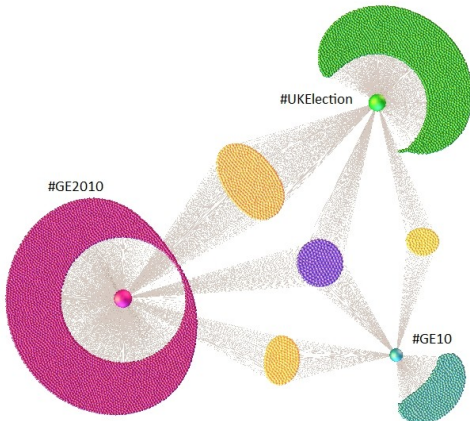


## Following #UKElection; priorities for week 2 Ali Fisher

The sacking of Stuart MacLennan for comments made on Twitter confirmed Twitter would have at least one influence on the election. A few #tags have been trending and fallen out of use already, but so far little has been won or lost – apart of course from Stuart MacLennan.

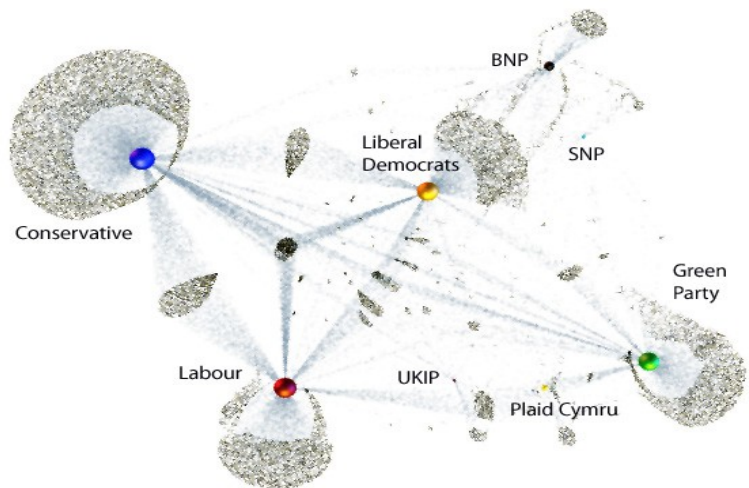


Trending topics will be important along with which messages people choose to RT. In any form of campaigning, the message is half the battle; the other half is finding the right people with which to interact. As the name suggests social networking is based on the interaction within a network. Those networks can be [represented](#) in a series of images.

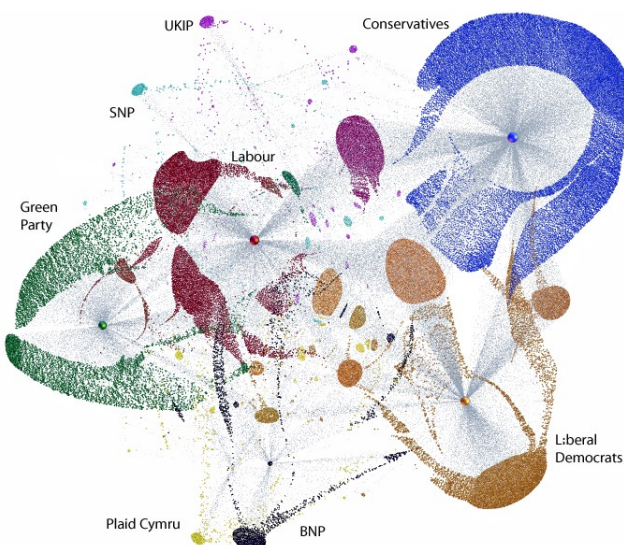
**How it works:** The dots (nodes) represent user accounts or for example #tags. Any two nodes that are connected are shown to be linked by a line (edge). As many individuals will create the same series of connections, clusters can be identified. Some clusters will be more important to target than others when developing strategy.

Focusing on the network behind the tweets highlights three priorities for parties using Twitter in week 2.

First, parties will need to identify the difference between groups that have chosen to use different tags to identify their tweets about the UK General Election. At the end of week 1, three tags have appeared with overlapping user-groups. Given the number of characters it would absorb, only a small proportion of users actually use them all.



The second priority for parties in week 2 is to analyse the relationship between their followers and those of other British parties. Before the start of campaigning, the political parties had been accumulating followers in fairly stable proportions. Conservatives had significantly more followers than Labour or Liberal Democrats. The fourth largest party in terms of followers was the Green Party – not far behind the Liberal Democrats.



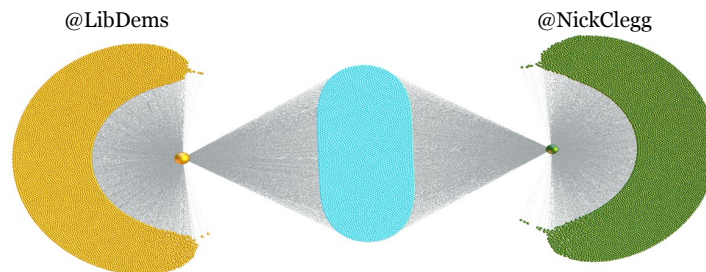
While individual followers will be of some interest or concern, the overlap in followers is a priority. Before parliament was dissolved, the clearest points of overlap were between the major parties, but with the Greens having a fairly high tendency to be included, when users are following more than one Party.

At the end of the first week of campaigning, the map has become much more complex as increasing numbers of users follow multiple accounts. Consistent with previous data the Conservatives maintain the most followers and the Green Party kept their position as fourth largest party. However, the number of points of overlap has increased dramatically.

The final priority in week 2 is to locate the right contested spaces in Twitter and other digital media so resources can be allocated effectively. Whether focusing on particular groups following two parties, or multiple accounts from the same party, key decisions

will be made during the next week to ensure the best use of resource.

The Liberal Democrats provide an interesting example, Nick Clegg and @Libdems have nearly the same number of followers, yet these are largely different people. Only the smaller, central, blue, section of the network represents users following both accounts. This may be an effective way of engaging people looking for something different from a party than a party leader. However, with clarity of message being a key concern during the campaign, this is a fine line. RT will play a role and this particular situation is not a great strain on resources. However, as the election approaches the ability to focus resources on the right contested areas will gain increasing importance.



Each party has a combination of accounts at their disposal, operated by candidates and the central party office. They also have their party or policy specific #tags and the three general election tags. The next week will determine whether followers become more or less specific in their choices. The dominant #tags for the run in to polling day may also appear or be confirmed in the coming days.

The network of followers is still evolving, and there are many virtual cheerleaders and other MPs on twitter too, so there is still much ground to be won or lost – and lets not forget, for all the efforts the parties have invested, Sarah Brown not only has more followers than any single party, but more than all the parties combined!