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## **MPs Should Take Advantage of Digital Technology to Communicate with Constituents**

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## **MPs Should Take Advantage of Digital Technology to Communicate with Constituents**

**Lavinia Chui**

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly affected the operation of the Parliament of Canada, and as result, the activities of the Members of Parliament as well. The primary duties of a Member of Parliament can be categorized into [two dimensions](#): legislation and representation. The first refers to an MP's responsibility in the realm of governance and decision making. The second indicates an MP's duty to serve their constituents and represent their riding and political party. Due to the increased focus on COVID-19 emergency policy making, the dimension of representation has been neglected.

During this time of uncertainty and confusion, there has been an increase in constituent concerns and issues. Furthermore, because of the pandemic, it has become increasingly difficult for MPs to connect with their constituents and hear their opinions. Typically, after being elected, an MP will work hard to [maintain the trust](#) of their constituents and focus on the issues that are most pressing to them. This may be done through open office hours, town hall meetings, and public appearances. All of these methods hold an in-person aspect; and therefore, in this time of physical isolation and social distancing, these measures of communication are largely absent. MPs have [struggled](#) to stay in touch with their constituents in a time when shaking hands and face-to-face communication is no longer possible.

Aside from the inability to physically meet up with constituents, MPs have also faced [drastic changes](#) to their roles and responsibilities. Under the chaos of the pandemic, the workload of MPs has grown, due to greater individual casework in relation to other areas of public service such as employment insurance or immigration issues. In addition, MPs have become broadcasters and key sources of real-time information. This increase in responsibility coupled with an influx of constituents' requests for help, has made it difficult for MPs to manage it all. In a study done by [Samara Canada](#), it was found that the biggest operational difficulty experienced by MPs and their staff was dealing with the overwhelming number of inquiries from community members. About 85% of MP respondents identified that keeping up with the high volume of communication from their constituents as the top challenge they faced during the first few months of the pandemic.

Research has shown that [constituency focus](#) is something that constituents expect and respond positively to when it does occur. In addition, numerous opinion polls in different regions have shown that citizens believe that some form of [constituency service](#) is the most important part of an MP's role. Therefore, especially during this pandemic, MPs must put additional effort into advocating for their constituency on a national stage.

In this age of digital technology and social media, everyday tasks have become increasingly easier. [Technological advances](#) have played a large role in changing the communication trends and providing innovative measures for parliamentarians to better connect with their constituents. Adapting to these technological advances has assisted in modernizing the legislative process and increasing transparency. Therefore, despite the new regulations of isolation and physical distancing, technology can still provide an effective platform for constituents to raise their issues. One of the most effective ways to reach out to constituents online is through social media strategies. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are common and effective ways that have been used by MPs during campaigns and to maintain communication with constituents once elected. Using social media has countless benefits for MPs as it provides opportunities to reach a broader public audience and be more personable to their constituents.

In-person town halls were once the norm, but [Facebook Live](#) has become the preferred mode of communication for MPs such as Niki Ashton from Churchill-Keewatinook Aski, Manitoba. Ashton recently hosted an 11-hour long live stream from her home to address concerns and questions for the constituents in her riding. Over 5,000 viewers, tune into her Facebook live events, where she discusses challenges in her riding, and updates her constituents on Parliamentary policy making in the era of COVID-19. Another example is Alberta MP Rachael Harder who has been proactive in her use of social media to connect with her constituents during this pandemic. Harder is extremely active on her [Facebook page](#) by consistently posting about recent news in Parliament and engaging her constituents.

Following the examples of Niki Ashton and Rachael Harder, all MPs should utilize the digital technology and social media platforms at their disposal to connect with their constituents. During this time of uncertainty and confusion, MPs' roles as community representatives and their ability to stay engaged with their constituents has been severely affected. Therefore, it is imperative for MPs to make a larger effort to keep their constituents informed and provide an open forum for discussion on the issues most pressing to them.