

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

RESEARCH REPORT

E-Electioneering

Use of New Media in the 2007 Australian Federal Election

in association with



© Copyright 2008

Australian Centre for Public Communication
University of Technology Sydney
PO Box 123
Broadway, NSW, 2007, Australia
www.uts.edu.au

Chief Researcher: Professor Jim Macnamara MA, PhD, FPRIA, FAMI, CPM, FAMEC
Consulting Researcher: Professor Philip Bell PhD

Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of research, or private study, or criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior written permission of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms and licences issued by copyright agencies.

Contents

ABOUT

The Australian Centre for Public Communication	4
--	---

INTRODUCTION	5
--------------------	---

• Background – evolution of the e-election and digital democracy	5
• Definition of new media	8
• Research objectives	9
• Social significance	9

KEY CONCLUSIONS.....	10
----------------------	----

METHODOLOGY	13
-------------------	----

• Online content analysis	13
• Mainstream media content analysis	14

RESEARCH FINDINGS	15
-------------------------	----

• Part 1: Online content analysis	15
• Part 2: Mainstream media analysis of new media	39

THEORISING NEW MEDIA	45
----------------------------	----

• The digital divide	45
• Social capital and social connectedness	46
• The new public sphere	47
• Digital enclaves and 'echo chambers'	48

REFERENCES	50
------------------	----

APPENDICES	52
------------------	----

A. List of politicians researched	52
B. List of political party sites researched	59
C. Research procedures	65
D. Media content analysis methodology	67

About

Australian Centre for Public Communication

The Australian Centre for Public Communication was established in 2002 to facilitate research and public debate about issues, ideas and developments in public communication and to assist in the dissemination of research and knowledge about public communication.

Public communication includes advertising, public relations, corporate communication, government and political campaigns, public education campaigns, and NGO and not-for-profit organisational communication. Public communication is important for establishing and maintaining an informed community.

The Australian Centre for Public Communication promotes ethical practice in public communication and facilitates debate among researchers, academics and practitioners in the field through industry liaison, research, seminars and publications. Australia's leading postgraduate education program in communication management at UTS is linked to the Centre with participation by teaching staff and students.

The objectives of the ACPC are to:

- Promote the university's leading role in the education of public communication professionals in Australia and enhance participation in debates and developments in the public communication field;
- Provide an external identity for UTS' undergraduate and postgraduate programs in public communication and communication management;
- Extend links with overseas scholars and institutions;
- Provide a focus for developing and delivering quality Continuing Professional Education;
- Provide a focal point for industry liaison and partnerships including work experience, internship programs and job opportunities for students and graduates;
- Undertake research projects for the extension of knowledge in public communication and the development of professional ethical practice in the interests of society;
- Disseminate knowledge through seminars, publications and short courses;
- Provide a focus for alumni communication and activities.

Introduction

Background – evolution of the e-election and digital democracy

Major change is underway in how public communication in political election campaigns is conducted in modern democratic societies. In 2007 during the US ‘primaries’ leading up to the 2008 Presidential election, it was noted and extensively reported that candidates, political parties and political activists used a range of ‘new media’¹. While use of new media was reported during the 2000 US Presidential election (Bentivegna, 2002) and the 2004 US Presidential election was cited as “a turning point for political communication via the Internet” (Xenos and Moy, 2007), several factors, that will be discussed later, have lead to a substantial increase in the range and extent of new media use in political communication.

In the US in 2007, Hillary Clinton announced her candidacy for the US Presidency on YouTube and reportedly employed a staff of 10 to manage her online campaign (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23-24 June, 2007, p. 21). Videos of political candidates posted on YouTube and other social media sites such as MySpace have become popular downloads. For example, a privately recorded song ‘I got a crush on Obama’ sung by a young woman calling herself ‘Obama Girl’ was reportedly viewed by 20 million people in just a few months after it was posted on 14 June 2007 (Davies, 2007; Crabb, 2007).

Another turning point in the use of media in political electioneering was the joint broadcast of a September 2007 Presidential candidates’ debate by CNN and YouTube. Whereas, previously, network television and major newspapers dominated coverage of electioneering and were the primary targets for electioneering advertising and publicity, a major shift is evident in mediated communication during political campaigns,

Political electioneering using new media is also emerging in Australia. In the 2007 NSW State election both the Premier, Morris Iemma, and the then Opposition Leader, Peter Debnam, produced blogs. The Labor Party also produced a Web site (www.debnamrecord.com) as a key campaign strategy.

In July 2007, in approaching the 2007 Federal election, the then Prime Minister John Howard, posted a video discussing climate change policy on YouTube which attracted widespread comment online and in mainstream media. Previously, Mr Howard became the first Australian Prime Minister to have a personal Web site. The then Federal Opposition Leader, Mr Rudd, also produced online videos which attracted substantial audiences and provoked widespread debate.

A number of other Australian political candidates have adopted new media in various forms and to various degrees and made claims for these initiatives improving public communication. For example, on 12 July 2007, ALP Senator Stephen Conroy launched a MySpace site on the Australian Impact Channel announcing in a media release that it was “to connect with people and share ideas”. The ABC reported in July 2007 that 17 Federal politicians in Australia were using MySpace sites for election campaign communication (ABC News online, 12 July 2007).

Politicians appearing on Channel 10’s ‘Meet the Press’ program in 2007 were asked questions by the program presenter and by MySpace members who submitted questions online.

¹ The term ‘new media’ is used in varying ways and other terms are used to denote similar concepts including ‘digital media’ and ‘Internet media’. It is used broadly here to refer to the range of one-to-one and one-to-many communication applications operating via the Internet including e-mail, chat rooms, newsgroups, Web sites, blogs, wikis and social networking sites and utilities such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, etc.

The 2007 Australian Federal Election campaign officially conducted from 15 October to 24 November 2007, but also unofficially in progress for several months prior, provided an opportunity to conduct research in the use of new media in political electioneering. Indeed, the 2007 Australian Federal Election was one of the first national elections in the world to use new media cited in this report, with the US Presidential election not due until 4 November 2008.

Like the US Presidential Primaries in which each major Party elects its Presidential candidates and their deputies, the 2007 Australian Federal Election was labelled 'The YouTube Election' and the 'Internet Election' by mainstream media. For instance, *The Daily Telegraph* noted "they're already calling it the YouTube election" and went on to quote then Workplace Relations Minister, Joe Hockey, as the first Australian Federal Minister to have his own Web site and also quoted then Opposition Spokesperson on the Environment and The Arts and now Minister for The Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, saying "the Internet has made politicians more accountable and more accessible" (*The Daily Telegraph*, 19 September 2007, p. 6). *The Sydney Morning Herald* similarly published a major feature headlined "The YouTube Election" (15 September 2007, p. 23).



Figure 1. Illustration and headline from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 July 2007, p. 23.

The Weekend Australian (15 September 2007, p. 7) quoted Peter Garrett saying "this will probably be a Google election".

According to media content analysis conducted by Media Monitors in the period from 30 September to 24 November 2007, the term "YouTube election" was used 19 times and the term "Internet election" was used twice in mainstream media articles (Media Monitors, 'E-Election Media Analysis Report', January 2008, p. 12). (See *Key Findings Part 2: Mainstream Media Analysis*)

Use of the new media for public communication came under increasing examination from the early 1990s with two broad schools of thought emerging on its social and political implications. On one hand, optimists enthused about the new media's potential to give people greater access to information, communication and interaction (eg. Howard Rheingold, 1993). On the other, a pessimistic view warned of a breakdown in social connectedness, what Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam (1995, 2000) termed a "loss of social capital" caused by the depersonalisation inherent in mediated Internet communication and time spent with media which takes people away from human interaction, termed the displacement hypothesis (Sparks, 2006, pp. 72-73). Also, critics and sceptics pointed to a "digital divide" (Novak and Hoffman, 1998) between those with access to new digital media and those without or with limited access because of financial and/or technical limitations.

Use of new media for political communication has been studied by a number of scholars and organisations including Bentivegna (2002), Fallows (2000), Hill and Hughes (1998), Lievrouw (1994), McChesney (1996), Pool (1983) and the Markle Foundation (1997), as well as in commercial and industry studies.

However, the evolution of Web 2.0² applications and uses of the Internet, rapidly expanding broadband, declining cost of personal computers and Internet access, development of intelligent search engines which have replaced 'surfing'³ and make finding information on the Internet faster and easier, and possibly increasing user familiarisation with Internet use, have overtaken findings of pre-2000 research and even much research conducted in the early 2000s. Many of the new media currently in use were 'invented' or began to achieve widespread use post-2004. The current extent and types of new media used in political communication are not well documented other than anecdotally in media reports and commentary and in some mostly quantitative industry analysis such as counts of Internet video downloads, views and Web site visitors, and limited qualitative analysis based on viewer ratings. For instance, Katherine Delahaye Paine, a leading US media research specialist, tracked views of Internet videos posted by US Presidential candidates from January 2007 in the key electoral college of New Hampshire and reported that Republican candidate Ron Paul had the most views (over 3 million) and gained an average viewer rating of 4.8 on a five-scale, while Hillary Clinton's videos were the least favourably rated with an average of 3.47 (Paine, 2007) (*see Figure 2*).

Rapid advances in technology and social change (eg. declining television viewing and newspaper readership and increasing Internet use) over the past three to five years suggest that the social, political and media implications of new media need ongoing critical review.

A full investigation of new media usage as well as the social and political implications of new media formats, content and practices is not within the scope of this study. This research was convened quickly to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the Australian Federal election called at a few weeks notice and held in late 2007, with the objective of collecting empirical data on new media use by politicians, political parties and political interest groups and activists and to provide an initial stage of qualitative analysis to identify the ways in which new media are being used in politics, particularly examining the level of interactivity provided. Nevertheless, this study provides important baseline data and insights to inform further in-depth analysis of the use and implications of new media for political communication.

² Web 2.0 is a term coined by Tim O'Reilly in collaboration with MediaLive International in 2004 referring to a second generation of Internet-based services (information and applications), the key attributes of which are that they allow openness for collaboration and high levels of interactivity without requiring programming skills.

³ 'Surfing' refers to pre-search engine ad hoc navigation of the Internet which was often time-consuming and sometimes fruitless. Intelligent search engines such as Google have made 'surfing' largely redundant.

Australia, like the US and the UK, is an ideal market in which to study use of new media. An Australian Communications and Media Authority (2007) report on use of media by Australian families released in December 2007 reported that 98 per cent of Australian homes now have a computer (ahead of DVD players at 97 per cent) and 91 per cent have Internet access, with 76 per cent having broadband. However, notwithstanding the 'hot spot' afforded by the Australian Federal election for exploring trends and developments in new media for political communication, caution must be exercised in applying findings in specific communities.

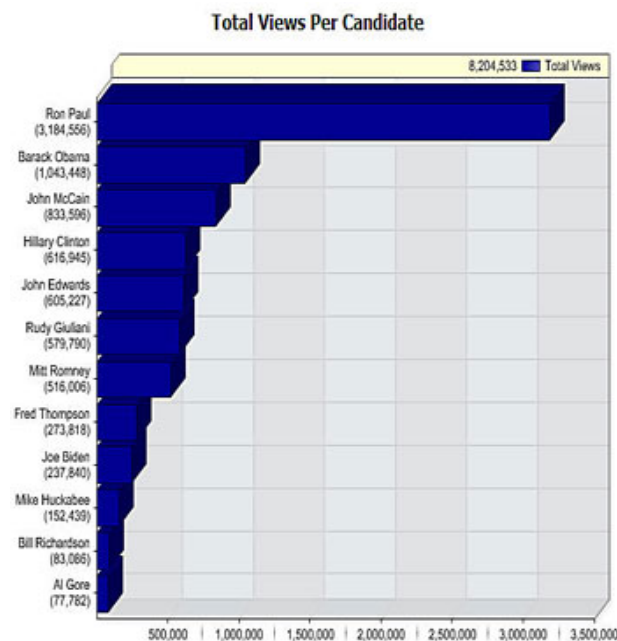


Figure 2. YouTube viewer numbers of US Presidential candidates' videos supplied by Katherine Delahaye Paine (*The Measurement Standard*, Vol. 6, No 8, December 2007).

Definition of new media

While there is considerable focus on Web 2.0 applications, 'new media' were defined for the purposes of this research as digital communication channels and tools embracing both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 technologies, including the following:

- Political and election related **Web sites** including personal Web sites of political candidates; political party Web sites; and independent Web sites including www.federalelection.com.au; www.google.com.au/election2007; www.electiontracker.net; www.Youdecide2007.org; Senator On-Line (www.senatoronline.org.au); and GetUp (www.getup.org.au);
- **Blogs** of political candidates such as The Bartlett Diaries (www.andrewbartlett.com/blog) and independent election-related blogs such as Crikey (www.crikey.com.au); www.newmatilda.com and Possum Pollytics (www.possumcomitatus.wordpress.com);
- **Vlogs** (video Web logs);
- **MySpace** sites (www.myspace.com);
- **Facebook** sites (www.facebook.com);
- **YouTube** (www.youtube.com);
- **Chat rooms** and online forums;
- **Wikis**;
- **E-newsletters** (online or downloadable in PDF format);
- **E-surveys** (online surveys);
- Other online communication such as **online petitions**.

Research objectives

The objectives of this research were to:

1. Capture baseline quantitative data on the frequency and type of new media used by Australian Federal politicians, political parties and political interest groups and activists during the 2007 Australian Federal election;
2. Provide an initial stage of qualitative analysis of the content of new media used to identify the range of viewpoints expressed (eg. public comments and/or questions) and the level of interactivity and community engagement attempted or achieved.

Social significance

This research has broad social significance as well as specific disciplinary relevance within the fields of media and politics. At a societal level, such research identifies the changing nature of public communication in political campaigns and points to potential effects (both positive and negative), risks (eg. alienation of people without access to broadband or computer skills) and opportunities to improve public access to information and political processes.

A key characteristic of Web 2.0 media is their potential to facilitate two-way 'conversations' and engagement (Scoble & Israel, 2006). For instance, the convention of blogging encourages readers of blogs to submit comments and make input to discussion (i.e. become producers) rather than being only consumers or audiences as mostly occurs with mainstream media. Also, bloggers are expected to post readers' comments, or at least a significant portion of them – including dissenting and alternative views. Hence, new social and citizen media have the potential to enhance participatory democracy. However, realisation of this potential depends on how new media are used – specifically whether their two-way 'conversation' and engagement functionality is used or whether they are employed simply as another channel for one-way dissemination of information and/or propaganda.

In this context, this study informs ongoing discussion of Habermas' concept of the 'public sphere' in which he identified media as part of a "forum of public communication: a forum in which individual citizens can come together as a public and confer freely about matters of general interest" (Habermas, 1989). The extent to which new media give new life to Habermas' concept of the public sphere and/or to McChesney's (1996) more cautious iteration of a "partial public sphere" is explored in this research, along with other theoretical implications.

At a professional level, this research also provides empirical information to political office-holders and their staff on the types of communication being used and their potential effectiveness. This will be of interest to political parties, staff of political representatives such as press secretaries, and practitioners in advertising, public relations and the media.

In addition, the findings are relevant to the teaching of public communication, media, arts and production, social inquiry and cultural and political studies.

Most importantly, it is hoped that this research contributes to ongoing revisionist study of use of new media for political communication and public communication generally to keep pace with rapid change in these fields.

Key conclusions

New media have not created a new public sphere of political discussion and debate where citizens can participate as equals as envisioned by Habermas (1989), at this stage. The use of new media among Australian Federal politicians is, with a few notable exceptions, still low despite descriptions of the 2007 Federal election as “The YouTube Election”. While 137 of Australia’s 226 Members of the House of Representatives and Senators (61 per cent) had a personal Web site, only 26 (11.5 per cent) had a MySpace site; 15 (6.6 per cent) had a blog; 13 (5.75 per cent) had posted one or more videos on YouTube; eight (3.5 per cent) had a Facebook site; and only seven (3.1 per cent) had a podcast on their personal Web site or MySpace site as at 20 November 2007.



Figure 3. Mainstream media and popular debate has over-estimated use of new media in politics. With only 26 sitting Australian Federal politicians in MySpace as at 20 November 2007 (11.5 per cent of sitting Members of Parliament), it hardly comprises an “invasion”.

Furthermore, despite their inbuilt interactive capability, most Web 2.0 type media used for political communication are being controlled by corporate, organisational and political ‘gatekeepers’ and remain one-way dissemination of information. Certain, usually supportive, viewpoints are selected for posting and critical and dissenting comments are, in most cases, blocked. This could be seen as a failure of Web 2.0 to realise its potential, or it could be that the first generation of new media users are like the pioneers of radio and television and have not yet learned to use these media to their full potential and harbour apprehension and fears (eg. Welles’ War of the Worlds).

This cautious approach to new media is at least partly justified, as the new participatory media are double-edged swords for political candidates and parties. While on one hand they offer politicians new channels to reach voters, there was more use of some new Web 2.0 type media

for producing and distributing parodies and spoofs of political communication than for official political communication, some of which were damaging to candidates. However, spoofs and parodies could be argued to be the public sphere at work, offering citizens access to express their views in their own formats and language rather than in the formalised language and elitist discourse of politics.

Lack of interactivity and engagement were also shown in that only 46 of 226 elected Federal politicians (20 per cent) provided a direct e-mail link or phone number for members of the public to contact them directly. The 'Contact' information provided by 80 per cent of Federal politicians was to office addresses to be processed by parliamentary or electorate staff.

Notwithstanding the limited and mostly one-way use of new media by politicians identified in this study, new media are being used more interactively and in novel ways by political parties and particularly by interest and activist groups. As well as the new-age integrated marketing campaign of Kevin07 (www.kevin07.com.au), applications such as Google's On the Record and Google Maps (www.google.com.au/election2007) showing electorate boundaries and information; activist sites such as Get Up (www.getup.org.au) which claimed more than 200,000 'members' during the 2007 Australian Federal election (more than some political parties); You Decide (<http://youdecide2007.org>) which invited citizens to report on issues in their electorates; Senator On-Line (www.senatoronline.org.au) which stood political candidates in the election, dedicated youth sites such as Election Tracker (www.electiontracker.net.au), and a range of blogs that contributed analysis and commentary on issues show the invigorating, if not transforming, power of new media.

New media gave prominence to issues closer to local communities than traditional media and official political channels of communication such as policy speeches. National economic management and industrial relations policy (particularly Work Choices) were the two most prominent issues in the government's campaign and in much traditional media coverage. However, these were the 8th and 7th most discussed issues respectively in new media where education, health, the environment, water management, social welfare and roads were the most discussed issues.

New Internet media genre such as blogs, YouTube and social utilities such as MySpace are most effective, and some say can only be effective beyond small niche audiences, when they *intermediate* with press, radio and/or television through which they can reach large mass audiences. Henry Jenkins (2006, p. 207) says of viewpoints posted online in new media that "the real challenge is to get those ideas back into mainstream media". This may change in future as Internet media genre mature. But a more likely mediascape of the future is one in which intermediation, *mediamorphosis* (Fidler, 1997) and hybridisation continue. In future, all media content may be 'mash ups' and intermediation will be the norm.

Mainstream (traditional) media have a fascination with new media at three levels. First, they are a news source. Intermediation (Severin and Tankard, 2006) works for the benefit of both traditional and new media, with press, radio and television gaining leads and content from new media (eg. images of the London bombings from citizen reporters on the scene) and new media gain wide distribution when their content is picked up by press, radio or television (eg. when the Monica Lewinski-Bill Clinton relationship first reported by blogger Matt Drudge became world headlines). This symbiotic relationship is likely to continue and escalate. At a second level, mainstream media are fascinated with new media as a news subject. The novelty of new media make their use 'cool' and a desire to be seen as 'cool' and up with the times is undoubtedly a driving force behind some new media use by politicians. Thirdly, despite increasingly relying on them for news, information and leads and exploiting their novelty value for headlines, traditional media concurrently hold conflicted views about new media, seeing them also as competitors and often striving to assert and maintain their dominance. For instance during the 2007

Australian Federal election build-up period, the leading national daily, *The Australian*, commented in an editorial: "... while Myspace and YouTube are important arenas for reaching out to younger voters, the decisive battles will be waged in the mainstream media" (*The Australian*, 19 July 2007, p. 15). This remains to be seen, as new media genre develop and expand, as content is increasingly intermediated between media types, and as media platforms continue to hybridise.

It is probably time to drop the terms 'mainstream media' and 'new media'. While 'new media' is a useful shorthand term for a range of media that do not fit into the traditional media types of press, radio or television, the Internet, first established with interactive features including newsgroups in 1969, and the Web developed with the first browser in 1991, are now approaching the end of their third and second decades respectively. It is time to recognise the Internet as a mainstream media type. Also, the range of Internet media and communication applications, rather than being a source of confusion, can be identified as new genre of Internet media. Just as news, current affairs, features, documentaries, talk-back and drama are media genre within press, radio and television, Web sites, blogs and social network utilities such as MySpace, YouTube and Facebook are genre peculiar to the Internet.

Internet media genre will continue to evolve and their use increase, but their evolution is likely to be gradual, tensioned and contingent on many factors. In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Henry Jenkins (2006, p. 208) summed up from a US perspective what this research study further confirms in Australia: "The new media operate with different principles than the broadcast media that dominated American politics for so long: access, participation, reciprocity, and peer-to-peer rather than one-to-many communication." He concluded that "given such principles, we should anticipate that digital democracy will be decentralised, unevenly dispersed, profoundly contradictory, and slow to emerge". But some level of digitally-enhanced democracy is emerging and bringing a changed sense of community, a greater sense of participation, less dependence on official channels and expertise, and a repositioning of politics within popular culture.

Methodology

Online content analysis

Use of new media in the 2007 Australian Federal election was primarily examined using online content analysis of a wide range of Web-based new media. This involved mainly quantitative research to count the number of Web sites, blogs, MySpace sites, Facebook sites, YouTube videos, and so on used by each politician, party and interest group. However, online content analysis also included reviewing new media using a questionnaire-cum-coding sheet which collected some qualitative information including:

- Interactivity features employed (such as direct e-mail addresses, downloadable text files, downloadable videos, active comment and feedback sections and links);
- The level of interactivity on a scale from 'Very Interactive' to 'Completely one-way';
- The number of comments posted (where comment sections were available and active);
- The number of critical comments (where comment sections were available and active);
- The main subjects and issues discussed.

Gender was also recorded from individual sites to enable examination of whether any significant differences were discernible between men and women candidates and activists.

All data was captured using a questionnaire/scoring sheet and stored in an Excel spreadsheet.

In addition, more than 120 screen shots were captured of typical and noteworthy sites due to the likelihood of many sites being shut down following the election – particularly those of unsuccessful political candidates. In the event, in mid-December 2007 the National Library of Australia announced a project to capture and preserve Ministerial Web sites and election campaigns sites including blogs and YouTube videos as an historical record.

Sample

Three groups were studied to provide an understanding of the use of these media in the 2007 Australian Federal Election as follows:

1. Politicians (226 comprised of 150 Members of the House of Representatives and 76 Senators);
2. Registered political parties (29 in total, but with focus on the four main parties);
3. Political interest groups and activists (six leading online groups were selected by search engine ranking).

While new media were also used by political candidates other than sitting Members of the House of Representatives and Senate (there were five or more candidates for most electorate and Senate positions), this research focussed on sitting Member candidates because this approach yielded a large sample (226) and also because sitting Members mostly came from the major political parties. Small political parties and individual candidates with no party support were considered to have limited resources and little hope of success, so their inclusion was considered to be unlikely to yield significant findings. Notwithstanding, such broader research would be useful at some point.

More than **500 Web sites** were searched and reviewed including Parliamentary and personal Web sites, MySpace and Facebook sites, YouTube video postings and blogs of political candidates, political parties and political interest groups and activists.

The **questionnaire/scoring sheet** is shown in Figure 16 (questions and criteria are in the left column of the data sheet) and the **research procedures** followed are outlined in Appendix C.

Mainstream media analysis

During the 2007 Australian Federal election campaign, considerable public discussion in relation to use of new media in took place in mainstream media reporting on political campaigning – an example of *intermediation* (Danielian and Reese, 1989; Severin and Tankard, 2006). In the sense that media reflect public discussion (Habermas' public sphere) and are a site of discourse, mainstream media coverage provided an additional opportunity to examine use of new media in the Australian Federal election and, to some extent, attitudes towards new media use in the political campaign.

In a second stage of analysis, the researchers worked with Australia's leading media monitoring and analysis company, Media Monitors, as an industry partner to capture mainstream media news reporting and commentary on new media use in the election and conduct quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

Some researchers such as Neuendorf (2002) and Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998; 2005) claim that content analysis is a *quantitative* analysis methodology only. However, others such as Shoemaker and Reese (1996), Neuman (1997) and Newbold, Boyd-Barrett and Van Den Bulck (2002) argue that content analysis can be conducted *qualitatively* as well as quantitatively and, further, that a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis is desirable. For instance, Neuman (1997) in a widely used text on social research methodology comments: "In content analysis, a researcher uses objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in a text" but he adds "there are qualitative or interpretative versions of content analysis". Neuman notes further: "Qualitative content analysis is not highly respected by most positivist researchers. Nonetheless, feminist researchers and others adopting more critical and interpretative approaches favour it" (p. 273).

Newbold et al. (2002) state that quantitative content analysis "has not been able to capture the context within which a media text becomes meaningful" (p. 84) and advocate attention to qualitative approaches as well.

Within mass media and communication studies, most media researchers do not draw the sharp definitional distinctions that Neuendorf does between text, content and discourse analysis. Media researchers and academics such as Newbold et al. (2002) and also Gauntlett (2002) and Curran (2002) refer to both quantitative and qualitative content analysis and most view the fields as complementary and part of a continuum of analysing texts to try to determine their likely meanings for and impact on audiences.

Hansen, Cottle, Negrine and Newbold (1998) comment: "... rather than emphasising its alleged incompatibility with other more qualitative approaches (such as semiotics, structuralist analysis, discourse analysis) we wish to stress ... that content analysis is and should be enriched by the theoretical framework offered by other more qualitative approaches, while bringing to these a methodological rigour, prescriptions for use, and systematicity rarely found in many of the more qualitative approaches" (p. 91).

Mainstream media content analysis was conducted by Media Monitors using the CARMA[®] International methodology. While a commercial system, this was developed in association with two US universities and is considered Best Practice. A description of the CARMA[®] methodology is provided in Appendix D.

Research findings

Part 1: Online content analysis

New media usage by federal politicians

- In addition to a Parliamentary Web site page provided free by the Commonwealth to all 226 Federal politicians (150 Members of Parliament in the House of Representatives and 76 Senators), as at 20 November 2007 **137 elected Federal politicians (61 per cent) had a personal Web site**.
- On personal Web sites, **42 politicians (18.6 per cent) published e-newsletters**, with most downloadable as PDF files.
- As at 20 November 2007, **26 elected Federal politicians (11.5 per cent) had a MySpace site**, making it the most popular social network site.
- As at 20 November 2007, **15 elected Federal politicians (6.6 per cent) had a blog**.
- As at 20 November 2007, **13 elected Federal politicians (5.75 per cent) had posted one or more videos on YouTube**. Several had posted more than one video.
- **Only eight (3.5 per cent) of elected Federal politicians had a Facebook site** as at 20 November 2007.
- **Seven elected Federal politicians (3.1 per cent) had a podcast** on their personal Web site or MySpace site as at 20 November 2007.
- **Only one elected Federal politician had a vlog** (video Web log) as at 20 November 2007.
- **Only one elected Federal politician had a link to Del.icio.us and Digg** as at 20 November 2007.
- Other common uses of new media in the 2007 Australian Federal election were online surveys and online petitions. As at 24 November 2007, **24 elected Federal politicians (10.6 per cent) had an online survey** on their personal Web site or MySpace site and **10 elected Federal politicians (4.4 per cent) had an online petition**.
- **On average, elected Federal politicians used 2.24 types of new media**, of which one was usually a personal Web site, as at 20 November 2007 (excluding Parliamentary Web pages). In other words, Federal politicians on average engaged in one additional new media genre other than a personal Web site.

This indicates that **use of new media among Federal politicians is not high – and certainly not as high as the hype present in mainstream media would suggest**. Descriptions such as the “YouTube election” are shown to be premature, with less than six per cent of Australia’s elected Federal politicians involved in producing and posting videos to YouTube as at 20 November 2007.

Use of MySpace and Facebook is also lower than the researchers expected given the massive growth in users of these social networking sites, and blogs lagged well behind non-interactive e-newsletters among elected politicians at the time of the 2007 Federal election.

NEW MEDIA TYPES USED

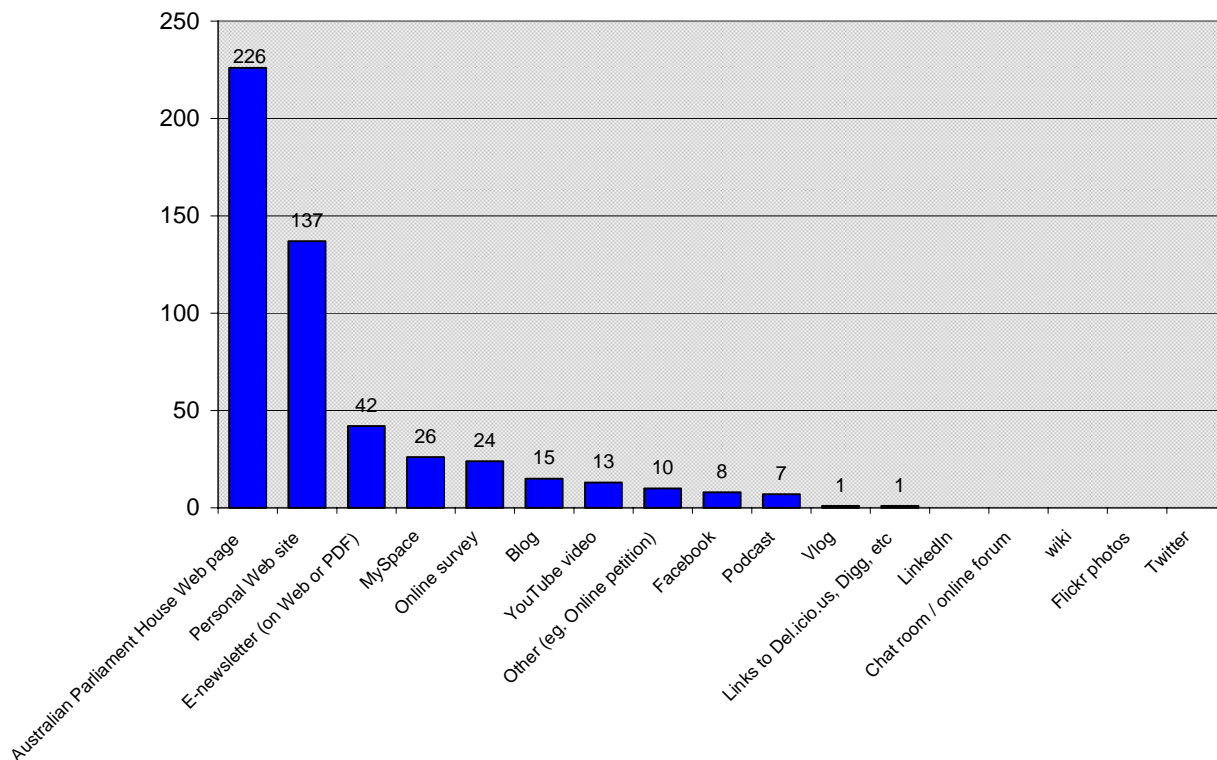


Figure 4. New media types used by Australian Federal politicians in the 2007 Federal election.

The stand-out new media presence during the 2007 Australian Federal election overall was the ALP Kevin07 site highlighting leader Kevin Rudd and its associated and closely aligned MySpace and Facebook sites and blogs. Kevin Rudd's MySpace site had 22,296 friends and 5,017 comments and his Facebook site had 53 discussion topics and 391 'Wall' posts as at 20 November 2007 – the highest of any politician in the sample. The site also had links to Del.icio.us and Digg and included YouTube videos critical of John Howard which attracted 4,264 views.

Other politicians who actively embraced new media included Greens Senator and environmental activist Bob Brown who used a range of new media including a personal Web site, MySpace, Facebook and YouTube (see Figure 5). Another was then Opposition spokesperson on the environment and now Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Arts, Peter Garrett, whose MySpace site had 4,348 friends and 293 comments (including three duplicates) as at 20 November 2007. He also published a blog which had 61 comments posted – albeit all favourable from supporters. Other active users of new media are discussed in the following and listed at end of this section.

One of the more innovative new media uses by an Australian Federal politician was the Web site of Malcolm Turnbull which featured his 'Dog Blogs' – a blog mainly talking about his and his family's dogs (see Figure 6). While unconnected with politics, Turnbull seems to have recognised that one of the key attributes of new media is personalising communication and speaking in the language and context of popular culture, rather from the elite position of the traditional political 'soap box' which, in modern times, has become policy speeches and 10-second TV 'sound bites'.

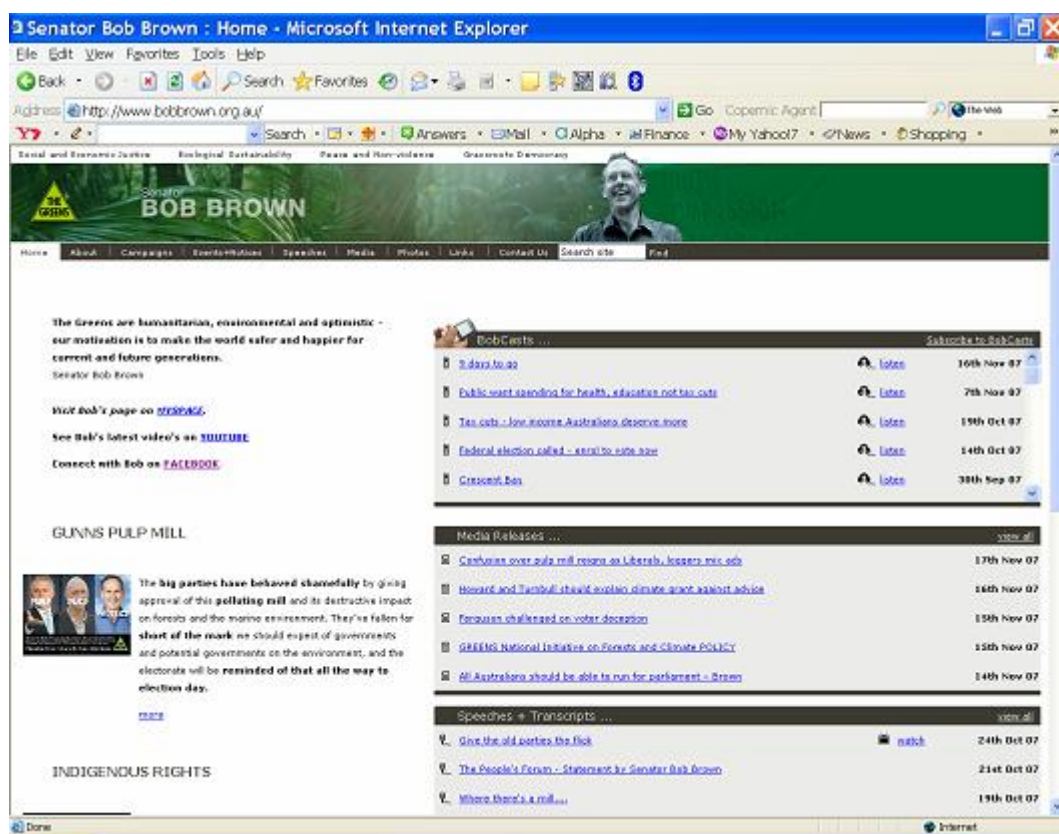


Figure 5. Senator Bob Brown's personal Web site showing links to MySpace, Facebook and YouTube.



Figure 6. Malcolm Turnbull's 'Dog Blogs' was a rare example of personalised new media communication.

Design

- The majority (80.56 per cent) of personal Web, MySpace, Facebook and blog sites of elected Federal politicians were based on templates as at 20 November 2007 – i.e. standard ready-made design formats. Many looked similar. Also, many used traditional political designs, slogans and top-down communication (see sample in Figure 7).



Figure 7. An example of a relatively uninspiring Web site emblazoned in party signage, official Government watermark background and featuring formal top-down communication. However, this site does provide links for direct e-mail.

- Nevertheless, 14 elected Federal politicians (six per cent) invested in professional design and production, evidenced by animation, special effects and sophisticated customised designs.
- Two Web sites were judged to be amateurish – eg. one had red type on a bright blue background which was very difficult to read (see Figure 8.)

Size and comprehensiveness

- Most Web and MySpace sites of elected Federal politicians (56 per cent) were judged to be “fairly comprehensive” (assessed based on number of pages and level of detail).
- However, Web and other sites of 70 elected Federal politicians (31 per cent) comprised a single screen or page of information and were judged to be a ‘token effort’.
- Only three (1.3 per cent) were classified as “very comprehensive”, assessed on the basis of multiple pages plus links to other information such as blogs, podcasts or YouTube.



Figure 8. Some Australian Federal politicians' Web presence was based on templates and low-level and even amateurish design. This one featured red and black type on a dark blue background providing poor legibility.

Interactivity features

An important part of this research was considered to be identifying the level of interactivity and public/audience engagement attempted or achieved through new media. As with overall analysis of use of new media, this analysis showed new media use is far from mature among Australian Federal politicians. Key findings were:

- Most Web and other sites contained a 'Contact Me' function, but 180 (almost 81 per cent) were directed to an office address where they could be assumed to be dealt with by staff. **Only 46 elected Federal politicians (20 per cent) provided a direct e-mail link for members of the public to contact them personally** (see Figure 9). Also, the 'Feedback' and 'Contact Me' sections on politicians' Web sites were relatively uninviting across all political parties (see example in Figure 10).
- **Downloadable text files were the next most popular interactive function, present on 131 sites (58 per cent) of elected Federal politicians** as at 20 November 2007.
- **Downloadable videos were available on 24 sites (10.6 per cent) of elected Federal politicians** as at 20 November 2007.

INTERACTIVITY FEATURES

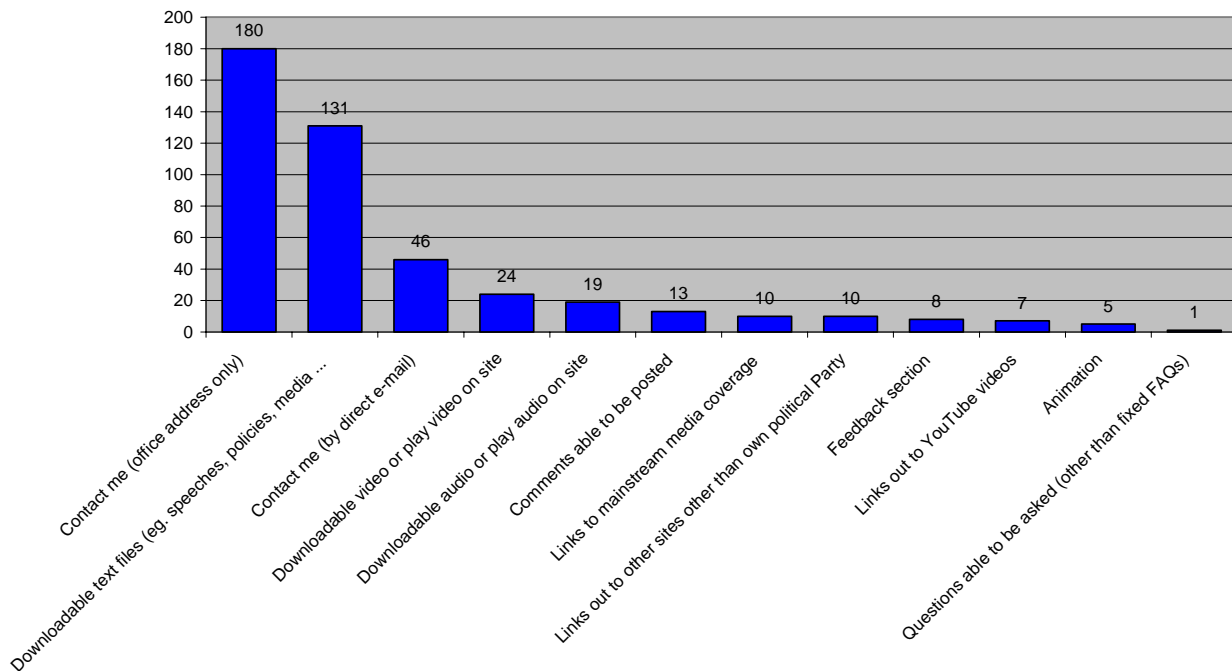


Figure 9. Interactivity features on Australian Federal politicians Web, MySpace and other sites.



Figure 10. Would you feel encouraged to talk to and engage with this politician?

Level of engagement

- **No Web or new media sites of elected Federal politicians were assessed to be “very interactive”** as at 20 November 2007 (with “very interactive” defined as involving multiple inputs from people other than the author).
- **Only 13 (5.75 per cent) of elected Federal politicians had a new media presence assessed as “fairly interactive”** as at 20 November 2007 (i.e. involving links inviting people to comment, ask questions or leave messages).
- **Some 29 (12.8 per cent) of elected Federal politicians’ new media sites were assessed to have very little interactivity or public engagement.**
- Significantly, **185 elected Federal politicians’ new media sites (82 per cent) were completely one-way information dissemination with no opportunity for comment or input by members of the public.** This is one of the most important findings from this research. It suggests that, while the level of use of new media is nascent but growing, the method of using new media echoes traditional mainstream media practices – i.e. it is predominantly one-way information dissemination (see Figure 11).

LEVEL OF INTERACTIVITY/ENGAGEMENT

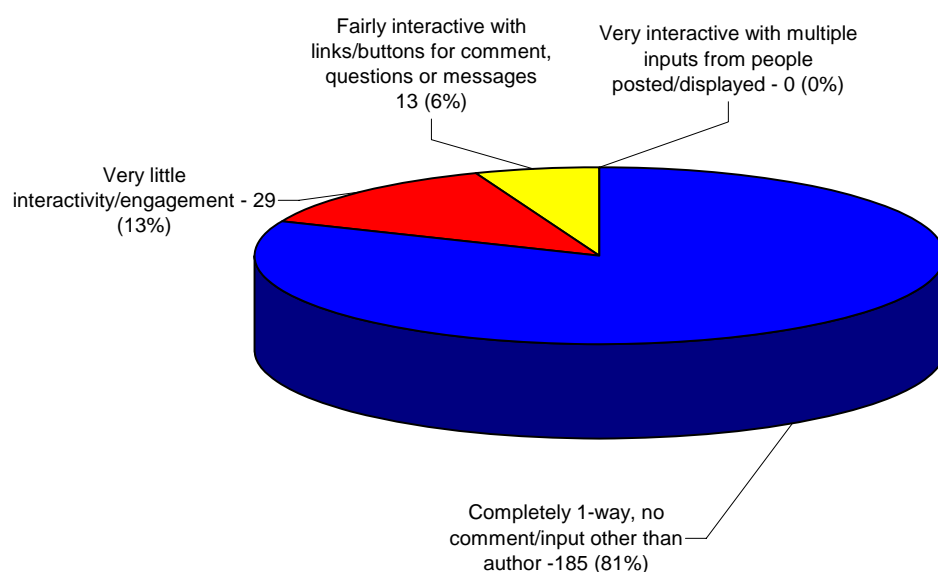


Figure 11. Level of interactivity and audience engagement in Australian Federal politicians’ new media sites.

Number of voices speaking/commenting other than the author

The number of contributors to new media sites other than the author (the politician) was calculated by counting the number of comments posted on MySpace sites and YouTube and ‘Wall’ postings on Facebook sites (discounting multiple comments from the same person).

- Overall, the average number of ‘voices’ speaking or commenting on each elected Federal politician’s site was 34.6. This is an apparently impressive number. However, it is inflated by a small number of sites that attracted large volumes of comments and engagement. For instance, the then **Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd’s MySpace site had 22,296 friends**

and 5,017 comments and his Facebook site had 53 discussion topics and 391 'Wall' posts, as at 20 November 2007. At the same time, the MySpace site of the Member for Kingsford-Smith and now Minister for The Environment, Heritage and the Arts, **Peter Garrett** had 4,348 friends and 293 comments (including 3 duplicates) and his blog had 61 comments posted. **Julia Gillard's Myspace site** had 2,999 friends and 458 comments as at 20 November 2007. All of these were positive comments from supporters.

- A more realistic illustration of the level of interactivity and engagement with the public of Federal politicians' new media sites is the finding that **the average number of critical comments appearing on each was 0.035**. In fact, only one Federal politician's online presence contained critical comment – that of Liberal Member for Wentworth and now Shadow Treasurer, **Malcolm Turnbull**, which contained two negative comments near the top of his MySpace site (see *Figure 12*).

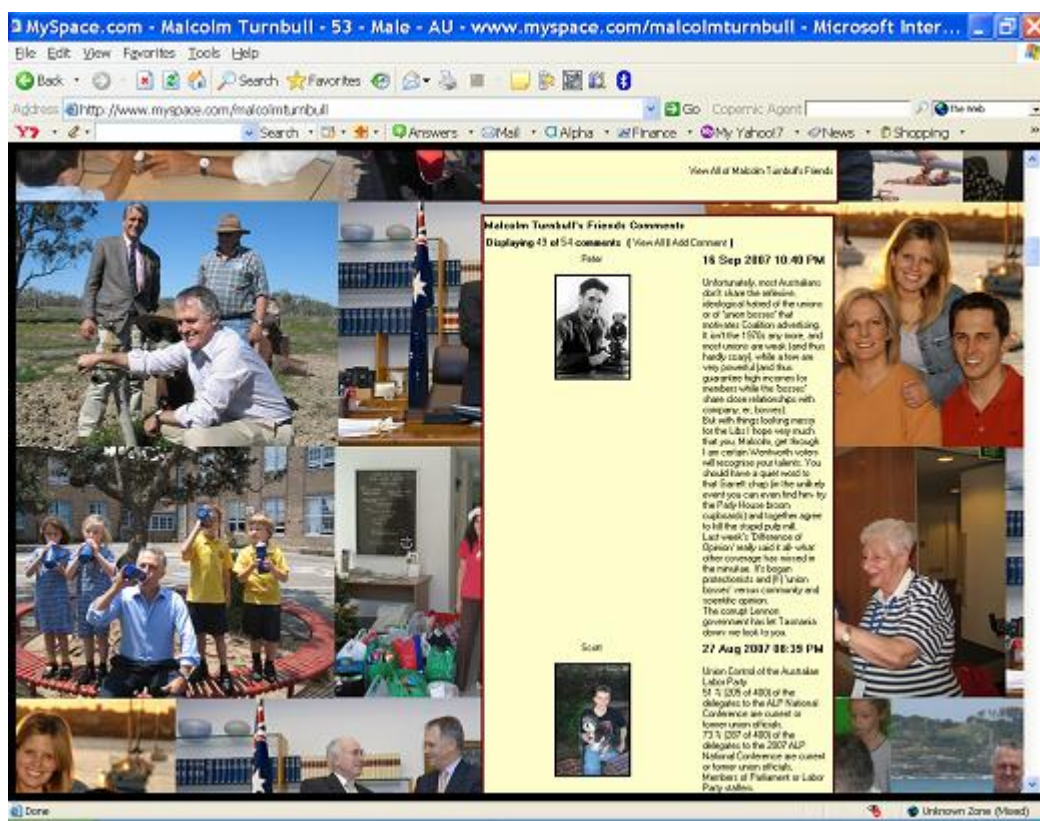


Figure 12. Malcolm Turnbull's MySpace site, as well as being a highly customised design, was the only Australian elected Federal politicians' Web communication to include critical comments.

The Web presences of some young politicians within the most common demographic of new media users were expected to exhibit more interactivity and engagement. However, this was not the case. The personal Web site of young Labor MP Nicola Roxon, for instance, was conservative in design with strong political party branding and had a low level of interactivity (see *Figure 13*). She did have a MySpace site, but this also was quite basic with political party videos only and, despite 244 friends, there were only six comments. Also a MySpace blog link revealed that no blog had been established.

Similarly, the Web site of Democrats Senator, Natasha Stott-Despoja, was very basic. This could be considered somewhat surprising given she is a former leader of the Democrats (i.e. politically experienced), is young, and is married to the CEO of a major public relations firm.

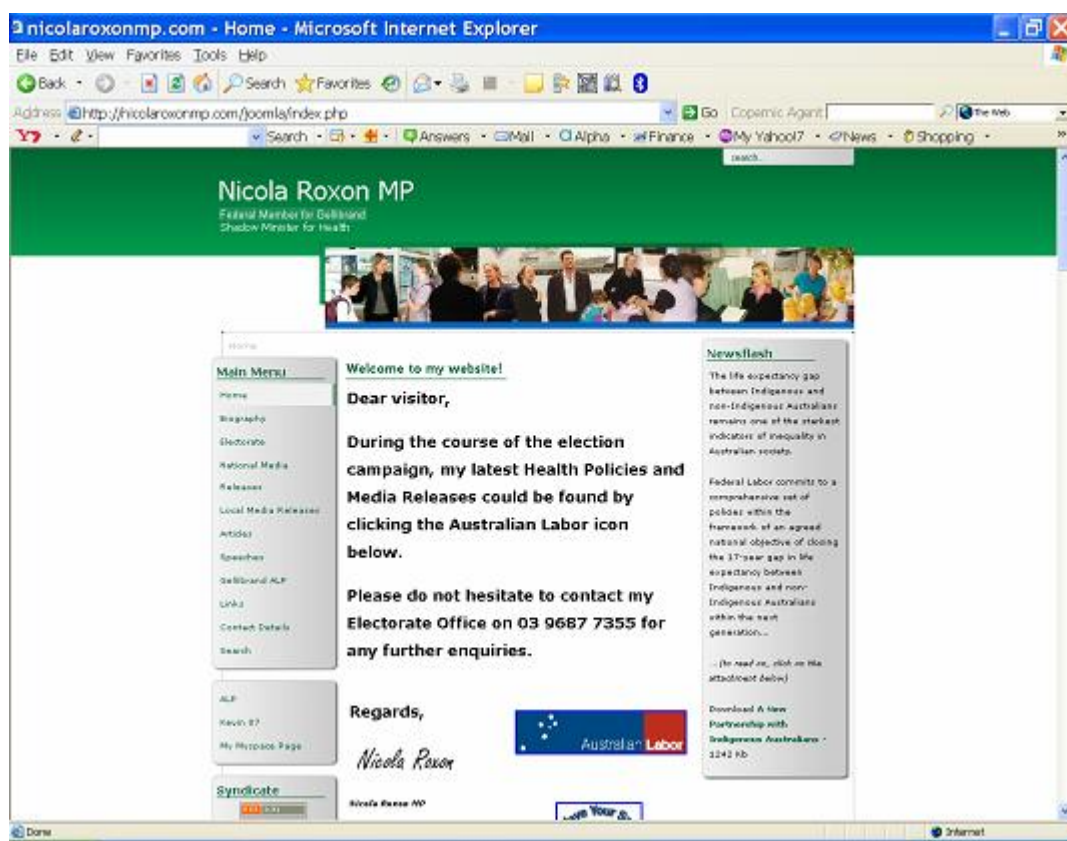


Figure 13.

ALP Federal Member for Sydney, Tanya Pilbersek, had both MySpace and Facebook sites, but she did not have links to these on her personal Web site.

Other politicians who demonstrated little competency in new media or who were taking only their first faltering steps included Country Liberal MP from the Northern Territory, Nigel Scullion, whose basic MySpace site had one friend and no comments posted. His Facebook site was slightly more developed with 98 friends and seven 'Wall' posts. But neither was linked from his Personal Web site and an e-newsletter offered was only available by filling out a subscription form, not directly online.

Young ALP Senator from the ACT, Kate Lundy, also showed that lack of new media know-how is not confined to older demographics with little community engagement on her site, no videos, no newsletter and she did not have a MySpace or Facebook site (as at 20 November 2007).

ALP Senator from the Northern Territory, Trish Crossin had a MySpace site linked from her personal Web site, but the link was almost impossible to see (a small text link only).

Some politicians missed the new media boat altogether with no personal Web site or sites under construction (see example in Figure 15).

Main subjects discussed

The 'top 10' subjects discussed in new media by Federal politicians were:

1. Education and schools (23 per cent);
2. Health and hospitals (22 per cent);
3. The environment including climate change, carbon trading, forests, etc (17.7 per cent);
4. Water management (11.5 per cent);
5. Social welfare for the poor and under-privileged (11 per cent);
6. Roads (10 per cent);
7. WorkChoices and industrial relations (9.7 per cent);
8. Economic management (8 per cent);
9. Farming and rural industry (6.6 per cent);
10. Veterans affairs (5.75 per cent).

This is an interesting finding in that it differs markedly from mainstream media reporting of Federal election issues during the same period and major election policy statements. Mainstream media reporting and official policy statements from political leaders, particularly the Liberal/National Coalition led by Mr Howard, focussed heavily on economic management (the 8th most discussed in new media) and on defending Work Choices and industrial laws it had introduced (the 7th most discussed in new media). This suggests that new social, citizen and participatory media focus more on issues more directly connected to the day-to-day lives of people. It perhaps also gives an indication of why the Government lost the election, as it shows much of its mainstream political communication including media advertising was out of touch with the issues being discussed daily across the nation online.

MAIN ISSUES/SUBJECTS DISCUSSED IN NEW MEDIA

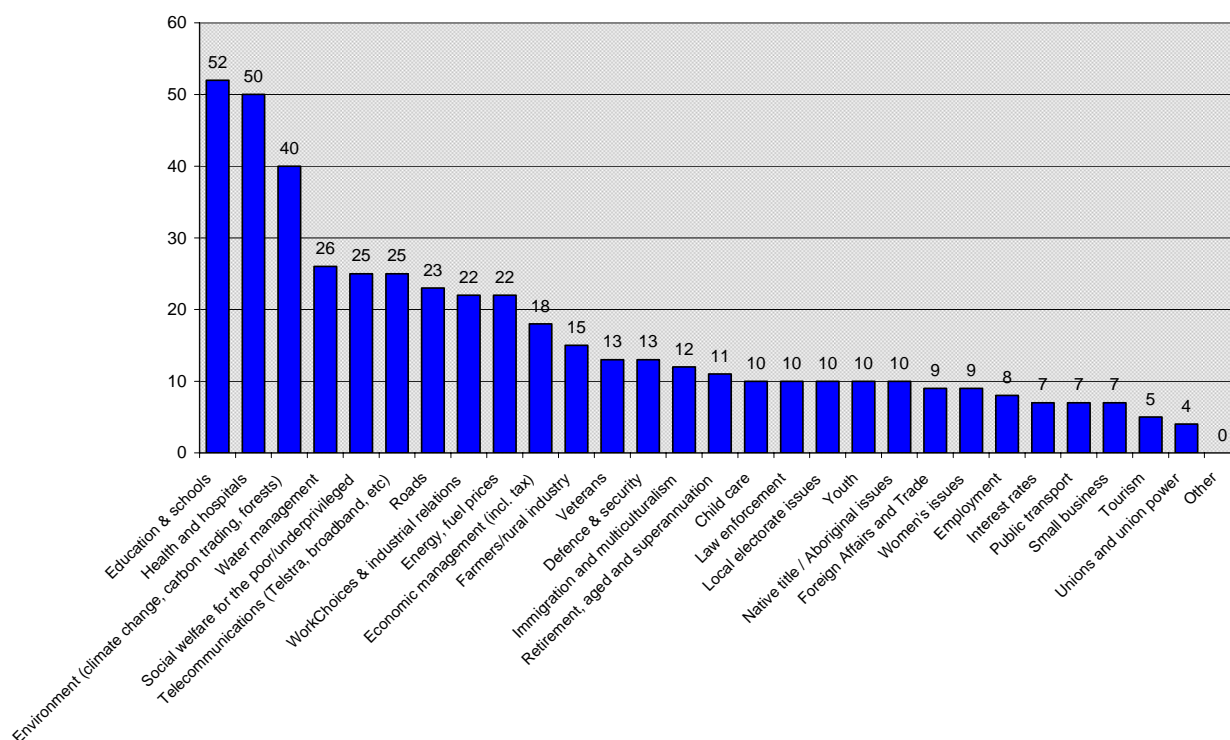


Figure 14. Main issues/subjects discussed in Australian Federal politicians' new media sites.

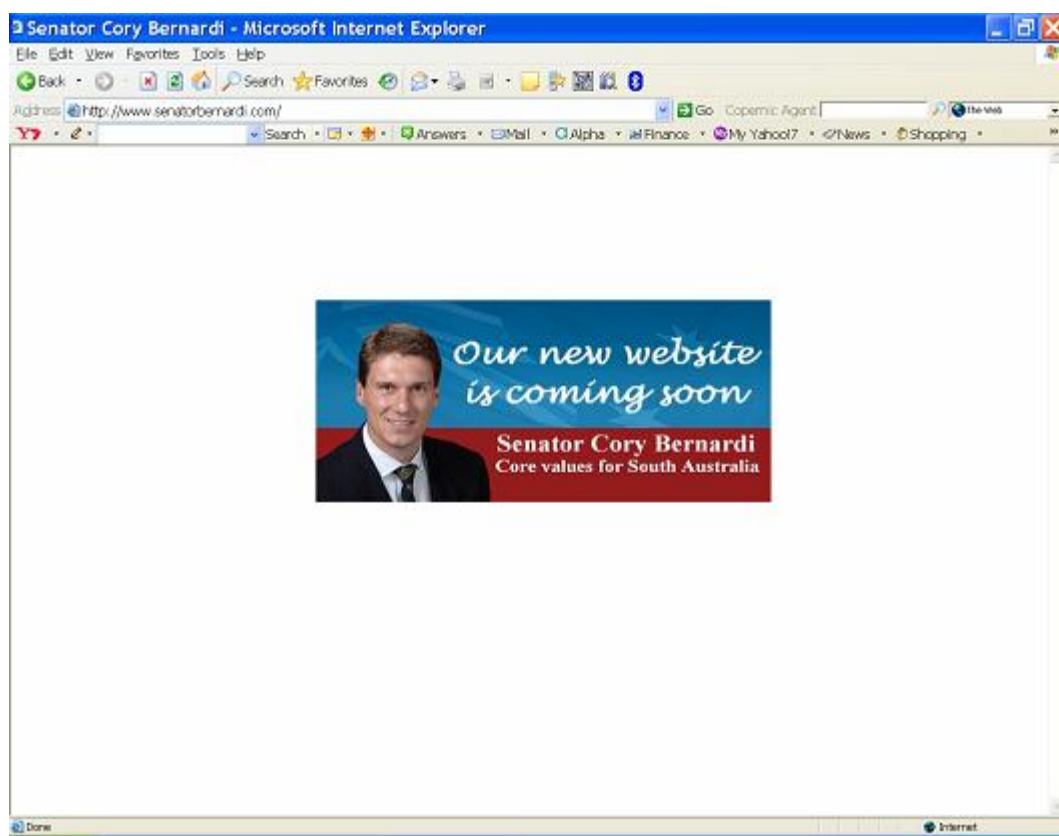


Figure 15. Some Federal politicians missed the new media boat altogether.

Gender balance

Of the 226 Federal politicians in the sample analysed **164 (72.6 per cent) were men and 62 (27.4 per cent) were women.**

Political party balance

Overall, based on volume of use and attempts at interactivity and engagement, the politicians considered to have made most effort and been most innovative in using new media during the 2007 Australian Federal election were:

- **Kevin Rudd** (ALP) – The now Prime Minister had by far the most friends in MySpace (22,296) with 5,017 comments (as at 20 November 2007); his Facebook site had 53 discussion topics and 391 'Wall' posts; and he had had videos on his personal Web site and posted to YouTube, including a video of John Howard (unfavourable) which attracted 4,264 views, in addition to links to Del.icio.us and Digg. However, it has to be recognised that, as Leader of the Opposition heading a multi-million dollar campaign to win Government, he had large resources including many professional staff to build and maintain his new media communication;
- **Peter Garrett** (ALP) – His MySpace site had 4,348 friends and 293 comments (3 duplicates). His blog had 61 comments posted, albeit all positive from supporters;
- **Malcolm Turnbull** (LIB) – His MySpace site had 281 friends and 54 comments (albeit many from one person), but it did include critical comments. He also had a Facebook site and his 'Dog Blog' was noteworthy for its personal approach;

- **Joe Hockey** (LIB) – He posted three videos on his personal Web site and had an extensive blog with 68 comments (albeit all positive); 1,012 friends in MySpace and 843 friends in Facebook;
- **Bob Brown** (GREENS) – He posted 44 videos on YouTube gaining 4,411 views. His MySpace site has 2,316 friends and 258 comments and his Facebook site had 2,472 friends and 140 'Wall' posts;
- **Brendan Nelson** (LIB) – He posted seven videos on his Personal Web site; three surveys and an e-newsletter with an RSS feed and 'Comment' section (but it required visitors to log-in to comment). Also technical difficulties were experienced in his online newsletter with the 'Back to Top' link causing an error;
- **Peter Costello** (LIB) – He had 228 friends in MySpace and 72 comments;
- **Bob McMullan** (ALP) – His personal Web site had links to ALP YouTube videos and also links to a useful YouTube video encouraging people to enrol to vote and showing how; His MySpace site had 208 friends and 50 comments.

The former Prime Minister, John Howard, was not included in the above list as, although he used YouTube videos, a personal Web site for a time, and intermittently published a blog (or his staff wrote it for him), his efforts attracted widespread criticism, including malicious and even obscene comments on YouTube and on other Web sites. He was also the subject of the largest number of anti-videos, spoofs and parodies.

Three lower profile politicians who also made considerable efforts in new media during the election were:

- **Lindsay Tanner** (ALP) – His Facebook site had 451 friends and 22 'Wall' posts and he used YouTube extensively to distribute his speeches and ALP commercials;
- **Pat Farmer** (LIB) – His MySpace site auto-loaded the song 'Straight Lines' by Silverchair on opening and had 669 friends and 57 comments (52 different contributors);
- **Sharon Grierson** (ALP) – The song 'Straight Lines' by Silverchair auto-played on opening her MySpace site where she had 213 friends and 22 comments (two from 1 person) and also a Myspace blog, but with only seven posts and two comments.

This analysis showed that, other than the widely criticised performance of the former Prime Minister in new media, there were no significant differences between political parties, with five Liberal and five Labor politicians among the best performers in new media, along with one Greens Senator.

Another politician who was severely embarrassed by new media was former Federal Parliamentary Secretary and one-time Liberal Party Federal Director, Andrew Robb, who was dubbed "the Google Assassin" for attempting to show that 13 ALP candidates were ineligible because they allegedly held publicly paid jobs. Unfortunately for him, Robb used out-of-date Google search information and was shown to be wrong.

(<http://blogs.abc.net.au/thepollvault/2007/11/google-assassin.html>).

However, new media and many of their publishers know no political masters. Labor Leader Kevin Rudd was shown in a video on YouTube in which he appeared to pick and eat his ear wax. The video clip was reportedly viewed more than half a million times (*Time Australia*, 19 November 2007, p. 17).

(<http://youtube.com/watch?v=ipvdBnU8F8>).

The following table (Figure 16) presents a summary of data collected from the sites of the sample of 226 Australian Federal politicians during the 2007 Federal election.

E-ELECTIONEERING ANALYSIS	TOTALS	Averages	Rank
QUANTITATIVE			
Australian Parliament House Web page	226	100.00%	
Personal Web site	137	60.62%	1
E-newsletter (on Web or PDF)	42	18.58%	2
Blog	15	6.64%	5
Vlog	1	0.44%	10
Podcast	7	3.10%	9
MySpace	26	11.50%	3
Facebook	8	3.54%	8
LinkedIn	0	0.00%	
YouTube video	13	5.75%	6
Chat room / online forum	0	0.00%	
wiki	0	0.00%	
Flickr photos	0	0.00%	
Twitter	0	0.00%	
Online survey	24	10.62%	4
Links to Del.icio.us, Digg, etc	1	0.44%	10
Other (eg. Online petition)	10	4.42%	7
NUMBER OF DIGITAL MEDIA TYPES USED		2.2434	
QUALITATIVE			
Design - Overall Look			
Professional production design (eg. multi-colour, animation, etc)	14	6.19%	
Template design	182	80.53%	
Home made/amateur look	2	0.88%	
Size and comprehensiveness			
Basic - single page/screen	70	30.97%	
Fairly comprehensive - multiple pages or long scrolling pages	127	56.19%	
Very comprehensive - multiple pages plus links to other info (eg. blogs, podcasts, YouTube) and/or downloadable material	3	1.33%	
Interactivity Features			
Contact me (office address only)	180	80.65%	1
Contact me (by direct e-mail)	46	20.35%	3
Animation	5	2.21%	
Downloadable text files (eg. speeches, policies, media releases)	131	57.96%	2
Downloadable audio or play audio on site	19	8.41%	5
Downloadable video or play video on site	24	10.62%	4
Links out to YouTube videos	7	3.10%	9
Links to mainstream media coverage	10	4.42%	7
Links out to other sites other than own political Party	10	4.42%	7
Questions able to be asked (other than fixed FAQs)	1	0.44%	10
Feedback section	8	3.54%	8
Comments able to be posted	13	5.75%	6

Level of elector/visitor 'engagement'?			
Very interactive with multiple inputs from people posted/displayed	0	0.00%	
Fairly interactive with links/buttons inviting people to comment, ask questions or leave messages	13	5.75%	
Very little interactivity/engagement	29	12.83%	
Completely 1-way, no comment/input other than Member	185	81.86%	
No. of 'voices' speaking/commenting other than Member	34.54867		
No. of critical comments or non-friend comments	0.035398		
Main issues discussed			
International/global (eg. climate change/global warming, globalisation)	10	4.42%	3
National issues	96	42.48%	1
State issues	6	2.65%	4
Local electorate issues	65	28.76%	2
Main subjects discussed			
Child care	10	4.42%	13
Law enforcement	10	4.42%	13
Economic management (incl. tax)	18	7.96%	8
Education & schools	52	23.01%	1
Environment (climate change, carbon trading, forests)	40	17.70%	3
Farmers/rural industry	15	6.64%	9
Health and hospitals	50	22.12%	2
Interest rates	7	3.10%	16
Immigration and multiculturalism	12	5.31%	11
Public transport	7	3.10%	16
Roads	23	10.18%	6
Social welfare for the poor/underprivileged	25	11.06%	5
Retirement, aged and superannuation	11	4.87%	12
Telecommunications (Telstra, broadband, etc)	25	11.06%	5
Unions and union power	4	1.77%	19
Water management	26	11.50%	4
WorkChoices & industrial relations	22	9.73%	7
Local electorate issues	10	4.42%	13
Small business	7	3.10%	16
Veterans	13	5.75%	10
Youth	10	4.42%	13
Tourism	5	2.21%	17
Employment	8	3.54%	15
Defence & security	13	5.75%	10
Foreign Affairs and Trade	9	3.98%	14
Women's issues	9	3.98%	14
Energy, fuel prices	22	9.73%	7
Native title / Aboriginal issues	10	4.42%	13
Other	0	0.00%	18

How would you describe the site's overall theme?			
Mainly Party political messages (eg. Party speeches, policy documents, links to Howard or Kevin07, flags, etc)	71	31.42%	1
Mainly national issues	38	16.81%	3
Mainly local issues	61	26.99%	2
Mainly self-promotion by the Member	23	10.18%	4
Mainly knocking the Opposition or opposing candidate	19	8.41%	5
Gender			
Female	62	27.43%	
Male	164	72.57%	

Figure 16. Data summary from online content analysis of new media used by the sample of 226 politicians in the 2007 Australian Federal election.

Other candidates

Maxine McKew was not a sitting Member of Parliament at the time of the 2007 Australian Federal election and, therefore, was not included in the sample. However, her new media use was analysed due to her high profile in challenging the incumbent Prime Minister in his own electorate (successfully). In addition to a personal Web site which included an e-newsletter, a screen shot taken on 20 November 2007 shown in Figure 17 shows her MySpace site with links to a blog. But note the 'Last Login' date near her photo showing "3 September 2007". She used new media and it appears to have played a role in her successful campaign, although she reportedly relied more on old-fashioned 'door knocking' and face-to-face communication (based on verbal comments from residents in her electorate).

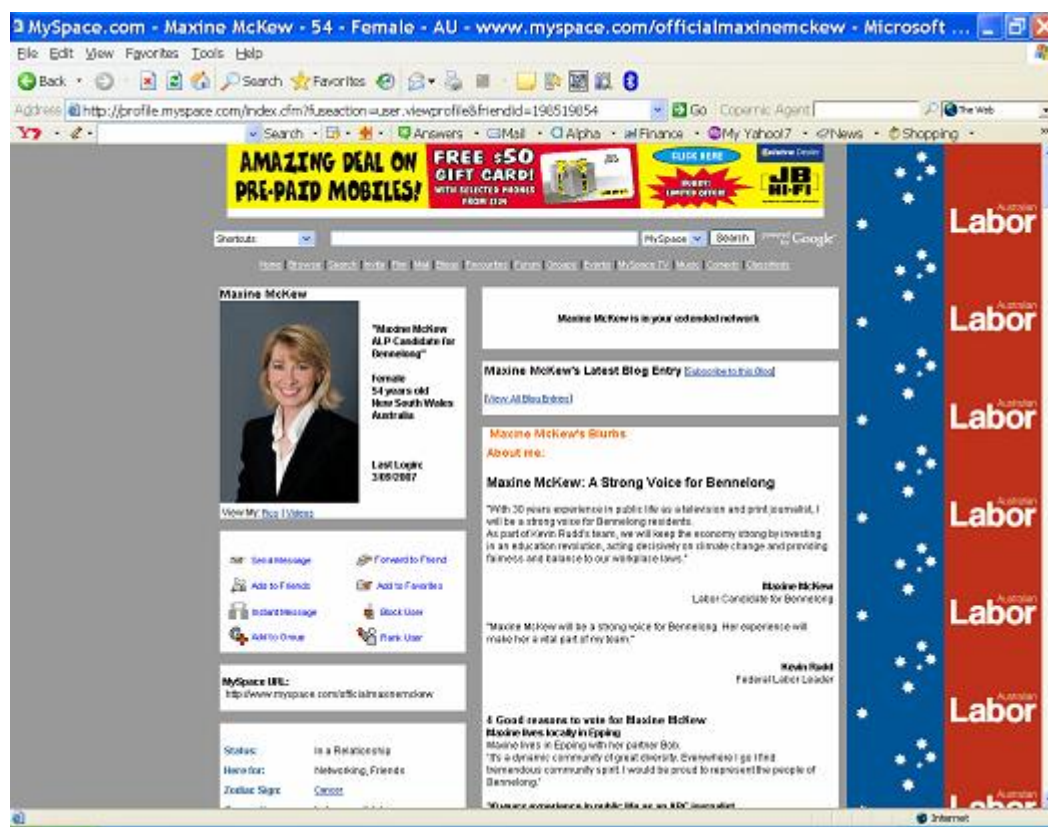


Figure 17. Maxine McKew's MySpace site.

Political party sites

The official **Australian Labor Party** site, Kevin07 (www.kevin07.com.au) was the most visited and talked about site during the Australian Federal election. In contrast with John Howard's stilted performance and seeming discomfort with new media, the ALP showed itself to be 'Net savvy'. A version of the Kevin07 Web site was built for access from mobile phones (www.kevin07.mobi) and also SMS (Short Message Service) alerts were offered, noteworthy innovations in use of new media. Labor campaign spokeswoman, Penny Wong, claimed the mobile Kevin07 site to be "a world first" (*The Australian*, 25 October 2007, p. 32).

Close analysis reveals, however, that much of the ALP's new media communication remained controlled and packaged. No negative or critical comments could be found on the Kevin07 Web site or any related MySpace or Facebook site or blog. This suggests that they were moderated (i.e. negative feedback and comments not posted). In other words, 'gatekeepers'⁴ are at work in new media as well as mainstream media in many cases.



Figure 18. Kevin07, the official Web site of the Australian Labor Party was the most widely discussed and one of the most popular new media in the 2007 Australian Federal election.

Kevin Rudd's presence in MySpace (www.myspace.com.au/200637520) (see Figure 19) was also strongly branded in political party livery and slogans in the same 'look and feel' as the Kevin07 Web site. The Labor Party's new media approach employed slick commercial marketing strategy and carefully controlled its online presence. One could argue that, while appearing to adopt a Web 2.0 approach, it was actually a traditional controlled communication campaign, albeit on a new platform.

⁴ Gatekeepers is a term reportedly coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (Schudson, 2000) and applied to editors and others who control access to and content of the media by White (1950); Gieber (1964) and a number of other social scientists and media scholars including McCombs & Shaw (1976).



Figure 19. Kevin Rudd's official MySpace site, carefully choreographed as part of the Kevin07 production.

Despite being the first Australian Prime Minister to have a personal Web site (www.pm.gov.au) and posting videos to that site, John Howard closed down his personal Web site and directed most of his 2007 Federal election communication through the official **Liberal Party of Australia** Web site, along with several ill-fated video ventures on YouTube (see Figure 20).

There were extensive spoofs and parodies of John Howard on YouTube. Searching "John Howard" in YouTube as at 20 November brought up 3,280 results, most of which were negative skits and portrayals. *The Australian* newspaper described John Howard's efforts on YouTube under a headline "Johnny-too-late is fair game for net users" as follows:

"The Prime Minister's first policy announcement made via the Internet and instigated at his own suggestion, attracted a litany of mocking abuse and scepticism yesterday" (18 July 2007, p. 4).

Searching "Kevin Rudd" on YouTube brought up 903 results. The ALP was more successful in confining its new media activities to sites which it controlled and could moderate.

Apart from the progressive new media use of Greens Senator Bob Brown, **The Greens** did not have a strong online presence (see Figure 21) other than videos posted online which they did extensively. The **National Party** used traditional Web sites emblazoned in the party's green and gold livery and relied on downloadable media releases and some e-newsletters. Other political parties including the **Australian Democrats** had a lower profile while small parties such as **Family First**, **One Nation**, **The Shooters Party**, the **Christian Democratic Party** and the **DLP** (Democratic Labor Party) used limited new media.

Senator On-Line is discussed under 'Political Interest Groups' as, while claiming to be a political party, its activities more closely identify it as a political activist group.

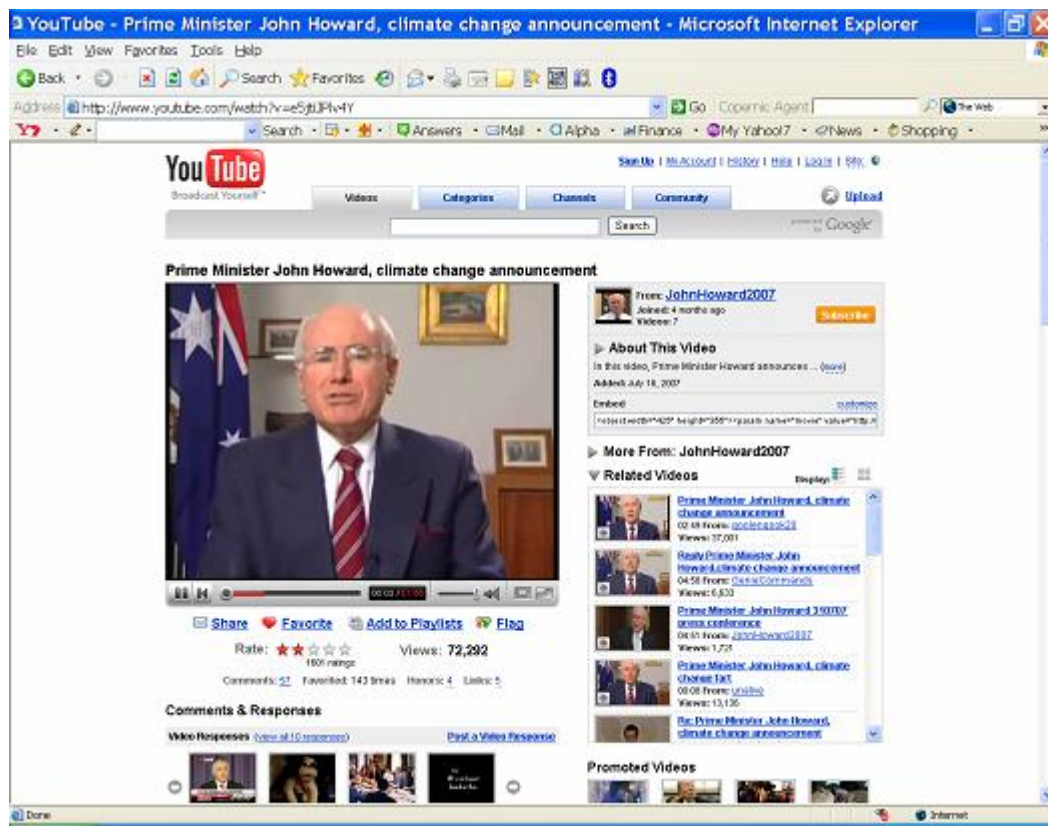


Figure 20. Former Prime Minister John Howard's YouTube videos were heavily criticised.



Figure 21. The Greens political party site.

Political interest group sites

A range of political interest groups and activist organisations used new media during the 2007 Australian Federal election. Prominent among these was **Google's** dedicated Australian Federal election Web site (www.google.com.au/election2007/) shown in Figure 22.

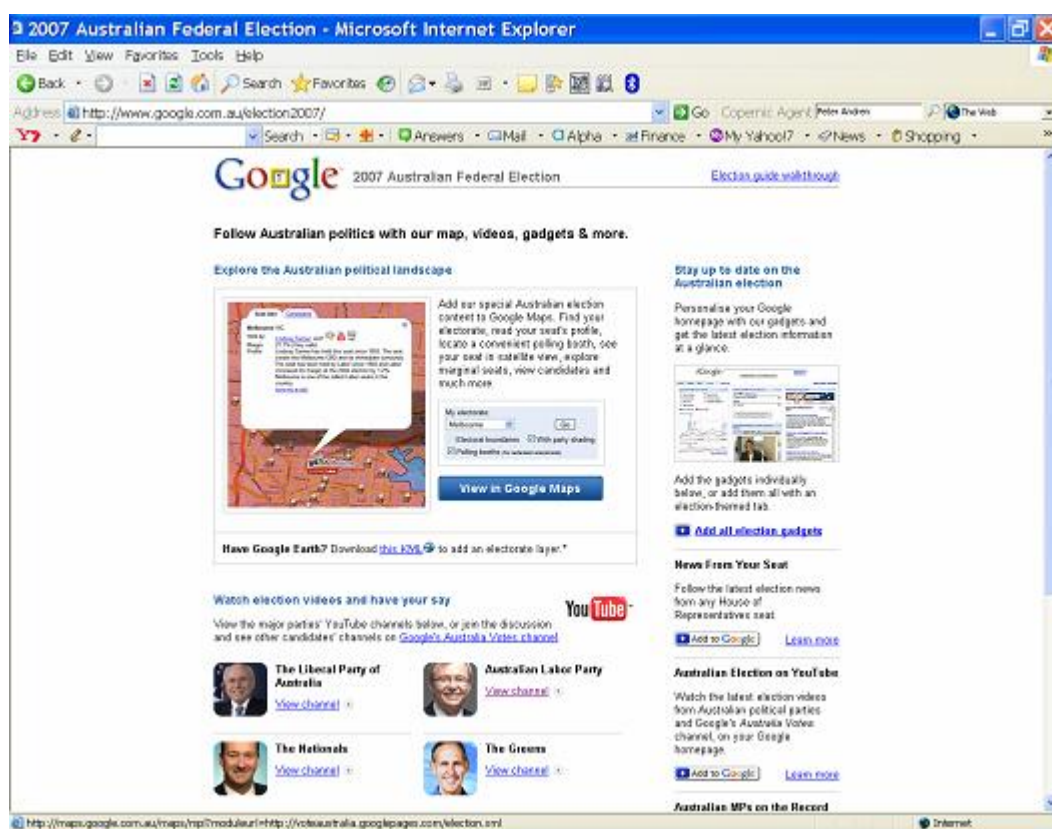


Figure 22. Web giant Google was quick to set up a specialist Web site for the Australian Federal election and provided a number of interactive services including a facility for people to find out what electorate they were in and who were the candidates, as well as a function to search archives of political speeches and statements of candidates.

Google's 'On the Record' service was a particularly noteworthy innovation with demonstrable benefit to the public. Using Google's search algorithm across millions of pages of Hansard (official transcripts of Parliament) and other Parliamentary records, users could access speeches and statements made by politicians on various issues over preceding years. Several politicians were caught out when their promises during the 2007 Australian Federal election campaign were found to contradict previous policy statements.

Also, Google Maps allowed voters to check their electorate location and access information on local Members of Parliament.

Federal Election.com.au (www.federalelection.com.au) was a specialist Web site set up by iPrime, part of the Prime Television Network, a regional television and radio broadcaster, to provide information and commentary on the 2007 Australian Federal election. The site included access to Roy Morgan Research and Sky News as well as political analysis (see Figure 23). Along with the extensive election tracking service set up by ABC Online, this is an example of a significant trend of mainstream media hybridising and adopting new media production and distribution techniques. The site also provided links to a wide range of political blogs.

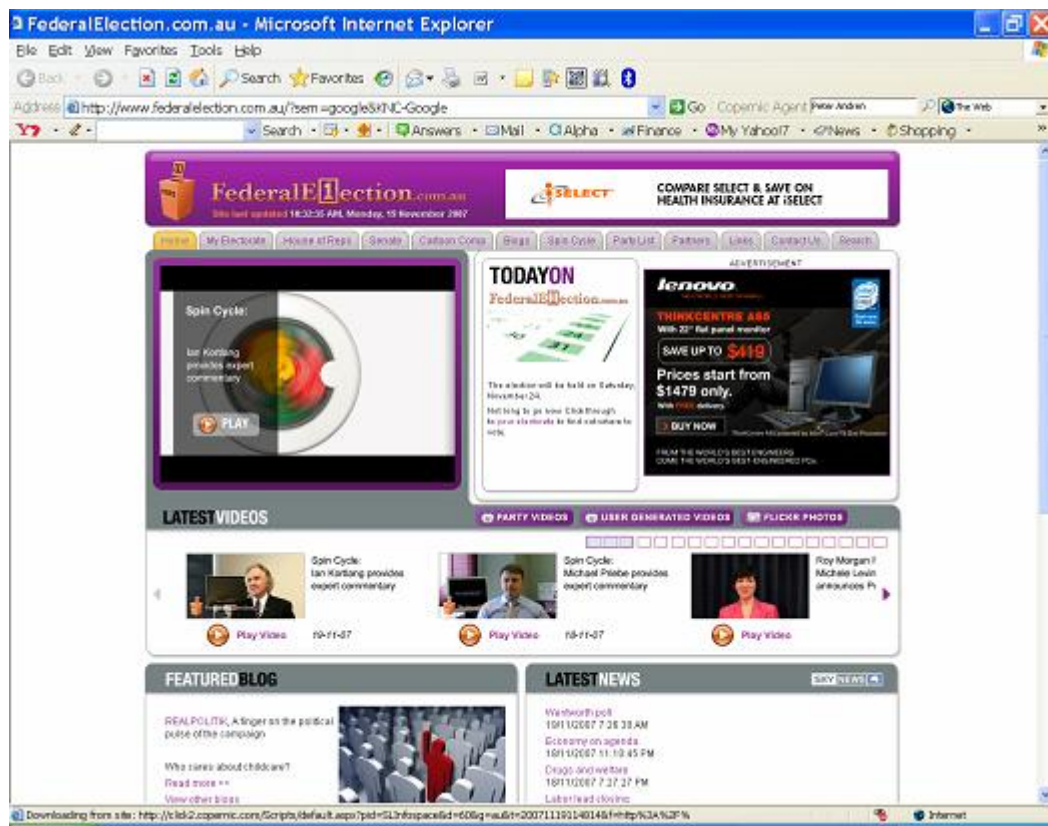


Figure 23. Federalection.com.au, a site specialising in election commentary and news.



Figure 24. Electiontracker.net is operated by a not-for-profit youth media and arts organisation.

Election Tracker (www.electiontracker.net.au) (see Figure 24) was established by a not-for-profit youth media and arts organisation, Vibewire to provide information relevant to youth and give a voice to youth in the 2007 Australian Federal election. Election Tracker funded four young writers aged between 19 and 23 to join the media contingent following John Howard and Kevin Rudd on the campaign trail and report on issues from a youth perspective. This use demonstrates the ability of new media to provide a wider range of specialist news and information outside of the mainstream media and to serve specialist niche markets.

Get Up (www.getup.org.au) is “an independent grassroots community advocacy organisation operating online” to allow everyday citizens “opportunities to get involved and hold politicians accountable on important issues”. Get Up claims to not support any particular political party, but to support “progressive Parliament”. It encourages citizens to take action ranging from sending an e-mail to Members of Parliament to volunteering for activist actions such as marches and protests (see Figure 25).

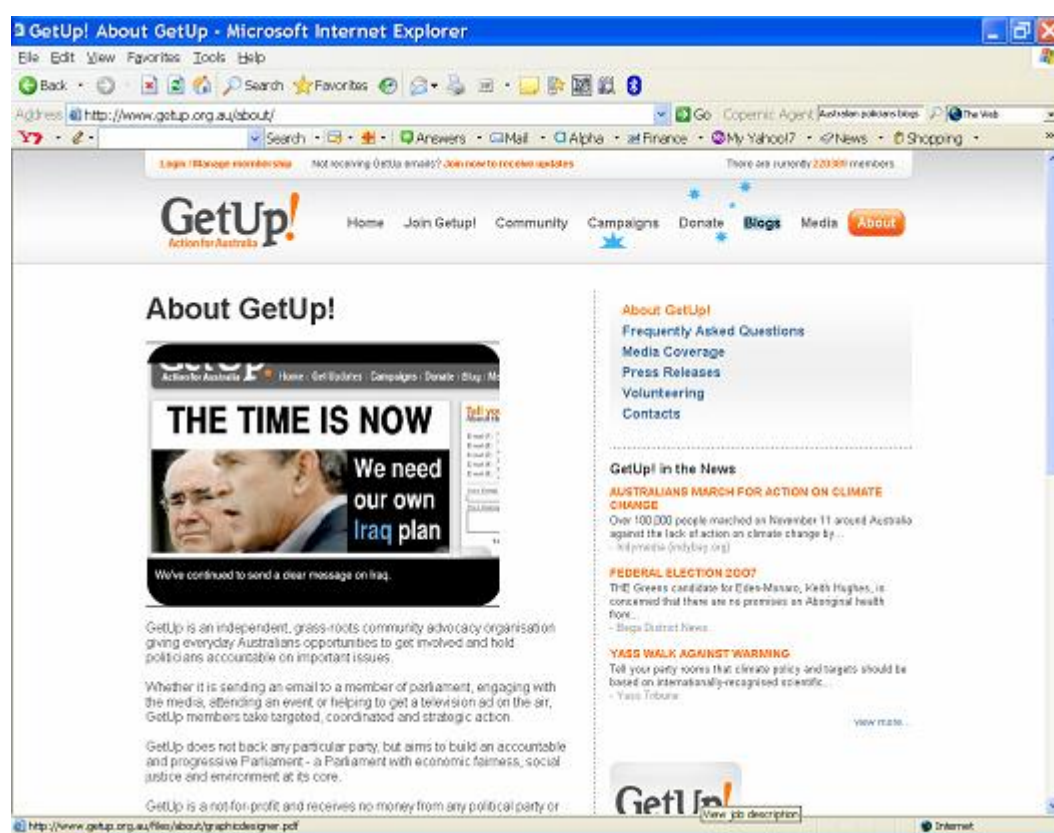


Figure 25. Activist group GetUp is an independent grassroots community advocacy organisation which uses its Web site and blogs to encourage engagement and participation.

Senator On-Line (www.senatoronline.org.au) was a particularly noteworthy addition to the Australian political landscape in 2007, claiming to be the first Internet-based democratic political party. The site was extensively interactive, allowing visitors to vote on policies and legislation. Senator On-Line claims to communicate the views of its ‘members’ to politicians.

In addition, Senator On-Line stood two candidates for the Senate in each mainland State of Australia in the 2007 Federal election. None was elected which probably reflects the candidates and their policies more than the communication capability of new media. This will be an interesting development to watch in future.



Figure 26. Senator On-Line proclaimed itself as the first Internet-based democratic political party.



Figure 27. YouDecide2007.org invited voters to become citizen journalists.

You Decide (<http://youdecide2007.org>) invited the public to become citizen journalists and write stories from their own electorates about issues and concerns.

Blogs

Also a range of independent blogs were active during the 2007 Australian Federal election. These provided a range of commentary from rants to informed expert analysis. See samples in Figures 28-30.



Figure 28. A well-established online new media publication, NewMatilda, which describes itself as “an independent Web site of news, opinion and analysis”.

The capability of blogs to present analysis rather than simply self-indulgent editorials and rants, as sometimes claimed, was demonstrated in a number of blogs. For instance, Club Bloggery in an analysis scoring election performance by candidates and mainstream media noted that “we ... need to think about how the blogosphere and citizen journalism can reach out beyond the political junkies and engage with those people who K-Rudd was trying to talk to on ‘Rove’” (<http://gatewatching.org/2007/11/23/club-bloggery-the-8th-scoring-the-e-election/>). The same blog claimed “political bloggers – and particularly psephs – have had a win this election” pointing to incorrect predictions of re-election of the Howard Government by *The Australian* newspaper compared with the more accurate ‘outing’ of public sentiment by new media such as YouDecide2007 (<http://youdecide2007.org>). and minor parties that “have also successfully embraced social networking services like Facebook”. In another post, Club Bloggery said “unlike the mainstream media, they [bloggers] have been able to carry out analyses and host conversations that reveal the range of community opinions” and, as an example, noted “the blogosphere – which is not hitched so tightly to the campaign caravan – has been better able to offer in-depth analysis, discussion and deliberation about climate change policy” (<http://gatewatching.org/2007/11/05/club-bloggery-5-digging-deeper/>).

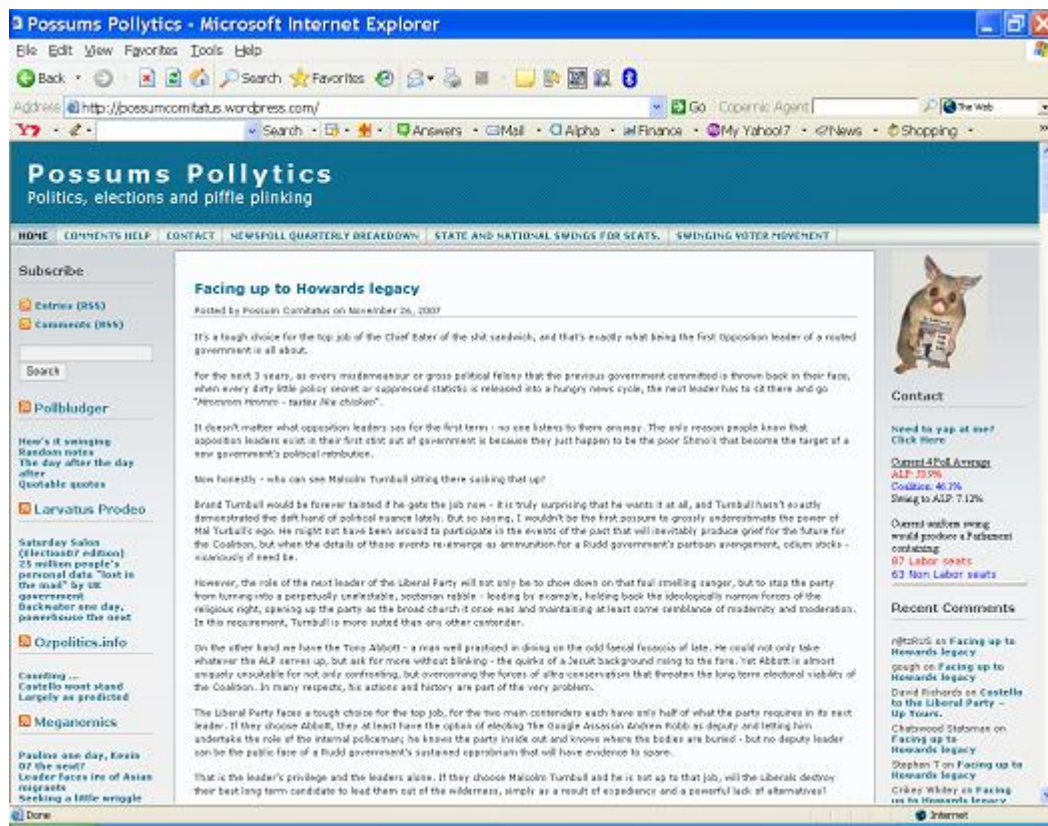


Figure 29. Possums Pollytics, a political blog.



Figure 30. The Poll Bludger blog.

Part 2: Mainstream media analysis

Media Monitors, Australia's leading media monitoring and analysis company (www.mediamonitors.com.au), worked in partnership with UTS to monitor and analyse mainstream media reporting of the use of new media during the 2007 Australian Federal election campaign to provide an additional perspective to this analysis.

This media monitoring and content analysis covered the **period 30 September** (when the election was formally announced) **to 24 November**, the date of the election.

The content analysis of mainstream media reporting focussed on press coverage due to the volume of mainstream media reporting and discussion. There were **281 press news articles, feature articles, editorials, columns and letters to the editor** analysed during this period.

The major players

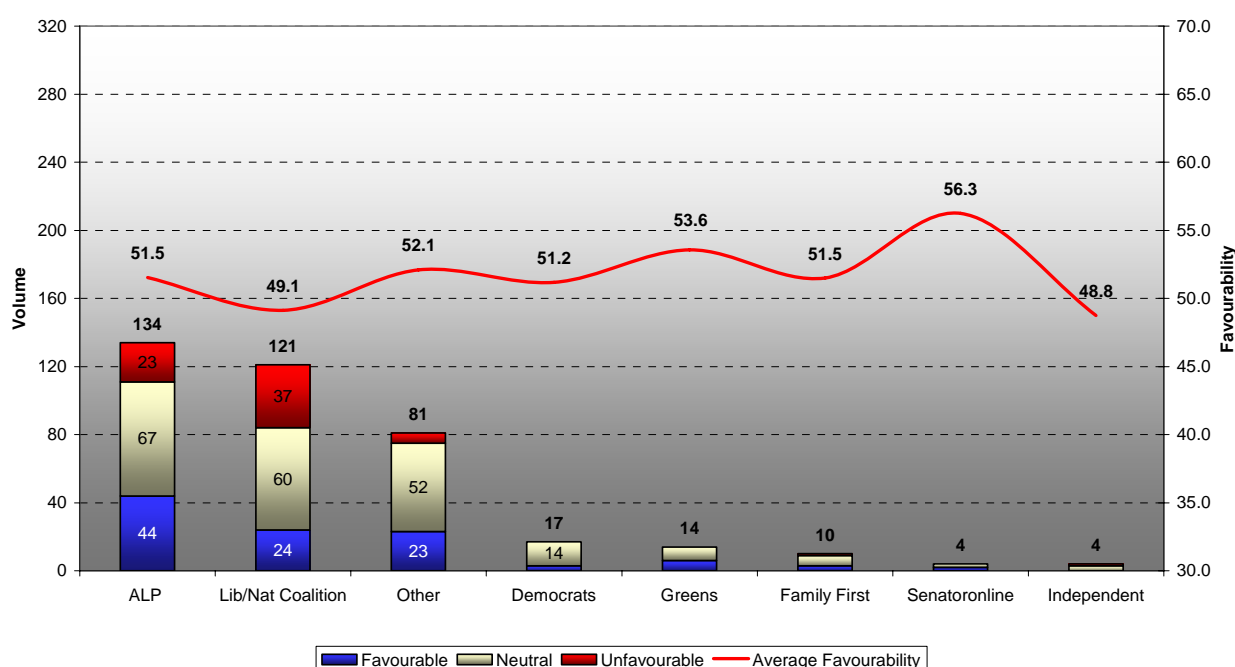


Figure 31.

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) was most discussed in relation to its use of new media (134 mentions) and also was more favourably reported in relation to use of new media than the Liberal/National Party coalition which suffered considerable criticism (eg. 37 unfavourable mentions and an average favourability rating below neutral). (See *methodology in Appendix D.*)

Leading messages

A range of messages was communicated in mainstream media news, features, columns and letters to the editor concerning politicians' use of new media. The most prominent sentiments expressed in mainstream media coverage, as shown in Figure 32, were that:

- Use of new media in election public communication is a major trend likely to continue and grow;
- The ALP was more successful than its competitors in use of new media;
- The Liberal/National Coalition was less successful than its competitors in use of new media.

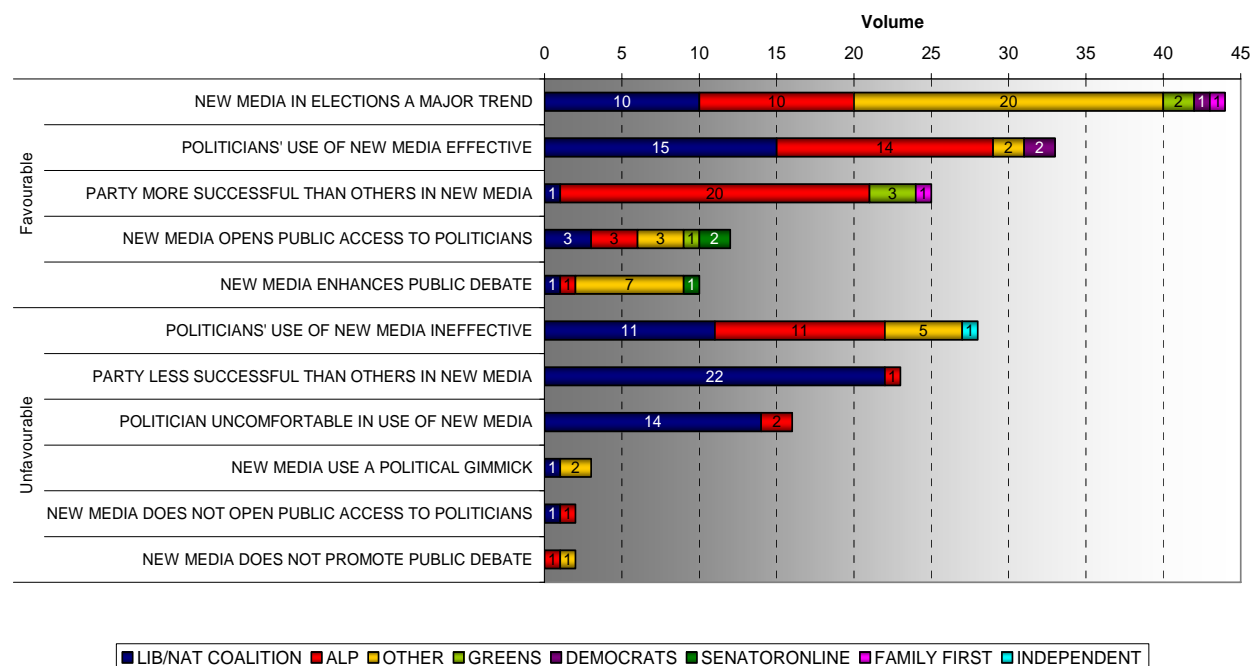


Figure 32.

There were **mixed views on whether politicians were effective in using new media** as evidenced by 33 messages to the effect that they were, contrasted with 28 messages that they were not.

There were also **16 references to the effect that politicians are uncomfortable in using new media**.

However, there were **12 comments to the effect that new media increase public access to politicians and 10 references to new media enhancing public debate**, compared with just two comments to the effect that new media do not open public access to politicians and two comments that new media do not promote public debate.

Some context is provided to this optimism by Figure 33 which shows the leading sources quoted. The **former Prime Minister John Howard was the most quoted source talking about new media** and was attempting to 'talk up' his use of new media to reach voters. Also, **Kevin Rudd (the third most quoted sourced) who based a large part of his campaign around Kevin07, a Web strategy using a Party Web site, YouTube, MySpace and Facebook, could be expected to speak very positively about the benefits of new media**. The second most quoted source, Harold Mitchell, is a leading media buyer and could be seen as a neutral source, while spokespersons from Google and GetUp could be expected to talk very positively in relation to the benefits and effectiveness of new media influenced by their vested interest.

Leading sources

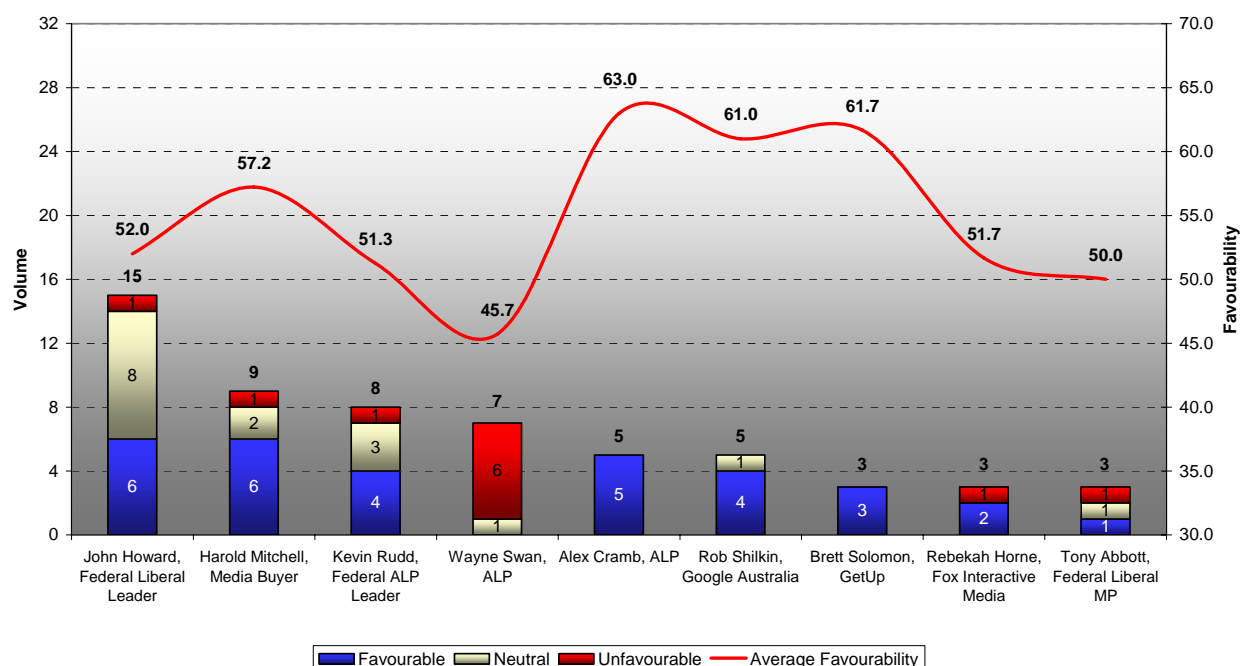


Figure 33.

Leading bylines

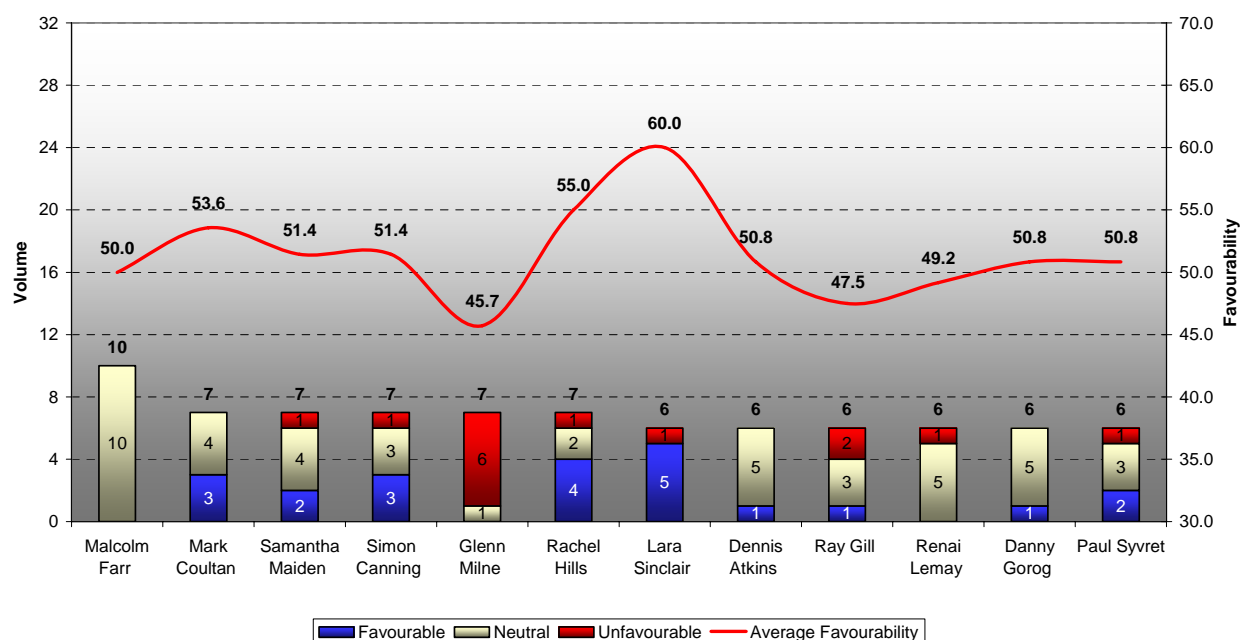


Figure 34.

The leading journalists writing about new media during the 2007 Australian Federal election are shown in Figure 34.

Other key findings

Other findings of content analysis of mainstream media conducted by Media Monitors were:

- **There was also substantial comment that neither of the major political parties used new media to its full potential or even appropriately in some cases.** Criticisms included not updating pages frequently, not observing 'Internet etiquette' such as avoiding blatant commercialism and propaganda and allowing public comments including critical comments. There was also criticism of politicians being awkward and uncomfortable in new media formats such as YouTube videos adopting a formal traditional public speaking stance rather than the more relaxed and casual style of new media. Mainstream media reports conveyed a view that politicians are unclear about the role of new media in their campaign strategies with many taking tentative first steps.
- Many articles on the use of new media in the election campaign focused on the **numerous parodies and spoofs posted on the Internet**. Often these were more popular than the formal and "wooden" approaches taken by politicians. For several politicians, including former Prime Minister John Howard, it was noted that parodies of their campaigns had more views than their official online campaign material.
- By extension, **mainstream media noted the potential for new media to damage or ridicule candidates**. Key examples of this during the campaign were footage of Kevin Rudd appearing to eat his own ear wax and Tony Abbott stumbling while discussing WorkChoices. Widespread coverage of these videos helped place YouTube as the leading new media in the coverage analysed.
- Most journalists and commentators reported that **the ALP's use of new media was more effective than the Liberal Party's** based on online feedback, viewer ratings, volumes of 'friends' and public discussion. It was frequently reported that the Kevin07 site followed the conventions of new media more closely and that Kevin Rudd was generally more comfortable and familiar with the protocols and etiquette of the Web. One journalist noted:

"Launching his MySpace site in mid-July, [Kevin Rudd] deftly promised – in response to a teenager's criticism that his website was ugly – that he was 'having it pimped'" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November 2007).
- Another reported that:

"John Howard's foray into YouTube was a complete flop, provoking hundreds of 'mashups' satirical responses attacking the PM and his policies. 'It was like vultures picking at a carcass. Howard failed because he didn't understand the medium and its rules. He just plonked himself in YouTube without even an introduction,' [digital marketing expert Julian] Cole says. Kevin Rudd is choosing to campaign with his Kevin07 website, which links to his pages on Facebook, MySpace and YouTube: innovative media choices that Mr Cole says add weight to the ALP leader's 'fresh ideas' philosophy" (*The Age*, 25 October 2007).
- Australia's leading media buyer Harold Mitchell observed that John Howard appeared uncomfortable in his use of new media.
- Comparison between the two major parties' use of new media commented on the level of sophistication (and lack thereof) of their sites, disparity in the number of views of their YouTube videos, and a substantial difference in the volume of friends each had on Facebook and MySpace. Was this a factor in the election result? It is hard or even

impossible to say given the wide range of factors influencing the election result. But it may well be that, in future, new media proficiency will be a key factor required to win election campaigns.

- There was much discussion on how **the rise of new media has created a major shift in advertising spending** and most industry commentators speculated that this trend is likely to continue.
- Another **key issue discussed in mainstream media was that advertising regulations governing mainstream media, such as the advertising black-out period prior to elections and the authorisation of advertisements, did not apply to new digital media**, with speculation that advertising regulations needed review.
- There was **relatively little discussion of the target audience of new media in the Federal election campaign**. It appeared to be widely assumed that the audience of new media is different to that of mainstream media and 'youth' was identified as the primary audience of new media – despite some data suggesting older demographics are increasing users of Internet media. Outdated data and assumptions about new media audiences and users need to be challenged with further investigation.
- There is an **overall sense that, for better or worse, new media has brought politics into popular culture**, a sphere that is not the natural habitat of most politicians and the greatest change wrought by new media may not be on the media or audiences but on political processes and politicians' approaches to public communication. It seems inevitable that politicians in future will need to master new media such as YouTube video formats and social media sites in the same way that they underwent TV interview training in the past.

While mainstream media gave considerable attention to new media as a political campaigning tool, particularly relishing the news value of *faux pas* made by some politicians, they remained reticent and even defensive about their own dominance and importance in public communication. For instance, the leading national daily, *The Australian*, commented in an editorial: "... while Myspace and YouTube are important arenas for reaching out to younger voters, the decisive battles will be waged in the mainstream media" (*The Australian* Editorial, 19 July 2007, p. 15). The same editorial cautioned that "some have been quick to proclaim the arrival of the Internet election".

Some other comments and reported statistics that further show new media as a rising influence in political campaigning and public communication worthy of serious study are:

- In total, **600 videos** created by Australian political candidates and political parties were posted on YouTube during six months from June to November 2007;
- **Thousands of other videos involving spoofs, satires and 'mash-ups' were posted** commenting on election candidates or issues during the same period;
- The advertising industry reported that **online advertising by political parties during the 2007 election reached \$45 million** – 10 per cent of all election advertising;
- The **Liberal/National Coalition created and posted 40 Internet videos** that gained 140,000 views up to 24 November 2007 (election day);
- The **ALP created and posted 64 Internet videos** and gained 460,000 views up to 24 November 2007;

- The **ALP** reported that it had a dedicated team of **20 full-time staff** managing its **Kevin07 Web strategy** (according to ALP campaign media director, Alex Cramb). Cramb also claimed the ALP gained **1.5 million views of its videos** across Internet channels including YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and www.kevin07.com.au;
- The **Greens reportedly posted 241 Internet videos** on YouTube up to 24 November 2007, with the Christian Family First Party posting 181 videos and the Democrats posting 98 videos on the Internet during the campaign.

Theorising new media

Because of its extent and pervasiveness, the Internet is a key subject of investigation and discussion in a wide range of fields including journalism, media studies, political science and social and cultural studies. This study, which itself is time, geographically and culturally bound, cannot hope to fully explore the extent of new media use or the full implications of its findings. But areas of theory and thinking which this data help inform including the following.

The digital divide

In focussing on the rapid development of new media and their potentialities, it is sometimes insufficiently recognised that there are wide differences in computer use and online access between what can be colloquially referred to as 'haves' and 'have nots'.

Novak and Hoffman reported that, in 1998 when 44.2 per cent of white people in the US had a computer in the home, only 29 per cent of African Americans enjoyed this access. Similar inequities exist among many other ethnic groups including Aboriginal people in Australia and also among poor people of all races, which prompted Novak and Hoffman to warn of a "digital divide".

In countries such as China, India and throughout the continent of Africa, the digital divide" is even wider than in Western countries. Only six per cent of China's 1.3 billion people had Internet access in 2005 and only 1.5 per cent of India's 1.1 billion people could access the Internet in the same year (Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney & Wise, 2006, p. 453).

However, between 60 and 70 per cent of the population of the US and Europe are now online (almost 200 million people in the US alone) and growth rates in online communication are soaring globally (www.internetworldstats.com). A 2007 Australian Communications and Media Authority (2007, p. 2) report on use of media by Australian families reported that 98 per cent of Australian homes now have a computer (ahead of DVD players at 97 per cent) and 91 per cent have Internet access, with 76 per cent having broadband. Falling computer and online costs and increasing access to the Web from mobile phones are also rapidly increasing access to new media in developing countries. Between 2000 and 2004 the number of Internet users increased 174 per cent in the Middle East; 140 per cent in Latin America and 123 per cent in Africa (Grossberg, et al., 2006, p. 453).

New data on computer and Internet access suggest that, while the 'digital divide' remains a key barrier to address in poor communities and under-developed countries, it is not the impediment that it was once posited by sociologists in the 1990s. As the importance of new media access grows, however, improving access for disadvantaged groups must be an important equity consideration for governments and social institutions.

Social capital and social connectedness

A number of sociologists and media researchers have speculated that time spent with media takes people away from human interaction and breaks down social connectedness and community – termed the displacement hypothesis (Sparks, 2006, pp. 72-73). Robert Putnam (1995 2000) famously warned of a loss of 'social capital' due to the rise of mass media such as television. Likewise, David Myers (1999) reported that in the US a number of "disturbing social trends seem to point toward a decline in close connections between people" which he attributed largely to time spent with media, particularly television.

Concerns over loss of 'social capital' and social connectedness have escalated with the rise in use of the Internet and new media. Robert Kraut and a research team at Carnegie Mellon University conducted a widely reported study titled *Internet Paradox: A Social Technology That Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-Being* which concluded that the Internet displaces strong social ties and contributes to social isolation and loneliness. Late 20th century research also suggested that Internet use led to feelings of depression (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Muckophadyay and Sherlis, 1998).

However, research from the 1990s has to be seen as time-bound and there were a number of flaws in the Carnegie Mellon University study that have been documented by other researchers since including McKenna and Bargh (1999) who take issue with Kraut et al. (1998). They point out that the sample was not chosen randomly (the researchers selected respondents from community groups who already had strong social connections) and the correlation between Internet usage and loneliness was small. Also, Glenn Sparks (2006, p. 218) notes that there was no control group in the Carnegie Mellon study – a fundamental requirement for any experimental research to have validity.

More recent research by McKenna and Bargh (1999) and others suggest that the Internet is making many people *more* socially connected, at least in some situations. Howard Rheingold (1993) optimistically reported that computer networks provide a new means of building communities, findings that are supported to some extent by DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman and Robinson (2001), Howard and Jones (2004) and Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002).

McKenna and Bargh (1999) reported largely beneficial effects from Internet use including increased self-disclosure (p. 254), decreased feelings of estrangement and isolation, decreased depression (also reported by Roberts, 1998), greater liking and acceptance by others, and a widening social circle (cited in Mundorf & Laird, 2002, p. 592). Other research by Jeffrey Cole (2000) on the social and psychological effects of technology, particularly the Internet, found that almost two-thirds of Americans have ventured online and the majority deny that the Internet created social isolation. For instance, more than 75 per cent said they do not feel as if they are being ignored by relatives and friends as a result of chat room activity. More respondents feel ignored because of television compared with Internet use. In fact, the majority of Internet users said e-mail, Web sites and chat rooms have a "modestly positive impact" on their abilities to make new friends and communicate more with family (cited in Mundorf & Laird, 2002, p. 592).

When uses such as distance learning are included, it is difficult not to see the Internet, particularly two-way Web 2.0 communication, having some positive effects in society (Bryant & Zillman, 2002, p. 595) and previous dire warnings of social breakdown can be seen to be overstated. DiMaggio et al. (2001, p. 319) summarise that the Internet's effects on social and political life has passed through three stages which they describe as "unjustifiable euphoria", "abrupt and equally unjustifiable scepticism" to "gradual realisation that Web-based human interaction does have unique and politically significant properties", although Xenos and May (2007) note that most views on new media effects are either optimistic or pessimistic. A more balanced view of new media use and effects is emerging and is a desirable approach.

The new public sphere

Habermas' concept of media as a 'public sphere' in which a range of views and opinion can be considered with reason and logic has been criticised and seen as unrealised or unachievable by other scholars because of its "idealisation of public reason" (Curran, 2002, p. 45) and also because of influences which have weakened the access of individuals to this 'sphere' such as media monopoly and oligopoly ownership (political economy views), technological barriers such as lack of access to expensive printing presses and radio and TV broadcast spectrum, and

globalisation leading to cultural ‘templates’ being distributed by dominant Western media conglomerates. Nevertheless, the public sphere remains a core concept in discussion of democracy and media (Howley, 2007).

In a recent paper, Habermas (2006, p. 412) reaffirms his view that “the independence of a public sphere that operates as an intermediary system between state and society” is part of the “bedrock of liberal democracies” and comments on changes to the public sphere since he first proposed the concept, including noting the growth of new Internet media. He notes that mediated communication in the public sphere can facilitate deliberative legitimisation [sic] in complex societies “only if a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environment and if anonymous audiences grant feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society” (p. 412). Habermas notes limitations and barriers to this feedback and responsiveness of civil society in the political public sphere continuing in the age of the Internet. He says: “Contemporary Western societies display an impressive increase in the volume of political communication (citing Van den Daele and Neidhardt, 1996), but the political public sphere is at the same time dominated by the kind of media communication that lacks the defining features of deliberation”. In notes to the paper he further says: “the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend ... to lead to fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics” (p. 423). This fragmentation of audiences is further discussed in the next section.

Habermas sees two major causes for a lack of feedback and involvement by citizens in politics: “social deprivation and cultural exclusion of citizens” leading to selective and uneven participation in mediation communication and “colonisation of the public sphere by market imperatives [which] leads to a peculiar paralysis of civil society” (p. 422).

Van Dijk (1999) also talks of social paralysis brought on by a different cause. He says an “information glut” created by the Internet paralyses people and confuses them because they cannot work out what is valid.

While not as pessimistic on the role of the Internet and new media in politics as the Markle Foundation⁵ (1977), Margolis (1996) and Margolis and Resnick (2000) who argue that “ordinary” politics has invaded and captured cyberspace” stifling its transforming capabilities, Habermas’ recent writing notes that “comparison of recent studies arrives at an ambivalent, if not outright pessimistic, conclusion about the kind of impact mass communication has on the involvement of citizens in politics” (p. 422).

But therein could lie part of the explanation and the way forward. New media are, in the main, not *mass communication* or *mass media*. They do not seek to reach, unify and homogenise large populations; in fact such notions are mostly an anathema to new media such as blogs. Nevertheless, fragmentation into small niche audiences and communities is itself an area of contention and will be discussed in the next section. But, before doing so, in reviewing the existence or otherwise of an effective public sphere in politics, it has to be noted that intelligent search engines are making the task of finding information on the ever-expanding Internet easier and faster and reducing the social paralysis that Habermas and Van Dijk are concerned about. Second, this analysis has shown a diversity of views expressed during the Australian Federal election in a range of formats including youth Web sites, citizen journalist sites and small independent political party sites, most of which would not have seen the light of day in traditional mainstream media or elite political discourse.

⁵ A Markle Foundation (1997) review based on a survey claimed that “at worst, the Internet produces a web of deceptive information, at best it offers a flow of decontextualised information that is hard to decipher and utilise”.

It cannot be argued that the Internet and new media have re-established the Athenian *agora* which inspired Habermas' view of the public sphere and they have so far not created a forum as envisioned by Rheingold (1993, p. 4) of which he says "in the discussion among citizens, issues were made topical and took on shape" and citizens "interacted as equals with equals".

This research suggests that the situation is more along the lines described by Bentivegna (2002, p. 51) who talks of "two-headed technology" – the "technologies of freedom" and the "technologies of control" – one a liberating force to give citizens a voice and access to a wide range of opinion and the other a powerful set of news tools and an environment that can be 'normalised' to reproduce structures previously existing in the physical world. There is growing evidence to support Bentivegna who argues that "we must ... abandon illusions about the miraculous power of the Internet on behalf of the renaissance of a country's political life in the absence of other profound transformations, as some have been inclined to do" (p. 51). As Bentivegna outlined, there are two opposing currents in motion concurrently, one capable of "challenging the monopoly of the political hierarchy" as Rheingold foresaw (1993, p. 14) and the other engaged in the "exercise of dominion and manipulation of citizenry" (Bentivegna, 2006, p. 50) such as traditional media owners and power elites seeking to colonise new media.

Thus, the public sphere is alive, but perhaps not well. It remains a desirable and even necessary feature for democratic societies to exist. But it exists at the intersection of opposing currents. New media provide new spaces with new opportunities for a public sphere. But, as Bentivegna (2006, p. 59) observes "the Internet will be a tool for democracy only when all those navigating it will allow it to be so". This leads to another key area of discussion.

Much of the focus of research in new media is on the media and the underlying technologies, but other questions need to be further investigated in relation to users and audiences (converging categories that some researchers now term *prosumers* or *produsers* (see <http://produsage.org>). Even if the Internet offers potentialities for new types of participation and engagement, are audiences ready? Russell Neuman (1991, p. 54) describes "the psychology of the mass audience" as "the semi-attentive, entertainment-orientated mind-set of day-to-day media behaviour". If this is the case, it suggests that people are not ready for the new types of engagement and communication that the Internet facilitates. Perhaps we are still in what Lévy described as an "apprenticeship" phase learning to use and deal with new media. Similarly, Henry Jenkins (2006, p. 243) asks "whether the public is ready to push for greater participation or willing to settle for the same old relations to mass media". Undoubtedly this is at least somewhat the case, evidenced by the low number of comments posted on many politicians' online sites and the profanities and digital graffiti submitted in response to a number of politicians' online communications. The potentialities of new media are at once about the capabilities of the technologies as well as the readiness, aptitude and motivations of users.

In a recent study, Xenos and May (2007) proposed that two models should be used to explore effects of new media on political and civic engagement – an "instrumental perspective" which looks at how users rationally access information available and a "psychological perspective" which focuses on user characteristics and how they interact with new media. The instrumental perspective identifies the Internet's ability to lower the cost of information and offer a broad array of information. Many optimists take the instrumental approach. Conversely, the psychological perspective proposes that political effects of new media are contingent on users' levels of sophistication, motives and social context. Researchers have found that less sophisticated users, perhaps not surprisingly, do not gain the potential benefits of greater access to and engagement in civic and political life. In the same vein, Shah, Kwak and Holbert (2001) found that although those who are politically interested and use the Internet for information purposes gain increased social capital, those using the Internet primarily for social-recreational purposes do not. These extensions of uses and gratifications thinking provide useful approaches for further research.

Digital enclaves and 'echo chambers'

A new concern has emerged as the Internet gains wider acceptance and use which further challenges the emergence of a new invigorated public sphere. Rather than exposing people to a diversified range of information and views and participating in discussion to reach informed decisions, some scholars are concerned that a majority of people use the Internet to congregate with like-minded people and gain reinforcement of their own views and prejudices. As early as 1984, Ithiel de Sola Pool argued that "the vast proliferation of information serves only special interests" (Pool, 1984). Bentivegna (2002, p. 57) says that "the absence of a centre and of well-established pathways permits the formulation of personalised navigation structures tailored to specific needs". In simple terms, people find what they are looking for and what they want. And, Joseph Klapper's (1960) findings on reinforcement of existing attitudes as a primary outcome of media communication and Leon Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957) have established that people most often select information and views that support their own.

While Howard Rheingold (1993) has been identified as an advocate of the Internet seeing it as "a road to revitalise an open and thorough debate among citizens who wish to nourish the roots of a democratic society" (p. 279) he also has critical views, warning that the Internet is creating "single-niche colonies of people who share intolerances" (p. 207), what Gitlin and Goode (2005) call "a multitude of public sphericules" in which bipartisan discourses occur without alternative viewpoints. Similarly, Henry Jenkins (2006, p. 207) citing LoPorto has warned that "we tend to seek out like-minded communities on the Web".

Following the 2004 US Presidential election and the defeat of John Kerry whose campaign used new media including blogs extensively, *Salon* technology columnist Andrew Leonard posed that the blogosphere had become an "echo chamber" bouncing back to small groups consonant views and mirrored images of themselves (cited in Jenkins, 2006, p. 237).

Is the Internet fracturing society into what De Sola Pool (1984) in *Technologies Without Boundaries* called "digital enclaves", warning that society may yet mourn the weakening of national popular culture and mass homogenised unity? Are new media serving to further fragment and divide society into small communities of self-interest which could have a polarising effect on societies? These are major questions to be asked and further researched as, while there is evidence of these negative effects, there are also signs of positive change and benefits. Habermas (2006, p. 422) and Dalton (2006) note that the Internet promotes a wide range of issues and they comment that overlap of issue publics may serve to counter trends of fragmentation. People seldom belong to one specialist issue virtual community thus, while they are exposed to narrow views in some Internet communities, they gain broader exposure as they enter other 'conversations' and 'communities'. This view is also partly supported by research showing that a high proportion of specialist group discussion on the Internet is 'off topic' (Jankowski, 2002) – i.e. participants discuss a range of issues even when the forum is designed around a specific topic or theme.

The questions and the issues raised in this study warrant further research for which this investigation provides examples of contemporary political communication practice. In future research, it appears to be time to drop the term 'new media'. While a useful shorthand term for a range of media that do not fit into the traditional media types of press, radio or television, the Internet, first established with interactive features including newsgroups in 1969, and the Web developed with the first browser in 1991, are now approaching the end of their third and second decades respectively. It is time to recognise the Internet as a mainstream media type. Just as news, current affairs, features, documentaries, talk-back and drama are media genre developed in press, radio and television, Web sites, blogs and social network utilities such as MySpace, YouTube and Facebook are media genre peculiar to the Internet.

References

- Australian Communications and Media Authority (2007, December). Media and communications in Australian families 2007: Report of the Media and Society Research Project, Canberra.
- Bentivegna, S. (2002). Politics and new media. In L. Lievrouw & S. Livingstone (Eds.), *The handbook of new media* (pp.50-61). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bryant, J., & Zillman, D. (2002). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cole, J. (2000). Surveying the digital future. Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles Center for Communication Policy.
- Crabb, A. (2007). The YouTube Election, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 July, p. 23.
- Curran, J. (2002). *Media and power*. London: Routledge.
- Dalton, R. (2006). Citizen politics. Washington DC: CQ Press, a division of Congressional Quarterly.
- Danielian, L., & Reese, S. (1989). A closer look at intermedia influences on agenda setting: The cocaine issue of 1986. In P. Shoemaker (ed.), *Communication campaigns about drugs: Government, media and the public* (pp. 47-66). Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Davies, A. (2007). Young voters caught hook, online and sinker, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23-24 June, World, p. 21.
- DiMaggio, P., Hargittai, W., Neuman, W., & Robinson, J. (2001). Social implications of the Internet. *Annual Reviews of Sociology*, 27, 307-336.
- Fallows, J. (2000). Internet illusions, *New York Times Book Review*, 16 November, pp. 28-31.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fidler, R. 1997). *Mediamorphosis: Understanding new media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Gauntlett, D. (2002). *Media, gender & identity*. London: Routledge.
- Gieber, W. (1964). News is what newspapermen make it. In L. Dexter & D. White (Eds.), *People, society and mass communications*. New York: Free Press.
- Grossberg, L., Wartella, E., Whitney, D., & Wise, M. (2006). *Media making: Mass media in a popular culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge: Polity. (Original work published 1962)
- Habermas, (2006). Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research, *Communication Theory*, Vol. 16, No. 4, November, 411-26.
- Hill, K., & Hughes, J. (1998). *Cyberpolitics: Citizen activism in the age of the internet*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine, R., & Newbold, C. (1998). *Mass communication research methods*. London: Macmillan.
- Howard, P. & Jones, S. (Eds.). (2004). *Society online: The internet in context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Howley, K. (2007). Community media and the public sphere. In E. Devereaux, *Media Studies* (pp 342-60), London: Sage Publications.
- Jankowski, N. (2002). Creating community with media: History, theories and scientific investigations. In L. Lievrouw & S. Livingstone, *The Handbook of New Media* (pp. 34-49), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Klapper, J. (1960). *The effects of mass communication*. New York: Free Press.
- Kraut, R., Patterson, M., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Muckophadhyay, T., & Sherlis, W. (1998). Internet paradox: A social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being? *American Psychologist*, 53, 1011-1031.
- Margolis, M. (1996). Electioneering in cyberspace: parties, candidates and interest groups and the 1996 presidential race in the Internet. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco.
- Margolis, M., & Resnick, D. (2000). *Politics as usual: The cyberspace 'revolution'*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Markle Foundation. (1997). *The state of 'electronically enhanced democracy: A survey of the Internet*. October.
- McChesney, R. (1996). The internet and US communication policy-making in historical and critical perspective, *Journal of Communication*, 46: 98-124.
- McChesney, R. (2000). *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times* (Rev. ed.). New York: New Press.

- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1976). Structuring the unseen environment. *Journal of Communication*, 26, 18-22.
- McKenna, K., & Bargh, J. (1999). Causes and consequences of social interaction on the Internet: A conceptual framework. *Media Psychology*, 1, 249-269.
- Media Monitors (2008). E-Election Media Analysis Report. Sydney.
- Mundorf, N., & Laird, K. (2002). Social and psychological effects of information technologies and other interactive media. In J. Bryant & D. Zillman, *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 583-602). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Neuendorf, K. (2002). *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Neuman, W. (1991). *The future of the mass audience*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Neuman, W. (1997). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Newbold, C., Boyd-Barrett, O., & Van Den Bulck, H. (2002). *The media book*. London: Arnold (Hodder Headline).
- Novak, T., & Hoffman, D. (1998). Bridging the digital divide: The impact of race on computer access and internet use. Project 2000, Vanderbilt University. Retrieved January 2, 2006 from http://www.vanderbilt.edu/News/register/April20_98/vr13.html
- Paine, K. (2007). Who's winning the YouTube video Presidential primary rate in New Hampshire, *The Measurement Standard*, Vol. 6, No 8, December. Retrieved December 14, 2007 from <http://www.themeasurementstandard.com/issue/12-1-07/youtubevideos12-1-07.asp>
- Pool, I. de Sola. (1983). *Technologies of Freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.
- Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 61(1), 65-78.
- Putnam, R. (2000.) *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of America community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rheingold, H. (1993). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (1998). *Analysing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (2005). *Analysing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Russell Neuman, W. (1991). *The future of the mass audience*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Schudson, M. (2000). The sociology of news production revisited (again). In J. Curran & M. Gurevitch (Eds.), *Mass media and society* (3rd ed., pp. 175-200), London: Arnold, Hodder Headline.
- Scoble, R., & Israel, S. (2006). *Naked conversations*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Severin, W., & Tankard, J. (2006). *Communication theories: Origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Shah, D., Kwak, N., & Holbert, R. (2001). Connecting and disconnecting with civic life: Patterns of Internet use and the production of social capital, *Political Communication*, 18, 141-62.
- Shoemaker, P. & Reese, S. (1996). *Mediating the message: theories of influences on mass media content*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Sparks, G. (2006). *Media effects research: A basic overview* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Van den Daele, W., & Neidhardt, F. (1996). Regier durch diskussion – über versuche mit argumenten politik zu machen [Government by discussion: On attempts to do politics with the help of arguments]. In W. van den Daele & F. Neidhardt (Eds.), *Kommunikation und entscheidung* (pp. 9-50). Berlin, Germany: WZB Yearbook, Rainer Bohn Verlag.
- Van Dijk, J. (1998). *The network society: Social aspects of new media* (L. Spoorberg, Trans.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wellman, B., & Haythornthwaite, C. (Eds.). (2002). *The Internet in everyday life*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- White, D. (1950). The gatekeeper: A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 27, 383-390. Reprinted in L. Dexter & D. White (Eds.), (1964), *People, society and mass communications*. New York: Free Press.
- Xenos, M., & Moy, P. (2007). Direct and differential effects of the Internet on political and civic engagement, *Journal of Communication*, Vol 57, No. 4 (December), 704-18.

Appendix A.

List of politicians researched

Appendix B.

List of political party sites researched

Appendix C.

Research procedures for online content analysis

Research procedures

The following research procedures were provided in a written brief and followed by researchers involved in the project.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

1. Go to <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/mi-alpha.asp> (list of MPs alphabetically)
2. Click on each Member one at a time to access their Parliament House page
3. Search the page to identify any links to 'personal Web pages'
4. Go to personal Web page if one
5. Search the personal Web page for any references and links to MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, etc;
6. Follow the links to validate (i.e. go to each linked new media);
7. Take a screen shot of each new media found (i.e. hold down the 'Control' and 'Print Screen' keys on your keyboard and then 'Paste' the screen image into a PowerPoint slide with one screen shot per slide (with a separator slide in which the Member's/Senator's name is typed);
8. Score "1" for each type of new media found in the scoring sheet;
9. If no personal Web page is found on the APH site for a Member, or if there are no new media linked from the Member's personal Web page, as a final check search for the Member by name in Google to identify any new media used as defined above;
10. Move to Stage 2 (as below)
11. Inside each form of new media found for each Member, analyse the content answering the following questions in the analysis sheet provided:
 - Are the issues discussed mainly (a) international/global issues (eg. global warming/climate change, globalisation); (b) national issues; or (c) local electorate issues;
 - What are the main subjects discussed (eg. interest rates, economic management overall, Work Choices, global warming, public transport, roads, health and hospitals, telecommunications (Telstra, broadband, etc), education, addressing poverty and underprivileged, social welfare (eg. welfare benefits); child care, other?
 - How would you describe the medium in terms of its size and comprehensiveness: (a) basic - single page/screen; (b) fairly comprehensive - multiple page/long scrolling page; (c) very comprehensive – sophisticated design, colourful, multiple types of information?
 - How would you describe the medium in terms of its overall theme: (a) mainly Party political messages (eg. Party speeches, policy documents, links to Howard or Kevin07, flags, etc); (b) mainly local issues discussion; (c) mainly self-promotion; (d) mainly knocking the opposition party or candidate?
 - What is the date of the last posting or update if any date can be found?
 - How would you describe the medium in terms of its 'engagement', defined as two-way communication – i.e. allowing and/or encouraging people to contribute, comment or ask questions: (a) Very interactive with multiple input from people posted/displayed; (b) Fairly interactive with links/buttons inviting people to comment, ask questions or leave messages; (c) Very little interactivity/engagement; or (d) completely one-way with no evidence of any comment or input other than the author?
 - How many 'voices' are there speaking in the site apart from the Member/Senator (eg. comments, messages, or postings from other people)?

SENATE:

1. Repeat the above steps for each Senator going to <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/homepages/index.asp> (List of Senators alphabetically)

Appendix D.

Methodology

mainstream media content analysis



CARMA International is a global research firm specialising in Computer Aided Research and Media Analysis (of which its name is an abbreviation). The company, established in Washington DC in 1984 and with offices in the USA, UK, Europe, Japan, Asia Pacific headquartered in Australia, India and South America, developed proprietary software for media content analysis (primarily quantitative) and is recognised as a world leader in this field of research.

In Australia and Asia Pacific, the exclusive franchise of CARMA International is owned and operated by Media Monitors, Australia's leading media monitoring and analysis company.

The CARMA[®] system utilises an Oracle database (widely recognised as the most powerful and robust database available) with customised data entry screens, menus and functions for conducting media content analysis. The CARMA[®] proprietary database also includes media circulation and audience data for each country.

CARMA[®] provides fields for media analysts to enter a range of coding data including:

- Date;
- Headline;
- Media name;
- Media type (newspaper, magazine, radio, TV, online and a breakdown by international, national, metropolitan, suburban, regional and rural);
- Article type (news, feature, editorial, opinion column, letter to the editor);
- Article prominence (eg headline mention, first paragraph, prominent mention, etc);
- Issues categories and issues (categories/classifications assigned by coders);
- Messages (positive and negative);
- Sources quoted;
- Byline;
- Photos or illustrations; and
- Tone (including key word usage from a coding list).

Methodology

A list of issues categories and issues (categories/classifications), messages and sources to be analysed (the Coding List) is set up *a priori* in the CARMA[®] system before content analysis is undertaken. Issues and messages are categorised by key words and phrases and sources by names or title descriptions set up in the Coding List.

The CARMA[®] system captures and analyses mainly *quantitative* content analysis data including the volume, frequency and type of reporting of each issue category and issue, message, source and media. The system can also calculate the total audience reached by various articles from circulation and audience ratings data. CARMA[®] also allows collection and processing of some *qualitative* data such as leading messages and calculates an average **Favourability Rating** of articles, media and sources based on a total cumulative score of coding data. The method of calculating the CARMA[®] Favourability Rating is outlined on the next page. This *multivariate* rating is more sophisticated than a simple positive/negative/neutral categorisation. This is particularly relevant where articles contain a mixture of positive, negative and sometimes neutral content.

CALCULATION OF FAVOURABILITY RATINGS USING CARMA[®]

Each article begins at **5.0** on the scale of 1 to 10 (ie. neutral).

1. For PROMINENCE of mention (add up to maximum of 2 points):

- a. HEADLINE mention of name – add 0.5 if favourable; subtract 0.5 if unfavourable;
- b. PRIORITY/TARGET MEDIA – if the article is in a high circulation or target media, add 0.5 if the article favourable; subtract 0.5 if unfavourable;
- c. PROMINENCE – if the mention is prominent taking account of (i) page number (eg. pages 1,2,3, A1, A2, etc); (ii) size or length of the article (medium to large); and (iii) the subject has more than a passing mention; add 0.5 if favourable; subtract 0.5 if unfavourable;
- d. PHOTO or LOGO – if there is a photo or logo of or related to the subject, add 0.5 if the article is favourable, or subtract 0.5 if unfavourable;

2. For favourable or unfavourable SOURCES, add or subtract up to a maximum of one point (1.0) as follows:

- a. ONLY A FAVOURABLE SOURCE quoted – add 1.0;
- b. ONLY AN UNFAVOURABLE SOURCE quoted – subtract 1.0;
- c. EQUAL NUMBER OF FAVOURABLE & UNFAVOURABLE SOURCES – no change;
- d. MORE FAVOURABLE THAN UNFAVOURABLE SOURCES quoted – add 0.5;
- e. MORE UNFAVOURABLE THAN FAVOURABLE SOURCES quoted – subtract 0.5;

3. For favourable or unfavourable MESSAGES, add or subtract up to a maximum of one point (1.0) as follows:

- a. ONLY POSITIVE MESSAGES in an article – add 1.0;
- b. ONLY NEGATIVE MESSAGES in an article – subtract 1.0;
- c. EQUAL NUMBER OF POSITIVE & NEGATIVE MESSAGES – no change;
- d. MORE POSITIVE THAN NEGATIVE MESSAGES in an article (or more prominent) – add 0.5;
- e. MORE NEGATIVE THAN POSITIVE MESSAGES in an article (or more prominent) – subtract 0.5;

4. For the OVERALL TONE of an article, add or subtract to a maximum of one point (1.0) as follows:

- a. If the article is substantially POSITIVE overall in tone and angle with positive messages or content in addition to those already counted, add 1.0;
- b. If the article is substantially NEGATIVE overall in tone and angle with negative messages or content in addition to that already counted, subtract 1.0;
- c. If the article has NO OTHER POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE characteristics beyond those already counted – no change.

The Favourability Rating is then **totalled and scaled out of 100** in the CARMA[®] system.