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New Zealand Parliamentarians and Online Social Media

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SUMMARY

- ▶ The majority of New Zealand members of Parliament (MPs) have at least one online social media account on the most popular online social media sites used by New Zealanders.
- ▶ Online social media influenced the 2008 New Zealand General Election campaign, and is likely to impact more upon future election campaigns.
- ▶ Online social media can facilitate better engagement and communication between MPs and the general public.

Introduction

This paper defines online social media and briefly notes Internet usage in New Zealand before focusing on the use of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube by MPs. The use of online social media in campaigning, its influence and instances of online public interaction is examined. Finally, possible future trends are discussed.

Definition

Online social media consists of Internet tools, sites, and services providing users with dynamic ways to interact, create, and share. Users are producers and collaborators, and interaction and participation is encouraged. This paper focuses on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, currently three popular tools. Other social media tools, such as Flickr,¹ are used by some New Zealand MPs, but are not discussed as they have lower usage.

New Zealand Internet use

According to a 2009 Statistics New Zealand survey, in the December 2009 quarter, over a million households had broadband and 80% of individuals aged 15 years and over had used the Internet in the previous twelve months.² New Zealanders frequently use the Internet to find information and opinions that can influence their attitudes, and also to post their own views.

¹ A photo sharing website.

² Statistics New Zealand. *Household use of information and communication technology, 2009* <http://www.stats.govt.nz/~media/Statistics/Browse%20for%20stats/HouseholdUseofICT/HOTP2009/HouseholdUseofICT2009HOTP.ashx> 16 April 2010 (11 January 2011), pp.1-4.

According to the World Internet Project, many New Zealanders consider the Internet to be a more important source of information than television, newspapers or radio.³ The table below shows the most popular social networking websites in New Zealand. Social networking is already well used in New Zealand, and its importance is expected to increase.⁴

Table 1: Top 5 social networking websites in New Zealand by approximate average daily traffic as at 10 January 2011

Social networking site	Ranking in list of top New Zealand websites	Ranking in list of top websites worldwide
Facebook	2	2
YouTube	5	3
Blogger	11	7
Twitter	12	10
Wordpress	16	19

Source: Alexa.com 10 January 2011⁵

Alexa.com uses an approximate average daily traffic equivalent. While using the number of visits is not necessarily the best way to measure website popularity, this table facilitates comparative analysis.

Blogger and Wordpress are websites that host blogs.

Parliamentarians and online social networking

As online social media data changes rapidly the figures below represent a 'snapshot' of MPs when the information was gathered.⁶ These figures provide some context for how online social media is used by MPs. While these do not necessarily indicate the engagement carried out by MPs and the influence MPs have, they infer usage rates of social media.

Facebook⁷

New Zealand MPs have been using Facebook since at least November 2007, when most Green Party MPs were reported to have legitimate Facebook accounts.⁸ It is the most used online social networking site by MPs. 92 out of 121 MPs⁹ (approximately 76%) of individual members

³ 65% of New Zealand respondents during 2009 said the Internet was an important source of information, compared with 55% for television, 53% newspapers and 44% for radio.

Smith, Philippa, Smith, Nigel, Sherman, Kevin, Goodwin, Ian, Crothers, Charles, Billot, Jennie and Bell, Allan. (2010). *The Internet in New Zealand 2009*. Auckland: Institute of Culture, Discourse and Communication, Auckland University of Technology. http://www.aut.ac.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/122829/WIPNZ-2009-Full-Report---Final_Fig-68-fixed.pdf (10 January 2011), p.10.

⁴ "1.8 Million New Zealanders interacting via social networking sites," Nielsen. 19 July 2010. http://nz.nielsen.com/news/Social_Media_ReportJul10.shtml (15 November 2010).

⁵ "Top Sites in New Zealand", <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/NZ>, Alexa.com (10 January 2011).

⁶ The New Zealand Parliamentary Library contacted MPs in October 2010 for confirmation of identified social media accounts and websites. By 2 November 2010, 115 of 122 MPs or their staff had confirmed websites and accounts. Unless stated, all the following data is from the Parliamentary Library.

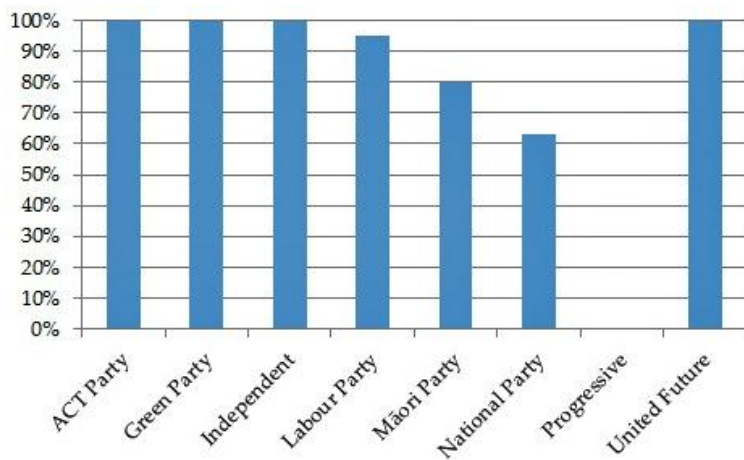
⁷ A large social networking site where people share information about themselves, and communicate with other people using updates, status updates, photos, videos and applications such as games.

⁸ "Politicians find friends in fake places," *Sunday Star Times*. 25 November 2007. p.5.

⁹ 121 MPs were surveyed as Hon Luamanuua Winnie Laban was leaving Parliament, so was not sent the survey.

across most political parties represented in the 49th Parliament had Facebook accounts on 2 November 2010 (see graph 1).

Graph 1: Percentage of MPs on Facebook by party as at 2 November 2010



Source: New Zealand Parliamentary Library¹⁰

Facebook facts

- There are different types of Facebook accounts – pages and personal profiles.
- Each Facebook profile has a "wall", where Facebook friends can post comments. Since the wall is viewable by all the user's friends, wall postings are a semi-public conversation.
- A Facebook page is a public profile used by public figures, businesses and organisations. Pages do not gain 'friends', but 'fans' – who are people who choose to like a page. Fans can engage in conversation with an MP by posting comments to their postings.
- People using Facebook pages cannot ask people to 'like' them (join their community), whereas using a profile page allows direct community building by requesting Facebook 'friends'.

As might be expected for public figures like MPs, there is a relatively small number of MPs (thirteen) who have restricted profiles. Restricted profiles mean that people searching for those MPs are unable to contact them or view details without becoming their 'friend'.

As of November 2010, the five MPs with the most 'friends' were National Party members. Rt Hon John Key launched his official Facebook page in February 2008,¹¹ and had both the most 'friends' and 'fans' on his profile and his page. MPs from the Labour Party and ACT Party were listed in the top five for 'fans' (see tables 2 and 3). Two of the MPs with the most 'friends' first entered Parliament after the 2008 General Election. This correlates with a suggestion by the international 2007 Internet and Elections Project that a new generation of "political actors who have come to power using the Internet are replacing those who have spent the twilight of their

¹⁰ Accounts were found using the Facebook search facility, a survey of members, the member's individual websites where applicable and more general searching. For this graph, the figures are based on the number of MPs with either a profile or a page. Members with more than one profile were only counted once.

¹¹ "John Key takes campaign to Facebook," http://www.nzherald.co.nz/politics/news/article.cfm?c_id=280&objectid=10494195, *New Zealand Herald*. 24 February 2008 (10 January 2011).

political careers adapting to the Internet.”¹² According to the ‘US Politics on Facebook’ page, an early sample of some US House of Representatives and Senate electoral races showed that candidates with more Facebook ‘fans’ won more contests in the November 2010 United States Midterm Elections.¹³

- 86% of female MPs have Facebook
- 75% of male MPs have Facebook
- 88% of List MPs have Facebook
- 72% of Electorate MPs have Facebook

Table 2: MPs with most Facebook ‘friends’ as at 13 January 2011

MP	Party	Number of ‘friends’
Rt Hon John Key	National Party	5,002
Hon Tau Henare	National Party	4,998
Louise Upston	National Party	3,978
Hone Harawira	Māori Party	3,941
Simon Bridges	National Party	3,781

Source: New Zealand Parliamentary Library

While there are fewer National MPs on Facebook than Labour, ten National Party MPs had over 1,000 ‘friends’ compared to eight Labour Party MPs. The Green Party had the highest proportion of MPs (44%) with over 1,000 ‘friends.’ Senior MPs with high profiles had the highest number of Facebook ‘fans’ (see table 3).

Table 3: MPs with most Facebook ‘fans’ as at 13 January 2011

MP	Party	Number of people who ‘like this’
Rt Hon John Key	National Party	50,081
Hon Phil Goff	Labour Party	2,334
Hon Rodney Hide	ACT Party	981
Hon Bill English	National Party	691
Hon Sir Roger Douglas	ACT Party	658

Source: New Zealand Parliamentary Library

¹² Kluver, Randolph, Jankowski, Nicholas, Foot, Kirsten, Schneider, Steven. (Eds.) *The Internet and National Elections: A comparative study of web campaigning*. Routledge, New York, 2007. p.264.

¹³ “US Politics on Facebook. Snapshot: The day after Election Day”, http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=448930025881, Facebook. 4 November 2010 (11 January 2011).

Green Party Co-Leader Dr Russel Norman also had many people who 'like this'. However, his page stated that people should contact him through his profile, as he no longer used his page.

Twitter¹⁴

In November 2010 the Green Party had the highest percentage of MPs active on Twitter followed by ACT and the Labour Party (see graph 2). National MP Hon Tau Henare had the highest number of 'tweets'¹⁵ while the Rt Hon John Key had the most Twitter 'followers'¹⁶ (see tables 4 and 5). Recently there has been some conversation between members of different parties via Twitter. There has been much conversation on Twitter between members of the public and MPs using @replies.¹⁷ In the past MPs may have been broadcasting¹⁸ in their 'tweets'. National MP Hon Tau Henare created a Twitter account in January 2010,¹⁹ began tweeting in earnest in August 2010 and already has 'tweeted' more than other MPs.

Twitter 'followers' are more casual than Facebook 'friends' and 'follower' requests are usually automatically accepted. Building a community of 'followers' is more complex than simply 'tweeting' a lot. Having interesting things to say and saying them in an interesting way helps to build a community.

- 43% of MPs have Twitter accounts
- 55% of female MPs have Twitter accounts
- 38% of male MPs have Twitter accounts
- 59% of List MPs have Twitter accounts
- 31% of Electorate MPs have Twitter accounts

¹⁴ A micro blog website, where people answer the question "What's happening" in 140 characters or less.

¹⁵ An entry made on the Twitter site of 140 characters or less.

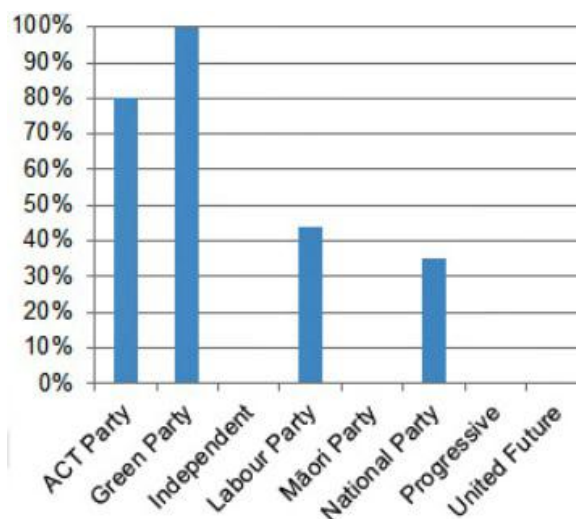
¹⁶ People who choose to read a person's tweets.

¹⁷ Messages aimed at particular people that anybody who follows the sender can read.

¹⁸ "Using the internet as a 'digital newsletter' rather than as a tool to enhance engagement or democratic participation" - Williamson, Andy. "Digital Citizens and Democratic Participation." Hansard Society, 2010, <http://hansardsociety.org.uk/files/folders/2345/download.aspx> (11 January 2011) p.1.

¹⁹ Date obtained from entering username (@TauHenare) into *When did you join Twitter?* <http://www.whendidyoujointwitter.com/> (10 January 2011).

Graph 2: Active MPs on Twitter by party as at 2 November 2010



Source: New Zealand Parliamentary Library

Table 4: Most 'Tweets' by MPs as at 11 January 2011

Member	Party	Number of tweets
Hon Tau Henare	National Party	3,087
Clare Curran	Labour Party	3,083
Chris Hipkins	Labour Party	1,217
Melissa Lee	National Party	1,176
Hon Heather Roy	ACT Party	1,129

Source: New Zealand Parliamentary Library²⁰

Table 5: Most Twitter 'followers' as at 11 January 2011

Member	Party	Estimated 'followers'
Rt Hon John Key	National Party	15,368
Hon Phil Goff	Labour Party	2,397
Jacinda Ardern	Labour Party	1,314
Metiria Tūrei	Green Party	1,097
Dr Russel Norman	Green Party	965

Source: New Zealand Parliamentary Library²¹

²⁰ Please note that these figures include 'bots' (automatic processes that tweet when repetitive tasks are completed, such as updating a website), 'retweets' (redistributing a person's messages) replies to people and live tweeting from events such as Question Time and party conferences.

²¹ Please note that these figures can include automated 'bots' and 'spam' accounts.

The Prime Minister has nearly seven times the number of 'followers' compared to the next MP (the Leader of the Opposition). This is probably related to his position and the resultant exposure and publicity. However, five Labour MPs had over 500 'followers' compared with two National MPs (the Prime Minister and Nikki Kaye). This could be because more Labour MPs use Twitter, or the level of engagement is seen to be greater for these MPs.

Social media often follows a pattern where 90% of the participants are 'audience' who read and observe but do not often actively participate, 9% are 'editors', who may add content or modify content but do not often create new content, while just 1% are 'creators' who contribute new content regularly.²² The behaviour of MPs using social media suggests that they do not follow this trend and that many are 'creators'. However, four National MPs, one Labour MP and one Green MP follow more people than they have 'followers'.

YouTube²³

The two main ways New Zealand political parties use YouTube are through presenting clips of speeches in the House of Representatives during debates, and through presenting more casual video blogs where MPs talk about recent activity. From 1 October 2009 to 1 October 2010, 57% of National MPs, including Ministers, uploaded videos to YouTube featuring them talking directly at the camera, implying they were made for YouTube.²⁴ Labour Party members have collaborated on videos, such as a clip supporting the All Whites football team.²⁵ Labour Party and Green Party videos often appear related to a particular topic, while National Party videos often appear to be individuals creating a video log.²⁶ The Māori Party has used its YouTube channel to present clips of House debates.²⁷ Videos have also been embedded on party websites.

There are differences in how parties use YouTube. Party strategies are discernible from the similarities in the way MPs from the same party use YouTube. While there are individual YouTube accounts for some MPs, these do not appear to be used as much as the party channels. This can be compared with Facebook and Twitter, which are used both by parties and by individuals and appear to show more branding of the MP than the party.

In early January 2011 YouTube was the 5th most visited Internet site in New Zealand,²⁸ and 45% of surveyed New Zealand Internet users had downloaded, streamed or watched an online video clip.²⁹ This makes YouTube one of the most useful social networking tools. It allows engagement with many people internationally and nationally, particularly those unable or unwilling to read party information.

In November 2010, the National Party had the highest number of video uploads, total video views and subscribers, while the Green Party ranked second. However, the Labour Party had the highest number of average views (see table 6). The United Future channel was created in October 2010.

²² "The 90-9-1 Principle," <http://www.antseyeview.com/90-9-1-principle>, *Ant's Eye View* (11 January 2011).

²³ A video sharing site where people can upload videos for other people to view for free.

²⁴ "NZ Nats," <http://www.youtube.com/nznats>, *YouTube* (27 September 2010).

²⁵ "NZ Labour," http://www.youtube.com/nzlabour#p/a/u/2/2f4b6_sjMEA, *YouTube* (27 September 2010).

²⁶ A journal in a video format.

²⁷ "Māori Party," <http://www.youtube.com/user/MaoriParty>, *YouTube* (11 January 2011).

²⁸ "Top Sites in New Zealand," <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/NZ>, *Alexa.com* (11 January 2011).

²⁹ "More stats – just in from Nielsen Online," <http://ijump.co.nz/more-stats-just-in-from-nielsen-online>, *iJump*, 18 May 2009 (11 January 2011).

Table 6: New Zealand political parties on YouTube as at 2 November 2010

Political parties	Uploads ³⁰	Total video views	Subscribers	Average number of views ³¹
ACT Party	37	8,082	36	218.4
Green Party	379	122,887	374	324.2
Independent	Not found			
Labour Party	13	21,530	31	1,656.2
Māori Party	128	11,831	70	92.4
National Party	865 (approx.)	436,552	760	504.7
Progressive	Not found			
United Future	7	346	1	49.4

Source: New Zealand Parliamentary Library

Influence

Although there is debate over just how much influence online social media has in the political arena, its potential impact is acknowledged. Anand Giridharadas, a *New York Times* columnist, has noted that some believe social media is capable of enabling “Athenian-style direct democracy.”³² US President Barack Obama has envisioned “technologies, including blogs, wikis and social networking tools to modernize internal, cross-agency, and public communication and information sharing to improve government decision-making.”³³ Soon after the 2008 New Zealand General Election, Rt Hon John Key said “While I can’t promise to read and reply to every comment that you make, your posts (on a range of websites including Facebook and YouTube) will be read by my staff and will contribute to our thinking.”³⁴ Australian Liberal MP Joe Hockey sent a ‘tweet’ in November 2009 asking for feedback on the Australian proposed Emissions Trading Scheme.³⁵ While he was criticised by some for this, Hockey said “That’s the great value of Twitter. There’s 8500 people out there who have different views. Some of them are quite plainly hostile, but they’re all prepared to give an opinion and so it’s useful.”³⁶

The use of online tools indicates that some government leaders recognise the potential for social media to provide a direct line of communication between “the governed and the government.”³⁷ However, the ‘digital divide’³⁸ can prevent some people accessing the Internet to

³⁰ Adding a video to YouTube.

³¹ Number of total video views divided by uploads.

³² Giridharadas, Anand. “Democracy 2.0 awaits an upgrade,” http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/12/world/americas/12iht-currents.html?_r=2, *New York Times*, 11 September 2009 (10 January 2011).

³³ Barack Obama: *Connecting and Empowering all Americans Through Technology and Innovation*. November 2007, http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/technology/Fact_Sheet_Innovation_and_Technology.pdf (11 January 2011) p.4.

³⁴ Key Notes No. 41.15 December 2008, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA0812/S00171.htm> (11 January 2011).

³⁵ “Australia’s Twitter Election,” <http://www.stuff.co.nz/technology/digital-living/3348817/Australias-Twitter-election>, *Stuff*, 19 February 2010 (11 January 2011).

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ Silverman, Matt. “The Future of Social Media and Politics,” <http://mashable.com/2010/11/01/future-social-media-politics>, *Mashable*, 2 November 2010 (11 January 2011).

³⁸ The difference between those who have access to digital information and communication technologies, and those who do not.

participate in online democratic activities. Nor does online activism necessarily translate directly into offline action. In the United Kingdom, a May 2010 survey found that 45.9% of Internet users who had engaged in official or non-official campaign activities online had not engaged in any way offline, such as through attending rallies.³⁹ This shows that having online ‘fans’ or ‘friends’ does not necessarily equate to having votes, or active offline supporters.

Campaigning

Of particular interest is the impact of online social media on electoral campaigning. The Internet helped shape the 2008 New Zealand General Election campaign. The Labour Party created a campaign website with a daily blog from Rt Hon Helen Clark, and extensively used YouTube and Facebook.⁴⁰ National Party Asian candidates used Facebook and YouTube to contact Asian voters. MP Melissa Lee said “It makes sense to engage them in cyberspace because Asian people are generally more internet-savvy, and now there's a space for them to discuss politics and stuff with us.”⁴¹ However, Nicola Kean, a journalist and scholar who studied Internet use during the election, has indicated that online interaction with citizens was “preaching to the converted.”⁴² While social media sites can help political parties connect with more people, it still requires motivation from voters. It may be easier for voters and constituents to contact candidates and MPs if they use the same online tools rather than expecting individuals to search for a way to engage with MPs online. Labour MP Grant Robertson said “I am not certain that any party in the election, Labour included, really harnessed the power of the internet in the way we saw with (US President) Barack Obama. There is much to learn in this regard.”⁴³ In New Zealand, National MP Hon Hekia Parata in the 2010 Mana electorate by-election started using social networking sites such as Twitter to broadcast her campaign activities before the Election date was announced.⁴⁴

There is debate over the impact of online social media on the United Kingdom’s 2010 General Election with some newspapers referring to it as the “first social media election.”⁴⁵ There were 14,000 voting registration forms directly downloaded from the ‘Democracy UK Facebook’, a Facebook page on United Kingdom politics. Approximately 9,000 forms were downloaded daily from ‘About My Vote’, an Internet site explaining United Kingdom voting and elections.⁴⁶ In the United Kingdom there appears to have been a shift towards continual election campaigning beyond the traditional campaign period. This has been described by the United Kingdom Hansard Society as the main shift caused by using digital communication. The Society further believes that political parties have been able to use the Internet’s organisational capacity to raise their profiles, and take control of communications from the mainstream media. Despite this, there “is little indication that citizens in advanced and developing democracies visit candidate or politician websites in any great numbers.”⁴⁷ This may suggest most people are not

³⁹ Gibson, Rachel, Williamson, Andy, and Ward, Steven. “Introduction: Whatever Happened to the Internet?” *The Internet and the 2010 election: putting the small ‘p’ back in politics?* Eds. Rachel K. Gibson, Andy Williamson & Stephen Ward, 2010. <http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/files/folders/2665/download.aspx>, Hansard Society, London, (27 September 2010) p.13.

⁴⁰ Robertson, Grant. “Labour” *Key to Victory: The New Zealand General Election of 2008*. Eds. Stephen Levine and Nigel S. Roberts. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2010. p.77.

⁴¹ Tan, Lincoln. “Asians get political in cyberspace.” http://www.nzherald.co.nz/chinese-in-nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=147&objectid=10537952, *New Zealand Herald*. 17 October 2008 (10 January 2011).

⁴² Kean, Nicola. “2008: The Campaign in Cyberspace” *Key to Victory: The New Zealand General Election of 2008*. p.205.

⁴³ Robertson, Grant. “Labour” *Key to Victory: The New Zealand General Election of 2008*. p.77.

⁴⁴ “Hekia Parata”. *Twitter*, <http://twitter.com/hekiaparata> (10 January 2011).

⁴⁵ Arthur, Charles. “2010: The first social media election,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/apr/30/social-media-election-2010> *The Guardian*. 3 May 2010 (11 January 2011).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Williamson, A., Miller, L. and Fallon, F. *Behind the Digital Campaign: An Exploration of the Use, Impact and Regulation of Digital Campaigning*, Hansard Society. <http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/files/folders/2455/download.aspx> (27 September 2010) pp.iv and 6.

actively searching for political information but rather wanting it to come to them, potentially through social media sites, or non-partisan sites offering comparative policy and campaign overviews. This has also been discussed in the context of the 2010 New Zealand Local Body Elections. The *New Zealand Herald* reported in September 2010 that some younger voters wanted to use modern technology to access the Internet to “find one site and find out about all these people (the candidates).”⁴⁸ Local Government New Zealand established a website as “a one-stop shop for confused voters”. The website asked candidates to list their top five issues, and provided the candidate statements in the booklets which had been posted with ballot papers.⁴⁹

Australian social media strategist Tiphereth Gloria said that the 2010 Australian General Election candidates were “broadcasting propaganda to voters” on social media, rather than using the sites to respond to voters. “If you take the basic definition of social media as a conversation online – then this is not it.”⁵⁰

Online interaction of MPs

While online social media is a comparatively new form of communication, MPs have always engaged with the public. According to Mark Blevis, a digital public affairs strategist, “The benefits of any social network – real or digital – come from the quality of the relationships with members of the network rather than the pure volume of people within it.”⁵¹ Social network analysis indicates that there is a ‘horizon of communication’ extending beyond a person’s direct contacts. When creating a social media account, many people choose to use the opportunity to explore carefully, with only a small initial community. This provides a chance to decide what ‘voice’ to use, and how to use a social media account. Over time many people move from ‘broadcasting’ what they are doing, to discussing their thoughts with their community. Due to the public profile of MPs, they often do not have this opportunity to explore how to use social media tools, as people begin following them immediately.

Smartphones and other devices such as i-pads are being used to post to and access social media. The use of these mobility tools is particularly helpful to MPs with their “on-the-move” lifestyles in allowing them to engage actively in online social media.

Social media compared to traditional publicity

Treating a Facebook wall or a Twitter stream as a broadcast mechanism, can add little value to the potential engagement with the public. Instead, it is similar to a mailbox drop. Previously, people who signed up to receive mail and information from an MP would most likely be a supporter or a constituent; today people who do not support the party or individual may sign up to observe the MP.

There is also more scope for interactions to be negative, and this occurs in a public arena. It is important to consider what policies and actions are in place for dealing with people who cause problems or want to discuss sensitive issues on social media accounts. In early 2010 Labour

⁴⁸ Collins, S. “Ward, board and candidates all part of a lottery,” http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10674897, *New Zealand Herald*. 21 September 2010. (11 January 2011).

⁴⁹ “New website slow starter”, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/super-city/news/article.cfm?c_id=1501110&objectid=10674898, *New Zealand Herald*. 21 September 2010 (11 January 2011).

⁵⁰ “Online battle crucial to election,” <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/online-battle-crucial-to-election-20100718-10g62.html> *Sydney Morning Herald*. 19 July 2010 (11 January 2011).

⁵¹ Blevis, Mark. *House of Tweets: Twitter and the House of Commons*, February 2010, <http://www.politicalview.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/House-of-Tweets.pdf> (11 January 2011) p.8.

MP Hon Trevor Mallard 'unfriended'⁵² Green MP Metiria Tūrei following an online conversation. Tūrei said: "The beauty of Facebook is that politicians like Trevor and I can discuss issues in the public eye. It means we are challenged by others to answer for our views, decisions and behaviour - which is great." Mallard said: "I choose who is there (on his Facebook wall). While there are lots of discussions initiated by constituents I decide whether they run or not. But the idea of politicians using the comments section of my status to attack me just doesn't seem right". Mallard later agreed to be 'friends' again.⁵³ This raises the question of what MPs allow on their Facebook walls, and how comments are regulated.

Hansard Society research in 2010 concluded "citizens do not want the passive, broadcast-only relationship with their MPs that has existed until now, they wish to communicate and engage, to track and contribute to the democratic debate."⁵⁴

Future Trends

Access to online social media is likely to increase in the future, and along with this, its political use. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), broadband prices are decreasing, while the speeds are increasing, and this combined with the increase in mobile technologies should mean increased Internet access.⁵⁵ As more people have Internet access, many will expect politicians to maintain and indeed increase their online presence. The 2007 Internet and Elections Project found international evidence that "an increase in political use of the web goes hand-in-hand with diffusion of the internet in a nation."⁵⁶ As young people reach voting age, and social media becomes ubiquitous, it will be necessary for "democratic institutions and practices to restyle their political communication in such ways as to be commensurate with the interests and discourse of contemporary youth culture."⁵⁷ Facebook is used by people of all ages; a July 2010 Omnibus report by Perceptive, a marketing and research company, showed that while engagement with Facebook declined with age, 64% of people aged 65 years and over still used it.⁵⁸

Online social media will continue to evolve in the future while remaining an influence on politics here and internationally. Peter Chen from the University of Sydney suggests that "online communication remains a contested political space and one where there remains considerable scope for competition and innovation in the future."⁵⁹

For effective use of online social media tools, it may be useful for MPs to consider the following points when creating a social media account:

- What sort of community do you want to build?

⁵² To remove a person from a list of friends on Facebook, taking away the ability to see the user's full profile and comment.

⁵³ "MPs caught in Facebook saga," <http://tvnz.co.nz/politics-news/mps-caught-in-facebook-saga-3345218>, TVNZ, 29 January 2010 (11 January 2011).

⁵⁴ Williamson, Andy. "Digital Citizens and Democratic Participation." Hansard Society 2010, <http://hansardsociety.org.uk/files/folders/2345/download.aspx> (11 January 2011) p.15.

⁵⁵ The future of the Internet economy: A statistical profile. OECD, Paris. June 2008. p.10.

⁵⁶ *The Internet and National Elections: A comparative study of web campaigning* Eds. Randolph Kluver, Nicholas W. Jankowski, Kirsten A. Foot and Steven M. Schneider. Routledge, New York, 2007. p.261.

⁵⁷ Loader, Brian. "Introduction," *Young Citizens in the Digital Age: Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*. Ed. Brian Loader. Routledge, Oxon, 2007. p.17.

⁵⁸ "The state of social media in New Zealand," <http://ijump.co.nz/the-state-of-social-media-in-new-zealand-stats>, iJump, 24 September 2010 (11 January 2011).

⁵⁹ Chen, Peter "Online Media". *Informing Voters? Politics, Media and the New Zealand Election* 2008. Eds. Chris Rudd, Janine Hayward and Geoffrey Craig. Pearson, North Shore, 2009. p.138.

- Social media will keep changing, how will you maintain your communities over a range of social media sites?
- What sort of voice do you want to use?
- What value can social media add to your current communicating tools?
- How will you manage negative interactions online?
- A high number of 'friends' and 'followers' is not necessarily useful if active engagement is limited – what can stimulate real engagement?

Conclusion

New Zealanders use the Internet for diverse activities which include sharing political opinions and engaging with others online. Online social media tools can be an effective way to easily engage with the community in an environment where people feel comfortable, and where little effort is required to find MPs. In the future, the level of online engagement with the public is likely to rise as more people access these sites, and their use becomes the norm. There is considerable potential for MPs to engage with the public in an innovative fashion online; however there are various points to be taken into consideration. While some MPs are using online social media tools that are useful for interaction with the public, some politicians use social media as a broadcasting mechanism, rather than as a way to engage with constituents. MPs often have many online 'fans', 'followers' and viewers. However, effective use of online social media requires more than a profile and occasional updates. An effort is needed to actively engage with the online community, such as through online dialogue and seeking feedback, rather than simply making announcements similar to media releases.

"Communication is not just person-to-person; it involves making the work of Parliament open, visible and transparent."⁶⁰

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