

Participating Online: The Internet and its Role in Political Participatory Behaviour in the Context of the New Zealand General Election 2008

A comparative discussion of young people's online
behaviour during the New Zealand General Election
2008

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Abstract

Recent developments in Internet technology have opened up new doors for political campaigning and related news information with video and social networking applications. These have created new spaces that the voting public can politically participate in. This study explores the extent to which such participation takes place, in order to contribute to the wider question of whether changes in the media can rejuvenate a growing apathetic electorate that has become increasingly isolated from the more traditional methods of political participation (Putnam 2000). There are now many unanswered questions regarding how this new technology will play a role in influencing voter preferences and behaviour compared to other forms of traditional mass media. The exponential growth of Internet technology and its use means that the majority of literature written on the subject becomes time-bound leaving large gaps of research and analysis that needs to be done. This thesis examined the opportunities made available for political campaigning by the Internet and how widening political knowledge can ultimately influence Internet consumers at the voting booth. The research undertaken was a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis using participatory groups in a controlled environment. Participants consumed different forms of mass media and any significant changes in preferences and behaviour was noted. The overall hypothesis of this thesis is that the Internet does have an effect on potential voters by providing a wider and more in-depth look at politics that broadens political knowledge, leading to greater political participation.

Chapter One

Introduction: What is taking place online in the realm of New Zealand politics and how could this affect political participation?

1.1 Introduction

On February 20th 2008, New Zealand's then Prime Minister Helen Clark posted a video of herself on YouTube outlining her party's achievements to date. This was not the typical video clip of her speaking at a Labour Party conference or in the House of Representatives; instead she was directly addressing the Internet community as an important group of potential voters. The personal nature of the way the Prime Minister stared directly into the camera without the usual mediated presence of television media definitively acknowledged the Internet's strengthening presence as a major media player in New Zealand post-modern political campaigning.

It would be unfair to say that the Internet established itself in this role only in the 2008 General Election, when it did play a smaller but nonetheless vital informative role in the 2005 General Election. The two major political parties, Labour and National, had their own party websites during the 2005 campaign, but Act and the Greens actually allowed for interaction online among members and non-members (Rudd & Hayward, 2006:334). The development of social networking sites (SNSs)¹ post-2005, for example YouTube and Facebook, has created a wider public space for political participation and aggregation of information for election campaigns (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008).

¹ Social networking sites (SNSs) are defined by Boyd and Ellison "as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or a semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others in the system" (2008:211)

But since 2005, New Zealand has witnessed a huge rise in the accessibility of computer technology in terms of availability and affordability, in particular the growing use of broadband technology (Bell et al., 2008). In the World Internet Project: Internet in New Zealand report, a survey by AUT University of 1430 people, 78 percent of those surveyed were Internet users and 66 percent of them had a broadband connection in their household (Bell et al., 2008). These growing trends in technology are providing fertile ground for the Internet to one day rival traditional media as a provider of political information and a forum for large debates.

A central reason as to why the examination of the Internet as a key political communication space is important is due to the decline in traditional methods of political participation. Over the last half a century, New Zealand has witnessed a steady decline in age-eligible voter turnout (Vowles, 2004a). As well as voter turnout, New Zealand is also experiencing a decline in civic engagement which includes party membership, campaign support or campaigning for a party, social movements and political donations (Vowles, 2004a:1). The age demographic which has the highest level of low voter turnout is the 18-24 group. This age bracket is also the least likely out of all to be enrolled, with one in four still not enrolled two months before the 2008 General Election (Electoral Commission, 2008a). There are several voting behavioural theories that attempt to explain this decrease in traditional political activities, but the key point here is that there is a strong message being sent by younger generations that traditional methods of political participation are becoming increasingly irrelevant to them. Internet usage is more prevalent amongst younger people (Bell et al, 2008) signalling a change in the way people are communicating with each other. If the traditional political establishment wants to prevent further decline in political participation amongst future generations, it needs to examine how the Internet can be used as a political

communication tool and help reinforce traditional political participation, more importantly voting.

There are several reasons why 2008 is the year that New Zealand witnessed a dramatic shift in media consumption from the more traditional outlets of television and print towards the Internet.

Recent technological developments in the Internet, in particular social networking sites, and greater access to it, has helped to develop an individualised form of communication via email and social networking that complements the form of post-modern political campaigning. Political campaigning in this research refers to “the activity of parties attempting to engage with potential voters” (Rudd & Hayward in Miller, 2006:327). Several theorists argue that New Zealand has undergone three distinct shifts in political campaigning: pre-modern, modern and post-modern (Norris, 2000; Rudd & Hayward in Miller, 2006). The underlying idea is that the development of new technology has led to changes in communication in political campaigning from grassroots organisation, door knocking and town hall meetings to the professionalised political campaigns of branding, focus groups and constant polling all run by the campaign wing of the political party (Norris, 2000). A feature of the post-modern campaign is the use of relatively new technology, for example, telecommunications and the Internet (Rudd & Hayward in Miller, 2006:329). Another feature of post-modern campaigning is that of the ‘permanent’ campaign period; a constant state of campaigning from one election to the next (Rudd & Hayward in Miller, 2006:327). A development of the permanent campaign is the involvement of public relations and communications consultants, conducting a centralised campaign message targeted simultaneously towards the general public (Rudd & Hayward in Miller, 2006:329).

Another reason as to why we have witnessed a shift in the public's consumption of media is the growing popularity of SNSs like Facebook, MySpace and Bebo that have efficiently joined communities of thousands of New Zealanders together, often because they have attended the same schools or are living overseas, crossing boundaries of time and distance. These networks have been successful in the way they allow people to construct their self-identity through profiles and groups (Giddens, 1991 in Loader, 2007:2) in utilising audio and video media sharing as a way to carve out a definition for themselves. Internet usage in New Zealand has been found in various studies to be 'age-graded'; younger generations are more likely to use the Internet and create their own content (Bell et al, 2008). In the last decade, access to the Internet, and particularly, broadband technology in households has grown rapidly. In March 2008, there were over 1.5 million internet users in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2008b). People are now beginning to live a portion of their lives online, for example, the extensive use of emailing. A survey by Auckland University for the World Internet Report, found that 77 percent of Internet users check their emails every day (2008:15). The same survey found that 61 percent of Internet users conduct their everyday business online (Bell et al, 2008:15). The higher the household income, the greater the likelihood for that household, have access to broadband Internet (Bell et al, 2008). The level of academic achievement also plays a correlative role in higher levels of Internet access and usage (Goodwin et al, 2009 in Cardoso et al, forthcoming).

More than 88 percent of New Zealanders who have access to the Internet use SNSs, and 48 percent of them are spending up to four hours a week on average on their main social networking profile (Nielsen, 2008a). The same percentage, who are using SNSs engaging with consumer generated media content (CGM) such as photos, links and videos (Nielsen,

2008b). These active consumers (78 percent) are likely to evolve into using more advanced CGM activities such as editing and commenting on content and creating their own content, most popularly (76 percent) uploading video and audio (Nielsen, 2008b). This exponential growth and transfer of activity into the online social networking sphere, especially amongst the young, wealthy and well-educated has encouraged post-modern political campaigning to readjust itself into the online world and communicate through it.

SNSs in the 2008 New Zealand General Election were exploited by political parties and media organisations for their ability to provide avenues for CGM and instant communication to a large number of people. This trend is already well-established overseas, particularly in the USA, where, for example, CNN and YouTube collaborated for the Democratic Primaries 2008 debates in the United States. Television New Zealand (TVNZ) followed the American format model for integrating popular online video network YouTube in one of the televised leaders' debates (Dominion Post, 07/07/2008). TVNZ joined up with YouTube to set up a website where New Zealanders could submit their video questions to the two major party leaders, Helen Clark and John Key. Video questions were selected from those submitted and were put to the leaders, shown on a giant television screen in front of the cameras and the live studio audience. This was an important moment that acknowledged SNSs as a major communicator by the traditional media in regards to political coverage of general elections.

Political blogging is a relatively new form of discussion that has grown with the development of the Internet, becoming a small but important part of the post-modern campaign. Over the last five years in particular, political blogging has been adopted by several politicians as an effective way to communicate to supporters and Internet users browsing for political information. Political blogging has been adopted by mainstream media journalists as well as

political activists and citizens. Blogging has been labelled by some as the fifth estate (Cooper, 2006), holding journalists accountable for the quality of their news stories. Bloggers, like journalists, can set the agenda of news stories. However, they do not have to meet the same deadlines as journalists and therefore can go into greater detail, particularly in policy debates, than their journalistic counterparts. It is important to note that this paper does not put bloggers and journalists in the same professional category; there is a notable difference between these two providers of information. As Cooper puts it, “as an alternative media, these blog posts are not links in a value chain including our mainstream media - as critical posts would be - but instead a bypass to that chain, or a supplement to that chain” (2006:253). This is because blogs, including reputable political ones, include personal responses to the political issues of the day (Cooper, 2006:253) offering ‘socioemotional’ significance to the reader and the verification of the blogger’s own political identity.

Political blogs have become an alternative source of information for voters and Internet users from mainstream media news. Often thorough in detail and in their use of statistical evidence, political blogs have become an important resource of information for political junkies, journalists, and even those who reside inside the Beehive (Matthews, February 16, 2008). Their strength lies not necessarily with their audience numbers but with their penchant for policy detail. The level of political debate and accountability amongst those in the blogosphere has the potential to impact upon party policy itself, as evidenced by NoRightTurn’s blogger Idiot/Savant and Dave from Big News whose posts about how the Maori Electoral Option should be entrenched with the seats were adopted by the Maori Party into its bill for amendment to the Electoral Act (NoRightTurn, accessed on 22/05/2009).

Political blogs have risen rapidly to prominence since they arrived less than 10 years ago. David Farrar's Kiwiblog.co.nz, one of the most popularly read political blogs, receives approximately 25,000 page views per day (TV3 News, accessed on 7/09/2008). They played a significant role in the 2008 General Election in breaking news, heralding discussion on policy (for example NoRightTurn and the Electorate Amendment Bill), researching campaign policies and noting details that journalists may have missed. The important point to make here is that political blogs are unable to rival the mainstream media in terms of audience reach but when it comes to policy and debate, especially among key decision-makers, political blogs from reputable bloggers are making headways into policy making and alternative detailed policy discussion.

Blogging has become so prolific in the political domain that New Zealand's major newspapers, *The Press*, *Christchurch*, *The New Zealand Herald* and the *Dominion Post*, have all added the task of blogger to their Parliamentary Press Gallery journalists' work (Matthews, 2008). These journalists now have ability to go into greater detail and depth on political issues through their blogs on their newspapers' websites. We are witnessing a shift in the relationship between political journalists and their audience. Heavyweight political journalists such as Colin Espiner (Fairfax) and Audrey Young (The New Zealand Herald) are now expected by their employers to have a blog that caters to a more politically astute niche of news consumers.

Journalists are also not the only ones who are changing the way they communicate. After witnessing the Obama Internet phenomenon, several New Zealand politicians are blogging, vlogging (video blogging), Twittering and constantly updating their Facebook status. New Zealand is witnessing multi-platform communication from its politicians who are slowly

beginning to recognise the fragmentation of their audience, partly as a result of these diverse social networking tools. For example, Rodney Hide from ACT and Russel Norman from the Greens both contribute to their own blogs as well as other Members of Parliament and those campaigning to be one. With the number of blogs dedicated to New Zealand politics growing over the past few years, the 2008 General Election featured an array of alternative political information provided by blogs on candidates' websites, journalists and citizens.

Another feature of the 2008 General Election, the way in which the campaign was conducted, inadvertently helped shift some of the campaign out of the mainstream media space and on to the Internet. The Electoral Finance Act 2007, introduced by the previous Labour Government, sought to restrict funding by non-party actors by setting an overall spending limit of \$120,000 per person and forcing those spending over \$12,000 to register with the Electoral Commission and appoint a financial agent (Vowles, 2008:2). Because of the low cost involved with sending emails, blogging and maintaining a fairly professionalised website, the financial incentive for online campaigning was greater than during previous elections. The Internet also has the advantage of anonymity if the user wishes to use a pseudonym in distributing party information, thus getting around the strict regulations of the Electoral Finance Act. With the growth of SNSs such as Facebook and YouTube, politicians found an expedient disseminator of information at a low cost.

Overseas developments in political campaigning with former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Internet electoral campaign called '*Kevin07*' and more recently, the revolutionary methods of online campaigning used by President Obama's campaign organisation in 2008, fusing traditional grassroots campaigning methods with online communication tools, set the stage for New Zealand's election to follow similar online trends.

Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in his electoral campaign in Australia 2007 utilised his MySpace profile page to create a fan following, making his own party website accessible to mobile phones and provided SMS alerts (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008). Barack Obama's presidential campaign in the US in 2008 created a network called My.BarackObama.com that connected Facebook supporters of Barack Obama and publicly profiled them to other members, including displaying their own levels of campaign activity (Facebook, 2008). Barack Obama's grassroots organisation online during the 2008 Presidential campaign showed successful aggregation of voters using the latest in social networking technology.

1.2 How could these new developments affect political participation?

The new social networking developments within the Internet changed the existing public space for political campaigning for the 2008 General Election in New Zealand, not only as a disseminator of information for the official campaign period but throughout the 'permanent' campaign period, the ongoing political campaign between elections (Rudd & Hayward in Miller, 2006:329). It is important to address in any research the potential of this new media space and how it is presently being used but also acknowledge the overall objectives by the political parties using it as a campaign tool. Ultimately, the goal for political parties in using the Internet for political campaigning is to reach their supporters, provide information to voters and control message on their terms as well as maximise their votes (Downs 1957:100) and this is achievable through making more information about themselves and their policies available to potential voters. Political parties, by expanding their sphere of campaigning beyond television, print, radio and on to the Internet are attempting to aggregate more votes through reaching a wider audience. A key question arises as to how this new form of political campaigning utilising SNSs technology will affect voting and political participatory

behaviour, in particular, the predominant youth demographic who are the most prolific SNSs users.

Various political participation theories will be explored in this thesis that attempt to examine why we are witnessing a steady decline in voter turnout in New Zealand and in civic engagement in general (Vowles, 2004a). There are questions about whether we are witnessing a decline in political efficacy (an individual's own understanding and participation in politics (Catt, 2006:569)) as a result of a basket of factors or whether we are witnessing the rise of a new kind of sophisticated citizen (Dalton, 2002). Political scientists such as Putnam argue that the post-1964 generations are becoming increasingly disconnected, replacing strong bonding social capital (for example, being actively involved in local community) with weaker bridging social capital, that require less of individuals (2000:185). Are we seeing the decline of traditional political participation, for example, town hall meetings and voting, or are these methods of participation outdated amongst younger generations who have adopted a new set of post-material values and take their political cues from single issues rather than wider social cues such as party membership (Dalton 2002:281)?

The issue that this thesis explores is whether political campaigning on the Internet related to the 2008 General Election in New Zealand influenced in any way voter behaviour. In particular, how did the Internet weigh up against other traditional media like television and print in influencing voter preferences when it comes to issues, policies and the portrayal of leaders? What role did political parties themselves see the Internet having as a communicative tool and possibly having a vote translatable function?

These recent changes in technology have had implications for previous literature on the subject of the Internet's influence as a major media player and on voting behaviour. Literature published before 2005, although relevant in discussion, has become outdated due to the subsequent development of social networking applications (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008:1). Ongoing study in this field is necessary because there is very little academic work available on how these new Internet phenomena impact on political campaigning, especially in New Zealand. As written previously, the New Zealand 2008 General Election was the first election in New Zealand where the public witnessed a significant use of SNSs in campaigning. The 2008 election campaign also saw an exponential growth of political news content made available online, the result of which (including the increased accessibility to the Internet) led to a larger level of public interaction taking place on blogs, forums and the comment sections of websites. It was important that some degree of analysis and study was undertaken during the 2008 election year to monitor the evolving nature of the Internet and its political playing field. It is similarly important to move beyond discussing the nature of the Internet itself and directly look at how people, in particular young people, are using the Internet to access political information and communicate about politics with others. The information and analysis that will be provided in this thesis will be valuable in the study of political campaigning and voting behaviour.

The direction of this thesis was to examine and analyse what had taken place in terms of the developments of political campaigning on the Internet and how it may have influenced voting behaviour compared to the other major media of television and print. In the second chapter, a review is undertaken on academic work discussing the democratic potential of the Internet during election campaigning and the previous experience of television and its impact on elections as a media comparison. The fourth chapter explains a participatory group

experiment that attempts to determine whether there is any evidence of correlation between consumption of political information from the Internet and changes in voting behaviour and issue preferences. Exposure to political information enhances citizens' political knowledge, which is an important predictor of voter turnout (Prior 2005:578). If the results of the participatory group work find a correlation between accessing political news on the Internet and changes in the participants' political knowledge, this has wider implications for examining methods to re-engage young people in institutional/formal politics.

1.3 Arrival of Social Networking Sites

Facebook recently has become the centre of a significant amount of political campaigning and recruitment in New Zealand due to its expanding membership of 300,000 New Zealand network members (23/04/08). Most New Zealand political party leaders have their own support group and allow members to join as 'fans'. John Key's supporters' page had over 8,137 supporters on the eve of the 2008 General Election. His profile page contained photo albums of the campaign trail, posted speeches and videos uploaded from YouTube. The increasing popularity of social networks like Facebook has forced politicians to expand their media profiles in order to maximise their reach to potential voters, especially younger voters who make up a huge part of the social network demographic (Bell et al., 2008). Creating fan sites like the ones on Facebook where politicians can control what information is being projected to members is also beneficial for grooming the party and politician's image, as it is easy to update and load information (Leighley 2004:193). During the 2008 General Election, over 50 percent of Labour Party candidates had a Facebook page and 40 percent of National candidates (Kean, 2008).

Video-sharing websites such as YouTube also pose risks for politicians in participating in such spaces by providing video evidence that can hold them accountable for their policy positions. Since both YouTube and Facebook are relatively new to the Internet, this has meant that the New Zealand 2008 General Election was the first election where these technologies potentially played a significant role during campaigning.

YouTube is an application that can also connect people from all over the world. Developed in 2005, YouTube allows members to upload video clips on to the network for viewing access (Australian Centre for Public Communication 2007:3). Over the last three years, YouTube has become an enormous video-based social network in the number of viewers it can attract for single video clips alone. A video clip featuring ‘Obama Girl’ singing in support of the Presidential Primaries Democratic contender Barack Obama generated over 20 million viewings in the first few months of its posting on YouTube (Australian Centre for Public Communication 2007:2).

Labour, National and the Green Parties in New Zealand have recognised the popularity of viewing video clips on YouTube and have each created their own channels where they post debates, speeches or informal ‘one on ones’ specifically aimed at New Zealand YouTube consumers. The Labour Party had over 2,600 channel views and the National Party over 10,000 views within a few months of setting up their channels (<http://www.youtube.com/user/NZgovt> and <http://www.youtube.com/user/NZNats>, both accessed on 14/04/2008). The popularity of one party’s social networking efforts compared to a rival can potentially be indicative of the electoral result that party will experience. The National Party succeeded in garnering the most supporters for its leader’s fan page and the most views for its videos. As well as being successful online, the National Party performed

the best on election night, winning the largest share of the party vote since the introduction of the MMP electoral system.

1.4 Overseas examples of political campaigning online

2008 was an important year for political campaigning on the Internet with the American presidential election taking place a week before the New Zealand General Election. In both countries, this would be the first election that would make use of all the SNSs and their social media tools. In many ways, the election campaign that Democratic Party candidate Barack Obama ran provided moments of inspiration that were echoed by New Zealand politicians, not just in the television debates, but more importantly, in the area of online campaigning. Barack Obama's campaign set the bar for using SNSs and mobile technology in order to spread a policy message and sign up new voters. His YouTube channel contained over 2,000 videos and was viewed over 94 million times (Podcasting News, 2008). Successful utilisation of SNSs in a campaign involves being consistent with uploading CGM content, in good quality and in large amounts, which is what Barack Obama's campaign achieved with his YouTube channel. He also made use of podcasting, MySpace, Flickr, Digg, Twitter and Facebook (Podcasting News, 2008). The key to Obama's success in his digital campaign was that he controlled his message by flooding the new media space with his own campaign's content. The campaign of his opponent, John McCain, spent less time feeding information and video content onto the Internet and therefore, anti-McCain viral content outnumbered the pro-McCain content in search engines results (Podcasting News, 2008). Aspects of Barack Obama's successful digital campaign strategy will no doubt be replicated by New Zealand political parties and politicians in the 2011 General Election as it was too late in New Zealand for the lessons of the strategy to be adopted in the 2008 election only a few weeks later.

In examining overseas examples that provide a digital strategy template for New Zealand politicians to replicate in their own election campaigning, it is also valuable to look across the Tasman to Australia to observe any similarities or precedents with its 2007 General Election. Australia's 2007 General Election was described by some as the "YouTube election", with the former Prime Minister John Howard posting videos on climate change and his opponent Kevin Rudd utilising the MySpace network to post information and blogs (Australian Centre for Public Communication 2007:2). Kevin Rudd's MySpace site was a successful use of a SNS; he had over 22,296 'friends' as well as his own *Kevin07* website which had a version built for mobile phone access and SMS alerts (Australian Centre for Public Communication 2007:7). Rudd utilised the Internet for his campaign by going a step further than just top-to-bottom dissemination of information, allowing more interactivity on his site through enabling comment posting. Part of the success of his Internet campaign was its ability to recognise the kind of engagement that the new developments of the Internet provided and the demographic segments that are utilising them. Without the successful use of SNSs by Kevin Rudd or Barack Obama, New Zealand politicians would have likely embraced SNSs less than they did in the 2008 General Election.

Traditional political activities such as town hall meetings and the consumption of traditional media of television and newspapers are no longer capturing the attention of today's youth culture (Loader 2007:1). Putnam despairs at the news and political information gap between the younger generations (born after 1964) and the "baby boomers", partly blaming the role of television for contributing to the decline of social capital (Putnam 2000). The growing fascination of the younger generations with SNSs like MySpace have provided a new outlet that Kevin Rudd and other politicians are using in an attempt to reconnect a previously

isolated younger audience, that has moved away from traditional participation methods and are online.

Nearly all of the New Zealand political parties posted videos on their party's websites in late 2007 to early 2008, providing information on policies and recent keynote speeches. During the 2008 campaign the National Party had a similar website design to the Kevin07 website with links to other websites for senior citizens, overseas New Zealanders and other related John Key fan sites (<http://www.national.org.nz>, accessed on 14/04/08). Because of what took place overseas in 2007-2008 in Australia and the United States in their digital political campaigns, we will continue to see new features adopted and revised by New Zealand political parties to their level of comfort. Many parties still appear apprehensive in their use of new Internet technology especially in the case of viral videos and content where they run the risk of losing control of the overall message of their campaign if they do not have the staff or the time to create their own at a constant pace. Nonetheless, the 2008 General Election in New Zealand was where online New Zealanders witnessed the adoption of new Internet application tools put to use in political campaigning by the parties.

1.5 The recent decline of voter turnout in Western Democracies

This research discusses current voting behaviour trends in order to attempt to understand what exactly is taking place amongst voters, with young people in particular, and examine the decline in traditional political participation in New Zealand. It is important to understand what is happening to people's political participation before theorising the effects that the Internet will have on it and discussing future possibilities in online campaigning and participation. Voting behaviour will be theoretically examined in two parts: firstly, by looking into theories that attempt to explain the decline of civic engagement in Western

democracies and secondly, exploring theories that attempt to explain the information process behind political participation, especially the act of voting. The importance of research into how the Internet can reinvigorate traditional political participation is heightened by the decline in traditional civic engagement in New Zealand (Vowles, 2004a).

Western democracies over the last half a century have experienced a steady decline in political participation across the board, from voting on election day to attending town hall meetings where a politician is speaking (Putnam, 2000). There are several theories as to why we are witnessing this decline: general economy security; the adoption of neoliberal economic policies by most Western governments (Inglehart 2008); the rise of television as a one-way stream of media; increased pressures on time and money; growing mobility and sprawl of the middle-class; and so forth (Putnam, 2000). This research will focus on specific social models that attempt to explain recent developments in changing voting behaviour patterns rather than going through all the variables of change in Western society over the last 50 years.

Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone* (2000) uses social capital theory in an attempt to explain declining civic engagement in the United States. Social capital “refers to the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000:18). Social capital functions at its highest levels when it is taking place within a network of social relations (Putnam, 2000:18). Putnam argues that there are two kinds of social capital - bridging and bonding (2000:22). Bridging capital is relationships formed by individuals in order to get ahead, whether it be socially or career motivated, whereas bonding capital is relationships built typically within the community in order to get by (Putnam, 2000:23). Putnam believes that society today is replacing bonding social capital with bridging capital (2000:184). These weaker social bonds which are self-oriented in their very nature play a role in the breakdown in the network of

relationships within the community and ultimately have a negative effect on political involvement as people feel disengaged from each other (Putnam, 2000:184). Political disengagement as a result of weaker social capital explains to an extent why we are seeing a decline in traditional political community-based activities such as town hall meetings and grassroots campaigning in the community. Yet it is important to note that even though we are witnessing a weakening of relationship ties from the post-1964 generations, it does not entirely explain political disengagement, as there are many communities with strong social capital, for example, Maori and Pacific communities that have low voter turnout (Hayward, 2006:519).

New Zealand's own decline in the level of traditional political activities indicates that a similar decrease in strong social capital to that of the United States is taking place. The New Zealand Election Study found that membership of any type of association fell from 85 per cent to 69 per cent between 1980 and 1999 and there was also a marked decline in the respondents' attendance at meetings once a month or more (Vowles, 2004a:7). The decline of memberships of parties and other organisations has also been mirrored by the decline of party donations by the public during election campaigns, from 14 per cent in 1963 to less than 5 per cent in the late 1990s (Vowles, 2004a:7). As mentioned previously, New Zealand has been experiencing a steep decline in voter turnout from 1945 onwards (Vowles 2004:3). Even though age eligible turnout was at 75.1 percent in 2008, it was "the second lowest turnout in over a century of New Zealand elections" (Vowles, 2008:3).

1.6 Youth political participation

Recent theory and research suggests that the declining levels of voter turnout in New Zealand and other Western democracies are based on generations/age cohorts. Therefore, it is important to focus a large part of this study on youth engagement as research indicates that generational replacement will continue to lead to voter turnout decline as well as a decline in

civic engagement. There is also a concerning lack of political knowledge amongst younger citizens. A street survey conducted by Fairfax Media New Zealand in October before the election found that opposition leader John Key was recognised by four out of six people aged 18-24 years. None of those surveyed recognised the Green Party co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons or Maori Party co-leader Pita Sharples (*Weekend Press*, 2008:A1). In Wellington, under half of 60 18-24-year-olds surveyed, could recognise John Key's face (*Weekend Press*, 2008:A1). The Electoral Commission's data show that the 18-24 year old demographic is also the least likely of all demographics to be enrolled to vote, with approximately 50 per cent of those not enrolled to vote coming from that age bracket (Catt, 9/3/2008). In New Zealand, civic studies or social studies are not available course options in high school senior years, which hinders politics being an embedded long-term interest by individuals. The media are thus relied upon to deliver most, if not all, political information to individuals but there are clear signs that recent age cohorts are switching off and not watching political news.

Why are we seeing this continued generational disconnection from traditional politics in New Zealand? Research indicates what is taking place amongst recent age cohorts but not why, and this decline in participation has been a perpetual problem since the 1970s (Catt, quoted in *Weekend Press*, 2008:A1). The Electoral Commission has documented a variety of reasons for non-voting according to young people in its research: lack of interest in politics, politics is too complicated, 'they don't listen to us', politics is uncool, politics is for adults, and they did not establish a footprint of participating in the past so why should they start now (Ibid)? This research will look at reasons offered by theorists as to why we are witnessing this tuning out when it comes to politics, from entertainment alternatives to cultural displacement of younger age cohorts from traditional politics.

The media in New Zealand are one of the few deliverers of political news. They are the 'fourth estate', traditionally responsible for holding politicians to account for their actions and to report their everyday actions in Parliament. Television, the most popularly viewed media in New Zealand, had its first official transmission in New Zealand in 1960 and featured one national network channel up until 1975 (TVNZ, accessed on 3/08/2009). The opening up of UHF television frequencies for sale in 1989 and the development of digital satellite broadcasting, Sky, made over 40 channels available to paying customers. Canwest added another two national free-to-air television channels to the existing two state-owned ones. This has meant that today's viewer can choose from an abundance of entertainment-themed channels over current events news. Markus Prior (2005) believes that this high media choice environment has had a disastrous effect on political involvement. Individuals who prefer not to watch political content can avoid it easily and therefore news channels that provide political news do not have the opportunity to create the appetite for political information. Prior argues that the consequence of greater media choice is that it creates a large information gap between those who are interested in politics and those who are not (2005:578). His analysis shows that understanding content preferences is a strong predictor of an individual's likelihood to vote, as political knowledge is a predictor of voter turnout (Prior, 2005:578). His hypothesis predicts a widening turnout gap as "those with other preferences (will) increasingly stay home from the polls" (Prior, 2005:579). Prior's hypothesis strikes a strong resonance with younger generations as this demographic are experiencing their formative years in a high media choice environment.

Brian Loader, like Putnam, is also concerned by the phenomenon of declining turnout amongst young people when recent age cohorts are more exposed to more political information and education than their familial predecessors (2007:1). Instead of accusing

young people of being increasingly lazy and apathetic, Loader advocates for cultural displacement perspective of young people's political engagement. "Young people are not necessarily any less interested in politics than previous generations but rather that traditional political activity no longer appears appropriate to address the concerns associated with contemporary youth culture" (2007:1). Young people are today primarily occupied with their own construction of self-identity hence the popularity of SNSs (Loader, 2007:2) where democratic participation and expression takes place within fan pages, wall posting and status updates. Loader's use of cultural displacement theory positions politicians as being unable to relate to these "self-induced communication spaces", (2007:2) with their use of traditional communication within structured debates in Parliament, rattling off slogans attempting to appeal to social class ties. According to Loader, younger people exist in a new social era obsessed with reality television and celebrities. Evidence of this lies in the large audiences that consume this content that concentrates more on "lifestyle politics focused on sexuality, identity, environment, consumerism, gender and global justice" (2007:2). The problem is bigger for politicians to solve than just creating a Facebook page and Tweeting, as Loader points out, as there has been a huge shift in social obligation and rights (2007:8), partly due (in New Zealand's case) to the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s. This has encouraged young people to follow more "individualised agendas" and has blurred the lines between a consumerist lifestyle and the obligations of the citizen, thus making political mobilisation difficult for traditional political organisations during campaigning (Loader, 2007:8).

Economic development in Western democracies has been described by Ronald Inglehart as the key catalyst for creating a social/cultural shift amongst those born post-1964 with adoption of new values, according to his World Values survey data (Inglehart, 2008). Like Loader, Inglehart (2008) describes these new values as being secular and rational, focused on

self-expression - a move away from the traditional values based on religion and economic class lines. He argues that the idealised community that Putnam outlines in *Bowling Alone* is outdated in a secular, globalised society, and this bonded community, drenched in 1960's American spirit, is also one that is actually "resistant to cultural change" (Inglehart, 2008). Even though we are witnessing the decline in traditional social capital that typically consists of strong community bonds, Inglehart agrees with Putnam that these bonds are being replaced with larger networks made up of weaker ties through the use of the Internet and cellphones (2008). Social capital is not necessarily in decline but it is currently being transformed (Inglehart, 2008), and this was exemplified by President Obama's grassroots Internet campaign that, in terms of widespread national organisation and mobilisation, cut through traditional party and class lines, outperforming the traditional party organisation (Inglehart, 2008).

1.7 Potential for Re-engagement via the Internet

According to cultural displacement theory, the Internet is a key political communicator that needs to be utilised in order to reach out to young people to educate them about present political institutions and democratic practices (Loader, 2007:2). Politicians have the potential to reconnect with the younger demographics using these new forms of communication of websites, podcasting, tweeting, vlogging (video blogging) and blogging. Loader and Putnam blame television for 'dumbing down' politics in order to attract a larger audience, encouraging political passivity through policy sound bites, images, branding, favouring visual imagery over text and discouraging the idealised Habermassian style debate through one-way communication (Loader, 2007:10). The Internet provides an alternative avenue through which two-way communication can take place with the individual, through chat rooms, posting, and instant messaging features. The question about the Internet is whether it can be a viable alternative that complements the new generational values of lifestyle and

consumer politics of the younger age cohorts and successfully mobilise them into politics, not just into traditional political action but also into unconventional participation and to sustain it (Loader, 2007:11).

1.8 How cognitive mobilisation theory explains political participation

Russell Dalton (1984) argues that over the last few decades the electorates in Western democracies have been becoming more politically sophisticated. The development in mass media technology and greater access to education have decreased the cost to obtain political information, therefore individuals are able to understand the complexity of politics by being able to focus and gather information on certain events and issues that have meaning for them. This means that what Dalton calls ‘external cues’ such as tying oneself to a political party through membership or other means is less depended upon to make decisions (Dalton, 1984:265). There are two ways in which a citizen can be involved in the political process, according to Dalton: party mobilisation and cognitive mobilisation (1984:265). Cognitive mobilisation is the process in which citizens become politically sophisticated, having “the skills and resources necessary to become politically engaged with little dependence on external cues” (Dalton, 1984:267). Citizens who are politically sophisticated or highly mobilised are the ones who barely rely on external cues when they politically participate (Dalton, 1984:267). Higher levels of cognitive mobilisation can lead to more direct political participation such as joining interest groups, protest behaviour, and community groups (Dalton, 1984:266).

1.9 Summary

This research will examine how the Internet in any way is influencing voting behaviour and political participation in an attempt to explain some of the aforementioned questions. In order to understand this, the Internet will be compared to other traditional media to see how the

Internet is affecting voting behaviour in ways that other media for example television cannot, in influencing voter preferences when it comes to issues, politicians and policies. Cognitive mobilisation theory (Dalton, 1984) will be used as an underlying theory to show how a process of knowledge, participation and efficacy leads to a level of political sophistication that can be affected differently in those areas by different media.

Chapter Two

The role of television and the Internet in political campaigning and their potential participatory effects

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines various theories on how television as a medium for political communication has affected voting behaviour, particularly in the context of New Zealand and how the Internet as a different form of media, can cognitively mobilise citizens in ways that television appears to be unable to. It is important to draw a comparison between television and the Internet in their roles as political communicators as television was once considered a ‘new media’ heralded for its potential as a mass communicator of news and politics. The format and style of television has changed significantly over the last two decades and has changed the way in which politicians communicate, particularly when it comes to campaigning. Some theorists believe that television is to blame for contributing to a ‘civic malaise’ (Putnam 2000:25) in regards to engaging people into politics. One of the main questions that is being explored in current academic literature on the Internet and political behaviour, is whether the Internet for all its advantages in being able to make headways into new forms of political communication, will merely reinforce existing patterns of political participation?

2.2 The arrival of television as ‘new media’

The introduction of television revolutionised how segments of society (those who had access to television sets) received information. Unlike radio and the newspaper, television streamed non-stop visual images into sets in the comfort of peoples own homes. Its rapid proliferation and adoption by Western households in the 1950s and 1960s, turned television into a mass media giant (Gore, 2007) and as a consequence brought people together through its national

focus in the way it streamed information. Television had the capacity to convene people and mobilise them in an efficient manner because of its instantaneous reach into households. Television established a one-way constant stream of information to the viewer, establishing a passive relationship on the part of the consumer. It ushered the beginning of visual media becoming a focus in scholarly literature in its role in politics.

Former United States Vice President, Al Gore, is despondent over the lack of interactivity between the television set and the consumer as there is no meaningful way for the consumer to communicate back to the television: “Television stations and networks are almost completely inaccessible to individual citizens and almost always uninterested in ideas contributed by individual citizens.”(2007:16). How this one-way media relationship affects civic engagement in politics will be discussed in more detail.

Television had an impact in the field of political communication especially on how the political campaign would be conducted, shortly after its introduction into homes in New Zealand in 1960. Further technological changes in the 1980s providing greater consumer choice, has led to the restructuring of the consumer audience (Prior, 2005) which inevitably affected politicians’ abilities to communicate their message across a diverse number of channels. Politicians who choose to communicate online face the same challenges with numerous different news websites and political blogs; therefore before discussing the potential and problems of the Internet in political communication, it is important to draw a comparative point with the experience of television in this area.

Television experienced phenomenal growth in the 1960s, shortly after its introduction in the more affluent regions of the world. In the United States in 1963, it became the most consumed source of information, overtaking radio and newspapers (Gore, 2007:7). Its introduction to New Zealand homes was hindered by the price of television sets, that there

was only one channel and there was no national news service until 1969 (Miller, 2004:8). By 1975, a second television station was established, yet both were owned by the Government (through the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand) which held a monopoly on the market (TVNZ, 2009). New Zealand's own experience with television and network channels over the last few decades has played an important role in the development of the post-modern campaign and how television is used in political communication.

2.3 Satellite Television and Deregulation in the 1980s and its impact

Two key changes took place in the 1980s that would have a profound impact on the television programming made available in New Zealand; Firstly the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand was split into two state-owned enterprises: Television New Zealand (TVNZ) and Radio New Zealand (RNZ) forcing them to become profit-driven; and New Zealand's television market was deregulated under the 1989 Broadcasting and Radiocommunications Acts (Atkinson, 2004:137). This opened up UHF television frequencies for sale allowing for competition and foreign-owned private enterprises in the New Zealand television market (TVNZ, 2009). This would pave the way for the establishment of TV3 and TV4 free-to-air national networks owned by overseas operator CanWest. With both state-owned television channels now running as profit-driven enterprises and facing increased market competition from privately-owned channels, the pressure to net a large audience share to encourage advertising spend significantly changed the format of current events news and even the format of televised political debates (Atkinson, 2004:151).

The 1980s also witnessed a huge shift in the way people would consume television content with the development of satellite technology that would enable people to watch multiple channels not just the few on offer from the state-owned and operated stations. This was made available to New Zealanders in the 1990s with Sky Television entering the market on the UHF band and in 1998 Sky introduced satellite broadcasting making over 40 channels

available to paying customers (TVNZ, 2009). This would result in an increasingly fragmented audience who would be able to choose from a variety of channels at their viewing pleasure, which added further pressure on three main free-to-air national networks to entice large audience shares. The end result is a media environment that enables people who own a television to have the ability to choose whether they want to watch political news and debates or not at all (Prior, 2005: 577).

After these developments, Joe Atkinson argues, TVNZ became a glorified programming purchasing agent as it was expected to earn the majority of its revenue from advertising (Atkinson, 2004:137). It had to compete with other private foreign-owned companies for an audience share and therefore its programming funding. Programming subsidies came from New Zealand On Air due to the overwhelming production costs of local content and was directed towards “drama, comedy, documentary and children’s television programming, giving nothing to news and current affairs” (ibid). Television coverage of the House of Representatives (Parliament TV) sitting does exist on Freeview and Sky television channels but there is no comprehensive ongoing coverage like in the United States with PBS or C-SPAN as television stations do not have the funding or arguably the sufficient market for this level of public service broadcasting (Atkinson, 2004:138).

The shift in New Zealand television broadcasting from a public service focus to a commercial and profit-driven post-privatisation, has consequently led to a fragmented audience. This has ramifications for the political knowledge of the New Zealand audience as when there is not comprehensive coverage of politics available “and when people are not informed, they cannot hold government accountable when it is incompetent, corrupt...”(Gore, 2007:17). This multi-channel environment created from privatisation, increased commercial competition and the development of satellite technology, as Pippa Norris points out, has contributed to the overall decline in the quality of news coverage from current affairs programmes and the rise of

‘infotainment’, focusing on human interest stories and celebrity culture (2000:91). The pressure of alternative entertainment-driven programming provided by other networks has forced news providers to incorporate similar content into their programming. This has led to a “levelling down” of broadcasting (ibid) that has long-term consequences for viewers’ abilities to gain the information needed to process politics.

2.4 New Zealand political campaigning on television

The 1969 General Election was a momentous year for political campaigning on this relatively ‘new media’ called television. It was the first campaign where the two major party leaders Prime Minister Keith Holyoake and opposition leader Norman Kirk debated on television (Church, 2004:160). And it was also the first election campaign that featured a television commercial for a political party made by an advertising agency (Robinson, 2004:52). The visuality of television and its ability to stream the faces of their political leaders nationwide, reaching voters in their homes, created a whole new playing field for political campaign. In the election of 1969, New Zealanders witnessed the beginnings of a shift away from traditional grassroots campaigning that previously comprised of town hall meetings and door-to-door knocking. The characteristic features of the modern and the post-modern campaign were made possible because of the immediacy and the visuality of television (Hayward & Rudd, 2006). And this is arguably part of the reason why New Zealand and many other Western democracies have witnessed a generational shift (Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2002) away from physical civic engagement, because people were receiving all their political information on a couch.

As mentioned previously, 1969 was the year where New Zealand witnessed the first televised election campaign (Hayward & Rudd, 2004:8). One of the Labour Party’s hired consultants had met earlier with strategists from Nixon’s 1968 Presidential campaign who had conducted an innovative campaign on television. This influence would lead to what scholars label the

‘Americanisation’ of politics, an top-level organised national campaign that would extensively use the abilities of television (Hayward & Rudd, 2004:9). The Labour Party and its leader Norman Kirk, on the advice of McHarmons advertising agency who had visited Nixon presidential campaign strategists, designed a campaign strategy that involved television advertisements, slogans, jingles and mini-documentary slots (ibid). Kirk adopted designer clothes, a new hairstyle and did an interview in a women’s magazine in order to make himself more appealing as a leader in visually focused media (ibid). Today, we see party leaders adopting similar campaign tactics such as current Prime Minister John Key and his wife Bronagh’s spread in the Australian Women’s Weekly in October 2008. Claire Robinson describes the refocusing of the political campaign on to the projected image of its leader Norman Kirk as the first instance of ‘commodification’ of a party leader in New Zealand (Robinson, 2004:52). The significance was huge for grassroots political campaigning when New Zealand first bore witness to the features of leader-focused post-modern campaigning as it meant that no longer was the emphasis on party members to do the leg work and go door-to-door knocking; television would deliver the message instead.

Hayward & Rudd argue that New Zealand has witnessed three key shifts in the way political communications is conducted during campaigning (2004:10). Before the advent of television, the political party itself was the “main communication channel and sent its messages direct to the citizen with heavy emphasis on ideology” (ibid). When television rapidly took over as dominant media outlet shortly after its introduction in New Zealand, political messages were micro-managed by professionals such as McHarmons advertising agency who existed outside of the party organisation (ibid). And now with the Internet and its emerging dominance contributing to a multi-channel environment that includes satellite television, “the pressures of commercialisation result in ‘infotainment’...politicians must be immediately responsive...ideology and policy substance are sacrificed for the need to be pithy and

understanding” (ibid). Post-modern political campaigning and a diverse media environment has brought politics into New Zealanders homes with minimal effort, but it is the ability of the media user to change the channel that has transformed political communication into catchy slogans and vague ideas to catch the largest spread of the voting population (Hayward & Rudd, 2004:9). The advent of the MMP electoral system in New Zealand with the introduction of the national party vote further entrenched the need for campaign organisation to deliver a centralised and all-inclusive message to voters (Hayward & Rudd, 2004:10). This new generalised discourse in political campaigning led to the ‘politics of illusion’ where the real politics of grassroots campaigning and specific policy announcement, slowly disappeared (Bennett, 1988).

As a result of television being able to reach thousands of homes at pace no organised grassroots door-to-door movement could ever hope for, the central party campaign organisation changed in its structure to accommodate for the post-modern style of campaigning (Hayward & Rudd, 2006:329). Instead of organising hundreds of members to knock on doors, call on neighbours and designate numerous organisational roles to the party faithful, a smaller political wing with the aid of consultants similar to the 1969 Kirk campaign, has control of the party’s leader movements, speeches and the overall party message (ibid). The party leader plays a more pivotal role in the campaign with the advent of television as it is their image and personality being projected on television screens across the nation (Leighley, 2004:228). However, this shift from the involvement of the party faithful to a small group of professionals has had a detrimental effect on traditional civic engagement activities and party membership numbers as people were no longer being engaged as a whole to the extent that they were before television (Hayward & Rudd, 2004:10).

Further developments in television broadcasting in New Zealand post-1989 gave birth to a fragmented, diverse channel environment which ultimately created fierce competition

between the two main national news providers, Television One (TV One) and Three (TV3), who both adopted similar practices in news reporting in order to garner the largest audience share. These practices which are common features in academic literature discussion on television news presentation can be traced back to a study done on the American Presidential Election news coverage in 1976 by Thomas Patterson (Leighley 2004:202). He found that the media primarily focus on the game or horse race rather than the substance of the policy being released by either candidate, and when they do focus on the issues being discussed, the media prefer “clear-cut issues where candidates take distinctive positions while candidates and ads and speeches focus on diffuse issues on which they can make broad appeals to shore-up support” (Patterson, 1976; Leighley, 2004:203). Patterson also found that the media focused on any mistakes or faux pas made by a candidate or their campaign rather than issues and gave considerably more coverage to people who did better than expected in the primaries (Leighley, 2004:203). It is this horse race-focused approach by television media that crosses over into the infotainment territory in order to appeal to a large widespread audience. Leighley believes that profit-driven media are increasingly failing to perform their function as a provider of political information and cues as they continue to veer into more infotainment material, short sound bites and allowing for visual aids (this is particularly the case with television news) to provide the majority of information to viewers (2004:235).

2.5 Television Debates

Televised debates are the staging of politics by media. It is important to look at this aspect of television media in politics because the only other time politics feature during the campaign apart from the news, political advertisements and the rare programme, are the debates. This is when policy information and candidate evaluation is available in a condensed form for the audience. Debates and campaign coverage on television in New Zealand has changed dramatically with New Zealand network stations opened up to competition. Another catalyst

for an evolving debate format was the change to MMP which gave importance to the party vote and subsequently increased the number of political party leaders participating in the televised debates (one of the effects of MMP was an increased number of political parties in Parliament). TV One and TV 3 have tried to limit the number of leaders in debates. For example TV 3 in 2002, allowed in the televised debate the leaders of only “the five top-polling parties” and Television One held a separate debate between the two major party leaders and the minor party leaders (Church, 2004:162) and did the same again in 2008, holding an extra debate for the two major party leaders. In 2008, TV 3 decided to have only a debate between the two major party leaders as they refused to attend a larger debate that included the leaders of other political parties. Without the two major party leaders, TV 3 deemed that the debate was not viable (3News, 28/09/2008). TV 3 may have felt that without the two major party leaders, it was lacking the more important members of the race. However, this focus on the horse race between the two main party leaders was risky for viewers as it limited the information they received during policy debates by being presented with only two opinions.

The style of moderation in these televised debates has also changed. Profit-driven pressures on networks have led to shift in entertainment-based line of questioning from moderators which has devalued the level of information available in televised debates. Previously, there was longer exchanges between participants because “the host was deferential towards the participants, but always reined them in when they went over time or make overly intrusive interjections” (Church, 2004:163). However, this format changed in the 1990s with the moderator taking a stronger role in debates, interrupting participants, presenting their own side of an argument, increasingly becoming more cynical in their approach to questions (ibid). Joe Atkinson gives the example of Mike Hosking in TV One’s Sunday programme law and order themed debate featuring then Prime Minister Helen Clark and the National Party

leader Bill English in 2002, where his “interventions became more hectoring and disruptive, the debate disintegrated into an unruly shouting match” (2004:150). The newer format of debates in New Zealand includes panels of journalists, academics and consultants who deconstruct comments made by participants in the debates and are encouraged to appoint a winner and a loser (Church, 2004:167). Stephen Church believes that this view of the debate as a zero-sum game rather than an opportunity for viewers to gather more information about party policies is harmful to peoples’ perceptions about politics (ibid). The change in the format and style of television debates relates back to the argument that modern day television presents political news coverage as a horse race rather than focusing on the content and the kind of political argument that is taking place.

2002 was also the year of the ‘worm’ debate for New Zealand, a debating feature which was a methodological disaster and misled people watching the debate on television at home (Atkinson, 2004:151). This further compromised the ability of the two television networks to provide political information and informative debate that would aid voters in making informed decisions on voting day. The ‘worm’ debate involved an audience of 100 undecided voters watching the eight party leaders’ debate on TV One in an Auckland studio, rating their preferences throughout the debate using a remote control with the settings ‘good, very good, normal, dull, very dull’ (ibid). The audience according to the ‘worm’ disliked it (found it ‘very dull’) when the moderator of the debate Paul Holmes, aggressively questioned or attempted to provoke conflict amongst the participants, instead they preferred policy ideas and explanations (ibid). Also, uncommitted voters are not necessarily a representative cross-section of the New Zealand voting population, so using the ‘worm’ results as an indication of what might the results be on voting day, is dubious. Atkinson also believed that because this ‘worm’ audience was watching the debate on television not in the live forum, there was evidence to suggest that they were basing many of their opinions on the reactions of the

actual debate audience (ibid). The 'worm' debate format has since been abandoned and did not feature in any coverage during the 2008 election campaign.

Geoff Kemp summarises the shortcomings of television as a political information provider succinctly, arguing that although it provided unprecedented access to visual images and information easily, television "lacked print literacy's ability to spur critical reflection and always has to juggle public service and commercial objectives" (2006:443). Television is losing the public service battle and increasingly leaning towards entertainment values over news. Kemp writes that even though the media have grown to become more professional, bringing in more consultants and experts, encouraging the discourse to be a little more 'high brow', it does not necessarily make up for the exclusion of 'grassroots input' from the political debate (ibid). Television although it is democratic in its accessibility in providing information, fails to engage in the political debate the people who actually decide the outcome of the election campaign.

2.6 Television's theorised impact on voters

In helping to understand how television's political news coverage affects audiences in the way they perceive information, this research will use agenda-setting theories in attempting to explain how the television news media have such a powerful influence over their audiences. Agenda-setting research allows for experiment designers to test their audiences' knowledge of news and politics to see if the media are shaping the news to be more image-based and to contain less information. The use of priming and framing in stories through the news media's own agenda-setting shapes and influences public opinion and perceptions of political candidates and issues (Leighley, 2004:178; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987 in Rogers & Dearing, 2007:87). Agenda-setting as it relates to the media, is where the media decides what issues are going to be shown to the television public (Leighley, 2004:178), in political campaigning, this is especially important as the news media play a considerable role in deciding what

issues are going to dominate the campaign and therefore the discussion. Priming in agenda-setting is the selection of the “criteria by which political actors are evaluated... (Therefore) candidate vote choice is determined by which issues the media choose to cover” (Leighley, 2004:178-9). Framing takes place through the way the media describe the story, thus influencing audiences’ perceptions of how the issue or event is viewed (ibid). In politics, when parties or candidates respond to an issue in the way the television coverage has framed it, then they gain further support (ibid). The television media’s choices in priming and framing issues/events in politics, or as Leighley puts it “which issues to cover and how to present them” (2004:193) plays a part in the formation of individual’s beliefs and opinions on what are the issues in the political campaign, which candidate addresses these issues and who provides the best policy response to this (ibid).

Iyengar and Kinder in their observational study on television news effects on participants’ perceptions of political events and issues, found that television coverage on the performance of the United States president not only made viewers more aware of issues but also “set the standards by which presidential performance was then judged” (1987; Rogers & Dearing, 2007:87). The concept of priming in agenda-setting in this study was used to understand the bar which the participants judged the president against (ibid). Agenda-setting is one way through which the news media influence voter behaviour and perceptions on politics.

Political advertising on television is another way in which television affects voting behaviour. Paid-for commercials by political parties that are shown on television can shape the audiences’ perception of politics. The effect of which is similar to television news as like the news, it contains information presented in a visual format. In New Zealand, political parties are allocated broadcasting according to their size but are not allowed to buy television commercials like in the United States (Hayward & Rudd, 2004:xi). Yet even this small amount of television advertising exposure compared to other Western countries, can still have

“measurable effects on voter cognitions, attitudes, and voting behaviour (Kaid, 1981, in Kaid, 2002:27). Even though the first political television commercial took place in 1975 (a National commercial showing dancing Labour cossacks), academics did not examine the effects of political commercials on the electorate, instead continuing their focus on “social group membership and party identification” as the key variables in determining responses in voting behaviour (Robinson, 2004:54). By the 1990s, party identification was rapidly declining amongst the electorate and undecided/swing voters were on the rise (ibid). With the introduction of the MMP electoral system, academics widened their research scope in the study of voting behaviour, to include media effects during the political campaign (Robinson, 2004:54) even though the research had existed in the United States since the late 1970s (Leighley, 2004). The 2002 New Zealand Election Survey Questionnaire set up by Professor Jack Vowles, was the first questionnaire that “asked about voters’ viewing of televised political advertising specifically, over the course of a campaign” (Robinson, 2004:54).

Methodologically, it is nearly impossible to isolate the effects of political television commercials as there are so many other campaign communications which can reach the voter’s subconscious and factor in their decision-making in some way or another (Robinson, 2004:54). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) in their research on agenda-setting were able to isolate other outside variables due to their ability to put their participants in a controlled television environment and limit their exposure to any other media and information outlet. Robinson correctly argues that viewing a television commercial itself is not enough to warrant any claim to affecting voting behaviour as it is the meaning and context taken away from the commercial itself by the individual that determines if it did have any effect on the voter’s perceptions (Robinson, 2004:55). That is why the professional campaign wing of political parties put vast amounts of research and strategy into how the candidate appears towards the voter in the commercial (Robinson, 2004:56). This can be hazardous in the sense that a

candidate can position themselves in a way that may not entirely represent their actual policies through making broad and generalised populist appeals (ibid).

So who in the electorate are positioned to be affected most by political commercials if it is assumed, based on previous literature (Robinson, 2004), that there is not necessarily a direct one-way effect between the intended appeal by the commercial and the viewing audience? Claire Robinson believes that the “greater the person’s level of political awareness, the more likely he or she is to receive campaign messages” (2004:57). If the individual in question is aware of the issues that dominate the campaign, then they will understand any appeal made towards them. However, there is the risk that because they are already aware they will instantly recognise any commercial that is inconsistent with their held opinions or beliefs (ibid). Robinson says that there are three categories of voters who are most receptive to a party’s campaign message in television commercials, firstly; early deciders, those who have strong party or ideological identification towards that particular party’s commercial; late deciders, who are politically aware and have some kind of party identification; and late deciders, who have very little political interest and awareness and will be highly influenced by campaign messages (ibid). This last category of voter is also the hardest to reach at the same time because of their low interest in politics, hence it is only when they are saturated with messages (which is usually the case during the last few weeks of the campaign period) do they actually receive any of them (ibid). The appeal of television commercials for late deciders with very little political interest is that they provide ‘shortcuts’ (Dalton, 2002:24; Robinson, 2004:59) which help simplify the decision-making process involving the smallest amount of time on the part of the voter. Television commercials are a part of this ‘shortcuts’ arsenal that can involve opinions of friends or peers, news stories, headlines and summarised polling data (Robinson, 2004:59). This can be dangerous, being so reliant on small snippets of information to make a supposedly informed decision although Hayward and Rudd argue

that there is enough information being circulated during the election campaign so that there is some degree of awareness taking place (2004:70). Is this enough to have some understanding of party ideology so that voters can rationally anticipate Government actions over the course of three years, taking into account legislation or motions that come from far left of field?

2.7 Television's overall ability to inform and engage an electorate

Television's role in public political knowledge needs to be seen in a wider context of how people are using different media. For political participation theorists, fragmented media audiences have become a concern as there are many in the audience switching off news media altogether (Prior, 2005). Putnam believes that in his research in the United States television struggles with its increasing emphasis on entertainment values to match the quality of information and the depth of analysis provided by reputable newspapers (Putnam, 2000:218). He argues that regular newspaper readers are "older, more educated, and more rooted in their communities than is the average American" (ibid). His research found that even when he held the variables of age and education constant, newspaper readers were more informed and involved in their communities than those who watch only television news (ibid). Yet Putnam despairs for a different generation and time in his discussion of social capital and levels of civic engagement. Newspapers today in New Zealand have succumbed to the same commercial pressures to that of television with only two major companies (Fairfax and APN) owning the majority of newspapers and magazine publications in the country. Even with these developments in ownership and profit demands, newspapers still provide more information to regular readers than that of a 30-second sound bite of a news story. Yet newspaper readership levels were steadily declining at the end of the 20th century (ibid). In the United States of America in 1948, the average American family was reading on average more than one newspaper a day. Fifty years later, this level of reading had dropped by 57 percent (ibid). Getting into the habit of reading a daily newspaper is similar to voting;

when you start young, you are likely to continue the habit for the majority of your adult life (ibid). Putnam believes that the decline of newspaper readership is generational as recent age cohorts are less likely to be reading newspapers (Putnam, 2000:219). Yet television is not to blame for this decline. As Putnam found in his research, an individual who watches news is more likely to read the newspaper (ibid). This supports Pippa Norris' (2000) 'virtuous cycle' thesis, that the more news an individual consumes, the more likely they are to become more civically engaged and minded. Those who switch off news altogether do not receive any political information exposure and therefore are less likely to become engaged.

Al Gore believes that the relationship between television and an individual is odd in a theoretical sense, as the individual has access and is given information but is unable to send information back (2007:246). What kind of conversation does this encourage between the electorate and those representatives elected into office? Gore argues that this has a negative effect on peoples' perceptions of democracy and their own feelings of a connection to government (ibid).

Even though television audiences have become increasingly fragmented due to the extensive number of entertainment and news channels and subsequently creating a division in those who are tuned in on political news and tuned out (Prior, 2005), Pippa Norris believes that if an individual pays attention to news media then this will eventually reinforce a pattern a civic engagement (2000:311). She argues that even though we see evidence of infotainment and move for some network channels towards the reporting style and format of more entertainment-based values, the "diversification in the channels, levels and formats of political communication that have broadened the scope of news and the audience for news, at both highbrow and popular levels" (ibid). In her work, *A Virtuous Cycle* (2000), Pippa Norris writes that previous research has indicated that exposure to political news media creates a more involved and informed electorate as continuous exposure means access to more

information, therefore an informed citizen (Norris, 2000:314). Constantly critiquing the news media assumes only a one-way relationship between the journalists and the audience. And although this a one-way relationship in a physically engaged sense, the public with their increased access to different ‘shortcuts’ are able to pick and choose what information will be used in the construction of their own political beliefs and opinions (Norris, 2000:317).

2.8 Summary of television effects on participatory behaviour

Out of this literature review, several questions arise about the effects of television and how emerging media can provide different levels of political participation and information. Firstly, how does the Internet provide political information in breadth and format where television can no longer do so with current market pressures? Television aided the divisions that now fragment the media audience between those who choose to consume political information and those who choose not to. Will this disengaged group continue to use the Internet in a similar way that they have consumed television news and programming and so will this emerging media reinforce an existing divide? Thirdly, how can the Internet bring back the return of ‘real politics’ and political discourse focusing on information and data rather than emotive appeals and the empty bickering that is encouraged in televised debates? Lastly, how can the Internet provide a meaningful platform for participation and re-engage those who have been glued to the couch?

2.9 Where can the Internet break new ground?

After examining the strengths and weaknesses of television as a former ‘new media’, this research will now look at the Internet and how it can break new ground in terms of political communication and compensate for the deliberate failures of television. Criticism about politics in academic literature (Gore, 2007; Putnam, 2000) has blamed television to an extent for increasing levels of disengagement. What happens when the medium changes as with the

case of the Internet? Is political communication by parties broken or was it television emphasising on entertainment values that aided this disengagement? It is important though to understand that for all the possibilities that the Internet can hypothetically provide in terms of reaching the disconnected younger age cohorts, it is also vulnerable to the same weaknesses of television as a communicative medium as those who simply are not interested in politics can still switch off or change the website or channel. In this literature review on political participation on the Internet, many of the works cited were written just before the sudden explosion in popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Even though there are many other social networking sites around the world, it was these two in particular which were used by politicians and their political parties extensively in New Zealand during the 2008 General Election. Since it was the first time in a General Election these sites were used in campaigning, comparisons will be made from the experiences of the 2007 Australian General Election and the 2008 American presidential election in order to get a clearer picture in terms of the real value and potential that the Internet and social networking has in communication and affecting voter behaviour.

2.10 Optimists' versus pessimists

So how can the Internet deliver in terms of reigniting civic engagement and encourage political participation where traditional media, specifically television, have failed to do so? This literature review will look at the optimist and pessimist arguments about the potential of the Internet in political communication and where it could suffer the same fate in reinforcing the divide between those who are switched on and those who continue to choose to be switched off politics.

One of the arguments that the optimists (those who believe in the democratic potential of the Internet in communication) point to when making the case for the success of the Internet in political communication is its ability to provide endless amounts of information and details at

the single click of a button (Jacques and Ratzan, 1997 in Kaid, 2002:28; Prior, 2005). When reading political news online, readers can continue finding out more about the candidate or policy by entering key terms into a search engine. Television and other older styles of media are limited in their ability to provide further information about a subject and therefore “limit audience behaviour options and do not stimulate information usage” (Jacques and Ratzan, 1997 in Kaid, 2002:28). Jacques and Ratzan found in their study on voters watching the United States presidential debates on the Internet, that they used related links to find out more information after the debate (1997; Kaid, 2002:28). It is this extraordinary level of political information now available that is leading the optimists to claim that this will encourage people to read more political information and the exposure will lead to some degree of political involvement (Prior, 2005:587).

The Internet is interactive in the sense that users can control the information that they view (Kaid, 2002:29) but they also have the ability to read alternative opinions and information if they wish to do so. Unlike television, it provides various forums through comment postings, Tweeting, and even uploading video responses for which the user to respond or communicate back to what they are reading or watching. Kaid found in previous research that the level of interactivity on a politician’s website actually affected how viewers perceived it (ibid). The Internet is the most interactive media available and it has the ability to connect millions of individuals with others in discussion. There is no other time in history when communication on this scale has been made possible (Gore, 2007:260). It is easier to interact on the Internet, start up a blog, and submit an opinion piece compared to getting a document or a pamphlet published (Gore, 2007:262). The Internet is an easy ‘organising tool’ for the politically active as social networking and websites are ideal platforms to establish groups, meetings and email newsletters (ibid). It removes barriers to political participation like long lengths of time, money, and geographical distance.

Positive perceptions of interactivity and user-friendliness of political websites encourages further exposure to political information and lessens levels of cynicism (Kaid, 2002:29) this encourages voter engagement by creating a welcoming platform on which users can communicate (Miller, 1999). Low levels of political engagement mean that voters become less involved in politics and reduce their political information exposure which ultimately creates this downward spiral of political cynicism (Pinkleton and Austin, 1998:82 in Kaid 2002:29). Kaid's research on the Internet users who interacted with a presidential candidate's website in 2000 found that users were less cynical after interaction whether it was entertainment value-based or just informational (Tedesco and Kaid, 2000). This supports Pippa Norris' thesis (2000) that continuous exposure to political information in whatever form eventually leads to engagement on some level in a 'virtuous cycle' but research done on political exposure via the Internet suggests that this process is sped up due the level of interactivity available unlike television. Kaid argues that it is this interactivity available on scale never before possible provides "a more overt and direct means of eliminating audience passivity" as the opportunities are available for users to access more information about a candidate or policy then use it to assess the candidate and then continue looking for more information related to politics (2002:29). This was the case in Kaid's research, where those who used the Internet "were more likely to want to vote in the next election than were those in the traditional television group" (2002:33). Those who watched television were more likely to want to be involved in traditional campaigning; this may be because television with its visuality and emotional appeals by candidates on it evokes partisan sentiment (ibid). However, this study was based mostly on political advertising in the United States in 2002, so interactivity was not at a level it is now with social networking and it is more likely that partisan feeling is stronger in the United States than in New Zealand.

Political blogging, even though it is being used on a relatively new medium, is connected to existing political and news media practices. Even though anyone with a computer and access to the Internet can set up a blog, many blogs follow a journalistic style of writing out of convention (Leighley, 2004:229). Many bloggers tend to be “policy-wonks” (for example NoRightTurn.blogspot.com in New Zealand who regularly gives detailed posts on sections of proposed legislation) who follow politics extensively and are a wealth of information on legislation, process and raw data. To an extent, blogging like political news is restricted to a group of knowledgeable people even though with the case of the Internet, anyone who has a computer can participate. Al Gore believes that blogs serve as a check and balance on the reporting by mainstream media networks and publications with their penchant for detail and accuracy (2007:131). They also contribute to debate and many of their comments pages encourage debate amongst readers without anyone having to all gather into one place (Gore, 2007:263).

Margolis and Resnick believe that the Internet provides for democratic participation within the media as users are all equally capable of sending and receiving information and have the same levels of access to information (2000:100). They argue that this is particularly important when it comes to policy formation as bloggers and other users who post information can play a role in policy-making in terms of pointing out details that may have been missed. Or users’ comments on a website about an issue that is perceived by those in policy-making as a close gauge of the electorate’s views. This supposed level of democracy is what will encourage individuals into politically-themed discourse in a more meaningful way than what had existed recently, according to Al Gore (2007:254). He believes that you cannot have a knowledgeable citizenry without it being connected; able to discuss ideas and events with each other, judging the accuracy of information given to them (ibid). The Internet has this potential to connect people who have ideas and opinions in common with each other but also

debate those who hold different ideas, this is made possible through the user-friendliness of the Internet (Gore, 2007:260), that anyone who has a computer can click into an Internet browser and enter a URL.

The crux of mobilisation theory (in terms of reinvigorating a growingly disaffected electorate) that is espoused by the optimist camp is that the Internet offers a different kind of political participation than attending town hall meetings and working for political parties (Norris, 2000:121). Through email, blogging and messaging overcoming physical barriers to political participation and engagement, the playing field is wider for more people to participate and neutralises any financial barriers of participation (ibid). The Internet also brings opportunities to those who struggle to articulate themselves in public or feel intimidated in voicing aloud their opinion.

The real factors that lie behind the Internet's success is that it is a multi-media platform. It combines technologies that the public is familiar with: video, telephone and data to create an interactive media where companies and people build websites to suit individuals' communicative desires (Gore, 2007:269). Social networking on YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Bebo, are all examples of websites that are based on communication and media use for millions of people.

Pessimists

Pippa Norris describes three main obstacles to the Internet as the overall concept of a 'digital divide' between those who access the Internet for news and political information and those who do not (2001:4). The first and largest obstacle is the global divide between countries which have access to Internet technology and developing countries whose people have little or no access to the Internet (Norris, 2001:4). Even those in developed countries suffer from the social divide where the distribution of technology is unequal amongst citizens and a

widening gap is reinforced between those who have the information and the tools to engage in politics and those who are without the necessary information to make informed civic engagement-minded decisions (Norris, 2001:10).

Complete utilisation of this multi-platform media requires broadband connection speed and this is where access to all of this technology is threatened as there are only a small number of broadband networks in New Zealand (Telecom owns the majority of phone lines and leases them out to other companies) therefore having broadband in a household can be very expensive. Al Gore believes that the level of control over prices and speeds held by only a few network operators hinders the development of the potential of the Internet as faster speeds at reasonable prices would encourage further technological advances to the multi-media platform and further develop communication tools on the Internet (Gore, 2007:265). Those who are the most informed about politics are the upper to middle-class and this socioeconomic group is also more likely to have access to Internet at home or work so the cost of Internet reinforces the information divide between the rich and poor (Leighley, 2004:33).

The final obstacle is the democratic divide, where those who have access to the Internet and know how to obtain political information still choose not to and willingly disengage from any form of civic engagement (Norris, 2001:4). Access to Internet technology has been acknowledged already in the literature review as an obstacle. However, in this research, it is the democratic divide that will be explored in more detail as New Zealand statistics suggested in the introduction of this thesis; indicate that the majority of voters have access to the Internet in some way.

Oates and Gibson believe that the wind was taken out of the optimists' sails in their predictions about the kind of participatory revolution that the Internet would bring with only

the affluent in Western countries able to afford computers (2006:3). They argue that the 'positive-mobilisation' claims of the Internet lost momentum when data analysis found that existing divisions between those who are well-informed about politics and those who are not were being reinforced (ibid). They agreed with Pippa Norris' conclusion that the Internet was being used for political information and engagement by those "who are already most predisposed toward civic engagement, reinforcing patterns of political participation" (2001:228). The opposite of political mobilisation theory, reinforcement theory, suggests that the Internet will just reinforce the gaps between the well-informed and the not well-informed (Norris, 2001:121).

The same participation dilemma exists with the Internet as it does with television with the increasing amount of media choice made available within each medium. Leighley calls this dilemma "narrowcasting" where political communication itself has changed, particularly in the case with the Internet. More specialised appeals by politicians take place in order to communicate to a fragmented audience (Leighley, 2004:32). It has changed from mass politics for mass media to different policy announcements to different segments of the electorate from YouTube speeches to email newsletters to the local business community. Yet this "narrowcasting" can have negative effects as it is reaching out only to particular segments of society and with the Internet, individuals must seek out the party website or subscribe to the party email newsletter before they receive any information (Leighley, 2004:231). Leighley believes that the optimists need to be more cautious in their arguments on the potential of the Internet as previous research has indicated that the majority of people use the Internet for entertainment purposes (Leighley, 2004:32). Pessimists believe that the Internet has so much media choice that people will choose entertainment videos and news content so as to distract them from becoming more politically engaged (Prior, 2005:587).

The trend of “narrowcasting” and a diverging electorate began before the growth of social networking on the Internet (Leighley, 2004; Prior, 2005). As much as the Internet serves to reinforce this fragmented media audience, it can provide a level of personalisation from politicians and parties towards voters in a way that would have never been possible before through the various ways one can communicate on the Internet (Leighley, 2004:244).

Prior (2005) found that both the optimists and the pessimists were right in certain elements of their predictions. In his evaluation of the 2002 News & Entertainment Survey in the United States, he found that there was evidence that the Internet does increase political knowledge and engagement but also people chose to view other content and switch off politics completely (2005:587). Individuals who preferred to view entertainment content rather than political information went down the disengagement spiral of knowing less about politics and therefore were less likely to vote (ibid). Prior believes that “people’s media content preferences are key to understanding the political implications of the new media” and how they will be affected by political news on the Internet (ibid). Content preferences are indeed important in assessing how the Internet can affect voter behaviour, however, Prior’s research was before the social networking boom in 2005, when the platform for political news and even levels of engagement shifted from mainstream news websites to more interactive online forums.

When Margolis and Resnick wrote *Politics as Usual* in 2000 before the rise of social networking sites and the habitual use of them as daily communication, they made some valid points about the barriers to engagement for those who are uninterested in politics that resonate today. They argued that the Internet would not be enough to re-engage people completely disinterested in politics; the downward spiral of disengagement could not be broken unless a party, candidate or issue actually encouraged people to take interest in politics; and that was when the Internet was an effective communicative tool as it made

information and communication itself cheap and efficient (Margolist & Resnick, 2000:72). Therefore, they concluded that the Internet would replicate online the “established political patterns of the real world” (Margolist & Resnick, 2000:73).

2.11 Summary

The younger the person, the more likely they are to be using the Internet (Nielsen, 2008a). It is this generational shift in media use that gives political media theorists hope that some people can be re-engaged into politics because of this alternative platform for discourse and information. It is the younger generations which could break the reinforcement trend which evidence had been finding for at the turn of the 21st century (Margolist & Resnick, 2000; Norris, 2000). Since it is the younger generations who are least likely to watch television and engage in traditional political participation, they are the most likely to use non-traditional methods (Bell et al, 2008:15) provided through the Internet and in turn end up supporting the mobilisation thesis (Norris, 2000:135).

Chapter Three

Exploratory analysis of social networking sites (SNSs) and the how the Internet is used in political campaigning

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how SNSs work and what makes them an ideal communicative and participatory platform for political campaigning. One of the questions that will be addressed is how SNSs can mobilise a person in a way that was never possible before? Is this the return of traditional grassroots campaigning or are we seeing a hybridised shift in a new form of political participation? This research will address the 2007 Australian Federal Election campaign, the 2008 United States Presidential Election campaign and the New Zealand 2008 General Election for evidence that could address some of these questions.

3.2 Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigning

The initial success of SNSs was that they were intended for socialising on a decentralised platform (Gore, 2007:265). These encouraged forms of political participation on SNSs, for example Facebook, as the format to establish groups, fan pages, and interaction through wall postings was provided and all that users had to do was enter in a dialogue. Facebook is currently one of the most popular SNSs used today. Created in 2004, initially as a college social network, and it grew to having over 21 million registered members by 2007 (when it allowed for international access), averaging 1.6 billion page views per day (Ellision, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Facebook's growth can be attributed to its success in understanding the "daily media practice of its users" (ibid) from self-constructing identities for profiles to voyeuristic practices in communication with status updates and posting comments on others profiles. Users are able to share links and videos with each in a user-friendly format, open for viewing by allowed friends.

YouTube, launched in 2005 (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008:3) is another successful SNS used in political campaigning and as a form of political participation as a large video-sharing network. Users can create their own profile channels, efficiently upload video and share it with the rest of the Internet using world. Its user-friendly player, link and embed code means that YouTube videos can be easily inserted into other social networking sites and websites. Technological advancements with digital cameras and mobile phones have meant that these are all tools that can be used in recording and uploading video on to YouTube. Historical events and bizarre moments can be captured and uploaded within a matter of minutes for millions of others to see. Naim (2007) calls this the “YouTube Effect” where video captured by citizens bypassing mainstream news media outlets has had an intense effect on politics and campaigning. A single mobile phone can now capture a slip by a candidate that television cameras may miss. Campaigns can now publish video cheaply as they can avoid spending hundreds of thousands on television advertising slots and just upload it on to YouTube. Yet the video needs word-of-mouth through social networking and online communities in order gather momentum and raise viewing numbers. Social networks are dependent on each other to build up numbers of audience members and viewers. Viral video campaigning was a huge feature of the Obama presidential campaign in 2008 (Podcasting News, 2008) and in New Zealand, politicians used YouTube to communicate policy ideas and the Green Party used YouTube for their opening broadcast for the 2008 General Election campaign (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEy2dou25y0>, 14th October, 2008).

3.3 Examples of how the Internet was used in Australia in political campaigning

The 2007 Australian Federal Election was described by some commentators as the “YouTube” election as the two major party leaders went head to head in using YouTube to communicate to voters (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008:1). John Howard used YouTube to upload videos of him discussing climate change (ibid) which supports some

of the predictions in academic literature that social networking would be used to discuss predominantly post-modern issues in an attempt to speak to a younger audience.

The Australian Centre for Public Communication found in its observation of online campaigning and participation during the 2007 Australian Federal Election that the issues discussed on SNSs and on websites were different from the issues that were being covered by the mainstream media (2008:11). Where the mainstream media focused on the economy and industry, the personalised nature of debate online amongst communities and forums, encouraged the discussion of issues that were “more closely connected to the day-to-day lives of people” (ibid) such as education and health care.

The Internet provided alternative forms of participation for those who wanted to engage in politics through non-traditional means during the campaign. An example was the lobby group getup.org.au, a non-profit organisation that used emails, video and petitioning to hold politicians accountable on a range of issues focusing on social justice and the environment (Clausen, 2007:17). Over the course of two years and during the elections, it signed up 211,000 members and raised \$250,000 (AUD) in 72 hours for a television advertisement campaign (ibid). Get Up! organised a debate between local candidates and voters who submitted video questions online before the mainstream media adopted this kind of format for some of their televised debates (ibid). This lobby group exemplifies a successful participatory alternative that the Internet and related social media can facilitate when post-modern issue-driven politics and popular media are combined with grassroots methods of civic engagement.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd used the SNS MySpace in his campaign during the 2007 Australian Federal Election in an attempt to connect to Internet users (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008). His MySpace site had 22,296 friends and over 5,000

comments on his MySpace wall (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008:6). The website was accessible to mobile phones and had SMS alert capability (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008:7). Yet the popularity of the Kevin07 website and MySpace page was dependent upon the mainstream media to publicise its existence. This ‘symbiotic relationship’ (ibid) between television and the Internet has continued to grow with networks like TVNZ using YouTube video questions in one of its televised debates. Television and the Internet may continue to reinforce each other as the vast amount of information available on the Internet means that there needs to be a noticeable filter bringing attention to available methods of political participation on the Internet.

Despite the movement into online campaigning by some politicians in the Australian Federal Election utilising SNSs, there was little two-way dialogue between politicians and users. There were no negative comments or blogging on political websites and SNSs to be found (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008:7). Conversation was moderated to the extent that websites merely existed as support pages in many cases. Kevin Rudd used his MySpace website for one-way communication of information. Neither did any other politicians utilise the “interactivity and ‘conversation’ features that distinguish” SNSs like MySpace and Facebook (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008:5).

Despite claims by Labour Environment spokesman Peter Garrett that the 2007 Australian Federal Election would be the “Google Election” (Clausen, 2007:17), 40 percent of the House of Representatives and Senate members did not even have a personal website. Only 15 politicians blogged and a small group of eight had a Facebook page (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2007:5). This was the first Federal Election in Australia that had the opportunity to make full use of SNSs so this tentative approach by politicians in its use in campaigning was to be expected as politicians would out of fear, attempt to control discourse

and dialogue in order to shield themselves away from criticism or negative attacks because of the conversational format of SNSs.

There are obstacles to political engagement due to the democratic divide and those who choose entertainment over political information. This problem was encapsulated by the fact that the most played video (over half a million views) was one of Kevin Rudd eating his own earwax in Parliament (Clausen, 2007:17).

3.4 The Obama Internet phenomenon

In the United States, political campaigning online has existed since 1996 with regards to candidates' websites (Graber, 2006:226). These websites featured policy information, videos about the candidates and the issues they wanted to address during the campaign, links on registering to vote and donate money to the campaign or volunteer to help (ibid). Howard Dean in 2004, however, was the first presidential candidate during the primaries to run a truly interactive website (Hindman, 2007:193). His campaign encouraged supporters to generate their own content, join online discussions, establish support-based websites and organise their own events (ibid). Encouraging this level of consumer-generated content meant that the Dean campaign had to give up some control over the website and organisation (ibid). Stronger candidates have little reason to stop regulating online content for example, John Howard and Kevin Rudd during the 2007 Australian Federal Election. Matthew Hindman found in his research on online politics that "patterns of web access and usage closely tracked existing social cleavages" but over time these gaps are narrowing (ibid). During the 2004 primaries, Hindman also found that those accessing political parties' websites were not swing or undecided voters but users with strong partisan identity and party affiliation (Hindman, 2007:196). Forty percent of Internet users who signed up for meet-ups (similar to town hall-style meetings) on the Dean campaign's website, actually turned up to those meetings; 30 percent of that 40 percent, heard about the event first from a family member or friend; and 10

percent found out about the event first from the website (Hindman, 2007:198). Dean created “local, decentralised social networks from scratch” through his campaign’s website instead of relying entirely upon regular campaign volunteers (ibid). Going on Hindman’s research it stands to argue that well-organised and interactive websites can reinvigorate supporters to participate in campaigning (Hindman, 2007:196).

The 2008 presidential elections in the United States were the first elections that had the opportunity to use all the new social media developments post-2004 like YouTube and Facebook. Barack Obama’s online campaign during the primaries and the election set precedent on the successful use of social media and combining it with grassroots organisation and support. The Obama campaign’s success has been analysed and researched as an example of a campaign completely inundating the web with content and information as well as using effective online communication techniques to engage new and young voters, creating mini-communities of supporters under the umbrella of the national campaign. Obama’s campaign did what the Dean campaign in 2004 did to a larger extent, connecting the campaign veterans to local communities and then organising meet-ups, fundraisers, and other events to recruit voters (Harris, 2008:16). The campaign organised this online and through SNSs to connect people and supporters. Those who volunteered in the campaign were introduced to 20 SNSs and the campaign action groups in their local area so volunteers felt that they were actually engaging in political campaigning (ibid). Obama’s website was easy to use for supporters who wanted to get involved. If they wanted to attend a campaign event, they could find out instantly when all the events were “within five miles of their location, get information about the organiser, and register to participate in the event.”(Fisher, 2008:1). The registered user would get prompt email confirmation and the organiser would contact them shortly afterwards.

An example of how this communication took place is on Facebook where an individual could connect their own Facebook profile with a My.BarackObama.com account (Facebook Updates, 20/10/2008) that highlighted which of their existing friends were with My.BarackObama. Each time that individual volunteered, attended a campaign event, or made phone calls, the details of their activity appeared on Facebook so that the group could see what each one of them was doing to support the campaign. On Barack Obama's official website, users were actively encouraged to use the link to the My.BarackObama.com community to use social tools to blog, join local groups, go to events, and talk to voters (www.barackobama.com, 20/10/2008).

Barack Obama's campaign was a multi-media phenomenon that encompassed all the social media that the Internet had to offer. His opponent John McCain, poorly utilised social online media and SNSs. Instead, his campaign used traditional media to reach his party faithful which limited the number of people he was communicating to (Lewin, 2008). Obama's official YouTube channel had over 24 million views, 2,000 videos and over 117,000 channel subscribers (ibid). McCain failed to produce as much video content and received only a quarter as many views and only a fifth as many videos. Thus Obama's video content and his message dominated on online video because he was consistent with uploading quality content for viewers (ibid). Barack Obama's domination of video content online encouraged the growth of viral video content that was positive about Obama (ibid). Because McCain's presence was not as strong on the Internet, the majority of viral video content about him was negative.

Obama also had video podcasts on iTunes, one type for his Senate constituents and one for the national campaign. He used podcasts to convey his own personal message to the growing number of ipod users (Lewin, 2008). McCain's campaign produced no podcasts. Obama

even had an iPhone application that kept users in touch with all the latest campaign-related news and local groups (ibid).

Barack Obama was also the most searched for candidate on Google and because his campaign dominated in terms of available online content, when he was searched for, users had endless amounts of information and media to view (Lewin, 2008). His campaign used Facebook, MySpace, Digg, Flickr and Twitter all at a low cost and made these tools available on his official website (ibid). When people searched for Obama on the Internet, they found mostly positive content and a controlled message as his campaign supplied (except for the viral videos) the information and media (ibid). Compared to McCain, whose lacklustre attempt at using online social media and tools, meant that there was not as much content available that was positive about him and therefore lost control of the message that was being presented about him online (ibid).

3.5 The Internet in New Zealand political campaigning

New Zealand's history with online political campaigning is very similar to the United States. In its beginnings in the mid-1990s, party websites were rough in their design and offered very little information (Miller, 2004:12). By 2004, they evolved to meet their typical user audience: party members, voters, students and journalists by offering large amounts of information for research on policy (ibid). This included information about candidates themselves and contact details to their offices. In 2002, Labour organised a live chat with a cabinet minister on their website but questions were to be submitted, as expected political parties were afraid of losing control of the dialogue and the overall message (Miller, 2004:13).

In the 2005 General Election, the year when the biggest SNSs had only just been established, political blogs started to gain momentum as a provider of political information and analysis

(Matthews, 16 February, 2008). A quarter of all New Zealanders used the Internet during the election campaign to get political information (3News, 12 September, 2008). All the major newspaper outlets in New Zealand created blogs for their Press Gallery journalists and this became an effective way for journalists to voice their own opinions and hold politicians to greater accountability for what was taking place in interviews as they had more freedom (Matthews, 16 February, 2008). Audrey Young of the New Zealand Herald posted up an interview transcript online when John Key attempted to deny what he had said about the Trans Tasman Therapeutics debate (ibid). Bloggers can link to facts and resources online as evidence, providing another level of accountability and fact-checking for voters to read. Bloggers are held to the same defamation laws as the mainstream media and it is easy to tell who the reputable bloggers are as they are the most popular ones here in New Zealand, for example, Kiwiblog.co.nz and norigturn.blogspot.com who are well-known for their use of statistical data and detailed examination of policy. The increase in the number of blogs and bloggers has led to a more diverse group of opinions providing political information on the Internet in New Zealand.

Luke Goode (2010) observed political blogs written by journalists and citizens during the 2008 General Election. He found that male bloggers were over-represented in the political blogosphere and that partisanship, personal attacks, and overly emotive language was common feature in many of them (Goode, 2010:440). The kind of emotive discourse that was taking place during the election amongst blogs and the level of time needed to be involved in interacting and debating amongst others, Goode found to be a barrier to participation (ibid). In observing blogs like NoRightTurn, Kiwiblog, WhaleOil and The Standard, Goode noted that the technical language and the intense detail of policy could potentially be a turn-off for Internet viewers looking for some extra political information on an issue or candidate (Goode, 2010:439). However, despite intense bickering at times amongst a couple of the

blogs, they provided policy detail and statistical data breakdowns that the mainstream media did not have the time or the resources to provide.

All the parliamentary political parties had websites by 2005 and individual candidates started to create their own websites and blogs. The Greens and the ACT parties were two who allowed for interaction on their parties' websites (Hayward & Rudd, 2006:334). Other parties used their websites only to disseminate information rather than interact with their voters.

3.6 The Internet in the New Zealand 2008 General Election

In 2008, the Internet became a safe haven for political discussion and advertising with the Electoral Finance Act of 2007 limiting third party expenditure. Due to the low cost of the Internet in distributing content, political parties embraced YouTube to deliver policy messages and established their own 'pages' on Facebook.

The 2008 General Election campaign saw websites vastly improved in terms of design, information and use of social media tools. The National Party's official website (www.national.org.nz) was an umbrella for all their other related group websites, creating a user-friendly environment for supporters to find their relevant groups like the Bluelibs (for the liberals), the SuperBlues (for retirees), the Internats (overseas voters and supporters) and the BlueGreens (for supporters with an environmental focus) (Sullivan, 22 September, 2008). John Key and Bill English had their own blogs and there was a video-based website (ntv.org.nz) where John Key regularly posted a video journal and viewers were able to comment (ibid). There was a link to John Key's Facebook page, links to policy, and a sign up link to subscribe to the newsletter. Also, there were links to download full speeches, policies and press releases. This was all accessible from their main website.

Labour struggled to bring together all the elements on social media in a cohesive and user-friendly manner on its 2008 official party website. There was only one video on the website

and policy had not been updated much since 2005 (Sullivan, 22 September, 2008). The design interface was awkward and candidate information was hidden away at the bottom of the website. Labour had instead decided to launch a second website specifically for the campaign (www.labourparty.org.nz) which did not make any sense for users trying to access information about the party. This website had a blog and links to Facebook and YouTube. Its YouTube channel '*Labour08*' had hardly any subscribers and video content (ibid). Sullivan makes an interesting point that as the incumbent, the online organisation was clearly not motivated enough to have a clear online campaign strategy (ibid).

New Zealand First's website had not been updated in its design since 2002 (Sullivan, 21 October, 2008). There was no blog and no links to SNSs, just links to policy and media releases. New Zealand First's website was more revealing in the demographic that it pitches to, older generations who are less likely to use the Internet and even less likely to use SNSs. The ACT Party's website was focused around basic policy and provided pdf links to download policy detail in full. The website allowed for comments from registered visitors, however, the home link did not go back to the default homepage "but to a page with a large graphic of the party members and links to policy, candidates and a multimedia link that goes to a blank page" (ibid). There was no link to SNSs on the website even though party leader Rodney Hide had a Facebook page and there was no YouTube official channel even though there was plenty of online video available on Rodney Hide (ibid).

The Maori Party's website had regular news releases and policy detail published to its homepage but its policies were listed under a 'party' link and there were only a couple there to read from 2005 (Sullivan, 21 October, 2008). There were links to 'other webs' that led to a Young Maori Party website, Pita Sharples' website and also to a Maori Party Facebook page. The Maori Party had an official Bebo page as well.

The Greens attempted to create a more engagement focused website with downloadable web banners, advice for promoting the party online and a link to their blog Frogblog (www.frogblog.co.nz) which allows for comments and interactions across all different points of view (Sullivan, 21 October, 2008). There was a link to its YouTube channel under ‘resources’ and it was filled with its own video content. There was also an audio page with speeches and a vast amount of images, speech transcripts, media releases and policy announcements that was user-friendly and easy to find (ibid). The Greens put together an educational and resource driven website that also linked to SNSs like Facebook.

United Future’s website had a user-friendly interface and video on the very front of their homepage during the 2008 General Election campaign (Sullivan, 21 October, 2008). The website also had a blog written by three people that was updated regularly. United Future used polling widgets to get its viewers and supporters involved and policy was easily available through pdf links (ibid). United Future’s leader Peter Dunne had a Facebook page but it was not linked to by the party website.

The Progressive Party’s website had a very simple design and had the format for online interaction with Internet users but did not follow through. There was video on the home page but it was not working and the comments section on the website had only one comment and no reply (ibid). Party leader Jim Anderton did have a blog but had not updated it for several months and Progressive’s YouTube channel had only one video on it (ibid).

SNSs have grown in popularity over the last three years in New Zealand and were used in the 2008 General Election by politicians as a communicative forum for announcing policies, news and travel. As mentioned previously, Nielsen research indicates that 88 percent of Internet users have been on SNSs in some capacity or another and just under half of these users regularly update and maintain a registered profile (Nielsen, 2008a). Regular exposure

and consumption to SNSs usually progresses to users editing and commenting on content (Nielsen, 2008b). The only obstacle in participating in SNSs is the time intensiveness of updating profiles, adding photos, joining groups and regularly commenting on other pages and friends updates. The original intended use of SNSs for New Zealanders was to connect with friends and people from the past such as old work colleagues and high school friends (Nielsen, 2008a). Yet over a course of two years, in particular with Facebook, SNSs have become this integrated multi-media format on which people can construct multiple levels of engagement with friends, fan pages, politicians and issues that suit their schedule and topics in which they are interested in. Before the change in the structure of the Facebook network system from countries to just local school and work networks in 2009, in April 2008, the New Zealand network had over 290,000 members, even though this was not a compulsory network for those who lived in New Zealand to join.

On the 7th November 2008, the eve of election night, National Party leader John Key had more than 8,137 supporters on Facebook with a large amount of available online video content on his fan page, diary entries from the campaign, comment posts and donate buttons. He also produced a video round-up for Facebook supporters but had stopped doing this later in the campaign. Labour Party leader Helen Clark had 3,670 supporters but hardly any video content available. Most of the information about the campaign came through RSS feeds. ACT Party leader Rodney Hide had 409 supporters on his Facebook page and he also used RSS feeds, photos and links to his blog posts. The two Green Party co-leaders, Russel Norman and Jeanette Fitzsimons had more than 200 supporters each and used photos, videos, posts, YouTube posts and myFlickr photo slideshows. One of Russel Norman's campaign assistant's named themselves the 'Facebook Fairy' and replied back to comments and wall posts.

Bebo is another SNS that is predominantly used by the 18-24 years demographic in New Zealand (Crann, October 4-5, 2008:A9). It is not as popular as Facebook and only the Maori Party had any real presence on the site with an updated page. The New Zealand Electoral Commission during the 2008 election campaign used Bebo to generate publicity about the election through its mascot Elector (the orange guy) who had his own Bebo page (ibid). This was an attempt to reach the 18-24 years demographic after a survey conducted by the Commission indicated that over half of this age group were unaware that it was even an election year (ibid). In August 2008, the Electoral Commission's Bebo page had 997 'friends' (ibid).

The 2008 General Election in New Zealand not only witnessed the use of SNSs in political campaign but also the fusion of online social media with mainstream news media. TVNZ partnered with YouTube during the 2008 election campaign to follow a debate format that had been popular in the United States with people submitting YouTube questions during the CNN run democratic primaries debates (Pullar-Strecker, 7 July, 2008). People uploaded their video questions to put to the party leaders onto the TVNZ and YouTube websites and those that were selected were played on a large television screen in the background of the debate main stage in front of a live audience (ibid). TVNZ had hoped that this format would make traditional television debates more engaging for a younger audience (ibid). This format works in trying to encourage participation but the intense selection process of only a few submitted videos indicates that debate participants and mainstream media are still attempting to tightly control the debate. Barack Obama interestingly noted during the CNN/YouTube debates that all the video questions had a degree of cynicism in them as if politicians would not directly answer the questions (ibid). This suggests the television debate format still needs to be amended to encourage audience participation in a meaningful way.

3.7 Summary

Despite concerns about access to computers and Internet technology being an obstacle to participation, the reduction in price of hardware over the last few years and increased telecommunications sector competition has softened the financial barrier. SNSs create a platform that allows for individuals to project their own self-expression in a user-friendly interface format. In terms of engaging younger people, SNSs create a communication window that would be otherwise closed to politicians. Political blogs although strong in rhetoric, still provide detailed policy analysis and an alternative to mainstream news commentary. Continuous exposure to political blogs would lead to an increase in political knowledge on an advanced level for a voter. New Zealand political parties' initial foray into using SNSs in political campaigning was a tentative one. There was reluctance to let go of some control of the party message and organisation of the campaign. Party campaign organisers need to realise that the key to organising a successful Internet campaign is to thoroughly engage and mobilise the party faithful into setting up their own umbrella groups for campaigning in order to aggregate larger groups of people. SNSs provide the communicative forum through which to do this as was understood by the Obama campaign.

Chapter Four

Political participation and voting behaviour theories – how can the Internet and social networking create a new form of participation?

4.1 Introduction

New Zealand is experiencing an overall decline in voter turnout for elections (Vowles, 2004a). This chapter examines various voter behaviour theories in academic literature in order to get an understanding of how people receive cues to participate in politics and how this relates specifically to New Zealand. It is important to look at voter behaviour trends and processes through which voters receive information and make the decision to politically engage. This then can be tentatively applied to hypothesising how political information online and SNSs can potentially affect young voters and motivate them to politically participate and vote but also acknowledging the weaknesses of this new form of communication.

4.2 Socialisation theories in the context of New Zealand

This research looks at possible reasons why New Zealand and other Western democracies are witnessing a shift in values (Inglehart, 2008) and what this means for issues that motivate citizens to be politically engaged. Numerous technological changes and generational cultural shifts have taken place over the last half a century (Putnam, 2000) and have impacted the discourse of political campaigning. Changes in how people communicate and higher levels of education have transformed political communication and the rise of disengagement suggests that traditional political campaigning in New Zealand is still playing catch up in recognising these changes.

In the realm of civic engagement in New Zealand there have been worrying trends that indicate the decline of traditional political participation. As mentioned previously, New

Zealand is suffering from declining voter turnout in general elections according to age eligibility over the last half a century (Vowles, 2004a:1). When examining voter turnout data in New Zealand, it is important to look at age eligibility rather than official turnout as official turnout is based on the percentage of enrolled voters. Even though it is compulsory to enrol to vote in New Zealand, in 2008 only 95.31 percent of the population was enrolled to vote according to age and citizenship eligibility (New Zealand Electoral Commission, 2008b). Looking at voter statistics based on age and citizenship eligibility gives a clearer and slightly more accurate picture of the total voter population in New Zealand (Vowles, 2004a).

Civic engagement includes more than just the act of voting but also party membership, campaigning for a party, signing a petition, and donating (Vowles, 2004a:1). Party membership in New Zealand has been on an incredibly steep decline since the 1950s (Vowles, 2004a:5). Even though data is slightly incomplete as political parties are not enthusiastic to release details about their membership numbers, party membership (as a percentage of the adult population) dropped from over twenty percent in the 1960s to under five percent by 2000 (ibid). It is nearly impossible to look at the trend of campaign donations as many of them are done under secrecy through trusts or anonymously (Vowles, 2004a:6).

New Zealand's own political history has played a role in the spiralling political disengagement of the last few decades as New Zealand politics "went through a crisis of confidence in the early 1990s" (Vowles, 2004b:188). Party identification dropped 20 points in the 1990 General Election compared to the 1987 General Election and it has never risen back up (ibid). Swing voters who make up their mind just before voting have increased (ibid). This is evident with 40 percent of voters who changed their votes "at the current and previous election from 1993 onwards." (ibid) And the number of voters who had made up their mind during the election campaign increased from 29 to 41 percent from 1987 to 1990 (ibid). The 'Michigan model' was the theoretical model used by scholars from the 1950s onwards to

explain campaign effects (Vowles, 2004b:184). It played down campaign effects on voters and emphasised partisan attachments to be the main reason behind voting (ibid). However, after the 1990s and the break from party identification by voters in New Zealand, scholarship redirected its focus to those who made their decision just before the election as an indication of voter volatility (ibid). This data suggests that in the early 1990s voters split away from identifying themselves solely with one political party and the number of voters who participated in issue-based voting increased.

Putnam's (2000) social capital theory looks at attendance and membership of clubs and groups as evidence of declining social capital and theorises that this is one of the main reasons why the Western world is seeing a decline in civic engagement. Data found by Vowles from the Ministry of Statistics on membership and attendance of associations for those 15 and over in 1980 and those 18 and over in 1999 in the Christchurch and St Albans electorates, show that "membership of one or more types of association fell from 85 percent to 69 percent (Vowles, 2004a:7-8). This small amount of data does support the theory of gradual disengagement from civic life deposited by Putnam (2000). However, the data available in New Zealand is not clear enough to paint a full picture of civic disengagement over the last thirty years amongst the voter population.

Inglehart (2008) believes that a shift in values has taken place due to economic development over the last fifty years leading to a better quality of living in general in the majority of Western democracies. Concerns regarding affordability of day-to-day living and religion-based values (traditional values) have shifted to values that are focused on self-expression (secular/rational) and are issue-specific (ibid). Putnam (2000) argues that this shift to secular/rational values has led to declining social capital as it encourages a move away from bonding social capital, no longer maintaining strong ties in the local community. Putnam cites the examples of fraternal clubs: bowling clubs, the Masons, church-organised

groups as evidence of types of bonding social capital and their declining membership as proof of eroding social capital (2000; Inglehart, 2008). Inglehart (2008) argues that these groups that Putnam idealises are opposed to change and therefore cannot maintain high levels of relevancy in a rapidly changing technology-based society. Putnam (2000) and Inglehart (2008) both believe that there has been a transformation of social capital from individuals being linked through strong, small amounts of ties to large groups of weaker ties. Instead of close-knit small communities that are resistant to change and diversity, these weaker ties “bridge ethnically diverse groups and are strongly linked with both creativity and democracy” (Inglehart, 2008). Evidence of these weaker ties is exemplified by SNSs that bring large groups of people together, many of whom would have never regularly contacted each other if it was not for the website network.

Barack Obama’s Internet grassroots movement was one example given by Inglehart (2008) where scholars witnessed this new kind of social capital in action. This new type of organising, hybridising traditional campaigners with new supporters through SNSs, overlapped McCain’s more traditional campaign organisation and the traditional democratic party organisation (ibid). A demographic breakdown of those who voted for Obama showed that he mobilised an ethnically diverse group of voters and young voters (ibid). Obama gained the votes of two-thirds of Hispanics and won over the under-30 group by 34 percentage points over McCain (ibid). Obama’s campaign was successful in understanding the new kind of social capital held by young people. All the older organisations such as labour unions, churches and registered party membership with entrenched bureaucratic practices are slowly becoming outdated in this new era of large and loose social networks that are organised through the Internet and mobile technology that have minimal bureaucracy (ibid). These networking links may be weak but they are more inclusive and diverse compared to Putnam’s ideal of small, fraternal 1960s organisations (ibid). Inglehart (2008)

believes that this new form of social capital and networking is far more capable of engaging in non-traditional methods of political participation for example, mass protests, demonstrations and boycotts.

4.3 Voter participation theories

In exploring the recent changes of how individuals are now voting along different lines rather than adhering to political party ties, it is crucial to look at other theories on what motivates people to vote in order to get a wider understanding of how people choose to politically participate through the act of voting.

Anthony Downs (1957) examines in his work *An Economic Theory of Democracy* why people choose to vote and bases his rational voting model on three main motivations. Firstly, the cost to the individual in casting a vote; secondly the benefits in terms of policy or outcome if their chosen candidate or party won; and thirdly, whether their vote will translate into a meaningful result (Blais, 2000; Vowles, 2006:316). Theorists later developed on Anthony Downs' rational choice theory of voting and added another key motivation to voting, civic duty (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Vowles, 2006:316). Even though this motivation does not fit with Anthony Downs' self-interested rational voter model, it is a key motivation that should not be overlooked. The model needs to acknowledge the variable of wider democratic co-operation by individuals when they are deciding to vote.

The second motivation mentioned in Anthony Downs' model is the one that has shifted considerably in the New Zealand electorate over the last few decades. In his model Anthony Downs believes that voters will make a decision at any time based on what party or candidate represents the views on issues held closest to them (1957; Tan, 2010:355). Voters have a select group of 'salient' issues that are close to them whether they were the ones that dominated in media discourse during the election campaign period or policy that relates to

them in one way or another (Campbell et al, 1960, in Tan. 2010:355). Even though the allowance is in that second variable for issue-based voting in the Downsian model, New Zealand campaign effects theorists before the 1990s had overwritten this with political party identification and ties (Vowles, 2004b:184). The literature (since the late 1980s) has shifted its focus to issue-based voting and campaign effects. This research will apply this focus on issue-based voting into the experimental design.

As well as exploring the motivations of how people are voting today another important aspect of voting behaviour theory to examine in this literature review is the patterns of voting amongst young age cohorts (Vowles, 2006:317). Jack Vowles argues that turnout decline is generational, with “the age cohort born after 1974 about 22 per cent less likely to vote than that before 1934” (2004:17). He believes that this generational shift in lower voter turnout has been aggravated by the lowering of the voting age and less competitive elections since the 1950s (2004:22). According to the New Zealand Election Study, a lower interest in politics and sense of civic duty among the more recent age eligible cohorts, “have had the largest impact on generational effects” (Vowles, 2004a:23). Research indicates that the decline in traditional civic engagement is generational (Franklin, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Vowles, 2004a). Therefore, the answer in re-engaging youth may be attempting to understand how these younger generations are communicating rather than trying to force them to revert back to pre-modern activities in the hope of stemming participatory decline.

Mark Franklin in his study of voter turnout in 22 countries argues that there are two key factors involved in voter turnout decline; lack of competitiveness in Western Democratic elections and the lowering of the voting age (2004; Vowles, 2006:317). A lack of competitiveness in elections can stem from poor vote translation into representative government, the effects of this are felt most keenly on younger voters (Franklin, 2004 in Vowles, 2006:317). With generational replacement, the number of younger age-eligible

citizens not voting grows as they are unable to see any changes in their democratic institution due to poor vote translation. This highlights one of Downs' variables in his rational choice theory model, where the probability of an individual voting decreases when they believe that their vote will have no effect on the result (Vowles, 2006:316). Franklin also believes that lowering the voting age has had a disastrous effect on voter turnout as potential voters under the age of 21 years are less likely to be in "stable and society-sustaining relationships" (Vowles, 2006:317), less attached to the broader network of society or, using Putnam's socialisation thesis, less likely to be in bonding social capital networks as they are unlikely to be homeowners in a community. For Franklin, another given reason for declining voter turnout is that if these younger age cohorts do not vote for the first time that they are eligible, it establishes a trend or 'footprint' of not voting and therefore the probability of them voting decreases in every following election (Franklin 2004, in Vowles, 2006:318).

Another aspect of Putnam's socialisation thesis builds on this generational/age cohort argument for declining political participation. Putnam believes that there is an information gap that is becoming apparent amongst younger generations in their knowledge of public affairs (2000:36). This is a recent development, according to Putnam, and contradictory to the fact that recent generations are better educated than their grandparents, Generation X (the post-baby boom generation, from 1964 on) are less informed about civic affairs (2000:35). This is a worrying trend as "political knowledge and interest in public affairs are critical preconditions for more active forms of involvement" (Putnam, 2000:35). Even though Putnam in *Bowling Alone* is specifically discussing the post-baby boom generation in the United States, New Zealand is showing similar signs of this information gap in political knowledge. In a recent Colmar Brunton poll, 40 percent of respondents could not name the Opposition leader Phil Goff and a significant 80 percent were not able to name the Opposition deputy leader Annette King (TVNZ 23/02/2009). Declining levels of political

knowledge are problematic, and indicate a continuing trend of waning voter turnout. However, there is a lack of social research in New Zealand on the political knowledge of various eligible voter age cohorts. Revising Downs' rational choice model again, how can an individual be aware of the benefits to expect from their vote or how it will affect the outcome of the election if they have minimal political knowledge, therefore the probability of them voting looks bleak?

4.4 Using cognitive mobilisation theory to understand political participation

Throughout this research, there has been an examination of potential theoretical effects that television media may have on the participatory behaviour of the electorate and the potential for the Internet and SNSs for creating a new window of communication and participation for those who are disengaged from politics. Voter behaviour and participation theories in this chapter examine how people are voting and what is motivating them. Cognitive mobilisation theory is the process through which people receive their cognitive cues to make decisions on voting and participation (Dalton, 1984). This research uses cognitive mobilisation theory to explain what is taking place during this process when voters are being presented with information and participatory opportunities through different media.

Russell Dalton argues that with the developments in technology and mass media have "increased the public's political abilities" (2002:18). In Western democracies, the availability of mass media has equipped the electorates with greater resources of information and increased their overall political sophistication as a result (Dalton, 2002:19). This has occurred through a process of cognitive mobilisation whereby citizens now have the "resources and skills that prepare them to deal with the complexities of politics and reach their own political decisions" (ibid). Dalton points at the growth of television media and its proliferation in households as an example of these expanding resources as well as the development of 24-

hour news channels (ibid). The electorate's ability to process politics has advanced through issue-based decision-making when consuming complex political information (ibid).

The increase in formal education in Western democracies is further evidence of a more sophisticated electorate (Dalton, 2002:22; Putnam, 2000:36). The increase in university and tertiary education enrolment numbers in the United States and in Europe is evident that parts of the electorate are receiving higher education than their predecessors (Dalton, 2002:22). Although there are still gaps between those who are information rich and poor, the numbers are growing for those who are gaining higher education qualifications. In New Zealand, the proportion of the population with a bachelor-level qualification nearly doubled over the last decade to 17 percent of those aged 15 years or over (Education Counts, November 2009).

Dalton insists that with the demands and pressures of time, citizens have no choice but to use "shortcuts" to simplify politics (2002:24). This involves focusing on only a few issues that are relevant to the citizen or are of interest to them (Dalton, 2002:25). According to this theory, electorates are then divided up into *issue publics*, consisting of citizens who have genuine concern about the issue and a degree of knowledge about it; everyone is a member of at least one (ibid). Issues like the economy, taxes and social welfare programmes are the topics of large issue publics (ibid). Dalton's explanation of political sophistication existing for many individuals on particular issues, skews Putnam's (2000:36) insistence that overall the public through each successive generation is suffering from a knowledge gap; instead they are knowledgeable just not about every single issue (2002:25).

The increase in political sophistication amongst the electorate-divided issue publics has decreased the dependency of citizens and voters on partisan cues provided by political parties in their decision-making (1984:264). New Zealand's own confidence crisis of the early 1990s witnessed the steep decline of party membership (Vowles, 2004b:188), the process of

cognitive mobilisation and developing issue publics has played a role in reinforcing this decline. As a result of this “cognitively mobilised publics are more issue orientated in their participation in such activities as voting, and less inclined to be led by the elite than in the past” (Dalton, 1984 in Tan, 2010:356). The development of this kind of political sophistication amongst electorates has played role in the decline of party identification as a key variable in voter decision-making and increased the level to which voters are influenced by issue position proximity to their own ideas and beliefs (ibid). Declining partisanship amongst the cognitively mobilised citizenry may also be encouraging them to forgo traditional methods of political participation encouraged by political parties and instead, mobilising themselves into ‘direct action’ methods such as signing petitions, protesting, mass demonstrations, and boycotts (Dalton, 1984 in Tan, 2010:266). Citizens who have high levels of cognitive mobilisation are the ones who “possess both the skills and the motivation (interest) to grapple with the complexities of politics on their own” without the need of external cues from the media or peers (Dalton, 1984 in Tan, 2010:267).

The background to the development of the cognitive mobilisation thesis (advancements in education and technology) suggest that it is more likely to take place amongst the younger generations as they are the ones who are exposed to higher education and mass media from an early age compared to their predecessors (Dalton, 1984:268). Present day young voters are also “socialised in an environment where parties are less central to politics” (ibid) as post-modern campaigning (as previously discussed) has a tendency to focus on leadership and personalities (Robinson, 2004). The industrialised shift to secular/rational values (Inglehart, 2008) has led to an emphasis on post-material values (for example, the environment) and these are most likely to be adopted by the cognitively mobilised young apartisans as these issues fall outside of traditional party political ideology (Dalton, 1984:275). What is taking place in the electorate is the growth of this new breed of voters who are still engaged in some

issues but cannot be communicated to using traditional political communication calling on partisan ties as this does not fit in with their decision-making processes. Loader terms this disconnection between tradition and post-modern political values as ‘cultural displacement’ where traditional politics no longer addresses the concerns of today’s youth culture (2007:1).

The process of cognitive mobilisation as indicated by the literature review is a process where efficacy (interest), knowledge and participation all play a role in the political mobilisation of a citizen. So the question in examining the role of the Internet in encouraging political participation, is where can the Internet encourage cognitive mobilisation where television cannot? The Internet provides a forum for interaction and participation, unlike television where there is a one-way stream of information that affects knowledge levels but does not provide the opportunity to directly participate. According to Neuman’s research on television viewers “television works as a knowledge “leveller” because it presents information in less cognitively demanding ways” (1976; Prior, 2005:578). Prior cites this as the reason why political knowledge has risen amongst its viewers and closed the knowledge gap amongst regular televisions news watchers (2005:578). Both television and the Internet provide political information exposure to encourage a ‘virtuous cycle’ (Norris, 2000) of political engagement. Yet as witnessed with the Barack Obama campaign and the use of SNSs in political campaigning, the Internet provides an alternative participatory route in politics as well as providing information to increase political knowledge and subsequently efficacy.

4.5 Is social networking a viable replacement for traditional political participation?

SNSs and the Internet provide an alternative participatory discourse and forum that suits the new cognitively mobilised young citizens of today as it provides a platform to project self-expression and discuss or mobilise on post-material values. Yet the question remains is whether these large groups of loose, linked networks (Putnam, 2000) can stabilise the decline

in voting and political participation amongst the 18 – 24 years demographic in New Zealand? Or will SNSs further support the move towards entertainment-value based media and political discourse? This concern became a reality with the success of the Bill and Ben Party, a comedic duo who mocked traditional political party campaigning and made no policy announcements but managed to garner 13,016 votes in the 2008 General Election. They had more supporters on Facebook (5775 on 7 November, 2008) than the incumbent Prime Minister Helen Clark.

It is the kind of interaction that takes place on social networking sites that makes theorists question whether political campaigning and participation on SNSs can amount to meaningful political engagement? Clausen refers to the example of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's MySpace page where most people were writing on the comments page "Go, Big Kevvie!" instead of discussing policy and issues on the campaign (2007:17). But is this expectation realistic of theorists when such pages are set up as fan and support pages and are further encouraged by the post-modern style of campaigning where the focus is on leadership personality and qualities? Clausen believes that the Internet's value in politics lies in its communicative ability to disseminate messages on a large scale in a cost-effective manner with television news publicising what has been taking place, old media reinforcing the new.

The Australian Centre for Public Communication wonders with the experience of *Kevin07* on MySpace and related humour-based viral video on YouTube, whether there is "some failure on the part of the new media to provide a public sphere of political discourse as envisioned by Habermas or whether they are part of the public sphere allowing citizens to express their views in their own language or cultural context" (2008:12). Are there two extremes that exist amongst SNSs with light humour and entertainment dominating media interaction on one side and the other, political engagement in a form of discourse that is reserved only for true policy-wonks in the blogosphere? Will political engagement on the Internet find a 'mass

audience' (ibid) and how will the mainstream media find an appropriate middle ground to balance the changes in how people are using media and creating their own discourse and still provide political information and news?

Another criticism of social networking and online communities is that they do not necessarily serve a democratic deliberative function involving a free exchange of different ideas as they tend to be groups of like-minded people interacting back and forth with each other. Margolis and Resnick write that while ideally, deliberative democracy takes place when there is a "resolution of group conflict" from interaction by both sides of the debate, online communities tend to simulate traditional political groups and isolate those who hold different ideas or beliefs (2000:101).

4.6 Summary

Perhaps what we are not seeing is a revolution for political participation and democracy amongst SNSs but a "repositioning of politics within popular culture" (Australian Centre for Public Communication, 2008:14). What is taking place is the move away from relying on television news and other forms of traditional media for information on politics and a move towards self-expression and a form of participation that reflects the beliefs and ideals of a cognitively mobilised post-modern generation in a style of interaction that they are comfortable with. The multi-media platform of current SNS sites such as Facebook suit political participation on a larger scale, however, it is up to content creators to create a dialogue format that provokes motivation for some level of engagement whether it be signing up to an email newsletter or going to a Facebook scheduled political event.

Chapter Five

Research methods and data of participatory experiment

5.1 Introduction

The research undertaken is an exploratory analysis of a participatory experiment in an attempt to understand how the Internet may cognitively mobilise young people where other traditional media - for example, television - is unable to in terms of interaction and participation.

Survey questionnaires based on the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) of 1996 (Dalton, 2002:264) were given out to a group of 16 students (none of whom studied any form of political science or were affiliated with any political party). The first questionnaire gauged their efficacy and media use. Then the group of 16 were split into three groups, each group was designated one media outlet (television, newspaper and the Internet) to view over the course of the week (15 minutes a day for five days). They came back after that week to fill out a second questionnaire that attempted to test the differences (if any) of each participant's perceptions and knowledge of politics.

5.2 Research design

The exploratory analysis was qualitative and not quantitative in nature. Qualitative research methods are used to “gather insights that can be provided by specific individuals or groups about how they relate to their environment or see the political world.” (Carlson & Hyde, 2003:207). The qualitative method is ideal to use in survey research on a small scale such as this study, looking at specific cases rather than generalising across an entire population as a whole (ibid). In terms of representation, a qualitative sampling can be very limited but this research looks for insights in participatory behaviour online by young voters. The study was

undertaken as an indicative and proof-of-concept exercise. Statistical software would not generate meaningful output with such a limited sample.

The key question that this exploratory analysis attempted to answer was what kind of political participation is taking place with the increased use of SNSs and is this participation meaningful enough to reverse current trends of declining traditional political participation and lowering levels of efficacy? How does the Internet play a role in influencing voter behaviour compared to other forms of traditional media? This research used participatory groups in a semi-controlled environment, where different groups consumed different types of media and any changes in their preferences were analysed. Cognitive mobilisation theory (Dalton, 1984; 2002) suggests that because of the Internet's ability to provide an abundance of information and a platform for alternative political participation, it has the potential to mobilise citizens in ways that television is unable to. The survey was constructed using a pre- and post-questionnaire in an attempt to find differences in efficacy levels between those who use the Internet for political information and those who watch television news for theirs.

The idea of using participatory groups in a semi-controlled environment came from a Iyengar and Kinder (1987) study where they interviewed a sample of Americans and then divided them into two groups, those who said they relied on television for all of their news and those who said they relied on other sources of information for the news as well (1987:6). They compared the political views of the two groups and carried out content analysis of television news coverage (ibid). They altered the newscasts presented to the groups in a hotel and then told them not to watch the news when they got home (ibid). After watching the altered newscasts, the participants were made to fill out the questionnaires again and then their perceptions were analysed again (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987:8). Iyengar and Kinder created the conditions under investigation, attempting to hold other exposure variables constant (ibid). So a similar attempt was made in this research by assigning each participant one of three media

that they had regular access to and asking them not to watch, or in some cases read, any other political news for the rest of the week.

The format for the survey questionnaire (refer to appendices four and five) was based on the of the 1996 ISSP survey format (Dalton, 2002:264). Dalton (2002) used this data in his research in measuring political efficacy and level of social capital. The ISSP format uses multi-choice answers with a direct line of questioning. This method of question and answer was necessary in order to ask all the questions that were necessary to get a clear picture of efficacy and participation from participants. Multi-choice answers meant that questions could be answered quickly and kept to a fifteen-minute time-frame for each questionnaire as there was not enough financial incentive there to keep them for any longer amount of time. Private rooms were rented out in the University of Canterbury library and participants filled out their questionnaires there. No more than five people at a time filled out their surveys as it was important to try to prevent anyone from copying answers from other participants or feeling under peer pressure to answer questions in a certain way.

Participants in this study were to be split up into three groups according to their designated media. It was essential to have a comparative point to understand how some media could cognitively mobilise citizens in ways where others could not. For the group using the Internet, their data was compared to those watching television and reading the newspaper to see if the Internet was any different in motivating young people through their consumption of political information online.

An advertisement (refer to appendix one) was posted around all the public notice boards on the University of Canterbury campus (with ethics committee approval obtained), three weeks before the designated time for the survey stating:

"Looking for people who are willing to participate in a study looking at election news coverage once a day (for about 15 mins or longer) for five days starting from Monday 27th October to Friday 31st October. I also need participants to fill out a questionnaire before and after the study (approx 15 minutes long). Volunteers must be registered to vote and between the ages of 18-24 years and will be given a \$20 petrol voucher or pre-paid cell phone card for their time. They also must not be a member of any political party."

The 27th October to the 31st was the week before the 2008 General Election in New Zealand, held on the 8th November. This week was selected because of its proximity to the election and that political news would likely headline for the entirety of the week because of it. Sixteen participants with an even spread of males and females came forward to do the study. All had access to the Internet; most had access to a television set, and only a few to a newspaper. Going on what participants had access to, three groups were split up accordingly: Four participants followed the newspaper (The Press); five participants watched ONE News and 3News, and seven participants used the Internet for their political news for the week. Having a larger number in the Internet group worked for several reasons: firstly, this is what the majority of students had access to and secondly, this group's data was going to be analysed the greatest so overrepresentation was needed as a precaution in case several did not turn up for the second questionnaire which would result in a void in the data results.

It was important that none of the participants had studied political science or belonged to a political party. Having highly cognitive mobilised students would mean that there would be very little change in their perceptions from exposure to media and their high level of efficacy would mean that there would be no change in whether they wanted to participate or learn more about politics after a level of information exposure. Participants needed to be enrolled to vote as it was essential that they had the option to vote if they chose to. If they were not

enrolled but felt that they wanted to participate after exposure, it would have devalued the outcome. The 18-24 years demographic is the age bracket that is least likely to be enrolled and least likely to vote according to the New Zealand Electoral Commission (Crann, October 4-5, 2008:A9) so it was this age bracket which the exploratory study would focus on in order to get some indicative signs about youth political participation and online behaviour.

Part one of the first questionnaire measured for levels of traditional political participation by asking questions about voting, attendance at speaking events and non-traditional participation or 'protest politics' as Dalton (2002) labels it, attending protests or signing petitions. The second part attempted to gauge the level of media consumption that the participant engaged in to get a picture of the average news consumption of this age bracket. This part also asked questions about online behaviour and whether Prior's (2005) suspicions are correct that the Internet is being used for entertainment purposes rather than news consumption. Part three sought to measure efficacy through getting participants to rank the general issues that had featured in the campaign according to their levels of interest. It also asked participants to give an approximation of how much political discourse featured in their day-to-day life.

Part one of the second questionnaire sought to find out whether the consumption of political information over the last week for the participant had encouraged their levels of efficacy. Did viewing or reading politics over the week encourage discussion on politics with their peers? Other questions attempted to see if there was any resonance with Loader's (2007) cultural displacement theory by asking participants if they felt political party campaigning was out of touch with their own interests when it comes to communicating and addressing the issues. Other questions gauged levels of cynicism towards politicians and how much they participated online through the use of comments and blogs. Participants were asked to rank what they considered to be the issues of the campaign and which were the ones they felt most strongly about.

Part two of the second questionnaire was tailored to ask specific questions about each of the three different groups' media consumption. One section was written for each of the television, newspaper and the Internet groups. Questions for all three focused on the consumption of political news and for them to indicate whether there were any obstacles for the participants in understanding the information. Questions were also asked to try and see if exposure to their designated media had in any way engaged them into politics more, testing the theory of Pippa Norris' (2000) 'virtuous cycle' theory.

Because the Internet is so expansive and there were many different kinds of political information relating to the New Zealand election available, a recommended list of websites (refer to appendix six) was given to the group of participants using the Internet, in order to give them some guidance as to where they could get information from. The list featured five news websites (two television and three newspaper-based sites all owned by different companies) and six blogs (three from each side of the political spectrum) and parliamentary parties websites.

Formative years and peers play an important role in shaping beliefs (Dalton, 2002) so there was a question included as to how their participants' parents were intending to vote and whether this had influenced the way they were going to vote? This was to try and control for a variable which was outside the realm of the experiment.

Due to so much raw data stemming from these two large questionnaires, this exploratory analysis focuses on seven key questions about youth participation and online behaviour drawing on from theory discussed in the research:

- 1) Are young people more likely to engage in non-traditional methods of political participation (Dalton, 2002; Inglehart, 2008)?

- 2) Are young people increasing becoming disengaged from politics due to low levels of news media consumption (Norris, 2000)?
- 3) Are young people politically participating online?
- 4) Are younger people using the Internet as an alternative news source for political information?
- 5) Is there evidence of a reinforced democratic divide in Internet usage in regards to political content (Norris, 2000; Prior, 2005)?
- 6) Does the Internet encourage alternative news and information, in particular those that emphasise post-material values?
- 7) Will exposure to political news information online encourage levels of efficacy and therefore mobilise young people (Norris 2000; Dalton 2002)?

5.3 Results

A summary of results does show the following:

Table 5.1: The number of participants who voted in the last General Election (2005) and the last Christchurch City Council elections in 2007(question 5-6, part one of first questionnaire).

Who did vote			Who did not vote due to choice		
Age	General Elections	Local Elections	Age	General Elections	Local Elections
18			18		
19			19		2
20			20		1
21	2		21		2
22	1		22		1
23	2		23		1
24	1	1	24		

Who did not vote due to age			Other		
Age	General Elections	Local Elections	Age	General Elections	Local Elections
18	1	1	18		
19	6	4	19		
20	3	1	20		1
21			21		
22			22		
23			23		1

As shown in table 5.1 all the participants in the study who were age-eligible to vote in the 2005 General Election did so. Nine participants did not vote in the previous general election as they were under the age of 18 years. Only one person, however, voted in the local Christchurch City Council elections in 2007 when they were age-eligible. This apathy with local elections is not surprising but it shows an incomplete political ‘footprint’ (Franklin, 2004). Average local election turnout is around 46 percent (Justice and Electoral Committee, 2005:1.7C). Local elections are held through a postal vote using the single transferable vote electoral system. Although the lack of local election voting is concerning amongst this group of young people, it is to be expected as the local elections do not have even half the publicity or the information available compared to a general election. This highlights one area of traditional political engagement that this group of young people are not involving themselves in.

After election day, an email was sent to all participants to see if they had voted. All participants voted in the 2008 General Election. So Franklin’s (2004) ‘footprint’ theory can be applied to this group of young people in the context of general election voting.

Dalton (2002) classifies two types of political engagement: traditional engagement which involves voting, attending town hall meetings and volunteering for campaigns; the other category is what he coins ‘protest politics’ (ibid), attending rallies, demonstrations, signing petitions and joining fringe activist groups. This survey did not ask about campaign participation as it was required from start that no participant was a member of a political party. Participants were asked whether they had attended town hall meetings, outdoor speaking events, protests, or signed a petition. Only seven participants had attended either an outdoor speaking event or a town hall meeting. Thirteen participants had signed a petition and one was a member of an activist group and had also taken part in a protest or demonstration. This data indicates that is more likely for young people to engage in non-

traditional forms of political participation. However, signing a petition requires very little from the participant so the results should not be over-interpreted to conclude that young New Zealanders are fully engaging in ‘protest politics’. This group of young people with the exception of one or two were apathetic when it came to engaging in traditional political participation.

Table 5.2: Participants’ frequency of news consumption from the three main media (questions 1-3, part two of first questionnaire).

	TV News	Newspaper	Internet News
Nearly Every Day	2	1	3
Most Days	4	2	1
Often	4	5	2
Hardly at all	4	8	9
Never	2	0	1

Table 5.2 shows the frequency to which participants were consuming news on different media in the first questionnaire. Three participants read the news online almost every day compared to two participants who watched the same amount on television. Still the numbers overall supported television news as the most frequently used media. There was a large group of nine who hardly used the Internet for news at all. The Internet has not replaced television for consumption of the majority of news media content as even with online video, it struggles to keep up with its visuality and format. The majority of participants did consume news on a regular basis so this is an encouraging sign that young people are still receiving political information and therefore are engaging themselves in a ‘virtuous cycle’ (Norris, 2000). Six participants watched the leaders’ debate on TV One. This is less than half of the group. However, only eight participants watched television news on a regular basis so this is proportional with the amount of television consumption.

Table 5.3: Participants' use of online social networking sites (questions 9-10, part two of first questionnaire).

	Facebook	Myspace	Bebo
Yes	11	0	5
No	5	16	11
Primarily Visit	10	0	1

In table 5.3 the majority of the participants in the survey say they use Facebook and 10 of the 11 who do, use Facebook over other SNSs. This is to be expected as Facebook is popular with young university students. The rest use Bebo which is indicative of their age bracket as Bebo caters to a younger audience. Three participants are a supporter of a politician or of a political party on Facebook. These participants regularly using Facebook, are engaging in political activity in a forum that they are familiar with. One participant had commented on a wall but this was the same participant who actively engages in non-traditional methods of political participation.

Table 5.4: Participants' use of online social media (questions 7-8, 11-15, part two of first questionnaire).

	Visited political blog	Subscribe to political news	Have social network profile	Upload media to social network site	Visited YouTube	Own YouTube Channel	Posted comment on a video
Yes	5	1	13	12	13	4	3
No	11	15	3	1	2	12	13

As indicated by the table above, the majority of those who use Facebook upload media to their profile. This highlights how Facebook has become a multi-media centre in communicating with others. Most of the participants had also visited YouTube and four had their own channel. The results are evident that young people are using this social online media that is available to them. Five had visited a political blog which was more than expected as blog readers are considered to be a part of a niche group. Only three participants

had commented on a video so this was less than what was expected. The level of engagement with this online media in terms of discussion was low. Three participants also made mention of receiving emails with political content. From their level of engagement, newsletter style emails were ineffective in mobilising these young people.

Table 5.5: Number of participants who watched political content related video online and the country it originated from (questions 16-17, part two of questionnaire one).

	Watched political content on online video	New Zealand	United States	Serious	Comedic
Yes	8	0	8	0	8
No	7				

Table 5.5 reinforces Prior’s (2005) belief that many will continue to use the Internet solely for entertainment purposes. All eight videos that were watched were of a comedic nature and they were based on United States politics. The proliferation of viral online video from the United States is clearly more enticing to watch to these participants. New Zealand politicians just speaking straight to the camera like a video diary, appears to be not attracting the attention of these students.

Table 5.6: Participants’ ranking on a scale of 1 – 6 (1 being most important and 6 least important) of what they considered to be the most significant issues in the election campaign according to the media (question 1, part three, first questionnaire and question 15, second questionnaire).

	Economy			Law and Order			Tax Cuts			Health Care			Education			Environment		
	N	I	T	N	I	T	N	I	T	N	I	T	N	I	T	N	I	T
Q1	1.75	1.5	2.2	3.75	5.3	4.4	3.5	2.4	4	2.75	3.3	3.6	3.5	3.2	1.8	5.5	4.2	5
Q2	2	1.6	2.6	3.5	4.4	3.8	3.25	2.4	4	3.25	4.4	4	3.5	3.4	2.2	5.5	4.7	3.6
Change	+0.25	+0.1	+0.4	-0.25	-0.9	-0.6	-0.25	nc	nc	+0.5	+1.1	+0.4	nc	+0.2	+0.4	Nc	+0.5	-1.4

In table 5.6, the same question ‘what do you think are the most significant issues according to coverage in this election’ was put in the first and second questionnaire to see if different

media exposure had affected what they perceived to be the biggest issues being discussed in the campaign by their designated media and the results were statistically averaged out. These were general issues chosen through their frequency in the media leading up to the participatory group study. Participants in all three groups after their week of media exposure ranked the economy higher in the second questionnaire. The Internet group ranked down law and order as an issue but increased their ranking of the environment. This was likely because the Internet blogs and party websites all had the economy as their number one issue towards the end of the campaign due to the beginning of the worldwide economic recession. The left-wing blogs like 08Wire, Frog Blog, and the Greens website would have all featured the issue of the environment prominently on their web pages, so the ranking upwards would most likely be the result of that. Left-wing blogs and websites encourage the discussion of post-material values such as concern for the environment so the Internet does in a way encourage these kinds of issues being presented as headline news. Health care was another issue that was ranked upwards in the second questionnaire by the Internet group. This reinforces what the Australian Centre for Public Communication (2008) found in its research that the Internet forums and blogs tend to focus on more personal day-to-day issues in their discussions.

Table 5.7: Participants' ranking (extremely strong, very strong, fairly strong, not very strong) how strongly they felt about these issues (question 2, part three, first questionnaire and question 16, second questionnaire).

	Economy			Law and Order			Tax Cuts			Health Care			Education			Environment		
	N	I	T	N	I	T	N	I	T	N	I	T	N	I	T	N	I	T
Q1	2.75	1.86	2.8	2.5	2.14	3	2.25	1.57	2.6	3.25	2.6	2.6	1.75	2.6	3.4	1.5	2.4	2.2
Q2	2.25	2	3.2	2.25	2.3	2	2	1.8	2	2.5	2.5	3	3	3.7	2.2	2.5	2.5	2.4
Change	-0.5	+0.14	+0.4	-0.25	+0.16	-1	-0.25	+0.23	-0.6	-0.75	-0.1	+0.4	+1.25	+1.1	-1.2	+1	+0.1	+0.2

Table 5.7 shows how the participants of each group ranked the issues that featured in the election campaign before and after their week of designated media exposure according to how strongly they felt towards them and this was averaged out to see if there is any statistical difference in their rankings. The most noticeable differences were shown by the television group who felt less strongly about law and order and education after their exposure. The Internet group felt more strongly towards the economy, education, law and order, and the environment. The newspaper group had the greatest averaged difference with feeling stronger towards the issues of education and the environment. These differences suggest that participants continuously changed their minds in terms of what issues were the most important to them and appear quite malleable to political information exposure by the media.

Table 5.8: Participants indicate through a ranking of 1-5 (1 being no change and 5 definitely will be consuming more information) whether they will be more likely to be consuming political news? (Part two, second questionnaire).

	Internet	Newspaper	Television
No Change (1)	1 (14.3%)	1 (25%)	2 (40%)
2	1 (14.3%)		
3	0		1 (20%)
4	4 (57.14%)	2 (50%)	1 (20%)
Definite Increase (5)	1 (14.3%)	1 (25%)	1 (20%)

Table 5.8 displays the percentage of change that participants expressed on whether they would be more likely to continue to consume political news after exposure to political news for a week. The Internet group experienced the greatest statistical change of 57.14 percent towards increasing their political news consumption after partaking in this study. Only four participants indicated no change to their political news media consumption after the study. This supports Pippa Norris' (2000) 'virtuous cycle' thesis that increased exposure to political news leads to further interest and engagement. The Internet group was presented with a list of new political information sources during their week of exposure (according to previous

online engagement data from the first questionnaire) so they would have been consuming a different variety of news on blogs, political party websites and online news websites.

Table 5.9: *Participants from the Internet group rank on a scale of 1-5 (1 being easy to read and 5 too detailed to understand what is going on) the level of difficulty in understanding the political content in news websites and political blogs (question 12-13, part two of the second questionnaire).*

	News Websites	Political Blogs
Easy to Read (1)	3	0
2	3	4
3	1	2
4	0	1
Too detailed (5)	0	0

Table 5.9 shows that participants in the Internet group did not find political blogs difficult to read. This suggests that claims of political blogs discourse itself is a barrier to participation (Goode, 2010) is not necessarily the case with the younger student demographic.

Table 5.10: *Participants from the Internet group indicate from a ranking of 1-5 (1 no change to 5 will definitely be consuming them more frequently in the future) whether they will be reading more political blogs and watching more frequently political online videos (question 14-15, part two, second questionnaire).*

	Political blogs	Political videos
No Change (1)	2	1
2	0	3
3	3	1
4	1	2
Definite Increase (5)	1	0

In table 5.10, participants from the Internet group indicated that they probably would consume more political-related content on online video and would more likely be reading political blogs in the future. This data does not show an overwhelming move for change which suggests that although consumption is slightly up, their efficacy had not managed to catch up with it. But overall, this group indicated that generally their political news consumption would go up which lends support to Pippa Norris' (2000) 'virtuous cycle' and

tentatively to Dalton's (1984) cognitive mobilisation thesis that increase in knowledge and participation will eventually led to greater participation. Six out of the seven participants who were in the group said they would look for the majority of their political news online in the second questionnaire which suggests that for those participants, the Internet is a more viable and accessible medium for them to consume news and information from.

Three participants' minds were changed about who they were going to vote for after their week of media consumption. All three participants belonged to the Internet group. Here are their three reasons for the change:

- 1) *"I found out about policies I was unaware of, but am in agreement with"*
- 2) *"Some parties policies were different from how I thought they would be"*
- 3) *"I was going to vote as my parents do but now I'm not sure"*.

The political information that these three participants' consumed on the Internet changed their beliefs and perceptions on candidates and political parties when they were presented with more information. All three answers were apartisan in context; these three participants learnt more about the issues and the parties and are now changing their minds with increasing political sophistication and awareness.

5.4 Summary

This research was exploratory in its analysis in attempting to see through a semi-controlled participatory group media study whether exposure to different media could provide some data that would give insight to media effects theories discussed in this thesis. Prior's (2005) assertion that the Internet could suffer the same pitfalls of television in providing

entertainment-based political information to those who are 'switched-off' in the fragmented media audience, had support due to participants only ever having watch entertainment online video. The Internet group's data, although small, showed some support for Norris' (2000) 'virtuous cycle' thesis and Dalton's (1984) cognitive mobilisation thesis, in the differences between wanting to consume more information than the other participants in the different medium groups. All the participants were intending to vote in the 2008 New Zealand General Election but it was three from the Internet group who changed their mind about who they were going to vote for when presented with more political information about the issues online. This suggests that the way in which the Internet presents more information than provided by the dominantly used media of television (by the majority of the participants in the study) leads to greater political sophistication amongst voters.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter discusses the results of the participatory group and the implications of the findings for the theories discussed in the literature reviews. This exploratory analysis did have its limitations for producing data, so any findings are cautiously discussed and not generally representative of the voting population of New Zealand. Behavioural changes as indicated by participants in their political news consumption are perceived as possible signs towards a working theory of re-engagement through Internet use for political information and participation. Conclusions will be drawn about the participatory platform of SNSs in political context that incorporate several voting behaviour theories that have been examined.

6.2 Discussion of participatory group experiment

This part of the conclusion is a general discussion on the results of the participatory groups and observations made during the experiment.

The most interesting result from the participatory group experiment was that three participants from the Internet group changed their mind on who they were voting for when presented with more information over the course of the week. The rest of participants' decision had been reinforced by their media consumption. One of the Internet group participants were going to vote according to their parents advice and then was left unsure of this action when consuming more political information. It is exposure that leads to greater awareness about politics (Norris, 2000), without viewing information, citizens are less political sophisticated and are less inclined to politically participate (Dalton, 1984).

Another interesting observation was that all the participants indicated that they felt some civic obligation to vote and several cited the reason for participating in this study was not just

for financial incentive but also to learn more about politics before voting day. So that element of civic duty in the rational choice voter model (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Vowles, 2006:316) was clear amongst participants.

Participants answered in both questionnaires that they felt that their vote did count and their media exposure over the week had served to reinforce this belief. This suggests that despite low interest and participatory levels in politics, participants felt that their vote translated into a meaningful result.

During the course of their media exposure, participants found that they were discussing politics more than usual with their friends and family (refer to question eleven in appendix five). This could have been due to the fact the election was a week away or that their consumption of media was providing them with more information on topics of discussion which encourages their overall levels of efficacy. It is hard to say for certain if the study was one of the correlating factors in this.

What appeared overall was that the participants in the study do regularly consume some form of news on a regular basis (the majority of it on the television) yet their level of participatory activity and interest suggests that they 'switch off' during the political segments. This supports Prior's (2005) hypothesis that the entertainment divide is the most concerning aspect of political media consumption amongst young people. Several participants stated that their political news consumption would not change after the study and most of them will probably continue to use YouTube only for entertainment watching purposes. The most heartening discovery during the study was that they all felt they should vote in the 2008 New Zealand General Election and needed more information in order to do so. The interest to kick-start the process of political sophistication was there during the election campaign amongst these young people but there is an expressed need for them to condense their levels of political

information during a short period of time so that it does not interfere with their lifestyle. These observations support Dalton's (2002) idea of issue publics and using cues to process information quickly on issues that are of interest to the individual.

6.3 Limitations of methodology

The time length is one of the limitations of the study as one week is a short period to see considerable changes in participants' perceptions due to exposure from different media. There were results suggesting that more exposure does lead to further interest but whether this translates into active political participation is uncertain.

This study attempted to control the exposure of media to participants but this was a difficult thing to achieve as it was impossible to know for sure if participants had viewed other media or even watched their designated media for 15 minutes for five days of the week. They all managed to answer in a question asking to list specific news pieces, a couple of headline news stories, so it can be assumed they were consuming the news.

Unfortunately, the participants were all university students who all had access to Internet and were by the nature of their study, representative of a small part of the New Zealand voter population. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) refused to use students in their study. However, research suggests that higher education does not always correlate with high levels of efficacy as shown by the results of the group. The limitations of budget meant that it would have been impossible to get the level of involvement and time from the general public for the same amount of money. According to Dalton's (2002) theory, the participants in the study were the young cognitively mobilised generation but their levels of political participation were low, the majority of them just participated in the act of voting in the general elections.

Only being able to use students also meant that these observations from the data analysis could not be applied to other voter demographics in New Zealand. There are young people in the 18-24 years age bracket that do not have access to the Internet at the level that these participants did.

It was also hard in this study to account for pre-exposure media effects and the influence of peers. Iyengar and Kinder point out that you cannot control for variables such as pre-exposure and beliefs (1987:7). Researchers can attempt to isolate them but it is hard to say with certainty that this was the effect that was taking place on the participant's perceptions. This is especially difficult when measuring for efficacy and then trying to judge whether efficacy may have been altered due to exposure.

The timing of the General Election 2008 in New Zealand was unfortunate as it was the same week as final year exams at University of Canterbury. It would have been ideal to have 25 or more participants but the clash of timing between the election and final exams meant that study was fortunate to get 16 participants.

6.4 Conclusion

The participatory experiment showed some support for Dalton's (1984) cognitive mobilisation thesis in the way participants responded to political information exposure. Several who used the Internet in the study, changed their mind about who they were voting for when presented with further information and a small group indicated that they would use YouTube and political blogs again to seek information. The tools to becoming a politically sophisticated citizen and highly cognitively mobilised exists, and the process is at an early stage with the majority of the participants. It is whether this translates into meaningful

political engagement through signing up to political groups on Facebook, writing comments on media and blogs, and increasing their political news diet, is what is in question. Those who participated in the Internet group showed more signs of becoming more cognitively mobilised (Dalton, 1984) than those who watched television. This was due to the level of political campaign coverage and information that the Internet provided, compared to the set news stories from the mainstream media networks on television. Yet for young people to become highly mobilised there needs to be interest in the first place to seek out and consume this information otherwise exposure to participatory opportunities and alternative forms of information cannot take place.

SNSs provide the participatory platform for the cognitively mobilised younger generations. It is an alternative forum that promotes the issues that are closest to the interests of young people (Inglehart, 2008). Existing participatory divisions between those who are interested in traditional politics and those who are not have translated into levels of Internet usage for political information. Yet compared to television where only consistent exposure leads to a 'virtuous cycle' (Norris, 2000) of engagement, the Internet and SNSs in particular, have the capacity to use networking links and accessible forms of political participation through groups and online petitions to engage younger people. The participatory study suggests that young people are consuming news but switching off during the political news so an alternative method needs to be utilised in order to engage these people.

SNSs and their online communities are joined together by weaker links but it is this form of engagement which young people prefer as Putnam explains "we have invented new ways of expressing our demands that demand less of us. We are less likely to turn to collective deliberation" (Putnam, 2000:184) in politics. The popularity of Facebook (as shown the study group's results) shows a platform through which effective political communication can take place as proven by the Obama Internet campaign during the 2008 American presidential

election. The 2008 New Zealand General Election had the second lowest turnout in over a century according to age and citizenship eligibility (Vowles, 2008:3). Effective online campaigning by politicians in a genuine capacity could help mobilise those who are voting for the Bill and Ben Party. This could be achieved through interacting and engaging with participants online like Obama's organisers did in order for their volunteers to feel like they were contributing to something bigger than themselves. The participatory group study highlighted that there is still a level of civic duty and responsibility being felt by young people. Therefore it is up to campaign organisers to mobilise online to capitalise on this in 2011.

Appendix One

Focus Group Participants Required

And receive a \$20 pre-paid cell phone card or petrol voucher

I am looking for people who are willing to participate in a study looking at election news coverage once a day (for about 15 mins or longer) for five days starting from Monday 27th October to Friday 31st October. I also need participants to fill out a questionnaire before and after the study (approx 15 minutes long).

Volunteers must be registered to vote and between the ages of 18-24 years and will be given a \$20 petrol voucher or pre-paid cell phone card for their time. They also must not be a member of any political party.

For more information please contact Alex at ama116@student.canterbury.ac.nz.

This has been approved by the University ethics committee.

Appendix Two

Elections News Online: The Internet and its Role in Voting Behaviour in the Context of the New Zealand General Election 2008

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis, I agree to participate as a subject in the project and complete the questionnaires. I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project before all the questionnaires have been handed in, including withdrawal of any information I have provided. I am aware that at any time, I am able to discuss any concerns with the project with Alexandra or the research supervisor, Dr. Alex Tan. The New Zealand Electoral Commission provides some of the funding for this project. I note that the project has been reviewed *and approved* by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Please circle one of the two following options:

I am / I am not to be contacted after the study in regards to whether I voted in the upcoming election (no details of how you voted are required).

Please give an email address or phone number that you can be reached on after the 8th November:

Name:

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Appendix Three

University of Canterbury

Department of Political Science and Communication

Information for Participants

You are invited to participate as a subject in the research project Election News Online: The Internet and its Role in Voting Behaviour in the Context of the New Zealand General Election 2008.

The aim of this project is to determine whether the Internet has any influence on voter preferences compared to more established forms of media like television and newspapers.

Your involvement in this project will be to participate in a weeklong study (Monday 27th October to Monday 3rd November) consuming the allocated media at least once day and then sit a questionnaire before the study and afterwards at an agreed time. The questionnaire will need to be filled out the week before (27th October) and after the week study (3rd November). It should take no longer than 15 minutes to fill out. When the last questionnaire is filled out you will be paid as advertised.

The results of the project may be published, and the data collected will be confidential. To ensure confidentiality, numbering will be used as pseudonyms in the thesis and any publications. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided, until your questionnaire has been added to the others collected. Because it is anonymous, it cannot be retrieved after that. One year after the date of the final survey of the study, the data collected will be destroyed.

The option is available for you to be contacted after Election Day to be asked if you voted in the New Zealand General Election (details of how/who you voted for is not required).

The project is being carried out as part of a Masters Thesis in Political Science by Alexandra Marett under the supervision of Dr. Alex Tan, who can be contacted at 364 2536 ext. 7536 or Dr. Donald Matheson on 364 2526 (ext. 7888). He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project. The New Zealand Electoral Commission provides some of the funding for this project.

The project has been reviewed *and approved* by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

University of Canterbury

Department of Political Science and Communication

Research student: Alexandra Marett
027 469 8733
ama116@student.canterbury.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr. Alex Tan
364 2536 ext. 7536
alex.tan@canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix Four

FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE

Please circle the answer where multi-choice answers are provided, where it is not, please answer in a sentence:

Part One

- 1) What is your name (first and last):

- 2) In what year of University are you in?
 - a) First
 - b) Second
 - c) Third
 - d) Honours/4th year
 - e) Masters/Doctorate
 - f) If you are doing a double degree please write in your two degrees and what year/what level are you up to:

- 3) What are you majoring in? (eg. Law, History, Engineering, Management...)

- 4) How old are you?
.....years

- 5) Did you vote in the last General Election in 2005?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No, I was old enough but did not vote
 - c) No, I was not old enough
 - d) Other (I cannot remember, I do not want to say)

If you have voted in more than one General Election, please write how many and in what years:

- 6) Did you vote in the last Christchurch City Council elections in 2007?
 - a) Yes, I voted for Mayor and Candidates
 - b) No, I was old enough to vote
 - c) No, I was not old enough
 - d) Other (I cannot remember, I do not want to say)

- 7) Have you ever attended a town hall or church meeting where parliamentary politicians spoke during an election campaign period that you can remember?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Other (I don't remember)

- 8) Have you ever attended an outdoor speaking event here at campus or anywhere else during an election campaign period, where parliamentary politicians have spoken?
- Yes
 - No
 - Other (I don't remember)
- 9) Have you ever participated in any kind of protest (e.g. a sit in or a march) against an issue (e.g. Iraq War) or legislation/government? (e.g. the 'anti-smacking bill')
- Yes
 - No
 - Other (I don't remember/ I don't want to say)
- 10) Have you ever signed a petition? (e.g. human rights/animal rights/petition for referenda)
- Yes
 - No
- 11) Are you a member of any activist groups (charities like Oxfam or World Vision are not included) or have donated any money to one? (e.g. Greenpeace, Human Rights Groups etc.)
- Yes, I am a member of one
 - No, but I have given money
 - No, I have done neither

Part Two

- 1) How many times a week do you watch the 6 O'clock news or any other television news update on any channel?
- Nearly every day
 - Most days
 - Often
 - Hardly at all
 - Never

If yes, which channel do you mainly watch (TV One, TV 3...):

- 2) Do you read a newspaper regularly (the physical one not Stuff.co.nz)?
- Nearly every day
 - Most days
 - Often
 - Hardly at all
 - Never

If yes, what is the main newspaper you read?

- 3) Do you read online newspaper websites as your main source of newspaper news compared to a physical newspaper for your daily/weekly news fix? (e.g. Stuff, Herald, CNN, Huffington Post, Fox, New York Times etc.)

- a) Nearly every day
- b) Most days
- c) Often
- d) Hardly at all
- e) Never

If so, which newspaper websites do you frequent?

- 4) How interesting do you find political news? (on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being incredibly interesting, 1 incredibly boring)
- 5) How frequently do you read political related news ?(on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being every day, 5 never)
- 6) What do you use the Internet primarily for? (Please rank from 1 to 8 in order of use, 1 being the most used, 8 the least)

- ...Email
- ...News information
- ...Research
- ...Social Network Sites
- ...Online Shopping
- ...Downloading software/music etc.
- ...Watching video
- ...Other: e.g. banking

- 7) When searching the Internet have you ever visited New Zealand political blogs or political parties' websites?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

If yes, which political related websites do you remember visiting in the last 3 months?

- 8) Do you subscribe to any political news (e.g. receiving email updates) or blog RSS feeds?
 - a) Yes, if so which ones:
 - b) No
- 9) Do you have a social network profile on any of these sites? Circle each one if you have a profile and you have visited it in the last 3 months:
 - a) Bebo
 - b) MySpace
 - c) Facebook
 - d) Any other? Please name here:

- e) Not a member of any of them

If your answer is e) you can skip to question 15)

- a. Do you have your political view details available on your social networking profile for your friends to view?

If your answer is yes, do you have your alignment, political party or a joke on display?

10) Which one do you primarily visit?

11) Do you upload photos/video/audio onto your network profile?

- a) Yes to all
- b) Only photos and video
- c) Only photos
- d) Never uploaded my own content onto my profile

12) How frequently do you visit your profile/networking site?

- a) Nearly every day
- b) Most days
- c) Often
- d) Hardly at all
- e) Never

13) Have you visited/searched on YouTube or any other video sharing websites?

- a) Nearly every day
- b) Most days
- c) Often
- d) Hardly at all
- e) Never

If your answer is e) you can skip to question 18)

14) Do you have your own YouTube channel which you favourite videos and make up playlists on?

- a) Yes, I upload my own content on it
- b) Yes, I just upload the odd random video
- c) Yes, but I never use it
- d) No

15) Have you ever posted a comment in regards to a video that you have just seen?

- a) Yes, I comment frequently
- b) Yes, I have only ever done it once or twice
- c) No, I have never posted a comment

16) Was the last video you watched with political content in it, about New Zealand or overseas?

- a) Yes, New Zealand
- b) Yes, overseas (please write which country):

- c) No, I have not watched any videos with political content in it online
- d) I don't remember

17) If you do remember seeing an online video with political content in it, was it of a serious nature or comedic?

- a) Yes, it was serious
- b) Yes, it was comedic
- c) I don't remember

18) Did you watch any of the leaders' debates on TV One/TV Three/Alt TV?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If so, which ones and how many?

Part Three

1) Rank the following issues in order from 1 (being the most important) to 6 (least important) according to what you think are the most significant issues according to coverage in this election?

- Economy
- Law and Order
- Tax Cuts
- Health Care
- Education
- Environment/Climate Change

2) How strongly do you feel about these issues? (Answer either: extremely strong, very strong, fairly strong, not very strong)

- Economy
- Law and Order
- Tax Cuts
- Health Care
- Education
- Environment/Climate Change

3) How often do you talk about these issues with friends/family? (circle one)

- a) Nearly every day

- b) Most days
 - c) Often
 - d) Hardly at all
 - e) Never
- 4) Do you feel that your vote counts in the upcoming General Election?
- a) Yes, every vote counts
 - b) Yes, but only in an election where the outcome is close
 - c) No, just one in several million
 - d) No, because the result is already a foregone conclusion
- 5) Which of the following statements best represents your understanding of the importance of the two votes you have in the MMP electoral system:
- a) Yes, I believe both votes count
 - b) Only the electorate vote counts in reality
 - c) Only the party vote counts in reality
 - d) I don't understand how seats are assigned under MMP
- 6) Do you feel (in general) that your vote counts in the election? (On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree)
- 7) If you are going to vote, have you decided which political party you will vote for? (On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being absolutely certain, 5 I don't have a clue)
- 8) Do you know the name of at least one person running in your electorate this election?
- a) Yes
 - b) I have no idea but I will find out closer to election day
 - c) No
 - d) I don't care
- 9) Would you like a petrol or a cell phone voucher?
- a) Petrol
 - b) Vodafone
 - c) Telecom

Appendix Five

SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE

PART ONE (GENERAL)

NAME:

- 1) Would you say that the amount of political news that you have consumed during the last week has exceeded your average consumption from the previous few weeks of the election campaign period? (from any media form)
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 2) Taking into account that is the week before the election, would you say that would have consumed less or more political information than you anticipated before the election?
 - a) More, if so how much (e.g. few more times a week)
 - b) Less, if so how much
 - c) About the same
- 3) Has viewing your allocated media over the last week encouraged you in any way to increase your personal consumption of news or political related media coverage?
 - a) Yes
 - b) made no difference

If yes, was there any particular reason that motivated this change:

- 4) Has the content that you have been viewing in any way influenced whether or not you will vote this General Election? (Please circle one)
 - a) Yes (it has encouraged me to vote)
 - b) No (This has convinced me not to vote)
 - c) No change (my attitude towards voting remains unchanged)

Please explain why:

- 5) If you are going to vote, have you decided which political party you will vote for? (On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being absolutely certain, 5 I don't have a clue)
- 6) If you are going to vote, has the content that you have been viewing over the last week changed in any way how you will be voting this election? (Please circle one)
 - a) Changed
 - b) Reinforced
 - c) Made no difference

Please explain why:

- 7) Has your own experience over the last week changed the way you feel about whether your vote counts in the election?
- a) Yes, I feel my vote counts now
 - b) Yes, I feel that my vote does not count
 - c) No, I still feel my vote counts
 - d) No, I still feel that my vote does not count
- 8) Would you say that how your parents vote, is a factor in how you will be voting this election?
- a) Yes, strongly
 - b) Yes, a little
 - c) No, it has no impact
- 9) Would you say that the news media is your primary source of political news?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
- 10) Would you say that there is any other place where you get a large amount of your political information from?
- a) Friends/family
 - b) Work
 - c) Personal reading
 - d) Other (please list):
 - e) All from news media
- 11) Would you say that the amount of political information that you have consumed in the last week has influenced your own amounts of discussion of politics with friends and family during the study? (Circle the amount that applies to you)
- a) Frequently
 - b) A little more often
 - c) Has had no effect
- 12) How much do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Politicians are out of touch with youth, in particular understanding the issues that concern them."
- a) Agree
 - b) Neither agree nor disagree
 - c) Disagree
- 12a) Would you say that your consumption of media over the last week has changed your response to question 12?
- a) Strongly
 - b) Hardly
 - c) Not at all

13) Would you agree or disagree with this statement “The recent developments in regards to politicians going online and using social networks like Facebook, to reach a younger demographic are effective.”

- a) Agree
- b) Neither agree nor disagree
- c) Disagree

14) How much do you agree or disagree with this statement: “People elected as (MPs) try to keep the promises they have made during the election.”

- a) Agree
- b) Neither agree nor disagree
- c) Disagree

14a) Would you say that your consumption of media over the last week has changed your response to question 14?

- a) Strongly
- b) Hardly
- c) Not at all

15) Rank the following issues in order from 1 (being the most important) to 6 (least important) according to what you think are the most significant issues according to coverage in this election?

- Economy
- Law and Order
- Tax Cuts
- Health Care
- Education
- Environment/Climate Change

16) How strongly do you feel about these issues? (Answer either: extremely strong, very strong, fairly strong, not very strong)

- Economy
- Law and Order
- Tax Cuts
- Health Care
- Education
- Environment/Climate Change

- 17) Before you participated in this study, would you say that you had a sufficient level of understanding regarding the important political issues in this election e.g. the global economic crisis? (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 having no idea and 5 a good understanding)
- 18) After participating in this study, would you say that you have a better understanding of the important political issues in this election? (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being still no idea, 5 a vast improvement in knowledge)
- 19) Are you a supporter of any politician or party on a social networking site?
- a) Yes
 - b) No, I am on a social networking site
 - c) No, I am not on a social networking site

If you answer is no, you can skip to question 22

- 20) Are you a member of any politically orientated group on Facebook?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
- 21) Have you ever posted a comment on a political group/party/politician's wall?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't remember
 - d) I am not a member/supporter of any of these

- 22) Have you ever written a blog?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If yes, was it of a political or personal nature?

- 23) Have you ever entered an online chat room where the topic thread was of a political nature?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
- 24) Have you ever received or sent an email that contained political information related to New Zealand in it?
- a) Yes
 - b) No

PART TWO

INTERNET

- 17) How many times during the course of last week did you go on the Internet to look for political information?

18) What was the average period of time spent on each Internet session? (10mins, 15mins, 20mins etc.)

19) Can you recall (if any) what blog websites you visited over the last week?

20) Did you visit any political party websites over the last week? If so, which ones?

21) During your weeklong observation, did you post any comment in regards to a news article, blog or another comment?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If yes, on what website did you do this on, and for what reasons did you feel motivated to do so?

22) Did you use links to other websites to look for any other political related information over the last week?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If yes, which websites? Please list:

23) In using links, did you find this useful in terms of searching for relevant information? (If you did not use any links, go straight to question 8)

- a) Yes
- b) No

24) Did you watch any video online containing NZ related political content over the last week?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If yes, was it:

- a) Of a comedic nature
- b) Campaign related
- c) About a specific policy area
- d) I don't remember

25) Please list the what you would consider to be the four major news pieces of last week (please rank in order of coverage, 1 the most covered news piece, 4 the least covered news piece that featured over the last week)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

26) How would you rank your level of understanding regarding the above four news pieces? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being no idea and 5 a good understanding)

27) Would you say that you need an extensive understanding of background information in regards to reading the political news pieces that you consumed over the last week? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being no background knowledge required, 5 being extensive background knowledge of the history behind news pieces)

28) Would you say that news pieces from online news websites are too detailed in their information to make it easy to understand political news? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being easy to read, 5 too detailed to understand what exactly is going on)

29) Would you say that news pieces from political blogs are too detailed in their information to make it easy to understand political news? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being easy to read, 5 too detailed to understand what exactly is going on)

30) Would you say that after participating in this study, that you are more likely to visit political related blogs? (On a scale of 1 -5, **1** being no change, **5** will definitely be reading them more frequently in the future)

31) Would you say that after participating in this study, that you are more likely to watch political related videos online? (On a scale of 1-5, **1** being no change, **5** will definitely be watching them more frequently in the future)

32) Would you say that you use the Internet as your primary source of news for political information?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If you answer is no, what is your main source of political news?

33) Would you say that you are more likely to use the Internet to look for political information/news in the future as your primary medium? (On a scale of 1- 5, **1** being no more likely than other media – newspapers/TV, **5** will definitely be using the Internet as my main source of news in the future)

34) Did you consume any other media during the study?

- a) TV News
- b) Newspaper
- c) Only allocated media

If you did consume other media that you can remember, which one and how many times?

PART TWO

TELEVISION

1) What television channel did you primarily watch?

- a) TV One
- b) TV Three
- c) Other, please state which one:

2) What time did you primarily watch the news?

- a) 6 pm
- b) 10 pm
- c) Breakfast/Sunrise
- d) Any other time or news bulletin, please state:

3) How many times during the course of last week did you watch television news on politics?

4) What was the average period of time for each viewing? (10mins, 15mins, 20mins etc.)

5) Please list the what you would consider to be the four major news pieces of last week (please rank in order of coverage, 1 the most covered news piece, 4 the least covered news piece that featured over the last week)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

6) Would you say that you need an extensive understanding of background information in regards to watching political news pieces that you consumed over the last week? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being no background knowledge required, 5 being extensive background knowledge of the history behind news pieces)

- 7) Would you say that news pieces on television are too detailed in their information to make it easy to understand political news? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being easy to read, 5 too detailed to understand what exactly is going on)
- 8) Would you say that the presentation of news pieces and the style of reporting is not relatable to a younger demographic? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being not at all, 5 it is extremely relatable)

If your answer is 1 or 2, could you please go in further detail as to why this is?

- 9) Would you say that you use the television news as your primary source of news for political information?
 - c) Yes
 - d) No

If your answer is no, what is your main source of political news?

- 10) Would you say that after participating in this study, that you are more likely to watch political related news on television? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being no change, 5 will definitely be watching it more frequently in the future)
- 11) Did you consume any other media during the study?
 - a) Internet
 - b) Newspaper
 - c) Only allocated media

If you did consume other media that you can remember, which one and how many times?

PART TWO

NEWSPAPER

- 1) What newspaper did you primarily read?
 - a) The Christchurch Press
 - b) The Herald
 - c) The Dominion Post
 - d) Other, please state which one:
- 2) How many times during the course of last week did you read the newspaper about politics?
- 3) What was the average period of time for each reading? (10mins, 15mins, 20mins etc.)

- 4) Please list the what you would consider to be the four major news pieces of last week (please rank in order of coverage, 1 the most covered news piece, 4 the least covered news piece that featured over the last week)
- 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
- 5) Would you say that you need an extensive understanding of background information in regards to reading political news pieces that you consumed over the last week? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being no background knowledge required, 5 being extensive background knowledge of the history behind news pieces)
- 6) Would you say that political articles in newspapers are too detailed in their information to make it easy to understand political news? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being easy to read, 5 too detailed to understand what exactly is going on)
- 7) Would you say that the presentation of political news articles in terms of how they are written and in its length, is not attractive to a younger demographic? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being not at all, 5 it is extremely readable and attractive)

Please go into further detail as to why this is?

- 8) Would you say that you use the newspaper as your primary source of news for political information?
- a) Yes
 - b) No

If you answer is no, what is your main source of political news?

- 9) Would you say that after participating in this study, that you are more likely to read political related news in the newspaper? (On a scale of 1-5, 1 being no change, 5 will definitely be reading it more frequently in the future)
- 10) Did you consume any other media during the study?
- a) Internet
 - b) Television
 - c) Only allocated media

If you did consume other media that you can remember, which one and how many times?

Appendix Six

Internet Group

List of recommended websites (this in no order of preference just recommendations, take it look at three or more over the week, from each category):

News Websites:

Stuff News (Fairfax newspaper media)

<http://www.stuff.co.nz>

The Herald

<http://www.theherald.co.nz>

The Otago Daily Times

<http://www.odt.co.nz>

TV3 News

<http://www.tv3.co.nz>

TV One News

<http://www.tvnz.co.nz>

Blogs:

<http://www.beehivebuzz.co.nz>

<http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz>

<http://www.thestandard.org.nz>

<http://www.08wire.org>

<http://www.whaleoil.co.nz>

<http://blog.greens.org.nz>

YouTube Channels:

(change the search requirements from video to channels)

NZ Nats

Thestandardnz

Nzgreenparty

Whaleoil

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