E-ELECTIONEERING 2013

An analysis of the use of social media and online communication in the 2013 Australian federal election and comparison with the 2007 and 2010 elections

Jim Macnamara & Gail Kenning

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Inquiries

Australian Centre for Public Communication
University of Technology Sydney
PO Box 123
Broadway, NSW, 2007
E-mail: acpc@uts.edu.au

Researchers and authors

Dr Jim Macnamara, Professor of Public Communication and Director of the Australian Centre for Public Communication, University of Technology Sydney

Dr Gail Kenning, Research Associate, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney

Graphics and visualisation

Dr Gail Kenning, Research Associate, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney

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High points

❖ Overall **use of social media and interactive online content increased by 67 per cent in quantitative terms in 2013** compared with the 2010 and was 243 per cent up on the 2007 federal election.

❖ **Facebook dominated political social media communication**, with 81 per cent of sitting members of parliament having a Facebook profile or page, compared with 70 per cent in 2010.

- Some federal politicians maintained a personal presence in Facebook with *profiles* accepting friends. Australia's youngest MP Wyatt Roy reached Facebook's maximum number of 'friends' (5,021), with Joe Hockey (5,015) and Julie Bishop (4,998) close behind.
- Most politicians maintained Facebook *pages*, with Tony Abbott the most popular with a quarter of a million 'likes'.

❖ **76 per cent of federal members of parliament were on Twitter in 2013** compared with 45 per cent in 2010.

- Kevin Rudd dominated Twitter in terms of 'followers' with almost 1.4 million, followed by Tony Abbott with 242,039. However, 'the Rudster' was not an active tweeter and Tony Abbott and his office managed just 56 tweets during the campaign – albeit this was a major increase on his two tweets during the 2010 election campaign.

❖ **2013 was the 'visual election'** with most growth in social media use occurring in videos uploaded to YouTube and other sites such as Vimeo and photos posted on Flickr. YouTube use grew by almost 300 per cent and Flickr by 333 per cent.

Low points

❖ Apart from Kevin Rudd who was 'following' more than 400,000 Twitter users, **most politicians were 'following' substantially fewer than their 'followers'**, which indicates a focus on speaking and gaining and audience, but not listening to citizens. For instance:

- Former Labor premier Bob Carr and Labor MP Tanya Plibersek were 'following' less than half of one per cent of their 'followers';
- Labor's Penny Wong was 'following' 0.75 per cent of her 'followers';
- The Liberal's Joe Hockey was 'following' just over 1,000 Twitter users compared with his almost 100,000 'followers' (1 per cent);
- Liberal MP Julie Bishop was 'following' 1.1 per cent of her 'followers'; and
- The Greens Christine Milne reciprocated with just 1.7 per cent of her 'followers';
- The Liberal's Cory Bernardi and/or his staff were 'following' no one throughout the campaign, despite having 14,623 'followers'.
- Malcolm Turnbull, who was the most active and interactive on Twitter in 2010 with 439 tweets during the campaign, more than half of which were responses or direct messages rather than broadcasts, was 'following' just 4 per cent of his 'followers' and he was only the sixth most active politician tweeter with 134 tweets during the 2013 campaign.

❖ **Most microblogging on Twitter was comprised of broadcast messages**, with only a small number of responses and direct messages which indicate dialogue and conversation.
  • Of 1,455 tweets posted by the 10 most active politicians on Twitter during the three-week campaign period studied, 5.4 per cent were responses or direct messages, with 94.6 per cent being broadcast messages.

❖ **Politicians' blogs were mostly one-way information transmission** with few readers' comments either because of heavy moderation of lack of citizens' interest.

❖ In terms of engagement in dialogue, conversation, responses, answering questions and listening to others' comments – key affordances of social media and Web 2.0 online content – **the 2013 Australian election was a step backwards compared with 2010** when 47.5 per cent of tweets by the 10 most active politicians on Twitter were responses and direct messages to others and 52.5 per cent were broadcast messages.

❖ While **the volume of social media use by politicians and the major political parties has increased by almost two and a half times since the 2007 election**, the 2013 Australian federal election was a case of 'the new being put into service of the old' – i.e., social media used for *mass communication* and 'politics 1.0'.

❖ **Most posts by politicians on Twitter and Facebook related to attacks on their opponents and campaign slogans**. A high level of negativity was expressed in social media by politicians, despite some complaining about the negative campaigning of their opponents. Both major political parties waged largely negative campaigns.

Other points

❖ There were **no significant differences in social media use between the major political parties**.
  • Labor dominated Twitter slightly, but Liberal politicians and the Liberal Party had the most 'likes' and favourable comments on Facebook.
  • The two major political parties were positioned fairly evenly on YouTube and Flickr.
  • The only slight skew in terms of political parties was a higher number of Green politicians heavily engaged and popular in social media relative to their numbers in parliament – e.g., Greens comprised three of the 'top 10' politician tweeters and had the highest average number of 'likes' on Facebook (6,000), compared with 4,500 for Liberal politicians and 2,800 for Labor politicians.

❖ There were **no significant differences based on gender**. The numbers of women politicians among the most 'liked' on Facebook, most active in tweeting, most 'followed' on Twitter and attracting the most video views on YouTube, were in proportion to the number of women parliamentarians in the sample studied (31 per cent of the 191 members of parliament standing for re-election).

❖ Despite widespread assumptions about young people being 'digital natives' and older people being reluctant to use social media, **there were no significant differences in social media use by politicians based on age**. While Wyatt Roy, the youngest politician in the Australian federal parliament and the only federal politician under 30, had the highest number of 'friends' on Facebook, he was not among the most active users of Twitter or among the politicians with the highest number of Twitter 'followers' or YouTube views. Social media use was spread across all age groups – albeit politicians over 60 years of age were more conservative than younger MPs and Senators.

E-ELECTIONEERING 2007–2013

Trends in online political campaigns over three elections

Following the 2004 US presidential election campaign which was described as "a critical turning point" in use of social media, and particularly the 2008 Obama presidential campaign, there has been increasing focus on the use of social media for political campaigning and what is termed *e-electioneering* and *e-democracy*. Nevertheless, studies of election campaigns between 2010 and 2012 in Australia, the US, UK, Sweden and Taiwan have identified a substantial level of what Steve Woolgar calls *cyberbole* in relation to use of social media for political engagement. With Web 2.0-based social media still referred to as 'new media' by many, and substantive patterns of change in political communication yet to be identified, a study of social media use in the 2013 Australian federal election was conducted using the same methodology as previous studies of the 2007 and 2010 Australian federal elections to gain comparative longitudinal data. This article reports quantitative and qualitative content analysis of social media use by 191[1] federal political candidates and the two major political parties during the 2013 campaign and compares findings with the two previous Australian federal elections to identify trends in the volume of *e-electioneering* as well as the ways in which social media are being used for communication and democratic engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Even though Australia has compulsory voting, which means that voter mobilisation is not a major election campaign strategy (Gibson, Lusoli and Ward , 2008), Australian political parties and candidates have followed international trends in embracing social media for campaigning and communication with voters, as shown by Chen (2008), Chen and Walsh (2009), Flew and Wilson (2008), Gibson, Lusoli and Ward (2008), Gibson and McAllister (2008), Gibson and Ward (2008), Goot (2008), Macnamara (2008, 2011), Macnamara and Kenning (2011) and others. For example, Macnamara & Kenning (2011) reported that the volume of social media use by political candidates and parties in the 2010 Australian federal election campaign was more than double that of the 2007 campaign.

While study of use of the internet for political communication has been intensive since the 1990s (e.g., de Sola Pool, 1990; Hill and Hughes, 1998; Jones, 1995, 1998; Livingstone, 1999; McChesney, 1996), the 2004 US presidential election was "a critical turning point" when online politics finally reached a mainstream audience", according to Xenos and Moy (2007: 704). Subsequently, a number of studies were made of social media use in national elections in the US (e.g., Rainie, Smith, Schlozman et al., 2012; Rosenstiel and Mitchell, 2012; Smith and Rainie, 2008); the UK (e.g., Gibson, Cantijoch and Ward, 2010; Gibson, Williamson and Ward, 2010); Australia and other countries such as Sweden (Karlsson, Clerwall and Buskquist, 2012) and Taiwan (Lin, 2013) between 2007 and 2012.

Bold pronouncements have been made in popular discourse in Australia as well as in the US, UK and other countries about social media transforming the face of political campaigning and

communication, such as claims of "the YouTube election" (Media Monitors, 2008; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2007), a "Google election" (Gibson and Ward, 2008), an "internet election" (Gibson, Williamson and Ward, 2010: 1) and a "social media election" (Smith, 2013).

However, these have been shown to be as misleading as reductionist claims that the democratic uprisings in the Middle East referred to as the 'Arab Spring' were a "Facebook revolution" or a "Twitter revolution" (Curran, 2012: 51; Naughton, 2011). Gibson and McAllister (2008a) noted that the promise of social media reaching a mainstream audience reported by Xenos and Moy (2007) was unfulfilled in the 2007 Australian federal election, a contention supported by Macnamara (2008). Similarly, in their detailed analysis of the 2010 UK election, Gibson, Williamson and Ward (2010) concluded:

> Whilst the UK parties arguably began to understand some of the significance of e-campaigning they still failed to fully buy into [the] concept. They still either operated an old-fashioned, top-down broadcasting principles (Conservatives) or only sporadically linked online mobilisation to offline activity (Labour) (p. 3).

In a comparative analysis of the 2010 UK and Australian election campaigns, Gibson and Cantijoch reported that, while there was increased openness and commitment to Web 2.0 techniques among British political parties, they "tended to give priority to the more top-down Web 1.0 applications that are aimed mainly at broadcasting information". They added that, overall, there was "an adherence to the unidirectional flows of Web 1.0 communication" (2011: 9)

A study of social media use by Sweden's 10 political parties at nine intervals over the period of the 2010 Swedish national election campaign by Karlsson, Clerwall and Buskquist (2012) found that all parties had official pages on Facebook, YouTube channels and Twitter accounts and most had blogs and Flickr sites. However, they reported that "although the parties make room for user input to some extent … when it comes to actually engaging with the users/the public, the parties appear somewhat unwilling". Karlsson et al. reported that there was interaction between the political parties and citizens in fewer than half of the postings studied and "there was only one-way traffic on other occasions" (2012: 17).

From a mixed method study involving interviews with the campaign staff of both presidential candidates and analysis of social media content during the 2010 Taiwan national election, Lin concluded that "interaction between candidates and netizens is limited", although he noted that there was "interplay" between top-down and bottom-up power on popular social media sites in Taiwan such as Plurk (2013: 303).

Despite many transformational claims made in relation to 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns, a Pew Research Center study examining how presidential candidates used social media during the 2012 US presidential election reported that "neither campaign made much use of the social aspect of social media. Rarely did either candidate [or their team of staff] reply to, comment on, or 'retweet' something from a citizen – or anyone else outside the campaign" (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2012: 3). The study found that campaign Web sites remained the central hub of digital political messages and these continued to be primarily one-way transmissional in nature. The sub-title of the Pew report was "Obama leads but neither

candidate engages in much dialogue with voters". In another study of the 2012 US presidential campaign, Rainie and Smith reported that the vast majority of American internet users posted little or nothing related to politics online and only six per cent said that most of what they posted related to politics, social issues or the 2012 campaign (2012: 2–3).

Nevertheless, because of declining citizen interest and participation in traditional politics and political communication (Dahlgren, 2009; McAllister, 2002), declining citizens' trust in politicians and traditional representative institutions (Coleman, 2013; Gibson, Lusoli and Ward, 2008: 111–113) and declining audiences of many traditional mass media referred to as 'audience fragmentation' (Anderson, 2006: 181–91; Jenkins, 2006: 238–43), politicians and political parties continue to look for new ways to engage voters and address what concerned researchers refer to as the 'democratic deficit' (Couldry, 2010: 49; Curran, 2011: 86). In particular, political parties and government agencies such as the Australian Electoral Commission are seeking ways to engage young people in political participation (Bennett, Wells and Freelon, 2011; Macnamara, Sakinofsky and Beattie, 2012).

The 2013 Australian federal election provided an opportunity to examine the use of social media and online engagement by political candidates and parties and compare findings with those of similar studies of the 2007 and 2010 federal election campaigns. In addition, with social media use in US presidential campaigns being largely focussed on gaining voter turnout because of voluntary voting, as well as fund-raising (Scherer, 2012; Vargas, 2008), Australian election campaigns provide useful sites to examine social media use focussed on *e-electioneering* and *e-democracy*.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA AND *E-DEMOCRACY*: THE FRAME FOR ANALYSIS

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (2010: 61). This provides a useful theoretical starting point for an examination of the use of social media, as it indicates that social media are characterized by a particular ideology, not only technology – or what the pioneers of the World Wide Web, and particularly *Web 2.0*, refer to as a philosophy, principles, protocols, culture and practices.

Boler notes that the founder of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, said the Web was designed for "shared creativity" and was never intended to be about delivering content to passive audiences (2008: 39). In this sense, early uses of the Web for static content and one-way transmission of information can be seen as a misuse and a continuation of *mass media* practices. The term Web 2.0 was coined by Tim O'Reilly as the theme of a conference in 2004 to refer to Web-based services that feature openness for participation, collaboration and interactivity (Boler, 2008: 39; O'Reilly, 2005)[2]. In a much-quoted essay titled 'What is Web 2.0?', O'Reilly said a central principle of Web 2.0 is harnessing "collective intelligence", a concept discussed extensively by sociologist Pierre Lévy (1997). O'Reilly summarized: "you can visualize Web 2.0 as a set of principles and practices" (2005: para. 7).

The principles and practices of Web 2.0 have been further explicated by other Web 2.0 pioneers such as Peter Merholz who refers to Web 2.0 as a philosophy. In his blog *Peterme.com* under a salutary heading 'Web 2.0 – it's not about the technology', Merholz states: "Web 2.0 is primarily interesting from a philosophical standpoint. It's about relinquishing control, it's about openness, trust and authenticity" (2005: para. 5). Publisher of *ReadWriteWeb* which is one of the world's top 20 blogs specialising in analysis of Web products and trends, Richard MacManus presents a number of definitions of Web 2.0 including describing it as "an attitude not a technology" and specifically as "the underlying philosophy of relinquishing control" (2005: paras 2, 3 and 5). Henry Jenkins similarly emphasises in *Convergence Culture* that the convergence of communication and content on the latest iteration of the Web is about culture more than technology and, in particular, "participatory culture" (2006: 243).

In their scholarly analysis, Harrison and Barthel state that "Web 2.0 is founded on a radical reconceptualization of the user, from consumer of online products and information … to producer of online products and information that they share with others" (2009: 160), a point also made in Kaplan and Haenlein's definition of social media which pointed to "user-generated content" and "exchange" of information as key characteristics (2010, p. 61).This citizen who is both media producer and consumer has been popularly labelled the *prosumer* (Toffler, 1970, 1980) and the *produser* (Bruns, 2008; Picone, 2007).

Interactivity is also emphasised by Bucy (2004) and Cover (2004) as a defining element of Web 2.0 communication – in particular, open *user-to-documents* interactivity and *user-to-user* interactivity, rather than the more narrow and perfunctory level of *user-to-system* interactivity, as discussed by McMillan (2002: 166–72) and Szuprowicz (1995). Carpentier similarly advocates what he calls 'person-to-person' interactivity versus 'person-to-machine' interaction (2007: 221).

Based on the literature, this analysis examined qualitative criteria in online political communication including *openness* and *interactivity* that enable *sharing*, *dialogue*, *conversation* and *participation*, as well as evaluating the volume of social media use by political candidates and parties. Also, this analysis was informed by the definitions and descriptions of Web 2.0 as being about relinquishing *control* that characterises one-way, top-down information distribution and *authenticity* in communication instead of pre-packaged content (Bucy, 2004; Boler, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Macnamara, 2013: 42).

E-electioneering and e-democracy are terms that denote use of interactive Web 2.0 applications for political engagement and participation. The Hansard Society's definition of e-democracy notes that "the concept of e-democracy is associated with efforts to broaden political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their representatives via new information and communication technologies" (cited in Carpentier, 2011: 118). E-democracy, in simple terms, seeks to use online interaction to create citizen participation and engagement that are central to democracy (Carpentier, 2007, 2011; Couldry 2010, 2012). The term e-electioneering is used here to refer to e-democracy practices specifically deployed during election campaigns.

Political and social science scholars widely agree that media collectively comprise the primary discursive site of the public sphere in contemporary democracies (e.g., Carpentier, 2011; Curran, 2011, 2012; Habermas, 2006; Howley, 2007; Poster, 1997). Notwithstanding a number of limitations of online media such as the 'digital divide' between those with access to new digital media and those without access because of financial or other factors (Gandy, 2002; Hoffman and Novak, 1998), many harbour great hopes for a revitalisation of the public sphere and redress of the 'democratic deficit' (Couldry, 2010: 49; Curran, 2011: 86) through social media. For instance, Corner says many see the internet, particularly Web 2.0 type interactive communication, "bypassing … the degraded central systems of mediation in favour of a more independent, varied and critical range of resources for political knowledge" (2007: 223).

As noted in the introduction, freed from the requirements of mobilising voter turnout and fund-raising, Australian elections afford ideal sites to examine the use of social media for political engagement and participation. Furthermore, with quantitative and qualitative data available on the use of social media in the 2007 and 2010 Australian federal elections from previous studies (Macnamara, 2008; Macnamara and Kenning, 2011), the 2013 Australian federal election presented an opportunity to gain comparative longitudinal information to help identify trends in e-electioneering and e-democracy. This is an important step in research given these channels are still widely seen as 'new media' (e.g., Flew, 2014; Siapera (2012), with patterns and substantive change still to be identified and understood.

METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

Research questions

This study was designed to explore five research questions as follows, the first two of which required quantitative analysis, while questions 3–5 involved qualitative analysis:

1. What social media were used by Australian politicians and political parties during the 2013 federal election campaign?
2. To what extent did Australian politicians and political parties use social media during the 2013 federal election campaign in terms of volume and frequency?
3. To what extent did citizens engage with Australian politicians and political parties in social media during the 2013 federal election campaign (as evidenced through 'liking', 'following' and 'tagging' political sites; viewing and downloading content; posting comments; retweeting; etc.)?
4. To what extent did Australian politicians and political parties seek to engage and interact with citizens during the 2013 federal election campaign, as evidenced through interactive features on their sites (e.g., e-surveys; e-petitions; comment boxes; 'liking', 'following' and 'tagging' others' sites and content; viewing others' content; responding to comments, posts and tweets, etc.)?
5. What were the main topics, issues and themes discussed on the social media sites studied during the campaign?

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Research method

This mixed method study used quantitative and qualitative content analysis of social media including blogs, the leading microblogging site Twitter, the social networks Facebook and Myspace[3], the video sharing sites YouTube and Vimeo and the leading photo sharing site Flickr. In addition, based on the concept of Web 2.0 as outlined, interactive content on personal Web sites including e-petitions, e-surveys and e-newsletters was included in the study.

In the first stage, quantitative content analysis produced metrics on the volume of sites, blog posts, Facebook posts, tweets, retweets, videos posted online, video views, photos posted, comments, 'friends', 'likes', 'followers', 'following', views, downloads, tagging and links. These data were recorded and analysed in a series of Excel worksheets, including comparative analysis with equivalent 2007 and 2010 data.

Qualitative content analysis was focussed on the sites of the 'top 10' most active politicians on Twitter. Twitter was selected as the site for qualitative analysis because it is the fastest growing social media used by Australian politicians and political parties and also because it offers the most opportunities for interactivity, dialogue and participation, noting that most political Facebook accounts are 'pages' which do not allow posts by visitors (only 'likes') and few candidates' or party blogs published posts by anyone other than the site owner, as will be discussed in this report's findings. Qualitative analysis of tweets was undertaken using NVivo Ncapture to import the text and metadata into NVivo 10 where they were coded, as recommended by text and content analysis scholars such as Neuman (2006) and Shoemaker and Reese (1996). Key words in the content of tweets, as well as metadata such as addressee and date sent, were used to code tweets into a number of categories which included identifying whether they were broadcasts, responses or direct messages, identifying the major topics discussed, and grouping them into a number of types including 'policy announcement', 'campaign slogan', 'attacking opponents', 'whereabouts reports', 'personal information or feelings', 'supporting colleague or party' and 'links to media articles or documents'. The coding categories are shown in Table 7.

Sample

To obtain data that were directly comparable with analysis of the 2007 and 2010 Australian federal election campaigns, the sample selected for analysis of social media use was all incumbent federal politicians standing for re-election in 2013 to the 150-member House of Representatives and the 76-member Senate in the Australian Parliament, as well as the two major political parties – the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party of Australia. This produced a sample of 191 politicians, with 35 members not standing for re-election, as well as the multiple sites of the two largest political parties.

Period of research

Quantitative and qualitative analysis were conducted of all sites in the sample during the final three weeks of the 2013 election campaign from Sunday 18 August to the close of polls at 6 pm on Saturday 7 September.

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QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Overview

After social media use by federal politicians more than doubled between 2007 and 2010, the number of social media sites used by federal politicians increased by 67 per cent in 2013 compared with 2010. This represented a 243 per cent increase overall in social media use compared with the 2007 federal election, as shown in Table 1 along with a breakdown of the main types of social media and interactive online content used.

Social media	2007	2010	2013	% change 2010–2013	% change 2007–2013
Personal Web site	137	157	174	11%	27%
Facebook	8	146	206	41%	2475%
Twitter	0	92	146	59%	*
YouTube	13	34	135	297%	938%
MySpace	26	9	25	178%	-4%
Blogs	15	29	45	55%	200%
Flickr	0	9	39	333%	*
E-surveys	24	7	48	586%	100%
E-petitions	10	3	20	567%	100%
E-newsletter	42	78	104	33%	148%
Total / average %	**275**	**564**	**942**	**67%**	**243%**

Table 1. Change in the number of politicians using various social media from 2007 to 2013.
(* Figures not available as no use was recorded in 2007.)

E-surveys and e-petitions appear to have made a comeback after losing popularity in 2010, but this is misleading in terms of interactivity as most were basic proformas with limited user content able to be entered. Beyond the high incidence of these features of politicians' Web sites, 2013 was a visual election with posting of photographs on Flickr and videos on YouTube being the fastest growing forms of social media content. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube remained the most popular social media overall as in 2010, although Twitter use increased more than Facebook, as the latter approaches market saturation (see 'Politicians on Facebook'). Myspace made an apparent resurgence, but this was because the relaunched Myspace retained old accounts, which mostly remain unchanged since 2007. Blogs continued to be published by almost one quarter of sitting politicians (45), more than a 50 per cent increase on the number blogging in 2010.

Most politicians used between three and seven forms of social media and interactive content from those listed in Table 1, with 5–6 forms on online engagement being most common, used by more than 50 per cent of those studied.

Personal Web sites

Of the almost 200 politicians studied, 91 per cent had an 'official' personal Web site (i.e., one that they established or approved) and 13 per cent had Web sites designed and hosted by their political party, as well as the Australian Parliament House (www.aph.gov.au) Web page provided for all federal members of parliament. Interestingly, 14 per cent of sitting members did not provide links to any other sites from their official aph.gov.au page. Of those who did link to other sites, 95 per cent linked to their political party's Web site, 76 per cent linked to a personal Web site, 50 per cent linked to their Facebook profile or page, and 47 per cent linked to their Twitter account.

Overwhelmingly, politicians' personal Web sites were Web 1.0 in terms of their design and architecture – i.e., primarily focussed on one-way distribution of information to visitors, such as biographies, lists of political achievements, speeches and questions delivered in Parliament. Many were also heavily media rather than voter orientated, with 'media centres', 'newsrooms' and media/news releases. Opportunities for interactivity were low to non-existent on most, except for online subscription forms for newsletters and online contact details for the politician. Less than half of politicians' sites studied provided their e-mail address for direct contact, with 48 per cent providing only a Web contact form and 4 per cent offering no opportunity to connect electronically with the politician.

Politicians on Facebook

During the 2013 election 81 per cent of sitting members of parliament had either a Facebook profile or page, or both, compared with just over 70 per cent in 2010. This analysis included Facebook profiles which allow 'friending' and posting of comments, as well as official pages which allow 'likes', 'talking about' and posting of comments. Unofficial community pages not under the control of the politician or political party and fake sites were excluded. Most politicians use Facebook pages for electoral engagement and campaigning, as these open to view without becoming a 'friend' and have no limit on numbers, while a few allowed citizens to become Facebook 'friends'. The volume of 'friends', 'likes' and 'talking abouts'[4] on politicians' Facebook profiles and pages, reported in Table 2, increased substantially from 2010 when the highest number of 'likes' was less than 70,000 for then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd had less than 50,000 'likes' and Tony Abbott less than 15,000. The youngest member of the Australian parliament Wyatt Roy reached the Facebook limit of 5,021 'friends' during the campaign and fellow Liberal Joe Hockey was approaching the limit with pending 'friend' requests.

	No. of 'friends'[5]			No. of 'likes'		No. 'talking about'
1	Wyatt Roy	5,021	Tony Abbott	249,357	Tony Abbott	117,742
2	Joe Hockey	5,015	Kevin Rudd	123,618	Kevin Rudd	67,986
3	Julie Bishop	4,998	Malcolm Turnbull	28,452	Adam Bandt	15,312
4	Tony Burke	3,595	Adam Bandt	24,951	Malcolm Turnbull	6,638
5	George Christensen	3,575	Bronwyn Bishop	15,022	Larissa Waters	6,176
6	Warren Snowdon	2,953	Cory Bernardi	10,286	Bronwyn Bishop	4,767
7	Lisa Singh	2,858	Christine Milne	8,481	Cory Bernardi	4,262

8	Mathias Cormann	2,384	Tanya Plibersek	8,002	Wayne Swan	3,621
9	Dennis Jensen	2,276	Christopher Pyne	7,887	Sarah Hanson-Young	3,567
10	Claire Moore	2,155	Sarah Hanson-Young	7,410	Christine Milne	3,458
11	Kelvin Thomson	2,132	Mark Dreyfus	6,894	Tanya Plibersek	2,842
12	Joel Fitzgibbon	1,999	Bob Baldwin	6,666	Kate Ellis	2,766
13	Amanda Rishworth	1,966	Wayne Swan	6,622	Anthony Albanese	2,503
14	Brendan O'Connor	1752	Bill Shorten	6,191	Steve Georganas	2,401
15	Andrew Southcott	1,694	Steve Georganas	5,606	Doug Cameron	2,282
16	Sharman Stone	1,655	Larissa Waters	5,120	Rachel Siewert	2,182
17	Ian Macdonald	1,571	Kate Ellis	4,912	David Bradbury	2,045
18	Stephen Jones	1,529	Janelle Saffin	4,400	Janelle Saffin	1,925
19	Sean Edwards	1,485	Chris Bowen	4,146	Anna Burke	1,640
20	David Bushby	1,462	Andrew Wilkie	4,143	Wyatt Roy	1,504

Table 2. The 'top 20' politicians on Facebook by number of 'friends', 'likes' and 'talking abouts' during the 2013 federal election campaign.

Politicians on Twitter

More than three-quarters (76 per cent) of the 191 sitting members studied had a Twitter account, compared with 45 per cent of sitting members during the 2010 Australian federal election, with just 24 per cent not on Twitter compared with 51 per cent who were not on Twitter in 2010. However, the style and purpose of 'tweeting' varied widely as will be discussed under 'Qualitative findings'.
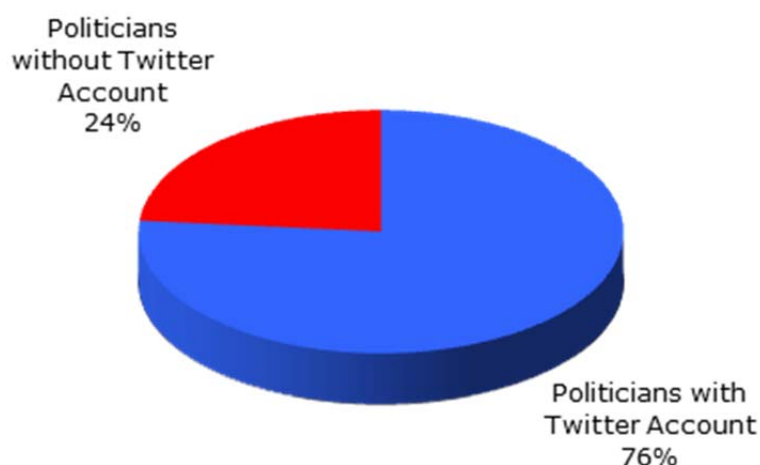

Figure 1. Politicians on Twitter during the 2013 federal election campaign.

The 'top 20' most active politicians on Twitter are shown in Figure 2. Compared with the 2010 election campaign, more politicians tweeted more, although the most tweets by any politician in the 2013 campaign was 277 by the Liberal Senator Matthias Cormann, compared with Liberal MP Malcolm Turnbull's 439 tweets in the final three weeks of the 2010 election campaign. Second to Cormann on Twitter was Labor's Andrew Leigh with 180 tweets, followed by the ALP's Anthony Albanese with 160 tweets and the Greens Senator Christine Milne with 148 tweets. In 2010 there was a long gap from Turnbull's prolific microblogging to the second most prolific tweeter, Scott Morrison, with 158 tweets. In 2013 nine of the 'top 10' most active politician on Twitter posted more than 100 tweets, as shown in Figure 2, compared with five 'centurion' tweeters during the 2010 campaign.

Turnbull was again active on Twitter with 134 tweets, but this made him the sixth most active of Twitter in 2013. Labor MP Kate Lundy and the Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, who were in the 'top 10' in 2010, slipped back to 14th and 17th most active on Twitter in 2103, while the Liberal leader Tony Abbott increased his use of Twitter from just two tweets during the 2010 campaign to squeeze into the 'top 20' most active with 56 tweets. What politicians tweeted about is discussed under 'Qualitative findings'.
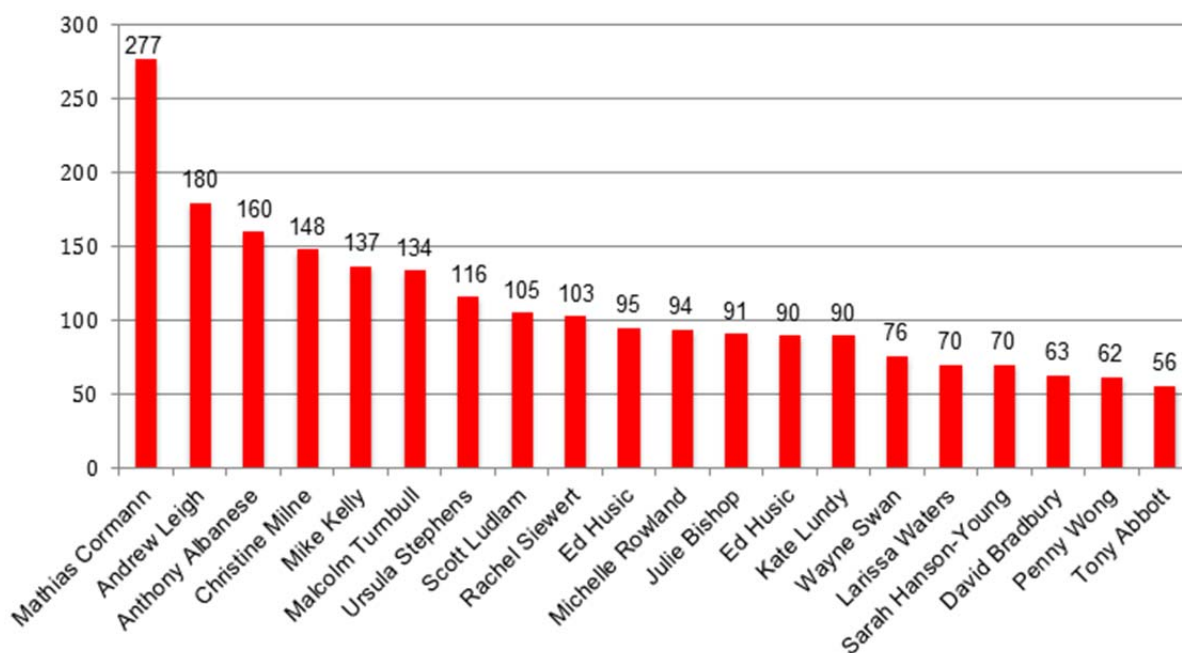

Figure 2. The 'top 20' politicians on Twitter by volume of tweets during the 2013 federal election campaign.

Twitter metrics that give some qualitative insight in relation to two-way interaction are the numbers of 'followers' versus the numbers of others who politicians are 'following'. Politicians typically seek to maximise their number of 'followers' – their audience to whom they can speak – but often the number of others who they are 'following' (i.e., listening to) is far fewer. This was clearly evident in the 2013 Australian federal election. Table 3 shows that the 20 most popular federal politicians on Twitter were 'following' substantially fewer people than their number of 'followers'. While this might be inevitable to some extent for popular public figures and elected officials, the disparity is marked. On average, the number of people who politicians were 'following' was just 21 per cent of their number of 'followers'.

Noteworthy examples of wanting an audience to speak to, but ostensibly not listening included former state Labor premier Bob Carr and Labor MP Tanya Plibersek, who were 'following' less than half of 1 per cent of their 'followers'; Labor's Penny Wong ('following' 0.75 per cent of her 'followers'), the Liberal's Joe Hockey who was 'following' just over 1,000 compared with almost 100,000 'followers' (1 per cent) and the Liberal MP Julie Bishop (1.1 per cent) and the Greens Christine Milne (1.7 per cent). Malcolm Turnbull who was the most interactive on Twitter in 2010 was 'following' just 4 per cent of his number of 'followers' and the Liberal's Cory Bernardi and/or his staff were 'following' no one throughout the campaign.

Crosstab analysis of volume of tweets shown in Figure 2 with data on 'followers' and 'following' illustrates that high usage of social media does not necessarily equate to interaction, dialogue and citizen participation, with some of the most prolific Twitter users (e.g., Christine Milne and Malcolm Turnbull) seeking an audience, speaking frequently, but not actively listening in Twitter. (Note: Equating 'following' to listening is a basic but useful metric, as the social media sites of politicians are usually operated not only by them personally, but by campaign and electoral staff for market research and voter engagement.)

Politician	Followers	Following
Kevin Rudd	1,390,762	422,793
Tony Abbott	242,039	31,804
Malcolm Turnbull	193,181	8,382
Joe Hockey	91,266	1,027
Penny Wong	51,092	384
Wayne Swan	49,177	2,092
Bob Carr	43,187	154
Julie Bishop	41,387	452
Kate Ellis	38,811	1,275
Anthony Albanese	36,713	989
Adam Bandt	35,928	16,627
Bill Shorten	31,073	10,691
Christine Milne	29,567	489
Tanya Plibersek	28,303	112
Tony Burke	28,178	11,593
Sarah Hanson-Young	26,404	874
Chris Bowen	19,879	726
Kate Lundy	18,430	3,489
Scott Morrison	16,492	677
Cory Bernardi	14,623	0

Table 3. The 20 politicians with the most 'followers' and the number of other Twitter users they were 'following'.

Politicians on YouTube and other video sharing sites

The former Labor leader Kevin Rudd dominated online video, posting 51 videos on YouTube during the campaign which gained more than 3 million views. The vast majority of these were of one video titled 'If you think homosexuality is an unnatural condition, I cannot agree' recorded from Rudd's appearance on the ABC program *Q&A* and uploaded to YouTube on 2 September 2013. (See Table 4.)

Significantly, the Liberal leader (now Prime Minister) Tony Abbott did not appear in the 'top 20' on YouTube by videos posted, subscribers or views. However, the Liberal Party YouTube channel had more subscribers and more than one million more views than the Australian Labor Party YouTube channel, as shown in Table 5. This indicates that the Liberal strategy was to direct more communication through the party's sites than those of the leader or individual politicians. More than 40 Australian federal politicians also appeared in videos on Vimeo, although only three had a Vimeo account.

Politician	Subscribers	Politician	Total views
Kevin Rudd	1,628	Kevin Rudd	3,015,003
Malcolm Turnbull	520	Malcolm Turnbull	135,845
Joe Hockey	194	Joe Hockey	96,061
Cory Bernardi	119	Bronwyn Bishop	69,199
Wyatt Roy	102	Peter Slipper	63,003
George Christensen	93	Sarah Hanson-Young	58,731
Christine Milne	88	Wyatt Roy	53,105
Scott Ludlam	71	Scott Ludlam	49,088
Doug Cameron	66	Michael Danby	46,784
Chris Bowen	64	Christine Milne	41,874
Penny Wong	62	Teresa Gambaro	40,583
Bob Katter	60	Cory Bernardi	36,766
Kate Lundy	60	Kate Lundy	35,856
Scott Morrison	59	Scott Morrison	34,808
Christopher Pyne	57	Jason Clare	32,539
Kelvin Thomson	57	Andrew Laming	24,563
Rachel Siewert	57	Julie Bishop	23,182
Wayne Swan	50	Andrew Leigh	23,013
Jason Clare	49	Christopher Pyne	21,800
Andrew Leigh	49	Chris Bowen	21,656

Table 4. The 20 most active politicians on YouTube in term of subscribers and video views.

Politicians on other social media

Posting of photographs increased substantially during the 2013 campaign compared with previous elections and the Liberals Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison dominated Flickr, along with Labor's Warren Snowdon and Kate Lundy, as shown in Figure 3. This, and the significant increase in the number of videos posted and video views on YouTube and other sites such as Vimeo, highlighted 2013 as the 'visual election' – although videos and photos posted mostly involved information transmission with limited opportunities to comment.
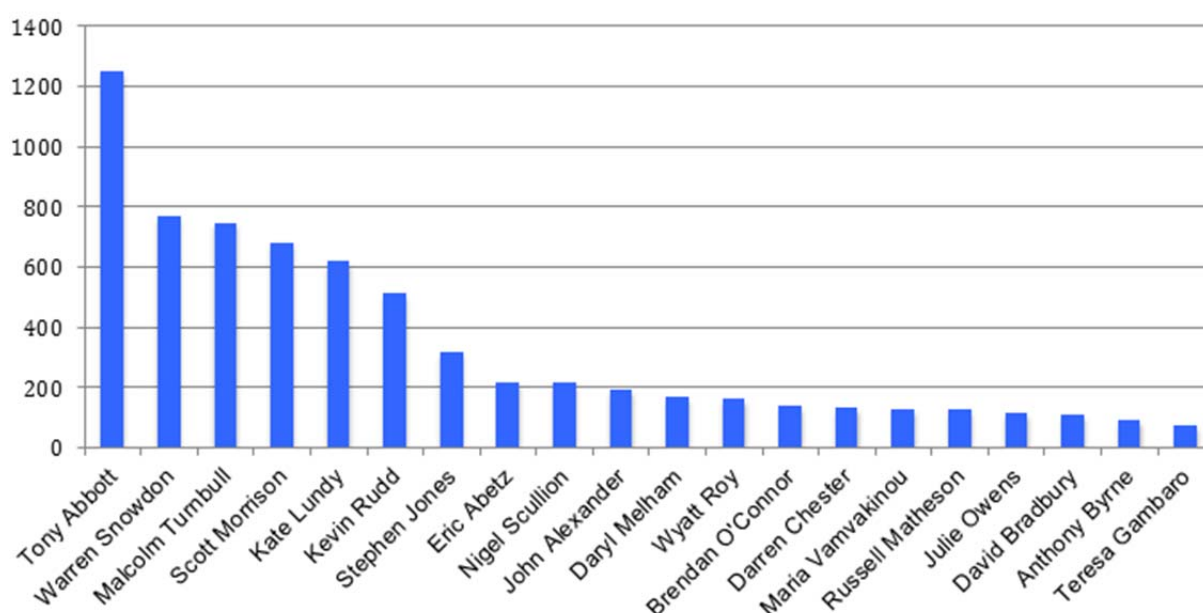

Figure 3. The number of photographs posted on Flickr by politicians during the 2013 Australian federal election.

The use of blogs by individual politicians has increased since 2010, but the majority of politicians' blogs featured articles by the hosts and few comments. It is not clear whether this is the result of heavy moderation (i.e., removing critical and unfavourable comments), or whether there were few comments. In either case, politicians' blogs are not sites of interactivity and engagement with citizens.

Politicians' social media use by party, gender, and age

As in 2010, there were no significant differences overall in social media use by politicians based on political party, gender or age, despite common assumptions that young people are more inclined to social media use than older people.

While the Liberals Senator Matthias Corman was the most active on Twitter by a good margin in terms of volume of tweets, of the 'top 10' most active politician tweeters, five were Labor, three were Greens and only two were Liberal . While this suggests a lag by Liberal politicians, on Facebook five of the most 'liked' politicians were Liberal, three were Greens and only two

were Labor. Liberal politicians also had a higher average number of 'likes' (around 4,500), compared with Labor politicians' average of 2,800 'likes'. The average number of Facebook 'friends' of both Labor and Liberal politicians was between 300 and 400 and use of YouTube and Flickr was relatively balanced between the two major political parties. The only slight skew in terms of political parties was a higher number of Green politicians heavily engaged in social media relative to their numbers in parliament, as evidenced in the 'top 10' tweeters and the average number of 'likes' on Facebook which the Greens topped with 6,000.

Of the 191 politicians studied, 69 per cent were men and 31 per cent were women. While the overall gender imbalance in the parliament is a matter for discussion, this analysis shows that seven of the 'top 10' politicians on Twitter were men and three were women, three women politicians were among the 10 most subscribed to and viewed on YouTube, and four of the 10 most 'liked' and most 'talked about' on Facebook were women, demonstrating a proportional gender distribution.

The youngest sitting member in the Australian parliament, Wyatt Roy aged 23, was not among the 'top 10' or 'top 20' users of Twitter or the most 'followed' or most 'liked' on Facebook, although qualitative analysis of his sites reveals some interesting divergence from the patterns of political social media use identified.

Political parties' sites

Quantitative analysis of the sites of the two major political parties showed that the volume videos posted on their respective YouTube channels, the number Facebook 'likes', the number of 'followers' on Twitter and the number of citizens the major parties were 'following' all increased substantially since 2010. In total, Labor almost doubled its number of video views from 1,247,009 in 2010 to more than 2 million in 2013, while the Liberal Party increased its total video views by six-fold from 639,111 in 2010 to almost 3.85 million. Similarly, the number of Labor and Liberal Twitter 'followers' increased from 5,617 and 7,089 respectively in 2010 to almost 55,000 and almost 40,000 respectively in 2013.

Labor was more active on Twitter, posting 333 tweets during the campaign, with almost 9,000 tweets in total and almost 54,559 'followers' by the date of the election, compared with the Liberals 353 tweets during the campaign, less than 7,000 tweets in total and just under 39,641 'followers' (see Table 4). However, the Liberal Party was more active and popular on Facebook with 27 Wall posts and more than 40,000 comments during the election, compared with Labor's 11 Wall posts and 15,680 comments. The Liberal Party's 200,000 plus Facebook 'likes' also outstripped Labor's 165,000.

Blogging and custom-built Web sites have lost favour with the political parties, with the Labor Party blog and *Labor Think Tank* being closed and *Labor Connect* being moved from a specialist Web site to Facebook. This is probably a result of the amount of work involved in maintaining specialist Web sites, but also reflects a consolidation of the social media market with a number of dominant sites (namely, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter).

Party	Media	Content & metrics	Site
ALP	Web site		www.alp.org.au
	Labor TV YouTube channel	32 videos[1] 101,140 views[2] 2,101,189 total views[3] 373 total videos[3] 6,464 subscribers[3]	http://www.alp.org.au/labortv
	Labor Blog	Discontinued	[http://www.alp.org.au/blogs/alp-blog]
	Twitter	333 tweets[1] 54,559 followers[3] 15,647 following[3] 8,863 total tweets[3]	https://twitter.com/AustralianLabor
	Facebook	11 Wall posts[1] 15,680 comments[1] 165,767 likes[3] 9,334 talking about[3]	https://www.facebook.com/LaborConnect
	Labor ThinkTank	Discontinued	[http://thinktank.alp.org.au/issues]
	Labor Connect	Moved to Facebook	[http://connect.alp.org.au]
	MySpace	20,080 connections[3]	http://www.myspace.com/officiallaborspace
	Flickr	512 photos[3] 443 photos[3]	http://www.flickr.com/photos/kevinruddPM http://www.flickr.com/photos/KRudd
LIB	Web site		http://www.liberal/org.au
	Liberal.TV YouTube Channel	21 videos[1] 554,164 views[2] 3,850,947 total views[3] 323 total videos[3] 7,196 subscribers[3]	http://www.youtube.com/user/LiberalPartyTV
	Twitter	353 tweets[1] 39,641 followers[3] 11,098 following[3] 6,894 total tweets[3]	https://twitter.com/LiberalAus
	Facebook	27 Wall posts[1] 40,402 comments[1] 203,278 likes[3] 6,287 talking about[3]	http://www.facebook.com/LiberalPartyAustralia
	Flickr	1,262 photos[3]	http://www.flickr.com/photos/tonyabbott

1 During the period studied (the final three weeks of the campaign: 18 August–7 September 2013).
2 Views of videos posted during the campaign.
3 In total as at the election date (7 September 2013).

Table 5. Social media use by the two major political parties, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal Party of Australia (LIB).

Trends in media use

Figure 4 show an overview of social media use by Australian politicians during the 2007, 2010 and 2013 federal elections, illustrating the growth and dominance of Facebook and Twitter.
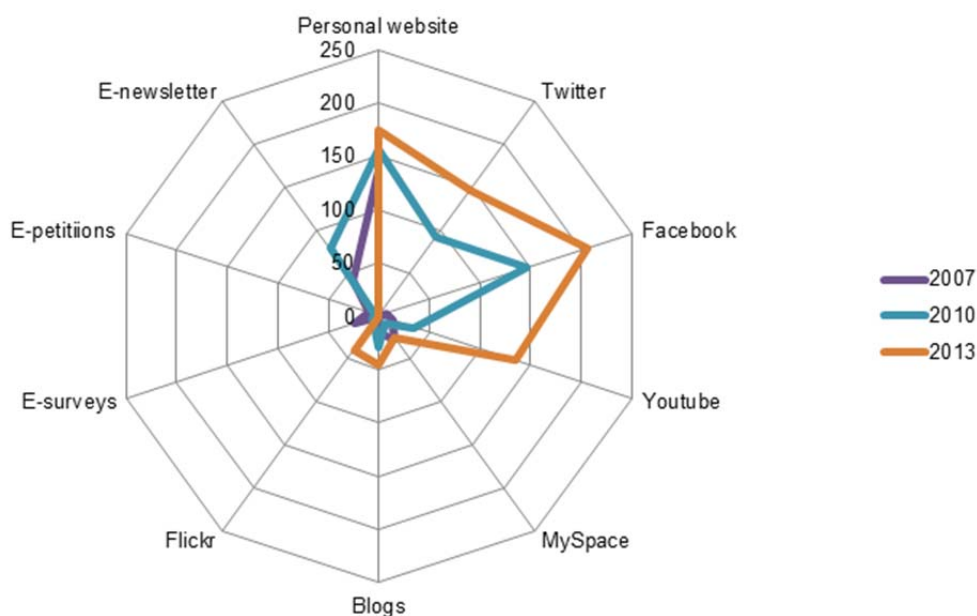

Figure 4. Social media use by politicians during the 2007, 2010 and 2013 federal election campaigns.

The 'mean' politician

The Mean Politician
Male
Aged 55 or 59
Labor
From NSW
Uses 5 types of social media
Has a Twitter account
Has tweeted less than 200 times
Following between 1 and 500 people
Is followed by between 1 and 2,000 people
Has a Facebook page
Facebook page has between 1 and 100 likes
Has no photos on Facebook page
Has a YouTube channel
YouTube channel has between 1 and 1,000 views
YouTube channel has between 1 and 10 subscribers
Does not have Flickr account
Does not have an e-survey or e-petition online
Personal Web site has a newsletter, but it is static (e.g., PDF)
Personal Web site has a media centre aimed at traditional mass media

Table 6. A construct of the average politician based on analysis of the 2013 federal election campaign.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

An overwhelming focus on politicians *speaking* in social media and a generalised lack of *listening* and two-way engagement is demonstrated, to some extent, in the disparity between the number of 'followers' of politicians and the number of others who they are 'following' on Twitter, as reported in detail in Table 3 and dramatically illustrated in Figure 5. (Note: Kevin Rudd, with 1,390,762 'followers' and 'following' 422,793 has been removed from Figure 4 to allow the chart to illustrate the relatively low or near non-existent level of 'following' across the remaining 19 of the 'top 20''.)
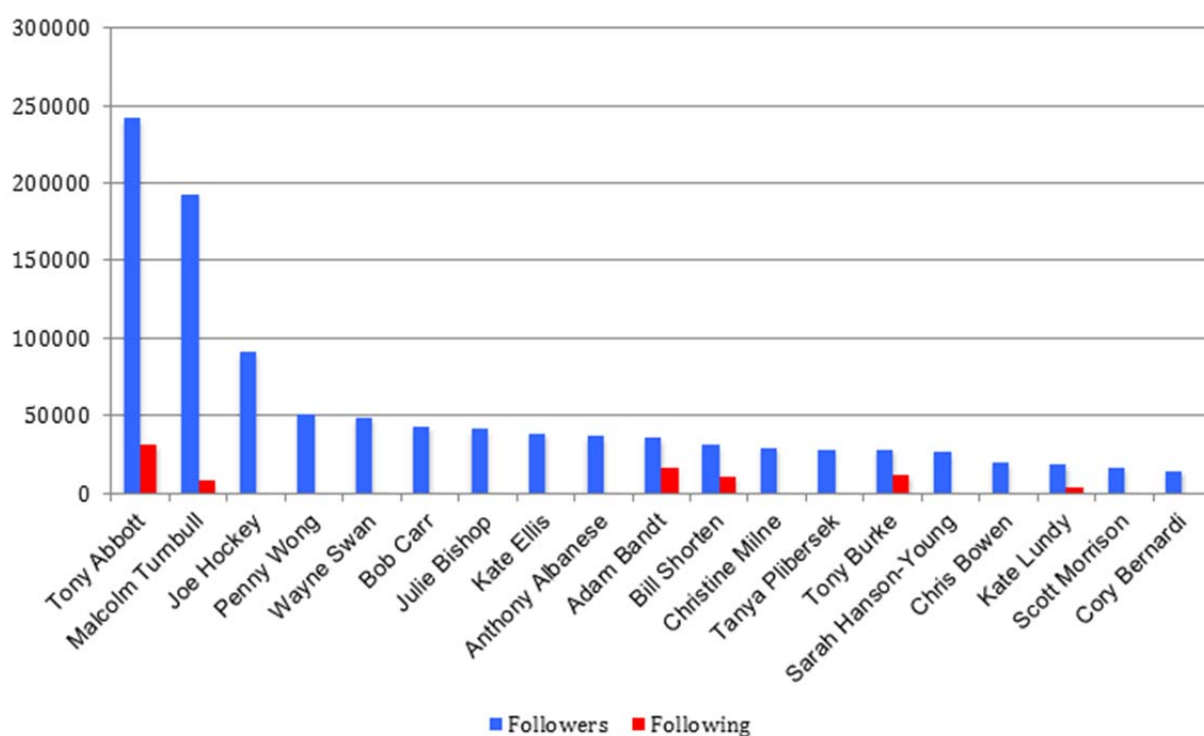

Figure 5. The number of 'followers' of the most popular politicians on Twitter and the number of others who they were 'following'.

More specifically, coding of 1,455 tweets posted by the 10 most active politicians on Twitter during period of analysis revealed an overwhelming focus on *broadcasting* messages, rather than responding to others, answering questions and engaging in conversations. Qualitative analysis found 94.6 per cent of the tweets of the 10 most active politician tweeter were broadcast messages, with just 5.4 per cent being direct messages or responses to others.

While 'national political or social issues' were the main focus of tweets (27 per cent of the content) covering a wide range of issues, 'election slogans and promises' were the second most discussed topic (19 per cent). These typically comprised repetitive 'sloganeering', such as 'Building the future' (Labor), 'Better schools' (Labor) and 'Real change (Liberal). Most gained little response other than from 'dyed in the wool' party supporters.

Almost 10 per cent of tweets were 'attacks on an opponent's policy' and a further 6.4 per cent were 'attacks on opponents by name', giving a total of almost 800 highly negative tweets from just 10 politicians during the three weeks. Examples of negative attacking messages

widely promulgated were "against our national interests" (Liberal attacking Labor) and "fraud band" and "demolishing the NBN" (Labor against the Liberal National Broadband policy). Even the 23-year old Liberal MP Wyatt Roy, who is very much in the demographic most familiar with social media, tweeted only occasionally and negatively such as: "Clive Palmer talking is about as appealing as Clive Palmer twerking"[6] (Roy, 2013a). Roy tweeted only eight times, which included three retweets. Personal 'whereabouts reports' were the fourth most common type of tweets (7.1 per cent), such as "I am at the ABC studios for an interview" or "Today I am visiting the … shopping centre". All in all, the Twittersphere was not a positive or illuminating political space during the campaign, with discussion mostly confined to political rhetoric and clichés and mostly one-way transmission of messages.

The main issues discussed on Twitter by the 'top 10' most prolific politician users were budget costings and economics (135 mentions), the National Broadband Network (91 mentions), engaging with and responding to the public' (56 mentions) and sport and betting (46 mentions). Carbon trading, health, school and tertiary education and asylum seekers and refugees were mentioned in just 3 per cent of tweets; climate change in just 2 per cent of tweets; and Indigenous issues, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues, women, poverty and food and agriculture were mentioned in just 1 per cent of Twitter discussion by the leading politician tweeters. Despite 56 tweets about engaging with and responding to the public, there was little engaging and responding in the social media analysed.

Conclusion

In terms of engagement in dialogue, conversation, responses, answering questions and listening to others' comments – key affordances of social media and Web 2.0 online content – the 2013 Australian election was a step backwards compared with 2010 when 47.5 per cent of tweets by the 10 most active politicians on Twitter were responses and direct messages to others and 52.5 per cent were broadcast messages. Even the Liberal's Malcolm Turnbull, who posted 439 tweets in the final three weeks of the 2010 campaign, with 76 per cent of them being direct messages or responses, tweeted 134 broadcast messages in the 2013 campaign and no direct messages or responses. Interactivity on politicians' and political party blogs also declined in 2013 compared with 2010, with some containing no comments and some blogs, such as the official Labor Party blog being closed down. While the volume of social media use by politicians and the major political parties has increased by almost two and a half times since the 2007 election, political communication remains 'politics 1.0'. (See Table 7 which presents a summary of the coding of the tweets of the 10 most active politicians on Twitter.)

Politician	Mathias Cormann	Andrew Leigh	Anthony Albanese	Christine Milne	Mike Kelly	Malcolm Turnbull	Ursula Stephens	Scott Ludlam	Rachel Siewert	Ed Husic	TOTAL	%
Party	Liberal	Labor	Labor	Greens	Labor	Liberal	Labor	Greens	Greens	Labor		
No. of tweets	**277**	**180**	**160**	**148**	**137**	**134**	**116**	**105**	**103**	**95**	**1,455**	
Coding categories:												
National political or social issue	276	127	146	147	134	128	116	104	100	94	1,372	27.0%
Local political or social issue	1	1	14	1	3	6		1	3	1	31	0.6%
Whereabouts / location	3	39	73	33	13	75	30	58	20	19	363	7.1%
Personal information or feeling	0	1	9	7	1	29	26	11	3	8	95	1.9%
Elections slogans & promises	235	31	139	100	70	65	43	168	27	95	973	19.1%
Attack on opponent by name	177	16	18	38	25	9	12	13	14	4	326	6.4%
Attack on opponent's policy	197	52	27	23	61	14	40	31	12	10	467	9.2%
TOTAL	1,166	447	586	497	444	460	383	491	282	326	5,082	100.0%
Direct message	0	4	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	61	79	5%
Broadcast tweet	277	176	146	148	137	134	116	105	103	34	1,376	94.6%
Sending links	18	96	25	93	94	120	59	92	72	22	691	47.5%

Table 7. Qualitative content analysis of tweets by the 'top 10' most prolific politician tweeters.

DISCUSSION

This analysis of use of social media by political candidates and major parties during the 2013 Australian federal election shows that what Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) called the 'third age of political communication' remains nascent and even illusory. Their prediction that control of messages would slip from the grasp of mass media producers and that technologies of interactive communication would give voice to citizens and create a more open participatory public sphere was unrealised in the 2013 Australian federal election in which Web sites and social media were used by most politicians and political parties as just another channel for one-way transmission of their campaigning messages.

The enduring research question 'so what' can and should be asked? Does it matter that politicians and political parties use social media for one-way dissemination of information? Based on studies of the perceptions and attitudes of young people to online communication by politicians and an insightful analysis of voting in the UK by Coleman (2013), the answer would appear to be yes. A study of 189 politicians using Twitter in South Korea by Hwang (2013) found that use of Twitter can create more positive perceptions of politicians and politics among young people (18–24 year olds) and identified two reasons for this. In addition to creating a perception of politicians and politics as being more contemporary and up-to-date, Hwang reported that use of Twitter indicated a desire for "dialogic communication" and "engagement" which improved the perceived credibility of and attitudes towards politicians and politics (Hwang, 2013: 254–255). However, with this characteristic missing in Australian e-electioneering and e-democracy, use of social media is unlikely to improve perceptions of politicians or politics among young citizens.

In his recent book *How Voters Feel*, Coleman (2013) reported three important conclusions about elections generally. He observed that "moments of voting are remarkably fleeting", the event of voting "seems curiously socially disconnected" taking place in "impersonal spaces … devoid of … registers of intimacy" and "acts of voting are surrounded by an eerie silence" and a "pervasive hush" 2013: 3). He noted that elections and voting were predominantly understood and assessed in terms of "instrumental effectiveness" (Coleman, 2013: 4). Coleman argued that "the sustainability of any cultural practice depends to a large measure on how it feels to participate in it" and added that "the way in which politics in general, and voting in particular, are conducted is incongruent with the sensibilities of citizens as rational and emotional makers of meaning" (2013: 5). In short, voting and democratic politics in general do not *affectively* engage citizens; they pay no attention to how citizens *feel*. To most citizens, Coleman says "the rules of the political game seem too much like imposed rules and someone else's game". He concluded that there is an "affective deficit" in contemporary democratic politics which is largely responsible for the disenchantment and disengagement, or stoic resignation at best, which characterise voting and attitudes towards politics generally in many democratic countries.

Coleman's analysis is significant and timely because, as well as being attractive to youth, social media sites afford opportunities for affective engagement – although this is often discussed pejoratively and as a criticism. Coleman noted that many claim that "people using social media networks to express ideas and sentiments are engaged in "senseless collective

prattle" (2013: 220). Papacharissi (2007), Fenton (2012) and others have reported that a substantial proportion of social media use is personal and entertainment-orientated and McNair has observed that social media are a "more crowded, noisy, chaotic, competitive, and rancorous communications space than was envisaged for the modernist public sphere" (2006: 73).

But this may well be social media's key contribution to democratic politics – and perhaps even its saviour. Social media provides sites for subjective, personal and affective engagement; an engagement in politics on citizens' terms, rather than what Coleman calls democratic practice "dominated by a discourse of arid proceduralism" (2013: 192). It is argued that mass media have turned citizens into spectators, rather than actors, providing at best what Horton and Wohl (1956) called 'parasocial interaction' and Thompson (1995) called 'quasi-interaction'. In contrast with the normative and increasingly unrealised notions of *dutiful* citizens (Schudson, 1998, 2003) engaged in *minimalist* democratic participation (Carpentier, 2011) in the normative deliberative public sphere proposed by Habermas (1989, 2006), interactive online sites and social media afford *actualising* citizens (Bennett, Wells and Freelon, 2011) *maximalist* participation including in *agonistic* ways that Mouffe (1999) and others argue are more accessible and more attuned to the way people interact and engage. Mouffe says "far from jeopardising democracy, agonistic confronting is in fact its very condition of existence", as it allows diverse viewpoints to be heard and gain consideration (1999: 756).

However, this potentiality of social media is achievable only if citizens are allowed to speak and are listened to in open interactive sites that allow and even encourage participation, dialogue and conversation. In this regard, the Australian media declared that "the much-vaunted Australian social media election campaign has failed to materialise" (Smith, 2013) and, while mass media are often eager to criticise social media, this analysis supports that contention at least in qualitative terms. Writing in *The Australian* newspaper, Australia's youngest politician Wyatt Roy said "voters utilising social and online media will expect a lot more of their politicians" (2013: 12). Reflecting on Gibson, Cantijoch and Ward's description of social media in the 2010 UK election as "the dog that didn't bark" (2010: 14), social media in the 2013 Australian federal election could be described as the dog that barked and barked, but didn't do what people wanted it to do. New media continue to be put into the service of the old – old *mass media* practices and old *mass society* politics – and perhaps the main conclusion is that the practices of politics need to change, not simply the media.

NOTE: *Figures 6, 7 and 8 following are animated charts further reporting on social media use by politicians during the 2013 Australian federal election campaign. Follow instructions on each figure to activate data visualisation.*

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1. The study focussed on sitting members of parliament. Of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives and 76 Senate seats, 35 sitting members retired or were not re-contesting in the election.

2. First use of the term Web 2.0 dates back to a 1999 article in *Print* magazine by Darcy DiNucci (1999, p. 32). However, DiNucci used the term mainly in relation to design and aesthetics in her article targeted at Web designers. The more common broad use of Web 2.0 is attributed to Tim O'Reilly (2005).

3. Even though Myspace was redesigned and relaunched in 2012 as a music sharing site, it was included in this analysis for consistency with previous studies used for comparison.

4. 'People talking about this', abbreviated to 'talking about', is a new Facebook feature introduced in October 2012 that records the number of unique visitors who interact with a page in a seven-day period in some way, such as 'liking' a page, post or comment, sharing, tagging, 'RSVPing' to an event, etc.

5. The number of Facebook 'friends' shown is based on data that is publicly viewable, which is dependent on acceptance of 'friend' requests and the privacy setting of the Facebook user.

6. A type of dance, which involves shaking and wobbling of the hips up and down.

Jim Macnamara PhD, FAMI, CPM, FPRIA, FAMEC is Professor of Public Communication at the University of Technology Sydney and Director of the Australian Centre of Public Communication, positions he took up in 2007 after a 30-year professional career spanning journalism, public relations and media research. He is the author of 12 books including *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* published by Peter Lang, New York in 2010 (2nd edition 2014).

Gail Kenning PhD is a Research Associate in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney and a practising artist specialising in digital media and data visualisation. She is engaged in experimental research into uses of digital media for social interaction and creativity and the implications for social capital, health and wellbeing.