

What Does a Satellite Campaign Do?

Momentum, the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn on Facebook in the 2017 General Election

Tristan Hotham*

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Abstract

Satellite campaigns, organisations that campaign for a party without being part of it, became a visible part of British elections in 2017. The best known was Momentum, formed to support Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party. I ask what Momentum’s Facebook page did that Labour’s own pages did not. I compare all 153 retrievable posts from Momentum’s page in the month before the 2017 general election with 278 posts from the Labour Party page and 144 from Corbyn’s page, each hand coded for 154 features. The party page ran a campaign for votes: 85% of its posts asked for a vote, 66% made a pledge and 80% used the party slogan. Momentum asked for a vote in 12% of posts. Instead about half its posts asked people to help on the doorstep, volunteer or sign up to campaign, against 3% to 7% on Labour’s pages, and it used humour in a quarter of its posts. Corbyn’s page was close to the party page overall, but on all eleven reliably coded features where it differed significantly from the party page, it differed in Momentum’s direction: less policy, fewer calls to vote, more news clips and more attacks on the opposition leader. On the Labour side of the 2017 campaign, the leader’s page sat between a formal party campaign and a satellite that asked its followers to campaign.

Keywords: satellite campaigns; Momentum; Labour Party; Jeremy Corbyn; Facebook; mobilisation; 2017 general election

1 Introduction

Elections are not fought by parties alone. Unions, charities, newspapers and campaign groups have long carried parties’ messages and recruited their volunteers (Edwards 2006; Whiteley and Seyd 2003). Social media made it cheaper for such groups to build their own audiences. In the 2017 general election Dommett and Temple (2018) described a new kind of actor, the “satellite campaign”: an organisation outside party structures that identified, mobilised and organised citizens on a party’s behalf. Their main example was Momentum.

A satellite is defined by what it orbits. To know what a satellite campaign adds, I need to compare it with the party’s own campaign on the same platform at the same time. I ask what Momentum’s Facebook

*Independent researcher. ORCID 0000-0003-4931-9349. Correspondence: contact@tristanhotham.com. The data were collected during doctoral research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The views expressed are the author’s own and do not represent those of any employer.

page did in the 2017 campaign, how that differed from the Labour Party page and from Jeremy Corbyn's page, and what the division of work between the three suggests about campaigning through several pages at once.

I compare every post that could be retrieved from the three pages in the month before polling day: 153 from Momentum, 278 from the party page and 144 from Corbyn's page, each coded by hand for 154 features. The data come from my doctoral thesis ([Hotham 2021a](#)). I first reported them in a 2021 working paper ([Hotham 2021c](#)), which argued that Labour ran a "Janus-faced" campaign: a traditional campaign on its party and leader pages and a "new methods" campaign through Momentum. This paper replaces that working paper. It reanalyses all codes with formal tests, corrects for multiple comparisons, reports which codes were reliably measured, and asks a question the original did not: where did the leader's page sit between the party and the satellite?

2 Satellites, parties and a division of labour

2.1 What is a satellite campaign?

[Dommett and Temple \(2018\)](#) added satellites as a fourth category to the three types of campaign identified by [Whiteley and Seyd \(2003\)](#): the central party campaign, centrally coordinated local campaigns and purely local campaigns. Satellites draw on "the energies of citizens who may not feel sufficiently enthused to join a party, but who may nevertheless share party values" ([Dommett and Temple 2018](#), p. 202). Older work used related ideas. [Edwards \(2006\)](#) wrote of "democratic intermediaries" that link citizens and the political system, and [Gibson \(2015\)](#) of "citizen-initiated campaigning", in which parties hand some control of their campaigns to supporters using digital tools. A group like Momentum combines these. It is formally separate from the party, has its own brand and audience, and directs that audience's effort towards the party's goals. It has been described as part movement and part party faction ([Dennis 2020](#); [Muldoon and Rye 2020](#)).

2.2 Why campaign through several pages?

British parties already campaign on Facebook through more than one page. In earlier work I found that they divide work between party and leader pages, with the party page carrying more policy and calls to vote and the leader page more personal content ([Hotham 2026a](#)). A satellite adds a third page with three possible advantages.

The first is *audience*. A satellite reaches people who follow it rather than the party. Many of those who joined Labour after 2015 did so to support Corbyn ([Whiteley et al. 2019](#)), and Momentum drew its support from this group ([Dennis 2020](#)). The second is *tone*. A party page speaks with the party's official voice. A satellite can be more informal and more partisan. The third is *action*. Campaigns need votes, but they also need volunteers, and a satellite whose audience is already committed can ask for time and effort rather than votes.

These points suggest three expectations. Momentum should ask for more participation and fewer votes than Labour's pages. It should be more informal and more partisan. And it should differ from both Labour pages more than they differ from each other. The paper tests all three and then asks where the leader's page sat.

3 Data and method

3.1 Posts

I collected the posts that could be retrieved through Netvizz (Rieder 2013) from the three pages between 3 May and 7 June 2017, the month before the general election of 8 June: 153 posts from Momentum, 278 from the Labour Party page and 144 from Jeremy Corbyn’s page. Facebook’s Graph API returned a limited number of ranked posts per page and favoured the posts with most engagement (Hotham 2021a). The data are therefore best read as each page’s most engaged-with posts in the period rather than a complete census, and all shares below are shares of retrieved posts. Every retrieved post from the party page was a video, which may partly reflect this selection.

3.2 Coding

Each post was coded by hand for 154 binary features, drawn from the coding scheme in my thesis (Hotham 2021a). The features cover format, sentiment, information quality, framing, rhetoric, the use of celebrities, experts and media, the depiction of groups, personalisation of leaders and others, partisanship, humour, and requests to act offline, online or on the post itself. The scheme adapts content-focused schemes such as Bene (2017) and the broader categories of campaign activity in Foot and Schneider (2006) and Gibson (2015). A post can carry any number of codes.

Reliability was tested during the thesis on the party and leader pages from the 2015 and 2017 elections. A paid second coder recoded 10% of those 1,208 posts (121 posts), which include posts from the Labour Party and Corbyn pages used here but not from Momentum. Agreement across all binary codes was Krippendorff’s $\alpha = 0.81$ (Krippendorff 2004): 0.86 for information codes, 0.74 for framing, 0.84 for mobilisation and 0.72 for personalisation. Agreement varied by code. Some codes central to the 2021 working paper were weakly reproducible, including whether a post was “mainly rhetorical, not factual” ($\alpha = 0.31$), “positively personalised” (0.65) and used first-person language (0.64). A few codes used mainly for Momentum’s posts, such as memes, screenshots of tweets and informal language, were not part of the test. I report each code’s α in the appendix, I base the comparison of the pages’ overall similarity on codes with $\alpha \geq 0.67$, and I mark claims that rest on less reliable or untested codes.

3.3 Analysis

For each code I report the share of each page’s posts carrying it, with Wilson 95% intervals. I test whether the share differs across the three pages with a χ^2 test, and compare pairs of pages with Fisher’s exact test. With 154 codes, some differences will appear by chance, so I correct p -values with Holm’s method (Holm 1979) within each family of tests.

To summarise how alike the pages were, I use a reliable set of 47 substantive codes: codes that are not about format or links, appear in at least ten posts across the three pages, have $\alpha \geq 0.67$, and are not sub-types of another code in the set. For each pair of pages I compute the average absolute difference in shares and the correlation of the pages’ profiles, with intervals from 2,000 binomial resamples of each page’s shares. I also record, for each code, whether Momentum was closer to the party page or to Corbyn’s page, and whether, where Corbyn’s page differed from the party page, it differed in Momentum’s direction. The appendix repeats the comparison for all 85 substantive codes and for other minimum frequencies.

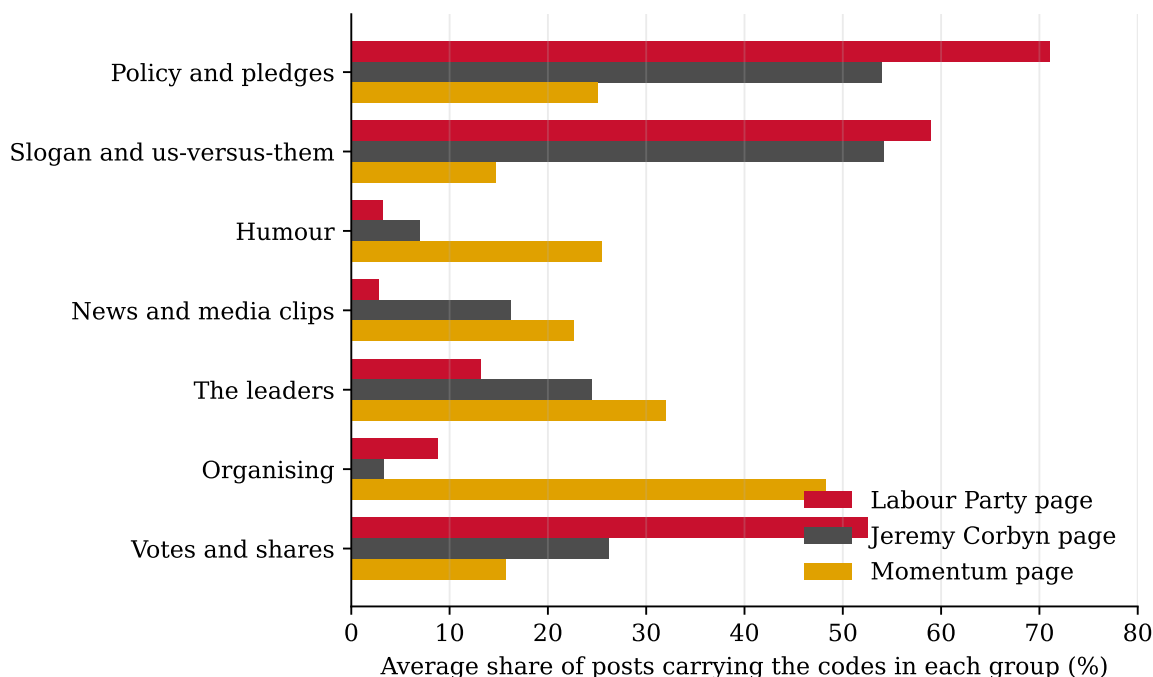


Figure 1. What the three pages did, month before the 2017 general election. Each bar is the average share of posts carrying the codes in a group. The groups are illustrative; the codes and their reliability are listed in Appendix Table 1. Labour Party page 278 posts, Jeremy Corbyn page 144, Momentum 153.

The data are counts of codes by page. They do not allow analysis of which codes occurred together in the same post.

4 Findings

Of the 142 codes that appear at least once, 61 differ across the three pages after correction. Momentum differed from the party page on 53 codes and from Corbyn’s page on 29, and the two Labour pages differed from each other on 32. Figure 1 summarises the main differences in seven groups of reliably coded features, and Figure 2 shows individual codes.

4.1 The party page asked for votes

The Labour Party page was a campaign for votes. It asked people to vote in 85% of its posts, made a pledge in 66%, set out how Labour would solve a problem in 90%, included policy detail in 58% and used the party slogan (“For the many, not the few”) in 80%. More than half its posts were short infographic videos (58%). It asked people to share in 59% of posts, more than either other page. It was the most positive of the three: 88% of its posts had a positive element and 29% a negative one.

4.2 Momentum asked people to campaign

Momentum asked for a vote in 12% of its posts, made a pledge in 10% and used the slogan in 6%. Instead it asked people to act. It asked them to help on the doorstep in 48% of posts, to volunteer in 49%, to sign up to campaign in 47%, to visit its website in 53% and to visit a campaign page in 44%. Labour’s

two pages made each of these requests in between 3% and 12% of posts. These codes were reliably measured (α between 0.74 and 1.00).

Momentum also spoke differently. It used humour in 25% of posts, against 3% on the party page and 7% on Corbyn's page ($\alpha = 0.94$). It gave voice to members of the public in 24% of posts, against 9% and 10% ($\alpha = 0.88$). It used re-edited news and media clips in 42% of posts, against 3% and 24% ($\alpha = 0.93$). Using codes that were not part of the reliability test, it also posted memes (14% of posts), text-only images (10%) and screenshots of tweets (19%), and used informal language in 12% of posts against about 1% on Labour's pages. Some of these format differences may partly reflect the retrieval of the party page's posts, all of which were videos.

Momentum praised Corbyn in 36% of its posts ($\alpha = 0.92$). The party page did so in 15%, and Corbyn's own page in 5%. Praise for the leader came mainly from outside the party.

4.3 Corbyn's page leaned towards Momentum

Corbyn's page did much of the party page's job. It asked for a vote in 59% of posts, made pledges in 58% and used the slogan in 69%, all far above Momentum. Overall it was close to the party page. On the reliable set of 47 codes, the shares on the two Labour pages differed by 9 percentage points on average and their profiles correlated at 0.87 (Table 3). Momentum was far from both: on average 15 points from Corbyn's page and 19 points from the party page, with profiles that correlated only weakly with either (0.26 and 0.30).

Where Corbyn's page did depart from the party page, it departed towards Momentum. On all eleven reliable codes where Corbyn's page differed significantly from the party page after correction, the difference was in the same direction as Momentum's. Corbyn's page carried less policy detail (39% against 58%) and fewer calls to vote (59% against 85%). It used more news and media clips (24% against 3%), more often focused negatively on a leader (28% against 12%) and criticised the opposition leader more often (26% against 11%, close to Momentum's 29%). It had fewer positive elements (61% against 88%). On one of the eleven, calls to share, it went further than Momentum: it asked people to share in 8% of posts, against 32% on Momentum and 59% on the party page. Of the 23 reliable codes on which the two Labour pages differed by at least five points, 17 differences were in Momentum's direction.

The same pattern shows in the average distances. Momentum was nearer to Corbyn's page than to the party page by between 2 and 4 percentage points on average, and it was closer to Corbyn's page on 30 of the 47 reliable codes and to the party page on 17. The direction holds for all 85 substantive codes and for every minimum frequency I tried, but the margin is modest (Table 3).

4.4 What the pages shared

Some things barely differed. All three pages diagnosed problems in most of their posts (between 78% and 92%, a modest difference) and diagnosed them negatively at the same rate (73% to 76%). They used celebrities and experts at similar rates, showed members of the public in their videos and images at similar rates (46% to 51%), and praised party members and campaigners equally rarely. None of the pages criticised current Labour politicians, and one Momentum post criticised a former Labour leader. In these posts, Momentum's page did not use its distance from the party to attack Labour MPs.

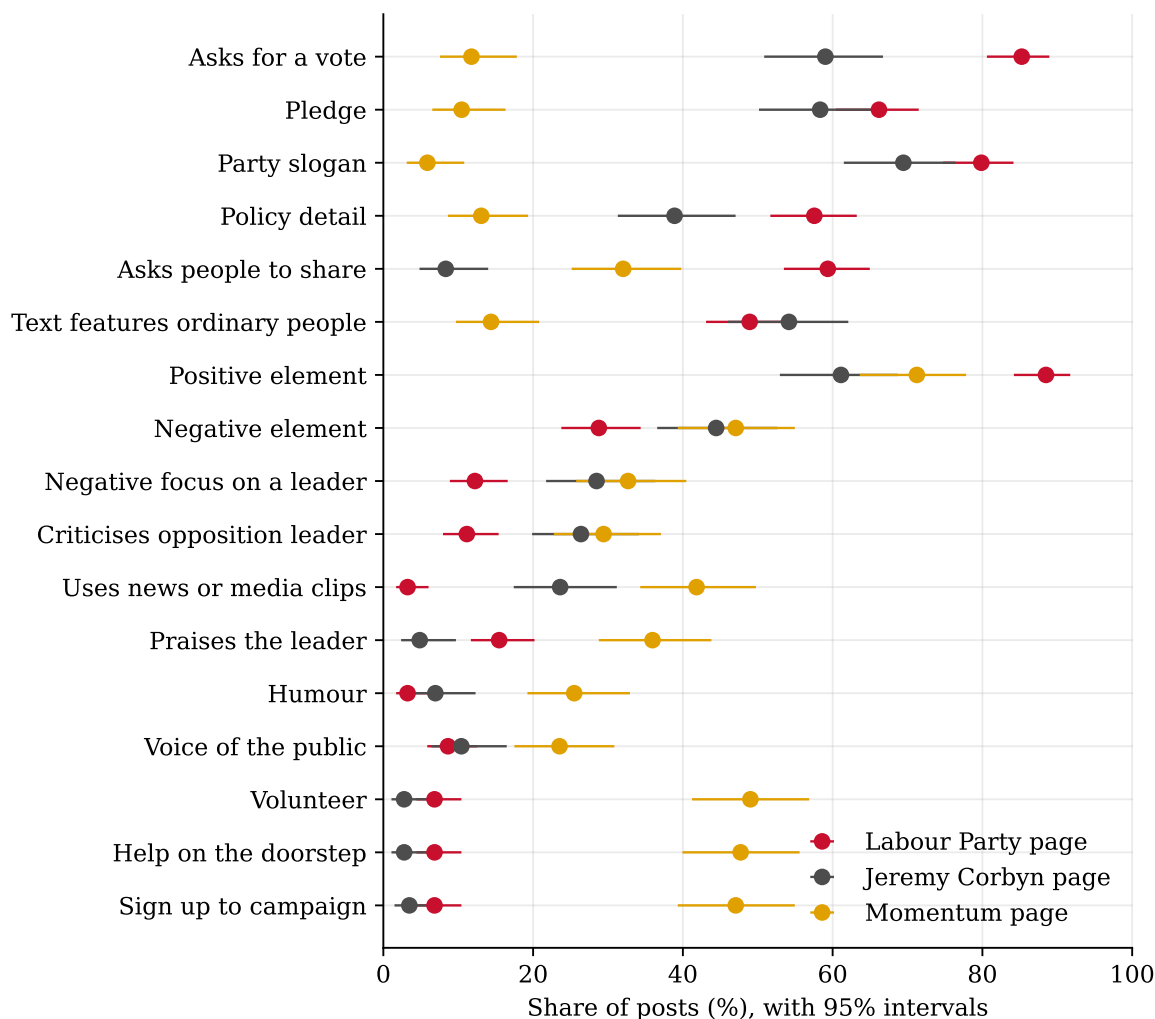


Figure 2. Selected codes. Share of posts carrying each code, with Wilson 95% intervals. Pairwise tests and reliability are in Appendix Table 2.

5 Discussion

5.1 From two faces to a graded campaign

In the 2021 working paper I described Labour’s Facebook campaign as Janus-faced: a traditional face on the party and leader pages and a new methods face on Momentum. The reanalysis supports the core of that claim. The satellite did a different job. It asked its followers to give time rather than votes, and it did so with humour and news clips that the party page hardly used. These differences rest on reliably measured codes and are large.

The reanalysis adds a refinement. The leader’s page was not simply part of the traditional face. It shared most of the party page’s programme, but wherever it departed from the party page, it moved towards the satellite: less policy and fewer calls to vote, more attacks on the opposition leader and more media clips. The Labour side of the 2017 campaign on Facebook looks less like two faces than a graded range: a formal, positive, policy-led party page; a leader’s page that carried the same programme in a more combative style; and a satellite that asked its followers to campaign.

I cannot tell from these data whether this arrangement was planned. Momentum was formally separate from Labour, and the pages may have converged because of shared people, shared politics or shared material rather than coordination. Nor can I tell whether the arrangement was effective. The data show what each page asked for, not what its followers did.

5.2 What this means for satellites

The comparison suggests that a satellite's distinctive contribution is in the requests it makes and the voice it uses, more than in its policy content or its general tone, which it shared in part with the leader's page. That has two implications. First, the line between a party's own campaign and its satellites on social media is not sharp: the leader's page can sit closer to the satellite than to the party on some dimensions. Second, a satellite whose leader is closely aligned with it, as Momentum was with Corbyn, will find much of its style echoed by the leader's own page. A satellite less closely tied to the leader would likely sit further from both.

5.3 What happened next

A satellite's work does not end on polling day. In a companion paper I follow Momentum's page into 2018 and find that it largely stopped asking people to organise and turned to arguing about politics and the media ([Hotham 2026b](#)). Read together, the two papers suggest that satellites are most distinctive during elections, when there is campaign work to organise.

6 Limitations

The data come from three pages in one campaign and show what each page posted, not what effect it had. Facebook's retrieval limits mean the posts are each page's most engaged-with posts, and the selection may bite differently on pages that posted at different rates. Reliability was tested on the party and leader pages but not on Momentum's posts, and some codes were weakly reproducible; I base the similarity comparison on reliable codes and flag the rest, but the Momentum codes rely on the same coder applying the same scheme. The similarity measures depend on which codes are included. I report their sensitivity, and the direction of the result is stable while its size is modest. Because the archive holds counts rather than post-level records, I cannot analyse how codes combined within posts.

7 Conclusion

What does a satellite campaign do? In 2017, Momentum's Facebook page asked its followers to campaign, spoke with humour and news clips, and praised the leader, all things Labour's own pages did far less. Labour's party page ran a campaign for votes. Corbyn's page carried much of the same programme, but wherever it departed from the party page it moved in Momentum's direction. On Facebook, the Labour side of the 2017 campaign ran across a graded range of pages, and the satellite was the end of that range that asked supporters for their time.

Provenance and AI use

The data were collected with Netvizz for my doctoral research, before Netvizz closed in 2019. This paper builds on my doctoral thesis (Hotham 2021a). An earlier version was circulated as a working paper (Hotham 2021c) and presented at the Political Studies Association conference in 2021 (Hotham 2021b), and the analysis develops Chapter 7 of the thesis. The analysis and writing were completed in 2026.

Version 4 (October 2026) corrects the share of Labour Party page posts with a positive element from 89% to 88% (246 of 278). No other figure changes.

The analysis code and drafts of the text were prepared with the assistance of an AI system (Claude, by Anthropic), which was also used to review drafts. I checked the analysis and the text and take responsibility for both.

Data availability

The coded counts by page and code, with each code's reliability, are deposited with this preprint. The underlying posts are not shared, in line with the terms under which they were collected.

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A Appendix

Table 1. Codes in each group in Figure 1: share of posts (%) and Krippendorff's α from the reliability test.

Code	Party	Corbyn	Momentum	α
<i>Policy and pledges</i>				
Use of policy detail	57.6	38.9	13.1	0.73
Pledge	66.2	58.3	10.5	0.82
Positive prognosis - how we will solve problem	89.6	64.6	51.6	0.70
<i>Slogan and us-versus-them</i>				
Use of party catch phrase	79.9	69.4	5.9	0.70
Use of 'us versus them' rhetoric	38.1	38.9	23.5	0.73
<i>Humour</i>				
Use of humour	3.2	6.9	25.5	0.94
<i>News and media clips</i>				
Use of external media or news content altered by party	3.2	23.6	41.8	0.93
Positive use of mainstream media	0.4	12.5	12.4	0.92
Negative use of mainstream media	4.7	12.5	13.7	0.68
<i>The leaders</i>				
Praise of Leader	15.5	4.9	35.9	0.92
Use of party leader in video	14.0	38.2	30.1	0.97
Post is negatively personalised	12.2	28.5	32.7	0.91
Negative appraisal of opposition leader	11.2	26.4	29.4	0.97
<i>Organising</i>				
Help doorstep campaign	6.8	2.8	47.7	1.00
Volunteer	6.8	2.8	49.0	1.00
Sign up to campaign offline	6.8	3.5	47.1	0.85
Visit campaign page	11.9	4.2	44.4	0.74
Call to visit party website	11.9	3.5	52.9	0.76
<i>Votes and shares</i>				
Call for vote	85.3	59.0	11.8	0.82
Register to vote	12.9	11.1	3.3	1.00
Call to share	59.4	8.3	32.0	0.85

Table 2. Selected codes: share of posts (%), Krippendorff's α (n.t. = not tested, codes used mainly for Momentum posts) and Holm-corrected p -values for the three-way test and pairwise comparisons.

Code	Party	Corbyn	Mom.	α	All three	Mom.-Party	Mom.-Corbyn	Party-Corbyn
Call for vote	85.3	59.0	11.8	0.82	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Pledge	66.2	58.3	10.5	0.82	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	1.00
Use of party catch phrase	79.9	69.4	5.9	0.70	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	1.00
Use of policy detail	57.6	38.9	13.1	0.73	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.031
Call to share	59.4	8.3	32.0	0.85	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
In-text use of ordinary public	48.9	54.2	14.4	0.89	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	1.00
Positive orientation	88.5	61.1	71.2	0.67	<0.001	0.002	1.00	<0.001
Negative orientation	28.8	44.4	47.1	0.86	0.011	0.017	1.00	0.15
Post is negatively personalised	12.2	28.5	32.7	0.91	<0.001	<0.001	1.00	0.008
Negative appraisal of opposition leader	11.2	26.4	29.4	0.97	<0.001	<0.001	1.00	0.014
Use of external media or news content altered by party	3.2	23.6	41.8	0.93	<0.001	<0.001	0.097	<0.001
Praise of Leader	15.5	4.9	35.9	0.92	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.12
Use of humour	3.2	6.9	25.5	0.94	<0.001	<0.001	0.002	1.00
Use of general public's voice	8.6	10.4	23.5	0.88	0.003	0.003	0.34	1.00
Volunteer	6.8	2.8	49.0	1.00	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	1.00
Help doorstep campaign	6.8	2.8	47.7	1.00	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	1.00
Sign up to campaign offline	6.8	3.5	47.1	0.85	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	1.00
Use of meme style humour	0.7	0.0	11.8	n.t.	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	1.00
Use of screen capture of tweet	0.0	0.0	19.0	n.t.	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	–
Use of informal language	1.1	1.4	12.4	n.t.	<0.001	<0.001	0.018	1.00
Content is mainly rhetorical in nature not factual	23.4	59.7	54.2	0.31	<0.001	<0.001	1.00	<0.001
Post is positively personalised	19.1	58.3	42.5	0.65	<0.001	<0.001	0.75	<0.001
Use of first person language	18.7	39.6	46.4	0.64	<0.001	<0.001	1.00	<0.001

Table 3. How alike were the pages? Average absolute difference in shares of posts (percentage points) and correlation of profiles across codes. Reliable set: substantive codes with $\alpha \geq 0.67$, in at least ten posts, sub-codes removed. Intervals from 2,000 binomial resamples of each page's shares.

	All substantive codes	Reliable set
Codes	85	47
Avg. difference, party vs Corbyn	8.9 [8.7, 10.0]	8.6 [8.1, 9.8]
Avg. difference, Momentum vs Corbyn	13.6 [13.2, 14.8]	15.0 [14.6, 16.6]
Avg. difference, Momentum vs party	16.3 [15.8, 17.3]	18.6 [17.9, 19.8]
Gap (Momentum vs party minus Momentum vs Corbyn)	[1.6, 3.4]	[2.1, 4.4]
Correlation, party and Corbyn	0.88	0.87
Correlation, Momentum and Corbyn	0.60	0.26
Correlation, Momentum and party	0.58	0.30
Codes where Momentum is closer to Corbyn / to party	51 / 33	30 / 17
<i>Reliable set by minimum number of posts carrying the code</i>		
At least 1: 61 codes	closer to Corbyn / party 35 / 22	avg. diff. 11.8 vs 14.7
At least 5: 53 codes	closer to Corbyn / party 35 / 17	avg. diff. 13.5 vs 16.8
At least 10: 47 codes	closer to Corbyn / party 30 / 17	avg. diff. 15.0 vs 18.6
At least 20: 44 codes	closer to Corbyn / party 29 / 15	avg. diff. 15.9 vs 19.7
At least 30: 40 codes	closer to Corbyn / party 27 / 13	avg. diff. 17.3 vs 21.5