audiences during the constituency service. Both scholars pioneered a rethinking of how interactions, scripts and symbolic actions produce the powerful and durable meanings that shape expectations and sustain perceptions. Goffman's prominent dramaturgical approach places detailed focus on how actors present their performance before others, and the unspoken impression given off. Dissection of the performance itself allows the excavation of meanings from this attempt at impression management, including techniques employed by the actor to sustain this impression, the script being performed and stage management. To make sense of the spectrum of meanings from a variety of actions produced in these performative acts, I draw on Foucault's conception of discourse from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to describe how a system of knowledge-containing statements, termed a discursive formation, are produced to result in rules of formation that structure the very discursive that is discussed (1972).

My aim here is not to evaluate the success of the MPs' constituency efforts in the eyes of the constituents, nor is it to predict the impact on the MPs' personal vote. My aim is to contribute a strong, detailed approach that explains how symbolic content, discourse and process play crucial roles in creating the conditions in which MPs craft their performances to their constituent-audience. The following section demonstrates why cultural pragmatics serve as a necessary conceptual tool to answer questions in this dissertation, followed by a discussion of how my analyses draw from Goffman and Foucault.

Cultural Pragmatics and Symbolic Action

Interpreting the constituency interactions as a social performance requires viewing political representatives as actors continually engaging in interpretive performances (Mast, 2016: 241). To fully interpret the meanings behind MP-

constituency interactions as a social performance it is necessary to situate the action within the backdrop in which it takes place, identify audiences, decode the meanings concealed in political and physical staging and detect if material or symbolic resources are drawn from existing power systems (Mast, 2016: 244). Drawing from Alexander's approach of cultural pragmatics, the meaning and influence of culture structures (such as institutions) can only be recognised through successful performative actions undertaken by concrete social actors (Alexander, 2010, 2011). The simpler the collective organisation, the less its social and cultural components are differentiated. The *fusion* of social performances is easily achieved by actors through rituals based on shared beliefs and direct face-to-face interaction. This is applicable to tribes and smaller communities in the past. Rituals are a primordial form of human social organisation, recurrent and simplified episodes of cultural communication in which the actor and the audience within the social interaction share a belief in the interaction's symbolic contents, in turn validating the ritual, resulting in effect and affect (Alexander, 2011: 25). However, growth in societies, alongside technological advances, has caused significant fragmentation and segregation of communities, resulting in a context of societal complexity. Traditional voices of authority can no longer rely on the compliance of their listeners (Alexander, 2010). Contemporary societies still strive to achieve fusion, but the context for performative success has altered, as observed through factors such as population growth and diversity of interests.

The British population, currently estimated to be 65.1 million, increased by 15.8% between 1975 and 2015 (Office of National Statistics, 2017). It is projected to surpass 70 million people in the year 2026 (Ibid). As an example of differentiation, we can consider the types of voluntary organisations in the UK. As of 2015, there are 165,801 voluntary organisations (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2017). This spans interests that fall into various categories, including 14,357 religious, 5,922 environmental and 6,710 health bodies (Ibid). The enlarged population and variegation makes it harder for representatives to successfully bring meaning during MP-constituent interactions that would appeal to multiple groups of people likely to have conflicting interests. Friction over these differences might result in broken and unconvincing

performances. Goffman alludes to a similar idea by referring to a disruption of performance, suggesting that events that might occur during the interaction between performer and audience might throw doubt on the entire performance (1959: 23), reducing its chances of being deemed authentic. This complexity in societies often leads to fractures in performances, as the social and cultural elements become more and more *de-fused*. The potential threat of disruptions will be further explored in Chapter 6, where we discuss the process of the MP-constituent interaction in depth.

For these political performances to achieve success, re-fusion between actor and audience must be achieved. How MPs perform and react within these interactions requires the carving of fluid, action-specific scripts from the background of broad cultural meanings constituents are familiar with (Alexander, 2011: 3). To do so, MPs must rely on ritual-like performative acts that allow audiences to experience ritual as it seamlessly stitches the disconnected elements of performances together, engaging in a state of *re-fusion* to infuse meaning. These are moral, emotional and existential concerns that actors are usually motivated by, determined by the patterns of the social and cultural worlds in which the actors and audiences live. Actors then present these collective elements to spectators through resources, materials and other forms of expressive equipment, attempting to project meaning through emotional and textual patterns (Alexander, 2011; Goffman, 1959). These cultural performances are reflexive and strategic, featuring managed forms of symbolic communication (where background collective representations are activated), the existing mechanisms of power, and how the meanings lurking in the staging, or mise-en-scène, are decrypted. Audiences then have to decode what actors have encoded in their performance of cultural texts, a process that is dependent on whether audiences are able to identify with the actors on stage. Furthermore, audiences may range from bored to attentive, be of varying social status and may not experience the emotional connection required for them to believe in the performance.

It is in this spirit I analyse MP performative acts with and for constituents during activities carried out during the constituency service. Alexander's interpretive conceptualisation reveals how representatives in a position of power rely on performances to make the institution meaningful while seeking to project legitimacy. Interpreting the constituency process as a social performance means viewing representatives as actors who are continually making a conscious effort to engage in interpretive performances consisting of symbolic action. I determine ordinary face-to-face advice surgeries, walkabouts in the constituency, updates on websites, blogs and social media platforms on the Member's activities to be routine social performances that strategically energise the participants involved. MPs carrying out their performatives intentionally design the structural hermeneutics of the moment, crafting scripts in the hopes that they will resonate more compellingly with their constituents and convince their constituent-audience of their purpose, legitimacy and power. Successfully carried out, these re-fused routine interactions have the potential to have a ritual-like effect for the constituents in attendance. Here, ritual-like interaction refers to "simplified cultural communication where the participants and observers of the social interaction share a mutual belief in the validity of the communication's symbolic subject matter, accepting its veracity" (Alexander, 2011: 25). This results in constituent audiences being convinced of the act's authenticity, having experienced the representative process. Deepening their identification with symbols as successful performatives energises them (here we refer to the government and related institutions), strengthening their loyalty to and legitimises the MP and/or political party's position (Alexander, 2011: 25).

However, while MPs have to assess the situation as well as rely on certain scripts and background symbols, how they perform in the process to overcome fragmentation as they seek to effectively communicate with their constituents through re-fusion also determines the success of the performance. Thus, my argument is also driven by Goffman's presentation of self approach, which I discuss next.

Presentation of Self

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach allows for the excavation of meanings through the details of everyday interactions and social performances observed during MP constituency activities. This allows for a hermeneutic analysis of how individual MPs presents themselves and their activity, as they strive to guide audiences to the best impression possible. When an individual presents themselves before others, different motives drive the desire to control the impression that is given to the audience. This includes what might or might not be said during the performance. There is also an implicit request for the audience to take seriously the impression the performer is trying to give off.

During any performance, Goffman postulates that there is a distinct division between the frontstage and backstage region. The front is where the performance is presented and consists of a number of elements. This includes the setting (décor and other physical props that help set the scene) and the personal front (items that are related to the performer themselves such as appearance and manner). As with theatre, backstage is where the performance is prepared. Language used backstage significantly contrasts with that used frontstage, consisting of reciprocal use of first names; collaborative decision-making; profanity; complaints and shouting; smoking; relaxed sitting or standing postures among others. The frontstage behaviour can be taken to be the opposite. Backstage conduct permits minor acts that might easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy, while frontstage conduct disallows potentially offensive mannerisms. Access is usually controlled in order to prevent audiences from seeing what occurs backstage, and to ensure outsiders do not see what is not meant for them. Ultimately, prior preparation and separation between regions are done to ensure that the moral ideals and values portrayed in the performance are aligned with the audience, where both performer and audience contribute and agree on the overall definition of the performance (Goffman, 1959: 21). Like any performer, MPs strive to control the image they portray in front of their audiences, and in doing so have a need to maintain divisions between front and backstage. This is made especially challenging with the use of digital media to interact with constituents. The MP's image has to be successfully integrated and portrayed

across the online and offline, in order to effectively direct the activity of their audience in a convincing and believable manner (Goffman, 1959: 234).

Goffman refers only to the performer's interactional speech context, and not the culture or history of the performance that is taking place. Thus, to achieve a comprehensive cultural approach to the MP's constituency service process, I turn to Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse in order to make sense of background scripts, script, symbolic actions, audience reactions and physical settings, by situating it within the institutional context. While it cannot be assumed that the same rituals and practices generally exist among MPs and their constituents across the UK, from the observation of these ordinary everyday interactions within the context of British political culture, history and relationships will emerge an understanding of why and how these practices exist, through the understanding of meanings, symbols and rituals.

Discursive Formations

My analysis is also guided by Foucault's concept of discourse in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) [1974]. This conception of discourse is not to be confused with the method of discourse analysis that concerns itself with the study of a linguistic system (*langue*). Foucault postulates the analysis of discursive formations as a method that facilitates the formulation of a meaningful relationship between statements, symbols and objects by first questioning and disregarding existing groupings, normative rules and reflexive divisions that we have become very familiar with (Foucault, 1972 [1974]: 22). To develop a pure description of discursive events requires studying the speech act out of isolation, and relating it meaningfully to other statements that might have been made at events of varying natures. Note that statement does not refer to merely a sentence or a speech act, but to signs that belong to a function of existence. Discursive formations can be enunciated, or repeated, with a sense of temporal permanence. They are revealed as statements are used, circulated, disappeared and allowed in various fields of use again and again. I argue that these discourses have existed in some form over constituency service since its emergence. For example, previous research has indicated that MPs in the 1960s considered their role in remedying constituent

grievances an extension of their role as the parliamentary ombudsmen, despite the nationalisation of political parties forcing MPs to support national directives rather than local issues (Gay, 2005: 58). The existence and consistent holding of MP advice surgeries across almost all constituencies today demonstrate that these surgeries are an object in the discursive formation of accessibility.

Objects, modalities of enunciation, concepts and thematic choices are conditions, or rules of formation, that shape a discursive formation. These features do not just constitute discourse, but are also constituted by way of the subject. This complements my cultural approach, where elements that make up discourses are also shaped by the discourse itself. In this vein, I reveal how the discursive formations of accessibility, visibility, and repair structure the performances MPs carry out on standby as they seek to wield performative power. I discuss these in detail in Chapters 4 to 7.

This may consist of elements across their constituency service activities, such as face-to-face and online interactions. Accessibility as a discursive formation, for example, possesses the attributes described by Foucault. It is a system of statements which contains what is said to demonstrate an MP's accessibility, a protocol of how and where constituents can or cannot reach the MP. This includes times of meetings, places to meet at and various digital outlets where the MP can be reached. Objects produced within the discursive practice, according to Foucault, are items (not necessarily physical) that are related to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse (1974: 48). Objects produced in the accessibility discourse include website updates, tweets, emails and newsletters. Modalities of enunciation refer to roles that take place in various sites, positions occupied and statuses held in reference to the formation of a discourse, which in accessibility results in roles such as MP, caseworker and constituent. Finally, I identify the rules of formation pertaining to accessibility as guidelines MPs employ to justify their actions and explain their choices. These include finite resources such as time and finances.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed previous studies examining MPs and the constituency service, evaluated how they were carried out and put forth my argument for a renewed perspective on constituency and representation research. I have established that the majority of research studies lean towards the rational choice approach, seeking to understand if the MPs were motivated by the possibility of benefits, such as the personal vote (Barker and Rush, 1967; Cain et al, 1984, 1987; Dowse, 1963; Herrera and Yawn, 1998; Norris, 1997; Gay, 2005). Scholars who do discuss the process of constituency service in their investigation often under-theorise details of the interactions that take place. Three categories of research encircling MPs and the constituency service can be found, the first being the classification of constituency roles and changes in constituency behaviour (Fenno, 1978; Norton and Wood, 1990, 1994; Norton, 1994, 1997; Radice et al, 1987). Another area of research that a number of scholars have presented considerable interest in is the MP motivation behind carrying out the constituency service (Norris, 1997; Cain et al, 1979, 1983, 1984; Buck and Cain, 1990). Lastly and more recently, in response to changes in the media environment there has been a considerable growing interest in how parliamentarians have adopted the use of digital tools in their communication with constituents. Research on MP use of websites and weblogs articulated a focus on information dissemination, and were mono-directional to a great degree (Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, 2011). Later research looked to the adoption of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, investigating the purpose of using digital tools, and if further interaction was desired between performer-Member and constituent-audience. MPs in the UK have been found to use digital tools passively, mostly to share information, rather than initiating participation or encouraging constituent engagement (Jackson, 2003; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, 2011; Norton, 2007; Williamson, 2009: 519; Umit, 2017).

I have also discussed the methods employed in these studies, and demonstrated why they are outdated. The majority of research investigating constituency behaviour drew on data from large N surveys and interviews (Barker and Rush,

1970; Cain et al, 1983, 1984; Norris, 1997; Searing, 1994). These surveys often relied on a small sample of the MP population, restricting the analysis of sub-groups and limiting the reliability of the sample. Furthermore, unresolved questions about legislative behaviour remain, in part due to different measures of constituency service being used. A small segment of studies on representatives and their constituency service drew on ethnography, providing vibrant details of MP activities on the ground, but were either dated in the case of Fenno and Munroe, or more descriptive than explanatory in the case of Crewe (Fenno, 1978; Munroe, 1977; Crewe, 2015). Lastly, scholars investigating the use of digital tools in constituent engagement primarily concentrated on the singular adoption of tools, utilising content analysis of data posted, analysing them with a coding scheme, resulting in the loss of situational context (Jackson, 2003, 2006; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Umit, 2017).

Overall, these studies have insufficient up-to-date knowledge of the constituency service *from the perspective of the constituency*. The distanced approach through the use of large N survey and interviews means the detail of each representative's performance, constituent reactions and the daily chaos they may encounter is lost. Therefore, in this dissertation I have chosen to consider and reinterpret social reality, by studying usually taken-for-granted interactions between MPs and their constituents as unfamiliar events that are not understood or obvious (Alexander, 2011: 275). I use Alexander's (2010, 2011) cultural pragmatics as a conceptual apparatus to interpret constituency interaction processes as a performance, focusing on how legitimacy and power is projected, preserved and lost. The meaning and influence of culture structures such as institutions can only be recognised through successful performative actions undertaken by actors (Alexander, 2010, 2011). Thus, in this dissertation I contend that these constituency interactions are legitimation procedures in which the MP-actors project and maintain their power to constituent-audiences as they negotiate meaning-making. It is through performance that Members transform from being distant political enigmas uninterested in local predicaments into authentic constituency advocates who are present and capable of resolving personal or community problems. I also draw heavily from the works of Goffman (1959) and

Foucault (1972) to detect and analyse a range of meanings produced by the political performers for their citizen audiences during the constituency service. Goffman's dramaturgical approach enables the excavation of meanings from the actor's performance as they seek to manage impressions. I then employ Foucault's conception of discourse to identify discursive formation from the spectrum of meanings and variety of actions produced in these performative acts (1972).

In sum, I have demonstrated the need for a complete rethinking of the constituency service and how this can be achieved by interpreting the representative process through the lens of an everyday performativity. In the next chapter, I discuss the development of my research methodology and data collection as I seek empirical evidence and details of how political performers and constituent-audiences battle in the meaning-making process.

3 Methods to Explore MPs in the Constituency

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss how I developed my research methodology and collected my data. I sought to retrace and extend existing studies discussed in the previous chapter to develop an updated understanding of MPs in their constituencies. To this aim, my fieldwork focused on how MPs choose to carry out their constituency service beyond the electoral context. Specifically, I identified and interpreted signs, symbols, discourse and performances of the constituency service in relation to the political and media environment MPs navigate and perform in, guided by the analytical and hermeneutic tools articulated by Alexander, Goffman and Foucault.

Fieldwork was conducted outside the range of election time. Therefore, the constituency party affiliation of MPs in this study is not considered to be a factor that will affect study of the constituency service. The MPs in this study were from three major political parties representing constituencies in England (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat), aimed at generating a cross-study analysis. I do not claim that the cases are in any way representative of what occurs in the rest of the constituencies in the UK as there are too many microcosms within each constituency to establish a generalisation (Nielsen, 2012: 191). As I articulated earlier, my aim is not to explain the success of constituency efforts. Rather, this dissertation aims to contribute a robust and detailed explanation of how symbolic actions, discourse and process come together to create the conditions for an authentic, meaning-centred process between the MP and their constituent-audience.

To shape my investigation into contemporary constituency service I first looked to how previous studies had carried out their research. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there is a significant amount of scholarship studying the increase in constituency service and political communication. These studies employ a series of different methods with three distinguishing features.

Firstly, findings are generalised and generated from a large N sample data gathered through questionnaires, surveys or interviews (Cain et al, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1993; Radice et al, 1987). This is observed in Searing's (1994) Westminster's World, derived from 521 interviews with Members of Parliament, and surveys in the manner of Norris (1997), where she drew data from the 1992 British Candidate Survey of 248 MPs, supplementing them with qualitative interviews. However, polled opinion measuring the average sentiment usually only represents one prevailing viewpoint, diminishing a wide scope of meanings, feelings, actions and discourses into rudimentary generalisations.

Secondly, while the studies on the constituency service I refer to over the course of my research have resulted in extensive data collected, the majority were undertaken during the 1980s and 1990s, making them unreflective of contemporary constituency service. As these studies took place prior to the mass adoption of digital tools, the methods utilised do not take into account changes brought about by the internet and digitisation.

Thirdly, studies that did consider the adoption of digital tools either largely placed focus on how they were employed as part of campaign communication (Cantijoch et al, 2016; Lee, 2014; Graham et al, 2016; Stromer-Galley, 2000), or on single medium use of specific outlets, such as Twitter (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Margaretten and Gabour, 2014), email (Vaccari: 2014), e-newsletters (Umit, 2017) or websites (Joshi and Rosenfield, 2013; Ward and Lusoli, 2005). Few scholars analysed multiple types of digital technology outside of electoral time.

Pursuing a closer perspective to the action has been acknowledged in previous ethnographic work, such as that by Fenno (1978) and Nielsen (2012) in the United States, and by Munroe (1977) and Dowse (1963) in the UK. By capturing the 'obvious', as in these studies, the various actors and multitude of perspectives of the audiences will be better understood, allowing for the maintenance of holistic and significant attributes of reality during my research (Yin, 1989: 14). Fenno's landmark ethnographic study of eighteen Congressmen in their districts allowed the identification of the Congressmen's goals, how they viewed their districts and

how these views affected their political behaviour, resulting in the cultivation of trust in constituents. As Fenno explains, "soaking and poking" may make participant observation research unamenable to statistical analysis, but it was a deliberate decision to prioritise analytical depth over analytical range (Fenno, 1978: 249–50).

Similarly, Nielsen's ethnographic work on political campaigning on the ground exposed the importance of face-to-face contact despite the use of digital tools. Nielsen explains the choice to make ethnography the centerpiece of his fieldwork stemmed from the lack of research on the day-to-day workings of contemporary American campaigning on the ground (Ibid: 190). Spending ten months of participant observation in two competitive congressional districts during the 2008 elections, his work enabled him to observe how contemporary political organisations operate, generating an argument for people as media for political communication and the reinterpretation of campaign field operations.

Guided by the analytically rich ethnographic work of Fenno and Nielsen, I chose ethnography as the first method. This allowed me to investigate the interactions and communication between MPs and their constituents, and closely observe the intimate details that set some MPs apart from others. Ethnography requires the researcher to "go native", to participate in and observe the phenomenon they are trying to study, while maintaining a professional distance so their analysis is not coloured by personal feelings. It is a "written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)", bringing to surface what is often neglected (Van Maanen, 1988: 1). The interdependence of theory, research methods and the knowledge of social phenomena this research technique yields a data-rich and insightful understanding of the MP within his or her constituency (Ellen, 1984: 27). Facial expressions, verbal inflections and reactions to unexpected emotional effusions are often missing in thin descriptions produced in mass observation accounts (Savage, 2010). As quotes and descriptive vignettes in this dissertation will show, this method has enabled me to thoroughly observe the process of each interaction before it takes place, during and after it is over. Using ethnography, I was able to understand choices made by the MP, shed light on how disruptions

are repaired, and capture an area of politics that is not often considered or understood by those not physically present.

To build a structure, understand the importance of constituency interactions and supplement my observations, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with MPs as the second method. By engaging in a qualitative semi-structured interview, I gently encouraged Members towards a unique, extended discussion in the form of a conversation that elicited understandings or meanings, as well as described and portrayed specific events or processes during constituency interactions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 5). Unlike structured interviews, this technique embraces that each interview and its outcomes are unique by establishing a responsive conversational partnership. It is a dynamic and iterative process, and not a prescriptive set of tools to be applied regardless of the context (Ibid: 15).

As the third method, to fully understand how the internet and digital tools are integrated into the MP's communication with his or her constituents, political discourse analysis was conducted on their communication outputs. Drawing from Van Dijk's definition, the study of discourse "should not be limited to the structural definition of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures" (Van Dijk, 1995: 15). This may provisionally include parameters such as participant characteristics such as their roles and purposes, as well as properties of a setting, such as time and place.

The rest of this chapter will detail the methodological approaches in my data collection and discuss how the data was analysed. I will also explain how I preserved research ethics and stored my data safely.

3.2 Method and Data Collection

To seek an understanding of how discourses are brought to life by active processes of symbolic communication, we need to turn to methods that enable the interpretation and explanation of structured meanings from which political speech and actions draw (Alexander, 2010: 282). A simple act such as an MP-

constituent advice surgery is not merely a means to an end, but a performative act that brings the constituent into the MP's preserve, persuading the constituent of the MP's ability and desire to help and encouraging the constituent to feel that they are on the same side. Thus, my method involved observing, identifying and interpreting signs, symbols, narratives and performances guided by the hermeneutic and semiotic tools illuminated by Goffman, Foucault and Alexander, with the use of ethnography, semi-structured interviews and political discourse analysis.

My data consisted of text, talk and performances that took place between the MP and his or her constituents. An ethnography of MPs' constituency service activities (such as the advice surgery, walkabouts and town hall meetings), semi-structured interviews with MPs, MPs' communication outputs such as flyers, emails and posts on social media and texts chronicling an MP's life in detail served as my data sources. To allow for flexibility during data collection, I began fieldwork before the UK Parliament dissolved on 30 March 2015. Data collection resumed as quickly as possible after the UK General Election on 7 May 2015, and continued for 24 months until 13 May 2017.

I started the project by approaching MPs from three major British political parties for the opportunity to shadow them in their constituency. Carrying out an ethnography allowed me intimate access to complex episodic interactions between MPs and their constituents. I primarily focused on the interaction between MP and constituents during the advice surgery, which I sat in on as an observer, as long as the constituent was comfortable with me doing so. I also followed MPs as they presented speeches in town halls, attended local council meetings and went on walkabouts in the constituency. I carried a small notebook around with me, recording my field notes in as much detail as possible between meetings and individual interactions, rather than during the meetings. This was deliberately done so that constituents, MPs and caseworkers would feel comfortable and natural during meetings. Notes were then typed up and stored electronically after every trip in the field.

Carrying out an ethnography involves the full-time involvement of the participant-observer (in this case, myself) over a period of considerable length and demands the interaction with the study of chosen human subjects in their natural environment (Van Maanen, 1988: 1–2). In view of time constraints I shadowed MPs representing constituencies in close proximity to London (where I live), with a travel journey of up to three hours each way. In total I shadowed ten MPs, from Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat, across constituencies in England for a minimum of three weeks each. As most of these constituency activities took place from Friday to Sunday, I shadowed up to three MPs simultaneously, depending on their schedules.

This method is particularly appropriate for unpacking a "difficult-to-define or multifaceted political phenomena" by providing a "thick description of the social and political lives of the informants", with high levels of internal validity (Halperin and Heath, 2012: 290–98). The biggest advantage is the capacity to recount and unearth the culture of a population or an organisation (Dobbert, 1982: 39). It is this immersion that allowed me to uncover symbols, discourses and processes utilised by the MP as they carried out their everyday representative duties in the constituency. Unlike the use of large N surveys, being in the field allowed me to be fully immersed in the daily life and activities of the MPs being observed (Ellen, 1984: 68), ultimately culminating in a "written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)" (Van Maanen, 1988: 1). As a participant-observer during these interactions, I gained an insight into the quotidian social and welfare work carried out and faced by MPs. Shadowing an MP over the course of a day permitted me to experience and adopt the perspective of the MP, for whom these activities were an essential component of their responsibilities. It also enabled me to observe how constituents reacted to the MP's performance. The choice to engage with the MP can result in varied interactions, depending on the nature of the case, the disposition of the constituent and the subsequent reaction of the MP.

While the detailed observation and investigation of these performances proved to be analytically rich, they also served as window onto how and when various

digital tools were employed and integrated in contemporary constituency service. As detailed in my empirical work, digital tools such as social media platforms were mostly viewed favourably. These platforms gave MPs the means to enact their standby discourse, facilitated their accessibility and enhanced their visibility with regular updates on activities carried out in and on behalf of the constituency.

The second method I used during data collection was semi-structured interviews with MPs. This technique allowed me to qualitatively understand experiences and reconstruct past events from the actors involved (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 3). These interviews were an opportunity to uncover unseen dynamics between the MP and the constituent from the MP's perspective, illuminate the dialectics between what people say, what they say they do, and what they actually do. After all, categories of meanings in cultures, how a perception compares with another and what values are regarded as important, are components which will subsequently inform behaviour (Agar, 1980: 107; Fetterman, 1989: 48). The data collected during the interviews supplemented and enriched the evidence gathered in the ethnography by allowing the MP to describe in their own words and terms how they view the constituency service and what they choose to do in the constituency. It also gave structure and meaning to the importance of face-to-face interactions, and its relevance in the management of political communication between the MP and their constituents. I interviewed eighteen MPs, including the ten MPs I shadowed. I asked these MPs for recommendations for whom I should speak to. Some offered to introduce me to other potential interviewees, and this contributed to a snowball effect of increasing my sample. I also interviewed three constituency workers at the start of my fieldwork. This allowed me to get a broad sense of how the constituency offices operated, and how they completed the MP's parliamentary office.

This method was favourable as it also enabled my personality to be incorporated, bringing about an interview exchange that was comparable to a conversation rather than an stuffy interrogation. It was also flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and different dispositions. Certain MPs carried

themselves more causally than others, allowing me to probe further in a more informal manner. For instance, during her interview former MP for Wells Tessa Munt conducted herself like a friend, made jokes with her caseworker and I, as well as offered me a slice of cake with a cup of tea. She spoke openly about how she did not consider herself is "a normal politician," unlike "them," referring to other MPs (personal communication, 8 June 2015).

As I carried out this process repeatedly with different MPs and their staff, my interviewing technique was constantly refined as I reflected on the conversation after every meeting. Discovering that interviewees found different aspects of the research focus more important than the study's original objectives provided me with an opportunity to further improve my research questions. For example, question 2 was added after the first two MPs interviewed brought into the discussion how their responsibilities were organised into a weekly routine. The interviews were structured around the following questions:

1. As an MP, apart from your responsibilities in Westminster, what other components do you think are significant in your role?
2. Can you describe a typical day for you?
3. How important is face-to-face interaction with your constituents to you?
4. How many surgeries do you carry out a month? How did you come up with that number?
5. How do you think the internet changed the way you interact with your constituents?
6. Having used both methods, are there any advantages/disadvantages? Which do you prefer/find more effective, and why?
7. Are you satisfied with the relationship you share with your constituents? How would you describe your relationship with your constituents?
8. What do you think can be improved and how?
9. How do you feel about online petition websites such as 38 degrees?
10. Are there any other MPs or people you believe I should speak to?

I developed these questions with an aim to uncover how MPs perceive their relationship with the constituency and their constituents, and how they manage their constituency service. Over the course of the interview, these questions invoked discussion on how the involvement of media and use of digital tools resulted in increased awareness of MP presence in the constituency, such as during neighbourhood walkabouts. Depending on the MP's schedule, most of these interviews took place at Portcullis House, with a few conducted at the MP's constituency office.

Apart from the MPs, I informally spoke to as many people as possible involved in the surgery interactions to enhance and verify the credibility of my ethnographic findings by reflecting a variety of perspectives (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 67). These included constituency caseworkers and relevant MP parliamentary staff. Speaking to them gave me an insight into the MP's behaviour from another point of view, and contributed to my construction of the context in which these interactions take place.

Part of my ethnographic work also involved collecting data from MP communications that were produced and disseminated in the constituency. I collected papers that were distributed in person, and also gathered what was posted on online media. These included flyers advertising surgery dates, monthly newsletters that described what the MP had done, posters with contact details, emails with constituency updates, e-newsletters, news articles written by the MP and updates on social media platforms. I collected flyers, newsletters and took photos of posters when I was in the constituency shadowing the MP. To narrow down the collection of data online and to ensure its relevance to the period of time the MP was shadowed, I only collected data posted online within a day of the constituency shadowing (one day before, the day of and the day after). This included posts on Twitter, Facebook, MPs' websites and blog updates. I also monitored local news websites for coverage on MPs' constituency activities and constituency issues discussed during interactions.

Transcripts of first hand data collected include the interviews I conducted with MPs in conjunction with quotes from my fieldwork during observation of their surgeries. In addition, the content of their tweets, Facebook and website updates that were made on the days before and after each surgery were analysed. Other relevant communication outputs from MPs directed towards citizens including personal letters or notes to address key issues were also included in the analysis. With this, a comprehensive snapshot of the surgery can be obtained. It will enable offline discourse to be observed and reveal how it is affected by or results in content produced online.

To further enrich and supplement the data collection with a broader perspective, I also drew on second hand data. I turned to accounts of contemporary MPs and the constituency service to supplement my observations, extracting and analysing excerpts containing their constituency experiences. These were published between 2012 and 2016, the period during which I conducted my data collection. These included memoirs written by MPs, such as *How to be an MP* by Paul Flynn (2012), MP for Newport in Wales, and *An Unexpected MP: Confessions of a Political Gossip* by former political representative for Harlow in Essex, Jerry Hayes (2014). I also gathered attitude survey reports and results such as the Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement, and monitored newspaper articles for relevant mentions of MPs I had shadowed and interviewed.

To classify the data collected, I used the data computational software NVivo. I developed a list of nodes (also known as grouping words), drawing key words from the literature, my interview questions and research questions. All the data I collected – transcripts, images of flyers, handouts and newsletters, tweets, Facebook posts – were uploaded into the software, where I manually coded relevant data to each node. Clusters of nodes revealed patterns in performance, which I then hermeneutically reconstructed in my identification and analysis of discourses in the MP constituency service.

To analyse the content of performances and how it relates to the MP presenting him or herself as an intelligent, competent and caring constituency

representative, I adopt Foucault's (1972) characterisation of discourse to describe how a system of knowledge-containing statements, termed a discursive formation, are produced to result in rules of formation that structure the discursive practice. As explained in the previous chapter, discursive formations feature objects, modes of statement, concepts and thematic choices, and can be observed in the constituency service. In this way, I reveal how discourse enables and structures the interactions MPs carry out in the constituency service. Accessibility as a discourse, for example, possesses the features described by Foucault. It is a body of knowledge which contains what is said to demonstrate accessibility, such as times of meetings and where the MP can be reached. Accessibility as a discourse also results in roles such as MP, caseworker and constituent. Objects produced in the accessibility discourse include blog or website updates, tweets, a political address or talk and news articles. Finally, rules pertaining to accessibility, while not clearly defined by Foucault, I identify as rules that MPs employ to justify their actions and explain their choices. These include resources such as time and finances.

To perceive meaning from the speech acts, I draw on Van Dijk's political discourse analysis, which suggests the various participants in groups acting within a political context as well as considering communication outputs from politicians (1995: 15). Thus, speech acts by politicians outside political contexts are not included in my research, but dialogue by citizens who participate and engage in the political events and processes are. Here, I refer to the spoken or written element of what is being said, rather than Foucault's discursive formation. This method of analysis complements my theoretical framework, which includes the context of the MP-constituent performance within the examination of the interaction itself. Unlike abstract discourse analysis, political discourse analysis ensures that the context is considered by looking beyond the verbal aspects of the interaction (Pomerantz and Fehr, 1997: 64). Differences in how actors in interactions perform in various contexts can result in differences in the production, understanding and analysis of discourse. Discourse is being produced, understood and analysed relative to such context features, where discourse is described as taking place or as being accomplished "in" or "out" of a

social situation (Van Dijk, 1998: 11), or, in Goffman's analogical terms, frontstage or backstage (1959).

As the empirical chapters will demonstrate, my analysis unveils how discursive practices are part of a larger organisation of meaningful conduct by people in society as they construct meanings through the production, dissemination and consumption of various forms of activities, actions, events, objects, etc., rather than how language and talk are organised as analytically separable phenomena (Halperin and Heath, 2012: 311; Pomerantz and Fehr, 1997: 65). There is a difference in emphasis between speech (*parole*) and language (*langue*), in order for spoken language to be understood in its totality (i.e. parole *and* langue) (Alexander 2011: 10). In this sense not only is what being said matters, but how it is related to and is understood matters as well. This distinction is key when comparing data between spoken interaction and written text.

3.3 Research Ethics

In order to adhere to my university's ethical standards as well as the University of London's, great care was taken to ensure that research ethics were maintained, especially during fieldwork. Prior to beginning fieldwork the project was approved by the department's research committee.

Consent forms (see Appendix I) were provided for all MPs who were shadowed. This not only created a sense of rapport and trust between myself as the researcher and the MPs, but also with the MP's caseworkers. I also signed confidentiality statements provided by the representative's offices, ensuring that nothing incriminating and sensitive would result in the identification of the constituent or the MP (should they choose to be anonymous).

Constituents were informed about my research, as well as my presence during the meeting, as the meeting began. In the event they were uncomfortable, I would leave the room. Over the course of my research, most of the constituents were comfortable with my presence. This excludes a constituent encountered during William Morgan MP's surgery. Discussed in further detail in Chapter 6,

she was uncomfortable with having anyone, caseworkers included, in the room except for the MP. She chose not to share the problem that brought her to see MP Morgan, and left.

Apart from MPs comfortable to be named, all other names (included staffers and constituents) are pseudonyms. To further protect the anonymity of the people involved, specific details of locations are intentionally obscured.

3.4 Data Storage

Data collected (both fieldwork and analysis) is kept safe to protect the identities of the participants involved, as well as the sensitive information discussed during these meetings. All information collected during the shadowing and interviews is kept safe both in the hard drive of my laptop, and as a hard copy, including notebooks where field notes were taken down. The data kept on my computer hard drive and external hard drive is password protected. On the occasion that the hard drive might be corrupted a second copy of information is also kept on a Cloud drive and password protected. Furthermore, electronic devices that I have used to access these data files are encrypted. The physical copy of my handwritten field notes and the notebooks used during note taking will be kept in a safe place and locked after information has been typed up electronically.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed how I pursued the study of MP constituency work outside the electoral context in detail in my fieldwork. I began by discussing and evaluating methods scholars have chosen to investigate MPs in their constituencies in previous studies. Existing literature studying the increased emphasis on the constituency service predominantly draw data from large N surveys and structured interviews. These are useful in providing a generalisable outline of MPs' constituency roles and motivations, but reduce a spectrum of meanings, feelings, actions and discourses to reflect the prevailing point of view. Furthermore, as these works focusing solely on the constituency service are outdated, they do not take into account changes brought about by the internet

and its tools, nor do they demonstrate the integration of these tools into local political communication strategies carried out by MPs.

I sought methods to identify and interpret signs, symbols, discourse and performances of the constituency service in relation to the political and media environment MPs navigate and perform in, using analytical and hermeneutic tools put forth by Alexander, Goffman and Foucault. Guided by analytical works on the ground by Fenno and Nielsen, I chose to begin my investigation by way of an ethnography. I supplemented and structured my understanding of the constituency service and interactions through semi-structured interviews with eighteen MPs, including the ten I shadowed. My ethnographic data collection also included communications that were produced and disseminated in the constituency and to constituents. I collected papers that were distributed in person, local newspapers, flyers and also gathered what was posted on online media by following the MPs on their social media accounts, websites and blogs. To supplement the data collection, I also drew on second hand data, such as accounts of contemporary MPs and the constituency service, as well as attitude survey reports and results such as the Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement. Finally, I used the data computational software NVivo to analyse the data collected against a list of nodes I developed, as well as Van Dijk's political discourse analysis, to guide my analysis of speech acts. Research ethics were adhered to strictly throughout the fieldwork process. Consent forms were provided to all participants involved.

In the following chapter I will demonstrate how MPs are "on standby" by enacting the discourse of accessibility, drawing on the combination of data collected during my fieldwork. I provide examples of the various techniques MPs apply to establish their accessibility, and discuss how newly elected MPs are more likely to accentuate the accessibility discourse in comparison to re-elected MPs.

4 What Can I Do For You? Staying Accessible

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I begin my argument for the standby MP by discussing the discursive formation of accessibility from the perspective of the constituency. These discursive formations, much like stories, not only inform us about the life that goes on around us, but also give shape and form to that life – temporal and spatial orientation, articulacy, meaning, purpose and boundaries (Frank, 2010: 2). As demonstrated in Chapter 2, continued emphasis on Members of Parliament carrying out constituency service apart from their responsibilities in Westminster is observed in the literature. The knowledge that MPs carry out regular meetings with their constituents seems innate, and the established existence of the phenomenon is taken for granted. With thousands of constituents in a single constituency, what exactly do we know about how this MP-constituent process, and how does it happen? Why is it meaningful? How has this action become symbolic to the actors, texts and audiences involved?

This chapter, and those that follow, does not set out to challenge accounts of the constituency service. It acknowledges the works that have already been carried out, and builds upon them through closer inspection of actual constituency interactions. Accessibility, as I argue in this chapter, is a discursive formation enacted as part of the MP's standby performance to their constituent-audience. I define accessibility as *the opportunity of being able to reach and interact with the MP at one's convenience when desired*. This is an opportunity provided by the MP, for constituents to reach them both offline and/or online. Along with other discursive formations that structure the MP's standby framework, it shapes public expectations with the help of accumulated public knowledge and memories, with MPs engaging with their constituents out of seemingly natural, subconscious habit. Unlike campaigning, where candidates engage with their constituents for a pre-determined period of time with an end date, Members have to sustain this interaction during their tenure. Thus, discursive formations useful in this meaningful relationship are formed through shared and credible

interactions. Democracy can only be achieved if there is a typical, widely understood and recognisable social performance (Coleman, 2013: 5).

Per my argument, MPs strive to seek performance re-fusion and authenticity in the constituency service by enacting discursive formations. These formations include their scripts, settings and performances. At the core of the constituency service are pursuits that enable constituents and MPs to meet, listen and interact. The 2017 Audit of Political Engagement indicated 47 per cent of the public polled thought MPs should spend the most time representing local constituency issues in the Commons, rather than national problems, with 52 per cent indicating they would contact an MP with their views (Hansard Society, 2017). These statistics not only demonstrate how constituents consider local issues of greater importance, expecting MPs to do the same, but that they would reach out to the MP. Thus, for the interaction between MP and constituent to transpire, accessibility is key. These interactions can vary wildly and can come about in different ways. In this chapter I analyse how the diverse elements come about to produce the discursive formation of accessibility. Relying on the analytical framework discussed in Chapter 2, this chapter will show how accessibility is part of the MP's everyday performativity. Interviews and evidence from my fieldwork will be discussed to demonstrate the development of these meetings as MPs strive to be accessible. I reveal how MPs produce a body of knowledge to ceaselessly allow constituents access, how objects such as flyers, posters and e-newsletters are produced, and how MPs' activities result in roles such as the caseworker. I argue that to understand this, it is necessary to distinguish analytically between what are staple forms of access, augmented variants of access, the rationale and significance behind access outlet choices and how they are prioritised by MPs. Accessibility tends to be bi-directional in nature, as dialogues take place during the interaction. Physical accessibility is provided when the constituent is able to meet the MP face-to-face, usually though advice surgeries, local events and while the MP is out and about in the constituency. Depending on when and where they take place, these can be fleeting moments, a brief conversation or perhaps an in-depth discussion. These points of access can result in more face-to-face interaction, and more recently, due to the emergence

and widespread adoption of the internet and social media, online interaction as well. MPs agree there is a role for technology to maintain accessibility and to assist them in carrying out their constituency service. As the details of accessibility emerge, I demonstrate how they work together to develop a foundation upon which to establish a relationship with the interaction's intended audience-constituents. These efforts also allow the significance of the constituency service and its meaningfulness to be understood and analysed. As I will show in this chapter, while access is a pivotal element of constituency service activities, perspectives on the importance of carrying them out are not homogenous.

I begin the chapter by looking at how MPs ensure physical accessibility through management and amplification. I draw from a range of existing research, conversations, anecdotes, images and allusions observed during my fieldwork that suggest a cumulative impact on the MP-constituent interaction as a social performance. The chapter will then evaluate how MPs expand their accessibility both through traditional methods and integration of digital tools. I go on to analyse variances in the significance of accessibility by MPs. The discursive formation in this chapter and the details identified here will set the scene for the next chapter as integral elements within a re-fused script, action and the performative space.

4.2 Physical Accessibility

Accessibility, or the provision of access to the MP, emerges as an important aspect during the MP-constituent performative. Quite simply, it forms the foundation of the representative relationship. Being physically present is valued highly and facilitates the legitimisation process and production of authenticity (Mast, 2016: 266). One of the primary and most common ways for MPs to provide accessibility to their constituents is by holding advice surgeries. This essential role is related closely to the medieval task of redressing grievances in Parliament (Gay, 2005: 57). These surgeries, having drawn their name from the doctor's surgery (Searing, 1994), have increased in number along with the expansion of the constituency role in the mid-1960s (Norris, 1997: 30). Approximately 80 per

cent of MPs held surgeries in 1960; 90 per cent by 1970; with proportions estimated to be even higher today. Now considered a core component of the constituency service, nearly if not all MPs hold surgeries (Searing, 1994: 126). Aligned with previous research, all of the MPs I spoke to held regular surgeries. Dependent on their schedules, demand and personal choice, MPs tend to hold around two to four advice surgeries a month. One former Liberal Democrat MP, Tessa Munt, held up to 11 surgery meetings a month during her time as representative for Wells in Somerset. These sessions usually last two to three hours, but can sometimes run longer if there are many cases. In the following section I discuss two main traits in the ways MPs establish physical accessibility – *management* and *amplification*.

Representatives are clearly extremely busy people. Making time to be physically accessible not only requires commitment, but management of time, resources and priorities. According to the MPs I met, the importance of accessibility cannot be overstated. Some consider it not merely fundamental to their job as representative, but necessary to be effective in their position. William Morgan MP, a Conservative representative for a suburban constituency just outside London, remarks, "To be an effective MP, you have actually got to speak to as many people as you can to appreciate what their concerns are. You have got to address them, even if you don't agree with them, you have got to, sort of you know, be able to speak to them, and let them truly believe they are, that they can influence decision-making, that you're not just someone who ignores them, through casework and surgeries… People have immediate problems" (personal communication, 29 July 2015). Being a representative of a constituency requires the knowledge that comes directly from the constituents. MPs have a responsibility to represent the entire constituency, despite its diversity and differences, but making time to connect also benefits the Member, providing a more comprehensive picture of constituency issues.

To manage the pressures of responsibilities and time constraints, MPs delegate common constituent concerns to their caseworkers to make time for atypical and unfamiliar issues during advice surgeries. Common sources of trouble are

immigration and visa application problems. MP Henry Green, for example, prefers not to meet constituents with immigration problems as it is much swifter for his office to manage these with the right information: "There are a lot of people who think they have to come to a surgery for me to help them... I try not to see immigration or housing cases at my surgery because it is much quicker for me to help them, certainly to sort out a problem with a passport or sort out a visa issue, it is much easier for them to give me their name, Home Office reference number, bare details, the facts, and I can get on with it" (personal communication, 7 July 2015). Harry Grove MP, a Labour MP who represented a constituency in the Midlands, held separate immigration-only surgeries fortnightly, which he did not attend. His caseworker carried out the immigration-only meeting as it was predominantly administrative. Thus, he was able to concentrate his efforts on the other advice surgery meeting he conducted personally. Here we observe that accessibility is not merely organised for the sake of it, but managed to be as efficient as possible.

Jacob Marshall, who was elected MP for an area of Cornwall in 2015, explains the importance of accessibility to him, and how he manages his strategy to be as reachable as possible within the context of his constituency and their key problems. "Before the election I set out four priorities, around housing, health, skills and jobs. So I try and work my diary in the constituency to focus on those areas... For example, I visit a school, every single week. So I go to a different school in the constituency, primary or secondary, and talk about, first I want to give them the access to an MP, for them to ask me anything they'd like... I got this ambition to be the most accessible MP out of everybody. But one thing I've done, and I've done 45 of these so far, is where I just find a venue, for 60 minutes, and I'll, well, all over the place, village halls, pubs, supermarkets, wherever what have you really, and let people know that I'm there for them to come talk to me. So they come to talk to me about a particular problem, or it might just be they want to know my opinion about something, or they have a view about something that is more general. So I do that. Obviously time is limited. But I do that, and well I've done 45 so far, since May last year, so it's almost one a week" (personal communication, 4 May 2016).

This extract displays in a nutshell MP Marshall's overall plan to be accessible within his constituency and how he manages to do so despite time constraints. He addresses the social problems the constituency faces, such as housing, and how his understanding of these problems shapes his approach. Comparison with his colleagues in the Commons can also be observed as MP Marshall says he aims to be the "most accessible MP out of everybody". By his revealing this desire, we are made aware of how he prioritises being accessible and how important *he* thinks it is to do so. Furthermore he says, "But one thing I've done…". There is an implicit assumption that he is doing more than or going beyond what he thinks or knows other MPs are doing to be accessible. This is then demonstrated by making room in his schedule for his weekly efforts to hold drop-in meetings at local businesses and cafes. He continues to explain the importance of making accessibility key: "I refer to it as the currency of the job. If I… Whether it is a fete or a coffee morning or meeting a resident's group, it is the only way you can really feel, or can really keep in touch with your patch. There is a real danger in London that you feel removed. It is a good six hours' journey during the daytime or night, during the evenings. If I got quickly so busy here, I will soon not be able to keep on top of what is going on in my patch. So I think, I enjoy it, but I think it is really important to be out and about. You just understand what matters to people". Here MP Marshall refers to the distance from his constituency to London ("it is a good six hours' journey"), and how being physically away from his constituency and constituents has disadvantages. There is the possibility of being out of touch, an outcome he wants to avoid. Again, the importance of being accessible, and generally being in the constituency, is stressed, with him making the effort to travel to and fro on a weekly basis, despite the distance.

Distance is recognised as a factor influencing accessibility, with MPs striving to go beyond regularly held surgeries and meetings in an effort to overcome detachment by amplifying physical accessibility through convenience. Peter Kyle, who became MP for Hove and Portslade in 2015, explains that being accessible was a goal he has striven for right from the start of his experience as an MP, even as a candidate: "For me it was always, from the second I was selected as a candidate, I wanted to be as accessible as possible. So I fundraised and got a shop

right on the high street, in Hove, so that means that people can come in at any time. They can feel like it's an interaction like any other [shop] on the high street. It has its frustrations, because it means that you get a lot of people, a lot of people turn up every single day, and it has become part of their social thing. Particularly elderly people who don't have a good routine they will just come in and tell you what's on their mind that day. But then there are other people who just turn up because they know it's there" (personal communication, 25 November 2015).

There are several significant elements emerging during this process of meaning making between the MP and the constituent. Within this quote we are able to see MP Kyle refer to accessibility as an interaction that consists of social relations between the participants (Fairclough, 2003: 75). Social relations can vary across "power" and "solidarity", or, in this case, social hierarchy and social distance (Brown and Gilman, 1960). For example, global organisations that operate at large distances from individuals are likely to run into issues such as legitimacy and alienation (Fairclough, 2003: 76). MP Kyle's aim to be "as accessible as possible" has led him to rent a shop on the high street, demonstrating him taking action with the purpose of minimising the gap between himself and his constituents, so that they "can feel like it is an interaction like any other". As indicated in Images 4.1 and 4.2, doing so means he is quite literally putting himself within reach, placing himself in a position of accessibility, and subsequently becoming part of his constituent's daily life. There is also a contextual understanding that MPs are receiving an increasing number of cases and correspondence. MP Kyle demonstrates existential assumption by assuming that people would like to see him for a variety of reasons, and would like to ensure that "people can come in at any time".

(Images 4.1 and 4.2: Peter Kyle's Constituency Office in Hove, taken 22 April 2016)

MP Kyle makes his presence on the high street obvious. The signboard above the shop front is bright red, the colour associated with the Labour Party. His name is clearly printed on the shop signboard. His name can also be found on the door, and on a pro-EU campaign poster featuring a large photo of himself. Constituents are not only made aware of his accessibility through the use of a shop front as his constituency office, but are given his contact details and social media handles, all of which are printed clearly on the window. In addition, the office's opening hours are provided. Awareness of the complexities of modern society can be observed. In the event constituents might not have the time to pop in for a face-to-face interaction, they are made aware of other communication channels through which they are able to reach MP Kyle, enabling a quasi 24/7 accessibility.

Understanding his choice to be accessible and his subsequent actions (such as his shop front) are key in comprehending MP Kyle's efforts to make interacting with him part of his constituents' everyday activities. Akin to running errands or buying groceries along the high street, constituents will become more aware of

his accessibility. According to his caseworker, Estelle, they receive approximately 10 to 12 drop-ins daily. Having worked for an MP before, she terms MP Kyle's office arrangements "a unique set-up" and reiterates how important accessibility is to him (personal communication, 22 April 2016). Constituents are not only more likely to view interacting with him as a close social relation, but view him as more accessible based on convenience. I observed this accessibility in action as I shadowed MP Kyle in early May 2016. His surgeries were generally held on Fridays. Timings varied according to his schedule availability, but were often held in the mornings or early afternoons. Commuting from London, I arrived at the office approximately half an hour before surgery appointments were arranged. I used this time to speak to his staff or generally observe them as they went about their day. On this particular day MP Kyle was in a meeting with a council leader when constituent Alice came in approximately 10 minutes before the surgery – it was meant to begin at 2pm. She was walking her dog along the high street when she decided to pop into the office. She apologised to Estelle, "I know I don't have an appointment, I did not realise it is appointment only on Fridays." She explained she had had no response to an email she sent about clamp fines and taxes she had received from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). Estelle welcomed Alice in, offering to check on it for her. After a quick look on the computer, she explained that another caseworker was meant to follow up on Alice's case. She invited Alice to sit down as she went through her case details with her. In summary, Alice had been fined and taxed three times due to the DVLA having her wrong address. Her final deadline to pay was that particular Friday itself, and she was unwilling to pay more than she needed to. She appeared agitated as she explained that she did not want to pay more than the initial fine. Estelle nodded in understanding and said, "Quite a few people have come in with this issue." She advised Alice to pay off the fine before it accumulated, but arranged to ring her the following week after she had checked with the DVLA. Alice seemed satisfied with the outcome as she said, "Okay I will pay it, and if you could give me a ring on Tuesday to have a chat about it. I am sorry for busting in," before leaving.

Why is this interaction significant? Notice this particular constituent did not have a chance to meet MP Kyle face-to-face. However, being able to pop into the office to ask for help as she was walking her dog was precisely the accessibility MP Kyle hoped to provide, and successfully so. Despite not having a surgery appointment, Alice received an update on her case, and advice on how she should proceed. As a constituent Alice had her political efficacy confirmed as her encounter with her MP led to the support and answers she was seeking.

Other MPs widen their physical accessibility through methods such as broadening the scope of areas where they can interact with their constituents, encouraging ease of access. In essence, MPs seek to minimise the physical distance between them and the constituent. MP William Morgan explains that apart from his scheduled surgeries with constituents, which are appointment only, he arranges several drop-in surgeries in restaurants around his constituency (personal communication, 29 July 2015): "You've got a corner of a restaurant, you've got a banner with the MP just sitting there. And if anyone just wants a moan, um… Because if you have an appointment and you have a surgery, people often come to you with a specific [case]… it's like going to the doctor's. You make an appointment and then you wait to go see them. So it's usually pretty important… But actually, if you just want to have a little bit of a whinge: your bin hasn't been collected or something like that, or the state of the world, you might bang off an email but you are not going to wait two weeks to see your MP… Yeah so you if you make yourself available, it allows people to… Vent their frustrations, which is just as important, frankly." MP Morgan demonstrates an existential assumption that constituents will have dissatisfaction or some form of unhappiness that they would like to share with their MP. He differentiates between meeting face-to-face and a mediated response such as "bang off an email", indicating that waiting another two weeks makes constituents less inclined to meet him. By arranging for a more casual setting, he provides his constituents with the opportunity to get things off their chests with little to no effort. Being accessible for constituents to raise concerns allows MP Morgan to facilitate the democratic representative process as a safety valve for political discontent. Here the social distance is minimised with MP Morgan physically

closing the gap by *going* to his constituents at the places they will be. Or, more specifically, the places they will eat!

Tessa Munt (former MP for the constituency of Wells, Somerset[2]) widened her accessibility by organising more constituency activities. For example, she carried out at least 11 surgeries a month. This number was unusually high compared with other MPs I shadowed, who usually held four surgeries a month. This meant that she had to carry out at least two, or sometimes three, surgeries over the course of one weekend. She explained that her constituency is rural and occupies a large geographic space of approximately 215 square miles. This posed challenges to accessibility in a number of ways. Firstly, because the public bus service is irregular and the only routes are along main roads, constituents might run into difficulty reaching her surgeries. This includes the elderly, who might have physical difficulties leaving their homes, as well as others who do not drive. Secondly, Wells is an area plagued with poor mobile and internet signal. MP Munt made this one of her campaigning priorities when she was in office, raising questions[3] during Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) and co-organising a Parliamentary Debate on Management and Delivery of Broadband[4]. Poor internet and mobile service meant that compared to urban constituencies, constituents in Wells were less likely to contact Tessa using communication technologies. It also meant that fewer people would be aware of Tessa's efforts to be accessible, exacerbating existing barriers to access Tessa herself.

To combat these problems, MP Munt held meetings in larger areas of her constituency such as the City of Wells, Glastonbury and Burton-on-Sea. She also held them in smaller towns and villages such as Wedmore, Chilcompton, Street and Shepton Mallet. Image 4.3 is a map of the constituency of Wells with the numbered villages and towns indicating where regular surgeries were held. These took place in diverse locations, from cafes (e.g. La Terre Café in Glastonbury), village halls (e.g. Chilcompton Village Hall) and village pubs (e.g. The Bell Inn in

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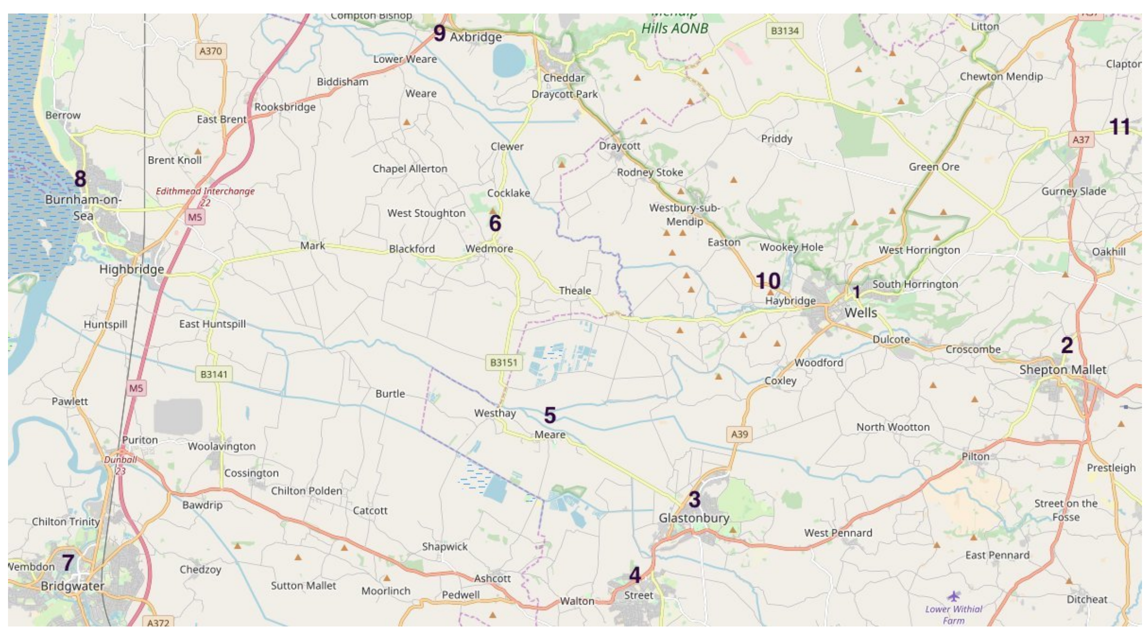
[2] Tessa Munt was the MP for Wells from 2010 to 2015. She lost her seat during the 2015 General Election. Research was carried out with her between December 2014 and May 2015.
[3] This took place on 25 February 2015.
[4] This Parliamentary Debate took place on 4 March 2015.

Shepton Mallet), to post offices (e.g. Meare Post Office). Given the extensive size of her constituency, she explained she regularly rotated between towns and villages in her constituency, and held roving surgeries in extremely rural hamlets to be as accessible as possible to those who wanted to see her. There was no need to make an appointment. Constituents were seen on a first-come-first-served basis, with no one being turned away. Everyone who came would be seen. She also made time for home visits on Sundays, a service she provided for constituents who were unable to come to her surgeries in person, usually due to personal or health reasons (personal communication, 4 December 2014).



(Image 4.3: Map of Surgery Meetings in Wells, Somerset. Legend: 1: Wells, 2: Shepton Mallet, 3: Glastonbury,4: Street, 5: Meare, 6: Wedmore, 7: Bridgwater, 8: Burnham-on-Sea, 9: Axbridge, 10: Haybridge, 11: Chilcompton)

MP Munt employed a series of offline techniques to communicate her accessibility to constituents. Posters with details of advice surgeries and her full contact information were placed on noticeboards of churches, public libraries, village halls and places where surgeries were held. Cards with MP Munt's contact details were also given out to constituents when she met them during her surgeries (see Image 4.3), at local community events and to constituents who came to the constituency office for help. Like MP Scully, she minimised the geographical distance between herself and her constituents by extending her physical access. She held a larger number of constituency surgeries compared to

other MPs, and visited constituents at home. Online, her efforts were less extensive. Digital tools were employed to further draw attention to her accessibility, albeit in a limited manner. Although MP Munt was also accessible and fairly active on Facebook and Twitter, she did not use these channels of communication as a primary means to inform her constituents of how she may be reached. Surgery dates were advertised on her personal website clearly. However, these were not mentioned on her Twitter and Facebook pages. The poor mobile and broadband signal in her constituency of Wells rendered this a less effective way of communicating. As I discussed earlier, mobile and broadband signals are poor in Somerset, thus making it more effective for MP Munt to advertise through more traditional methods. To be reached by her constituents face-to-face was clearly a priority for her, and there was heavy emphasis on using offline means of communication. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter on visibility and the use of digital tools by MPs, this was especially important within the context of her rural constituency and compromised communication channels. A native of the area, she shared that she has personally experienced these communication and transport challenges. She demonstrated this understanding as she strategically organised her advice surgeries to reach as many areas within her means, as often as possible.

Physical accessibility can be enhanced by the MP's personal disposition during the performance. If the MP's performance during the face-to-face meeting is wooden, awkward or contrived, constituent-audiences will not be convinced by the meaningful symbolic actions, and the action will lose its authenticity. An MP's capacity to be accessible may be reliant on time and resource management, but amplifying this capacity by being open not only encourages constituents to see them, but to be candid about their feelings. Discussing her representative position during a lull at one of her surgeries in Glastonbury, MP Munt remarked, "Not to sound immodest, but I think people see me as smiley, friendly and approachable. Rather than as an MP or politician, they see me as a friend. They open up, and can come speak to me" (personal communication, 4 December 2014). Contrary to what other MPs may think or feel is appropriate or necessary, MP Munt is observed to consider social relations between her and her

constituents to be closer than a typical representative-constituent relationship. Her quip about being seen "as a friend" explicitly discloses how she views herself as "one of them", an ordinary person, claiming she believes herself to be accessible and trusted amongst her constituency. By making reference to not being treated as "an MP or politician", she refers to the commonly expressed notion that constituents feel distant from their MPs and do not trust them. As pointed out earlier, British MPs have consistently been found to be the least trusted of all professions (Ipsos MORI, 2016). Although making reference to sounding immodest, MP Munt implicitly suggests that her perceived approachability is her strength, setting her apart from her colleagues. In this sense she claims that her personal qualities, rather than functional qualities, allow her to amplify her accessibility beyond that of other MPs.

In this section I have demonstrated how MPs make arrangements to be physically accessible as they carry out the constituency service. As I have shown, this is established through management and amplification, facilitating the performance's legitimisation process and production of authenticity. Making time to meet constituents face-to-face not only requires commitment, but management of time, resources and priorities. In the pages that follow, I show how MPs make constituents aware of these options. These efforts not only enhance awareness of the MP's accessibility, but also contribute to accessibility as outlets of communication themselves.

4.3 Augmented Accessibility

Apart from being physically accessible, MPs are observed to inform constituents about additional ways of accessibility through a number of other communication channels. Being accessible does not merely refer to being able to reach the MPs in person, but increasingly means being able to reach the MP easily and through a variety of communication outlets. In this section I analyse how MPs call attention to their accessibility, and how they encourage further interaction beyond physically meeting by emphasising their wide range of means of access. This continuation of accessibility includes the use of *traditional* forms of communication such as flyers and contact cards, and *digital* tools such as email

and social media platforms. As I will demonstrate in the following, this continuation can be implemented in the following ways: offline to offline, offline to online, online to offline and online to online.

Traditional Methods

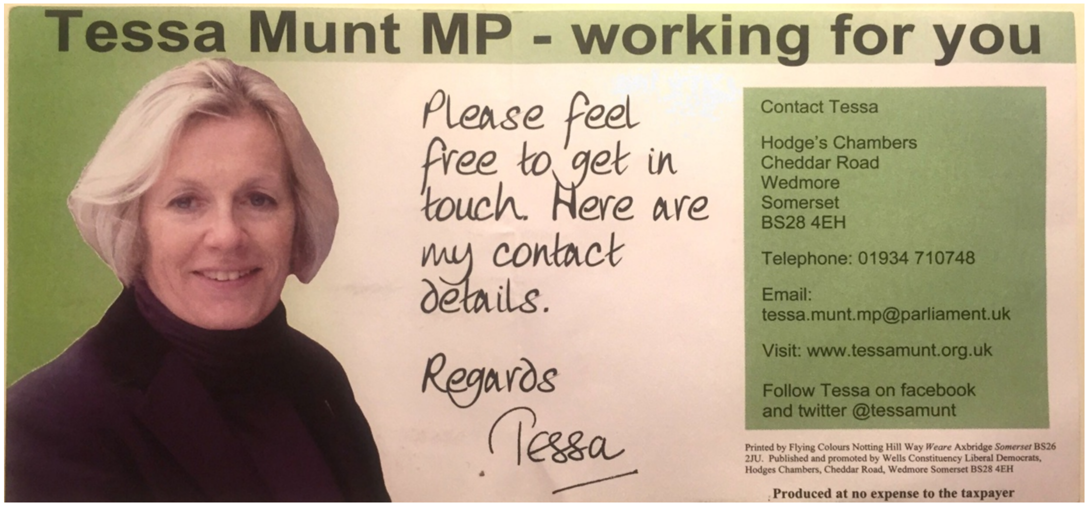
MPs draw on a number of methods to make their outlets of accessibility known in highly creative ways. MPs may exhibit their accessibility by establishing their presence prominently in the community. MP Peter Kyle chose to showcase his accessibility in the most obvious manner he could think of – to use a storefront on the high street. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, while it is not guaranteed that constituents who drop in have an opportunity to see MP Kyle, they are promised a face-to-face interaction with one of his staff. Other methods include the production and distribution of newsletters, posters and name cards. Constituents are made aware that these access outlets include phone calls, writing letters, attending events the MPs will be at, and, more recently, emails. Andrew Smith MP's contact card is designed in a functional, straightforward fashion (Image 4.4). It features a small photo of him so that constituents can identify him, followed by a section where constituents are able to contact him by writing with their questions or problems. Details of MP Smith's surgeries and other methods of contacting him are also clearly visible on the right of the card. Constituents can send this contact card directly to MP Smith without paying postage, as it is freepost. Postage is paid for by MP Smith's office. Constituents are able to contact MP Smith at no personal financial cost, and yet are able to reach him for help, making the card itself an outlet for access.

(Image 4.4: Andrew Smith MP Flyer, 2015)

The deployment of additional resources also encourages further interaction beyond the initial meeting. To further establish the relationship, MPs inform constituents of the various ways they are able to keep in touch. This includes writing letters, attending another advice surgery, sending an email or through the social media platforms the MPs might use. I observed this in action as Tessa Munt MP ensured that every single one of her constituents knew that they could contact her after their meeting was over, handing them a flyer with a full range of her contact details (Image 4.5). During one of her surgeries in December 2014, held in the small market town of Axbridge in the local pub The Lamb Inn, MP Munt met Mr Daniel Howard. He was a victim of a fraudulent investment scheme, and had been swindled of thousands of pounds. With a troubled expression on his face Mr Howard explained that he had a family and two children. As he described how the fraud had occurred, MP Munt requested permission to record the conversation with her phone. Explaining she was working with Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, MP Vince Cable[5] as his Parliamentary Private Secretary[6], having this recording allowed her

[5] Vince Cable represented Twickenham from 1997 to 2015. He lost his seat in the 2015 General Election.

to “suss out different people who are set up to take him [the fraudster] down.” Mr Howard agreed, then proceeded to describe how the situation unfolded as MP Munt listened sympathetically, leaning in closer to hear better. Offering him support, MP Munt told him, “You can contact me anytime. I’ll give you my card… I’m here every month.”



(Image 4.5: Tessa Munt MP Flyer, 2014)

This interaction between MP Munt and Mr Howard highlights several components of accessibility. Firstly, the issue Mr Howard shared was of a highly sensitive and serious nature. It was important that he was able to access someone who was equipped to provide him with the help he required. With MP Munt making herself physically accessible, Mr Howard was able to seek advice on the matter in question by going to one of her advice surgeries. Furthermore, he was also made aware that she would continue to be accessible beyond the face-to-face meeting they had. Secondly, mentioning MP Vince Cable and her position in Parliament (apart from being an MP) revealed a different aspect of accessibility on Tessa’s part. Here she drew her legitimacy from Westminster, and this was an apparent display of power (Fenno, 1978). Furthermore, MP Munt boosted her power and standing as an MP by being able to closely access the Secretary of State, and working alongside him as a parliamentary aide. The concept of power

[6] Tessa Munt resigned from this position on 25 January 2015 due to disagreement over fracking policies.

and how MPs draw from Westminster as they carry out their representative role will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

MPs approach enlarging their accessibility in various ways, some visually, some by way of ease and some choose to demonstrate their personality. MP Munt extended her accessibility by providing Mr Howard with her contact card, furnishing him with details on how to continue communicating with her. Her contact card (Image 4.5), at first glance, resembles a personally written note. The font chosen is similar to her handwriting, creating a sense of closeness, as if she herself had written to each individual constituent. She begins her note with "Please feel free to get in touch", encouraging constituents to approach her. To the left of the note is a photo of MP Munt. This not only puts a face to the name but also symbolically places MP Munt directly in the line of communication with the constituent, even if they are not face-to-face.

Even though both contact cards are used to emphasise and extend the MP's accessibility, different approaches to communication can be seen. MP Smith's constituents are informed of the communication channels through which he is accessible, and are also able contact him directly using the surgery card. The card is not only a useful tool detailing his points of access, but a tool of accessibility itself, allowing it to achieve a bi-directional flow of communication. MP Munt's surgery card only allows for mono-directional communication, with the information flow directed to her constituents from her. Differences in how MPs use this opportunity to present their personality as they inform constituents about how they can be accessed can also be observed. Compared with MP Smith's contact card, MP Munt's is equally informative but relatively informal. This style is congruous with her previous statement of herself as convivial, being a friend to her constituents rather than a politician. MP Smith's contact card does not demonstrate any personal touches, but instead is purely informative and practical.

On two occasions in March 2016, I observed as Labour MP George Watson, representative of a constituency in northwest London, publicised his online

accessibility to his constituents by providing them with his contact details by way of a card. MP Watson walked his constituents out of the room at the end of every appointment and would ask if they had his contact details, “Have you got one of my cards?” He would hand them a card regardless of their answer to ensure they were able to contact him if necessary, reiterating that they were able to email anytime they required assistance. The card itself was the size of an envelope, with a red and white-coloured theme aligned with the colours of the Labour party. An image of MP Watson smiling adorned the front, with his name and slogan (“From [Constituency A], for [Constituency A]”) in bold, capital letters next to it, and a detailed contact list, composed of his email, constituency office phone number, website, Facebook and Twitter links.

Quite clearly, MPs are displaying behaviour which encourages further communication. MPs Munt and Watson seek to enhance their physical accessibility by providing contact details after their face-to-face interactions. This enables a *continuation* of accessibility after the meeting has taken place. The MP contact cards I have discussed included a variety of ways the MP could be accessed, including their constituency office details, phone numbers, email addresses, website links and any further digital platform information such as Facebook and Twitter. In the case of MP Munt, she reminded Mr Howard that he was able to contact her anytime, as she passed him her card. This parting further strengthens her message of accessibility. She has proven that she can be reached face-to-face during the surgery meeting; that she can continue to be accessed afterwards; and she also assures him of this verbally. Andrew Smith MP’s contact card informs his constituents how he may be accessed, but also creates an opportunity for accessibility with freepost included. As seen in Images 4.1 and 4.2, MP Kyle exhibited a similar practice of encouraging further forms of access by putting similar information on his constituency office window. The continuation of access sustains the MP’s symbolic actions during the performance. The consistency of accessibility deters constituents from thinking that these interactive episodes are merely an orchestrated act, contributing to the portrayal of authenticity, and re-fusion of the performative act.

Digital Tools

This provision of choice denotes a sense of 24/7 accessibility, encouraging interaction. It not only implicitly sends the message that the Member is widely accessible, but that the constituent is able to access the MP through a method that suits them. With one in two of those polled indicating they will contact their MP or representative on issues, MPs have to go beyond meeting face-to-face to ensure they can be reached (Hansard Society, 2017). This section will identify and analyse further accessibility methods facilitated by the use of digital tools such as email, Twitter and Facebook.

Apart from being physically accessible, MPs have always received constituency correspondence by way of letters. Traditionally, this was the primary form of constituents' access to their representative, with MPs not always frequently visiting their constituencies (Jennings, 1957). The amount of mail MPs received quadrupled between 1964 and 1997, with the numbers of letters sent to the Commons rising from 10,000 to 40,000 (Gay, 2005: 58). In recent times, with the use of digital tools, the use of email is increasingly common (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009; Williamson, 2009). MPs I encountered over the course of my fieldwork have indicated that they receive emails more than they do handwritten letters. Using email makes accessing MPs much easier. Labour MP Samuel Pollock, who has represented a West Midlands constituency since 2005, shares that, "An awful lot of constituency correspondence now comes via email of course, rather than traditional paper post. This is convenient for the constituents and it is good" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). Thus, while it is clear Members are receiving even more communication, measurements of correspondence are harder to determine. With the statistics of average emails unavailable, I turned to MPs I interviewed for estimates of email quantities received as they shared the use of email as an additional outlet for access. Five of the MPs I spoke to had been MPs for at least 10 years, and had personally experienced how the changes in digital tools and the increase in communication choices had had an impact on their constituency correspondence. Henry Green MP, of the Conservative Party, describes how things have changed since he was first elected to represent his West London constituency in 2005, "We're increasingly seeing that more and

more people write to us, via email rather than a letter, about any problem… Well I arrived here [in Westminster] in 2005, no one would email about a problem. Now I think about 70 per cent of the people email their problem" (personal communication, 7 July 2015). Similarly, James Williamson, a Conservative MP who has represented a constituency in southeast England for 18 years, explains that when he was first elected he was managing his workload and correspondence mostly on his own, but now "there is actually quite a substantial amount of correspondence to be dealt with every week," resulting in him having to delegate more. He receives approximately 300 letters and emails a week that need to be processed, and keeps track of these with the help of his staff. He acknowledges that there might be an increase in demands on the MP, but largely attributes this to more people wanting to communicate with their MP. Digital communication technology means that constituents are able to contact their MP as and when they desire, "It's now easy. You just go online and send an email. You raise your points, and clearly they need a response. If someone writes to me about, say taking military action in Syria, they are entitled to a response" (personal communication, 7 January 2016).

Others also notice that constituents are communicating with them more, making email a credible tool in their accessibility performance. Labour MP George Watson, who has represented his northeast London constituency for the last 15 years, notes that when he was first elected the main contact was by post, "Email has transformed that, and social media is beginning to change the interaction… it's beginning to be a way for people to get in touch" (personal communication, 22 September 2015). Fellow Labour Party MP Logan Woodward, who has represented a predominantly rural constituency in the Midlands for the last 15 years, comments on how he thinks the internet has changed constituency communication, "They communicate with me more. That's the biggest difference. So people email… It is quicker and simpler. There are far more emails than there are letters" (personal communication, 1 July 2015).

Thus I have shown that the increasing use of email to access MPs is evident. Veteran Members describe differences between their initial experiences in office

with what they are presently going through. They also indicate that more constituents are actively getting in touch with them, whether it is about a personal problem, policy or event, enabling constituents not only to easily access their MP for help, but to engage their MP in conversation. MPs Watson, Woodward and Williamson have observed that constituents are reaching out to them more. This growth is aligned with the streamlining of digital tools in Parliament. A unified Parliamentary ICT service (PICT) was implemented on 1 January 2006, with legislation introduced in 2007 to ensure that ICT provision was managed by a joint department (Norton, 2007: 355). MPs and their staff are now equipped with the necessary technology to facilitate online communication within the Commons as well as outside. As the use of the internet and email proliferated, parliamentarians were able to use it as a direct mode of communication with their constituents.

In terms of constituency-related matters, maintaining communication online has increasingly become an important way for MPs to engage with their constituents, and remain accessible outside of the office as much as possible. MPs have embraced the use of digital tools (in addition to emails) to establish an online presence, such as creating a website outside of their party's. In 2003 only approximately 28 per cent of MPs had websites (Jackson, 2003: 126). This number continued to grow and most, if not all, MPs in Britain now have an accessible website, although the quality of them may vary (Norton, 2007). I discuss MP adoption of websites further in Chapter 5.

Subsequent adoption of digital tools includes the use of blogs (Francoli and Ward, 2008), e-newsletters (Jackson, 2006) and social networking platforms (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). Social media such as Twitter and Facebook have become staples in an MP's digital communication toolkit. Currently, 546 out of 650 British MPs are on Twitter (Tweetminster, 2017). I will discuss how MPs are using these tools in further detail in Chapter 5. In the following section my analysis will show how MPs have increasingly started using digital tools to accentuate their accessibility – to interact with, but also garner views from, their

constituents – and how they are no longer using digital tools in a top-down information distribution manner.

Twitter's limit of 140 characters per Tweet poses questions of how useful it can be in extending the MP's accessibility. MPs have indicated that the use of Twitter as a platform of access is not an outlet they actively seek to grow, but rather has become an access point because of constituents reaching out. Henry Green MP remarks that Facebook and Twitter are platforms where constituents reach out for general discussion rather than to discuss personal problems (personal communication, 7 July 2015). Reflecting on his Twitter use, MP Harry Grove says, "I don't get much direct messaging. But I will sort of re-tweet civic events and local activities, and interesting things" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). However, it is possible that constituents may be encouraged by the MP's presence on Twitter, and so contact them through that outlet. Labour MP George Watson, who predominantly uses Twitter as his social media platform of choice, shared, "I am noticing that I am getting casework through Twitter, people wanting to get in touch… They might try and ask for a surgery appointment via Twitter… And sometimes if they are contacting me about particular events in Parliament they me to go to via Twitter as well" (personal communication, 22 September 2015). He goes on to say that he usually responds with his constituency email address so that constituents are able to provide further details, as well as verify that they are indeed constituents, demonstrating online to online communication.

In a reversal, some MPs have used Twitter to access constituents' opinions. Christopher Lewis is a Conservative MP for a constituency in Lancashire, England. During our interview, he said that the internet and use of Twitter specifically has allowed him to have a greater reach across demographics in his constituency. He admits his scepticism about social media when he first started to campaign for his seat in 2010. He now finds Twitter and Facebook effective platforms to keep in touch with his constituents, and give them insights into a day in the life of an MP. Between the two platforms he is more partial to Twitter, and uses it as an "online diary" to "[keep] constituents informed about what I am

doing." According to MP Lewis, he enjoys using Twitter as an avenue to poll for opinions as he finds that most of his followers are local (personal communication, 17 October 2014). For example, he has used Twitter previously to run a quick poll on Iraqi air strikes, and to share his experience in Parliament when he debated and voted for Palestinian recognition. He said that he received many comments and responses to the speech he made, including to two photos of him on television.

Facebook, on the other hand, has the potential for constituents to access the MP with detailed discussions about their issues. Although cases are sent to them via Facebook and its messaging facilities, MPs are still keen to direct constituents to email as it allows them to confirm that those who message are indeed constituent residents, as well as keep a record of the correspondence. MP Samuel Pollock states, "They do they use it like email which is a bit of a challenge, because… It's a public forum. We then usually direct them to email if it is an individual problem" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). Similarly, MP William Morgan is very active across his Facebook and Twitter accounts but shares that although he receives many messages regarding casework from constituents, he directs them to email instead (personal communication, 1 August 2015).

Through the use of these digital tools, accessibility extends to building an understanding between MP and constituents, and a personal relationship. MP Lewis is observed to be trying to do this as he shares his experiences and polls his followers for their views. Peter Kyle MP shares his life and experience as an MP with his constituents. He does that through a few methods, but has said that he prefers to use Facebook as it allows him to write long, expressive posts, similar to how one would on a blog (personal communication, 22 April 2016). An example of this would be Peter Kyle MP celebrating and sharing a reflection of his first year as an MP. This anniversary occurred on Friday 6 May 2016 (and would be the same for all MPs elected for the first time during the 2015 General Election). I happened to be shadowing him that day. His office manager Jon had prepared a cake and a large silver "1" balloon to celebrate his achievement, an event that was tweeted and shared online on both Jon's and MP Kyle's accounts.

Later in the weekend (on Sunday 8 May 2016) MP Kyle published a long Facebook post titled, “1 Year As Your MP!” This was also available on his website (www.peterkyle.co.uk). The article is approximately 1,200 words long, accompanied with a photo of MP Kyle speaking in the House of Commons. He tries to encapsulate his experience in this heartfelt piece that describes how he adjusted to life in Parliament while retaining his pre-parliamentary beliefs to remain the same person his constituents voted for. Accessibility is addressed right at the beginning of the article, in the second line of the opening paragraph (“I meant that I would do my best to be accessible”), highlighting its importance to him, and more importantly, to his constituents. Describing his experiences and emotions, both positive and negative, he acknowledges in detail the difficulties he has had, such as his first time speaking in the chamber. He also brings up the stereotypes and concerns people have about him disappearing up to London and turning “into one of them”, once again referring to the distance between the Commons and the constituency, as well as the possibility of becoming out of touch with his constituents.

By sharing intimate experiences and demonstrating vulnerability, MP Kyle not only allows access into more personal territory, but presents himself as someone who goes through similar experiences and feelings to any ordinary person. The post received 213 ‘likes’, eight ‘loves’, three ‘wows’, one ‘flower’ and one ‘angry’ reaction, 16 shares and 71 comments. The majority of these comments were positive, with constituents thanking MP Kyle for his hard work, and for providing an insight into his life as an MP, something they would ordinarily not have access to. Constituent Michael Armstrong wrote, “A fascinating insight and a great read – thanks for sharing and keep up the great work.” In another comment, Marina Edwards acknowledged the gap between the constituent and Parliament, stating that MP Kyle’s approach allowed her greater understanding of his views and, more importantly, how he carried out his job representing his constituents: “Thanks Peter. That was a really interesting account. I think you've been doing a great job throughout your first year. You are definitely one of the most dedicated, conscientious and hardworking MP's. I like that whenever an issue is contentious, you explain your views about it here, so that even if we, your

constituents, might not always agree with you, we can understand how you've reached your conclusion and have a better understanding of the parliamentary process. Keep up the good work." Jordan Russell's comment demonstrated appreciation of MP Kyle's openness, "What a great update. Congratulations on your first year, from everything I see you are doing a great job. So refreshing to see an MP being so open!" These responses demonstrate a direct response to MP Peter Kyle's performance of accessibility. Although it cannot be determined how the rest of his constituents feel, or if they think he has become "one of them", the use of Facebook in this way enables him to be accessible. Reaching constituents and providing access to his experience as an MP elicited responses recognising these very features. There were also a number of neutral and negative comments made, but it must be pointed out that they were not in response to the post itself, but were attacking MP Kyle for alleged party disloyalty[7]. Despite the negative comments received, the post achieved the goal of allowing his constituents access into a lifestyle that is not often revealed, while also giving them the opportunity for access to him personally. Constituents were able to react, speak, question and, in some cases, even insult.

In this section I have demonstrated how MPs augment their accessibility through traditional means such as flyers and contact cards, where a plethora of contact information can be found, with some, such as MP Andrew Smith, using the contact card itself as a point of access. I have shown how MPs are drawing on digital tools, particularly email, as an integral component of expanding their accessibility, having replaced written letters. Furthermore, social media is not only used by MPs to share information on where they can be reached physically (one-way communication), but is increasingly used by constituents to

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[7] This post was put up when MP Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party was questioned. An article in the Daily Mail (Brendan Carlin, 14 May 2016, "Moderate Labour MP in storm after blasting Corbyn as a 'losing leader' and calling for focus on winning elections" http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3590949/Moderate-Labour-MP-storm-blasting-Corbyn-losing-leader-calling-focus-winning-elections.html#ixzz4PjKo9yUQ) quoted MP Peter Kyle out of context, resulting in a number of unhappy remarks about his character and lack of leadership support. He took the opportunity to thank them for their comment, before responding politely.

communicate problems to the MP, resulting in two-way communication. I have also found that extending accessibility is not simply an exercise in increasing the number of outlets the MP can be reached through, but encourages a continuation of access beyond the initial meeting, which MPs prefer to take place face-to-face. The following section will discuss how MPs prioritise accessibility and its different components.

4.4 The Prioritisation of Accessibility

Through my observations, interviews and the discussions above, I have demonstrated that MPs clearly make an effort to enact the discursive formation of accessibility within their constituency service by being accessible to their constituents, and letting their constituents know where and how they can access them. In this sense, MPs are informing and reminding their constituents that they are there for them, if the constituents so require. This interaction has to be sustained during their tenure as MP in order to establish a meaningful relationship formed through shared and credible interactions. These are carried out in the context of their constituency needs, but also within the House of Commons. MPs recognise their role as being provided by their constituents, a representational role that has been externally allocated (Norton, 1997: 17), and that has continued to develop in the last 50 years. To put current MPs' workloads in context, MPs in the 1950s were not expected to live in the constituency, and carried out what one might refer to as a purely representative role – that is, one in Westminster. MP Desmond Hill, representing a West London constituency, affirmed this change, sharing a story of his colleague: "A Labour MP who won their seat unexpectedly in 1997 was handed over the entire casework file which was just 12 typed letters, typed by the MP himself, on a typewriter. And that was less than 20 years ago, and that same MP tells me that within his first term he had 10,000 cases, so you can see that difference in approach" (personal communication, 27 January 2015). Not only do MPs have to be accessible representatives, but they have to be available to listen, help and provide assistance. As Searing found in one of his interviews, "The aim is to be available always: 'I'm always available on the phone, at home, to my constituents. I personally don't believe in Members of Parliament being ex-directory… It may be

inconvenient at times to be too readily available, but I think this is one of the prices of the job'" (Searing, 1994: 127). Through my observations and interviews, I found all the MPs to hold the view that being within reach was a key component of their constituency role, and they strove to balance this with their responsibilities.

As I demonstrated, MPs have acknowledged accessibility as a cornerstone of their constituency service. As William Morgan MP mentioned earlier in this chapter, him making himself available allows people to vent their frustrations to him, which he thinks is just as important as helping them with their problems (personal communication, 29 July 2015). And yet, being accessible, as I will demonstrate in the following section, is a discursive formation that is not always perceivable. Henry Green MP, who has represented a West London constituency since 2005, states, "[Accessibility] *is* very important, there is a whole other area where that is very important, which is being seen to be in the community. Being seen to be standing up for the local community about larger planning issues, about transport issues, about education issues, it is very important" (personal communication, 7 July 2015).

However, I found that among the 18 MPs in my study, there were variations between experienced and recently elected MPs (in 2015). For instance, recently elected representatives such as Jacob Marshall MP, William Morgan MP, Peter Kyle MP and Barnaby Wright MP strove to not only be physically accessible, but also to ensure their accessibility was made known. On the other hand, experienced MPs such as Andrew Smith MP and Desmond Hill MP concentrated their efforts on being physically accessible. One possible reason for this could be the need for newly elected MPs to make themselves known amongst the community as well as to be available, whereas experienced MPs choose to focus on supporting constituents and their problems instead.

Some MPs, in particular two experienced Labour representatives, did not find accessibility particularly important. Rather, it was withholding the expectation that one had to be accessible that drove their decisions to maintain a minimal

level of accessibility. Marie Moore, a Labour MP who has represented a constituency in northeast England since 2010, felt that surgeries were important but were "a pain" to carry out. She explained that they take up too much time, and ultimately felt that many of the cases could be solved without her help. Having been a constituency office manager for her predecessor before becoming an MP herself, she explained that it was never easy to satisfy constituents when they came to her for help. She finds this to still be true. When probed further about why she still held surgeries, she stated bluntly that she "would be slated otherwise" (personal communication, 19 November 2014). MP Woodward shared a similar point of view. He held a weekly surgery where constituents were able to come and see him should they wish, but felt these face-to-face interactions were viewed as more important than they actually were (personal communication, 1 July 2015). Furthermore, with approximately 110,000 constituents in his constituency, he explained that there was limited opportunity for face-to-face interaction.

With both MPs, their negative impression of maintaining these interactions and accessibility was made apparent. Both of them reacted to the questions in a brusque manner and maintained controlled expressions, further reinforcing what was said, and how they felt about the need for surgeries and face-to-face meetings. This clearly reveals a mutual relationship of conditional influence between events (in this case surgeries) and their contexts (to be accessible) (Van Dijk, 2016: 4). The need to carry out surgeries is not just a product of being accessible, but is a key tool to enact the accessibility discursive formation.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the question of how MPs are carrying out their constituency service process by identifying and shedding light on the discursive formation accessibility. I have demonstrated that accessibility is part of the MPs' everyday performativity as they seek to establish and sustain a meaningful relationship formed through shared and credible interactions. Through my observations, interviews and the discussions above, I have shown that MPs clearly make an effort to be as accessible as possible, while balancing this with

their other responsibilities. I have demonstrated how MPs produce a body of knowledge to ceaselessly allow constituents access, how objects such as flyers, posters and e-newsletters are produced, and how roles such as the caseworker arise. Through these efforts, MPs seek to portray and emphasise the idea "I am always available." I have shown that physical accessibility – such as providing face-to-face meetings like advice surgeries – is carried out by every MP in my sample. Being physically present forms the very foundation of the representative relationship, as it facilitates the legitimisation process and production of authenticity (Mast, 2016: 266).

MPs use advice surgeries to help constituents with problems pertaining to immigration, education and health. I discussed two main traits in the ways MPs establish physical accessibility – *management* and *amplification*. Distance is recognised as a deciding factor, with MPs striving beyond regularly held surgeries and meetings in an effort to overcome detachment by amplifying physical accessibility through convenience. Peter Kyle MP chose to use a shop front on the high street in Hove as his constituency office to "put" himself closer to the constituents, whereas former Wells representative Tessa Munt chose to hold more advice surgeries as her constituency was rural, large in size, had poor transportation links and patchy mobile and broadband signal. Making time to meet constituents face-to-face not only requires commitment, but management of time, resources and priorities.

I also found that MPs augment their accessibility through a combination of traditional and digital tools, to make constituents aware of these options and further establish their relationship. These efforts not only enhance awareness of the MP's accessibility, but also contribute to accessibility as outlets of communication themselves. I showed how the use of these additional resources encourages further interaction beyond the initial meeting, indicating that MPs demonstrate an array of communication choices to denote a sense of 24/7 accessibility. This continuation of interaction can be implemented four ways: offline to offline, offline to online, online to offline, and online to online. These

communication choices encourage interaction and the constituent is able to access the MP through a method that suits them.

Finally, I showed that although I found all the MPs to hold the view that being within reach was a key component of their constituency role, and that they strove to balance this with their responsibilities, variations across experienced and recently elected MPs (in 2015) can be found. Recently elected MPs were keen to be known to be accessible, both physically and through other traditional and digital tools of communication. However, experienced MPs preferred to focus on physical accessibility, suggesting that recently elected MPs had to publicise their accessibility in order to establish a relationship with the constituents.

As I have alluded to in this chapter, MPs have to balance a variety of responsibilities in their performance as an MP on standby. This tension between Westminster, their constituency and the management of resources can often mean that they are not always able to do everything or be everywhere in the constituency. This can mean that constituents may not be aware of what their MPs are doing. As I have pointed out, trust in British MPs is low. In the next chapter I discuss how MPs seek to make visible what is unseen through the discursive formation of visibility.

5 To See and Be Seen: Being Visible

5.1 Introduction

The goal of a Member's performance, as they communicate and interact with their constituents, is to create an emotional and persuasive connection between actor and text, resulting in conditions to project cultural meaning from performance to audience (Alexander, 2011: 53). Chapter 4 has uncovered that MPs draw on the discursive formation of accessibility to engage with their constituents, establishing a relationship between actor and audience. For this performance to take place also requires presence. However, in our large modern societies, there can be substantial distance between actor and audience – in this case between Westminster and the constituency. This distance can often impair what symbolic actions constituents see (or don't see) their representatives performing, further fragmenting the performance's authenticity. Since it is unfeasible for MPs to be seen by more than a small percentage of their constituents at any given time, how do MPs ensure that what they do is being seen? What tools do they utilise in order to be seen, or to appear to be everywhere? This chapter seeks to build on Chapter 4 by posing the question of how MPs strive to seek re-fusion and authenticity in the constituency service by performing the discursive formation of visibility. I define visibility as *being seen or perceived to be seen by constituents, while within the constituency*. Unlike accessibility, it is a mono-directional form of communication that focuses on the dissemination of information.

Visibility is the cornerstone of an effective constituency strategy (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987: 27). Unless an MP served as the prime minister, or held a position in the cabinet, the possibility of being well known by their constituents is low. For constituents to be aware of who MPs are and what they do, being visible is indispensable. Holding office for a long time in the same constituency might build a reputation, based on the accumulation of past activities and publicity efforts, resulting in heightened visibility (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987: 31). In order to be visible, one has to been seen. As I have expressed earlier in the dissertation, successful performances have become increasingly difficult to

deliver as societies become more complex and segregated, making it clear that being visible to their constituency population requires effort by the MP beyond striving to see as many constituents as possible. In this chapter I show how MPs construct their performance by putting on show what they do to represent the constituency as part of their portrayal of being on standby. I reveal how the discursive formation of visibility comprises the production of knowledge (specifically updates on when and what MPs are doing for and around the constituency); roles such as MP, office or communication manager (in charge of updating websites, digital tools and MP schedules); objects such as newsletters, e-newsletters, Facebook posts and Twitter tweets; and abiding by rules such as consistent updates in a "drip feed" (Flynn, 2012: 141).

On the surface it might seem that there is not a clearly defined distinction between the discursive formations of accessibility and visibility. Similar to accessibility, being visible can take place through physical presence or through the utilisation of traditional and digital communication tools. Its components are not mutually exclusive, as how an MP enables accessibility (such as arranging and tweeting about an upcoming advice surgery) may also promote their visibility. As the discussion on visibility continues in this chapter, an overlap that occurs in the tools MPs use to enact these discursive formations will be demonstrated. However, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, the mono-directional characteristic of visibility means that this might not always result in increasing accessibility. In this sense, it must be made clear that the performance of increased visibility may not lead to accessibility.

Physical presence occurs when the MP and constituent are in the same place or able to see each other. To understand this, I argue that it is necessary to analytically perceive the ways MPs seek to articulate and sustain the discursive formation of visibility, and their rationale behind doing so. I also demonstrate and interpret everyday constituency interactions, allowing the significance of being seen to emerge through visibility routines carried out by the MP. Through details of my observations and interviews, I show how MPs go to great lengths in order to make the invisible visible. With the ubiquity of digital tools such as the

internet, email and social media platforms in everyday lives, being seen in person is no longer the only way constituents are able to know what MPs are doing, in or out of the constituency. I discuss how MPs integrate the use of these tools with traditional means to provide a structure, or symbolic scaffolding, as MPs seek to portray authenticity and re-fuse their constituency performances. Through the range of my detailed observations and interviews, my findings suggest that MPs convey the visibility discursive formation to *prompt* constituents about their efforts and presence, while simultaneously *accentuating consistency* throughout their social performance of being on standby. Additionally, although evidence suggests that while all MPs agree on the importance of visibility and do seek to be seen, the use of digital tools to augment accessibility is still met with trepidation. I analyse how and why MPs choose between traditional media and digital tools or some combination of both, arguing that the choice of how visible they want to be is not necessarily a binary decision, but one that occurs along a continuum.

I begin with examining the visibility discursive formation by analysing what the MPs can be seen to be doing, and how the MPs are making known what they are doing. I show how this can be observed in two ways – physically, where I analyse the significance of face-to-face visibility and the MP's constituency routine, and augmented visibility, facilitated by use of traditional and digital tools. Finally, I also analyse variances across the ways MPs choose to manage their image and portray visibility. This extends and develops the dissertation's argument of MPs on standby, establishing centrality of visibility as a component of the framework MPs portray as they seek to re-fuse their performances and be perceived as authentic by their constituents.

5.2 Physical Visibility

Visibility means what can be seen and perceived by one's sense of sight. Within the context of everyday lives, it is linked to being physically present and the use of our physical capabilities. This strand of visibility is situated where those people who are visible to us within our field of vision (*sans* the use of technical devices such as binoculars) share the same spatial-temporal locale (Thompson, 2005: 35). In theory visibility should also be reciprocal, where those we are able to see

should be able to see us. Thompson terms this “the situated visibility of co-presence” (2005: 35). Physical visibility in the constituency refers to MPs carrying out constituency activities, visits with local schools and businesses, media appearances, casework surgeries and other appropriate affairs which require them to be physically situated in the constituency.

Prior to the 1960s, visibility in the constituency was not a prime concern for Members as they focused on parliamentary life and duties in the Commons. With limited budgets for travelling and hiring of staff, it was not unusual for Members to have little contact with their constituents, and casework was not a priority (Norton and Wood, 1990: 197). As the emphasis on constituency work grew, MPs became increasingly visible in their constituencies as they spent more time locally. Increased budgets in the Commons also meant that MPs were in a position to travel to and from their constituencies more often, as well as hire a few members of staff to manage the growing constituency work (Ibid). As MP James Williamson shared in Chapter 4, as a neophyte he managed constituency casework and letters on his own, but the increase in cases required him to delegate some constituency-related tasks to members of his staff (personal communication, 7 January 2016). Despite the increase in casework and need to balance their workload with responsibilities in the Commons, all 18 of the MPs in my fieldwork indicated that they were of the view that it was necessary to make time for face-to-face interactions. In the following section I trace how an MP’s physical visibility in the constituency is driven by two attributes: a need *to be seen* and the *demonstration of interest*.

Evidence in my data indicates that being seen in the constituency is indispensable – a non-negotiable. MPs emphasise the importance of presence, which not only minimises the distance between the actor-representative and the audience-constituents, but establishes the MP’s position in the constituency as the constituents’ representative. This then contributes to their performances being regarded as authentic and credible. After all, a lack of visibility means that Members are unable to have independent standing in the electorate’s collective mind (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987: 27). The more MPs engaged in

constituency work, the more they were able to build a reputation within the constituency to create a reserve they could draw on when they were looking to be reelected. Previously carried out activities and publicity could accumulate and result in currently higher visibility (Cain, Ferejohn and Moirina, 1987: 30). These economic metaphors, "reserve" and "accumulate", suggest that visibility is akin to an item of value that can be exchanged for something else. As I demonstrate in the following paragraphs, visibility of the constituency service is significant to the MP on standby because it intensifies the symbolic connection between the MP-actor and constituent-audience in their pursuit of performance re-fusion.

The Importance of Being Seen

That time is a finite resource in an MP's arsenal is evident. Managing a variety of responsibilities is typically overwhelming enough, but MPs still insist on making time for face-to-face meetings. Preceding the development of print and digital media, the visibility of political rulers largely required their physical appearance before others in the contexts of co-presence (Thompson, 2005: 36). Their interactions were primarily carried out between political leaders and a group of political elites. From the constituent's viewpoint, occasions where they were able to be co-present with political leaders happened infrequently. Rare public event occasions when leaders appeared before a wider audience were usually full of ceremonial splendor, with the leaders still maintaining distance from their audience while being in a context of co-presence (Thompson, 2005: 36). I find that the awareness of distance between MPs and their constituents is a paramount concern regarding visibility. Physically, the distance between the constituency and Westminster gives rise to the risk of constituents de-personalising the Member (as they are not in the context of co-presence), and not considering the MP as part of the local community. MPs indicate a common understanding across different political orientations that the risk of distance affecting their perspective is very real, and of the value of emphasising their visibility. In a conversation with newly elected MP Jacob Marshall, from Cornwall, he referred to face-to-face interaction as "the currency of the job" (personal communication, 4 May 2016). Note his use of "currency" as a metaphor to describe the value of face-to-face interaction, and how it is used in exchange

for a better understanding of what is going on in the constituency. "It is the only way you can really feel, or can really keep in touch with your patch. There is a real danger in London that you feel removed… You just understand what matters to people". Similarly, Conservative MP James Williamson, a Member since 1997, elucidated his experience on this matter: "Some people have a very old-fashioned idea of what MPs do. So oddly enough, they have expectations of the MP that in terms of the MP's aloofness, or his style of life, or what he does here (House of Commons), that are a million miles from reality. A lot of people think that MPs don't come to their constituencies very often… I keep on finding this rather extraordinary! They are a little surprised when they discover how much time I am spending in the constituency, along with the volume of correspondence even if they are contributing to it… I realise that with the internet" (personal communication, 7 January 2015). MP Williamson was emphatic and spoke in a firm and concise manner as he described the importance of an MP's visibility. He acknowledged that the view of MPs that prevails is one where they are de-personalised and detached due to the distance between Westminster and the constituency, but asserted that this is untrue. Similarly, Labour MP Samuel Pollock explains, "It is very, very important that people can see you face-to-face. They can speak to you, look at you in the eye. If you're just an electronic presence, that's not good enough… Different people do different things. It is that curiosity, that sharing of information, and making sure you're visible" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). Situating the importance of face-to-face interactions within the context of the internet, it is suggested that the value of face-to-face interactions and being physically present simply cannot be replaced by the use of digital tools. Thus, MPs seek to challenge their constituents' existing notions through regular face-to-face contact, as much as their schedules allow. I also demonstrate further in this section that ensuring and maintaining a "sustained contact" through routine visibility is key to MPs successfully establishing a reputation in the constituency. This is the rule that shapes the construction of visibility as a discursive formation.

These face-to-face interactions are distinguished within the two contexts of formal and informal physical settings. The constituency activities MP Grove

partakes in have a varying number of audiences. During formal interactions such as the advice surgery the MP engages with a select number of constituents with problems, whereas something informal such as a literary festival will involve meeting and being seen by a larger group of constituents. The mix of interactions implies that he is able to encounter different sections of his constituency, broadening his visibility not only to a greater number of people, but also constituents across diverse demographics. MP Grove also demonstrated belief in the part that he is playing while interacting within his constituency. He draws the legitimacy of his position as a representative from Westminster, an association that also arms him with the power he requires to carry out his duties (Fenno, 1978). During my opportunities to shadow MPs in their constituencies, mentions of Westminster and the Commons would continually manifest. I discuss this performative power in chapter 7, where the management of power relations by MPs will be examined in detail.

Maintenance of their image is also an aspect that MPs are concerned with as they ensure their visibility. To be seen in the way they would like to be requires some form of management. Twice during that particular snippet (which took place over a few minutes' conversation) MP Grove describes being "always 'on'" and being aware that he is in "'Member of Parliament' mode," explicitly revealing that he is deeply aware of how he is projecting himself as he interacts with his constituents. Here we can draw from Goffman (1959)'s presentation of self to better understand what being 'on' and having a mode means. Being 'on' a mode is akin to being frontstage, where one is carrying out the MP performance. On the other hand, being 'off' meant that they were backstage, and no longer performing. Politicians, as actors in a performance, speak to, interact with, and act before their audiences in order to draw legitimacy and support from. This allows them to develop a political relationship (Fenno, 1978: 54). This is especially key for MPs who rely on visibility to inform their constituents on what they do. Conservative MP James Williamson describes face-to-face contact as crucial, especially with the growth of the internet and its tools: "Oh I think it is very important – I realise it with the internet. Things may have changed, but I think ultimately, face-to-face contact with constituents is very important. And

MPs will have different approaches as to how they, in a sense publicise their own activities… With 18 years of being an MP, it is quite plain to me that maintaining a reputation for providing a service is intimately dependent on sustained contact with people. And if you do it for long enough, then people will probably see" (personal communication, 7 Jan 2016). MP Williamson demonstrates a preference, recognising the different performances one might experience while being 'on' in the co-presence of constituents, and being 'on' all the time online, which he does not believe is particularly useful. I delve deeper into this later in the chapter.

The importance of being seen is also observed across varying workloads. My local MP Justine Greening, whom at the time I spoke to her was Secretary of State for International Development, explained that being visible was a challenge due to the demands of her ministerial position. Travels abroad were frequent and she tried to be around for her constituents as much as she could. Unable to always see her constituents face-to-face it was important that her constituents were kept aware of what she was up to as, she said, "[MPs' service] stops being useful when it is not about the people and becomes about themselves" (personal communication, 24 October 2014). What emerges from this conversation is an acknowledgment that being able to spend time physically in the constituency matters, but that there is also a need for the work she does to be seen, even if she is not physically present. MP Samuel Pollock shared a similar sentiment: "I think face-to-face is really important. You know, if I go to the constituency… And I spend all my time in meetings and not being out there in some way, that's not a good use of time" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). As time is a finite resource, MPs have to decide what they want to do with it, and what they hope to procure in exchange for time spent. Although MP Greening and MP Pollock have different parliamentary responsibilities and workloads, when it comes to constituency work, enhancing their visibility while being out and about is a common and clear priority. More specifically, MP Pollock explicitly emphasises the value of being out in the constituency and that he sees this as a "good use of [his] time" (personal communication, 30 June 2015).

MPs also suggest that being visible not only informs constituents about their presence, but also projects a sense of interest in constituents' lives. This lends a sense of credibility to their desire to represent the local area and its people. MP James Williamson remarks, "In one sense you could argue, that role is done by presence, more than anything else. Clearly, the presence of a local MP, at charitable fundraising events, opening of fetes in the summer, a whole range of charitable and voluntary activities, is plainly valued! … They may want the Member of Parliament to take an interest in their lives, and in the lives of the local communities, and to show that, by being there, even if by being there he isn't performing any specific function" (personal communication, 7 January 2015). Similarly, MP Henry Green says, "There is a whole other area where that is very important, which is being seen to be in the community… Being seen to stand up and campaign for constituents on issues is sometimes what the local council won't do… You're seen as one of the faces of local civic society. So it's quite important for people to see that you know, as much as you want them to take an interest in you at voting time, you should be taking interest in them throughout the whole five years. And being seen at these things builds up a credibility that you're interested, that you understand the issues, that you're embedded in the local community" (personal communication, 7 July 2015). Here it can observed that being physically visible not only prompts constituents to realise that the MP is around the local area carrying out their duties, but further establishes and naturalises the social relationship between actor and constituent as part of the local community. In this sense, the physical distance between Westminster and the constituency will no longer impede the constituent's awareness of the MP's presence.

Furthermore, although not the main aim of being visible, a convenient advantage of making efforts to be visible is that it also results in greater understanding of the constituency and its problems. Conservative MP William Morgan, who represents a constituency in Greater London, opines that seeing his constituents face-to-face is of crucial importance, and is what makes an MP effective. As he carries out activities within his constituency on behalf of his party, such as door knocking and campaigning, MP Morgan considers these prime moments to pick

up more casework and unearth local issues. By not being out and about, one was not only putting oneself at a disadvantage by not being seen, but "if you didn't do it, you wouldn't know what's happening just by sitting in one organisation. You might not hear about something on the street, in the far corners of the constituency" (personal communication, 29 July 2015). Similarly, MP Niles Perry, representing a constituency in Yorkshire, says, "[It] happens all the time, on the streets, in the coffee shops, when I'm doing my shopping. I always pick up cases. It was last week that I only walked from the sandwich shop to my office and I picked up three new bits of casework along the way. People stop you and go, 'Can you do this, can you that?'" (personal communication, 30 October 2014). Not only does being out and about enable the MP to be seen, but also to observe what is occurring in the constituency. As with my argument on MPs being on standby, being out and about not only serves as a visibility instrument, but also builds on the MP's knowledge of the constituency. This may seem passive, but monitoring the constituency allows MPs to be prepared, react and repair their performance. In the next chapter I discuss how problems and disruptions may erupt, and analyse how MPs repair them.

While meeting these constituents in person nurtures the personal relationship between the MP and those they meet, it is not visible to everyone in the constituency. How else can an MP employ the visibility discursive formation? MPs draw attention to these activities in a number of ways. Four out of the 10 MPs I shadowed would hold a number of their surgeries in public places that were not only accessible, but also allowed them to be seen by their constituents. Conservative MP Christopher Lewis says that he conducts supermarket surgeries regularly, as it gives a face to the name for his constituents. He explains that, "It shows [constituents] that you really care, even if no one comes, it is important to continue doing so" (personal communication, 17 October 2014). Interacting with constituents who need help, or want to speak to the MP is not the only objective when holding a surgery in a public place – being seen by their constituents is equally critical. For MPs to be viewed by constituents putting in the time to show up in a public place demonstrates sincerity, and can be considered a form of self-presentation. Former Wells MP Tessa Munt held most of her surgeries in cafes or

pubs within wards of her constituency. Posters advertising these surgeries were prominently displayed in the windows or doors of these cafes. Prior arrangements were made with the establishments ahead of time, so that the staff would know when to expect her. MP Munt often used the same tables to meet her constituents, with the café or pub usually reserving them for her. As she carried these meetings out, those who were not there to meet her were able to see and watch her in action. When she was not holding her surgeries, the posters advertising her advice surgeries could be seen by customers going in and out of the stores. It can be observed that holding her surgery and having her poster in a public place where there was plenty of human traffic, contributed to enhancing her visibility. In a similar fashion, MP Peter Kyle's decision to have his constituency office on the high street was not merely made to be more accessible, but the office was also strategically positioned for maximum visibility. He explained that there was a bus stop directly in front of his office that served as a main transport artery along the town centre. There were buses coming and going frequently, approximately every minute or two. As people got off the bus, or looked out the window, they were able to catch sight of him or his staff "doing things", "communicating, and talking and discussing and helping people" (personal communication, 25 November 2015). Apart from wanting to be easy to find, MP Kyle acknowledged that he would like his constituents to see him (and his staff) as they carried out their everyday duties. These seemingly simple decisions were not taken lightly, and express the MPs' explicit desire to put their work *in plain sight*.

In this section I have demonstrated the importance of physical visibility to MPs. What occurs as they make themselves visible can be deciphered utilising Goffman's (1959) concept of the presentation of self – that is, the MPs are positioning themselves in the direct presence of others as they make a presentation of themselves to their audience, in this case, their constituents. As Members make choices about what they do and say around their constituencies they can, to a degree, control how they present themselves, and subsequently the image their constituents have of them (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987: 31). I have showed how face-to-face interaction not only serves to establish their

presence in the constituency, but also projects a sense of interest into the lives of constituents, further establishing the social relationship between MP and constituent. I have also revealed how knowledge of the constituency can be gained, preparing MPs on standby to react if necessary. Finally, I also show how MPs draw attention to their constituency activities by making visible what they do in plain sight. In the following section, I show how these components of physical visibility are crucial to the MP's representative routine and what a typical week is like for them.

Routine Visibility

Life as an MP requires a full time commitment and is often unpredictable. Unlike MPs of the past who might have held other positions alongside their responsibilities as a Member, contemporary MPs have had their role considered to be a full time position since the 1970s. Although MPs have distinctly different routines when they are in Parliament and when they are in their constituencies, it is a priority for MPs to keep constituents aware of what they are doing for the constituency, even if it is a "Westminster day". As I show in this section, MPs perform and accentuate the discursive formation of visibility consistently through delegating resources to the constituency office. I also reveal how MPs sustain their visibility in the constituency by spending at least three to four days in the constituency every week. I analyse the outline of these routine schedules, describing what each day in the constituency is like.

Much of the action in an MP's life takes place in the House of Commons. It is where parliamentary debates in the Chamber, policy discussions and party meetings take place. While these issues may impact constituencies and constituents, they are usually discussed on a national level. Members are assigned their office in the Commons, with several newly elected MPs sometimes having to share one larger office due to a lack of space. Often they hire a number of staff members to help manage their workload. How they choose to allocate their resources, whether directing them to Westminster or in the constituency is entirely their prerogative. The number of staff members they would like to hire, or where to place them, differs from MP to MP. Having staff is increasingly

necessary for MPs to manage their mounting workload. For instance, Andrew Smith MP of Oxford East does not have any staff in Westminster. When I arrived at Portcullis House for my appointment to interview MP Smith (1 July 2015), I was surprised to see that he had arrived to pick me up from the reception himself. This was unlike the other interviews I had, where I was usually met with an office manager or caseworker first, before being sent to the MP's office. At the beginning of the interview MP Smith explained that he makes taking up individual constituents' concerns a priority, which is why "I have no staff here. All my staff are in the constituency" (personal communication, 1 July 2015). MP Samuel Pollock shared a similar idea on resource allocation, "The staffing allowance for MPs allows us to employ about four people. So I have three people in the constituency, and one here in Parliament. So most of my staffing allowance is people working in the constituency, not people working here in Parliament" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). There is an increasing emphasis on not only spending time on constituency service and being in the constituency, but also allocating a larger proportion of resources to constituency service.

The marked increase in MPs spending time in the constituency is not a revelation. As discussed earlier, it was previously common for MPs to visit their constituencies annually, with the focus of their efforts placed on Parliament (Radice et al, 1987: 102). However, this is no longer the case. Members are keen to spend at least a third of their week in their constituencies, with many of them maintaining a residence within the constituency itself. To function effectively in Westminster, serve their party and country usefully, Members need to be well aware of what goes on within their constituency. As I pointed out earlier, being visible serves not only to show constituents that the representatives are present, but is also an opportunity to inspect and monitor the constituency. "They act as two-way channels of information, to the government, and the party policymakers on what the nation thinks and will tolerate, and to the electorate on how government and party policies are to be understood and justified" (Radice et al, 1987: 103–04). In fact, it is through this sense of understanding of what is on the ground, empowered by the knowledge of their constituents' opinions shared

through personal meetings, correspondence or interactions on various platforms, that Members will be able to make a powerful impact on policy changes.

Thus it is clear that ensuring a routine visit back to the constituency every week is important to MPs. As we have discovered through the enactment of discursive formations in the previous chapter, being accessible and visible in the constituency forges a strong foundation in the MP-constituent interaction. Routine is culturally embedded, appearing naturalised, and with that comes a sense that nothing else could happen (Coleman, 2013: 57). The portrayal of legitimacy and authenticity in the MP's performance requires constituents to know that their MP has a reasonably sound understanding of local issues and concerns. Therefore, being seen and noticed is significant for MPs representing constituencies far from London. They cannot afford to be noted "as absentee MPs always in London", a point raised by many of the MPs I had spoken to, including MPs Jacob Marshall and Peter Kyle (Radice et al, 1987: 102–03). Maintaining routine visits to the constituency is therefore part of their weekly schedule.

Most MPs spend a good part of their week in the constituency, usually from Thursday nights to Sundays (or even Monday morning). That's approximately 50 per cent of their time in a week spent locally, with the other half of their time spent in the Commons. It has become increasingly common for MPs to maintain a local residence in their constituency. As we observed in snippets of interviews with the MPs above, the constituency activities include weekly engagaments around the constituency, carrying out of advice surgeries and walkabouts around various wards. Over the course of my fieldwork I interviewed and shadowed MPs who represented constituencies with varying distances from Westminster. For example, Liberal Democrat MP Tessa Munt, who represented the constituency of Wells, had to commute a distance of 130 miles from London. Much like the other MPs who commute over long distances, she would drive down from London on Thursday night, driving back to London on Sunday night or Monday morning. These included MPs who represented areas in London. The distance has little effect on how MPs divide their days between parliamentary and constituency work. As the following examples will demonstrate, regardless of the commute,

MPs spend approximately half the week in their constituency or on constituency-related events, and the other half on parliamentary responsibilities.

MP Christopher Lewis provides an elaborate description of his schedule in the constituency, explaining that the commute between his constituency in North West England and London is a distance of approximately 250 miles. The journey can take him up to five hours by car or train depending on traffic. He explains that Parliament begins at 2.30pm on Mondays, to allow MPs to travel across the UK. Mid-Mondays till Thursday evenings are spent in London, where he attends to a series of commitments. These include voting on policies, sitting in on Committee meetings discussing Statutory Instruments or a Bill, attending Prime Minister's Questions, leading or contributing to Westminster Hall and Chamber debates. Furthermore, increased responsibilities as a Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) mean that MP Lewis has other engagements and meetings that do not pertain directly to his constituency. Throughout the day there is also a need to regularly stay on top of correspondence, especially his emails. The use of a smartphone enables him to respond to urgent matters quickly between meetings. Apart from these, constituent correspondence is continuously read, researched and replied to, with him mailing several hundred letters a week on a wide range of concerns. Fridays and Saturdays are designated constituency days, and their schedules are very much alike. MP Lewis says unless a particularly important Private Members Bill needs to be supported on Friday, he is certain to be in the constituency. Unusually, MP Lewis has two constituency offices. Splitting his time between them, he also visits local schools, hospitals, businesses and community events. If time permits, he selects a part of the constituency he has not visited in a while to knock on doors and proactively engage residents. Twice a month, MP Lewis holds advice surgeries on Saturdays, where constituents can book a meeting slot to discuss a problem with him. He states that they are always oversubscribed. Constituents who are unable to secure a meeting, have pressing issues, or have difficulty attending these meetings in person, will be ensured an alternative time slot. Sundays are kept free, to allow himself some personal time. Yet it is often that there are community events he is expected to attend, such as a village fete or church services.

Labour MP Samuel Pollock, whose constituency is 140 miles away from Westminster, has a similar weekly routine. Spending Fridays and Saturdays in the constituency, carrying out local duties and interacting with the constituents. Advice surgeries are always held on the weekends, when people are less likely to be working. To be as available to the most constituents as possible, coffee mornings are held in residential estates or community centres, usually on a Friday or Saturday morning. As part of his routine, he regularly spends most Fridays during the academic year outside school gates at the end of the school day. Firstly, he will meet the Head Teacher to have an informal discussion about how things are going in school. This usually lasts for about 20 minutes. As students begin to drift out into the schoolyard, MP Pollock will start speaking with parents, asking if there are any concerns they would like to raise. Surgery cards with his full contact details (as discussed in Chapter 4) will be handed out. He ardently explains that this is not in any way a political exercise. Rather, "it is just 'Here I am as your local MP. Here are my surgery cards if you want to come and see me'" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). He considers this activity part of what he needs to do within the constituency to keep his ear to the ground.

No distinct differences in routines and schedules between MPs representing constituencies further or closer from Westminster can be detected. While MPs representing constituencies in or near London maintain residences in London, they share a similar schedule when spending time in their constituencies. Conservative MP Henry Green, who represents a constituency in suburban West London, spends all day Fridays and Saturdays, and Monday mornings in his constituency. He ensures that unless he has other parliamentary commitments, Fridays are always spent in the constituency. Unlike MPs Lewis and Pollock, MP Green does not have to travel a long distance to Westminster. Despite this, he maintains a similar routine within the constituency. This was also found to be the case for MPs William Morgan, George Watson, Desmond Hill, David Miller and James Williamson, who represent constituencies 25 miles or less away from Westminster. It is possible that the time spent travelling might not be considered

"lost" or "wasted" if that time is used to work, as an MP would do if they were living in or near London, or, in the case of MP Jacob Marshall, to sleep.

In this section I have demonstrated how MPs ensure regular visibility through weekly routine visits to the constituency, spending at least half their week there. There is no observable difference in routine schedules between MPs representing constituencies in London and those representing constituencies outside of London, suggesting that the time used to travel is still spent on similar work, such as emails. In the following section I discuss how MPs draw further attention to what they do on behalf of the constituency when not physically present with the constituent-audience.

5.3 Augmenting Visibility

It is also necessary for MPs to devise ways to continue performing the discursive formation that they are out and about beyond being seen in person. Work MPs carry out behind-the-scenes, or pertaining to a small group of constituents, is not often discussed or exposed. Constituency population sizes of the MPs I spoke to ranged approximately from 85,000 to 110,000, spread over geographical areas of varying sizes (Parliament UK, 2017). Realistically, it is unfeasible for MPs to physically meet all their constituents face-to-face. The MPs I was in contact with over the course of my fieldwork not only acknowledged this limitation on their visibility, but demonstrated strategies to make the invisible visible. New means of communication, the growth of the internet and proliferation of digital tools meant that Members were able to acquire a kind of visibility detached from their physical appearance before a group of people (Thompson, 2005: 36). This following section will show how MPs enhance the visibility discursive formation through accentuating the consistency of their focus on the constituency. This is achieved by drawing on a mix of traditional tools such as print media and, more recently, digital tools, such as personal websites and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Traditional Methods

Flyers, letters and monthly newsletters are also used in order to inform and share what they do, enabling MPs to forge a self-image that could also be conveyed to others in distant places (Thompson, 2005: 36). These are sent to voters who are on the registry, or posted to houses within the constituency. They are also distributed at surgeries, and other constituency meetings where appropriate. Below (Image 5.1) is an example of an annual newsletter former MP Tessa Munt published in 2014.

(Image 5.1: Magazine VIEW, Tessa Munt MP, 2014)

Several elements of the cover stand out. The title is in large type font, with many possible interpretations here of "view". Firstly, it is view in the present tense, of what MP Munt is doing now in the constituency. The subtitle "Part of the 'awkward squad'" refers to this current work. Secondly, the magazine provides a "re-view" with the use of the past tense ("Thousands helped"), demonstrating that she is using the magazine as an opportunity to update audiences on what she and others have been doing, with "More to do" implying a pre-view, a projection into the future. We can observe as past, present and future come

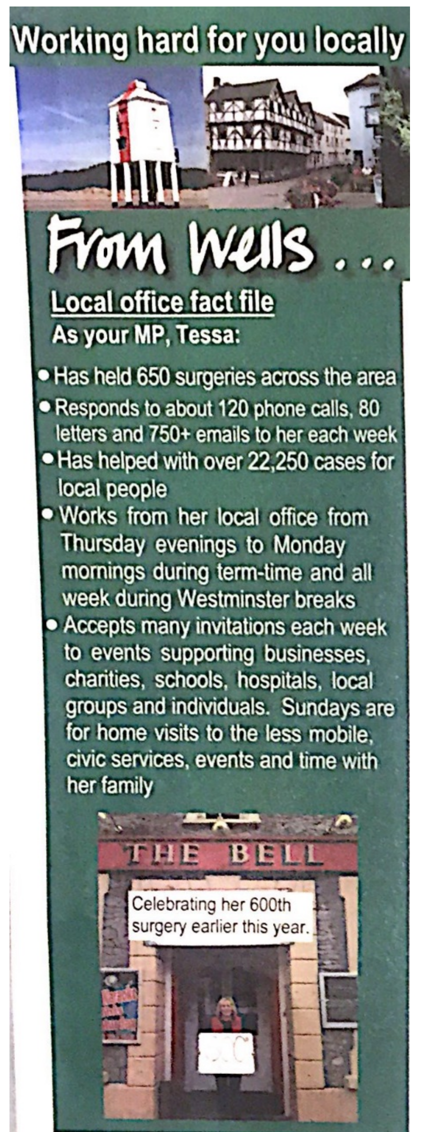
together for the visibility discursive formation to emerge, composed carefully through a multimodal text.

A closer study of the image used on the cover reveals a spatial representation of power relations. MP Munt features prominently on the cover, making her visible to the reader and drawing attention to the magazine. As Wells is a rural constituency with a large farming community, posing with a cow could indicate her understanding and interest in the dairy industry in the constituency. Furthermore, with her hand firmly on the cow's face, her body language visually indicates a steady grip on what is occurring locally. Specifically, MP Munt is looking up at the camera from a lower position, suggesting that she is not afraid of getting her hands dirty to achieve results for the constituency. The bottom left corner has the written text "Standing again" which suggests a vertical concept, something MP Munt does when she is "up", despite being "down" in this photo. The references to various directions suggest how she is able to accomplish and fulfill her responsibilities everywhere, whether it is "up" in Parliament or "down" in the constituency.

Her name is also on the cover twice, firstly just below the masthead and secondly on the main cover line, clearly identifying who she is, and her role as MP. Notice that the main title heading says "Tessa reports back". Here the use of her first name suggests a familiar relationship, as between friends. As discussed in Chapter 4, this is a notion that MP Munt has herself pointed out. She shared how her constituents were more likely to view her as a friend rather than as a politician. Additionally, the use of "report" implicitly demonstrates a sense of accountability to her constituents. The coverline that follows also has a similar tone. "After another busy year as your Member of Parliament" not only tells the readers how much work Tessa is doing, it also emphasises that she is doing all this work for them specifically through the use of "your". It is also made explicit that this magazine was not created at the expense of taxpayers, an issue that has become sensitive since the MPs' expenses scandal in 2009. Right at the bottom is a dark strip reminiscent of a ticker-tape, a re-mediation of what one would usually find on a news channel (Botler and Grusin, 1999).It highlights key

updates, drawing the reader's attention to look inside and finding out more about what MP Munt has done.

On pages 2 and 3, Tessa provides a summary of the work she has done. Firstly, she discusses what she has done locally, starting with the headline "From Wells…" (Image 5.2). The decision to do this is especially significant, because she is making clear that constituency work is her priority and focus. The left column is highlighted in green to draw the reader's attention. The list of facts begins with the number of surgeries she held in 2014, informing constituents that she has done 650 surgeries that year. It is also accompanied with a photo at the bottom, where she celebrated her 600th surgery that year. On page 3, on the right hand of the page is a continuation of the column titled "to Westminster" (Image 5.3), providing further information on what Tessa has accomplished within the Commons. In the middle of these two pages there is an elaboration of specific incidents and policies she has pursued on behalf of the constituency. These include "Revenge evictions by rogue landlords" and "Update: cancer treatment". These details are showcased not only to recognise Tessa's efforts and accessibility but also to bring them to the forefront. Published by her and her office, the news stories shared are positive in tone, and paint Tessa in a good light.

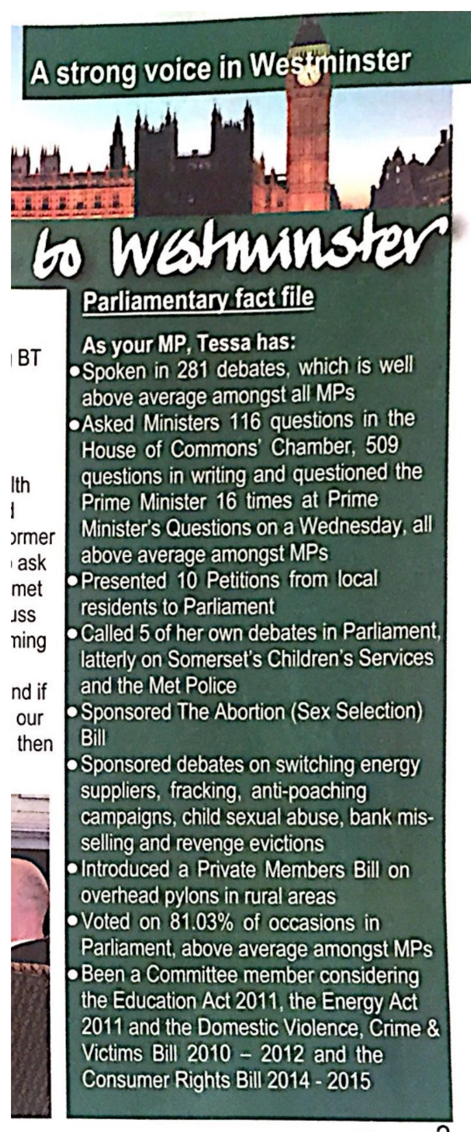

Working hard for you locally

From Wells ...

Local office fact file

As your MP, Tessa:

- Has held 650 surgeries across the area
- Responds to about 120 phone calls, 80 letters and 750+ emails to her each week
- Has helped with over 22,250 cases for local people
- Works from her local office from Thursday evenings to Monday mornings during term-time and all week during Westminster breaks
- Accepts many invitations each week to events supporting businesses, charities, schools, hospitals, local groups and individuals. Sundays are for home visits to the less mobile, civic services, events and time with her family


A strong voice in Westminster

to Westminster

Parliamentary fact file

As your MP, Tessa has:

- Spoken in 281 debates, which is well above average amongst all MPs
- Asked Ministers 116 questions in the House of Commons' Chamber, 509 questions in writing and questioned the Prime Minister 16 times at Prime Minister's Questions on a Wednesday, all above average amongst MPs
- Presented 10 Petitions from local residents to Parliament
- Called 5 of her own debates in Parliament, latterly on Somerset's Children's Services and the Met Police
- Sponsored The Abortion (Sex Selection) Bill
- Sponsored debates on switching energy suppliers, fracking, anti-poaching campaigns, child sexual abuse, bank mis-selling and revenge evictions
- Introduced a Private Members Bill on overhead pylons in rural areas
- Voted on 81.03% of occasions in Parliament, above average amongst MPs
- Been a Committee member considering the Education Act 2011, the Energy Act 2011 and the Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Bill 2010 – 2012 and the Consumer Rights Bill 2014 - 2015

VIEW MAGAZINE 3

(Image 5.2: Magazine VIEW, Page 2, Tessa Munt, 2014)

(Image 5.3: Magazine VIEW, Page 3, Tessa Munt, 2014)

Similarly, Conservative MP Christopher Lewis begins his four-page monthly newsletters with a cover story that draws attention to a local constituency event or issue that MP Lewis has participated in. The title, “[Constituency B] Matters”, plays on the word “matters” by not only reporting on the goings on in the constituency, but reminding the audience that it matters, and is of importance to the MP. For example, October 2014’s newsletter features a headline “HUGE INVESTMENT IN OUR LOCAL NHS” in bold white type, with a subheading describing how MP Lewis has “championed” protecting the local NHS in his constituency. Focusing on what is likely to be a valued update for his constituents on the front page, the words of “huge” and “championed” indicate MP Lewis’ victory, as well as the hard work that must have been devoted to the cause.

Subsequent pages continue to report a mix of constituency and parliamentary news. Like MP Munt, MP Lewis begins with a local story, suggesting to constituents and readers that they are indeed first and foremost in MP Lewis's work representing the local constituency. He also draws attention to what he has achieved, not only making it visible, but spotlighting his capability in achieving it.

Another way that MPs are able to extend the visibility discursive formation is through news media. MPs can offer opinions, quotes or write articles to appear in local media, usually to discuss local matters. MP Williamson occasionally writes articles for his local newspaper. On one occasion while I was shadowing him and he was waiting for his constituents to arrive, he asked his party agent if the article he was asked to write for the local press had been published yet. He explained that he was asked to write a 900-word opinion piece on his Brexit stance three weeks prior, and had not seen it since. He looked annoyed as he looked through the local papers, a habit he had as he waited for the next appointment. "I'm a bit miffed. If you asked me for it, what happened to it?" (personal communication, 8 April 2016). His agent offered to check in with the newspaper on his behalf, and he appeared placated. Another example of MPs appearing in their local news to provide an opinion occurred during my meeting with Andrew Smith MP at his office in the House of Commons. At the end of my interview with him he was finishing a paragraph to be emailed to his local newspaper, and he requested that I wait for a few minutes while he sent it out so that he could walk me out. Apart from it being reported what he does in Westminster, he shared that he is regularly contacted by local media in Oxford to provide quotes, sharing his opinions on policies and incidents that may have an effect on the constituency. On this particular occasion he was writing a paragraph on the opening of a new addiction recovery centre in Blackbird Leys, a council district in his constituency Oxford East (*The Oxford Times*, 3 July 2015).

MP Smith and MP Williamson do not rely on digital tools to enhance their visibility but acknowledge that digital tools are an option they could possibly utilise. MP Williamson does not believe in the use of digital tools to

communicate or enhance his visibility as he considers them "a form of propaganda", preferring his work to speak for itself (personal communication, 7 January 2016). Although he uses email regularly, to be accessible to his constituents, he does not use it to augment his visibility. Rather, as observed, he relies on articles published in the local press to make him visible within his constituency. Looking out for his article and following up on it implies that it matters to him that it is published and thus that he is visible. Furthermore, it suggests that he would like his opinions to be seen by his constituents. However, it must be pointed out that these news articles are also updated on the local newspaper's website, making it digitally visible as well. Interestingly, this dichotomy between what is positive (physical and traditional visibility) and negative (the use of digital tools such as social media) suggests that MP Williamson prefers the communication type over which he has the most control.

MP Smith, on the other hand, does maintain a website, and accounts on Twitter and Facebook. However, he feels "we could do more [online]", and that "there's a limit to how much time you've got for all this stuff though, and my office staff as well. I don't think it's really changed the way I interact with people face-to-face, but it's supplemented it" (personal communication, 1 July 2015). Thus, although Andrew Smith MP uses traditional and new media, it is clear that digital tools are used in addition to physical visibility, which he suggests is core in his constituency performance. To ensure that they are able to maintain a visibility discursive formation without the use of digital platforms, these MPs place importance on appearing in other media. Using traditional media to increase the visibility of the MP is advantageous, as it allows the most control over the message they are trying to send and the image they are trying to portray.

Some MPs feel the need to find more ways to augment their accessibility, but are unsure of how to proceed effectively. MP Marshall, who was elected in 2015 and aims to be the most accessible MP in the Commons, discloses he has not been able to successfully develop a media strategy ("I haven't got a strategy!"), and that he finds that this negatively affects his visibility. Prior to being elected, he "literally just delivered pieces of papers through people's doors. I didn't do

anything on social media" (personal communication, 4 May 2016). Now that he has been elected, he would like to ensure that his constituents know what he is doing for the constituency: "I do get people that come and see me, wanting to know what I am doing. And when I explain it, they want to know why it is not in the local media" (personal communication, 4 May 2016). This indicates that his constituents are aware of how to access him, but imply that they would like information about what he does on behalf of the constituency, and that this information should be easily found. Constituents have some information, but are not consistently informed. Thus, in this case, unlike MPs Smith and Williamson, MP Marshall's lack of strategy online and offline has masked what he does in the constituency, resulting in a partial visibility discursive formation to his disfavour.

Although MPs Williamson, Smith and Marshall are not actively using digital tools to augment their visibility, some MPs have demonstrated that using digital media to produce objects of visibility has become more common. Indeed, there are now more ways to communicate than ever before, creating new fields of action and interaction which involve distinct forms of visibility, with power relations shifting quickly and unpredictably (Thompson, 2005: 34–35). This has made it easier for MPs to publish news, share information and interact with their constituents if they want to. In the next section, I analyse how MPs are drawing on the use of digital tools to augment their visibility discursive formation through the use of what I term the MP digital toolkit.

The MP Digital Toolkit

Apart from relying on print media to augment their visibility, MPs also turn to digital tools. Visibility enabled by digital tools is amplified and more complex. Distance is no longer an issue as large amounts of information and symbolic audio-visual content can be transmitted quickly and simultaneously (Thompson, 2005: 37). Within the context of mediated visibility, "the making visible of actions and events is not just the outcome of leakage in systems of communication and information flow that are increasingly difficult to control: it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be a weapon in the struggles they wage in their day-to-day lives" (Thompson, 2005:

31). Even though they are not always able to see it physically, MPs would like their constituents to be aware that they are qualified, responsible and working for them, doing the job they have been voted to do. This is crucial as MPs relate their visibility to projecting and maintaining their image. Rather than letting their efforts go unnoticed, some of the MPs reveal how they use communication media to create new forms of information exchange and interaction, resulting in distinctive forms of mediated visibility (Thompson, 2005: 34).

The more information constituents have access to, the more visible their local MP becomes to them. Apart from carrying out face-to-face interactions, increased constituency demands have reinforced the need for MPs to not only be available on a medley of platforms, but also to appear to be constantly "on-the-go". Having control over some of the messages they send out about their work allows them to augment their visibility, present themselves to the community and, for some, challenge the entrenched MP stereotype of being out of touch. MP Marshall acknowledges that his constituents are not privy to the work that is carried out, and he has to consider drawing on communication tools in order to make it more visible, "I feel personally committed to let them know what is going on… I may find in time, a different medium for getting information out, because I wonder how… It is not just me having to read the comments, the problem is it's the other people on it. So I wonder how much I want to expose how much of the stuff that goes on there… I won't say I am satisfied because there are lots of challenges and we are doing lots of work. A lot of it is unseen and I do need to find a way to communicate with the people more honestly about what's going on and what the challenges are" (personal communication, 14 May 2016). Here MP Marshall discloses his commitment to sharing what he does as a form of responsibility, but also alludes to the challenges that come along with being visible, particularly online. Not only does he open himself up to attacks by being online, but it is possible that comments made by visitors, who may or may not be constituents, on his digital accounts – positive or negative – will impact how other constituents view him.

Previous research on MPs' use of internet and communication tools have revealed that British MPs use internet-driven tools with their party agenda in mind, with minimal expression of individuality (Norton, 2007: 367). Trends in MP roles and behaviours point towards increased individualism, although party loyalties and career professionalism constrain the scope for independence (Ward and Lusoli, 2005: 60). MPs can (and have) elementarily adopt technologies to improve the efficiency and professionalism of their traditional duties and roles. These include the use of email and personal websites. Furthermore, the development of digital tools such as Twitter and Facebook has enriched MPs' abilities to establish two-way interactive relationships with their constituents (Ward and Lusoli, 2005: 60). As MPs tap into the potential of digital tools to facilitate the visibility discursive formation within their constituencies, an interaction between the online and offline can also be observed.

Email

The use of emails has become ubiquitous in our everyday lives, and this has permeated other areas of society, especially in politics. As explored previously, in Chapter 4, emails have become one of the easiest ways for constituents to access MPs for help, an occurrence that is slowly becoming the norm (Jackson and Lilleker, 2004: 525). Drawing on the same ease of use and minimal drain on resources as with email, MPs can extend their visibility discursive formation beyond face-to-face through the use of e-newsletters. These provide constituents in their contact database updates on what their MP has been up to. How often e-newsletters are sent varies. Out of the 18 MPs I approached, only one did not promote an e-newsletter on their website, which suggests that it is a common, cost-effective and convenient manner in which to share constituency information. The MPs who use e-newsletters do so as an opportunity to make visible what they do for the constituency. MP George Watson says, "I try to keep in touch with those constituents who want to via email. I have an email newsletter I send that out to 4- or 5,000 people now. I arrange for that once a month or once every couple of months, different times, and tell them what I am up to so they get a sense of how busy I am" (personal communication, 22 September 2015). MP Watson's comments suggest that he uses e-newsletters to

maintain an image of "a busy MP", not unlike Paul Flynn MP's suggestion for MPs to, "Never stop working. The alternative is to organise the day to give the impression of a perpetually working MP" (2011: 141). Thus we observe how MP Watson uses this digital tool to keep in touch with his constituents and demonstrate that he is indeed working hard for them. The inconsistent and infrequent sending of e-newsletters suggests that this is not a digital tool primarily utilised by MP Watson. Elaborating further he says, "I think your [sic] constituents want to know that they are getting their value for money". The economic metaphor once again denotes an exchange of goods, one where MP Watson is portraying his visibility in exchange for what seems like his constituents' contentment with his performance.

The use of e-newsletters to augment an MP's visibility is also unlikely to establish a political relationship between MP and constituent on its own. MP Jacob Marshall, who represents a constituency in Cornwall, states, "The other thing I do is an email bulletin about once a month, or I tend to. And that goes to about 8,000 people, and that is all... I don't get any notice from that. I might get five people saying um, raising an issue. Generally speaking, when I see people they appreciate it" (personal communication, 1 July 2016). Here we observe as MP Marshall seems slightly disappointed at the lacklustre response to his email bulletin, but also notices that constituents do inform him that they are appreciative of it when they see him. While it is unclear how many constituents have come up to him to say that, it indicates that the email bulletin is read, thus MP Marshall being able to make visible what he is doing in the constituency, strengthening the symbolic connection between him and the constituents.

Similarly, Labour MP Desmond Hill says, "I've got like maybe 15,000 people on email who [sic] I can write to every week if I want to. I probably don't write them every week they will get sick of it. But I might write to them every fortnight or every month and give them half a dozen things about what I'm doing, or issues I'm interested in, but also things that happen in the constituency and that's brilliant. But you don't want to disenfranchise those people who don't have email" (personal communication, 27 January 2015). Compared to MPs Watson

and Marshall, MP Hill has a significantly larger database of emails. In addition, the e-newsletters are sent out more frequently than for the other MPs, suggesting his efforts at a consistent symbolic construction and sustainment of the discursive formation of visibility. His awareness that these e-newsletters do not reach all of his constituency audience demonstrates his understanding that e-newsletters alone are insufficient, indicating that he is aware that he needs to use a combination of methods to be visible.

The use of e-newsletters for visibility is asynchronous, allowing the MP to sustain interaction with a bigger group of people, while giving the sender time to manage their self-presentation more strategically (Baym, 2010: 7–8). With e-newsletters, MPs have the opportunity to carefully select the stories that portray them in the best light, rather than simply listing everything they have done. While the MP does not necessarily get a reply from those on the mailing list, they are able to promote themselves on their terms, and remind their constituents of their presence. It is also evident that e-newsletters are not used in isolation, but in conjunction with other methods of providing visibility.

Personal Websites

Prior to 2000, it was not common for British MPs to have their own websites. There were only 97 accessible Member sites in 2000, and this increased to only 186 in 2002 (The Guardian, 2000; Jackson and Lilleker, 2004: 524). In a survey of 168 MPs carried out in 2008, 85% of respondents have their own websites (Williamson, 2009: 518-9). At last count, approximately 370 MPs have personal websites (Parliament UK, 2017). Across all sites, party affiliations are clearly displayed on the main banner in colours that are normally associated with each party[8]. Background information on each MP can be found on their site, including their policy interests, activities and the various channels through which constituents are able to get in touch (Campbell et al, 1999). As an extension of what they already do offline, Members also use their website to promote their

[8] Websites for Labour Party MPs have red banners, Conservative Party MPs blue and Liberal Democrat MPs yellow with green details.

own causes (as well as their parties'), press releases, speeches that were made and further MP details (Williamson, 2009: 3; Norton, 2007: 367). Given the tribal nature of British politics, it is unsurprising to find that MPs do not appear motivated to use their sites to engage with and seek views (Norton, 2007: 367). Similarly, previous research on American electoral candidates resisting the interactive nature of the internet revealed the need to tightly control the information disseminated to residents (Stromer-Galley, 2000). The nature of the internet makes trying to control the flow of symbolic content within it problematic, subsequently making it harder for those in power to ensure that the images and information circulated are those they want to be disseminated (Thompson, 2005: 38). Using interactive components of the internet possesses the potential for messages to be misinterpreted by target audiences, and the possibility of impacting the candidate's image. In other words, personal sites are used primarily to disseminate information on the Member and their party in a mono-directional manner.

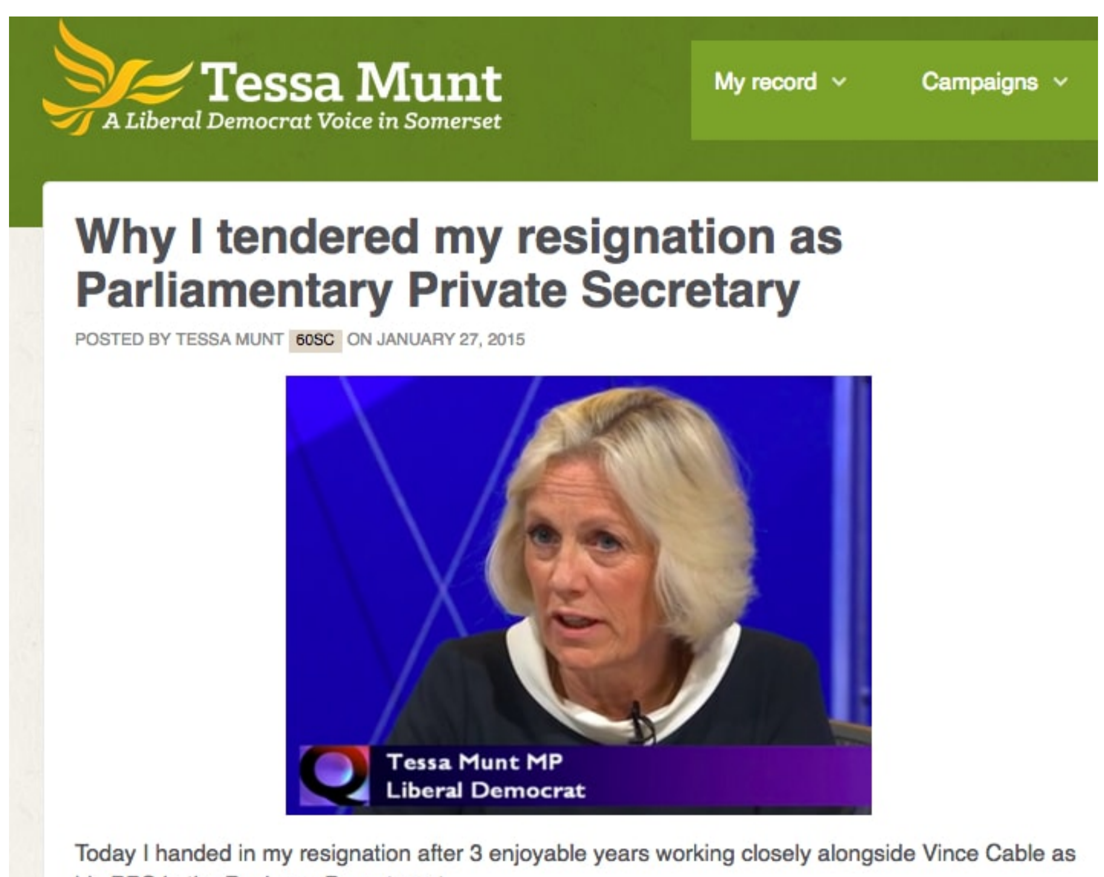
Individualistic elements and innovative methods of encouraging interactivity with constituents on MP websites can be observed. All 18 of the MPs I interviewed and shadowed maintained a website separate from their main party's sites, displaying many of the elements highlighted above. Information on how to reach the MP is provided. This includes the MP's email address, a phone number, the address of the constituency office and links to social media accounts. Through the personalisation of their websites and approaches, MPs manifest their desire to control their message and image portrayed to their constituents. Although some MPs have recognised the importance of using some form of bi-directional communication, I have found that MPs still seek to control their message, preferring to engage with constituents symbolically. MP David Miller, who has been representing a suburban constituency in greater London since 1997, uses his website to seek constituent views on the latest policy issues in the form of an e-survey. The e-survey is promoted clearly on the website with a hyperlink on the navigation bar. According to MP Miller, he has carried out this e-survey annually over the last 12 years, with over 700 constituents taking part in the survey in 2013. At the time of my fieldwork there was a link to his "20 Seconds

Survey" displayed prominently on his website. This survey consists of four succinct multiple-choice questions. Respondents are asked about their local concerns, national concerns, thoughts on their MP and whom they would vote for if there was an election tomorrow. At the end of the survey respondents are asked for their name, email address, postcode and phone number (optional). MP Woodward also uses online (along with paper-based) surveys regularly, citing response rates of about 30 to 70 per cent (personal communication, 1 July 2015). Encouragement of interaction online not only allows the MP to appear more accessible, and garner useful views from constituents, but also to engage with citizens who might not be politically active offline. By keeping his surveys short, MP Miller makes it easy for constituents on his website to quickly share their views. During our interview, MP Miller also mentioned that results from these e-surveys help him monitor concerns within the constituency (personal communication, 26 June 2015). Although it is unclear how frequently these results are tabulated and how much they are used to implement changes in the constituency, the dissemination of e-surveys itself indicates a symbolic form of visibility. MPs are seen to be showing interest in the constituency and what constituents have to say, thus strengthening the discursive formation of visibility.

Some MPs also use their sites to make personal blog posts (as demonstrated by Peter Kyle MP's anniversary post on his personal website and Facebook account discussed in Chapter 4), to share sentiments on certain policy outcomes they might have disagreed with or explain why they voted in a particular direction in the Commons. It is a platform for drawing attention to causes they are passionate about, or providing an explanation for actions undertaken. When MP Tessa Munt resigned as Parliamentary Private Secretary to then Business Secretary Vince Cable MP over her opposition to the extraction of shale gas (also known as fracking)[9], a blog post was immediately uploaded to her website and her Facebook page, explaining her actions to her constituents (Image 5.4). This matter was controversial, with MP Munt standing firm on her views against the party line, citing the negative environmental impact that fracking would have on

[9] Tessa Munt's resignation took place on 27 January 2015.

her constituency. Although it is unclear how many of her constituents read the post, it serves as an official statement from MP Munt amongst the news articles reporting her resignation as Parliamentary Private Secretary. Using her website as a space to post her own thoughts visibly, she was able to challenge and preemptively respond to possible negative attacks on her.



(Image 5.4: Tessa Munt, www.tessamunt.org, 27 January 2015)

I shadowed MP Munt in her constituency the weekend after her resignation, as she carried out her surgeries as scheduled on the weekend of 30 January 2015. She held two surgeries in Shepton Mallet and Chilcompton on Friday, and two other surgeries in Glastonbury and Meare on Saturday. An A4-sized pale green poster with MP Munt's name and photo was placed on the window or door of each café and pub where advice surgeries were held. These surgeries were labelled 'Can We Help' Advice Centres, and a schedule of dates and contact details were listed clearly. During these surgeries, 27 constituents came to seek help, with 10 of those mentioning her resignation over the course of their meeting with her. These statements were made positively, generally commending her for standing

up for their community. The following vignettes from these particular surgeries highlight instances of constituents approaching MP Munt, broaching the subject of fracking and her resignation from her parliamentary role.

Tom, 77, sought MP Munt's help during her surgery in Shepton Mallet. He explained that his wife suffered from the advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease. As her primary caregiver, he lacked the resources to meet her care needs, and required help in applying for financial support. Tessa Munt MP emphathised, as her own stepfather's mother suffered from the same illness. She took Tom's details down and as he prepared to leave he said, "I commend everything you have done, especially to do with fracking". MP Munt laughed as she thanked him, then asked if he voted for her during the last election in 2010. He stated that he was a former Tory voter, and said "I did, and I think I will be voting again. Well done on fracking" (personal communication, 30 January 2015).

Another resident came up to the table to greet MP Munt between cases. Greeting her, MP Munt shook her hand, as the constituent leant in to whisper, "Thank you for doing all you can about fracking. We are terrified of pollution" (personal communication, 30 January 2015). MP Munt thanked her, saying "I was doing all I can till the very last minute I tell you".

Jane and Steve Reynolds were next in line to see MP Munt about their neighbour next door. According to the Reynolds, the house had been in decay since their neighbour's husband died. MP Munt offered to come by the house to have a look. The Reynolds thanked her and brought up her "tough week", referring to her resignation. MP Munt was cheerful in her response as she talked about her personal story fighting against fracking, "That is alright! I feel so much better".

Following this surgery another one was held at the village hall in Chilcompton. MP Munt's caseworker Bianca was with us. As we made our way there in the car, MP Munt referred to the response she had received from her constituents on her anti-fracking petition and her resignation. She described the feedback received as positive, with many people congratulating her. She also updated us on her plans

to write an article to be published in *The Telegraph*[10] "about this fracking malady. I just want to say I did by my best principles".

On Saturday at her Glastonbury surgery, MP Munt spoke with a constituent she recognised from a previous surgery. The constituent, Nadia, provided an update on her case, and mentioned that she "really came to say congrats on your stand on fracking. It must have been really difficult". MP Munt admitted, "It really was. But I am still the MP and I am standing again". She also went on to tell Nadia that she had done an interview about fracking, approximately 10 minutes long, with the Russia Today programme *Going Underground*, which would be airing that week. Nadia took note and said, "I just wanted to say thank you and well done".

Apart from these surgery interactions, I observed as constituents stopped MP Munt to greet her as she walked around the four towns and villages between surgeries. Most of them called out to her by name, demonstrating an awareness and recognition of their local MP. Although it cannot be determined where these constituents read or heard about MP Munt's resignation, it can be observed that she extended her visibility by informing constituents about other media appearances she would be doing or had done. It is possible that the resignation in itself made her more visible to her constituents, but by choosing to discuss it online, she capitalised on the exposure it had provided her, extending her visibility both online and offline.

Social Media

Adoption of social media by MPs has increased significantly over the last 15 years (Coleman, 2007; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). Other than making the MP more accessible, they are used as tools to make visible information on what an MP is busy with (both within the constituency and in Westminster) and local goings on. More significantly, these digital tools are synchronous, enabling MPs to

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[10] The article she referred to during this interaction cannot be found. It is not certain that it was published, but an opinion piece by MP Munt was found in *The Mirror* that weekend (published 30 January 2015).

communicate and interact with their constituents in real time, within online spaces. The most commonly used social media platforms by MPs in this study were Facebook and Twitter, with some MPs venturing into other communication channels. MP William Morgan brought up the possibilities of using other media platforms to communicate and share with constituents, including photo-sharing application Instagram and business-networking site LinkedIn (personal communication, 29 July 2015). MP George Watson raised the possibility of using text-messaging application WhatsApp. Inspired by the National Childbirth Trust (he disclosed that he recently had a baby with his partner), he said that he thought it might be useful for constituents to gain access to him should they require help (personal communication, 22 September 2015).

MPs hold varying views when it comes to running their own social media accounts. MP Christopher Lewis emphasises the importance of personally managing his social media channels, as he believes the public can tell that he is the one communicating. On the other hand, some MPs rely on the help of their staff to manage their accounts. MP Harry Grove uses both Twitter and Facebook. He uses Twitter to "retweet civic events and local activities, and interesting things. I have a Facebook account, and I don't run it". He also mentions that he does not usually receive direct messages on these platforms. Three other MPs in my study also mentioned having help with managing their social media accounts.

Since its inception in 2004, Facebook and the number of its users have grown rapidly. At present, there are an average of 1.32 billion daily active users, and 2.01 billion monthly users on the largest global social media platform (Facebook, 2017). In the UK, 60 per cent of the population are on Facebook, a statistic that makes adopting Facebook as a means of communication practical and fairly straightforward for MPs (Internet World Statistics, 2017). In 2005 only 3 per cent of British MPs were on social networking sites, increasing to 23 per cent in 2009 (Williamson, 2009: 39). Initial use of Facebook and other social media platforms was limited to information sharing as the predominant online strategy (Lilleker and Koc Michalska, 2013: 192). This is increasingly no longer the case, with MPs demonstrating use of Facebook's interactive architecture to not only make visible

their activities, but, in some cases, bring up policies and enter into discussions (Ibid). Image 5.5 is an example of how MP Miller not only makes visible what activities he has carried out, but touches on issues the constituency is facing and his role in the solution, and shares his own emotions.

(Image 5.5: David Miller MP Facebook Update, 25 June 2015)

The increased visibility enabled by use of digital tools has also resulted in subsequent interactions offline. An instance of this occurred while I was shadowing Conservative MP Barnaby Wright in his constituency in Essex. He met his Westminster parliamentary assistant and me at the train station to drive us to the location where the surgery was going to be held. After coming into the station, he went to the station coffee stall and bought himself breakfast, while chatting to the barista. As this occurred a constituent, who had just disembarked a train, approached to discuss an update that MP Wright had posted on Facebook and his blog the night before. The constituent, John, also talked about how he had commented on the post, which concerned train improvements in the constituency. John was an engineer working in London. His job required shift work, which meant that he occasionally missed the last train home, or had trouble getting to work on the weekends due to engineering repairs to the train lines. In this incident we can observe face-to-face communication about digital communication, and the ways in which one enables or reinforces the other.

MPs also demonstrate preferences for various social media platforms. For example, Andrew Smith MP puts "stuff out on Twitter… To a lesser extent on Facebook", demonstrating his preference for Twitter over Facebook. On the other

hand, Peter Kyle MP prefers Facebook over Twitter as it allows him the capacity to share detailed posts. Describing the strength of Facebook, he says "If you go to my Facebook account, and then to my Twitter account, you will see instantly that I love Facebook and that I find Twitter quite difficult. I used to love Twitter when I was a campaigner, because you just get punchy things out there and it lands and you get quoted in the papers and that sort of thing. But when you want to actually make a sophisticated argument, it's difficult. Facebook has the potential to have emotional intelligence… The way you post, the way you lay out your stall in each individual post, and also in the way you interact with people after it. You give people the opportunity to do so back to you." MPs show awareness that the affordances and features of different platforms enable different kinds of dialogue, and seek ways to use these for maximum persuasion or engagement.

Twitter is the largest microblogging platform in the world (Tromble, 2016: 7), with 328 million monthly active users globally (Forbes, 2017). As I discussed in Chapter 4, 84 per cent (546 out of 650) of MPs have a Twitter account. It has become an easy and popular method for MPs to let their constituents know about what they are occupied with, in bite-sized 140 character-long updates. Having a Twitter account has steadily become the rule rather than the exception for politicians in Western democracies (Burson-Marsteller, 2014). Apart from the ability to post individual updates, Twitter also allows several mechanisms for user interaction, including basic retweeting (where user reposts the original message content without changes), modified retweeting (part of the original message content is reposted with changes made by the user), -@ mentions (where users are able to contact or acknowledge another user within the content) and -@ replies (where users directly respond to another's tweet) (Tromble, 2016: 7). Previously carried out research on politicians' use of Twitter reveals it is primarily used as a tool for political marketing and impression management rather than interaction with other users (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Larsson and Moe, 2013).

However, more recent research has found that politicians are increasingly utilising Twitter's interactive features (Enli and Skogerø, 2013; Larsson and Ihlen, 2015). More specifically, in the case of the UK, Graham et al's (2013) study of the

use of Twitter by politicians during the 2010 General Election indicates that the majority of British politicians used Twitter to distribute information, with a small group of politicians displaying interactive behaviour with voters.

(Image 5.6: Tweet by Peter Kyle MP, 14 May 2016)

Within the scope of this study, it is observed that many MPs do use Twitter as part of their everyday activities to disseminate information mono-directionally. As demonstrated in Image 5.6, Peter Kyle MP uses Twitter to update his constituents on what he has done within the community. As an object produced as part of the discursive action, this photo of him in action further reinforces his visibility. Similarly, we can see David Miller MP tweeting about his surgery (Image 6.7) below. I was present as he carried out the surgery mentioned and note that he chose to send this tweet after the surgery had ended, and not while it was still going on, as mentioned. He expressed that it was important to him to

maintain his personal security while remaining visible, so he preferred not to provide real time updates (personal communication, 26 June 2015). As I will demonstrate in Chapter 6, physical and verbal assaults do occur, disrupting the advice surgery. I will also show how MPs repair the interaction.

(Image 5.7: Tweet by David Miller MP, 26 June 2015)

Twitter's 140 character limit and ease of use has earned the site MP enthusiasts. MP Christopher Lewis really enjoys using Twitter because it means he can update his constituents on meetings, parliamentary debates and local issues quickly and easily. He also finds that Twitter allows him to reach out to constituents across various demographics. For him, Twitter is less political and more of an online diary as he uses it to "keep constituents informed about what I am doing". This is a similar use to MP Miller's tweets about his surgeries, above. MP Lewis asserts that the nature of his tweets is not especially political, and finds that most of his followers are local. Unlike MPs who only use Twitter to share information, he likes to use it as an avenue to ask for his constituents' opinions, in order to stay accountable. He said that once he was in a pub to meet his constituents and was unable to be seen because he was physically blocked out of view by the people around him. However, through Twitter -@ mentions and tweets about his presence by those he was visible to, constituents were informed about where he was in the pub and were able to meet him (personal communication, 17 October 2014). This is a clear example of how the offline and online can interact with each other within a hybrid media environment. There is an almost collaborative nature to this episode, where tweets shared by his constituents helped with the visibility of MP Lewis in person.

Similarly, William Morgan MP says that although all online and offline tools are useful to him, he prefers Twitter as it is easy for him to update. Having worked when he was younger as a parliamentary assistant for an MP who did not use any

form of digital tool, he is aware of how much the job has changed, and he considers social media to play a "huge" role in the lives of MPs (personal communication, 29 July 2015). However, he is cautious and aware that reliance on Twitter might result in slight laziness on his part, "I mean, if you put everything on Twitter, then you think 'Oh everybody has heard you', and you forget about all the other things. You forget about the other people" (personal communication, 29 July 2015). It is evident that the convenience of Twitter appeals to MP Morgan. While he acknowledges how useful it can be, he also demonstrates an awareness that relying on it for visibility would result in the neglect of non-Twitter users in his constituency. Furthermore, there is the uncertainty of how many of his followers are indeed constituents. As I will show in the following paragraphs, he is not alone in his concerns about social media.

Analysing Concerns and Differences

Some MPs do express concern that use of digital tools, especially social media, may overshadow the primary responsibilities of MPs, despite their potential for positively impacting MPs' visibility. Using social media as a barometer for the concerns of the constituency is likely to result in misconceptions of what is really going on, on the ground. MP Samuel Pollock agrees that almost every MP has an online presence, and has a Twitter account, a Facebook page and a website. Out of these digital tools he believes that the majority of his constituents look at his Facebook and Twitter pages the most, rather than use his website. He discloses, "I slightly worry that in Parliament we are spending more time on Twitter and Facebook than we should" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). Speaking specifically about Twitter, he agrees that MPs are very active on that platform, and discloses that he is "in two minds about that". While he thinks that it is positive to share information about visits and policy stances, he worries about the risk of Twitter being an echo chamber. He fears that as people seek out other accounts with similar views to their own, these views will be reinforced rather than challenged. He considers this possibility "a political danger". He also demonstrates concern about the message only being received by a small percentage of his constituents. At the time of the interview, he estimates he has

about 10,000 Twitter followers[11]. He raises the question of how many of his followers are actually one of the approximately 61,000 voters in his constituency. Although he is not certain, he speculates that constituents only constitute a small minority of his followers, and raises the need to be careful about considering Twitter a form of mass communication when in reality it is not. This suggests he is of the opinion that the public sphere should be regulated or monitored, to prevent the possibility of filter bubbles or echo chambers leading to groupthink.

MP Williamson, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is insistent about not using Facebook and Twitter. He does, however, maintain a web presence by way of a website, and uses email regularly to respond to constituent problems. He considers the use of Twitter for self-promotion and image management a form of political propaganda. As MPs choose to promote themselves and heighten their visibility through these channels, he vehemently expresses his view that being seen physically is how he prefers to be judged. Saying that it is a personal choice, he does not see any advantages to its use, but in fact thinks, "there are quite serious drawbacks to doing it, which I can pick up from colleagues". He espoused face-to-face interaction as more crucial than ever, especially in light of the internet. Elaborating, he says, "I have to say I am not overwhelmingly impressed with it as a means of communication because it seems to me that all communications are a form of propaganda: 'I am now going to visit, you know, X School, in my constituency' and 'This is where I am at the present moment'. And I think it can become a treadmill, that's my personal view... What you're doing, is with a, let's face it, an intention of trying to put the best possible image forward about your proactivity. Well I think I prefer people to judge me on my proactivity on what they actually in reality see and experience! And I think actually there is a risk if you do that, at the end of the day people are going to say that's rather shallow." MP Williamson is observed to contest the very idea of MPs "artificially" making visible what they do in the constituency. As he stated earlier in this chapter, he believes that his presence in the constituency during constituency activities is more than enough visibility for him to be a successful representative.

[11] He presently has 16 900 followers on his Twitter account (2017).

In this sense, the same Twitter feed would be considered by MP Lewis to be an online diary, but by MP Williamson to be propaganda.

Thus, it is evident that not only are MPs viewing traditional media and digital tools differently, but how they use these tools within the process of contemporary constituency service varies as well. MPs Pollock and Williamson are aware that their colleagues in the Commons make use of an array of digital tools, but are wary of these tools for different reasons. MP Williamson, while agreeing that being seen is important, thinks that it is important to do so in a fashion that does not come across as political spin. Rather than self-promote his activities, he prefers to rely on physical visibility and face-to-face interactions with his constituents. However, as I have shown earlier with the example of his opinion piece, MP Williamson's effort to resist digital tools as propaganda is not as unambiguous as he claims it to be. MP Pollock, on the other hand, demonstrates concern that overreliance on social media platforms will result in MPs not only mimicking each other in terms of policies and issues at hand, but in them neglecting issues that might concern only their constituents. Despite this apprehension, MP Pollock is still active on his social media accounts. Is MP Pollock's performance less authentic than MP Williamson's, as he uses social media despite recognising its pitfalls?

As I have demonstrated, an MP's visibility is not always evident, nor is it well-defined, to an observer. On one end of the spectrum, some MPs, such as MPs Williamson and Pollock, believe that only co-presence, through physical visibility, will allow for portrayal of authenticity in the representation performance. The use of digital tools is unrealistic and unnatural as it is not the MP's "real self". This in turn might have further ramifications such as the establishment of an echo chamber that is unrepresentative of the constituency. Thus, physical visibility is kept separate from any use of digital tools as they try to preserve the core image of themselves as a single entity. In the middle of the spectrum of use of digital tools are MPs like Andrew Smith MP and Harry Grove MP, whom emphasise physical visibility, but use digital tools to supplement their visibility. Their use of digital tools, especially social media platforms, is basic.

Meandering between co-presence and digital tools means their efforts are slightly divided, with more effort placed on co-presence. On the other end of the spectrum, Christopher Lewis MP, Peter Kyle MP and William Morgan MP have remarked on the importance of digital tools as they seek to portray authenticity with as much transparency around their actions as possible. Their use of social media to symbolically construct their visibility is just as pertinent as what they do physically, fluidly moving from physical presence to traditional media and digital tools with ease. Thus, it is found that MPs are integrating co-presence with traditional media and digital tools in the discursive formation of visibility along a continuum, from low to no integration emphasising co-present visibility, to average integration with an emphasis on co-presence, to high integration with equal emphasis on additional tools and co-presence.

Baym (2010: 51) suggests that digital media should be considered "a new and eclectic mixed modality that combines elements of face to face communication with elements of writing, rather than a diminished form of embodied interaction". As MPs strive to maintain an everyday visibility discursive formation, they demonstrate an awareness of the range of digital tools they are able to tap into. This gives rise to questions of how authentic these self-presentations are, and if offline behaviour is consistent with what online behaviour. Enli theorises a concept of "mediated authenticity", referring to authenticity as a currency in the communicative relation between producers and audiences (2015: 1). Despite the benefits of digital tools, there are disadvantages when compared with physical, face-to-face interactions. Face-to-face interactions are typically "dialogical", characterised by a two-way flow of information and communication (Thompson, 2005: 32). When one person speaks to another person or group, the audience can reply, resulting in a dialogue. This exchange encompasses a varying choice of words; changes in vocal intonation; symbolic cues; and facial expressions that convey and interpret. However, when visibility and interactions take place via the use of other tools or media, some of these social cues are lost in varying degrees (Baym, 2010: 9). Unlike physical visibility, mediated visibility is not situated within a shared physical space. Examples of this include MP David Miller's online survey and MP Samuel Pollock's concerns about

how many of his Twitter followers are his constituents. In the case of MP Grove and his "on"/"off" modes for instance, the absence of social cues in these tools throws doubt on what is being presented, making it impossible to tell when he is "on" or "off". There is also the risk that the selves we portray through digital media do not line up with those presented face-to-face, calling into question the authenticity of our identities, relationships and practices (Baym, 2010: 3).

In addition, whilst MPs Williamson and Pollock express doubts about reliance on digital media, there is evidence that MP-constituent interaction is no longer limited to either offline or online. Significantly, we observe that MPs not only supplement their visibility and existing relationships with their constituents online but are able to build offline relationships that may have started online. Although online interactions may have sparser social cues than face-to-face interactions, they focus on issues that personally impact the constituents and can have a positive effect on relationship development offline. Mediated meeting challenges our conventional comprehension of relationship building as we are used to evaluating people and their nonverbal cues in person (Baym, 2010: 103). Furthermore, the extension of visibility takes place beyond the physical space where the interactions can take place. We observed as MPs Munt and Wright were approached in public by constituents only *after* said constituents had viewed or interacted with them online, demonstrating the fluidity between the situated spaces where these visible interactions can take place. Thus, it can be said that making a choice between visibility facilitated by co-presence, the use of digital tools, or both, is not binary. In the hybrid media system these interactions take place in, these choices fall along a continuum. It is not a matter of which tools of visibility MPs choose to use, but how much they choose to use them.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to build on my question of how MPs are carrying out the process of the contemporary constituency service. MPs acknowledge the difficulties faced as they strive to be seen by their constituents. The distance between Westminster and their constituencies, keeping up with the challenges of technological advances and adoption of various social media platforms and the

desire to prioritise their constituency needs, amidst other responsibilities, have been cited as some reasons for these difficulties. Sustaining visibility is significant to the MP on standby because it intensifies the symbolic connection between the MP-actor and constituent-audience in their pursuit of performance re-fusion. Significantly, my findings suggest that MPs convey the visibility discursive formation to prompt constituents about their efforts and presence, while simultaneously accentuating consistency throughout their social performance of being on standby.

As Members make choices about what they do and say around their constituencies they can, to a degree, control how they present themselves, and subsequently the image their constituents have of them. Through details of my observations and interviews, I have demonstrated the lengths MPs go to to make the invisible visible. I have shown how physical presence occurs when the MP and constituent are in the same place or able to see each other. MPs indicated a common understanding across different political orientations that the risk of distance affecting constituent perception of the MP is very real, and of the value of emphasising one's visibility. MPs also suggested that being visible not only informs constituents about their presence, but also projects a sense of interest in their lives, lending credibility to their position as a representative. In addition, MPs are able to use these opportunities to be seen to monitor their constituencies, adding to their arsenal of knowledge on standby. I also revealed how MPs sustain their visibility in the constituency through constituency routines in their weekly schedules.

With the ubiquity of digital tools such as the internet, email and social media platforms becoming staples in our everyday lives, being seen in the flesh is no longer the only way constituents are able to know what MPs are doing, in or out of the constituency. The use of communication media has lead to the creation of novel forms of action and interaction, resulting in changing visibility. Thus, I also sought to understand how MPs used traditional media and digital tools in their constituency service. I discussed how MPs integrate the use of these tools with traditional means of increasing visibility to provide a structure, or symbolic

scaffolding, as MPs seek to portray authenticity and re-fuse their constituency performances. Furthermore, evidence suggests that while all MPs agree on the importance of visibility and do seek to be seen, the use of digital tools to augment accessibility is still met with mixed responses. I make the argument that the choice of how visible they want to be is not necessarily a binary decision, but one that occurs along a continuum. My findings indicate that MPs integrate the use of traditional media and digital tools along a spectrum of low to no integration, emphasising co-present visibility, average integration with an emphasis on co-presence and high integration with equal emphasis on additional tools and co-presence. The nature of the media environment within which these interactions take place also indicates that the online and offline spaces are not separate entities, thus resulting in my finding that deciding not to engage in any form of digital presence is a false choice, for there is no decision to be made.

Lastly, it must be said that visibility itself does not guarantee a positive performance re-fusion. The positioning of themselves in the constituency, when and how they want to see and be seen, implies that MPs have complete control over how and when they choose to be visible. With more channels for interactions, problems such as inauthenticity, inconsistency and lack of control over messages and images may arise. Furthermore, the proliferation of media and communication tools, and the blurring between the private and public, has meant that events such as political scandals and unsavoury incidents might make their way into the public eye more often (Thompson, 2000; 2005). On the proliferation of digital tools for visibility, Jerry Hayes MP states that, "Social media is a serious nightmare. If MPs think that they have so many followers because of their personal popularity, they are in need of a prefrontal lobotomy. Journalists, opponents and all-round loons are just hoping for them to say something really daft" (2014: 298). As I will address in Chapter 6, politicians may encounter people they did not expect to meet, possibly derailing their plans, thus requiring repair to overcome the disruption.

6 We Interrupt Your Regularly Scheduled Programming… MP Routines and Repairs

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I delve into deeper detail about the performance between MP and constituents, and the challenges MPs face, by discussing the discursive formation of repair. Close probing of the patterns of these performances in Chapters 4 and 5 has allowed us to understand how MPs perform the process of contemporary constituency service through accessibility and visibility – forming the foundation of my standby MP argument; the integrative relationship between traditional media and digital tools used to advance these discursive formations; and how MPs divide their resources and time to work in Westminster and the constituency. In Chapter 5, I discussed how even if the nature of each event or issue is not always the same, a sense of general routine to an MP's week can be observed. Recurrent elements of this routine can be detected, such as the carrying out of advice surgeries, weekly walkabouts in the constituency and regularly planned industry meetings. Routines are an integral part of how discursive formations are experienced by those involved in their emergence. They are carried out by default, an innately known phenomenon that seems to be unquestioned, where "the strength of its influence lies in its latency" (Coleman, 2013: 57). For instance, advice surgeries are usually held on a weekly or fortnightly basis, and are a keystone of the constituency service. Looking deeper into these schedules, the discursive formation of repair can be detected. During these performances, MPs are expected to help constituents solve their problems and repair any negative impressions of themselves, the party and Westminster. This discursive formation consists of a body of knowledge, in which constituents are made aware of the MP's ability as a means to obtain help; the production of roles such as constituency caseworker as well as the MP as a safety valve and social worker; creation of objects such as written letters on behalf of constituents; with rules such as limits on the MP's jurisdiction within their own constituency in place.

While routines and patterns can be observed in the MP's work, what happens when the performance of repair does not go according to plan? For example, the emergence of a global event with significant political ramifications has the potential to alter an MP's schedule at the last minute, impacting work in the Commons and the constituency. Constituents intending to see MPs about their difficulties will be unable to do so, potentially further enlarging the gulf between actor and audience. Performances in the constituency are also privy to erratic interferences, with the real possibility of danger and assault. Jo Cox, Labour MP for Batley and Spen in Yorkshire, was on her way to her advice surgery on 15 June 2016 when she was fatally stabbed by one of her constituents (*Guardian*, 15 June 2016). This attack on an MP is not an isolated incident. It is not uncommon for MPs to be assaulted or attacked by their constituents during surgeries. Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham, was stabbed twice in the stomach while carrying out a constituency surgery on 14 May 2010. Previous MPs attacked during their constituency service include Liberal Democrat Peer Lord Nigel Jones MP in 2000 and Ulster Unionist MP Robert Bradford in 1981 (*Guardian*, 16 June 2016). MPs have also been at the receiving end of death threats (*Guardian*, 30 August 2015). Thus it is understandable that MPs can feel unsafe while out in their constituencies, in comparison to Westminster, where security measures are higher (*Financial Times*, 23 March 2017). Furthermore, recent research has exposed that four out of five MPs are victims of intrusive or aggressive behaviour (James et al, 2016).

Changes in schedule, unhappy constituents, differences of opinions and occasional hostility can mean that the MP-constituent interaction is not a pleasant or smooth sailing affair. Thus, I argue that actors seek successful performances even in the seemingly ordinary everyday interactions they carry out repeatedly as part of a routine. I discuss how regular constituency activities such as the advice surgery are routine performances in which MPs seek to successfully portray legitimacy and achieve authenticity. I demonstrate over the course of my empirical evidence that the unpredictability of their field of work is continually emphasised by MPs and their caseworkers. In this chapter I argue that as MPs react to these unexpected incidents while on standby, they spring into action,

seeking to resolve these issues and achieve performance re-fusion. To this purpose, I extend existing literature on constituency service interactions by analysing a specific routine performance – the MP surgery – to their constituent-audience. I address challenges faced during the contemporary constituency service process, first by analysing how a routine performance between the MP-actor and audience-constituent takes place when repair advances smoothly, when and what type of challenges and interruptions occur and how they are overcome as MPs react to these obstacles. Overcoming disturbances successfully requires tact and finesse on the part of the MP. I analyse how MPs rely on three techniques: the use of logic; exertion of authority; and counselling, to overcome these breakdowns in their symbolic performance as quickly as possible and return to routine process. Finally, I assess performative differences across various stages of repair.

The rest of this chapter will begin by discussing routines in the constituency service, followed by an analysis of how a typical MP advice surgery episode is performed. I outline a framework of this MP-constituent interaction process and the steps it includes. Then, I draw on my fieldwork observations to examine when interruptions occur over the course of the process, and the nature of these interferences. Lastly, I deal with the skills MPs exhibit to overcome these interruptions, and the performative differences detected between backstage and frontstage behaviour exhibited by MPs over the course of the repair process to re-fuse their performances. As I suggest here and investigate more fully in the next chapter, the symbolic work in the repair discursive formation, along with those of accessibility and visibility, contributes to construction of meaning, projection and maintenance of power, as part of the MP's performance of being on standby.

6.2 Routines and Ritual-like interactions in Constituency Service

There is an institutional need for Members to straddle responsibilities between Westminster and their constituency. Some responsibilities are location specific, such as parliamentary votes, debates and Early Day Motions, and occur only as part of their Westminster face. As a conduit between Westminster and constituency, constituency service activities carried out by the MP could be

considered a performance of democracy in action. These processes often include regularly carried out repetitive actions that can be considered to be part of the MP's performative routine. Within a simpler social setting, such as a village, the authenticity of one's performance is not often questioned. A smaller society means that there are fewer gaps between what people know and recall within a shared memory (Connerton, 1989: 17). Modern society does not merely mean a larger audience within an enlarged physical space, but a change in audience demographics. As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, technological advances and the complexity of modern society have resulted in the de-fusion of social and cultural elements in performances, resulting in them being viewed as inauthentic. Rifts might occur, resulting in disbelief in the interaction. Much of this depends on how receptive the audience is to the actor. The success of the interaction is at once an enactment and experience of a set of meanings that is already socially established, as actors in complex societies seek to overcome these fractures by creating fluidity and achieving authenticity through their performances (Alexander, 2011: 55). As audiences become more involved in the interaction, and more invested in what the actor has to say or do, the performance is able to encourage them out of "demographic and subcultural niches into a more widely shared universalistic liminal space, to sustain collective belief" (Alexander, 2011: 77). For a successful performative action, the actor must be able to communicate the meanings of their actions that they consciously or unconsciously want their audiences to understand and believe (Kertzer, 1988). Only then will it sanctify the existing system and those in power within it.

Routines and rituals are terms that are often used interchangeably. Before exploring details of the interaction process, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by routine, ritual-like and ritual, and how they fit within the analytical framework I put forth in Chapter 2. On a superficial level, it may appear that there is not much of a distinction between the three terms. They allude to repetition of conventional, taken-for-granted gestures. Yet a difference emerges between the three; a distinction that is vital to the argument within this chapter as we discuss performances in the constituency. Routine refers to a repeated act that is culturally embedded to the point of appearing naturalised and has an

instrumental function (Coleman, 2013: 57). It serves a purpose, much like a means to an end, and does not usually involve a performance of meaning.

Unlike routine, ritual performs a displacement function, allaying anxieties about what might otherwise happen (Coleman, 2013: 57). A general investigation into the meaning of the term ritual has resulted in a number of interpretations, with a consensus that ritual connects the past to the present, as well as the present to the future, giving meaning to the world around us. Durkheim (1915) takes on a systematic worldview on rituals, arguing that rituals are needed to support social solidarity. Nations are not dissimilar from simple hunter and gatherer groups, as they present themselves to people through symbolic representations of the collectivity (Kertzer, 1988: 64). Rituals can bring people together either by identifying a common allegiance through these symbols and making them feel as one, or through a negative solidarity such as a witch hunt, which reaffirms national purposes and forging of national solidarity through action (Ibid). Kertzer, on the other hand, takes a middle path when defining the role of ritual in politics, between "an overly restrictive definition, which would limit ritual to the religious sphere and identify it with the supernatural, and an overly broad definition, labelling as ritual any standardised human activity" (Kertzer, 1988: 8). He considers ritual as an analytical category that allows us to understand the chaos of human experience within a coherent framework (Ibid). Repetitive, standardised action bereft of symbolisation is merely a specimen of habit and not ritual. Symbolisation gives ordinary action much more important meaning. It is through the use of ritual that beliefs about the universe come to be acquired, reinforced and eventually changed. Ritual not only gives meaning to the universe, it becomes part of the universe as well.

Similar to Kertzer's definition, I consider ritual a successful formal, structured action often enacted at certain places and times. Its success as a ritual, as opposed to a routine, occurs by portraying symbolic meaning that is understood by both actor and audience. The manifestation of a successful performance is, quite simply, the absence of the performance itself. The signifiers seem to become what they signify, with no evidence of relying on scripts, props, power or

audiences (Alexander, 2011: 55). In essence, flow is achieved. Alexander draws from Bourdieu's concept of "becoming natural" – where a performance has achieved its aim of "an experience of aesthetic grace" (2011: 55). "When performance is successful, social powers manifest themselves not as external or hegemonic forces that facilitate or oppose the unfolding performance but merely as sign-vehicles, as means of representation, as conveyors of the intended meaning" (Alexander, 2011: 55). Within this context in particular, the success of the routine is not merely in achieving the goal of problem resolution. Successful performance of the process invigorates the system of representation and institutions, strengthening the belief that it does work. This is exactly how a ritual and routine differ. However, while it is clear that the central processes in complex societies are symbolic and sometimes societally integrative, these interactions and repair processes are not rituals in the traditional sense (Alexander, 2011: 27).

For the citizen-audience, participation in institutional routines has the potential to symbolise meaning going beyond routine. This hinges on the representative's performance being deemed as authentic by the citizen, energising them and attaching them firming to each other, and the symbolic meaning produced during the interaction. Only then can re-fusion be said to have occurred, producing ritual-like effects. Participating in these interactions enables the citizen of the modern state to identify with the larger political focus only experienced by way of a symbolic silhouette. This simplified, general outline of the world allows them to understand what is going on as they participate in a political ritual (Kertzer, 1988: 1). While I am not assessing the success of the routine performance in this chapter, I argue that its performative success is considered ritual-like, as its effervescence is short lived. The MPs might carry out these ritual-like performances regularly, but often they do not meet the same constituents again.

Thus, for the purpose of this research, I define carrying out a constituency surgery as routine for the MP involved. It is carried out on a regular basis to enact the discursive formation of repair. If successful, these symbolic actions allow

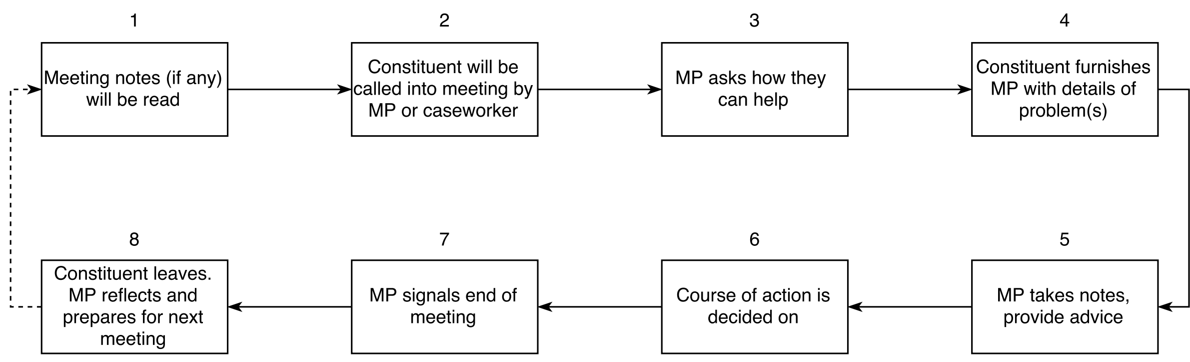
constituents to understand abstract political entities, providing a means of identifying with them, and structure an understanding of their position within the political world and the public's attitude to the various political actors that propagate it (Kertzer, 1988: 13). Unlike large-scale performances, where there is an audience-performer gulf, constituents have direct contact with the MP during the advice surgery. Fusion of audience and performer is not marred by physical distance. However, the possibility of audience diversity might result in broken performances, which we will explore later in this chapter. This re-fusion of performance does not merely rely on the dissemination of a shared background script that includes shared symbols, but is enacted through a strategic use of performances that consist of discursive formations as mechanisms to communicate the meaning and influence of the routine. The difficulty in achieving a seamless interaction is not simply a reflection of social structure and demographics. It is also a matter of interpretation. Audience interpretation is a process and does not happen automatically (Alexander, 2011). This will occur if the MP's performance is considered authentic, and re-fusion has been achieved. It reinforces the process and legitimacy of the MP as a representative. Its success means reaffirmation of the constituent's trust in them, the institution and the democratic process. For the constituent, if this interaction is successfully carried out, it could be considered ritual-like. With this concrete understanding of the terms routines, ritual-like and rituals, the following section examines the process of how advice surgeries are carried out, observed over the course of my fieldwork. I show how the volley between the MP and constituent encompasses eight formal steps.

6.3 The Advice Surgery Repair Process

Within the context of constituency service, advice surgery routines in the constituency may be perceived as ordinary, technical and practical. As MPs carry out these meetings, they provide guidance on personal problems such as public housing applications and benefit claims, amongst others. If constituents question the government's stance on certain policies, the MP will then be able to furnish them with more details, while answering the constituents' questions. In the event that a problem in the constituency has escalated and requires the attention of

Parliament, the MP may then consider speaking or debating about it with their colleagues in the Commons. The repetitive arranging and carrying out these meetings are far from being mere instruments of political representation, but constitute the actual exercise and actions of the discursive formation of repair, where MPs strive to overcome fractures in their performances to the constituent-audience. Furthermore, the success of this ritual-like performance will re-embed the role of the standby MP within the government's institutional organisation.

Specifically, when MPs carry out surgeries, they hold each appointment in a formal manner with clearly defined steps that make up the entire process from start to finish. If the performance goes according to plan, the conversation tends to flow fairly naturally, with the MP navigating the direction it should go. Dependent on the MP's choice, sometimes a caseworker is present during the surgery to take down notes on behalf of the MP, as well as providing a bit of information support. There are eight distinct stages during this process, starting from before the meeting, to during and after. Figure 6.1 below demonstrates a framework of how the process takes place.



(Figure 6.1: The MP-Constituent Surgery Process)

The first stage of the eight-stage process occurs even before the MP interacts with the constituent. Akin to Goffman's idea of staging talk, this takes place backstage (1959: 174). Questions on the cases or notes are raised and clarified; the environment where the meeting takes place is prepared to receive the audience; the character of constituents are discussed; past and likely difficulties are talked about. Performance scripts are adjusted to suit the situation in hand, while remaining in accordance with the MP's presentation of self.

Prior to each actual meeting, MPs quickly read through the notes prepared by their caseworkers and caught up on other work. Andrew Smith, former MP for Oxford East, often used this time between meetings to sign letters that his caseworkers had prepared. On occasion, if the constituent was running late, the MP would use this time to check if they were indeed turning up. This was usually by way of a telephone call, which also encouraged the constituent to try to arrive as quickly as possible. During a surgery with David Miller MP, held at a local church in July 2015, the constituent who was meant to arrive at 11am had not done so. Five minutes past the arranged time, MP Miller rang her on the number she provided, telling me "I ring them to embarrass them really". This was especially the case if the meeting was appointment-based, with the constituent having communicated with the MP's office beforehand. With subsequent meetings arranged back-to-back, one meeting running late would result in a delay for everyone else. The majority of surgery meetings were arranged when caseworkers were unable to manage the case themselves due to its complexity. On occasion, constituents insisted on meeting their MPs as a first point of contact. Notes comprised an outline of the constituent's concern, a copy of prior correspondence (such as email printouts and/or handwritten letters) and relevant paperwork that might be useful in providing context to the problem at hand.

Actual interaction between MP and constituent(s) occurs in Stage 2. Almost all of the MPs in my study (apart from one, due to a health problem) would personally fetch the constituent from the waiting area, directing them to the room or area where the meeting was being held. As they took a seat, constituents were greeted with a typical opening line (Stage 3). MPs began the interaction with a variant of similar lines, such as "How can I help?", "What can I do for you?" and "What is the issue here?" I observed as the MPs consistently used the same lines, much like an actor would a script. Constituents then proceeded to explain what their concerns were, and what help they hoped to receive from their MP (Stage 4). Although they already had a general understanding of what the issue is about from the case notes, it was common for MPs to let the constituents describe the

situation at hand, before delving into what help they needed, and what the MPs could do to help.

Notes were taken over the course of the conversation, either by the MP or the caseworker, if present. Often, MPs would ask a few clarifying questions before proceeding to suggest how they may be able to help. Depending on what the constituent wanted, or how they reacted during the meeting, a course of action was decided on (Stage 6). Apart from providing advice, or directing constituents to other local government bodies for further information or action, an offer to write a letter was the typical course of action. MPs would usually ask for their constituents' permission (through a signed letter) to represent them in writing to the respective councils and companies. Once a decision was made on what their next steps would be, MPs also reminded their constituents that there was no guarantee on what outcomes they would provide.

As a conclusion was reached, the end of the meeting was usually signalled by the Member, saying that they would be in touch, asking if there were any other questions or help needed (Stage 7). Sometimes a hint was necessary, especially if the constituent was particularly chatty. In this case, MPs would either stand from their seat, thanking their constituents for coming, or indicate that the meeting was over by saying that there was another appointment waiting. For example, MPs George Watson and Desmond Hill would let constituents know that there were other constituents with appointments waiting, and that they had to go. The MPs then thanked the constituent for coming to see them, before standing up, and walking the constituent to the door.

After each meeting, it was typical for the MP to reflect on the case they had just helped with. If a caseworker was there, a small discussion may have ensued (Stage 8), mulling over the reception to the last performance, in what were sometimes called "post mortems". Simultaneously, "wounds are licked and morale is strengthened for the next performance" (Goffman, 1959: 174). The MP then proceeded to read through the next meeting's notes, before fetching the next constituent. The process then continued from Stage 1 again. With this

understanding of how the interaction process takes place, we now turn to understanding how conflicts or disruptions can undermine the performance's authenticity.

6.4 Threats to Authenticity: Conflict, disruptions and broken routines

As I raised earlier in this chapter, the repair process is a performance that does not always go smoothly. As with any everyday interaction, there are bound to be disagreements and interruptions. During turbulent moments, it is possible that a new set of motives may suddenly emerge and the established social distance between the audience and performer may sharply increase or decrease. It is then when "a portrayed character 'forgets himself' and blurts out a relatively unperformed exclamation" (Goffman, 1959: 167). As the crisis is overcome it is likely the previously working consensus will be re-established, albeit with some reticence (Ibid). As this section will demonstrate, crises have been observed to erupt at different stages of the process. This results in conflict that may threaten how the interaction proceeds and, ultimately, whether the repair routine achieves the performative re-fusion required to be considered authentic.

Over the course of the actual meeting (from Stages 2 to 7), it was common for MPs to correct misconceptions of what constituents thought they were able to do on their behalf. I observed multiple times as MP Peter Kyle repeatedly explained that he did not have jurisdiction or the power to do what constituents were hoping he was able to do, explaining that "I can be a voice that can cause a rethink" (personal communication, 22 April 2016). MP James Williamson is noted to say, "Let me see what I can do," demonstrating how he will work within his abilities as an MP. This acknowledgement of limits initially seems like a lack of power, but can be considered as strength on the part of the MP. I discuss this further in Chapter 7 where I investigate the discursive formation of power. For this section, we will look at how each stage in the process outlined in Figure 6.1 has the potential for interference, thwarting repair.

How MPs successfully manage and react when these routines are disrupted is usually contingent on the mood of the constituent, the MP's skill and experience

and the general disposition of the MP. Reactions during surgery cases can often be unpredictable, occasionally resulting in agitated and distressed constituents. When managing the situation at hand, MPs often have to go beyond their parliamentary representative capacity to embody a number of different roles, such as being a welfare counsellor or a legal adviser. The following section will begin by analysing various stages during the process when conflicts may occur, how MPs behave during conflicts and techniques utilised to resolve them.

Disruption during Stage 1

Disruptions in the process can occur as early as backstage, during Stage 1, as the MP prepares for the meeting. This may be due to the challenging nature of the topic to be discussed, lack of preparation or through previous interactions (either in person or via other forms of correspondence) with the constituent. With the MP expecting the meeting ahead to be difficult, this inadvertently sets the tone for interaction to come. It is only natural that the MP will seek to present themselves in a manner they believe will allow them the most control over the reparative process, and subsequently the performance's outcome. When two sides present themselves to each other for the first time for the purposes of interaction, the members of each side tend to maintain the line that they are what they claim to be, and strive to stay in character (Goffman, 1959: 166).

With this disruption in Stage 1, the MP will perform their role as a representative, with the need to overcome the disruption adjusted in their script, prior to speaking to the constituent. I had the opportunity to observe this a handful of times over the course of my fieldwork. As MP Barnaby Wright read through his meeting notes during a surgery in November 2014, before his constituent was called in, he exclaimed, "Aghh! I wish I had known about this beforehand! I would have brought a print out of the government's policies", referring to a constituent who had made an appointment to see him about firemen's pensions. Having a copy of the printout would have been a useful performance prop, enabling him to stay on script suitably.

His constituency caseworker, Margaret, reminded him that all surgery appointment details were made available on his calendar, to which he replied, "I know, I just haven't had time to look at it". MP Wright retained an annoyed expression on his face as he looked through his notes, explaining to me that the policy on firemen's pensions was a contentious issue that he had received several constituent letters about. This sense of defence continued into the meeting. As the constituent, Mr Robert Wells, a fireman, broached why he had come (Stage 3), MP Wright responded firmly, "We have been on top of it, I know all about it." The interaction continued smoothly as the fireman shared a pension policy he had drawn up based on calculations he had made. MP Wright listened to the suggestion as he took notes, interjecting periodically with specific knowledge from parliamentary debates. As the meeting came to a close, MP Wright showed appreciation for Mr Wells's efforts by asking for a copy of the policy plan. He also assured Mr Wells that a letter would be sent, updating him on the debate's progress.

I observed a similar episode with MP Peter Kyle, in April 2016, as he carried out his weekly surgery meetings. Meetings were usually held on the second floor of his office, housed in a shop front along his constituency's high street. Constituents waited downstairs in the waiting area for their turn. MP Kyle prepared by reading case notes before the start of the next meeting, speaking to his caseworker Estelle at the same time for any updates that he might have missed. He then proceeded to fetch his appointments from downstairs.

On this occasion, Estelle briefed him quickly on his second appointment after his first appointment of the day left. The second appointment was with a lady named Natalie who was approximately 70 years old. Estelle spoke in conspiratorial tones as MP Kyle listened carefully with a serious look on his face. They had a brief discussion on how to manage Natalie, following which MP Kyle made his way downstairs to fetch the constituent. With a slight laugh, Estelle hurriedly filled me in on the details, saying, "This lady is a bit mad, according to her GP." Natalie's local council and the police have also been in touch with the doctor, reiterating the severity of her mental health problems. Estelle speaking to MP

Kyle before the meeting allowed him to prepare himself for the meeting, as well as acquaint himself with the severity of the situation. The case's difficulty proved to be true, as I show later on at Stage 4.

Prior interaction with constituents may also result in the MP establishing an idea of what the interaction will be like. In March 2015, I shadowed MP Desmond Hill during his surgery, where he was scheduled to meet four constituents. After walking his third appointment to the door, MP Hill read through his notes to prepare for his final appointment of the day. As he did so, MP Hill made an uncomfortable face. As he prepared to fetch the last constituent, he explained to me that the last constituent was rather "eccentric", and that it was "best not to stay". While he did not go on to explain further, his facial expression and remark divulged he did not believe that the meeting would go smoothly and would be challenging, prior to even meeting the constituent.

MPs Wright, Kyle and Hill demonstrate how the MP-constituent interaction process can be disrupted from Stage 1. As the MPs proceeded from Stage 1 to 2, there was a need to manage the issue in as smooth a manner as possible right from the start. Adjusting the script to suit the interaction ensured that the MP stayed within the image he hoped to portray. The example of MP Wright firmly telling Mr Wells that his team was on top of the firemen's pensions illustrates an attempt to control the performance to his favour. Successfully doing so not only shows the constituent that he is able to help, but also presents MP Wright positively in the performance. By being "on top of it", MP Wright is clearly confident as he goes into the discussion, further reassuring the constituent of his capabilities, adding to the possibility of the constituent being convinced of his performance, hence achieving re-fusion and authenticity.

Disruption during Stage 2

A disruption that occurs during Stage 2 is not common, with the constituent having just entered the room to the meet the MP. Over the course of my fieldwork, I only observed this to happen on one occasion. MP William Morgan's first appointment of the day, constituent Lynette Walker, arrived early at the

public library where the surgery was held, having made an appointment to see him. I noticed as she waited at the library's reading area for her name to be called. MP Morgan and his caseworker Michael arrived just before the scheduled surgery time, directing me to where meetings were to be held, in a large, private conference meeting room accessible only by code. The conference room had an imposing oval-shaped walnut table in the middle, with approximately 20 matching chairs around it. It was plainly decorated, with several scenic paintings adorning the walls. MP Morgan and Michael spent some time preparing for the surgery, first by deciding where they should sit. MP Morgan decided to sit near the head of the table with Michael to his left, in order for his constituents to sit next to him on his right.

MP Morgan proceeded to leaf through prepared case notes and paperwork as Michael provided him with a brief description of Ms Walker's appointment reasons, a typical exchange during Stage 1. Michael then left the room to walk Lynette to the meeting room. MP Morgan, who had started signing letters while waiting for her to enter, stood up to greet her with an outstretched hand. Lynette took his hand as she asked if it was possible to speak to the MP on her own, citing the sensitive nature of her problems. According to her, one of her in-laws was a fairly prominent person in the City, and she would prefer if her discussion with the MP was kept between as few people as possible. MP Morgan repeatedly assured her that all information shared amongst the group was strictly confidential, giving her his word that nothing said during the meeting would leave the room. He further explained that his caseworker's presence was necessary to ensure his general safety from possibly distraught constituents. Ms Walker looked increasingly uncomfortable as she heard this. Unconvinced by his explanation, she chose to leave the room instead of continuing with her appointment.

This interaction between MP Morgan and his constituent Ms Walker is a unique example, but also highlights the increasing importance of personal security. Not only was the meeting disrupted during Stage 2, but this resulted in an incomplete performance. Ms Walker's discomfort and ultimate decision to leave indicates

distrust in MP Morgan's performance and his reasoning. As she was not convinced by MP Morgan's reassurance and explanation, this repair routine was unsuccessful.

Disruption during Stage 3

During Stage 3, the MP proceeds to ask how they able to help the constituent. An interruption during Stage 3 might occur as the MP is disrupted or preoccupied before they ask the constituent about their issue and why they have come. This is a situation that can have many variations. During an advice surgery with Tessa Munt MP in Glastonbury, Somerset, constituent Mr Pradeep Singh was ushered to take a seat. This took place in a local café along the high street. A table at the back of the café was reserved for MP Munt whenever she was scheduled to hold her advice surgeries, usually once a month at this particular place. On this day, she was accompanied by her caseworker Matthew. The first constituent to meet MP Munt was Mr Singh, who had just taken his seat across from MP Munt when a portly gentleman came to the table to greet her. MP Munt looked delighted as she stood to kiss his cheek in greeting. The gentleman turned out to be town council employee Mr Harold Steiner. They spoke in lowered voices, a conversation that lasted about five minutes. Matthew maintained a slightly awkward nonchalance as he waited with Mr Singh, who had an extremely annoyed expression on his face. Mr Steiner and MP Munt hugged each other goodbye, and she returned to her seat at the table. MP Munt then shuffled through some casework papers she brought with her. Exhaling loudly with a frown, Mr Singh continued to wait, but his impatience was obvious. MP Munt finally looked up from her papers, and started asking him for updates about his business problems, indicating she was prepared and familiar with his problem. Mr Singh finally relaxed his brow as he showed MP Munt a letter he received, and the interaction proceeded from Stage 3 to 4.

This performance between MP Munt and her constituent describes how MP Munt's attention was diverted away from the script, resulting in what Goffman terms the forgetting of oneself (1959: 167). MP Munt momentarily forgot the line she was meant to be saying next, and what she was in the middle of doing,

resulting in the disruption. This was further demonstrated as she turned her attention away from the interaction, to something else, in this case speaking to Mr Steiner. The process was stalled as the constituent was made to wait, running the risk of further interruption of the process should the constituent get upset, or express further displeasure. It is also a possibility in such a situation that the MP may have difficulty returning to the performance's dynamic, especially if the disruption lay with their action.

Disruption during Stage 4

Dissatisfied or distressed constituents often use the surgery as an outlet to express their disappointment and anger at the party, institution and, on occasion, the MP themselves. While this can occur any time over the process, my fieldwork observations indicate that this occurs primarily at Stage 4, just after constituents are asked to expound on what is bothering them. This opportunity to vent can feature extreme emotional reactions. As demonstrated in the following two examples, tricky disruptions can be difficult to manage once constituents are given the floor to express themselves.

During a surgery meeting in January 2016, I observed as a constituent directed his frustrations with policy changes and migration towards MP William Morgan and his caseworker Stuart. The surgery took place at the local Conservative Association, with meetings held at one of the tables in the café area of the building. Constituents milled around the entrance as they waited, where there were a few chairs and tables available. Between each appointment, Stuart and MP Morgan went through the case notes, before MP Morgan walked to the waiting area to meet the constituent. During this particular meeting, British Army veteran and constituent Patrick McNeal expressed acute frustration at the number of migrants in Britain, blaming them for putting a strain on the government's financial resources. Approximately 70 years old, Mr McNeal was dressed sharply in a dark brown tweed suit, and was aided by a walking stick. Mr McNeal was particularly aggrieved at the government's changes in healthcare policies, especially when it came to older people. "Why are you not helping the old people? I don't want to pay for my healthcare. Why can't they go back to the

old system?!… It's a bloody invasion! Let's call it what it is." MP Morgan demonstrated familiarity with this constituent's rants and did not show visible facial reactions. He said, "I know we have talked about it last time." Mr McNeal continued to rant for a few minutes, while MP Morgan remained quiet until the rant was over. MP Morgan then used the opportunity to draw on local neighbourhood examples to disprove Mr McNeal's point of view, such as the owners of the curry house who were of Indian origin. He referred to them as local business owners trying to make an honest living, constituents who did not deserve to be looked at negatively. Mr McNeal was stubborn, getting increasingly aggressive upon MP Morgan's response. He insisted the UK's financial situation was not as bad as the government made it out to be. Rather, the money was "in all the wrong bloody places." Patiently, MP Morgan remarked, "Patrick, tell me. You keep coming back asking me what I am doing for old people, but I cannot go back to a system that never worked… It won't work the same way it used to." Mr McNeal slapped his hand loudly on the table in a show of irritation. His anger was evident as he proceeded to express argumentative anti-Muslim sentiments with a disclaimer, "You're going to say it's racist but it is not!" With knitted eyebrows and crossed arms, MP Morgan's face conveyed frustrated exasperation as he told Mr McNeal that his view was "bigoted". He indicated that his appointment was over by telling him that other constituents were waiting their turn. Mr McNeal did not stand from his seat, and attempted to continue the meeting by speaking about military pensions. Without acknowledging his statement on pensions, MP Morgan repeated plainly that they had the next constituent waiting. Annoyed, Mr McNeal grunted and said, "Try and sort it out. It is getting stupid." Stuart stood up and came towards Mr McNeal to help him with his walking stick, while repeating that there was another constituent waiting. Mr McNeal conceded that his time was up, and left.

The next example saw constituent Anna Wesley arriving at the constituency office with her young daughter, Lila, in tow in March 2016. MP George Watson first gave his attention to Lila, asking her name and how old she was. Around five years of age, she replied to MP Watson's questions shyly, nodding her head intermittently. "I'm going to talk to your mum. You're going to sit there yes?" Ms

Wesley looked visibly distressed as MP Watson turned his attention to her, asking how he could help. She loudly explained the local council had made intentionally homeless, with a possession order on her home. Her agitation was escalating as she started to shout, "It's ridiculous, it is not our fault this is happening!... I can't cope with this. I'm getting depressed. I'm actually going crazy!" Clarification revealed she had lived in a council flat for the past nine years, which she managed to purchase from the council. However, a need to rebuild had meant that the council had asked her to vacate her flat and move. MP Watson took down notes as he enquired about approaching the council. According to Ms Wesley, all her attempts to receive help had been unsuccessful. When asked if she had evidence of correspondence with the council so that MP Watson could have a better idea of what was being said, the constituent retrieved a stack of letters from her tattered canvas tote, hurling them across the table towards the MP. She slouched in her chair and looked away angrily as the MP leafed through them.

Frustration is a common emotive theme running through the examples of disruption in Stage 4. It is observed that constituents are not only expressing unhappiness directed at their personal situation but also specifically relate these situations to policy issues and government decisions. Each constituent can be seen in their speech to consider the government – "them" – as the source of their problems. As an elected representative, the MP is put in the position of tackling these issues head on. This usually involves correcting misconceptions, providing a clear explanation of the government's policy position, and how the process works, as observed in the case between MP Morgan and Mr McNeal. The act of coming to see their MP is not only an exercise in their political rights, but also demonstrates an understanding of the MP as a representative of the political institution and system. Regardless of the interaction's outcome, we can observe that constituents are aware of the MP as a means of obtaining help through the body of knowledge produced in the discursive formation of repair. Taking part in the routine further serves to influence and shape ideas of political events, public policies and concepts of what appropriate political leadership is like to

constituents and of how well the world around them measures up to those standards (Kertzer, 1988: 79).

Disruption during Stage 5

As the MP listens to the constituent explain their problem, what they need help with is not always highlighted or made immediately clear. This could be due to the sensitive nature of the issue, the difficult nature of the constituent or the constituent hoping that the MP is able to go beyond the typical institutional boundaries to resolve their issues. It is often difficult for the MP and constituent to come to a consensus, as this not only requires adjustment of the script to suit the issue's context, but also convincing the constituent of the MP's solution. This step is made even more intricate depending on the MP's belief in being able to help. As we observed in the previous stage, with MP Morgan and Mr McNeal, a problematic disruption could also mean that Stage 5 is not reached, terminating the process of repair. MPs tend to approach Stage 5 cautiously as providing advice. Discussing solutions before deciding on a course of action is therefore not always a straightforward affair, making the transition from Stage 5 to Stage 6 especially fraught with the possibility of disruption. The two examples below demonstrate how the MP's suggestions and advice can result in fractures in the interaction.

MPs might find providing advice and help challenging if they do not emphathise with the constituent's problem. During a surgery on 10 October 2015 at the local library, MP William Morgan had an appointment with a constituent, Mrs Germaine Wolfson, who had come to see him about her prescription for gluten free (GF) products and request to be referred to a homeopathic hospital. As Mrs Wolfson described her case, she also shared photocopies of previously sent letters to her GP. According to her, she and her son had been prescribed a GF diet for approximately 20 years. This was to help with her son's celiac disease (a gluten-sensitive condition) and his asthmatic symptoms. For herself, she used the GF diet to manage and alleviate her anxiety and depression. She had no doubt that it was effective, insisting on its importance. Having a prescription allowed her to purchase GF groceries at a discount, but for the last three years she had not been

given this prescription. She was unable to afford the higher cost, and she was of the opinion this resulted in health complications of which her son passed away from as a result. Presently, she found her own day-to-day life negatively impacted and reiterated her desire to see a homeopath. Listening to her intently, MP Morgan looked unsure of how to proceed, revealing he had never heard of this prescription subsidy before. He took his phone out to look it up, while questioning her as to why these prescriptions were no longer provided. Mrs Wolfson explained that she was not sure, as her efforts to find out had been for naught. She was instead prescribed a pill to help with her anxiety, which she no longer wanted to rely on.

Nodding his head, MP Morgan explained, "Homeopathy is not something I particularly support the NHS spending money on." He further explained that he was willing to write a letter to the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in charge of her case in support of her doctor's prescription, but only if updated medical tests were undertaken and a psychiatrist's letter was provided. His caseworker Megan was then also instructed to look up the NHS and party position on homeopathy. Megan handed Mrs Wolfson a consent form to fill out. The form would allow MP Morgan to represent her when writing about her health. She provided her consent then asked if he was able to write an additional letter to the Health Secretary about the reduction of subsidies for those who require a GF diet. MP Morgan did not immediately react to what she said, but continued to research prescribed GF bread on his mobile phone. "Isn't it more expensive to get it on prescription? I know GF bread is more expensive, but isn't it like, say five quid now?" Mrs Wolfson gave MP Morgan a long look, saying she was not sure. Still looking at his mobile phone, MP Morgan said, "You can get the GF bread at any Morrisons." This volley continued until MP Morgan attempted to wind the meeting down by assertively asking her, "What is the exact treatment you need it for? Is it just for the anxiety or is it something more? Is it psychosis?" She provided a brief summary of what had already been said, before leaving the meeting when assured that a letter to her local CCG and another to the Health Secretary enquiring about the NHS position on homeopathy will be written on

her behalf. It was emphasised that he was not able to promise her any kind of outcome.

In another incident, constituent Tom Sidney approached his local MP Tessa Munt in January 2015 to speak about the assistance that primary caregivers received from the government. MP Munt met him at the local pub in Shepton Mallet during one of her regularly scheduled meetings. She listened as he explained in detail the challenges he faced as his wife's sole caregiver. Approaching his 80s, he had had to give up driving due to his age. The severity of his wife's Alzheimer's condition meant that she could not be left alone for more than an hour, making caring for her incredibly taxing. For instance he was unable to take her to her medical appointments and any errands would take more than an hour, as he would have to use the public bus, which ran infrequently. He had not been able to get help as hiring an additional carer at £18 an hour was beyond his budget. Appearing incredibly exasperated as he reached the end of his explanation, he raised his voice and exclaimed with teary eyes, "I don't think the government recognises this plight and aren't doing a damned thing about it!" In a conciliatory tone MP Munt said, "I don't think that's true", then offered to provide some pamphlets for groups his wife could join. Mr Sidney rebuffed her offer, saying his wife disliked group activities with strangers. His disappointment was obvious, and MP Munt noticed. Her expression empathetic, she explained she understood his circumstances well as her own stepfather suffered from Alzheimer's for 24 years before he passed away. Her own mother, as his primary carer, received her monthly allowance only after 20 years. She then asked Mr Sidney sympathetically yet straightforwardly, "What do you want me to do?"

We can observe that both MPs use this stage to clarify what the constituents have shared with them, before giving advice. In the interaction between MP Morgan and Mrs Wolfson, his uncertainty over her case is demonstrable. His unfamiliarity with her claims and medical needs have rendered any script he might have had impractical. Instead a swift adjustment to the script was required, facilitated with the use of his mobile phone. In addition, he made clear that his stand on homeopathy contrasted with Mrs Wolfson's. The disruption in this case

did not necessarily result in anger or unhappiness, but it did not allow Stage 5 to proceed smoothly to Stage 6. MP Morgan's lack of belief in what the constituent was saying emerged through his occasional silences (such as when she asked for an additional letter), and his thoroughly trying to understand her story by asking specifically worded questions (such as "What is the exact treatment you need it for?"). Asking questions in this manner not only enabled him to build a clearer picture of the entire issue, but also narrowed down what the constituent wanted out of the meeting. Clarity results in better script adjustment, subsequently resulting in a higher chance of overcoming the disruption and achieving re-fusion. This could be seen with MP Morgan, as he agreed to write the letters on Mrs Wolfson's behalf.

Furthermore, we can see that both MPs provided suggestions, but these were initially refused by the constituents. This negotiation stage, which links Stage 5 to Stage 6, not only reveals what the constituent really wants the MP to help them with, but also is an indication of what sort of help the MP is able to provide. On occasion, the constituent might not be clear or upfront about what they would like from the MP. This is occasionally due to embarrassment or timidity, sensitivity about their problems or even a lack of trust that the MP is able to help. Their questioning indicates that the MP is trying to restore equilibrium in the interaction as soon as possible, but also finding out key elements of the constituent's specific problems that they could integrate into their existing script.

In MP Munt's case, we can observe her struggles during this stage as she attempts to provide suggestions to Mr Sidney. His disillusionment with institutions and their ability to help is evident. As discussed in Chapter 5, MP Munt here draws on her personal experience to appear accessible to her constituent. She enacts the use of this narrative to not only draw a connection with Mr Sidney, but also to demonstrate that she's an institutional representative who understands his plight. Here a new script has erupted out of the old one: from "a representative", to "a representative like him" – someone who understands what he is going through. This revamped script allows MP Munt to continue with the performance.

Disruption in Stage 6

As discussed in the previous section, a disruption in Stage 5 can result in delays in progress to Stage 6. Advice and opinions that are shared by the MP in Stage 5 might not necessarily result in a course of action that is mutually agreed on by both MP and constituent. MPs are able to trigger disruptions in this stage by prematurely ceasing their performance. This usually occurs when the MP does not believe that they able to help, or disagrees with the constituent's request. An example of this occurred during my shadowing of Conservative MP James Williamson in April 2016. His advice surgeries took place every Friday at his local Conservative Association office, a convenient location about 15 minutes' walk from the local train station. The constituent in question, Mr Randall Hill, had child support issues with which he wanted to seek MP Williamson's help. He had fathered a number of children with different women and was unable to afford to pay child support fees, resulting in a large debt of £15,000. Previous help sought from MP Williamson culminated in a child support payment plan of approximately £120 per month. Recalling Mr Hill and his case, MP Williamson sustained a fair tone during the meeting, asking what Mr Hill hoped to attain in this meeting. Mr Hill bullishly revealed that he found the monthly payment unviable and that Child Support Services was "only interested in money". He hoped to lower the amount he had to pay. Listening intently, MP Williamson recalculated the monthly payment plan, arriving at the same amount. He also pointed out that the amount had already been reduced in light of Mr Hill's inconsistent salary and was calculated with the minimum amount in mind, "You're going to have to pay it off, I'm sorry. I can't do more for you." MP Williamson then stated that it was best that Mr Hill left, terminating the repair process.

Hammering out what constituents want to be done about their problems and negotiating a plan of action can also take some time, possibly resulting in disagreements. As I have pointed out previously, it is not uncommon for constituents to have unrealistic expectations of what the MP can do for them. Legislative limitations dictate the extent of an MP's influence and ability to help,

and it is often during Stage 6 that this emerges. I perceived how MPs avoided disruptions by firmly asserting a solution within the remit of the constituent's request. As demonstrated in the case of MP Morgan and Mrs Wolfson in Stage 5, MP Morgan agreed to write a letter to her local CCG and the NHS as she requested. However, he did not intend to request that she be given a prescription, but to write to enquire what their position on homeopathy was.

As observed in these examples, decisions made in Stage 6 may not be the outcomes sought by constituents, and can be disruptions in themselves. While the performative act is aimed at repair, decisions made in Stage 6 are not always able to achieve successful re-fusion.

Disruption in Stage 7

Disruptions that occur in Stage 7 are uncommon. This is the stage in which the constituent and MP part ways, after the performative routine is over. Over the course of my fieldwork, I observed as interactions were disrupted in earlier stages of the process, before escalating to levels where the constituents were asked to leave. At this point they were often indignant, and could exhibit stubbornness. Waiting to still be heard, they sometimes obstinately continued sitting in their seats, until the MP had to persistently inform them that the meeting was over. Other times, subtler approaches could be taken. Body language such as the tidying of paperwork or standing up ready to go were actions that MPs and their caseworkers undertook to indicate that an interaction was over.

However, as I have pointed out, these disruptions do not begin in Stage 7, but continue through till Stage 7 after beginning in an earlier stage. In Stage 7 the MP is getting ready to say a goodbye greeting and thank the constituent for coming. Hypothetically, this interaction may turn sour if the MP accidentally upsets the constituent by saying something out of place just before saying goodbye, such as that they have low faith in certain cases given to them.

Disruption in Stage 8

At Stage 8 of the process, the constituent is no longer taking part in the interaction. The performance is over, but the possibility of disruption still exists. Despite the MP being in the same area as before, any type of backstage behaviour can transform the frontstage into the backstage. To provide an example, we can return to the interaction between MP Morgan and Mrs Wolfson described in my discussion of disruptions during Stage 5. After Mrs Wolfson and MP Morgan agreed on a course of action, Mrs Wolfson was escorted out of the room by caseworker Megan as MP Morgan looked through the notes on the case. When Megan returned, he looked up the name of the white pill Mrs Wolfson said she was given in place of her original GF prescription, discovering that that medication is used to treat severe mental health problems, including schizophrenia. "It's bloody dangerous to give homeopathic medicine!" he exclaimed in angry disbelief. He went on to emphasise the strain on taxpayer's money that alternative medicine creates.

Backstage behaviours not only reveal how the MP really feels, but enable a comparison with the frontstage. MP Morgan's continued research indicated scepticism of the benefits of a gluten-free diet, as well as what his constituent was telling him. Although it could not be assumed that the constituent was given the pill as she suffered from mental health issues, the possibility was enough to shock MP Morgan, disrupting the interaction at this late stage. Although it was uncertain how much this affected MP Morgan's decision to help, as a representative he had made clear that he could put aside his personal thoughts for the benefit of his constituent. It is possible that the letter could be crafted to temper his lack of enthusiasm, while keeping the constituent's needs in focus.

Although this is the end of the process, hypothetically there is a possibility of further disruption if the MP and the caseworkers start discussing the case disfavourably when they think the constituent has left. If the constituent has not fully left the building and happens to overhear what is being said, there is a high possibility of the constituent storming back into the room to confront the MP. Other disruptions in this stage could occur if there is a realisation that

information provided by a constituent was incomplete or untrustworthy. I discuss this further in the following section.

6.5 The Pursuit of Repair

Performative success in the discursive formation of repair is dependent on the overcoming of disruptions and unexpected interruptions in as natural a manner as possible. The above examples illustrate how routine advice surgery meetings are subject to a range of interruptions across various stages of the process, as all MPs seek to achieve repair regularly in their constituency service. In this section I identify and analyse the techniques utilised by MPs to overcome disruptions in their symbolic actions, such as remaining calm, being a source of comfort and exerting dominance. Drawing from Goffman's (1959) presentation of self, I also demonstrate performative differences between backstage and frontstage across the stages of the repair process.

As discussed in Chapter 1, general trust in British politicians has been consistently low. The Hansard Society's 2016 Audit of Political Engagement revealed that just 32 per cent of those surveyed were satisfied with how the UK Parliament worked, and only 29 per cent were satisfied with how MPs were doing their jobs (Hansard Society, 2016). These numbers indicate that trust in the institution is below public expectations. Interestingly, 35 per cent of those surveyed in the same poll indicated satisfaction with how their own MPs were doing. The importance of the representative as a link between constituent and government is reflected in the slightly higher percentage of trust that constituents have in their own MPs. Thus, this suggests that most, if not all, MPs place importance on the pursuit of repair, seeking to portray legitimacy and authenticity. By engaging the constituent in the usually emotionally charged interaction, this ritual makes the symbols more salient, nurturing a bond between MP and constituent (Kertzer, 1988: 37).

As described in Chapter 2, with societies becoming larger and more differentiated, audiences are no longer easily convinced by performances from their MPs. By being accessible and visible, MPs' constituency performances are

always liable to disruptions. This keeps the performative acts in the state of de-fusion, making it harder for re-fusion to be achieved. Within the MP surgery itself, MPs are almost always enacting the discursive formation of repair. This occurs even in the seemingly innocuous moments where constituents come to merely have a chat about government policies, such as the episode observed between Tessa Munt MP and constituent Mr Arun Menon. He had come across her website the night before, and sought her out to hear an explanation of the British involvement in the Iraq War, as well and wanting to find out more about MP Munt. Although he did not speak about anything constituency related, he saw these as personal issues as he held spiritual beliefs that were against nuclear weapons and warfare. MP Munt was required to repair the situation by explaining the government stance, but she also shared her personal opinions on the war. In other circumstances, constituents arrived at this meeting often obviously in despair, as demonstrated by the examples and quotes I have drawn attention to. Despite the varied constituents and the diverse reasons for seeking out their MP, I show in the following section similar conflict management techniques MPs utilise to manage and overcome these disruptions.

Crisis Management Mechanisms

MPs evidently face numerous challenges during their constituency interactions and are subject to a range of interruptions across various stages of the process. I have also analysed how MPs react to obstacles, manage the conflict, and ultimate attempt to achieve re-fusion. Through my analysis I perceive a series of crisis management mechanisms MPs rely on during their reaction. The following section will discuss three primary techniques I have observed MPs draw on to overcome these disruptions in routine.

1. *Remaining calm*

   Upset constituents are often emotionally distraught. As MPs probe further into what ails the constituent, reactions such as crying, shouting, or in more critical cases, physically abusive behaviour may result. Staying calm is often the first step in the course of action as many MPs displayed as such. It also prevents emotions from escalating. As observed in the cases such the one

between MP George Watson and his constituent Ms Anna Wesley in Stage 4, frustration and stress often results in constituent being overcome by their feelings. On another occasion in August 2015, David Miller MP representing a Greater London constituency interacted with an antagonistic constituent, Mr Archie Butler. MP Miller explains that I am an observer, to which he says to me, “Give up, they’re all corrupt! Even this one.” He has come to discuss his pension, disclosing he believes his advisor is lying to him. He shows MP Miller the letter he received, commenting brusquely, “I’m not sure you can do anything about it!” Now that he is getting older and unemployed, he also insists the government is only doing the minimal of what they can for the elderly “in order to make the books look good.” MP Miller maintains composed as he articulates clear statements saying, “I don’t think that’s a valid statement. I don’t think it’s fair to say it is just part of the government. If you like I certainly can ask a parliamentary question about it.” Delicately managing and mitigating the conflict is of paramount importance. In order not to incite the constituents further, MPs are perceived to not outwardly react to their constituents' outbursts. The MPs in both cases and other adverse interactions I have observed tend to keep constituents focused on the matter at hand. Maintaining a neutral tone of voice while speaking alleviates the potential for further angry debates, encouraging the process to carry on.

2. *Being a source of comfort*

Frustration and distress are often at the root of constituent's disruptive behaviour, and can result in tears. By embodying the role of a social worker (Norton, 1995, 1997), a sympathetic listening ear and providing comfrot is required to overcome the disruption. Although many MPs I observed demonstrated sympathy when listening to their constituent’s problems, not everyone exemplified it in the same way. Some, such as Tessa Munt MP and Andrew Smith MP, would reach over and physically comfort through either through a pat on the hand or the back. For example, MP Munt gave support to her crying constituent Mr Daniel Howard, during an advice surgery in Axbridge, Somerset in December 2014. He had been duped in a Ponzi scheme, losing a significant portion of his savings. A father of three, he explained that

his finances are stretched, with this incident placing further stress on him and his family. Furthermore, his attempts at reclaiming the money and contacting the fraudster have led nowhere. MP Munt moved closer to sit next to the constituent, placing her hand over his and said in a gentle, low voice, "I'm so sorry." She suggests a number of ideas, including checking Facebook for any groups of those who had been implicated in the same scheme. She also offers to speak to Liberal Democrat MP Vince Cable, who at that time was Secretary of State for Business, Innovations and Skills. As the interaction came to an end she reiterates that he can contact her anytime, provides additional contact information and reminds him that she can be found at this pub (where the surgery was held) every month. Being reassuring enabled MP Munt to calm the constituent down, subsequently being able complete the repair process successfully.

Others, such as James Williamson MP and Barnaby Wright MP, preferred to show their empathy through a form of practical compassion. While they do express regret at their constituent being upset, they would prefer to point out what can actually be done to resolve the problem at hand. During a meeting with frustrated parents in April 2016, MP Williamson was sympathetic to Mr and Mrs Smith as they struggled to put their autistic son Leo in a mainstream school in Buckinghamshire, which had for no good reason rescinded their offer. They describe Leo's condition as mild, citing improvements in his behaviour with the help of therapy. In tears, Mrs Smith expressed her desire for Leo to have a chance at normalcy and attend school with her brother. MP Williamson remarks, "The fact that the school rescinded their offer sounds a serious bureaucratic cockup." He tells Mr and Mrs Smith openly that he will write further letters to the local district council and the school, reminding them that there is no guarantee of the outcome. He also directs them to acquire a pediatrician's letter in support of their son's condition. It is clear that MP Williamson disapproves of what Mr and Mrs Smith are going through, but offers comfort through practical suggestions on what can be done.

3. *Exerting dominance*
   To advance the repair process, MPs are observed to steer the conversation in more productive directions in order to come to a conclusion, or reach a course of action. As we observed in the interaction between MP Barnaby Wright and his constituent in Stage 1, concerned over how the conversation over firemen pensions would turn out, he demonstrated control over the situation by preemptively stating he was aware of the situation. More problematic constituents require an overt expression of dominance on the part of the MP in order to achieve this. In the discussion of Stage 4 I showed how MP William Morgan remained calm in light of his outbursts. As aggressive comments continued, he then firmly portrayed his control over the situation by addressing the reasons why Mr McNeal's repeated visits will not trigger the result he wanted. Furthermore, he did not shy away from telling Mr McNeal that he was in fact, behaving like a bigot, before suggesting the meeting was over.

Extremely challenging processes may also break out right from the start of the meeting, where overcoming the conflict is never managed. Here, with the routine performance incomplete, re-fusion has failed to be achieved. It is usually when the constituent is being particularly difficult, and does not happen relatively often. This is not the same as the MP not being able to help the constituent, or does not want to, but rather the tension within the situation was not able to dissipate, and remained challenging. An MP-constituent interaction not only involves the MP trying to overcome the disruption, but also involves the constituent's accord to reach a conclusion together. As I have demonstrated earlier in this chapter, constituent-audiences at the receiving end of the actor's performance have to find it convincing before any form of disruption can be resolved. Disruptions can only be overcome if the other party accepts what is being told, and chooses to be part of the resolution.

Exceptionally challenging interactions do not occur often as cases are usually screened by the MP's caseworker before an appointment is made, but over the course of my fieldwork I was privy to a particularly challenging case in February

2015. A particularly difficult meeting Labour MP Desmond HIll encountered with his constituent Mr Jerermy Langdon is significant. These weekly meetings either take place every Monday morning, in his constituency office or at an advice centre in West London. On this particular day it is held at his constituency office, which occupies the ground floor of a red house along a quiet row of houses. I am let into the constituency office by MP Hill's staff member Jonathan, and told to wait in the seating area, where there are a number of plastic chairs arranged in a row near the door. Just in front of the seated and to the left is a kitchenette area. MP Hill's staff members are seated upstairs on the first floor, whereas the party staffers are seated in a large room at the end of the ground floor. The advice surgery takes place in a small room on the ground floor, between the stairs and the party office. The walls are plain, and there is a small, square white table set in the middle of the room. There is a large black office chair, with three other plastic chairs around the table. There is a window to the left of the room, providing natural lighting. MP Hill is dressed smartly in a dark navy suit and tie, with shiny black brogue shoes. At the beginning of the sessions MP Hill comes into the room with a small stack of paper folders, each labelled with the names of constituents he would be seeing, prepared for him by his parliamentary staff. Each folder contained printed emails between the constituent and his office, as well as a short summary of the issue the constituent is seeing MP Hill for.

Mr Jeremy Langdon was the last constituent of the day to see MP Hill. After a brief look at his notes, MP Hill proceeded to the waiting area to call on them. He appeared to be in his mid-sixties, suffers from lupus, and is also very hard of hearing. He required the use of two walking sticks as he walked into the surgery room, and brought a friend Rosie along with him, who was carrying a number of bags and boxes. Mr Langdon begins the conversation by talking about Rosie, whom he considers a well-trusted close friend and confidante and happens to be an expert witness. MP Hill begins by asking him to explain what he needed help with. Mr Langdon's expression changed immediately. Distraught, he said MP Hill should be well aware of his issues if his emails have been read. MP Hill goes on to explain they have been read, but would like him to explain it in his own words, and describing how he could help. Taking a deep heave, he is silent for a moment

before beginning to explain that his home has been burgled on numerous occasions. Due to his profound deafness, he is often unable to hear movement in the house and only discovers that items are missing on random occasions. Additionally, items of value such as his mobile phone and laptop are never stolen, suggesting that this was a case of distraction theft. He explains that he has tried to seek help from the local police. However they have been very unhelpful, and have classified him as a 'time-waster'. Over the course of the conversation with Mr Langdon which spanned approximately 45 minutes, MP Hill repeatedly tries to steer the conversation back to three key points: 1) his general safety, 2) attempting to identify and perhaps find the stolen goods and 3) speaking to the local police on his behalf. However Mr Langdon keeps asking MP Hill to 'use your power' to make the police believe him and to do their jobs. MP Hill explains that he does not have that sort of power, and further explains that what he is asking of him is undemocratic, making him no different from the police who did not do their jobs correctly.

Mr Langdon looks exasperated and agitated as he hears MP Hill's response. He takes a plastic sandwich bag filled with balls of dark hair out of a box. Asking MP Hill if he understands what lupus sufferers go through, to which he explains he does, as a very good friend of his also has the same disease. Ignoring the response, he proceeds to open the bag and place the ball of her hair on the table. Growing slightly hysterical, he explains the condition worsens with stress, causing chronic hair loss, and that this is the amount of hair he has lost in the last few weeks. MP Hill calmly explains that he understands that it must be difficult, but it is limited in terms of what he can do. He then has Rosie place a dusty storage box with wheels on the table, reaching in to take out a dusty comforter cover with holes all over. Raising his voice further he shouts that burglars have stolen his expensive threadcount sheets, leaving him to use this destroyed set. At this point MP Hill stands up to say, "Okay. I'm afraid you better leave. We are getting nowhere today." Rosie agrees and starts to help Mr Langdon with his items. It takes some time for the pair to leave the room as Mr Langdon continues to speak loudly about how MP Hill should be using his power and position to help him.

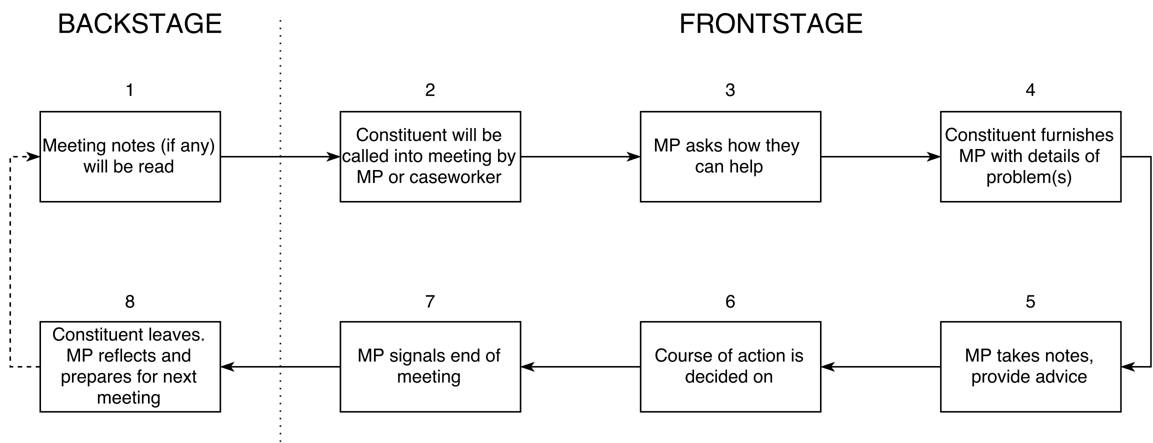
As he wraps up the surgery by tidying up the table, MP Hill explained he did not manage his time very well this week. He usually allocates twenty minutes per appointment. This time, what should have been a two hours long session ended up being three hours long. Although he does not like to keep constituents waiting, he often likes to allow them the time they need to speak about the problem at hand. This is especially since meetings with constituents are only arranged when they have problems more challenging and unique to tackle. In addition, he only sees cases his caseworkers are not able to manage such as this on, he prefers to gives them the time they need to explain what is going on. Looking exhausted, he also made it a point to explain that meeting hysterical constituents such as Mr Langdon was an anomaly that very rarely occurs.

As observed clearly in this exchange, MP Hill's efforts at remaining calm and showing sympathy for Mr Langdon's situation was futile. His hysterics such as bringing a bag full of bodily effects and destroyed duvet show was unexpected and extreme. Attempts to steer the conversation back to his safety and the burglary was met with unreasonable retorts, eliciting a forceful termination of the process. MP Hill's explanation after the surgery appointments were over reveals tensions he experiences in managing these meetings while keeping in mind his time in limited. In addition, evaluating his time management and disclosure of how rare a disruptive constituent like Mr Langdon is demonstrates backstage behaviour that I have found to occur in Stage 8. The following section will discuss the emergence of performative differences during the advice meeting process.

Performative Differences

Just like actors would on stage, MPs often demonstrate differences in behavior between when they are in front of their constituents and when they are not. Presenting themselves in a professional and approachable manner is key when interacting with their constituents. This presentation of self results in a marked difference in behaviour when they are frontstage (Stages 2 to 7) and backstage (Stages 1 and 8), revealing when the MP is performing and when they are not. "The individual projects a definition of the situation when he appears before

others", wishing to control the way people think of him, or for them to think that he thinks highly of them, or perceive how he feels towards them (Goffman, 1959: 15). This control is achieved "largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan" (Ibid). The ideal routine of how an MP conducts their surgery meetings, or any other interaction with constituents, is one where they are presenting their ideal self. Front stage, how they behave sets the tone for the meeting as they hope to exert control over what their audience thinks of them, or what they believe their audience thinks of them.



(Figure 6.2: The Expanded MP-Constituent Surgery Process)

Backstage behaviour is often less restricted, with actors revealing what they feel or think. This is often what is left unsaid during the formal, front stage interaction. The following example demonstrates how this takes effect. Conservative MP Barnaby Wright exhibited front and backstage personas clearly during his surgeries. I shadowed him in November 2014, during a surgery he held at the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) located in his constituency. The room where the surgery was held was small, neat and functional. The room was furnished with a desk with four chairs, and was enclosed with partially tinted glass. It was located in a newly equipped office (the CAB had moved to these new premises a few months earlier). On this occasion MP Wright was accompanied by his senior caseworker (stationed at his constituency office) Margaret, his

parliamentary assistant Laura (who had travelled to the surgery from London with me) and myself. A middle-aged woman, Margaret, scheduled the appointments with the constituents and prepared a brief outline of the issue at hand. The schedule and meeting preparation notes were available to be read prior to the actual surgery by MP Wright and his other assistants, but Margaret also provided him with updates between each meeting. Before he began the advice session, he made it a point to put his blackberry on silent mode, before asking us all if our mobiles were turned off. He then placed his phone on the table and announced that we ought to start. The procedure was as follows – Margaret or Laura would call for the constituents in the CAB waiting area and bring them into the room. MP Wright would stand up as he saw them, shake their hands, introduce himself, invite them to sit and start each appointment off by asking, “What can I do for you?” During this observation we are able to see how MP Wright prepares himself backstage, with the agenda clearly set with the silencing of our phones, as the process shifts from Stage 1 to Stage 2.

Issues that are raised during these surgeries were fairly mixed and ranged from personal to broader issues, such as local business initiatives, firemen’s pensions and immigration policies. Only six of the eight appointments showed up that Friday. A particular case, where a constituent sought MP Wright’s help in hopes of getting her grandson a place in a specific primary school in the area – Greenfields Primary School – is worth discussion. As per their routine, Margaret briefed MP Wright on the case prior to calling Mrs Sotheby in. Margaret emphasised to MP Wright that everything had been done to assist the constituent and her grandson, whose mother suffered from severe bouts of depression. MP Wright nodded and asked Laura to fetch the constituent into the office. Mrs Sotheby aggressively explained her situation to MP Wright. She claimed that his attendance at Greenfields was the only way she could get her grandson to school with the help of a neighbour (whose son also attended the school), as Mrs Sotheby worked full-time. She also pulled out a newspaper article from the *MailOnline*, saying, “I want to help you change this policy”. The article, "Teachers are struggling to cope with ‘influx of migrant children’", accused migrant children of being the cause of the insufficient number of places in

primary schools and inundating the country's resources (*MailOnline*, 29 October 2014).

Mrs Sotheby expressed that her grandson was going through these enrolment difficulties as he was born during a baby boom year, a fact that the hiring policies of teachers in primary schools had not catered for, a clear neglect on the part of the government. MP Wright did not visibly react to her aggression, but responded by asking her patiently about getting her grandson into other schools in the area. She was adamant that not enough had been done to help her situation, delving into how difficult her daughter's life was with depression, an illness that she had battled since the age of 17. Margaret interrupted to ask whether a doctor's letter had been given as proof to support Mrs Sotheby's case. MP Wright took over in a firm tone, "Margaret, let me handle this." This unyielding tone carried on to the end of the meeting, where a decision was taken to write another letter of support. As Mrs Sotheby left, MP Wright shook her hand with a "God bless", as he did with everyone constituent who came to his surgery. I later discovered that MP Wright was a devout Christian who attended church every week. As soon as Mrs Sotheby was out of the room, he turned to us immediately and stated plainly, "She just wants him to go to the better school". This sparked a short but fiery discussion, with a consensus being reached by all three that it was irresponsible for her daughter to have a child in the first place – given her severe depressive state. Laura made a face when she brought up the *MailOnline* article, revealing how she felt about the news source, and about the constituent for referencing it in the meeting. The surgery was wrapped up with the MP asking to speak to Laura outside, while Margaret and I tidied up the room as we left. Differences in backstage and frontstage behaviour were obvious on the part of MP Wright and his parliamentary assistant Laura. There was an evident shift in the mood of the room as Mrs Sotheby left. There was a lack of formality as MP Wright discussed the case with his staff. His need to control his mood and tone also dissipated, and he mentioned what he really thought of the case to his staff.

In the example with MP Williamson discussed in Stage 6, stark peformative differences in behaviour could be observed between the performance and after the constituent left. Although MP Williamson maintained a fairly neutral tone during the meeting, he expressed his inability to help Mr Hill the way he expected, terminating the repair process by suggesting that he leave. After he did, MP Williamson looked incredulous at the constituent, saying he must have “a way with women” as he had evidently fathered children with numerous women to be having such a problem. Actors usually present themselves as motivated by emotional and moral concerns guided by the environment they share with their audience (Alexander, 2011: 29). In this exchange we observe as MP Williamson’s moral judgement guides his performance. In this instance achieving repair was not his goal.

Although backstage behaviour usually occurs in Stages 1 and 8 of the advice surgery process, backstage behaviour can turn any region into the backstage. For example, as I shadowed Tessa Munt MP during her surgeries in Wells, I would often be given a lift in her car between surgeries. During these car journeys, cases would continue to be discussed between MP Munt and her caseworker beyond the surgery meeting, with them sharing thoughts and opinions. MP Munt’s opinions of the constituents and the cases were revealed in these instances, whether this was pity, empathy or moral judgement.

Garfinkel (1967) discusses the idea of making trouble during familiar and quotidian scenes. How one reacts to a conflict denaturalises these interactions, and this enables us to understand how these “structures of everyday activities are ordinarily and routine produced and maintained” (Garfinkel, 1967: 38). When an interaction with a constituent does not go according to plan, MPs need to react quickly and appropriately to manage the situation as they seek to return the interaction back to the process of repair. The demonstrated differences in behaviour depending on if they are in front of their constituents or not indicates not only the presence of performance but also the struggle MPs face as they seek to overcome performative fractures.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought deeper understanding of the performance between MPs and constituents by questioning the contemporary challenges they face in the process. I addressed this question firstly by analysing how a routine performance between the MP-actor and audience-constituent takes place when repair advances smoothly, and secondly by analysing when and what type of challenges and interruptions may erupt. Lastly, I interpreted how these conflicts and interruptions are overcome, delving into the performative differences between frontstage and backstage behaviour.

Analysing the interaction process of an advice surgery, I argued that MPs rely on the discursive formation of repair as they react to issues raised by constituents. This consists of a body of knowledge, in which constituents are made aware of the MP as a resource for help; the production of roles such as constituency caseworker as well as the MP as a safety valve and social worker; creation of objects such as written letters on behalf of constituents; with rules such as limits on the MP's jurisdiction within their own constituency in place.

Dissecting the advice surgery process, each appointment was found to go through eight clearly defined steps that make up the entire process, starting from before the meeting, to during and after. However, sudden schedule changes, disgruntled constituents, clashing opinions and potential hostility can mean that the MP-constituent interaction is not straightforward or simple. I have argued that as MPs react to these unexpected incidents while on standby, they spring into action, seeking to resolve these issues and achieve performance re-fusion. To this purpose, I interpreted how the MP advice surgery is carried out as MPs seek to successfully carry out the repair discursive formation, in order to portray legitimacy and achieve authenticity. I extended existing literature on constituency service interactions by analysing a specific routine performance and the challenges that may occur in each stage of the process. Findings indicate that MPs consistently encounter many stressful situations, and are often faced with challenging constituents. The unpredictability of their field of work was emphasised throughout this chapter as I showed how disruptions can occur

during any stage of the advice surgery. Overcoming disturbances successfully requires tact and finesse on the part of the MP. Through my interpretative analysis, I identified that MPs rely on three techniques: the use of logic, exertion of authority and counselling, to overcome these breakdowns as quickly as possible to return to routine process. Furthermore, MPs often demonstrate differences in behaviour depending on if they are in front of their constituents or not. Evidence demonstrates a marked difference in behaviour when they are frontstage, which occurs from Stages 2 to 7, and backstage, in Stages 1 and 8. This indicates the presence of performance, and allows the struggle MPs face as they seek to overcome performative fractures to be revealed.

Successfully overcoming these breakdowns indicates the possibility of ritual-like effects, an outcome that is often sought as it contributes to the MP's legitimacy as a representative of the institution. While I am not concerned with this evaluation of performative success, it validates my analytical argument of MPs seeking re-fusion through the discursive formation of repair. Thus, the next chapter will explore how MPs perform their representative constituency roles through performative acts that consist of discursive formations of accessibility, visibility and repair to symbolically "construct" meaning, projecting and maintaining their power. I also discuss how MPs exemplify power by the way they present themselves to constituents, exert power and draw reference to London and Westminster.

7 Performative Power and Seeking Re-fusion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I address the performative aspects of the MP-constituent interaction, by showing how MPs draw on existing discursive formations and other elements of social performance to portray legitimacy and power as an MP on standby. Prior to becoming MPs, political candidates struggle for power through the process of trying to convince voters to vote for them, by giving a performance that resonates with the voters. Once they have secured the position as political representatives for their constituencies, MPs are in positions of power, but have to continue successfully performing to their constituents in order to convince them of their legitimacy. Rather than asserting this legitimacy loudly and verbally, a lasting impression is best achieved through the staging of a dramatic presentation, or what I termed a legitimation procedure (Kertzer, 1988: 40). The goal of constituency performances is to create an emotional connection between the actor-MP and constituent-audiences, and the script results in the conditions for projecting cultural meaning from performance to audience successfully (Alexander, 2011: 53). The actor and their action will only be considered authentic if the elements of the performances have overcome fragmentation by achieving flow and re-fusion. Authenticity is attributed to the actor's ability to stitch the seams of distinct and separate elements seamlessly and convincingly. Alexander's epigrammatic description captures this struggle and its elements. "It depends on skill and fortune, on commanding an effective stage, on media interpretations, on shifting historical constellations, on audiences being prepared and responding in felicitous ways. The discourse of civil society creates the vocabulary for political speech, but it is flesh-and-blood actors who make this script walk and talk, who speak the words, form intonations, create tropes and time rhetorical flow" (Alexander, 2011: 102). It is this ability to deliver a successful performance that determines the projection of power and legitimacy. Thus, through my interpretative approach of the constituency service process, I look closely at elements of the interactions themselves to show they are being delivered.

This chapter also builds on the argument and motivation that has already been discussed at length in Chapters 1 and 2, and draws from the discussions in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 to show how these symbolically construct meaning between MP and constituent, culminating in performative power. How do MPs convince constituents of their legitimacy and power? In the context of political representatives, they have to demonstrate their power through symbolic actions guided by scripts, replete with appropriate symbols, settings and, in some cases, a cast of supporting actors. Yet a performance's success is never guaranteed, depending not only on the actor's performance, but also the audience's understanding and interpretation. As a result, constituent audiences remain unconvinced that what they see or hear is valid and true, and may find the presence of emotional and moral traits lacking in the political performances they experience. Thus, authenticity and legitimacy become out of reach. In a nutshell, the struggle to re-fuse the actor and their audience, connecting them with the script's discursive formations and the backgrounds that define it, encapsulates this struggle for power. As I have demonstrated in the earlier chapters, MPs enact each of the discursive formations in some form or another. However, my findings indicate that MPs face challenges of social performance that indicate performative failure. This includes the challenge of being natural, the challenge of means of symbolic production and the challenge of reception. Thus, the gap between actor and performer cannot be overcome and re-fusion cannot be achieved.

I then analyse the expression of these symbolic guises through *delivery*, where I discuss features of performances and how they are delivered by MPs to project power. This includes drawing legitimacy from Westminster, how they exert their power and, lastly, the acknowledgement of limits to their power. Following that, I relate power to the authenticity of MPs' constituency performances, suggesting that re-fusion has not been completely achieved.

7.2 Performing Power

As I have examined earlier in this chapter, discursive formations of accessibility, visibility and repair are integral to the MP's portrayal of power. These discursive

formations give structure and meaning to their constituency performance, but the success of re-fusion also lies in the delivery of the performative act. Convincing constituents of their power, capabilities and sincerity is also dependent on how the MP's performance is delivered. Demonstration and exercise of performative power can be observed as MPs interact with their constituents. Having control over the interaction as they project power is a prime opportunity for the MP to have their legitimacy established as they emphasise their accessibility, prompt their visibility and overcome disruptions during repair. Thus, in the following section I show how MPs cultivate control over their performance in order to convince their constituent-audiences through their delivery. This control comes by drawing legitimacy from Westminster, projecting power through the use of digital tools and through means of symbolic production.

Explanation of Power

During a performance, power can be communicated to constituents as MPs explain an abridged version of how power is distributed within the political system. It is an opportunity to provide the constituent audience a better conceptualisation of the Member's own power and how the Member is able to exercise this power. As Fenno (1978) described in *Homestyle*, each MP, especially experienced and returning Members, usually has a well-practiced spiel about what the job of an elected political representative entails. This may take the form of a speech, much like something from a politics and civics class, where the MP explains the three aspects of their role (party, government and local). Sometimes it is enlivened with the occasional "inside scoop" into what life is *really* like in the Commons, or, most frequently, an explanation of what a day in their life is really like. As the MP explains their power to their constituents, a key purpose is to convey the perception that they possess thorough knowledge about the system and policies in place, and are "comfortably conversant with its procedural intricacies" (Fenno, 1978: 137). During a surgery interaction between Oxford East Labour MP Andrew Smith and his constituent Mr Patrick Eccles in July 2015, I observed as MP Smith explained how a policy is passed and implemented. Enquiring about child tax credit changes, Mr Eccles sought MP Smith's help in

helping him understand what could be done to stop the changes, and whether the House of Lords had the authority to reject any policy changes. MP Smith explained the Labour Party's position on this matter, and then the process of policymaking in detail. Mr Eccles nodded as he took detailed notes and clarified his doubts. MP Smith answered these with ease, after which Mr Eccles thanked him, and left shortly after. In this episode MP Smith is observed to swiftly and proficiently provide a thorough explanation of the process, demonstrating knowledge as a party representative and a parliamentary representative. This interaction proceeded simply, with Mr Eccles satisfied with the answers he received.

The explanation of power as a sustenance to legitimacy is especially pronounced when MPs want to relay their ability to "get something done", and present themselves to be qualified to do so. MPs are increasingly required to become a one-stop hub for local problem solving, and, as I showed in the discussion of disruptions in Chapter 6, a shoulder to lean on. Demonstrating they possess this know-how not only speeds up the repair process, but also conveys a sense of competence that is more than likely to instill confidence in the audience. For instance, it was common to see MPs assuring their constituents during advice surgeries that they were able to help by being familiar with the local government bodies and their standard operating procedures. Constituents who have issues dealing with several problems through the various agencies are often at their wits' end when they decide to approach the MP. As the last resort, constituents are often hoping that the MP will be able to help them through their struggles. The ease they display when being able to provide or suggest a solution further legitimises the MP's position of power, which contributes to a smooth performative process.

In particular, having dealt with the same local agency before meant that the MP was confident in knowing how to handle the situation, and who to contact. During a surgery in February 2015, West London Labour MP Desmond Hill met with constituents Mr and Mrs Raymond Marshall, who had come in due to problems with the floorboards in their building. Mr Marshall, aged approximately

60, had mobility issues and walked with the help of a cane. The couple had been placed in their current first floor studio flat as part of the benefits they received. They pointed out to MP Hill that they were grateful to have a place to stay, but were experiencing difficulties with the location of the flat (a ground floor flat would be more suitable), and, more importantly, the poor quality of the floorboards. They explained that even the briefest of movements would result in loud squeaks that could be heard by the people in the floor below. Mr Marshall explained that they, along with their neighbours upstairs, had tried to use carpets and rugs to minimise the sounds, but with little effect. Tranquility Housing, the housing association in charge of managing their council flat, had been notified, but the situation was yet to be remedied. MP Hill nodded his head and said, "I'm not surprised. We have had problems with them before. I deal with this all the time. Tranquility is well aware of these problems." He took notes and explained that he would write to Tranquility Housing on the couple's behalf, if they would like him to. Mr and Mrs Marshall thanked MP Hill, before he walked them out. Here we observe as MP Hill demonstrates power by exhibiting familiarity with local issues, cases and/or specific policy areas. Being able to respond quickly with advice and help navigating the local government circuit enables the MP to not only be a conduit, but also to inspire constituents' confidence in them, and in the system itself.

This display of knowledge is further intensified if MPs are able to advise their constituents on how they should best proceed, down to the most minute of details. The specificity of the next steps to take further cements the portrayal that the MP is not only present to help, but also that they possess the extensive knowledge to do so. In a surgery in September 2015, MP George Watson met with Mrs Natalya Milton, who arrived promptly for her appointment. Offering her a seat, he proceeded to sit across the table from her, asking how he was able to help. Mrs Milton, who had called the constituency office every day to make an urgent appointment, explained that her house was severely flooded due to the recent heavy downpour. The drainage system had always been problematic, "a real issue" according to her, and significantly more so recently. Using her mobile phone, she showed MP Watson and his caseworker Eloise photos of the flooding,

to which MP Watson exclaimed, “Crikey!” Pollution and sewage from the drain had travelled up as it flooded, with her home and estate filled with garbage. The garden was also completely destroyed. MP Watson looked thoughtful, then proceeded to give Mrs Milton detailed, step-by-step instructions. “I will tell you what I need you to do, then I will tell you what I am going to do.” He instructed Mrs Milton to write him a detailed email, explaining what had occurred, specifically mentioning the rubbish from the sewage, and attaching the pictures she had just shown him. The first email she would receive from his office would be an automated reply, he said. MP Watson then explained he would write to the local council and Thames Water informing them about her situation, as “they are always fighting with each other as to who is to blame.” Winding up the advice session, he asked Eloise to check if the next appointment had arrived. He then recommended that Mrs Milton send an email to him as soon as possible so that they would be able to start the process of repairing the sewer and her home. Mrs Milton expressed concern that writing emails might not be effective, but MP Watson reassured her, saying, “Well, they have to reply to me.” He prompted her to write as soon as possible, informing her that it might take up to about five weeks before she could expect any information.

This incident illustrates MP Watson’s portrayal of power in a few ways. Firstly, his methodical approach to Mrs Milton’s problem speaks of confidence. “I will tell you what I need you to do, and then I will tell you what I am going to do”, is a very assertive line, with the use of “I” signify him taking charge, making the problem his to solve. Secondly, the step-by-step explanation illustrates how he is able to successfully signpost constituents to places or agencies to receive the help they require. He also makes clear what information the constituent needs to include in her letter, so that he may pass it on to the respective agencies. A belief in the power he boasts can also be observed, as he states bluntly that the agencies he contacts have no choice but to respond to him. In this respect, he is privileged and possesses the power to control the reaction of the institutions. While he is not able to assure Mrs Milton of the type of response he will be receiving, he expresses confidence that he will certainly get one.

Similarly, during an advice surgery at the local community centre in July 2015, MP Andrew Smith spoke to troubled constituent Serena Khan. The meeting took place in an empty multifunctional hall, where a table and four chairs were set up in the middle of the room. Approximately 50 years of age with a slight frame, Ms Khan looked worried as she approached MP Smith at the table. When asked how he was able to help, she explained that her daughter had been undergoing rehabilitation at an addiction treatment centre just outside of Oxfordshire. She had not received any news from her daughter in recent months, and was unsure if the last contact number she was given was still in use. Confidentiality clauses meant that the treatment centre was unable to release any further information. Visibly distraught, her eyes started to water as she explained that her son had passed away a few years ago, making it especially important for her to find her daughter. MP Smith reached over the table and placed a hand over hers, comforting her. In a show of empathy, he shared his own experience, as his wife Val had recently passed away. As the constituent calmed down, she continued to provide MP Smith with details of the centre. He offered to write to the treatment centre, reassuring her by saying, "They will let an MP talk to her, don't worry".

In both these instances, we are able to observe the MP drawing on power as a representative of Westminster. MP Smith's statement, "They will let an MP speak to her, don't worry", describes the authority he believes he possesses. Clearly, he considers that his position allows him the power to circumvent conventional data protection measures.

On another occasion, MP Barnaby Wright spoke with an upset constituent about the large amount of homework her children were receiving in school. The surgery took place in a tidy, medium-sized office at the local Citizen's Advice Bureau. MP Wright was dressed in a navy suit, white shirt, matching tie and polished brown brogues. Mrs Sonia March looked sharp in a white blouse, black trouser suit and court shoes. When called in, Mrs March strode into the room purposefully and took her seat. All three of her children (aged between seven and 11 years old) were attending the same local primary school. She described her children as constantly miserable, "coming home crying", and loudly opined that the stress the school

was putting her children through was unnecessary. Her efforts to speak to their teachers and school principal had not led anywhere, resulting in her approaching MP Wright. She hoped he was able to wield influence on the education policy that was currently in place. He listened to her intently while taking note of the primary school's details. He asked her a few questions about the school principal, before proposing to have a word with then Secretary for Education, Nicky Morgan MP. According to him, his Westminster office was across the hallway from hers. The close proximity allowed him convenient access to reach out to her, but he made sure to remind Mrs March that it was not his place to promise anything, but that he would do his best.

Within this exchange, presentational and explanatory elements can be observed (Fenno, 1978: 137). Firstly, it is evident that MP Barnaby Wright exhibits confidence as he provides Mrs March with an explanation and a suggestion. By checking that she had exhausted the typical avenues, he was then able to suggest another course of action. His offer to speak to the Secretary of Education demonstrated a capacity to be able to do so, a key to inside power (Ibid). Here, it is plain to see that "power is partly discourse, and discourse is partly power" – the statement condensed the power available in the process, while strengthening the discursive formation of power itself (Fairclough, 1995: 4). MP Wright uses this opportunity to strengthen his power within the office he holds, but also presents himself as drawing on the power he holds from Westminster to speak on behalf of Mrs March.

MPs also use speaking up in Parliament during opportunities such as Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) as a method of demonstrating how they are able to influence policymaking. Over the course of my observations, MPs offered to raise questions during PMQs to draw attention to cases they were not able to directly help with, in the hope of influencing policy. While I was shadowing Andrew Smith MP in July 2015, one particular case stood out. This meeting took place at the local pool and leisure centre, in a meeting room that was plain, quiet and away from the main centre area. The first appointment of the day, constituent Micah Rannells and his wife Jemima, arrived at the advice surgery with an urgent

matter about which they had previously written to MP Smith. Upon their arrival, MP Smith invited them to have a seat, saying, "Tell me about it. I mean, I know what it is about briefly, but tell me about it in your own words." The Rannells' son had been imprisoned in Thailand for a number of years, due to what they believed was a misunderstanding. Contact with him was limited, largely due to the language barrier and the minimal rights he received while in prison. MP Smith looked contemplative as he listened. As the Rannells' son was imprisoned overseas, MP Smith did not have legal jurisdiction over the case. He suggested Mr and Mrs Rannells research similar cases through the House of Commons Library, to find out how cases of imprisoned nationals abroad were managed by the government. "The other thing I could do is, ask a parliamentary question. I could mention him by name, but only if you want me to." MP Smith went on to explain that doing so would send a signal to the Embassy of Thailand. To prevent any damage being done to the Embassy's reputation, there was the possibility that they would take action on the case a little faster. However, if the Rannells were not comfortable with that, he suggested the possibility of raising a more general question during PMQs, such as "How many British nationals are awaiting trial abroad?" This would bring attention to the case, as well as solicit some helpful advice.

Digital Power

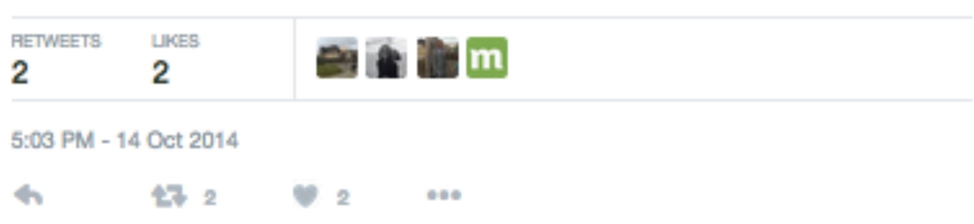
As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, the MPs I observed sought visibility along a continuum that integrated physical co-presence with traditional media and digital tools. This ranged from low to no integration, emphasising co-present visibility, to average integration with an emphasis on co-presence, to high integration with equal emphasis on additional tools and co-presence. Those who included digital tools and social media platforms in their communication arsenal were able to demonstrate to their constituents the power they drew from their position in Westminster. Utilising platforms such as personal websites, Facebook and/or Twitter, MPs were not only able to maintain visibility to their constituents, but also exhibit themselves wielding power within the Commons.

As these posts were being generated and posted, those in positions of power sought to promote the image of themselves they would like the audience to have, subsequently maintaining their place as power holder (Kertzer, 1998: 40). Images 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 are three consecutive tweets from Conservative MP Christopher Lewis. He tweeted updates before and after a parliamentary debate that took place on 13 October 2014, where he presented a speech on recognising Palestine. A link to the speech transcript was also tweeted the day after (14 October 2014) the speech took place. The tweets, and intention behind the tweets, can be interpreted to be serving multiple purposes. Firstly, they were informative. Audiences were kept up-to-date with what the MP was doing in the Commons, along with how he would be voting. As a topic of a sensitive political nature, this openness not only allowed MP Lewis to share the experience with his followers, but also to reveal the magnitude of the decisions he had to make in his position as an MP. Secondly, the interactive nature of Twitter provided the opportunity for audiences to respond, if they so wished. The tweet in Image 7.1 received six retweets, seven likes and 11 responses, whereas the tweet in Image 7.2 received 14 retweets, nine likes and four responses. Responses to the tweets contained a mix of support, opinions and opposition. It is, however, uncertain if these responses were made by constituents living in the constituency.

(Image 7.1: Tweet by MP Christopher Lewis, 13 October 2014)

(Image 7.2: Tweet by MP Christopher Lewis, 13 October 2014)

Image 7.3 displays a later tweet by MP Lewis with a link to the transcript of his speech. It reminded audiences about the speech he had made in Parliament the day before, and his voting choice, and was transparent about the content of his speech. It provided a form of accountability to the audience – ensuring that they had access to what had been said. The use of Twitter enabled a percentage of MP Lewis' audience to catch up on what had been said, engaged audiences in the process of policy making and, once again, drew attention to the MP having the power to carry out his duty as a representative.

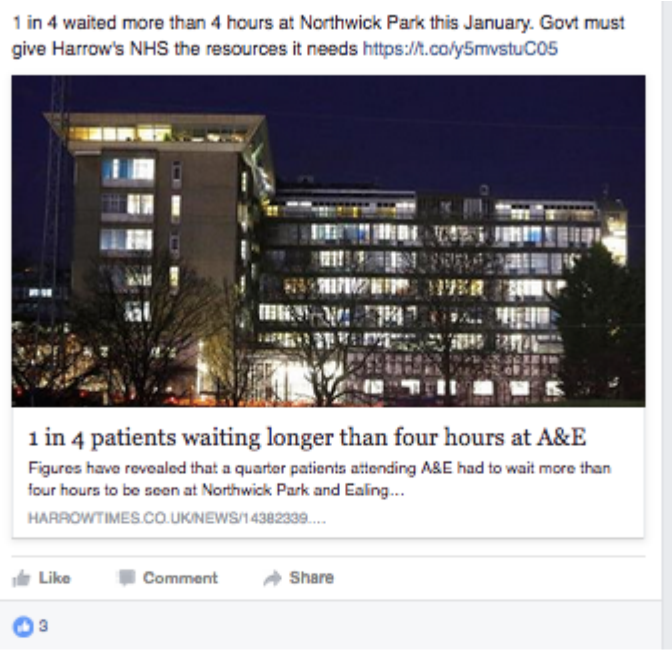


(Image 7.3: Tweet by MP Christopher Lewis, 14 October 2014)

MP George Watson, who represents a constituency in Harrow, demonstrates in the Facebook updates below (Images 7.4 and 7.5) how he spoke in the chamber about how budget cuts in the health service would directly impact his constituents and sick patients in his constituency. This opportunity and the use

of this outlet enables him to present his presence in Parliament, and his power as a political representative to potentially impact policy that could help his constituency.

(Image 7.4: Facebook update by MP George Watson, 22 March 2016)



(Image 7.5: Facebook update by MP George Watson, 24 March 2016)

Here we observe that the presence of MPs online has been a way for them to demonstrate not only what they are doing in Parliament as well as in the constituencies, but also being in the position of power to possibly effect significant policy changes. Some MPs believe that they also have the power to influence and encourage constituents, as their representative. While shadowing Conservative MP Barnaby Wright, who represents a commuter constituency in Essex, I observed as he attempted to wield his power by tweeting and updating his status on Facebook to encourage his constituents to ring into a local news radio show. As I discussed in Chapter 5, on this particular day MP Barnaby Wright picked his parliamentary assistant, Marina, and me up from the local train station to drive us to the advice surgery that was to take place at the local Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB). During the drive to the CAB, MP Wright discussed interactions he had had with constituents that morning at the train station, including Mr Oppenheimer. We arrived at the location a little ahead of schedule, so we sat in the car while MP Wright finished his breakfast, with BBC Essex playing in the background. The morning radio news show was on and the host, Dave Monk, was preparing to interview the local Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). This prompted MP Wright to react loudly. Asking Marina for her opinion, he considered tweeting to "instigate" discussion about illegal squatters, a problem that had been plaguing his constituency. MP Wright and Marina discussed the matter angrily. The local police had not been helpful, and none of the other local institutions seemed bothered about the influx of squatters, despite them exhibiting anti-social behaviour such as being rude and abusive to residents. MP Wright implored constituents who had experienced this abuse to call in by tweeting twice, updates that were also cross-posted to his Facebook page, before we left to start the surgery. The tweets were worded similarly, retweeted four and five times each, with one of them liked twice.

Within half an hour of shadowing MP Wright, I had observed as he demonstrated his power online in more than one example. Similar to MP Christopher Lewis, MP Wright used his Facebook page and blog to demonstrate his power as a representative, and spotlight on what he had done in his position of power. There was also evidence that he believed he had the power to influence his constituents

to call into the radio programme by tweeting about it. Describing his action as an instigation points to a provocation of sorts, evoking a less than positive meaning behind his actions. It is evident that he had hoped that the PCC would be faced with questions from constituents, and would be held accountable for not having done anything to improve the situation.

Means of Symbolic Production

As actors and audiences interact within the same environment, the dynamism within the interaction also involves the objects around it, or what Alexander (2010, 2011) refers to as the means of symbolic production. What Goffman (1959: 34) terms "standardised expressive equipment" includes clothes, physical places where the performance takes place and any other prop that would assure the successful performance to an audience. These objects and spaces help to dramatise and make vibrant the invisible intentions they are trying to represent (Alexander, 2011). These are details most intimately identified with the performer that can often be lost in oversight. Dressing in a certain manner, especially professionally, having a neatly coiffed hairstyle, the manner in which one carries oneself and the physical places where performances take place are details that come together to allow symbolic projections to be made (Alexander, 2011: 31). Just as one would dress in a costume and prepare theatre sets for a performance, the way MPs dress and the places where meetings with their constituents take place also contribute to setting the scene, their impression management and their projection of power.

To further illustrate the importance of these subtleties, Sahlins (1976) argues that the American system of clothing is like the structure of language. Much like language, the rules surrounding the types of clothes one wears map a cultural entity, complete with a set of rules on what to wear, when and who. Clothes are produced to suit specific categories: genders; night or day; to lounge about at home or to go out; for the adult or youth. These in turn generate classifications of time, place, occasion and status in relation to the combinations and textures of the clothing, denoting numerous statements about the relations between persons and situations within the system in place. Furthermore, Connerton points out

that 19th-century Victorian clothing, for example, not only indicated to the world what type of roles the wearers were expected to perform, but also was central in reminding the wearer themselves of the responsibilities and constraints of their role (1989: 33). Men wore dark coloured, sharply silhouetted clothing, which emphasised broad chests, with minimal embellishments that allowed the wearer free reign to move easily. This denoted that men were meant to be serious, strong, aggressive and active. Women, on the other hand, were expected to embody frivolity; to be delicate, inactive and submissive. Corseted dresses were pastel-coloured, adorned with frills and ribbons, were constricting and accentuated the idea of a small waist and sloping shoulders (Ibid).

Within the modern day context, the language of clothing is still persistent, though less tethered to strict rules. Women's clothing is no longer as restrictive, and inspiration is drawn from menswear (e.g. boyfriend jeans and the trouser suit). Colours and patterns have been introduced to the male wardrobe. Despite these relaxations in language rules, the subtle nuances that accompany what type of clothing is worn during specific occasions still exist. These include the implicit signals that are tied to attire and the setting of the interactions. For instance, professional working attire often alludes to a sense of formality during an interaction between the performer and the audience. I observed the MPs' clothing from the standpoint of the perceiver, and not the performer wearing it (Connerton, 1989: 33). Five of the male MPs I shadowed during their advice surgeries were always dressed in fairly formal fitted suits. When I shadowed MP Barnaby Wright in November 2014, he wore a well-tailored navy suit, pressed white shirt, an expensive-looking navy silk tie, polished brown oxford shoes, complete with a Mont Blanc ball point pen tucked into his suit pocket. Conservative MP William Morgan and Labour MPs George Watson and Desmond Hill wore similar clothing permutations when meeting their constituents during surgeries. They would usually wear a dark grey suit, a pressed white or light blue shirt paired with a dark coloured silk tie and gleaming black court shoes. They would carry a backpack or folder containing casework and letters. It was plain to see that MPs Morgan, Watson and Hill dressed to maintain a sense of formality between them and their constituents.

Conservative MP James Williamson's presentation of self proved to be particularly interesting. I had the opportunity to shadow him for a full day around his constituency on 8 April 2016. The day started from his commute from London to his constituency, located in Buckinghamshire. Gretchen, his long-time office manager, informed me that MP Williamson had offered to drive me to his constituency, an offer I accepted. I was reminded to arrive at his West London home promptly at 9am, and was emailed precise instructions from Gretchen (including a location map) the day before. I arrived on time as instructed, and met MP Williamson outside the door of his townhouse. He was dressed in the same outfit I observed him wear the previous two Fridays I had shadowed him. He paired a brown, green and blue tweed jacket with matching trousers tailored to suit his frame, a sky blue shirt, a knitted navy tie and a forest green Barbour waxed jacket. As before, his feet were clad in woollen blue socks and polished brown brogues. Gold-rimmed glasses were perched on his nose, and his blond hair was neatly brushed. A transparent box folder, filled with surgery case notes, was tucked under his arm as he directed me to one of his two cars, calling it his "small constituency car". The dingy grey car looked rather messy, and, as he described, was indeed a modestly-sized sedan. He stated that he drove into the constituency all the time, and did not get his transport costs reimbursed.

From this episode we are able to observe how MP Williamson sought to control his image in the constituency. Always dressed impeccably and well-groomed, MP Williamson also ensured that he drove a specific car (out of the two he owned) to his constituency. It was the less showy of the two, as it was small, modest and fairly dated. His use of this car demonstrated that he was doing what he thought he should be doing, contributing to how he was perceived by his constituents. There was a sense that he ensured his image was maintained in a consistent manner in order to minimise the dissimilarity between himself and the constituent.

In typical everyday life, there is a straightforward awareness that first impressions are significant (Goffman, 1959: 22). These five MPs illustrated how the role of an MP, in their perspective, required them to dress as working professionals. Much

like those in professions that require specific dress codes, such as a financial position in the City, these MPs were observed to dress well. This observation is aligned with arguments that the job of an MP has increasingly become professionalised, with a growing trend towards the career politician (King, 1981; Riddell, 1993; Cairney, 2007). The suits worn by the MPs functioned as a stimuli, signifying the performer's status, as well as the performer's temporary ritual state – whether they were engaging in a formal social activity, work or a recreational affair (Goffman, 1959: 34). As they engaged with constituents in the constituency as representatives, they were conducting meetings as part of their remit as an MP. Care had clearly gone into how these MPs presented themselves. However, it must be pointed out that this ran the risk of performance failure, should constituents be reminded of the varying social powers between themselves and the representative and leave the performative interaction thinking the MP was unlikely to understand their plight.

In terms of settings, these performances took place in a variety of office-like settings depending on the day. These included but were not limited to a room in the local party office (MPs Williamson, Watson, Hill and Morgan), a room at a charity office (MP Wright) or meeting rooms in the local library (MPs Miller and Morgan). These meetings areas were secure and quiet, allowing private issues to be discussed comfortably. Several chairs and a table were often set up in the middle of the room, with the MP and their caseworker (if present) usually sitting on one side of the table. As constituents were called in by the MP, much like in a doctor's surgery, they were invited to sit down and talk about their problem. Looking professional, and working within an office-like space, coalesces to present a setting where the MP is prepared to solve the constituent's problems, and ultimately where performance re-fusion can take place.

Making decisions on what expressive equipment was standard for themselves was not always straightforward for the MPs. MP Peter Kyle spoke to me about how, as a politician, he felt the need to dress more formally than he ever had previously, a revelation that was at odds with his own sense of comfort and self. He expressed how the clothing he wore directly impacted not only how he felt, but how he

acted. This open, honest conversation provided further understanding of how the expressive equipment can affect the way MPs project their power. This clothing allowed him to perform his role to his constituents as authentically as possible, resulting in a re-fused performance. He described in detail how dressing in a suit rather than in jeans and a sports jacket made him feel: "… You have to dress a certain way as a politician. Obviously in the Chamber you have to wear formal stuff, you have to wear suits. I can really understand why people say, 'I voted for him, or her, and now look at 'em. That's not the person I voted for.'… I didn't own a tie until I was 35, so dress is very important for me… The world doesn't fall apart if you're in jeans and a jacket. And it is amazing… part of that is about me, and allowing me, because dress is very important, and it is. It's about me being able to feel comfortable in my own skin, and if I am more comfortable, then I am able to act more comfortably, and it will come across more as, as my personality because I am more comfortable in my own skin and my environment" (personal communication, 25 November 2015). Here, we observe as he alludes to how authenticity requires cohesion between means of symbolic production.

From his interview excerpt above, MP Peter Kyle demonstrates his passionate belief that he was his most authentic self when dressed comfortably, in what he preferred. Similar sentiments were also shared in a Facebook post describing his first year as Hove's representative (8 May 2016). This post described various dimensions of his role as an MP, his hopes for the rest of his tenure, as well as the challenges he had faced. He also used this occasion and outlet to draw attention to his image and appearance, relating it to the kind of clothes he felt he had to wear, depending on the occasion. In his post, he mentions "Loads of people said, 'once you get elected you'll disappear up to London and turn into one of them'. I know what they mean and I'm very conscious of it. It's something I really struggle with because if you're in the Commons what you wear, the language you use and even your vocabulary is regulated… It's really tough to appear 'normal' because the situation I'm in now is often abnormal. I try my best though and I do things like change into clothes I'm comfortable in once I'm finished in the chamber for the day, it's something I'm still working on" (Peter Kyle MP Facebook, 8 May 2016).

This explanatory excerpt illuminates the stark contrast between what his constituents think of MPs in the Commons, and what they think of MPs in the constituency. MP Kyle expounds on this by discussing how what he wears and how he speaks differs depending on whether he is in the Commons or not. Referring to being out of his comfort zone when wearing a suit, he is making clear that he feels stifled in the formal situation he is now part of, while trying to retain his identity as the person who has been voted in by his constituents. Declaring that "dress is very important to me" further cements his assertion that clothing has a large impact on the way he feels, and therefore on how he performs. He suggests that this sense of authenticity would be perceived by his constituents during their interactions.

Like MP Peter Kyle, there are some MPs who prefer to dress informally when meeting with constituents. While wearing a suit might project a sense of professionalism and formality, for these MPs this might be precisely the reason why suits or more formal attire are avoided. Some prefer to maintain their approachability by wearing smart-casual or even casual clothes, akin to what their constituents might wear to their meetings. This included MPs Tessa Munt and David Miller. MP Munt was often observed in her constituency with a well-groomed blonde bob, dressed in dark blue jeans and a long-sleeved polo top or jumper, knee-high leather boots, a navy gilet and a large red leather purse. Furthermore, her outfit was practical for moving around a large, rural constituency like Wells, where she often had to drive to various villages and towns to meet her constituents. Her advice surgery meetings were often held in local cafes, pubs and community halls, thus creating a cohesive synthesis between the means of symbolic production. Similarly, MP Miller usually sported a polo neck t-shirt, beige cargo trousers or slacks, and a pair of sports trainers. On a particular Saturday surgery, MP Miller dressed in a similar combination, and rode his bicycle to the meeting that took place within a local church hall. It was a casual, open plan area, where the parishioners walking in and out of the church were able to pop their head into the office to say hello to MP Miller, and

ask if he required anything. His casual outfit, presentation of self and the typical everyday environment were cohesive, presenting the image of a relatable MP.

Recall that the goal of these performances is to overcome social and cultural fragmentation, to create flow and to ultimately achieve re-fusion. Re-fusion is reliant on all the separate elements of performances coming together so seamlessly they appear to be indivisible and invisible (Alexander, 2011: 55). Symbolic signifiers such as the actor, background, culture, mise-en-scène, audience and means of symbolic production must all seem to come easily together. Another facet relating to presentation of self is the manner in which we carry ourselves. Manner may be taken to "refer to those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation." (Goffman, 1959: 35). In other words, how does the performer behave, in light of their script and setting? As I have just demonstrated, MPs often have a "confirming consistency", between their appearance and their manner (Ibid). For example, a well-dressed and groomed representative within a neat and clean office (such as MP Desmond Hill), behaving with an air that demonstrates that they are aware of what they are doing, presents a harmonious, cohesive image that becomes the backdrop of the performance that takes place. However, the performance's success is also dependent on the manner in which the MP carries themselves.

During a surgery with Barnaby Wright MP, whom I have described earlier as being well dressed and groomed, it could be observed that his manner was consistent with his self-presentation. Control over the situation was demonstrated as he ensured we had turned our mobiles to silent mode before the first meeting began. As the surgeries proceeded, he continued to establish his authority. During the surgery appointment with Mrs Sotheby, as discussed in Chapter 6, she was visibly aggressive towards MP Wright in hopes of getting her grandson a place in Greenfields Primary School. Recall she also pulled out a newspaper article from the *MailOnline*, saying, "I want to help you change this policy". The article, "Teachers are struggling to cope with 'influx of migrant children'", accused migrant children of being the cause of the insufficient number

of places in primary schools and inundating the country's resources (*MailOnline*, 29 October 2014). MP Wright did not visibly react to her aggression, but responded by asking her patiently about getting her grandson into other schools in the area. She was adamant that not enough had been done to help her situation, delving into how difficult her daughter's life was with depression, an illness that she had battled since the age of 17. Margaret interrupted to ask whether a doctor's letter had been given as proof to support Mrs Sotheby's case. MP Wright took over in a firm tone, "Margaret, let me handle this." This unyielding tone carried on to the end of the meeting, where a decision was taken to write another letter of support and Mrs Sotheby leaves.

MP Wright can be observed to control the setting as much as possible, ensuring that there would be no interruptions from mobile phones. His authority was further demonstrated during the interaction with Mrs Sotheby, when he assertively told his caseworker Margaret, when she tried to ask questions, to "let me handle this." This command was clear in content and delivery. While Margaret might have been trying to be helpful, but MP Wright saw her question as an interruption, and wanted to move past it so that the advice surgery process would be able to carry on.

In another example, during an advice surgery with Andrew Smith MP in July 2015, it was revealed that he had strategically arranged for constituent Mrs Madeleine Dillon to meet him as the first appointment so that would be able to ask her to leave if he needed to. She had come to see him a few times already, and insisted on doing so even though "[MP Smith couldn't] really do anything more." Over the course of the interaction, which lasted approximately 10 minutes, MP Smith listened attentively as Mrs Dillon talked about her dogs and how she hoped MP Smith could help her advocate for them, "I live for my dogs, you know." He reminded Mrs Dillon that he was unable to do anything further for her. Disappointed, she tried to engineer other ways to discuss her plight but MP Smith stood up and said, "Well, it was nice to see you again" as he indicated the meeting was over. MP Smith established control over the interaction with an exit strategy in place. Over the course of the meeting he was also able to direct the

flow of the conversation politely while reminding Mrs Dillon that he was not in a position to do anything more for her. Although repair was not achieved in this interaction, as a legitimation procedure, MP Smith succeeded in giving the constituent his time and going through the process of repair cordially and respectfully. However, he also acknowledged his limits, which I will discuss in the next section.

7.3 The Art of the Possible: Acknowledgement of Limits

Being a representative of the people does necessitate the possession of some power, but often there are things that are beyond the MP's capacity. As much as they would like to assist, there are instances that indicate their power to so is limited. Over the course of my observations, variants of the line, "I cannot promise anything but I will do what I can" were often the parting words MPs gave before signalling the end of the advice surgery meeting. This acknowledgement of their limits might be conceived as a lack of power, but I demonstrate in this section why the contrary is true. Unlike a performance disruption, as I have analysed in Chapter 6, the grasp of one's capabilities can be considered a form of power in itself. By knowing and communicating their limits, they are managing their constituent's expectations; maintaining the line that they are trying to do their best, while also possibly avoiding potential disruptions.

During the advice surgery where I shadowed MP William Morgan in August 2015, two interactions with constituents demonstrated this clearly. Ms Malindi Dalakoti, aged approximately 35, arrived at the local Conservative Party office to discuss her immigration problems. Originally from Pakistan, she explained that she had lived in the UK for over 10 years, mostly on a Tier 4 student visa. During this time, she got married to her husband, and they now had a seven-year-old son. Her application for permanent residency had been declined and she would have liked MP Morgan's help in her appeal. As she did not have a clear visa status, she had also not been able to find a job, resulting in financial difficulties for her family. MP Morgan agreed to write a letter to support her appeal, but reminded her openly that he was unable to "wave a magic wand", and "[couldn't]

guarantee [her] anything". She appeared to understand, and gratefully thanked him for his help.

The last constituents of the day (out of 10), Mr and Mrs Willoughby, were seeking MP Morgan's help with regards to their son, who suffered from acute mental health difficulties. Mrs Willoughby emotionally explained that they had struggled with medical professionals at the care home where he lived, over healthcare decisions, and that this had been detrimental to their son's recovery. Mr and Mrs Willoughby were both healthcare professionals, and were familiar with decision-making procedures as his parents. However, doctors had blamed them for his health complications, and had denied them the right to make medical choices on his behalf. Furthermore, they believed that he ought to be sectioned. Helpless, they hoped that MP Morgan would be able to suggest possible solutions. MP Morgan listened intently while his caseworker took notes. After some clarification of the issue at hand, he suggested that their lawyer contact the Minister of State for Health. He cautioned them, "Truth be told I'm not sure that will help. He will just push it on to someone else." MP Morgan admitted that he was not familiar with the care home they spoke of, but said that he would acquaint himself with the necessary information, ending the meeting by saying, "I can't promise anything obviously, but I will write these letters."

Members emphasise their desire to help, but explain that their influence on constituency matters does not necessarily help change decisions already made by other bodies. In one example, MP Peter Kyle was observed to explain numerous times to constituents that wanted him to change decisions already made by the Housing Council that he was unable to do so: "I'm afraid that this is not within my jurisdiction… I am a voice that can cause a rethink."

Both examples above demonstrate clearly how MP Morgan was keen to help, and had some idea of what to do, yet was aware that power on his part to change any decisions made was limited. On both occasions he was quick to remind constituents that he was unable to guarantee a favourable outcome. Why is this significant? If we consider the position of the MP as a conduit between the

government and the people navigating the rough seas of public administration, it is important to recognise that the constituents have chosen to seek the MP out for assistance. Regardless of the outcome, the MP is present to assist constituents. Going through the routine itself is an acknowledgement of the MP's position of power, in the hopes that they will be able to provide some sort of help.

In another instance, MP Desmond Hill met his constituent Weston Pope during an advice surgery that took place in July 2015. Mr Pope revealed that a large financial transaction he had made online through his bank's website had been fraudulently intercepted. Despite writing a complaint to the bank, and contacting the financial ombudsman, the bank he used had not been able to help him. Frustrated, he explained that the bank had been using their data and client protection policies as a shield against helping him acquire his money back. The situation, in his opinion, was "downright bizarre". MP Hill listened intently as he shifted in his seat, taking notes and asking a few questions. Tapping his finger on his temple, MP Hill suggested that Mr Pope consider calling into the Moneybox programme on BBC Radio 4 to seek advice, stating, "I think this is about all I can bring to the table." He continued to suggest that going to the media (here he referred to the news media) might be the best option, if the typical methods did not seem to be leading anywhere. MP Hill proposed the possibility of passing the matter to the Treasury Select Committee, but such a request would take some time to be processed and its success unlikely. "Hopefully I won't have to do any of these things. Don't let the fact that I'm dealing with this stop you from dealing with it too." MP Hill continued to explain that it might be useful to use the media as a threat, "probably be effective if you say that you met with your MP, and that he is horrified, and might speak about it to the media. Let's push all their buttons and see what happens."

MP Hill's advice to Mr Pope proves unique but no less presentational when it comes to him explaining his power. Although he acknowledged his limits about being unable to help in his position as an MP, his unique advice to approach a radio programme while mentioning his name suggests MP Hill's belief that this

would bring prominence to Mr Pope's plight. It also demonstrates belief in the part he is playing – that is, using his name would serve to greater influence an outcome to emerge. His advice indicates an understanding of the media and how it could work in their favour, possibly from his experience as an MP since 2005.

In this section I have demonstrated how MPs acknowledge the limits of what they are able to do in their position of power. While this might be initially conceived as a lack of power, I have demonstrated how the grasp of one's capabilities can be considered a form of power in itself, as MPs manage their constituent's expectations and maintain that they are doing their best, while also possibly avoiding potential or further disruptions. In the next section I draw an analysis between these performative deliveries, the discursive formations in the standby MP framework discussed throughout the dissertation, and the quest for re-fusion, to complete my discussion of the contemporary constituency service process.

7.4 The Quest for Re-fusion

Per my dissertation argument set forth in Chapter 1, seeking to overcome societal fragmentation and stratification to achieve authenticity is the goal of MP performances. MPs as power-holders seek to promulgate the view of the political situation (in this case the work being carried out in the constituency service and on behalf of the constituency) they would like their constituency audience to hold (Kertzer, 1988: 41). As MPs and their constituents interact at a micro level with the influence of institutions and cultures present, it is observed that this struggle for power is not over once the MPs have been voted in. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, with modernity comes growth of communities and societal stratification (new or the exacerbation of existing fractures). With these changes come repeated challenges to power. The success of a re-fused performative action where one is considered authentic only occurs when an individual or a collective actor is able to communicate the meanings of their actions they want their audiences to believe, within the context of the socio-cultural structure in place. Demonstration and exercise of power with the help of symbolic guises is observed as MPs present themselves to constituents, exert

power when faced with challenges and draw references to Westminster and Parliament (Kerzer, 1988: 174). This not only legitimises the MP's position within the constituency, but also is an opportunity for the power hierarchy to be displayed between the actor-MP and audience-constituent. The struggle for power within these interactions is not so much a struggle to be the next head of a tribe or the political leader but, rather, the struggle for successful performance re-fusion.

To complete my investigation of the contemporary constituency service process I will first briefly restate the criteria for a successful performance as set out by Alexander's (2010; 2011) theory of cultural pragmatics. Recall that the goal for any performance, regardless of whether it takes place on a stage or in society, is to nimbly create a believable, masterful, affective connection with the audience that will result in the projection of cultural meaning. For successful performative re-fusion to occur, actors must seek to overcome social and cultural fragmentation in the most natural way possible to recover a momentary ritual-like effect, in which all the performative elements fuse together frictionlessly (Alexander, 2011: 55). The performance's success is determined by its verisimilitude and the inability to detect the performance at all (Alexander, 2011: 56).

Through my analysis of the constituency process in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I have determined how the discursive formations of accessibility, visibility and repair form the framework of the MP's constituency service performance, which I termed "on standby". In this section I will bring to bear challenges to performative re-fusion observed through my earlier analyses of accessibility, visibility, repair and the manifestation of power in the constituency service performances by MPs that indicate the possibility of performative failure. These include the challenge of the means of symbolic production, the challenge of being natural, and the challenge of reception. When faced with these challenges the gap between actor and performer cannot be overcome and re-fusion is not achieved.

The Challenge of Means of Symbolic Production

A key aspect of a performance's success is whether its means of symbolic production is appropriate and sufficient. In a smaller society access to these means is not usually complicated. However, in a larger, differentiated complex society, the means of symbolic production required for a performance to not just a variety of people, but a large number of them can prove to be a challenge. These performative spaces, or stages which the actors use to project their messages, need to be a suitable base on which symbolic production can take place. They are often configured to suit the performance about to take place. These configurations include decoration, rearrangements and costumes. Although it is possible to critically interpret each aspect of these elements even further (e.g. criticism of these aspects from their respective professional institutions), as my study of the constituency service process is a close inspection of the micro-level process, I will focus on the elements as they appear.

In the context of the MP and the constituency, this means that not only do MPs have more than one stage on which to perform, but cohesion between these components must also be achieved. To be accessible, MPs have to choose performative spaces in which they are able to successfully perform to their constituents. Stages MPs have selected include spaces that allow for both face-to-face and mediated interactions, such as their own constituency offices, local party office, local cafes, pubs, town halls, their Facebook and Twitter feeds and personal websites. These chosen performative stages then have to be suitably furnished and perhaps even decorated. For example, MP George Watson's advice surgeries took place in his local constituency office, which had a large name board with his name on it hanging above the office entrance. Several chairs were arranged in the main corridor of the party office to serve as a waiting room area. Labour Party imprinted posters and contact cards tastefully decorated the waiting area, and MP Watson was dressed in a suit. MP Watson was dressed appropriately to match the formality of hosting the meeting at his local party office. However, the large room he used as his office and meeting space had awkwardly arranged furniture, mismatched chairs and random stacks of papers on the floor. While there was a general cohesion between the choice of clothes,

the way he presented himself and the office space, there was the possibility of MP Watson's performance being challenged by the disjointed impression of professional yet disorganised. He may have seemed to be able to "get things done", but when would this be executed? Would it be lost in the pile of papers? On the online stages of Facebook and Twitter, MP Watson demonstrates similar inconsistencies. As one of the many MPs in my study who fell into the middle of the continuum I expounded in Chapter 5, he viewed his use of digital tools as an accompaniment to face-to-face interactions, which were "absolutely critical" (personal communication, 22 September 2015). However, his updates on Facebook and Twitter were often sporadic, showing little to no engagement with comments made on posts. MP Watson possessed the means of symbolic production across offline and online performative spaces, but there was a lack of cohesion within each and across all of the performative acts. As a consequence, this may cause confusion in his portrayal of legitimacy and performative power. Along with means of symbolic production, it is also necessary for MP-actors to play the part convincingly, which I will discuss next.

The Challenge of Being Natural

Even if there are adequate means of symbolic production, a carefully crafted script that draws on collective representations, and the act is choreographed step by step, the performance's success rests on the actor's ability to act it out believably. This is often the most difficult component of the performance. Unlike professional actors, political performers already occupy a position within the social performance, but their ability to maintain their role has always been subject to ceaseless scrutiny (Alexander, 2011: 71). In the case of the MP, although already in the position of power, they have to be able to convincingly perform their role within the constituency. It is possible that the MP's speech and actions may be communicated as insincere, fake or for the sake of publicity. For instance, just as MP James Williamson perceived MP updates on digital tools such as Facebook and Twitter to be propaganda, it is not unconceivable that constituent-audiences reading their MP's updates might view them in the same light.

Thus, this challenge of being natural is being made even more intricate as it occurs across the various tools and methods MPs choose to employ as they perform their constituency service activities. Additionally, as Chapter 4 revealed, MPs encourage continual interactions beyond the initial performative act. The need to be natural and consistent across offline and online communication tools has never been more relevant. Constituent-audiences may not believe in their MP's accessibility or willingness to help if it does not appear genuine on any outlet they choose to seek out their representative. MP Peter Kyle recognises this challenge, having expressed difficulty in being consistent across different communication media (traditional and digital) and face-to-face, "You have got to be that [same] person regardless of what medium you're communicating on. So that person that they meet on their doorstep, because I still do a lot of work in communities, has to be the same person, or has to be recognisable to the one they see on television. And to me that is a very, very difficult thing to do" (personal communication, 25 November 2015). MP Kyle's comprehension of the situation may provide him with an advantage when it comes to his performances, but no matter how experienced or exceptional the actor-MP is, there is no guarantee that the constituent-audience will decipher a performance the way it was intended.

The Challenge of Reception

The challenge of reception occurs when the performative text and audience are unable to achieve re-fusion. This means that what is being projected is not decoded the way it was intended to be. Previous cultural and pragmatic theories, including Goffman's (1959) presentation of self, neglect to include the role of audience reception in the performative projection. This perspective entitles the political performer and renders citizens passive audience members. Earlier, in Chapter 2, I drew on Alexander's post-Weberian conceptualisation of performative power and legitimacy: privileging meaning-making but allowing that audience interpretations may differ greatly from what performers intended to develop (Mast, 2016; Alexander, 2013). To maintain legitimacy, MPs have to project power skillfully to invoke feelings of identification in the audience,

linking the representative with the represented (Alexander, 2010, 2011; Mast, 2016).

Along with the social and cultural complexity that makes these performances challenging for MPs, it must be recognised that constituent-audiences are in no way a homogenous population. Within the group of constituents the MP interacts with at a town hall meeting, or the various appointments across a day's worth of advice surgeries, are internally segmented groups of people. For instance, these constituents are likely to possess varied political orientations, personal interests and socio-economic backgrounds. Audiences do not simply view the world through a straightforward perspective of their cultures. Furthermore, re-fusion of performances is also a matter of interpretation. Thus, even as political representative strive to keep their finger on the pulse to ensure their scripts and performances involve collective background representation to incite re-fusion (as we have perceived from MPs Jacob Marshall and William Morgan), audience interpretation is simply not automatic. The very same performance projection could be interpreted in diametrically contrasting ways (Liebes and Katz, 1990).

Similarly, as my findings showed in Chapter 5, MPs possess varying preferences for and views on they integrate physical co-presence, traditional media and digital tools in the visibility discursive formation. Thus, an MP who primarily emphasises physical presence with a low amount of other tools may potentially be interpreted by the audience as inconsistent and doing little on behalf of the constituency, when in reality, the MP has chosen to invest their resources in ensuring they could help as many constituents as possible in the repair process. Another constituent may appreciate the face-to-face meeting, and be glad that the MP was not wasting time online. Furthermore, comparisons may be made with existing sources of knowledge, such as what the previous MP might have done, or their personal preferences for specific styles of interaction. Consequently, this will impact how a constituent-audience reacts to the performance and how they experience the symbolic connection the MP is trying to make.

In this section I have discussed how challenges to re-fusion result in actors having difficulty overcoming the social and cultural fragmentation of an audience. Together with my discussion of performing power earlier in this chapter, I have demonstrated three challenges to performative re-fusion, supported by my earlier analyses of accessibility, visibility and repair, indicating the possibility of performative failure. These include the challenge of means of symbolic production, the challenge of being natural, and the challenge of reception. I will conclude my discussion in the next section.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the performative aspects of MP-constituent interactions. I revealed how MPs draw on existing discursive formations and other elements of social performances to portray legitimacy and power as an MP on standby. Although MPs are in positions of power, it is necessary for them to continue to successfully perform to their constituents in order to convince them of their legitimacy. The discursive formations I discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 give structure and meaning to the constituency performance, but the success of re-fusion also lies in the delivery of the performative act. I have discussed how control over the interaction is a prime opportunity for the MP to have their legitimacy established as they emphasise their accessibility, prompt their visibility and overcome disruptions during repair. I have shown how MPs cultivate control over their performance in order to convince their constituent-audiences through their delivery by the explanation of power. They do this by drawing legitimacy from Westminster, projecting power through the use of digital tools and means of symbolic production. MPs draw legitimacy from Westminster as they speak about Parliament and the Commons, but also through a combination of explanatory and presentational elements which display that they are indeed "qualified" to be in the position of power. These links to Westminster provide them with a foundation of power they are able to wield during other meetings. MPs who include the use of digital tools and social media platforms in their performance toolkit are able to use these to demonstrate power to their constituents from their position in Westminster. Utilising platforms such

as personal websites, Facebook and/or Twitter, MPs are not only able to maintain visibility to their constituents, but also exhibit themselves wielding power within the Commons as they debate and develop policy.

I have also demonstrated how MPs manage constituents' expectations and the outcome of the interaction by acknowledging their limits. Unlike a performance disruption, as I have analysed in Chapter 6, the grasp of one's capabilities can be considered a form of power in itself, as MPs manage constituent's expectations while also avoiding potential disruptions.

Finally, I discussed challenges to performative re-fusion observed through my earlier analyses of accessibility, visibility and repair, and the manifestation of power in the constituency service performances by MPs on standby. Modernity and societal changes in audiences bring repeated challenges to power. My analyses indicate the possibility of performative failure lying in: challenges in means of symbolic production, where elements of performative stage, presentation of self and any other tools that are required for the performance do not come together smoothly; being natural, where the actor-MP's performance is not convincing and seamless; and the reception, in which the constituent-audience do not decipher the act the way the actor intended them to, usually due to comparisons with prior experiences.

The discussions in this chapter have demonstrated how a performance's success in a complex and differentiated audience is dependent on many interconnecting factors. Furthermore, a performance's success is never guaranteed. In the context of the MP and the constituency, cohesion between the MP's performances, how they choose to wield power and integration between performative components must not only be achieved during a single legitimation procedure, but consistently across the various performative spaces they choose to utilise. If not, constituent-audiences not only remain unconvinced that what they see or hear is valid and true, but are not symbolically connected with the political performances they experience, resulting in authenticity and legitimacy being out of reach. In short, the struggle to re-fuse the actor and their audience, connecting

them with the script's discursive formations, and the backgrounds that define it, encapsulates the MP's constituency service process. In the next chapter, I conclude this dissertation by summarising the aims and findings, before suggesting future research ideas.

8 A Method to the Madness? MPs on Standby

> "It is fashionable for commentators to argue for politicians to 'speak human'. This really is the most dreadful nonsense. What the electorate want is for politicians to *be* human."
>
> – Jerry Hayes, *An Unexpected MP*

8.1 Key Findings

Contemporary constituency service is instrumental to British representation, and is an important component of how citizens experience democracy in action. As established earlier in the dissertation, we know it commonly takes place, that almost every MP carries it out, but how? This dissertation has been driven by the question of *how* contemporary constituency service is carried out. By extension I also sought answers to the challenges of contemporary constituency service faced by MPs, and the integration of traditional and digital communication tools. To answer the question, I have traced the process of the contemporary constituency service closely by following 18 MPs across three political parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat) as they carried out their constituency service activities. Through my fieldwork I was privy to intimate features of an MP's life in the constituency, unexceptional details that are often lost in the larger scheme of things. However, it is precisely these particularities that reveal so much about the contemporary constituency service. I observed as MPs made conscious decisions to prioritise meeting constituents as they struggled with tensions between responsibilities in Westminster and the constituency, and unsteady navigation of the challenging digital environment. MPs were inundated with assaults in their everyday responsibilities as they navigated through the complexity of the contemporary constituency service.

This dissertation has revealed the significance of the constituency service to MPs and the process by which they choose to carry it out. Members across political parties are distinctly aware of their negative reputation. Recall MP Peter Kyle discussing his fear of becoming "one of them", meaning an MP who was so focused on the Commons they had lost sight of what was going on on the ground

(personal communication, 25 November 2015). MP Jacob Marshall found the distance between London and his constituency "a real danger" (personal communication, 4 May 2016). MP Samuel Pollock acknowledged that politicians are out of touch with the public, yet recognised that "[there has not] been a generation of politicians trying harder to be in touch with the constituents" (personal communication, 30 June 2015). This is representative of most MPs, and is a suitable starting point for my answer to the question I asked in this dissertation. MPs are "on standby" as they carry out the process of contemporary constituency service by prioritising regular face-to-face interactions in the constituency. In routine performative acts, such as advice surgery meetings, MPs seek to keep abreast of constituency knowledge and make symbolic connections to portray legitimacy and authenticity. The use of traditional media and digital tools, integrated with their face-to-face meetings, varies, but these tools are predominantly used to draw attention to what MPs do on behalf of their constituents, depending on personal preference, knowledge and resources. When approached by constituents about personal, community or national problems, MPs are ready to react and repair, redressing and overcoming these problems with the knowledge they have accumulated.

Contemporary constituency service is about the production of meaning and symbolic connections with constituent-audiences, in which the outcomes are largely determined by how well the MP-actor performs and crafts these acts. However, as I have discussed in Chapter 7, the actor's ability to control the outcome of their performance is never guaranteed. These performative acts consist of a variety of advice surgeries, neighbourhood walkabouts, speeches made at schools and meeting residents at a local coffee morning, to name a few. Through my thick description of experiences in the constituency, I have shown how these performances are legitimation procedures in which MP-actors and constituent-audiences arbitrate the development of meanings, where MP-actors project and maintain their power and seek to connect with their constituent-audience, transforming from distant political enigmas into authentic constituency advocates who are present and capable of resolving personal or community problems. Depending on how they are being used, these

performances can take place face-to-face (where individuals are co-present), via traditional media such as newsletters or digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and emails, where the participants negotiate meaning developments through images, words, speaking and reacting with each other (Mast, 2016: 5022).

Three key findings emerge from my analysis of these performances. Firstly, it is clear that despite the negative press and opinion polls, MPs *do* care. Unlike previous literature suggesting the personal vote and psychological rewards as primary motivations for MPs to carry out the constituency service (Cain et al, 1987; Norris, 1997), my findings suggest that MPs are driven by a sense of answerability and personal stimulus. Logistically, it is impossible for MPs to meet every single constituent over the period of their tenure. With other parliamentary responsibilities in place, MPs are not able to proactively seek out constituency issues. Instead, MPs rely on being *reactive*. To do so requires them to be accessible. MPs across varying experiences, political orientations and constituency size have demonstrated the importance of the constituency service and concern for their constituents, and are observed to do as much as possible for constituents. This is primarily achieved by establishing a relationship with their constituents by being accessible. Being accessible in the constituency is imperative, as they strive to overcome physical distances to be closer to and convenient for constituents. Keeping constituents informed of their accessibility is a priority for MPs as they remind constituents that they are there for them, if they so require. MPs establish the discursive formation of accessibility through management of resources and priorities, as well as amplification by convenience, and through a combination of traditional media and digital tools to encourage further interaction beyond the initial meeting, securing the relationship with the constituent. My findings also indicate variations across MPs with varying experiences. While all MPs emphasised the need to be physically accessible, recently elected MPs strove to ensure their accessibility was made known. A possible reason for this could be the need for newly elected MPs to make themselves known amongst the community as well as being available, whereas experienced MPs may already be known in the constituency. MPs keep themselves accessible in order for constituents to easily seek them for help

whenever they need to. On standby, they are ready to react and repair, armed with knowledge about local and other common issues, such as immigration.

Secondly, despite suggestions by digital positivists that digital tools will allow for greater engagement between MPs and their constituents, MPs were found to unanimously agree that face-to-face co-presence was their preferred method of interaction, terming it "absolutely paramount", "huge" and the "currency of the job". Traditional media and digital tools are considered valuable and are integrated into the MP's arsenal of communication tools, but to varying degrees. My findings indicate that MPs strive to maintain some form of everyday visibility, but demonstrate differences in how they choose to do so. As the goal of performance re-fusion is also one of authenticity, MPs are of the view that being face-to-face allows them the best opportunity to intensify the symbolic connection between the MP-actor and constituent-audience in their pursuit of performance re-fusion. Although MPs agree that digital tools are useful to elevate their visibility and could be initial points of access, integration of digital tools to boost visibility is met with some apprehension. My findings show that MP use of traditional media and digital tools falls along a spectrum of low to no integration emphasising co-present visibility, average integration with an emphasis on co-presence and high integration with equal emphasis on additional tools and co-presence. However, the nature of the contemporary media environment means that offline and online spaces are no longer disparate, with MPs no longer able to make a true decision of how much of a digital tool they would like to incorporate in their performances, thus putting forward my finding that making a decision not to engage in any form of digital presence is a false choice.

Thirdly, although previous research has indicated specific roles and motivations that make up the constituency service (Norton and Wood, 1993; Norris, 1997; Searing, 1994; Gay, 2005), MPs find the contemporary constituency service challenging as demands made of them are no longer as specific and are twice as many. The struggle to balance and multitask between constituent demands, resource management and consistent performances is exacerbated by the increase in digital tool usage. This hampers their pursuit of re-fusion because

performing consistently between all the various communication tools and physical co-presence is difficult to project and sustain. This difficulty has gone undocumented as previous studies are outdated, and any mention of online technologies refers only to the use of email or websites (Jackson, 2003; Williamson, 2009), or focuses on single tool usage (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Jackson, 2006). It is easy to assume that a strategy is in place, and much of the updates are deliberate and carefully crafted, much like the ones during their campaign electioneering, developed to maximise the impact of the MP's updates. However, this is not the case. My findings indicate that MPs do not have a specific strategy that incorporates and synthesises physical co-presence, traditional media and use of digital tools. Instead, MPs draw on the framework of the three discursive formations identified – accessibility, visibility and repair – in order to do as much as they can to respond to constituents' requests for help; staying aware of constituency events while ensuring their constituents are aware of their presence. Chapter 6, in particular, reveals how MPs are consistently faced with stressful and occasionally dangerous situations as they seek to overcome numerous types of disruptions to repair their performance within the advice surgery process. My findings indicate the use of logic, exertion of authority and counselling as methods to overcome disruptions and achieve repair. In this sense, being on standby is not necessarily a strategy but a response to the increased challenges MPs face in the contemporary constituency service process.

8.2 Contributions

Through this dissertation I contribute to the existing literature a new theoretical approach that calls for a refraction of perspective by rejecting previous assumptions held about the constituency service (which are generally outdated) and consolidates all types of communication and activities carried out in the constituency under one umbrella. While many scholars have identified and confirmed the increase of constituency service interest and activities by MPs, they often hold these activities to the same roles and top-down perspectives that were set forth in previous studies, such as Searing's 1994 study *Westminster's World*. While that study's comprehensive data and results cannot be denied, it is imperative to realise that the context in which these activities and interactions

take place have changed, thus requiring a shift in perspective. Drawing on Alexander's (2010; 2011) theory of cultural pragmatics, Goffman's (1959) presentation of self and Foucault's (1952) notion of discursive formations I have developed a cultural approach of everyday performativity *from the perspective of the constituency*. I have demonstrated a refreshing notion in understanding how these constituency service processes take place, and how they are developed and perpetrated. From this theoretical point of view and with the support of my empirical research, I have built a case for getting closer to the action, paying attention to performative acts occurring in real time, and engaging with them to allow the bigger stories to be imaginatively identified and expressed with intricate details (Back, 2015).

The theoretical approach guiding my work thus contributes to the way we think about representative processes and those who carry them out. One major implication of this contribution is that it prompts a rethink of how we approach studies of representation and citizenship. This theoretical approach demonstrates that it is not that meaning no longer matters or does not exist between MP and constituents, but, rather, the context for meaning-making is no longer the same. Power can no longer be forced or bound by the view of rational-legal legitimacy or existing culture structures, but needs to be meaningfully defined and portrayed through successful re-fused performances. Thus, by rejecting the assumption of social reality this dissertation contributes a new lens through which we can view the constituency service, its process and how it relates to concepts of representation. Remember that this is not merely an exercise in embellishing what we already know through large N analyses and qualitative typologies with details but a re-examination of a process we know already exists, in order to understand its unspoken realities.

As I have demonstrated, these MP-constituent performances are not in any way sanitised interactions but meetings that involve real people with significant problems. As I showed in Chapter 2, while scholars do not entirely neglect to discuss the process of constituency service, details of these processes are often under-theorised and under-studied. Much of the previous literature is reductive

in nature, treating these meetings as purely procedural by generalising them; losing the affective, aesthetic and cognitive dimensions in the process. Thus, it is unreflective of what occurs on the ground. Most importantly, this dissertation shows that these interactions are rich experiences full of symbolic meaning, more than the typical rational choice approach that dominates the studies in the field recognises them to be. By addressing how the process of the contemporary constituency service takes place, this dissertation has contributed a new viewpoint to the studies of representation and how MPs deal with constituents. I have also contributed in-depth details of constituency interactions and dynamics between MP and constituent, bringing what is usually not obvious to light. I also extended existing literature on constituency service interactions by analysing the advice surgery, and the challenges and disruptions that may occur in each stage of the process. Through these details I have also contributed a holistic understanding of how MPs integrate traditional media and digital tools in their constituency service.

My dissertation reveals a tension that exists between MPs' responsibilities and their resources. The struggle to manage this tension is not often captured, thus resulting in a simplistic understanding of how resources are delegated and utilised, possibly leading to superficial solutions of communication improvement. For instance, studies on MPs and the use of digital tools such as Twitter place their focus on the output, using discourse analyses to seek answers about what MPs use these tools for (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). As my approach demonstrates, MPs may use these tools as a form of impression management, but the choice to do so is no longer binary, and is integrated with existing practices. Furthermore, I suggest that it is precisely this tension that is preventing re-fusion of performance from occurring. Thus a narrow perspective on how MPs draw on digital tools needs to be avoided.

This dissertation does not provide solutions to how tensions between MPs' Westminster and constituency responsibilities should be managed. This tension is acknowledged throughout the dissertation, and provides an opportunity for us to reflect on what is not ideal about the circumstances under which MPs have to

perform their constituency service activities. While differences between constituency characteristics and MPs' communication practice preferences make developing a protocol that would suit all MPs unrealistic, it might be possible to make an effort to effectively include these variations as a contextual background in future work on the constituency service.

On a related note, this dissertation also reveals a gap between social expectations of what MPs should do, and the reality of what MPs are actually doing locally. This is aligned with previous research that suggests trust in individual local MPs (51 per cent) is higher than trust in British MPs overall (21 per cent) (Ipsos MORI, 2013). This supports the case for looking closer at national and macro-level phenomenon by balancing them with an approach of everyday performativity, for what is often assumed in rational choice approaches is narrow and unreflective of what occurs on the ground.

In addition, as I have shown in the empirical fieldwork, MPs face many challenges as they carry out demanding responsibilities. I observed how they spend their weeks, often having little time for their families and personal lives. Some MPs shared that they often ended up working on Sundays, simply because there was always something to do, or a constituency event to attend. MP James Williamson said that he rations the weekend time he spends working because he needs to spend time with his family and would not see them otherwise (personal communication, 7 January 2016). Paul Flynn elucidates that most of an MP's personal relationships are destroyed by the "excessive demands of the parliamentary workload" (2011: 159). This begs the question of whether MPs are being forced to undergo this extremely stressful way of life for little to no benefit to themselves, and possibly only slightly to the institution. Perhaps a rethinking of what effective constituency service means is required. As a response to the quote from Jerry Hayes MP I have placed at the start of the chapter, MPs *are* human, after all.

8.3 Directions for Further Research

To conclude this dissertation, I will propose two research questions for further academic research based on the findings I have discussed in this chapter. Firstly, my research sought to understand how the process of contemporary constituency service was carried out. Conducted over the MP's shoulder, I was able to observe and analyse decisions made as part of the MP's performance and how they sought to make symbolic connections and portray legitimacy to their audiences. As I discussed in Chapter 7, a performance's success is dependent on the audience's reception, which I did not have an opportunity to pursue due to resource constraints. Thus, an opportunity emerges for a possible research agenda, where further understanding of the performance's success can be sought, investigating if it achieved its goal of re-fusion, by looking at how constituent-audiences receive and interpret these performative acts. This would enable further understanding of the constituency service process, and has important implications for developing a suitable constituency service protocol for MPs.

Secondly, in my discussion of the discursive formation of visibility in Chapter 5, I showed how some MPs drew on a number of different traditional and digital tools to augment their visibility. In particular, my analysis of MP Tessa Munt's newsletter "Magazine VIEW" demonstrated the work she carried out on behalf of the constituency locally, which was always a priority, and in Parliament, with creativity and finesse, to showcase her power and legitimacy. Apart from MP Munt, only two other MPs in my sample gave out physical copies of their newsletters, with the remaining MPs relying on email or e-newsletters to keep their constituency updated on their activities. Thus, another research agenda opportunity emerging from my work is to systematically observe patterns in MPs' newsletters, and investigate whether similarities can be found between those of MPs in government and those of MPs in opposition, as well as front and backbenchers.

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10 Appendix 1: Consent Form

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Department of Politics and International Relations
www.royalholloway.ac.uk

CONSENT FORM

Royal Holloway, University of London is committed to ethically conducting research. This project has been ethically approved by the Department of Politics and International Relations.

If you are happy to allow Nikki Soo (RHUL) to shadow you, please complete and sign the form below.

Please tick

• I confirm that I have the read the information sheet on the above project, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have them answered satisfactorily.	
• I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time.	
• I understand that any information that may identify me will be altered to protect my anonymity.	
• I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.	
• Please tick here if you would like your name to be anonymised.	

I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date

11 Appendix 2: Details of Data Collection

Interviews and Fieldwork

Name of MP	Party Affiliation	Gender	Date Interviewed	Date(s) Shadowed and Details
Christopher Lewis	Conservative	Male	17 October 2014	N/A
Justine Greening	Conservative	Female	24 October 2014	N/A
Niles Perry	Conservative	Male	31 October 2014	N/A
Barnaby Wright	Conservative	Male	14 November 2014	14 November 2014
Marie Moore	Labour	Female	19 November 2014	N/A

Tessa Munt	Liberal Democrat	Female		• 29 November 2014
				  ○ Glastonbury
				• 5 December 2014
				  ○ Burnham-on-Sea
				  ○ Axbridge
				• 6 December 2014
				  ○ Wells, Somerset
				• 17 January 2015
				  ○ Cheddar
				• 30 January 2015
				  ○ Shepton Mallet
				  ○ Chilcompton
				• 31 January 2015
				  ○ Glastonbury
				  ○ Meare
				• 28 February 2015
				  ○ Glastonbury

Desmond Hill	Labour	Male	27 January 2015	• 16 February 2015 • 9 March 2015 • 6 July 2015 • 13 July 2015
David Miller	Liberal Democrat	Male	26 June 2015	• 26 June 2015 • 3 July 2015 • 7 August 2015
Samuel Pollock	Labour	Male	30 June 2015	N/A
Harry Grove	Labour	Male	30 June 2015	N/A
Logan Woodward	Labour	Male	1 July 2015	N/A8
Andrew Smith	Labour	Male	1 July 2015	• 10 July 2015 • 17 July 2015 • 19 July 2015 – Door-step knocking sessions
Henry Green	Conservative	Male	7 July 2015	N/A

William Morgan	Conservative	Male	29 July 2015	• 1 August 2015 • 10 October 2015 (Whole day session, with 3 times the number of usual surgery attendees) • 28 January 2016
George Watson	Labour	Male	22 September 2015	• 24 September 2015 • 23 October 2015 • 24 March 2016
James Williamson	Conservative	Male	7 January 2016	• 28 Feb 2016 • 11 March 2016 • 8 April 2016 (Attended a talk, meeting and surgery with him)
Peter Kyle	Labour	Male	25 November 2015	• 22 April 2016 • 6 May 2016 • 13 May 2016
Jacob Marshall	Conservative	Male	4 May 2016	N/A

Image and Digital Tools Data Collected on Fieldwork

Note: Per the request of MPs who wished to be anonymised, details have been changed.

Chapter 4

Images 4.1, 4.2	Peter Kyle MP's Office, Hove, Sussex. Taken 22 April 2016.
Image 4.3	Map of Surgery Meeting in Wells, Somerset from OpenStreetMap <https://www.openstreetmap.org/node/304611#map=10/51.2082/-2.6395>, edited to show points of meetings.
Image 4.4	Andrew Smith MP, Contact Card. Collected 17 July 2015.
Image 4.5	Tessa Munt MP, Contact Card. Collected 5 December 2014.
Samuel Pollock MP	Samuel Pollock MP, Contact Card. Collected 30 June 2015. Samuel Pollock MP, Leaflet on Local Surgeries. Collected 30 June 2015.
Christopher Lewis MP	Christopher Lewis MP

Chapter 5

Images 5.1, 5.2, 5.3	Tessa Munt MP (2014), Magazine VIEW. Collected 5 December 2014.
Image 5.4	Munt, Tessa (27 January 2015) Why I tendered my resignation as Parliamentary Private Secretary [Website Blog Post] Retrieved from <www.tessamunt.org.uk/why_i_tendered_my_resignation_as_parliamentary_private_secretary>
Image 5.5	David Miller MP Facebook Update. Collected 25 June 2015.
Image 5.6	Peter Kyle MP Twitter Update. Collected 14 May 2016.
Image 5.7	David Miller MP Twitter Update. Collected 26 June 2015.
Andrew Smith MP Article	Smith, Andrew (2015, 3 July) Centre for addicts has promising start. *The Oxford Times.* Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/13367603.Centre_for_addicts_has_a_promising_start/>
Tessa Munt MP Russia Today Media Appearance	Russia Today (2015, 31 January) Tessa Munt talks fracking, succession in Saudi Arabia, and Syria smeared? (E168), *Russia Today,* Retrieved from <https://www.rt.com/shows/going-underground/228127-uk-housing-crisis-protest/>
Tessa Munt MP Mirror Article	Munt, Tessa (2015, 30 January) Why I resigned from ministerial job over Cameron's plan to frack in Somserset. *The Mirror.* Retrieved from <www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/resigned-ministerial-job-over-david-5071025>
Christopher Lewis MP Newsletter	Christopher Lewis MP, Constituency B Matters [Newsletter] October 2014. Collected 17 October 2014.

Chapter 6

Barnaby Wright MP Surgery (Mrs Sotheby)	Mctague, Tom and Daniel Martin (2014, 29 October), Teachers are struggling to cope with 'influx' of migrant children, warns Chief Inspector of Schools Sir Michael Wilshaw. *Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2813035/British-schools-need-help-cope-influx-immigrant-children-says-Ofsted-chief-Sir-Michael-Wilshaw.html>

Chapter 7

Image 7.1, 7.2	Christopher Lewis MP Twitter Updates. Collected 13 October 2014.
Image 7.3	Christopher Lewis MP Twitter Update. Collected 14 October 2014.
Image 7.4	George Watson MP Facebook Update. Collected 22 March 2016.
Image 7.5	George Watson MP Facebook Update. Collected 24 March 2016.