

Perceptions of Use: Social Networking Sites, MPs and Citizens

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Abstract

The Internet has many benefits for politicians including its ability to immediately disseminate information and facilitate communication. This study contributes to the body of research on the political consequences of the Internet through an analysis of: how and why New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites; and the perceptions of the public regarding MPs' use of social networking sites. The research used data generated from a content analysis of MP's Facebook profiles, analysis of data from coffee.geek.nz, online surveys of social networking site users, interviews with five MPs, and interviews with two young people. The findings of the study showed that MPs are using social networking sites in a similar manner to how they use blogs with little real commitment to increased two-way communication. The study also showed that young people perceived MPs' use of these sites in a very different way to the MPs themselves. The public view MPs' use of these sites as limited and aimed more towards information provision than communication. The research concludes that only a full commitment to the communication potential of the sites, on the behalf of an MP, can lead to greater interactivity and communication between politicians and constituents.

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Introduction

Accessing information and communication has been made considerably easier with the growth and popularity of the Internet. Individuals can access information on any given topic and enter into new communication networks via the Internet. This ease of access and communication has made its mark on the political realm with many politicians making use of the Internet to provide information and to establish new communication networks or to extend existing ones. This has been attempted through political party websites, politicians' personal websites, politicians' blogs and increasingly through the use of new social media, in particular, social networking sites. As new media technology continues to change and evolve, more opportunities are opening for MPs and constituents to 'bridge the gap' that divides them and this can potentially lead to a revitalisation of democracy by fostering greater interactivity between those who govern and the governed.

The increase in the number of politicians on social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook has led to much research into this field, especially in the US and UK. This current research is a case study of the use of SNS by politicians in New Zealand. By taking an in-depth look at how and why New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites, and how citizens view this use, we can not only gain deeper insights into this particular case but, we can also highlight areas that need further study.

The main argument of this research is that MPs' use of social networking sites will tend to mirror their use of other platforms on the Internet for information provision, but that there may be some differences in use due to the inherently interactive nature of social networking sites. It is further argued that it is likely that MPs are not utilising these sites fully, again mirroring their use of other platforms on the Internet, and are likely unaware of (or do not place much importance on) the potential of these sites for enabling true interaction and communication between politicians and constituents. Finally, this research argues that there will be a difference in how MPs view their use of social networking sites and how citizens view MPs' use of these sites.

The plan of the thesis is as follows. Chapter One provides a critique of the key research in this area, particularly research that has focussed on how politicians are using the

Internet in a variety of ways. Chapter Two outlines the methodological approach used to gather data for this study. Methods used were a content analysis, analysis of data from coffee.geek.nz, online surveys and interviews. In Chapter Three, the results of the analysis of the data are presented. Finally, in Chapter Four, the major findings of the study are discussed in relation to the following research questions:

- a) Are MPs trying to connect with voters in general or youth voters in particular through SNS?
- b) How successful are these sites at connecting MPs and voters?
- c) What type of information is provided by MP's profiles on social networking sites?
- d) What type of communication channels are established through MP's profiles on social networking sites?
- e) Are MPs establishing durable communication channels through SNS?

Communication and Interactivity between Politicians and Citizens

This chapter addresses the issue of whether new media, essentially the Internet, can lead to a revitalisation of democracy by fostering greater interactivity between those who govern and the governed. I begin with an examination of traditional mass media and some of the roles it must fulfil and some of its failings, to highlight the one-way nature of this form of communication. A discussion of the general debates surrounding the interactive potential of the Internet follows. The research that has been conducted about political party websites, politicians' websites, politicians' blogs and politicians' use of social networking sites, are all dealt with separately to highlight the potential of these devices for revitalising democracy and their general failure to do so. The chapter concludes with a closer look at the research conducted into how political parties and MPs are using the Internet in New Zealand and the potential for further research in this field, in particular the role that social networking sites can play in encouraging interactivity between politicians and citizens.

Traditional Media

The mass media has an important role to play within democratic societies; they must "facilitate, inform and articulate society's discussion".¹ McNair describes five functions that the mass media should fulfil in democratic societies; they must inform citizens, educate citizens about the significance of facts, provide a platform for public political discourse, give publicity to government institutions and serve as a channel for advocacy of different political viewpoints.² Norris highlights the importance of the role of the media in informing citizens and policy makers, the first of the functions that McNair describes.³ The media can take on the role of ensuring that both citizens and policy makers make informed quality decisions by providing a multitude of information on any given topic. They must also

¹ Geoff Kemp, "Democracy, the Public and the Media," in *New Zealand Government and Politics*, ed. Raymond Miller (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2010), 386.

² Brain McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication*, 3rd ed. (London:Routledge, 2003), 21-22.

³ Pippa Norris, "Global Political Communication: Good Governance, Human Development and Mass Communication," in *Comparing Political Communication: Theories Cases and Challenges*, ed. Frank Esser and Barbara Pfetsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 117.

educate the public as to the importance and significance of such information, the second function described by McNair. The third of McNair's functions is explored in more depth by Dahlgren, who emphasises the importance of the media in facilitating informed debate about major issues and the role that the media plays in the creation of a public sphere.⁴ The media can perform this function by ensuring that "multiple interests and voices are heard in public deliberation".⁵ The media must provide fair and balanced coverage of issues in order to fulfil this role successfully. Donohue and Tichenor explore the fourth function outlined by McNair, the watchdog role of the media. Mass media channels promote government transparency.⁶ Political institutions can be held accountable for their actions through the media's scrutiny of their actions and rhetoric. The final role of the media that McNair outlines is concerned with the fact that "parties...require an outlet for the articulation of their policies and programmes to a mass audience, and thus the media must be open to them".⁷ Each of these functions of the media highlights their role within democratic societies but we must also consider the limitations of these roles.

Many of the scholars mentioned above have also outlined ways in which the media are failing in the roles assigned to them. Norris outlines how limitations on the role of the media can be enforced through government institutions themselves through such measures as legal restrictions on freedom of expression, official censorship and government propaganda.⁸ In conjunction to this there is a concentration of media ownership in the hands of major multinational corporations. Norris explains that "media mergers may have concentrated excessive control in the hands of a few multinational corporations, which remain unaccountable to the public, reducing media pluralism."⁹ McNair considers growing concerns about the objectivity of the media, suggesting that media reportage is often biased and flawed.¹⁰ Equal weight is not given to every side of an argument, making it difficult for the public to make informed decisions. Kemp outlines the one-sidedness of political communication through the mass media; there is no real

⁴ Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere: Citizenship Democracy and the Media* (London: Sage, 1995), 9.

⁵ Norris, "Global Political Communication," 118.

⁶ George Donahue and Phillip Tichenor, "A guard Dog Perspective on the Role of the Media," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 2 (1995): 116.

⁷ McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication*, 22.

⁸ Norris, "Global Political Communication," 120.

⁹ *Ibid*, 121.

¹⁰ McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication*, 28.

opportunity for discussion or citizen involvement.¹¹ This ensures that there is a clear distance maintained between, not only politicians and constituents, but also between the media, who are meant to facilitate discussion, and the public. Sanders argues that we should not try and fit the media into our view of democracy at all, as politics and the media both rely on different ‘logics’ to inform their activities.¹² Among other examples of clashing logics, Sanders points out that while politics must work within “a deliberative and persuasive framework”¹³ the mass media relies on “sources and a ‘canon’ of news values”.¹⁴ Negrine argues that a new media system needs to be created to contend with the changing nature of society and then proceeds to outline the numerous limitations that would hinder a change to a new system.¹⁵ Each of these scholars agrees that the role that the media can play in today’s society towards fostering democracy is rather limited by a number of separate institutions and causes. However, we should not simply blame the media for public disenchantment with its role; politicians themselves are also contributing to this state of affairs.

We cannot look at the role of the media in political communication without also looking at the way that politicians manipulate the mass media. Davis highlights the role that the media plays in agenda setting in politics with reference to the way politicians enable this to happen.¹⁶ He argues that agenda setting in the media occurs through politicians shifting their policy agendas in order to stay a step ahead of the mass media. In other words politicians have some idea of what policies will grab the media’s attention before they are in the news and purposefully shape their positions on these issues with this in mind. Sellers clearly illustrates the direct link between the promotional activities of politicians and the amount of coverage they receive in the media.¹⁷ Negrine goes a step further by outlining the rise of the ‘public relations state’.¹⁸ Negrine explains how politicians carefully craft their communication strategies in order to ensure that they get good press in the media. He argues that this kind of crafting can lead to a privileging of the

¹¹ Kemp, “Democracy, the Public and the Media,” 387.

¹² Karen Sanders, *Communicating Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 32.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ralph Negrine, *The Communication of Politics* (London: Sage, 1996), 10-14.

¹⁶ Aeron Davis, *The Mediation of Power: A Critical Introduction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 96.

¹⁷ Patrick Sellers, “Cycles of Spin,” *Conference Papers -- American Political Science Association* (New Hampshire: American Political Science Association, 2007): 24.

¹⁸ Negrine, *The Communication of Politics*, 10.

views of government in the media. A number of scholars analyse the use of media advisers, or 'spin doctors' as they have come to be known, by politicians to help them manipulate the way they are portrayed by the media.¹⁹ Sanders highlights the way that 'spin' has "become synonymous with a focus on message management rather than policy substance."²⁰ The role of media advisers is to ensure that politicians get a simple, believable and likeable message out to the public in all of their dealings with the media. Other scholars are now arguing that the negative connotations associated with the word 'spin' will mean that at worst the vocabulary used to explain the way politicians present themselves will change, and politicians and media advisers may begin to try and fix the damage that they have done to political culture.²¹

The very nature of mass media means that the majority of communication that occurs through this medium is one-way. There are, however, some exceptions to this rule. The use of talk-back radio, letters to the editor and television talk shows are all intended to give the public a voice in the overwhelming presence of the mass media. Clayman examines a number of these 'areas of interaction' in the mass media and concludes that while there has been a definite increase in the demand and occurrence of interaction in the mass media this must be "tempered with a realistic assessment of how conditions of access and norms of conduct impose constraints on participation."²² Wahl-Jorgensen emphasises the fact that letters to the editor are first and foremost selected *by* the editor, meaning that not all voices are heard.²³ Wahl-Jorgensen concludes by noting that editors prefer those letters that are emotionally charged and are examples of individual expression, as opposed to rationally argued points and those letters submitted by groups.²⁴ Richardson and Franklin highlight how letters to the editor can be framed and sent by individuals with close political ties and sum up some of the problems associated

¹⁹ Ivor Gaber, "Government by *spin*: an analysis of the process," *Contemporary Politics* 5, no. 3 (1999): 263-275, David Martinson, "Political Advertising: A Roadblock in Teaching Social Studies Students the Importance of Truthful Political Communication to a Democratic Society," *Social Studies* 100, no. 2 (2009): 75-78, and Brian McNair, "PR Must Die: spin, anti-spin and political public relations in the UK, 1997-2004," *Journalism Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 325-338.

²⁰ Sanders, *Communicating Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, 29.

²¹ Kevin Moloney, "The rise and fall of spin: Changes of fashion in the presentation of UK politics," *Journal of Public Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2001): 124-135, and Leighton Andrews, "Spin: from tactic to tabloid," *Journal of Public Affairs* 1, no. 6 (2006): 31-45.

²² Steven Clayman, "Arenas of interaction in the mediated public sphere," *Poetics* 32, no. 1 (2004): 46-47.

²³ Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "Letters to the Editor as a Forum for Public Deliberation: Modes of Publicity and Democratic Debate," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 3 (2001): 303.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 317.

with this forum by acknowledging that “for their part, editors select letters not simply according to their newsworthiness but to reflect the identity of the newspaper, to meet the perceived preferences of readers, as well as the more prosaic requirements of availability of space and editorial imperatives concerning balance.”²⁵ Alternatively, Herbst cautiously makes the point that talk-back radio and television talk shows have the potential to reshape public dialogue, allowing individuals to decide and discuss the important news of the day.²⁶ What is obvious from these studies is that true two-way communication in the mass media is hindered by a number of factors.

Taken together these scholars highlight the role that the traditional media plays in the communication between politicians and citizens and the way in which politicians themselves try to manipulate the media. While some argue that the media’s role is necessary for democracy and others argue that this role has been distorted beyond recognition, what is important to note here is the general acceptance and agreement that political communication is mediated and that the possibility for direct and interactive communication between politicians and constituents is near impossible through these traditional media channels. We now turn to a discussion of the Internet and its political implications for establishing new and durable communication networks.

The Internet

The Internet has the potential to overcome some of the problems associated with traditional forms of political communication. Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler go so far as to argue that the traditional media, namely television, is being directly challenged by the emergence of new media.²⁷ They argue that while television is still a significant medium for political communication it must meet the challenges posed by new media and adapt within them.²⁸ Many of the scholarly debates surrounding politics online focus on the potential of the Internet to foster greater connectivity between voters and politicians and for increased participation in politics by voters. A first wave of theorists (referred to henceforth as ‘first generation scholars’) interested in the potential of the Internet,

²⁵ John Richardson and Bob Franklin, “Letters of Intent: Election Campaigning and Orchestrated Public Debate in Local Newspapers’ Letters to the Editor,” *Political Communication* 21, no. 1 (2004): 459.

²⁶ Susan Herbst, “On Electronic Public Space: Talk Shows in Theoretical Perspective,” *Political Communication* 12, no. 1 (1995): 271.

²⁷ Michael Gurevitch, Stephen Coleman and Jay G. Blumler, “Political Communication – Old and New Media Relationships,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625, no. 1 (2009): 164.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 172.

highlighted many of the positive possibilities for increased political participation that the Internet offered to citizens. Schwartz²⁹ and Rheingold³⁰ both argued that the Internet would facilitate the rise of new, more inclusive communities, which would increase social capital and enable the public to participate more fully in politics. Other scholars emphasised the potential for stronger links between the state and citizens. Dahl argued that telecommunications technology could enable any “advanced democratic country”³¹ to strengthen its links with citizens by ensuring that all citizens have access to relevant information and the opportunity to interact with the officials who created such policies. Budge took this concept further by arguing that there was potential for Internet-based communications networks to lead to direct democracy.³² The networks created through the Internet, Budge argued, allowed debate to flourish amongst individuals on any number of issues, including public policy. In short these scholars saw the Internet as a means of establishing and fostering communication channels that were not available through the mainstream media.

A second wave of theorists was less optimistic about the potential of the Internet to increase political participation and communication. Bimber argued that the Internet could not possibly create a “new era of democracy”³³ because it would not raise enthusiasm or interest in politics that was not already present, despite the increase in information and communication channels available to citizens. Scammell similarly could see no real evidence of increased political participation through the Internet in the traditional sense but felt this could be a result of the emergence of the “consumer-citizen”³⁴ who was more concerned with lifestyle choices than political ones. Hill and Hughes also contended that the Internet was not going to change politics but would reproduce the same characteristics and divisions of ‘offline’ politics.³⁵ These second generation theorists are now giving way to a third generation that looks more specifically

²⁹ Edward Schwartz, *Netactivism: How Citizens Use the Internet* (Sebastopol: Songline Studios, 1996).

³⁰ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1993).

³¹ Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 338-339.

³² Ian Budge, *The New Challenge of Direct Democracy* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996), 1.

³³ Bruce Bimber, “The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism,” *Polity* 31, no. 1 (1998): 136.

³⁴ Margaret Scammell, “The Internet and Civic Engagement: The Age of the Citizen Consumer,” *Political Communication* 17, no. 1 (2000): 355.

³⁵ Kevin Hill and John Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 1998), 182.

at certain aspects of the relationship between the Internet and politics. One of these areas of research is focussed on how the internet is being used by political actors to establish communication channels.

The ability of the Internet to create new and durable communication networks is an area of study that is contested by many different scholars. Some argue that this potential is limited while others maintain that it is infinite. Moog and Sluyter-Beltrao acknowledge that the Internet has potential for creating new communication networks but argue that television will remain the most important source of political information for the majority of individuals, meaning that any communication networks established through the Internet will merely be temporary.³⁶ Tolbert and McNeal report dissatisfaction with traditional media coverage of elections amongst citizens and muses that the Internet may “serve to fill a void in the coverage of political elections vacated to some degree by the main-stream media.”³⁷ Rather than creating entirely separate and unique communication channels this view of the role of the Internet in politics suggests that the Internet is merely taking over some of the traditional roles of mainstream media. In a similar vein Lilleker and Jackson found that politicians and political parties are using the Internet for interactivity and communication in order to create or strengthen their brand image.³⁸ In this sense it would seem that while the Internet can be considered non-mediated, political parties are using it in the same ways that they use the mass media, namely for advertisement. Lilleker and Jackson also point out, however, that there is potential for greater interactivity and communication between constituents and politicians as the non-mediated nature of the Internet means that more people will be less inclined to simply accept party brands.³⁹ Politicians may need to allow for a “more collaborative mode of election communication”⁴⁰ in order to convince constituents of their abilities. While these scholars highlight the doubts that some feel regarding the potential for interactivity and communication online, still others are taking a more positivist tone.

³⁶ Sandra Moog and Jeffrey Sluyter-Beltrao, “The Transformation of Political Communication?,” in *New Media and Politics*, ed. Barrie Axford and Richard Huggins (London: Sage, 2001), 57.

³⁷ Caroline Tolbert and Ramona McNeal, “Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation?,” *Political Research Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2003): 183 – 184.

³⁸ Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, “Interactivity and Branding, public political communication as a marketing tool,” in *Political Studies Association (PSA) Conference: Sixty Years of Political Studies: Achievements and Futures, 29 March – 1 April 2010, Edinburgh University, Scotland* (Edinburgh: Political Studies Association, 2010).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Challen found that while many political parties and politicians are not using the Internet to its full potential, they are nonetheless making an attempt to do so.⁴¹ He argues that in the future the Internet will allow politicians and parties to address constituents in a tailored and localised manner, which can only occur with changes in the “style and mode of political communications.”⁴² Norris likewise argues that while political actors are not making use of the Internet to its full potential at the moment, this does not mean that they will not in future.⁴³ Norris also raises some questions about whether or not it is fair and necessary to expect political actors to have fully interactive online presences, pointing out that opportunities for informed debate about politics are numerous on the Internet and do not have to come solely from the state.⁴⁴ While many scholars argue that the potential of the Internet for communication is not being utilised fully, they still agree that the potential for non-mediated communication is available through the Internet.⁴⁵ A closer look at some of the forms of communication between politicians and constituents available on the Internet will allow us to distinguish more clearly the extent to which these forms are being used for communication. Existing literature on how political actors use political party websites, individual politician websites, blogs and social networking sites and the successfulness of these uses of the Internet by politicians at establishing communication channels, will now be considered.

Political Party Websites

One forum through which politicians can communicate with citizens on the Internet is through political party websites. Many scholars have agreed that there is a general prioritisation of information over communication on political party websites.⁴⁶ Ward,

⁴¹ Colin Challen, “Think global, talk local: Getting the party political message across in the age of the Internet,” *Journal of Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (2001): 254.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 130.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Yana Breindl, “Critique of the Democratic Potentialities of the Internet: A Review of Current Theory and Practice,” *tripleC* 8, no. 1 (2010): 43-59.

⁴⁶ Julian Bowers-Brown, “A marriage made in Cyberspace? Political Marketing and UK party websites,” in *Political Parties and the Internet*, ed. Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (London: Routledge, 2003), 98-119, Michael Margolis, David Resnick and Joel Wolfe, “Party Competition on the Internet in the United States and Britain,” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 4, no. 4 (1999): 24-47, Andrea Römmele, “Political Parties, Party Communication and New Information and Communication Technologies,” *Party Politics* 9, no. 1 (2003): 7-20, Rachel Gibson and Stephen Ward, “U.K. Political Parties and the Internet: “Politics as Usual” in the New Media?,” *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 3, no. 3 (1998): 14-38, Rachel Gibson and Stephen Ward, “Virtual Campaigning: Australian Parties and the Impact of the

Gibson and Nixon outline three main uses of political party websites by the parties that establish them.⁴⁷ Firstly the website is used as an administrative tool, information about the party history, rules, constitution, policy documents and speeches are all available on the majority of political party websites as well as organisational information such as contact information and party structure.⁴⁸ These websites can save the party time and labour by providing information for the public that would otherwise need to be asked directly of the party. The second use of these websites is as an active campaign tool.⁴⁹ During election campaigns these websites can be developed to deliver the party message through a non-mediated forum. The campaign messages can be tailored for specific groups through these sites which can be delivered directly to voters without the intervention of the traditional mass media. Thirdly, these websites are used as participatory and organisational tools.⁵⁰ They can be used to mobilise citizens and encourage donations. They are also used for internal party communication through the use of bulletin boards and up-to-date email lists. While this description of the usefulness of political party websites briefly touches on its communication possibilities it gives far more weight to how the websites can be used as an informational tool for citizens. Taking a different tack Bowers-Brown views political party websites through the lens of political marketing and argues that for many, if not all, political parties the main draw card of an online presence is its ability to extend their marketing endeavours.⁵¹ Likewise Margolis, Resnick and Wolfe found that political party presence online in America and Britain was generally more pronounced for well-known political parties that were attempting to extend their support base.⁵² They also highlighted the fact the Internet is populated by “consumers of information, products and services”⁵³, just as the offline world is, and so active communication and debate through political party websites is not a high priority for the majority of these Internet users.

Internet,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 1 (2002): 99-129, Eva Johanna Schweitzer, “Election Campaigning Online: German Party Websites in the 2002 National Elections,” *European Journal of Communication* 20, no. 3 (2005): 327-251, and Bruno Villalba, “Moving towards an evolution in political mediation? French political parties and the new ICTs,” in *Political Parties and the Internet*, ed. Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (London: Routledge, 2003), 120-138.

⁴⁷ Stephen Ward, Rachel Gibson and Paul Nixon, “Parties and the Internet,” in *Political Parties and the Internet*, ed. Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (London: Routledge, 2003), 12 - 13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 13.

⁵¹ Bowers-Brown, “A marriage made in Cyberspace?,” 116.

⁵² Margolis, Resnick and Wolfe, “Party Competition on the Internet,” 43.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

Other scholars, such as Römmele, have also found that the majority of political parties using websites are doing so in order to maximise votes and are not actively encouraging interactivity or communication on the sites.⁵⁴ Gibson and Ward also found in an early study that political parties were not exploiting the potential of the Internet to establish and encourage communication networks, rather they were being used to promote campaign messages and as a tool for a downward dissemination of information.⁵⁵ Norris contradicts this finding to a certain extent in a 2003 study of European political parties.⁵⁶ It was found that the websites were encouraging bottom-up communication from citizens to the party hierarchy as well as a top-down dissemination of information. Ward, Gibson and Lusoli highlight the potential of the Internet in general to encourage political participation and suggest that there is a trend towards greater mobilisation and participation in politics through the Internet.⁵⁷ They also outline that this participation can lead to greater participation offline also. Many of these scholars highlight the fact that one of the most interesting results of political parties moving online is the opportunity it affords for minor parties to produce information about themselves.⁵⁸ While traditional news media may tend to ignore minor and fringe parties to some extent, the Internet provides an opportunity for them to have a greater voice and visibility. Other scholars, such as Margolis, Levy, Resnick and Wolfe, however, found the opposite, with minor party presence on the Internet not as obvious as that of the major parties.⁵⁹

Much research has also been conducted into country specific political parties and their use of party websites. Gibson and Ward found that Australian political parties were making little effort to interact and communicate through websites, going so far as to say that the Australian political parties were virtually five years behind in their development of party websites when compared to other countries.⁶⁰ An analysis of the use of party

⁵⁴ Römmele, "Political Parties, Party Communication," 15.

⁵⁵ Gibson and Ward, "U.K. Political Parties and the Internet," 20.

⁵⁶ Pippa Norris, "Preaching to the Converted? Pluralism, Participation and Party Websites," *Party Politics* 9, no. 1 (2003): 43.

⁵⁷ Rachel Gibson, Stephen Ward and Wainer Lusoli, "Online Participation and Mobilisation in Britain: Hype, Hope and Reality," *Parliamentary Affairs* 56, no. 4 (2003): 667.

⁵⁸ Norris, "Preaching to the Converted?," 43, and Gibson and Ward "U.K. Political Parties and the Internet," 21.

⁵⁹ Margolis, Resnick and Wolfe, "Party Competition on the Internet," 43-44, and Michael Margolis, David Resnick and Jonathan Levy, "Major Parties Dominate, Minor Parties Struggle: US elections and the Internet," in *Political Parties and the Internet*, ed. Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (London: Routledge, 2003), 65.

⁶⁰ Gibson and Ward, "Virtual Campaigning," 122.

websites in the 2006 Italian parliamentary elections by Vaccari likewise found that Italian political parties are not making the most of the opportunities afforded to them by the Internet.⁶¹ However Vaccari was careful to point out that Internet penetration in Italy was rather limited in comparison to other European countries and that the role of the traditional media in Italian elections was far more pronounced than in other Western nations. A study of the 2002 national elections in Germany by Schweitzer again found that political parties were ignoring the potential of the websites to host interactive functions and were merely using them as informational tools.⁶² A similar result was found in a study of French political parties' use of ICTs with the author commenting that these websites are "simply reproducing the same political patterns that were traditionally presented in the press, or in internal party literature".⁶³ Small found more positive results in a study on political party websites in the 2004 Canadian election, highlighting the way in which minor party websites are often more interactive in nature than major party sites.⁶⁴ While major party sites were found to be more attractive in terms of lay-out and use of multimedia technology, the minor parties included more interactive features.

Some scholars have attempted to explain why political parties are not using their websites to their full extent. Nixon and Johansson noted that the Internet is still characterised by uneven access and levels of acceptance, meaning that for political parties it would still be necessary to provide information elsewhere to mirror that which it can provide on the Internet.⁶⁵ The importance accorded to the Internet population may not be as high as that accorded to those who gain political information through the mainstream media. Gibson and Ward also offer some explanations for the poor performance of Australian political parties in their 2000 study, namely that the study was conducted between elections.⁶⁶ They argue that political party internet activity may be more pronounced in an election year.⁶⁷ Gibson and Ward also highlight the point that many

⁶¹ Cristian Vaccari, "Research Note: Italian Parties' Websites in the 2006 Elections," *European Journal of Communication* 23, no. 1 (2008): 75.

⁶² Schweitzer, "Election Campaigning Online," 345.

⁶³ Villalba, "Moving towards an evolution in political mediation?," 135.

⁶⁴ Tamara Small, "Equal Access, Unequal Success Major and Minor Canadian Parties On the Net," *Party Politics* 14, no. 1 (2008): 65.

⁶⁵ Paul Nixon and Hans Johansson, "Transparency through technology: the Internet and political parties," in *Digital Democracy: discourse and decision making in the information age*, ed. Barry Hague and Brian Loader (London: Routledge, 1999), 145-146.

⁶⁶ Gibson and Ward, "Virtual Campaigning," 122.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

political parties simply do not see much demand for a full and interactive web presence.⁶⁸ Jackson's findings from his study of the 2005 UK general election suggest that for many political parties, other uses of ICTs are more effective for their purposes.⁶⁹ He outlines how the use of email by UK political parties was more successful at mobilising support than the party websites themselves.⁷⁰ Such results could be likely to encourage political parties to focus their attention and resources on list-serves and e-newsletters rather than on the party website. Römmele provides the most straightforward argument for why political parties are not utilising websites to their full extent. She makes the point that political parties will use websites to fulfil their goal orientation.⁷¹ From this point of view it can be argued that political parties simply do not wish their websites to be more interactive. Römmele applies this logic to party uses of all ICTs.⁷² A discussion of individual politicians' websites may highlight a different logic.

Candidate Websites

Research into candidate websites is generally country specific but often these studies have similar results. Ward and Lusoli conducted research into how MPs were using the Internet in the UK and discovered that the majority of MPs' websites were used for three distinct categories of information.⁷³ These were background information such as biographies and contact information, specialised information such as the roles of the MP and work in Westminster, and snapshot information like the results of the last election and an online MP diary.⁷⁴ This study also looked at interactive features available through MP websites but noted that the results for these were much lower than for informational functions.⁷⁵ Lilleker and Malagón conducted research into the 2007 French presidential candidates' websites and found that, like other countries, the levels of interactivity on these sites were limited.⁷⁶ They believe that this is because of the risk to message control that would occur

⁶⁸ Ibid, 123.

⁶⁹ Nigel Jackson, "Political parties, the Internet and the 2005 General Election: third time lucky?," *Internet Research* 17, no. 3 (2007): 267.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Römmele, "Political Parties, Party Communication," 15.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Stephen Ward and Wainer Lusoli, "'From Weird to Wired': MPs the Internet and representative politics in the UK," *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 11, no. 1 (2005): 71.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 71-72.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 72.

⁷⁶ Darren Lilleker and Casilda Malagón, "Levels of Interactivity in the 2007 French Presidential Candidates' Websites," *European Journal of Communication* 25, no. 1 (2010), 25-42.

if the sites were made more interactive.⁷⁷ In an interesting case study of the 2007 presidential primaries of the Grand National Party (GNP), the largest opposition party in the South Korean National Assembly, Park and Lee looked at the nature of cyber-campaigning.⁷⁸ They found that of the two front-runners for nomination, Lee Myung-Bak focussed more on the informational aspects of his website and Park Geun-Hye focussed on communication functions. Park and Lee outline how that this fits with the wishes of the support bases of both candidates.⁷⁹ This distinction between information and communication functions is something that will be explored in the Results section of this study.

Any discussion of how politicians are using the Internet in general, and candidate websites in particular, would not be complete without discussing Barak Obama's use of online media in the 2008 US election campaign and his continuing use of this technology into his presidency. Borins provides a good overview of how Obama continues to use the Internet as President.⁸⁰ Borins emphasises the level of transparency that is made possible through the Internet and highlights the importance of dialogue in this process, outlining how interactive the President-elect site was.⁸¹ Borins then notes that "it remains to be seen.... whether [the White House] moves more boldly into the unconstrained Web 2.0 world of citizen dialogue in which both the campaign and the transition team operated comfortably."⁸²

Research into individual candidate websites has largely focussed on the usefulness of this forum for promoting the politician in question. Some early studies into how candidates use individual websites make for rather sober reading. Davis found that while many candidates had quite good interactive features on their websites, they failed to utilise them to foster public discussion or for direct discussion with the citizens visiting the sites.⁸³ Kamarck likewise found that the majority of candidates' campaign websites did not

⁷⁷ Ibid, 39.

⁷⁸ Yeon-Ok Lee and Han Woo Park, "The Reconfiguration of E-Campaign Practices in Korea: A Case Study of the Presidential Primaries of 2007," *International Sociology* 25, no. 1 (2010), 29-53.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 47.

⁸⁰ Sandford Borins, "From Online Candidate to Online President," *International Journal of Public Administration* 32, no. 9 (2009), 753-758.

⁸¹ Ibid, 756-757.

⁸² Ibid, 757.

⁸³ Richard Davis, *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

allow for discussion between the candidate and citizens.⁸⁴ Stromer-Galley was slightly less pessimistic about how candidates in US elections were using campaign websites, outlining that many of the sites provide functions (such as donate now links) that would presumably encourage donors to further their interaction with the candidate.⁸⁵ On the whole, however, Stromer-Galley points out that for the majority of candidates their sites were merely set up to appear interactive with many multimedia functions but very little human-to-human interaction. Obviously this phenomenon for not using new media technology to its full potential is not found solely in the US. Jackson and Lilleker concluded their study of British MPs in much the same way, claiming that candidates “are largely talking at, rather than with, their constituents”.⁸⁶ Ward and Gibson also found that British MPs were not using their websites to their full potential.⁸⁷ They partly attribute this to the fact that at the 2001 election which they were studying it did not make sense for MPs to devote too much time and energy to a communication medium that was used by less than half the population. They go on to note that those that do look at candidate websites tend to be either party members or already politically engaged members of the public, making websites less useful for candidates trying to extend their support base, although they also acknowledge that the willingness of the politician to engage through websites is the biggest factor in determining whether or not they will do so.

Many reasons have been suggested by scholars to try and explain why politicians are not utilising candidate websites to their full potential. Strandberg theorised that there is no simple answer to determine why some politicians maintain a comprehensive online presence and others do not but she did suggest a range of factors that could influence this.⁸⁸ These include candidate demographics such as age and education, constituency demographics, intra-party variables such as the competitiveness of the candidates and whether they were incumbents or challenges, and also, inter-party variables like the size

⁸⁴ Elaine Kamarck, “Campaigning on the Internet in the elections of 1998,” in *democracy.com?: Governance in a networked world*, ed. Elaine Kamarck and Joseph Nye (Hollis: Hollis Publishing Company, 1999), 99-123.

⁸⁵ Jennifer Stromer-Galley, “On-Line Interaction and Why Candidates Avoid It,” *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 4 (2000): 127.

⁸⁶ Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, “Just Public Relations or an Attempt at Interaction?: British MPs in the Press, on the Web and ‘In Your Face’,” *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 4 (2004): 530.

⁸⁷ Stephen Ward and Rachel Gibson, “On-line and on message? Candidate websites in the 2001 General Election,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 5, no. 2 (2003): 188-205.

⁸⁸ Kim Strandberg, “Online campaigning: an opening for the outsiders? An analysis of Finnish parliamentary candidates' websites in the 2003 election campaign,” *New Media Society* 11, no. 5 (2009): 834.

and ideological orientation of the party.⁸⁹ Parkin, Druckman and Kifer highlight some of the practical reasons why candidates may not maintain fully interactional websites.⁹⁰ They outline some of the feasibility issues that are associated with web use such as the level of ease of using the technology, staff size and financial resources which all play a part in a candidate's ability to maintain a dynamic webpage.⁹¹ They also argued that political considerations such as the competitiveness of the campaign and whether or not the candidate was an incumbent played a major role in determining their web use.⁹² A later study conducted by Parkin et al. found that in terms of issue engagement through candidate websites the major determining factor seemed to be the saliency of the issue in public opinion.⁹³ From this we can assume that candidates are more likely to engage online about any given issue when that issue is receiving a significant amount of attention from the media and the public. Trammell et al. are more optimistic about the future of candidate websites.⁹⁴ They found that in the 2004 Democratic primary cycle in the US "there was a noticeable shift in online campaigning, encouraging more interactivity through the frequent textual requests for participations and by allowing supporters to place their mark on the campaign by use of the feedback mechanisms".⁹⁵ Gibson also found that there is some reason to be positive for the future when she looked at web campaigning from a global perspective.⁹⁶ In a study published in 2004 Gibson urges politicians to make use of truly viral politics, what she explains as "a unique type of peer to peer communication through jokes or emailed stories via the internet"⁹⁷ in order to have a more obvious impact on the voting public through the Internet. Of course each country is different, and so the web presence of politicians in one country will not be directly comparable to the web presence of politicians in another country. A comparative study of the websites of George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac, Angela Merkel and Tony Blair conducted

⁸⁹ Ibid, 841.

⁹⁰ James Druckman, Martin Kifer and Michael Parkin, "The Technological Development of Congressional Candidate Web Sites: How and Why Candidates Use Web Innovations," *Social Science Computer Review* 25, no. 4 (2007): 438.

⁹¹ Ibid, 436.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ James Druckman et al., "Issue Engagement on Congressional Candidate Web Sites, 2002-2006," *Social Science Computer Review* 28, no. 1 (2010): 19.

⁹⁴ Kaye Trammell et al., "Evolution of Online Campaigning: Increasing Interactivity in Candidate Web Sites and Blogs Through Text and Technical Features," *Mass Communication and Society* 9, no. 1 (2006): 22.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Rachel Gibson, "Web campaigning from a global perspective," *Asia-Pacific Review* 11, no. 1 (2004), 95-126.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 117.

by Ib Bondebjerg in 2007 highlighted the fact that individual politicians websites not only reflect different political ideologies but also national and cultural differences.⁹⁸ In an earlier study Williams et al. found that the way US presidential candidates were using websites in the 2004 campaign differed greatly from the way that they used blogs.⁹⁹ They concluded that candidate websites and blogs must be considered as two different channels of political communication because they are used to provide different types of information. Hence I will now turn to a discussion of the research conducted into candidates' blogs.

Politicians' Blogs

A distinction needs to be made here between political blogs and politicians' blogs. In this section I will be focussing on research that has been conducted into the nature of blogs that are written by politicians, not on blogs that have been written by citizens about politics. In a study on politicians' blogs and their websites, Williams et al. found that politicians were using these communication channels in different ways.¹⁰⁰ They found that while websites were used to disseminate vast amounts of information on specific topics, politicians' blogs were being used to provide smaller snippets of information on a greater variety of subjects.¹⁰¹ However, for blogs to fulfil their potential as a communicative forum that connects politicians and citizens they need to do more than just provide information. In another comparative study of politicians' websites and blogs conducted during Taiwan's 2008 general election, Wang found that candidate websites were less likely to foster online democracy than blogs.¹⁰² This backed up the findings of the Williams et al. study. Auty found that levels of interaction through blogs vary depending on the politician.¹⁰³ She concluded her study by commenting that the majority of blogs (or weblogs) included in her study showed signs that this particular communication channel was used mainly for top-down dissemination of information.¹⁰⁴ Ferguson and Griffiths concurred with this

⁹⁸ Ib Bondebjerg, "Power and personality: politicians on the World Wide Web," *Northern Lights* 5, no. 1 (2007): 136.

⁹⁹ Andrew Williams et al., "Blogging and Hyperlinking: use of the Web to enhance viability during the 2004 US Campaign," *Journalism Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 184.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 183.

¹⁰² Tai-Li Wang, "A comparative study of campaign blogs and web sites: The case of Taiwan's 2008 election," *Online Information Review* 34, no. 2 (2010): 247.

¹⁰³ Caroline Auty, "UK elected representatives and their weblogs: first impressions," *Aslib Proceedings* 57, no. 4 (2005): 354.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

evaluation going so far as to say that “political blogging appears to be stunted”.¹⁰⁵ They highlighted the lack of deliberative debate occurring through blogs and emphasised the way in which bloggers tended to concentrate on ‘static’ views, unwilling or unable to reach out beyond the ideas that they generate themselves.¹⁰⁶ Coleman and Moss likewise found that politicians’ were not using blogs in a communicative manner.¹⁰⁷ They focussed on how politicians’ could reduce the perceived distance between themselves and constituents through blogs. They outlined two ways that blogs could achieve this, firstly, they can try and reduce the *perception* of distance through different communication styles on the blogs and secondly, they can attempt to create real relationships through reconfiguring “the reality of indirect representation”.¹⁰⁸

Other scholars have focussed on campaign blogs and how these can contribute to transparency and communication. Janack found similar results to Ferguson and Griffiths in his evaluation of Howard Dean’s 2004 campaign blog.¹⁰⁹ Rather than encouraging open debate about issues, Dean’s blog tended to encourage posts that supported his campaign message and discourage those that did not. Jordan highlighted the popularity of Dean’s blog and the impact that it had in the 2004 campaign as “his campaign blazed the trail for the shrewd use of the internet to raise funds and motivate supporters in elections to come.”¹¹⁰ Jordan continues by outlining the marked gap in how Republicans and Democrats are using blogs, noting that Republicans have been slower than Democrats in utilising the communication potential of the Internet, although also outlining how this gap is slowly closing.¹¹¹ Trammell, Williams and Landreville were more optimistic in their study of the 2004 primary season in the US.¹¹² They argued that the candidates were able to grasp the communicative nature of blogs more easily in this campaign and used them to encourage interaction and debate. In another study conducted by Trammell, however, it was found that the issues discussed on campaign blogs’ had little relevance for young

¹⁰⁵ Ross Ferguson and Barry Griffiths, “Thin Democracy? Parliamentarians, Citizens and the Influence of Blogging on Political Engagement,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, no. 2 (2006): 373.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Coleman and Giles Moss, “Governing at a distance – politicians in the blogosphere,” *Information Polity* 13, no. 1 (2008): 19.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ James Janack, “Mediated Citizenship and Digital Discipline: A Rhetoric of Control in a Campaign Blog,” *Social Semiotics* 16, no. 2 (2006): 297.

¹¹⁰ L. Ashley Jordan, “Broadcasting Yourself (and Others): How YouTube and Blogging have Changed the Rules of the Campaign,” *Hinckley Journal of Politics* 9, no. 1 (2008): 76.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹¹² Trammell et al., “Evolution of Online Campaigning,” 42.

people, the group that these new media communication forums are most aimed at involving in politics.¹¹³ What this tells us is that there are mixed results for a number of studies conducted on campaign blogs, while some highlight the use of blogs for reaffirming campaign messages others emphasise the change to a more interactive style of communicating that is slowly occurring.

In regards to the potential that blogs' hold for the advancement of representative democracy Coleman and Wright outline how empirical research has challenged the claims that blogs, and new media in general, will revolutionise democratic systems and practices.¹¹⁴ They do, however, acknowledge the way in which blogs are evidence of a changing communication environment. Jackson highlights the importance of blogs for communication in his study of MPs' use of blogs in the UK.¹¹⁵ He found that blogs were not just good for representative democracy because they allow constituents to have a voice, he also found that these blogs were creating whole new e-constituencies of interest that were completely separate from the MP's physical constituency.¹¹⁶ In this way blogs can be seen as giving a voice to those constituents that may not identify with MPs solely on the criteria of geography. Wright found that the potential for a more direct, interactive form of representation was available through the use of blogs but is cautious in his evaluation of how interactive blogs really are, claiming that "interaction is limited: citizen comments often are not sought or given, and when they are (generally in limited numbers), replies are often ignored".¹¹⁷ What is obvious from the literature is that no one can quite agree on the usefulness of politicians' blogs for enhancing communication and representative democracy.

Social Networking Sites

Another way in which politicians use the Internet is through social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter. SNS can be considered similar to blogs in their potential for

¹¹³ Kaye Trammell, "Candidate Campaign Blogs: Directly Reaching out to the Youth Vote," *American Behavioural Science* 50, no. 9 (2007): 1262.

¹¹⁴ Stephen Coleman and Scott Wright, "Political blogs and representative democracy," *Information Polity* 13, no. 1 (2008): 3.

¹¹⁵ Nigel Jackson, "Representation in the Blogosphere: MPs and Their New Constituents," *Parliamentary Affairs* 61, no. 4 (2008): 642-660.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 657.

¹¹⁷ Scott Wright, "Political blogs, representation and the public sphere," *Aslib Proceedings* 61, no. 2 (2009): 162.

encouraging more dialogue and debate than is possible through political party websites and politicians' websites. Boyd and Ellison provide a useful definition of what constitutes a social network site, namely that they are

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or 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 within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.¹¹⁸

There has been less research into this particular use of the Internet than the others previously discussed because it is still a relatively novel concept for politicians to use SNS. The 2008 Obama campaign popularised the use of social networking sites by politicians and a study of the 2008 campaign found that over 40 percent of Americans went online to find information about the campaign and roughly 10 percent of Americans used SNS to engage in political activity.¹¹⁹ Obama even created his own social networking site www.my.barrackobama.com which came to be known as MyBo. Talbot outlines how other new media platforms on the Internet were utilised by the Obama campaign to encourage voters to join MyBo which would then encourage them to donate time and money to Obama's campaign.¹²⁰ In a comparison between the use of Facebook in the US and Canada during election campaigns, Small concluded that while the online campaign in Canada was just as vibrant and dynamic as its counterpart in the US "it just did not occur on Facebook".¹²¹

Just like the other communicative forums available through the Internet, research into SNS has revealed contradictory results for different researchers. One study conducted into the potential of Twitter to provide useful information and encourage debate about

¹¹⁸ Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1, at <http://icmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>, accessed 14 June 2010.

¹¹⁹ Aaron Smith and Lee Rainie, "The Internet and the 2008 Election," http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2008/PIP_2008_election.pdf.pdf, accessed 14 June 2010: 2.

¹²⁰ David Talbot, "How Obama Really Did It," *MIT Technology Review* 111, no. 5 (2008): 81.

¹²¹ Tamara Small, "The Facebook Effect? Online Campaigning in the 2008 Canadian and US Elections," *Policy Options* 29, no. 10 (2008): 87.

politics suggested the site was a valid indicator of political sentiment.¹²² However, this same study also categorised Twitter as merely an informational tool that can be used for political forecasting, much in the same way that polls are used.¹²³ Wills and Reeves took this idea a step further by analysing the type of information that can be taken from Facebook.¹²⁴ They found that the type of information that can be extracted from SNS could be used as a political tool, both for forecasting and for extracting information on opponents.¹²⁵ Lilleker and Jackson studied the way in which MPs use SNS and concluded that while there were examples of MPs communicating with citizens on these sites they were outweighed by the vast majority of MPs who did not seem to use the medium to its full potential.¹²⁶ Baumgartner and Morris were critical of the potential of SNS to engage young voters in politics.¹²⁷ They found that young voters using these sites were actually less knowledgeable about politics and could not find any evidence that they would be more likely to vote because of their use of these sites.¹²⁸ Other studies found more positive results. Sweetser and Lariscy discussed the potential of these sites to engage young voters and concluded that while the conventional wisdom suggests that new media is most effective for fundraising, the relationships established between politicians and young voters was evident and had the potential to engage voters further.¹²⁹ Other studies found mixed results on the impact of SNS on political engagement, suggesting that while use of these sites seems to encourage greater civic engagement it does not lead to greater political participation or confidence in government.¹³⁰

¹²² Andranik Tumasjan et al., "Predicting Elections with Twitter: What 140 Characters Reveal about Political Sentiment," in *International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, 2010), 184.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ David Wills and Stuart Reeves, "Facebook as a political weapon: Information in social networks," *British Politics* 4, no. 2 (2009): 265-281.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 279.

¹²⁶ Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, "MPs and E-representation: Me, MySpace and I," *British Politics* 4, no. 2 (2009): 256-257.

¹²⁷ Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris, "MyFaceTube Politics: Social Networking Web Sites and Political Engagement of Young Adults," *Social Science Computer Review* 28, no. 1 (2010): 24-44.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 38.

¹²⁹ Kaye Sweetser and Ruthann Lariscy, "Candidates Make Good Friends: An Analysis of Candidates' Uses of Facebook," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 2, no. 3 (2008): 196.

¹³⁰ Weiwu Zhang et al., "The Revolution Will be Networked: The Influence of Social Networking Sites on Political Attitudes and Behaviour," *Social Science Computer Review* 28, no. 1 (2010): 75-92.

Another way researchers have approached the study of politicians' use of SNS has been by analysing the way this communication medium is used in specific campaigns.¹³¹ A study of the use of Facebook in the 2007 Danish national election campaign by Andersen and Medaglia found that Facebook politics was simply "politics as usual".¹³² Those connecting with candidates through these sites were found to be people that were already connected with the candidate offline and in addition to this it was found that these individuals did not expect to gain increased influence on politics through these social networking sites.¹³³ A study conducted by Mirandilla into how SNS were used in the 2010 Philippine presidential election campaigns found that the candidates' SNS pages appeared to be merely abridged versions of their websites and were mostly used as a supplement to mainstream media as a campaign platform.¹³⁴ However, despite this she also found that a great proportion of the 'undecided' voters were attracted to these profiles which could provide the information necessary for these voters to make a decision.¹³⁵ In a study of new media (including SNS, candidate websites, blogs, e-newsletters, online surveys and petitions, and video web logs) used in the 2007 Australian federal election, Macnamara found that dialogue was restricted on SNS and made up mainly of 'fan mail' because the majority of candidates employed 'gatekeepers' to moderate discussion on the sites.¹³⁶ Macnamara concluded that in this campaign new media was not used to its full potential with candidates mainly providing information in a top-down fashion, although he also found a distinct increase in citizen outreach and engagement compared to previous campaigns.¹³⁷ While the studies discussed here are just a brief overview of some of the

¹³¹ Kavita Karan, Jacques Gimeno and Edson Tandoc, "Internet and Social Networking Sites in Election Campaigns: Gabriela Women's Party in Philippines wins the 2007 Elections," (paper submitted for presentation at the *Politics: Web 2.0: An International Conference*, London, April 2008), <http://www.politikiletisim.com/pdf/siyasaliletisimveinternet/Internetandelectioncampaigns.pdf>, accessed 13 June 2010: 1-32, and Christine Williams and Girish Gulati, "Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections," in *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (Chicago: American Political Science Association, 2007), 1-23.

¹³² Kim Andersen and Rony Medaglia, "The Use of Facebook in National Election Campaigns: Politics as Usual?," in *Electronic Participation*, ed. David Hutchison (Heidelberg: Springer Berlin, 2009), 110.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Mary Grace Mirandilla, "Cybercampaigning for 2010: The Use and Effectiveness of Websites and Social Networking Sites as Campaign Platforms for the 2010 Philippine Presidential Election," in *4th Communication Policy Research: South Conference* (Negombo: Communication Policy Research, 2009), <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1553724>, accessed 13 June 2010: 13.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Jim Macnamara, "E-Electioneering: Use of new media in the 2007 Australian federal election," in *Power and Place: ANZCA 2008: Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association Conference 2008*, ed. E. Tilley (Wellington: ANZCA, 2009), 7.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 16.

country specific research that has been conducted into the use of SNS in election campaigns, they demonstrate the type of results that are common in this field of research.

The New Zealand Case

There has been relatively little research conducted into how political parties and MPs are using the Internet in New Zealand although there has been some research into the general nature of e-democracy in New Zealand.¹³⁸ E-democracy can be defined as “the processes and structures of electronic communication which enable the electorate and the elected to connect.”¹³⁹ New Zealand specific studies into this area have tended to focus on ways in which institutional websites can connect MPs and voters rather than how MPs as individuals, or members of a political party, are connecting with voters through Internet communication channels. Shaw provides an in-depth overview of the current New Zealand literature on the relationship between politics and the Internet but notes that there are obvious gaps in the current research.¹⁴⁰ Despite the general lack of research there have been some studies which deserve a closer look.

Research on New Zealand political party websites is limited but a study conducted by Pedersen on party websites during the 2005 general election found that New Zealand political parties were not utilising the full potential of their websites.¹⁴¹ She notes that these political party websites, while greatly improved upon since the mid-1990s, were still being used to supplement offline campaigning in the 2005 election rather than as new and vibrant campaign platforms in their own right.¹⁴² Pederson also comments that the political parties in the 2005 election campaign were “reluctant to encourage new ‘online’ forms of party activity”¹⁴³ and did not offer many examples of interactive and participatory

¹³⁸ Peter Fitzjohn and Rob Salmond, “The Battle of the Blogs: A Phony War?,” in *The Baubles of Office: The New Zealand Election of 2005*, ed. Stephen Levine and Nigel S. Roberts (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2007), and Juliet Roper, “New Zealand Political Parties Online: The World Wide Web as a tool for democratisation or for political marketing?,” in *The Politics of Cyberspace*, ed. Chris Toulouse and Timothy Luke (New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹³⁹ Julie King, “Democracy in the Information Age,” *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 65, No. 2 (2006): 20.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Shaw, “Politics and the Internet: the New Zealand Research,” *Political Science* 61, no. 2 (2009): 4.

¹⁴¹ Karina Pederson, “New Zealand Parties in Cyberspace,” *Political Science* 57, no. 2 (2005): 115.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Karina Pederson, “Electioneering in Cyberspace,” in *The Baubles of Office: The New Zealand General Election of 2005*, ed. Stephen Levine and Nigel Roberts (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2007), 247.

features on the sites.¹⁴⁴ A study conducted by Chen into how political parties and individual candidates used online media in the 2008 election campaign found that in terms of party websites there was a marked difference in how the two major parties used the sites.¹⁴⁵ Chen provides evidence to support his conclusion that the National Party website was well-run, easy to navigate, pleasing to look at and provided some interactive features.¹⁴⁶ This is contrasted against his description of the Labour Party campaign website as confusing, less interactive and not as visually appealing.¹⁴⁷ Chen also looked at how individual candidates used new media in the 2008 election campaign and concluded that there were relatively few candidates with their own websites, only 13 percent.¹⁴⁸ In terms of blogs, a study conducted by Hopkins and Matheson into political blogging during the 2005 New Zealand general election provides some insight.¹⁴⁹ Hopkins and Matheson looked at a variety of different blogs from different sources (not just candidate blogs) and found that the quality of the blogs, “if judged in terms of the thoughtfulness of posts and the linking by bloggers to a range of perspectives”,¹⁵⁰ was not high. In terms of how candidates are using social networking sites there is again only a limited amount of research despite MPs use of SNS gaining the interest of mainstream media.¹⁵¹ Chen briefly looks at the use of SNS by candidates in the 2008 election campaign but limits this to a discussion of how John Key and Helen Clark used the sites and the media attention this received.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Chen, “Online Media,” in *Informing Voters? Politics, Media and the New Zealand Election 2008*, ed. Chris Rudd, Janine Hayward and Geoffrey Craig (Auckland: Pearson Educational, 2009), 126.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 126-130.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 126-130.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 132.

¹⁴⁹ Kane Hopkins and Donald Matheson, “Blogging the New Zealand Election: The Impact of New Media Practices on the Old Game,” *Political Science* 57, no. 2 (2005): 93-105.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 104.

¹⁵¹ Hamish McNeilly, “Key ahead in Facebook race for voters,” *The New Zealand Herald*, May 24, 2008. Accessed from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/politics/news/article.cfm?c_id=280&objectid=10512216 on 17,05,10, Anna Rushworth, “John Key takes campaign to Facebook,” *The New Zealand Herald Blog*, February 24, 2008. Accessed from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/blogging/news/article.cfm?c_id=1501095&objectid=10494195 on 17,05,10, and David Fisher, “Power Brokers,” *The Listener*, October 11 2008. Accessed from: http://www.listener.co.nz/issue/3570/features/12018/power_brokers.html on 17/05/10.

Conclusion

The research covered in this chapter has shown that traditional media is failing in the roles assigned to it, due to factors such as the concentration of media ownership and the often biased nature of media reportage. More importantly for this study, the traditional media is failing to promote two-way communication between politicians and constituents. While talk-back radio, letters to the editor and television talk shows are intended to give the public a voice in the presence of the mass media, they are often slanted towards sensationalism or moulded to fit the ideals of the media vehicle involved. Hence the Internet has been hailed by some as the perfect vehicle for true two-way communication between the governed and those who govern. However, research into the interactive nature of political party websites, candidate websites and blogs has had mixed results. The majority of the research has found that while there is potential for greater interactivity through these channels it is not being utilised fully by the political parties/politicians. Unfortunately the research seems to suggest that these Internet tools are not leading to a revitalisation of democracy through greater interactivity but are, instead, maintaining a type of status quo.

One area that has not been researched in much depth, however, is social networking sites. International literature on SNS suggests that it could be taking the same route as party websites, candidates' websites and blogs but research into the New Zealand case especially has been limited. Shaw emphasises the fact that more research needs to be conducted into how politicians and other political actors are using the Internet and the reasons why they are doing so in New Zealand and how new media technology is being used *between elections*.¹⁵² This study sets out to address this gap in the literature by looking specifically at how and why New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites in a non-election year and to discover whether or not this specific medium leads to greater interactivity between MPs and the public.

¹⁵² Shaw, "Politics and the Internet."

Methodology

This chapter details the methodology used in order to address the research questions posed at the end of the Introduction to this research. First an overview of the general research framework is outlined with an explanation of why this framework was chosen. This is followed by a discussion of the specific research methods used in this study with full details of how the interviews with MPs, the content analysis of Facebook, the use of the website *coffee.geek.nz*, the online surveys and the interviews of young people were conducted. This is then followed by an explanation of how the data from each of these sources was analysed and the limitations of each of these methods. The overall difficulties encountered while conducting the research are also outlined and discussed. Finally, the ways in which validity and reliability can be applied to qualitative research, with particular reference to this study, is discussed at the end of the chapter.

Research Design

This study is interested in the *perceptions* and views of MPs and young people. Because of this the most appropriate research strategy for this study was constructivist, involving a qualitative research methodology of semi-structured interviews of MPs and young people. The author attempts to address the research questions through the use of a qualitative research framework which treats the topic as a case study of the use of social networking sites in New Zealand (for a copy of the ethical approval obtained for this research see Appendix One). The study was approached as a case study in the New Zealand context because it allows the author to conduct an in-depth examination of this particular country which has often been overlooked in other literature. While some of the research methods used in the study are generally associated with quantitative research (content analysis and surveys) they have been used in this study in a qualitative way. This has come about through the use of the open-ended question in the online survey and the categorisation of information and communication functions in the content analysis. There is also a mixture of primary and secondary data used in this study. The information obtained from *coffee.geek.nz* supplements the research conducted by the author and has been interpreted in order to fit with the general research objectives. The mixing of different methods in this study is seen as an advantage because it allows the author to conduct an

in-depth examination of the general topic by using quantitative data to reinforce the qualitative analysis.

Data Collection

Interviews with MPs

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 31st May 2010 and 12th July 2010 with five New Zealand MPs to determine some of the reasons why MPs are using social networking sites and to assess the usefulness of these sites for MPs. The MPs interviewed were Pete Hodgson (Labour MP for Dunedin North since 1990), Michael Woodhouse (National list MP since 2008), Metiria Turei (Green list MP since 2002), Eric Roy (National MP for Invercargill since 2005), and Clare Curran (Labour MP for Dunedin South since 2008). The questions used in these interviews were open ended and general in nature so the line of questioning was not fixed beforehand (see Appendix Two for the Interview Schedule). The interviews were conducted at the Dunedin electorate offices of Pete Hodgson and Clare Curran, the Invercargill electorate office of Eric Roy and at the Dunedin offices of Metiria Turei and Michael Woodhouse. Each interview lasted roughly 20 minutes and all participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix Three).

The five MPs interviewed represent different political parties, different age groups, lengths of time in office, parliamentary responsibilities, electoral responsibilities and even different uses of social networking sites. Clare Curran, Michael Woodhouse and Metiria Turei all had established Facebook profiles at the time of the interview. Eric Roy did not have a Facebook profile when the interview was set up but had created one by the time the interview was conducted. Pete Hodgson did not have a Facebook profile at all and the interview took place before his announcement that he would not be standing in the next general election.

Interviews with Young People

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on the 9th October with two young voters (age 24 and 25) to determine how they viewed MPs' use of social networking sites. The interviewees wished to remain anonymous. The questions used in these interviews were open-ended and general in nature so the line of questioning was not fixed beforehand (see Appendix Four for the Interview Schedule). The interviews were conducted via phone with

each of the interviewees. Each interview lasted roughly 15 minutes and both participants were asked to sign a consent form that maintained their anonymity (see Appendix Five for a copy of the consent form).

Both interviewees were active on social networking sites but neither had any particular interest in New Zealand politics. The interviews were not intended to be representative of young voters in New Zealand. The interviews provided information which supplemented the information gained from both the interviews with MPs and the online surveys and also provided information that served to highlight some of the issues and concerns that surround MPs' use of social networking sites.

Facebook Profiles

A content analysis was carried out on the Facebook profiles of all New Zealand MPs who were found to have a profile on the site. This was used to assess how New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites (see Appendix Six for a copy of the content analysis framework). Data was collected from the Facebook profiles of seventy-nine MPs between the 19th July and the 21st July and included all individuals who were MPs at that time (several have left parliament since then).

Data from coffee.geek.nz

Information on the interactivity of MPs using the social networking site Twitter was accessed from the website coffee.geek.nz on the 29th August. This site analyses the interactivity of New Zealand MPs on Twitter and provides information on the amount of tweets, replies and broadcasts they make. The reliability of this information cannot be verified by the author as it was research undertaken by someone else. However information on how interactivity was measured is detailed on the site (see www.coffee.geek.nz for details of the methodology used) and given such information, it is the author's opinion that the information provided was reliable.

General Demographic Information.

To supplement the content analysis and the information obtained from coffee.geek.nz, research was conducted into the demographic make-up of those MPs using Facebook and Twitter throughout September 2010. This information was found through a variety of

sources online which were: political party websites, individual politicians' websites, Facebook profiles, Twitter profiles, the New Zealand Parliament website and media articles published online which were found via Internet searches using google.

Online Survey

An online survey was conducted between 18th May and 30th July to find out what the general public think MPs are using social networking sites for (see Appendix Seven for a copy of the survey questions). The survey was hosted through the site surveymonkey.com and was advertised through the social networking site Facebook and word-of-mouth. The survey was not intended to provide a representative sample of all those using these sites but rather as a means of obtaining some indication of individual opinions about why MPs are using social networking sites. Seventy-two individuals responded to the survey and sixty-four of these respondents answered all the questions. The survey began with an information sheet detailing how the responses would be used and why. All respondents were made aware of the fact that they could leave the survey at any time and that their responses would be completely anonymous (see Appendix Eight for a copy of the information sheet). The survey itself began with some demographic questions such as age and gender, followed by questions querying the respondents' use of social networking sites and whether or not they used these sites for communication about politics. The survey ended with an open-ended question asking respondents "Why do you think that New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites?" The answers to this question provided the most relevant information for this study.

Analysis of Data

Reading of Transcripts for Themes

Each of the interviews with MPs and young people was recorded and a transcript typed up. The MP's transcripts were then analysed for relevant themes. Some of these themes were evident across all of the interviews, some in only one or two interviews. The themes that emerged from the reading and rereading of the transcripts were: proactive versus passive use of SNS; the use of social media for keeping face-to-face contact with members of the public versus real face-to-face contact as being more preferable; the use of SNS for maintaining presence/name recognition; the use of SNS for dispensing information versus

use of these sites for their social aspects; and how SNS is perceived as a stepping stone to the next big interactive medium.

As with the interviews of MPs, the transcripts of the interviews with young people were also analysed for relevant themes. Here the themes that emerged were: the effectiveness of SNS loses ground when an MP is not posting for themselves; that despite SNS being about networking and communication it is not likely that MPs would be able to use the sites effectively in that way; that MPs who use these sites need to be careful about the type of information they put up; and that there is a sense of general disconnect between the young people in the interviews and the MPs themselves, despite MPs having profiles on social networking sites.

What was learned from the analysis of the interviews with MPs and young people, was then used to address the questions set out at the beginning of this study.

Content Analysis

The content analysis framework employed to gather data from MP's Facebook profiles mirrors the one used by Pippa Norris in her 2003 study of European political party websites.¹⁵³ By changing the framework to fit MP's Facebook profiles this study attempts to highlight how and which information and communication functions are apparent on these profiles. The changes made to Norris' content analysis framework were minor. For example, changing the wording from *can email party officials* to *can send private email to MP*. Other changes included completely removing some aspects of the original framework, for example, *constituency information or election results by districts* was removed as it was not expected to be found on the profiles of New Zealand MPs. There were also some functions that were not included in the original framework which were added into the framework for MP profiles on Facebook, including *RSS feeds* and *become friend of MP*.

Despite adapting Norris' framework, this study did not attempt to compare its results with Norris' 2003 study due to this study being a case study rather than a comparative study.

The content analysis looked for information and communication functions on the Facebook profiles of MPs which were then coded as present (1) or absent (0). The

¹⁵³ Pippa Norris, "Preaching to the Converted?: Pluralism, Participation and Party Websites," *Party Politics* 9, no. 1 (2003): 21-45.

information functions included such things as *individual biographies* and *schedules of events* which were used to measure the “information transparency”¹⁵⁴ of the profiles. The information transparency of these profiles can be best explained as how effective the profile is at providing information for the visitor. This includes not only that information which the MP wishes to provide but also that information which the visitor may wish to know. The communicative functions included functions such as the ability to *send a private email* and *volunteer services* which were used to evaluate the “communication interactivity”¹⁵⁵ of the websites. Communication interactivity can be best explained as how effective the profiles are for mobilisation purposes and at encouraging two-way communication. Measuring the information transparency and communication interactivity of these profiles highlights how MPs are using these sites to connect with the public.

It is important to note that different MPs use different privacy settings, meaning that some MP’s profiles did not show information that is normally only available to those who become friends or fans of the page. This content analysis was conducted from the point of view of a visitor to these profiles rather than as a friend or fan of the MP. This was intentional as the study was designed to find out how active MPs are with these sites rather than how proactive any visitor to the site would have to be. The profiles analysed are restricted to those that could be found in simple Internet searches. Again this was intentional as it is assumed that those profiles that could not be found easily were unlikely to be found by the general public. Finally, the information collected from the content analysis allows only a snapshot of the use of Facebook by New Zealand MPs; any fluctuations that occur in the use of these sites by MPs were not covered by this study.

Data Gathering from coffee.geek.nz

The information from this site was used to supplement some of the findings from the content analysis and to give a brief overview of how New Zealand MPs are using Twitter. As with the content analysis, the information provided by coffee.geek.nz is only a snapshot of MP’s levels of interactivity on Twitter. Levels of interactivity may vary over time but as the data was collected to supplement the results of the content analysis of Facebook, this snapshot of the online presence of MPs was sufficient for the purposes of this study.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 29.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Data Gathering from Various Internet Sources

The data gathered on the demographic make-up of MPs was used to compare and contrast those New Zealand MPs using Facebook and those using Twitter. It is likely that there are many factors which influence if an MP is likely to have a Facebook or a Twitter profile and although this study does not attempt to determine which factors are more influential, this information was included to provide context.

Analysis of Survey Answers for Themes

The answers to the open-ended question included in the online survey were categorised according to themes evident in the responses. The overarching theme was how MPs were using social networking sites. Three purposes were identified: to obtain votes; to get in touch with younger voters; and for communication and advertising purposes. What was learned from this analysis was then used to formulate the semi-structured interviews with two young users of social networking sites. The intention was to find out how young people viewed MPs' use of social networking sites and compare this with MPs' views.

Conducting the survey online meant that only those that were already active on the Internet had an opportunity to reply. Advertising the survey only through Facebook and word-of-mouth meant that only a limited number of people who do not use Facebook responded to the survey. However as Facebook has been the main social networking site under scrutiny in this study this was not seen to be a major problem.

Difficulties

There were several difficulties that were encountered while conducting this research. Firstly, the dates that were set for the interviews with MPs were frequently changed by some of the MPs. This meant that there were large gaps between most of the interviews with MPs, making it difficult to have all the interviews finished within a set timeframe. Secondly, the interviews with young voters were difficult to conduct. The interviewees were reticent about responding to many of the questions as they did not seem to have previously thought about the issues raised in the interviews. They also took longer to answer many of the questions and had to have some terms explained to them. Thirdly, for both the interviews with MPs and the interviews with young people, the transcripts were very time consuming to type up even though the interviews themselves did not take very

long. This meant that more time was spent transcribing the interviews than what had been thought necessary to begin with. As previously mentioned, difficulties were also encountered with the privacy settings on Facebook. The different types of privacy settings meant that some MPs displayed more information on their pages than others. This was not a major difficulty however, as the pages were viewed as a visitor would see them and so could still be analysed in the content analysis. Lastly, difficulties were encountered when attempting to advertise the online survey. The survey was advertised through the author's own social networking pages and so naturally attracted those individuals who already use the networks. It was also advertised through the author's own email list to gain responses from some individuals who do not use these sites. This was not considered to be a very important issue because the questions were all geared towards those that already use social networking sites and because the most important answers came from the open ended question at the end of the survey rather than from the questions regarding the Internet habits of the respondents.

Validity and Reliability

LeCompte and Goetz outline the ways in which validity and reliability can be applied to qualitative research.¹⁵⁶ These take the form of external validity and internal validity, and external reliability and internal reliability. This study meets the criteria for all of these categories.

External validity is outlined by LeCompte and Goetz as the degree to which findings from any given study can be generalised.¹⁵⁷ Flyvberg corrects a general misconception that generalisations cannot be made from a case study by asserting that examples (cases) are powerful tools in generalisations and that "the force of example" is often underestimated.¹⁵⁸ In this way this specific New Zealand oriented case study allows for generalisations to be made about the nature of SNS use by MPs and some of the logical perceptions of this use by young people through an in-depth examination of the data and information obtained from the research. The generalisations that are made from this study can be found in the Discussion Chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Margaret LeCompte and Judith Goetz, "Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research," *Review of Educational Research* 52, no. 1 (1982): 31-60.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 50.

¹⁵⁸ Bent Flyvberg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research," in *Qualitative Research Practice*, ed. Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber Gubrium and David Silverman (London: Sage, 2004), 423-424.

LeCompte and Goetz outline how internal validity can be achieved through a good match being made between researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they develop.¹⁵⁹ This particular case study achieves internal validity through the logic of the ideas and conclusions that are made from the interviews and survey responses. In other words, the conclusions made in the Discussion Chapter *make sense*. A logical process was followed whereby themes were identified from the interviews and surveys which were then used to answer the research questions, rather than only extracting that information that automatically matched the original questions. This process has meant that the conclusions made are logical and have been informed by the information provided by the respondents and interviewees with as little interpretation on the part of the author as possible.

This study also meets LeCompte's and Goetz's criteria for external reliability, which is concerned with the degree to which a study can be replicated.¹⁶⁰ The methodology which has been put forward in this chapter clearly outlines how the research for this study was undertaken and how each of the data sets were analysed. The transcripts from the interviews with MPs and young people and the survey responses provided for the open-ended question are all available for others to reanalyse if so desired. Because of this it is possible for this study to be replicated either as this one has been conducted, for New Zealand MPs and citizens, or as a comparative work between this study and studies of other countries.

LeCompte and Goetz outline several ways in which internal reliability can be achieved, one of which is that those studies rich in first hand data and multitudes of examples are generally considered most credible.¹⁶¹ This study meets the criteria for internal reliability through its use of 'low-inference descriptors'.¹⁶² As mentioned in reference to the internal validity of this study, the conclusions made from this study have been informed by the respondents and interviewees with as little interpretation on the part of the author as possible. Wherever possible first hand quotes have been used to answer the research questions directly. By allowing the interviewees and survey respondents to speak for themselves this study has established its internal reliability.

¹⁵⁹ LeCompte and Goetz, "Problems of Reliability and Validity," 44.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 37.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 41.

¹⁶² Ibid.

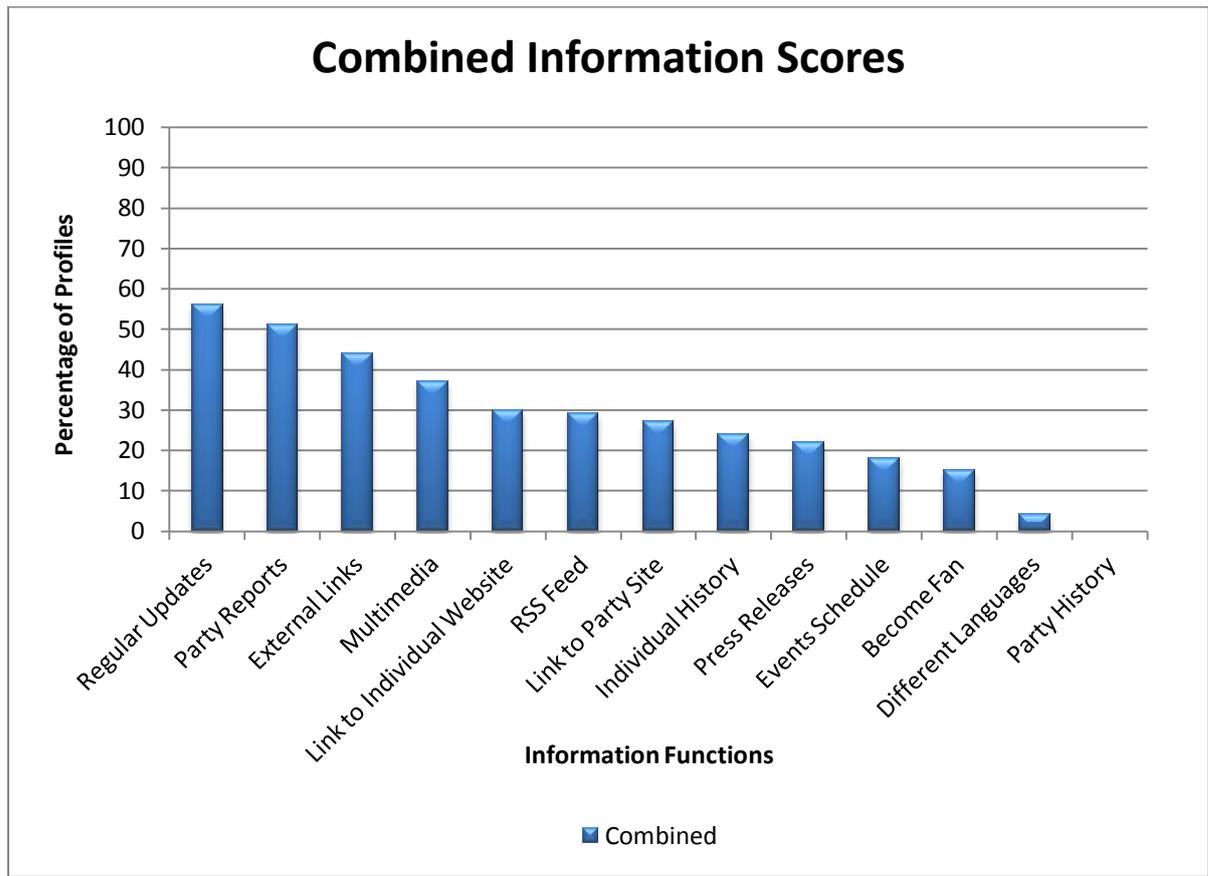
Results

MP's Facebook and Twitter Profiles

Social networking sites can be used in a variety of ways, from providing background information on any given individual to fostering new communication channels. In order to determine to what extent New Zealand MPs are making use of these networking sites, the content analysis measured both the information functions provided on the individual profile pages and the communication functions. This section begins with an analysis of which information and communication functions were most popular and least popular on the MP's Facebook pages. The different information and communication scores obtained by the different political parties are considered next and are compared with the interactivity levels of these same parties on Twitter. This provides some insights into how social networking sites are approached by different political parties. Lastly, an examination of the demographic make-up of the MPs using Facebook is considered in this section as is the demographic make-up of those MPs using Twitter in order to compare any differences across different networking sites. These factors provide interesting insights into why some MPs are using these sites.

The Internet allows for information to be distributed quickly and easily and for a greater volume of information to pass from person to person. It is not uncommon now for a politician to have a profile page on a social networking site and these profiles can serve important functions that may be lacking in candidate and party websites, such as more regular updates on the politician's activities and more personalised information. The information transparency of these profiles is based on a range of different functions and can be best explained as how effective the profile is at providing information for the visitor. All of the information functions included in the content analysis would provide a better knowledge of the individual MP for any visitor to the profile. Graph 1.1 shows the percentage of MP's profiles that included each of the information functions.

Graph 1.1

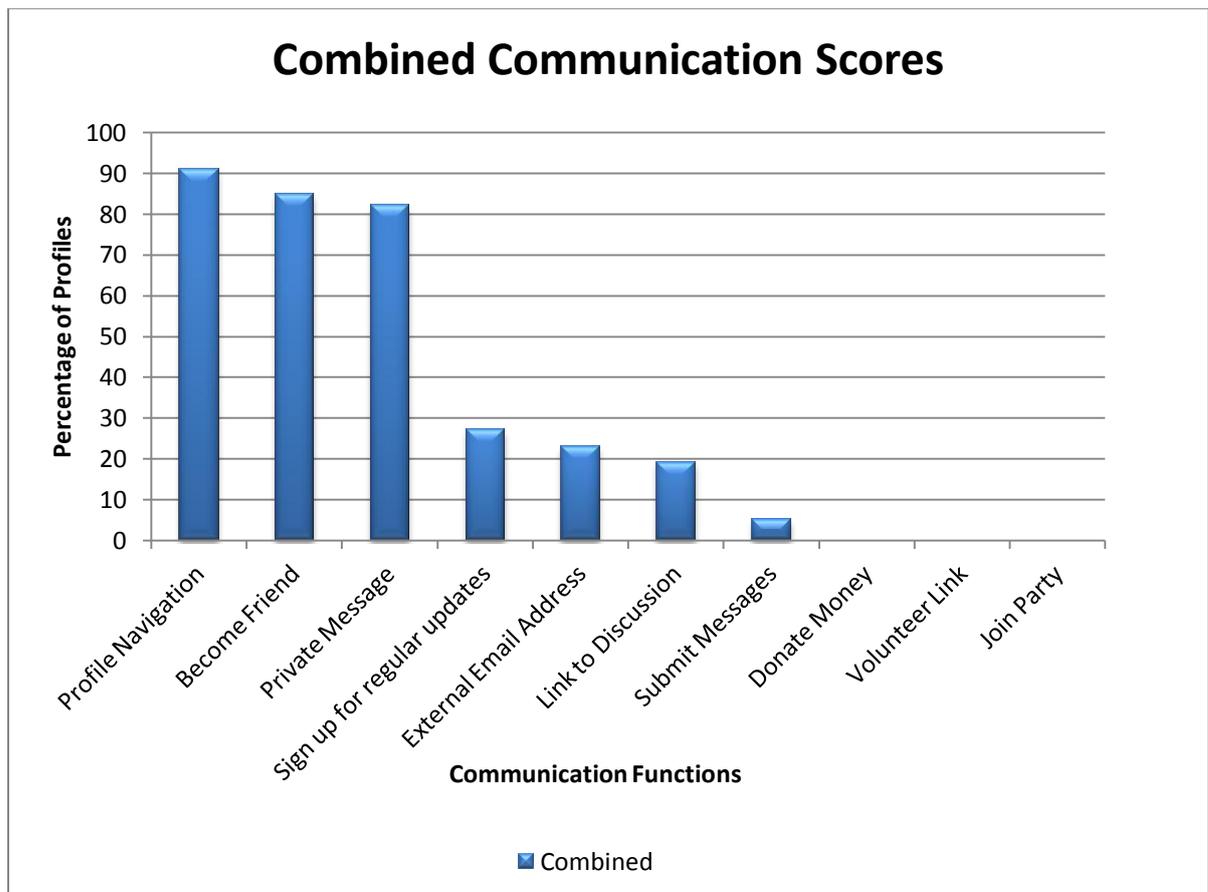


The type of information that was most commonly found on the Facebook profiles was *regular updates* (56 percent of the MP's profiles were updated regularly), *party reports* (51 percent of the profiles had this function) and *links to external pages* (44 percent). The least common information functions on the profiles were *party histories* (none of the profiles had this function), *different language* options (four percent), *become fan* buttons (15 percent) and *events schedules* (18 percent). The fact that only 15 percent of the profiles studied had *become fan* buttons is not of real concern however, because it means that the rest of the profiles had the option to become a friend of the MP. What these results show is that a number of MPs using Facebook included clear cut information on the party (reports) or had direct links to their party website. The low amount of profiles with *party histories* could be an indication that MPs would rather redirect visitors away from their profiles for more in-depth information on the party while still reporting on party activities they are associated with through these profiles.

The Internet also has the potential to increase and clarify communication between politicians and the public and again, social networking sites have the potential to engage

the public more fully than candidate or party websites if they are utilised fully. The communication interactivity of these profiles can best be explained as how effective the profile is at encouraging interaction between the visitor and the MP and also how effective the profile is at mobilising support. Hence a variety of different communication functions were looked for on the MP's profiles. Graph 1.2 shows the percentage of MP's profiles that provide each of the communication functions.

Graph 1.2

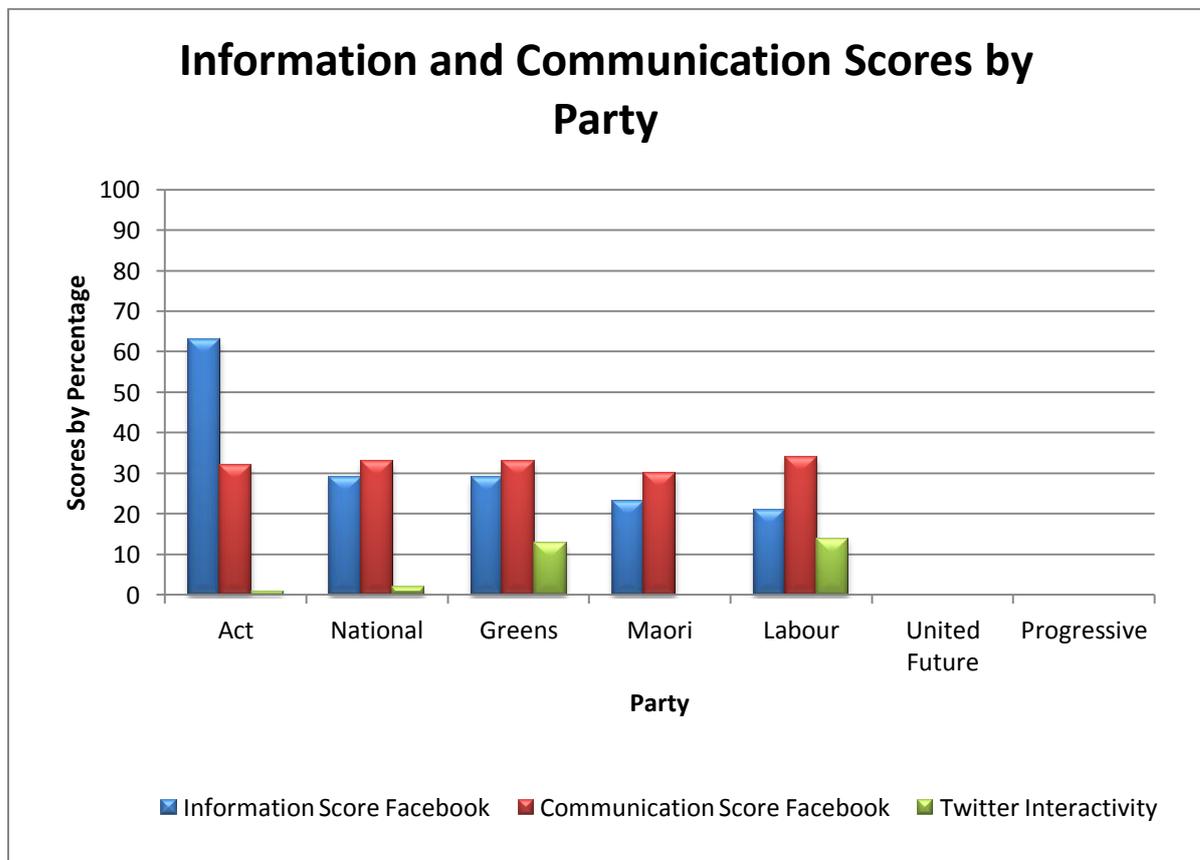


The type of communication functions that were most commonly found on the MP's profiles were *profile navigation* tools (91 percent), *become friend* buttons (85 percent) and the ability to send a *private message* (82 percent). The least common communication functions included *volunteer* links, *join party* links and *donate money* links (none of the profiles had any of these options), and also the ability to submit a message on the profile without first having to become a friend or fan of the MP (five percent). These results suggest that while MPs are using these profiles to network and reach more individuals, they are not using them to directly encourage visitors to engage in party activities. With 85 percent of the MPs using *become friend* buttons rather than *become fan* buttons it would

seem that MPs are truly trying to connect with visitors to the sites rather than just providing information. However, the inability to leave a message without first befriending or becoming a fan of an MP seems to suggest that there is no real dedication to establishing *transparent* communication channels. The total lack of any *join party*, *volunteer services* and *donate money* links also suggests that these profiles are not centrally managed by the party and are quite likely to have been set up and run by the individual MPs. One political party where this is clearly not the case is the Act Party which will be discussed in more detail further on.

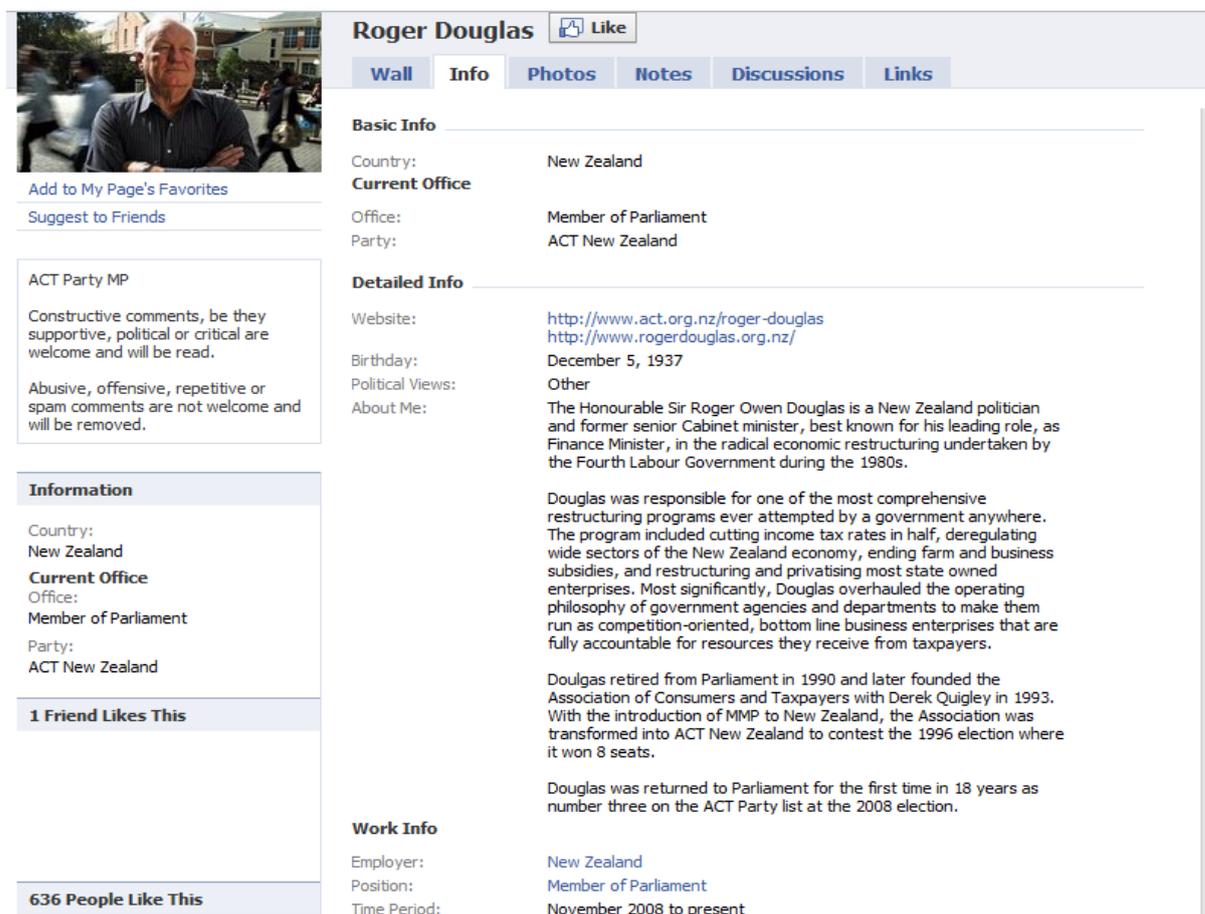
The average information and communication scores from Facebook of each political party and the interactivity levels of these parties on Twitter are represented in Graph 1.3. These scores show which, if any, of New Zealand's political parties are using social networking sites most effectively and also highlight the uniform nature of some of the MP's profiles.

Graph 1.3



Both United Future and the Progressive Party had information and communication scores of zero because they each have only one representative in parliament and neither Jim Anderton or Peter Dunne have a Facebook profile. The lowest information scores of the remaining parties were those of the Labour Party (average information score of 21 percent) and the Maori Party (23 percent). The highest information score was achieved by the Act Party (63 percent) with both the National Party and the Green Party coming second (both 29 percent). While the Act Party managed to gain a rather high information score this may be explained by the fact that their MPs' profiles are centrally managed by the party. The Act MPs all had *become fan* buttons rather than *add as friend* buttons meaning that their profiles were more open than those of many other MPs. They also all provided very similar types of information. Figure 1.1 highlights the uniform nature of the Act Party profiles. The information scores of the other parties are all quite close to one another suggesting that there is not much difference in the importance placed on information provision across the different parties.

Figure 1.1: Uniformity Across Act Party Facebook Profiles



The screenshot shows the Facebook profile of Roger Douglas, an ACT Party MP. The profile is highly uniform in its information provision, with a clear focus on political and professional details. The layout includes a profile picture, a cover photo, and a navigation menu with tabs for Wall, Info, Photos, Notes, Discussions, and Links. The 'Info' tab is selected, displaying the following information:

- Basic Info:** Country: New Zealand; Current Office: Member of Parliament; Party: ACT New Zealand.
- Detailed Info:** Website: <http://www.act.org.nz/roger-douglas> and <http://www.rogerdouglas.org.nz/>; Birthday: December 5, 1937; Political Views: Other; About Me: The Honourable Sir Roger Owen Douglas is a New Zealand politician and former senior Cabinet minister, best known for his leading role, as Finance Minister, in the radical economic restructuring undertaken by the Fourth Labour Government during the 1980s.
- Work Info:** Employer: New Zealand; Position: Member of Parliament; Time Period: November 2008 to present.

Additional features include a 'Like' button, 'Add to My Page's Favorites', 'Suggest to Friends', and a section for '1 Friend Likes This'. The profile also contains a bio section with guidelines for comments: 'Constructive comments, be they supportive, political or critical are welcome and will be read. Abusive, offensive, repetitive or spam comments are not welcome and will be removed.'



John Boscawen Like

[Wall](#) [Info](#) [Photos](#) [Discussions](#) [Notes](#) [Links](#)

Basic Info

Country: New Zealand
Current Office
 Office: Member of Parliament
 Party: ACT New Zealand

Detailed Info

Website: <http://www.act.org.nz/john-boscawen>
 Birthday: December 24, 1956
 Hometown: Auckland
 About Me: Self-employed in finance and property investment since 1990, John has been an ACT member since 1995. During that time he has been an ACT candidate for Epsom, an ACT Boardmember, and ACT Treasurer. He also filled the role of ACT Campaign Manager for Epsom in the last General Election.

John Boscawen is also:

- Member of the New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants
- Member of the New Zealand Institute of Directors
- Associate member of the New Zealand Business Roundtable.

His community involvement includes:

- Trustee of the Auckland Philharmonia Foundation
- Trustee Otahuhu College Foundation
- Rotary Club of Downtown Auckland
- Ronald McDonald House Fundraising Project

John Boscawen is also the founder of the Freedom of Speech Trust, established to continue the campaign against the Electoral Finance Act.

"For far too long we have tolerated falling living standards and lost opportunities. I am not prepared to sit back any longer. I am standing for ACT because I believe ACT's policies – based on a philosophy of personal responsibility and equal opportunity – are by far the best way of achieving the highest standards of education, health, security and prosperity for us all," he said.

Work Info

Employer: New Zealand
 Position: Member of Parliament

Information

Country: New Zealand
Current Office
 Office: Member of Parliament
 Party: ACT New Zealand

210 People Like This


Nicola Julie Galu


Tolumoye Youdiowei


John Brinsley-Pirie


Suzanne


Phillip


Ali



Rodney Hide Like

[Wall](#) [Info](#) [Photos](#) [Notes](#) [Discussions](#) [Events](#) [»](#)

Basic Info

Country: New Zealand
Current Office
 Office: Member of Parliament
 District: Epsom
 Party: ACT New Zealand

Detailed Info

Website: <http://www.act.org.nz/rodney-hide>
 Birthday: December 16, 1956
 About Me: Rodney Hide is New Zealand's leading proponent of accountability and transparency in government. He is also Parliament's most highly qualified environmentalist.

He entered Parliament in 1996 as an ACT list MP and became the Leader of ACT in 2004. In 2005 he won the Electorate Seat of Epsom.

Rodney forged a reputation in parliament by running successful campaigns against government waste, red tape, excessive taxation, and corporate welfare. He has helped many of his constituents in their struggles against government bureaucracy.

Rodney was founding chairman of ACT's predecessor, the Association of Consumers and Taxpayers, and founding president of ACT in 1994. Before becoming an MP, he worked as an economist, university lecturer, and on North Sea oil rigs.

Rodney has Masters Degrees in Economics (from Montana State University) and Resource Management (from Canterbury/Lincoln Universities).

Work Info

Employer: New Zealand
 Position: Member of Parliament
 Time Period: October 1996 to present
 Location: Wellington, New Zealand
 Description: ACT Leader
 MP for Epsom
 Minister of Local Government
 Minister for Regulatory Reform
 Associate Minister of Commerce

Facebook Page: <http://www.facebook.com/honrodneymhide>

Information

Country: New Zealand
Current Office
 Office: Member of Parliament
 District: Epsom
 Party: ACT New Zealand

1 Friend Likes This

ACT Party Leader

Constructive comments, be they supportive, political or critical are welcome and will be read.

Abusive, offensive, repetitive or spam comments are not welcome and will be removed.

The lowest communication score (excepting United Future and the Progressive Party) was achieved by the Maori Party (30 percent) and the highest by the Labour Party (34 percent). The difference between these scores is very small and while all the communication scores could be considered rather low this could be because of the intense privacy settings on Facebook. It is assumed that at least some of the information and communication functions that were looked for on these profiles were not found because they are only available to *friends* of the MP. However, the lack of availability of these functions to visitors to the profile should be considered as a general failure on the part of many MPs to provide useful information and aid in the establishment of communication channels. Figure 1.2 shows the difference between those Facebook profiles that are open to the public and those that are not.

The interactivity levels of each of the political parties on Twitter were considerably lower than the information and communication scores that each obtained on Facebook. These interactivity levels were obtained from coffee.geek.nz and reflect how often an MP actually interacts with a member of the public on their Twitter page.¹⁶³ It is easier to track interaction on Twitter than on Facebook because the privacy settings are very different. More information is available to a visitor to a Twitter profile than a visitor to a Facebook profile as outlined in Figure 1.3. The Twitter profiles have accordingly been judged by more rigorous standards than the Facebook profiles. This is not a problem for this study, however, as the results show some similarities. United Future and the Progressive Party once again failed to have any presence on the networking site but this time they were joined by the Maori Party. This could reflect a focus within the Maori Party to concentrate on one specific networking site. The Labour Party has the highest interactive score on Twitter which, when combined with their communication score on Facebook, would suggest that interaction is a solid core of their networking strategy. The Act Party and the National Party had negligible interactivity scores suggesting that they care to focus more on information provision. For Act especially this would be in keeping with their high information score and low communication score on Facebook. For the National Party this could be an indication that those MPs whose party is in government do not have the time to respond to as many questions and comments as those MPs in opposition parties. It is also interesting to note that 57 percent of those MPs using Twitter had an interactivity score of zero suggesting that while social networking sites are inherently interactive, New Zealand MPs have a knack for making them less so.

¹⁶³ For a detailed explanation of the methodology used to gauge interactivity levels see www.coffee.geek.nz.

Figure 1.3: Twitter and Facebook Profiles Compared

Christopher Finlayson Like

Wall Info Photos Discussions

Christopher Finlayson + Others Just Christopher Finlayson Just Others

Christopher Finlayson
Hon Christopher Finlayson - Home
www.chrisfinlayson.co.nz
 Chris Finlayson's website

August 24 at 6:20pm · Share

3 people like this.

Attorney-General
 Minister of Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations
 Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage

Information

Affiliation:
National Party

Location:
 Wellington, New Zealand

2 Friends Like This

261 People Like This

Jonathan Franklin
 Bridget Anderson - Huria
 Rose Thomas

chrisfinlayson

Name Chris Finlayson
 Location Wellington
 Web <http://www.chrisf...>
 Bio Attorney-General, Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations, Wellington National Member of Parliament

96 following 411 followers 28 listed

Tweets 133

Favorites

Following

Sorry about the large gap in transmission; I've been in Europe (not since my last post, though!) with @NZSO. We can be very proud of them.
 2:57 PM Nov 16th via web

A great turnout at the PM's Awards for Literary Achievement last night. Many National colleagues there + Steve Chadwick from Labour.
 5:31 PM Oct 18th via web

No Twitter for a while - I am off to the Chatham Islands until Friday with my colleague Hon John Carter.
 1:41 PM Oct 5th via web

I was interviewed by Greg King on TVNZ 7's The Court Report on Tuesday. You can see it this Monday or watch here <http://tinyurl.com/33hsu5b>
 7:02 PM Sep 30th via web

Had a great morning on the bridge of the HMNZS Wellington in the Harbour, and now off to meetings for the rest of the day.
 5:25 PM Sep 27th via web

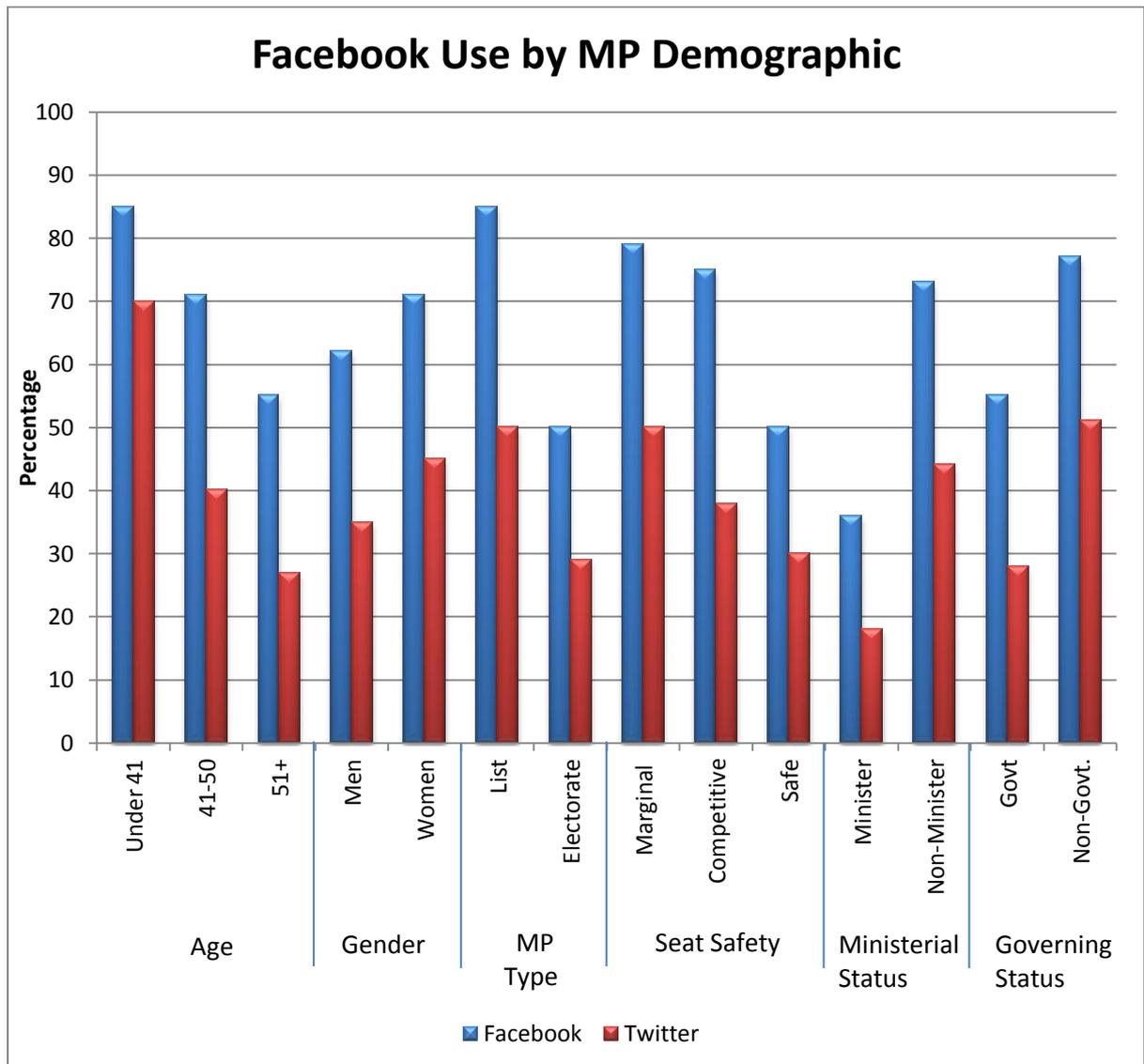
Play It Strange pics from Tuesday up here <http://tinyurl.com/297pbj>
 9:49 PM Sep 22nd via web

@AshGrahamMusic My pleasure. It was a fantastic evening, and I

RSS feed of chrisfinlayson's tweets

It is likely that there are many factors which influence if an MP is likely to have a Facebook profile. Although this study does not attempt to determine which factors are more influential, Graph 1.4 does set out the demographic make-up of those New Zealand MPs using Facebook and those using Twitter.

Graph 1.4



This graph shows which percentage of all MPs within each group have a Facebook or Twitter profile. For example of MPs, under the age of 41, 85 percent have a Facebook profile and 70 percent have a Twitter profile. Many of these results were expected; most especially that seat safety¹⁶⁴ would play a part in how likely an MP is to have a Facebook

¹⁶⁴ For electorate MPs seat safety was calculated at three levels. 1) if the seat was won with a majority of twenty percent or more of the votes at the last election = Safe, 2) if the seat was won with a majority between ten to nineteen percent of the votes at the last election = Competitive; and 3) if the seat was won

profile. This shows that those MPs in safe seats are the least likely to have a Facebook page and those with marginal seats are the most likely. Younger MPs are also more likely to use Facebook than their older colleagues, as are non-ministers and those who are not in government. The most obvious explanation for this is that young MPs who are not in government and are not ministers have more time for such things as social networking sites. The only unexpected result was that 85 percent of list MPs have a Facebook profile as opposed to 50 percent of electorate MPs. This could be because of how useful these sites are for creating public profiles and reaching people within similar networks. This could be an important function for list MPs who do not enjoy the readymade prominence and communication networks that come with being an electorate MP.

The results for Twitter closely mirror those for Facebook although there seems to be a slightly more even spread across all demographics for Twitter. For example, while there was a gap of 35 percent between female and male MPs on Facebook; this gap is reduced to only 15 percent on Twitter. While the spread is more even across Twitter the same conclusions can still be made; that young MPs who are not in government and are not ministers are more likely to be using Twitter. List MPs also seem to be using Twitter more than electorate MPs. It appears that Facebook is a more popular choice for many MPs than Twitter. While 65 percent of all MPs use Facebook, only 38 percent of all MPs use Twitter. This could be due to the different networking style favoured by Twitter where people become *followers* of one another rather than *friends*.

The content analysis and coffee.geek.nz produced some interesting results. Firstly, many Facebook profiles seem to be used to inform visitors about the MP themselves without going into too much detail about their party or policies. Secondly, it seems that the majority of MP's social networking profiles are not centrally managed by their political party and that the over-zealous use of privacy settings by some MPs shows less than a full commitment to *transparent* communication. It can also be concluded that while the Labour Party has the highest communication score on Facebook and the highest interactivity level on Twitter, these are still rather low and could indicate that while

with a less than ten percent majority of the votes at the last election = Marginal. For list MPs safety was calculated at three levels also. 1) if the MP was in the top third of all MPs elected off their parties list at the last general election = Safe, 2) if the MP was in the middle third of all MPs elected off their parties list at the last general election = Competitive; and 3) if the MP was in the bottom third of all MPs elected off their parties list at the last general election = Marginal.

interactivity is slightly more important to the Labour Party than others, it is not important enough to encourage MPs to make proper use of these networking sites. In fact it seems that for many MPs interactivity does not matter at all. Finally, the results unsurprisingly show that those MPs most likely to use Facebook or Twitter are younger than their colleagues, tend to be out of government and are non-ministers. The fact that list MPs are more likely than electorate MPs to have a social networking profile suggests that these sites have some benefit for those MPs who are perhaps not as well known to the public.

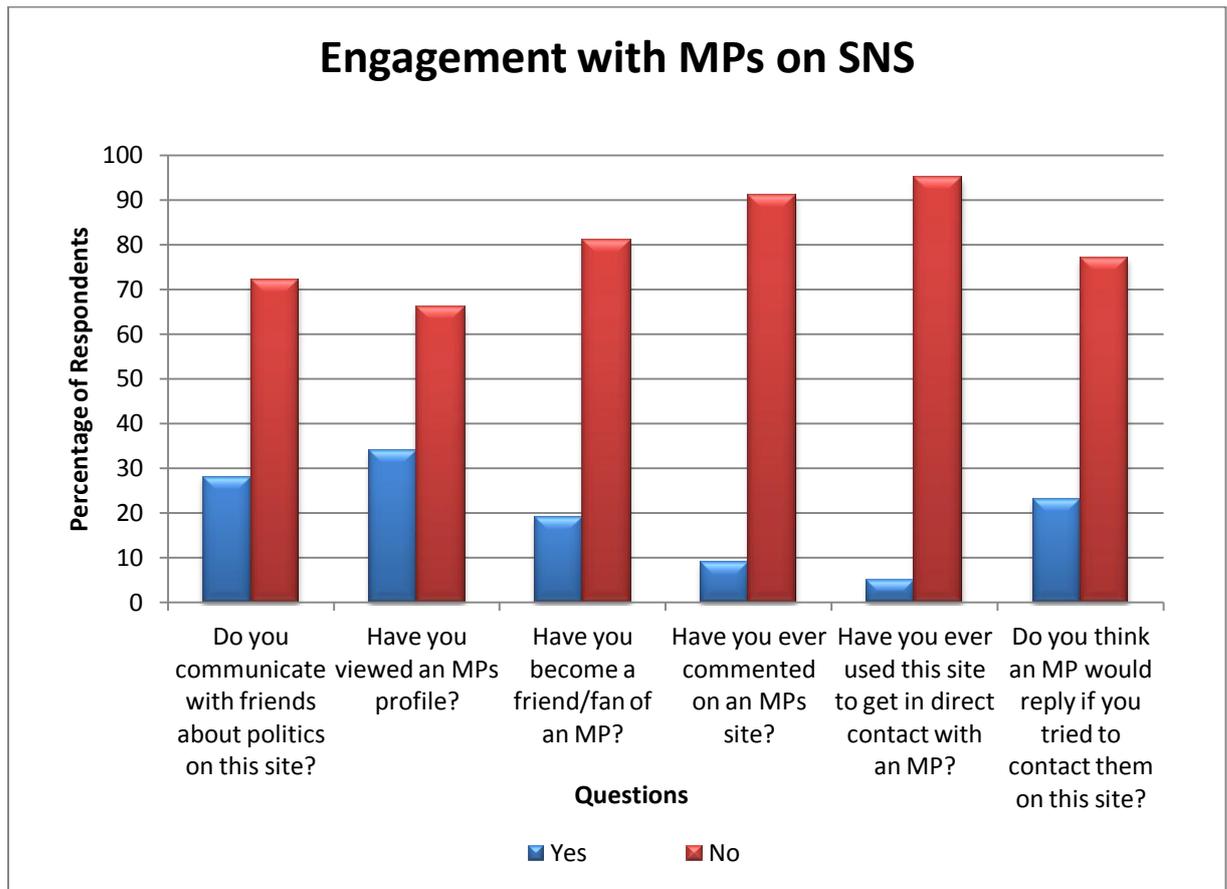
Online Survey of Social Networking Use

The use of social networking sites by New Zealand MPs enables them to become more accessible to the general public. However, the perception of why these sites are being used by MPs is not necessarily going to be the same for MPs and the general public. The online survey consisted of two parts: closed-ended questions on the Internet habits of the respondents and their perceptions of MPs' use of SNS and an open-ended question on their perception of why MPs are using these sites. The results of the closed-ended questions are used to examine levels of engagement with MPs on social networking sites, followed by an examination of the perceived usefulness of these sites for connecting MPs with voters. The answers to the open-ended question included in the survey are used to identify four themes; that MPs are using these sites to appeal to younger voters, as a new communication channel, for advertising purposes and to obtain more votes in general.

The mere presence of MPs on social networking sites is not enough to foster new communication channels. If members of the general public are still failing to connect with MPs then we are simply witnessing 'politics as usual' in a new forum. The survey respondents were asked a series of questions to gauge to what extent they engage with politicians on social networking sites. Graph 1.5¹⁶⁵ shows the percentage of respondents who answered in a particular way to these questions.

¹⁶⁵ The graph refers to NZ MPs only and to social networking sites.

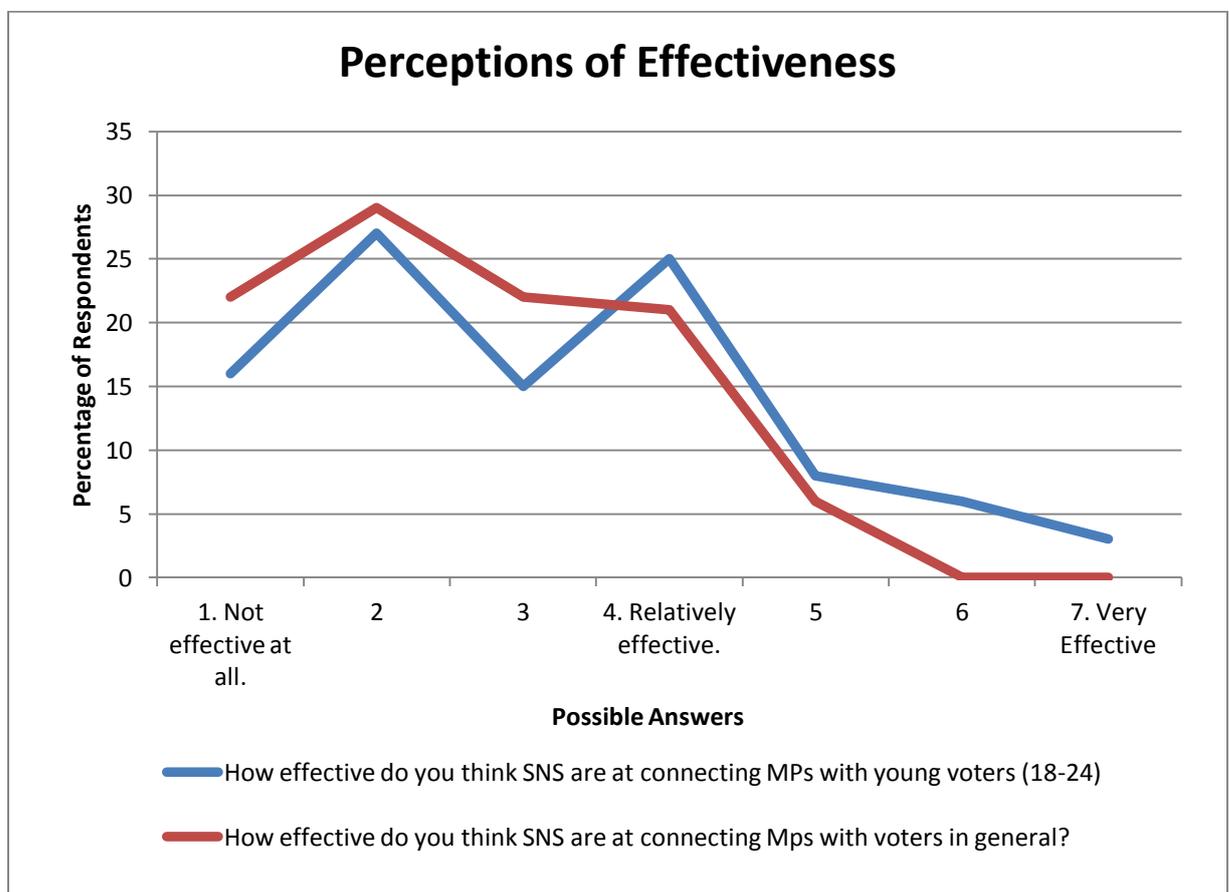
Graph 1.5



The graph shows that engagement with MPs on social networking sites steadily decreases the more effort the member of the public has to expend. Viewing a MP's profile does not require much effort on the visitors' behalf and accordingly has the highest percentage of yes answers (34 percent of all answers were yes). Becoming a friend or fan of an MP requires slightly more effort on the behalf of the member of the public (either finding their page and requesting their friendship or accepting a friend request sent to them by the MP) and the amount of respondents who answered yes to this question dropped to 19 percent. Commenting on an MP's profile takes even more effort (nine percent yes answers) and using the site to directly contact an MP requires more effort again (five percent yes answers). Furthermore only 23 percent of respondents thought an MP would reply if they did try to contact them. Taking into account that only 28 percent of respondents communicate with their friends about politics on social networking sites it would seem that politics simply is not an important aspect of SNS use. This could indicate a general apathy towards politics or, perhaps more worryingly, a certain amount of doubt about MP's motives for using these sites.

The few respondents who had been in contact with a New Zealand MP on a social networking site were asked more questions to try and establish how interactive this type of communication is. The general response suggests that while the three individuals who had contacted MPs on these sites all received responses, the communication ended at that point. Because we have no idea of the nature of these conversations it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this. We can, however, look at some of the perceptions that the general public have about MPs using these sites. Graph 1.6 shows responses to some further questions about perceptions of how effective the networking sites are at connecting MPs and voters.

Graph 1.6

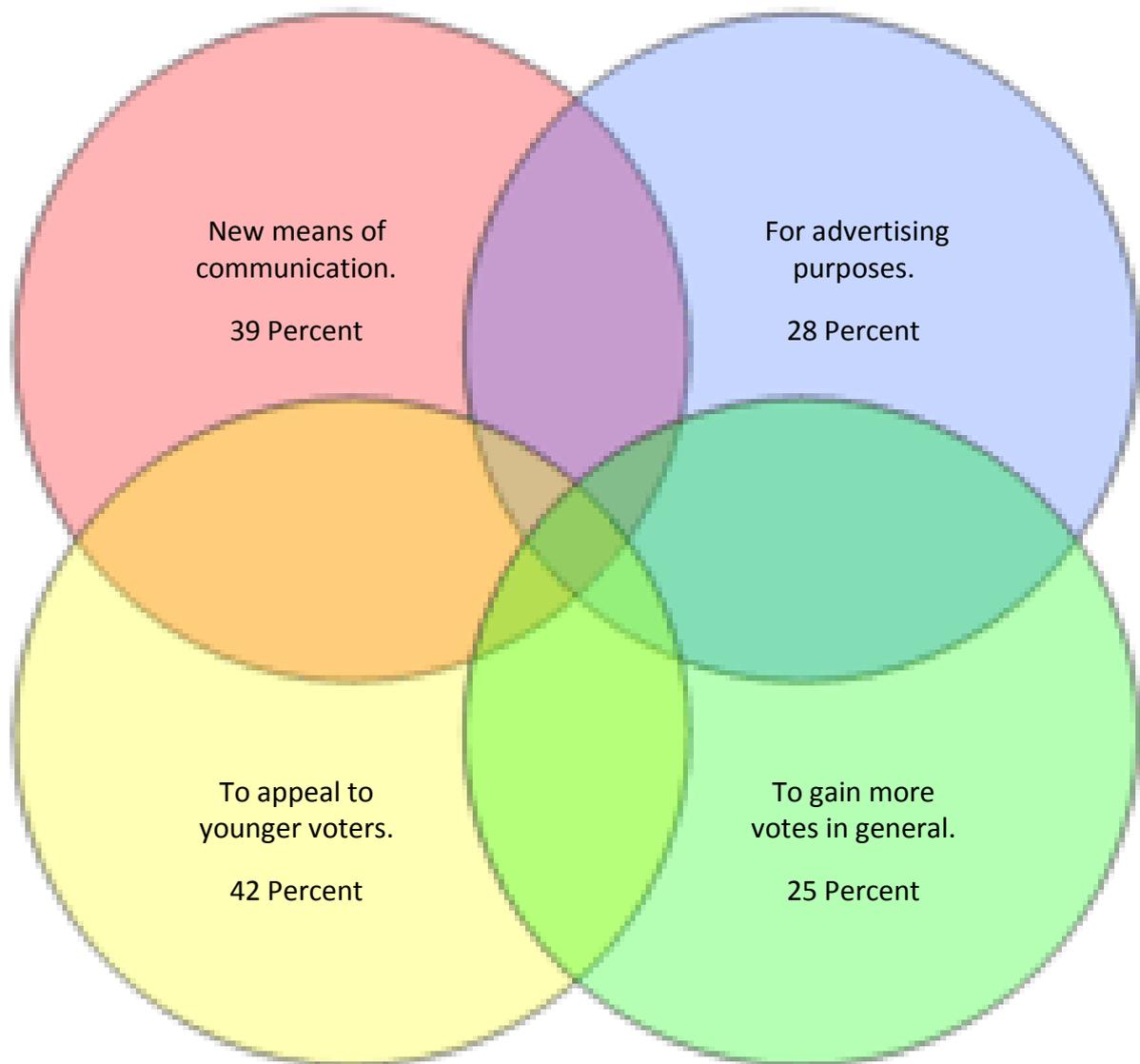


The graph shows that respondents thought that social networking sites are more useful for connecting MPs with younger voters than they are for connecting MPs with the public in general. However, neither set of responses shows a high amount of confidence in SNS connecting either young people or the general public with MPs. Fifty-eight percent of respondent felt that SNS were less than relatively effective at connecting MPs with young voters, while 73 percent felt they were less than relatively effective at connecting MPs

with the general public. Only 17 percent of respondents felt that the sites were more than relatively effective at connecting MPs and young voters (25 percent thought they were just relatively effective) and six percent thought that the sites were more than relatively effective at connecting MPs and the general public (21 percent thought they were relatively effective). These results suggest that the respondents believe the use of SNS by MPs to be more effective for connecting with younger voters than the general public but that they are not particularly good for connecting with either. There were only 72 respondents to the online survey which is clearly not a representative sample of the general population and therefore cannot be used to draw statistical conclusions. However, the findings can be used in conjunction with the qualitative data obtained from the interviews with MPs and young people to better inform our understanding of general perceptions of effectiveness and use of SNS by MPs.

The most interesting and helpful information to come from the online survey were the answers to the open-ended question which finished the survey. Respondents were asked: 'Why do you think that New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites?' From this question four main types of answers (themes) emerged. These themes are not mutually exclusive; some responses covered two or more of the themes. Figure 1.4 outlines the main themes that were found in the answers and how they can overlap with one another.

Figure 1.4: Themes from Survey Answers



The most prominent theme to come from the survey results was the perception that MPs are using these sites to connect with or appeal to younger voters. Forty-two percent of all respondents mentioned ‘younger voters’ in their answer at some point. This is not particularly surprising because these networking sites are generally viewed as the domain of younger people for a variety of reasons. What is surprising is the combination of different themes that were apparent in the answers that contained reference to ‘younger voters’. Some were short and to the point; “to get in touch with younger voters”, “to reach young people” and “to try and appeal to a younger audience”. Other responses combined themes of communication and advertising with younger voters: “to connect to a different younger target market who generally would not follow them through traditional media,

also using social networking sites and connecting to people is a novelty to the users and makes them feel important to be ‘facebook friends’ etc and will be more likely to vote for them”, and “to reach out to the younger voters and encouraging them to take an active role in shaping the country”. The variety of different responses means that there is no clear cut answer to the question posed in the survey but ‘young voters’ can safely be considered one of the central themes.

The second most prominent theme to come from the survey responses was the perception that MPs are using SNS for new communication purposes. Thirty-nine percent of respondents used the words, ‘communicate’, ‘connect’, ‘interact’, and ‘to get in touch’, somewhere in their answer. Answers ranged from the simple, “new avenue of communication”, “a way of communicating with young people” and “making use of all communication outlets”, to the convoluted, “because it is an effective tool for those members of the public who are interested or involved in politics to ‘stumble’ across an MPs page/site, and communicate with them when they otherwise wouldn’t have any contact or information about the MP or what the MP was doing” and “I don’t know but if they actually answered your questions or concerns it might have some impact but at this stage I think they’re only using it the same as everyone else to keep in contact with people they know, they need to make a better effort to keep communication lines open between them and young voters.” Again, many of the answers which mentioned communication also made reference to other themes. What is clear from many of the responses is that there is an expectation from the public that MPs using these sites must be making an effort at two-way communication, even if they are not doing so effectively.

The third theme which came from the survey responses was the perception that many MPs use these sites for advertising purposes. Twenty-eight percent of respondents made reference to the words ‘advertising’, ‘getting profiles out there’ and ‘exposure’. Answers such as “a free means of advertising”, “puts their name out there” and “to get their voice out there – it’s just another way to advertise” suggest that this particular perception of MPs’ use of social networking sites is rather clear cut in the minds of the respondents. Other answers mix in the idea that MPs are using these sites ‘because everyone else is’, such as “they’re easy and cheap, ‘the buzzword in marketing right now’, and make them feel like they’re ‘out there’ in the public eye even if it’s only their existing supporters and journalists who seek them out” and “because the majority of New

Zealanders use a social networking site, and it is relatively low maintenance publicity.” The perception that these sites are used by MPs for advertising was not unexpected but it was interesting to note that this theme was the one that was most often combined with the idea that MPs are using these sites ‘because everyone else is’ (which made an appearance in 19 percent of the answers).

The fourth and final major theme that was apparent in the survey responses was that MPs are using these sites to gain more votes in general. Twenty-five percent of respondents made some reference to ‘getting votes’ or ‘catching votes’. This is the most straightforward of the themes found (even though it was the least prominent) because many of the answers were simple e.g. “to try and get more votes”, “to catch votes” and “to get extra votes”. The most surprising result about this particular theme was that it was not more prominent in the answers.

Overall, the online survey provided some interesting but not entirely unexpected results. Firstly, that the willingness of members of the public to engage with MPs on social networking sites decreases the more effort the member of the public is expected to expend. Secondly, respondents believe that the use of SNS by New Zealand MPs is more effective for connecting with younger voters than the general public, a result that was displayed in the body of the survey and in the themes taken from the open ended question at the end. The responses suggesting that MPs are using SNS for communication demonstrated some belief that MPs are making an effort at two-way communication on these sites, even if they are not doing so effectively. Finally, the other themes from the open-ended question, advertising and to gain more votes in general, were surprising only to the extent that they were not more prominent in the respondents answers.

Interviews with New Zealand MPs

In order to find out why New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites interviews were carried out with five MPs, Pete Hodgson (Labour MP for Dunedin North since 1990), Michael Woodhouse (National list MP since 2008), Metiria Turei (Green list MP since 2002), Eric Roy (National MP for Invercargill since 2005), and Clare Curran (Labour MP for Dunedin South since 2008). The transcripts from these interviews were analysed for relevant themes. Some of these themes were evident across all of the interviews, some in only one or two interviews. This section looks at each of the themes in turn beginning with

the proactive versus passive use of SNS. This is followed by an examination of how some MPs use social media to try to keep face-to-face contact with members of the public while others place emphasis on real face-to-face contact as being more preferable. The third theme examined is how some MPs use SNS to maintain presence/name recognition while others do not. The fourth theme looks at how some of the MPs use these sites to dispense more information to the public while others use them more for the social aspect itself. Finally, the section will conclude with a look at how social networking is perceived as a stepping stone to the next big interactive medium.

The first theme that was found from the interviews was that some MPs prefer to be proactive with their use of SNS while others take a more passive approach. Both Turei and Curran outlined how they use SNS proactively. In Turei's case proactive use of SNS breaks down to having different networks of people such as "a strong Maori network and a strong green network and ... a kind of personal arty network" and establishing these networks by using an "algorithm" for adding people where she checks the other persons' profile and if "they've got more than like thirty common friends I just add them without checking the list." Curran outlines her proactive use of SNS as being systematic but would like it to be more so and in particular she commented that she would like "to be friends with many more Dunedin people and so I'm trying to work out a system to do that, to actively go looking for them so that I've got more of a Dunedin group of people to communicate with." Other MPs take a more passive approach to SNS. In relation to adding friends on Facebook Roy stated that "Paddy [one of Roy's assistants] and I talked about an interest factor and a judgment thing. We try to cut out people from overseas and just stick within here and all of that. So we're just seeing if we have any whoopsi's and work our way through that." This more passive approach to SNS also becomes apparent in whether MPs personally manage their own SNS profiles. Turei, Curran and Woodhouse all post on their own profiles (while admitting to having people that help them with some of the more technical issues) while Roy acknowledged that "I don't have enough time to do it... generally I get Paddy to post all that stuff and he has a level of professionalism that I don't have." So while some MPs are proactive with their use of SNS others adopt a wait and see or passive attitude.

The second theme identified from the interviews is how some MPs use SNS to try and maintain a type of face-to-face contact with the public while others prefer more

traditional methods of face-to-face contact. On the one hand, Turei pointed out that “numbers [of friends on SNS] are really good because ... I can put something up on Facebook and I’m talking to fifteen hundred people in one go. I’ll go to a public meeting and I’ll be pretty pleased if I get sixty.” In addition to this Turei outlined how SNS helps keep a more personalised flavour to communication between MPs and the public:

For the purpose of kind of being personally accessible, I mean one of the things about this kind of job is that you have to be accessible to the community and stuff, you have to kind of belong to them, the more distant you get from them the less likely they are to support you. They won’t hear you let alone support you and so we’re all about trying to be popular. So for the purpose of making ourselves available and known so that people are more likely to hear us when we’ve got something that we really want to get through it’s [SNS] really helpful.

On the other hand other MPs acknowledge that while SNS can help maintain contact between MPs and the public, traditional face-to-face contact is still preferable. Woodhouse, Hodgson and Roy all placed emphasis on traditional contact. Woodhouse stated that “I don’t think the social media sites will ever replace, for politicians, the importance of actually getting out there and connecting with people physically. You know a smile and a handshake is always going to be better than a blog on a website.” Hodgson also felt that traditional means of communicating were more important stating that “[pamphlets] can be personalised, so I can send a letter to your name, and that’s a level of intimacy which is certainly different from Facebook.... It’s probably got a value [that is a] different value to Facebook and I think probably a higher one.” Roy also agreed with this sentiment feeling that:

These sites just have the danger of consuming too much time when you could be doing other things and politics is about interacting with people and the highest value you can put on that is the one to one stuff.... So you go to the pubs and the sports days and all of that, that’s where people actually want to see their MPs, like the policeman on the beat walking round.

So while some MPs see value in SNS for keeping direct contact between politicians and the public, others think that it could never replace traditional face-to-face interaction.

The third theme identified from the interviews is the value some MPs attach to SNS for establishing name recognition and those that use it despite not needing to gain name recognition. Curran and Woodhouse use SNS, to some extent, in order to increase their name recognition; Curran in Dunedin South where she “would like to be friends with many

more Dunedin people” and Woodhouse in Dunedin North. Woodhouse states that “politics is often about profile, it’s about frequency of message, it’s about getting your face out there and actually Facebook’s not a bad way of doing that.” More established MPs don’t use SNS for name recognition because they feel they do not need to. Hodgson acknowledges the usefulness of SNS for new MPs but states that:

If I were a member of parliament who was beginning my career and I wanted to get my name recognition up I think I would probably have a different view of things, or of Facebook. I think it’s a good way to get some idea of who the person is but I’m not at the beginning of my career and outside the university... my name is well recognised and we know that, we measure it.

Similarly even though Roy has a Facebook page he does not need it to increase his name recognition:

I’m probably at the stage now where I feel my credibility rests on how well reasoned I’m actually doing things now. I don’t actually have to get name recognition, my job now is to cement that in with sensible, rational explanations and so that’s where I am at this stage in my career.

For MPs trying to increase name recognition SNS can be seen as a tool for this purpose, those MPs who feel that they already have name recognition can understand how SNS helps with name recognition but feel no need to use it for that purpose themselves and so are less likely to make as much of an effort to use these sites.

The fourth theme identifiable from the interviews is that some MPs use SNS purely for information provision while others use it more for social interactions. Roy, in particular, really only uses SNS to provide information. In his own words:

One of my reasons of involvement is to put things on so that people who go in and hit google and put in a subject are going to be drawn to me. So actually dispensing information and making those kinds of connections rather than just the social stuff which politically may or may not have as much value as some people think.

Other MPs feel that just using these sites to provide information is missing the point. Curran and Turei especially enjoy the social networking side of SNS and emphasise its usefulness for MPs. Turei believes that the social aspects of SNS are advantageous for MPs and stated:

It’s also more advantageous that they get to see all the people that I do know and talk to and all the different other parts of my life that are completely public and my engagement with that as well. If the whole point is to open up conversations with

people then you're much better doing it in a much broader context than in a very narrow one... my purpose is to use it to talk to people about stuff, their stuff, my stuff, personal stuff, political stuff

Curran takes a similar view to Turei and places importance on the interactive nature of SNS: "I find it a really good outlet and I find it good for testing ideas but sometimes I just want to tell people what I'm thinking about." Curran's reasoning behind using SNS interactively is that "I want people to know that politicians are just like ordinary people, they do ordinary things and sometimes they have silly ideas... or you can have a silly conversation with them." She also said that "when I am on [Twitter] and doing something I engage with people and I have conversations. That to me is the whole point of social media, it's not about just putting stuff up and then walking away." Utilising the social aspects of SNS means that these MPs are connecting with people more readily and easily but other MPs find the sites more useful for providing more information.

The fifth and final theme that was apparent throughout the interviews was the idea that SNS are just a stepping stone to the next big interactive medium. All of the MPs interviewed made some reference to the fact that SNS are probably not here to stay and that something else is bound to come along. Hodgson said that:

I think... things come and go and they come and go quite quickly at the moment, today's the day where you're meant to be signing off Facebook because we're all distressed about its privacy... I just think it's going to go rapidly through a variety of different forms... So I just think that there's going to be lots and lots of new manifestations of IT and convergence will play its role in things.

Woodhouse, Turei and Roy likewise mentioned the changing nature of technology and where it would take us next and Curran nicely summed up the ever changing nature of social media:

Facebook and Twitter will both evolve and it will probably happen reasonably quickly. It's a bit like... the latest cafe that you go to and you walk past and it's really full and lots of people are in it because that's the place to go but then a couple of months later you walk past and it's empty because everyone's moved on to somewhere else.

Even though all the MPs agreed that SNS will fade out or evolve into something else most of them still felt that it is important to interact on these sites as they stand until the next networking phenomenon approaches.

The themes that were made apparent through the interviews provide an insight into the reasons why MPs are using, or not using, these sites. Firstly, some MPs tend to be proactive about their use of SNS while others are more passive and wait to see what happens. Secondly, some MPs use SNS and value it for providing direct contact with members of the public while others prefer to place more emphasis on traditional face-to-face contact. Thirdly, SNS can be useful for MPs who are trying to increase their name recognition while for others this is not necessary. The fourth theme identified was that some MPs use SNS for information provision while others prefer to use it for its social aspects. Finally, this section looked at how all MPs agree that SNS are just a stepping stone to the next interactive medium.

Interviews with Young People

Interviews were also conducted with two young people to find out how they viewed MPs' use of social networking sites. The two interviews brought to light some aspects of MPs' use of SNS that it would be reasonable to assume is of relevance to a wider public. Firstly, that the effectiveness of these sites loses ground when an MP is not posting for themselves. Secondly, that despite SNS being about networking and communication it is not likely that MPs would be able to use the sites effectively in that way. The third idea to come out of these interviews was that MPs who use these sites need to be careful about the type of information they put up. Finally, there is a sense of general disconnect between the young people in the interviews and the MPs themselves, despite MPs having profiles on social networking sites.

The first theme to come from the interviews with the two young people was that the effectiveness of social networking sites decreases when the profiles are not run by the MP themselves. Of course, in some instances it is expected that the MP is not posting and updating their own profile, for example, the Prime Minister, John Key. But as Hodgson said in relation to MPs not posting on their own profiles "the value of something like Facebook drops off accordingly. You know that it's all rather indirect." In addition to this it is rather obvious to anyone using the site when an MP is not posting themselves; there is no

conversation, no interactivity, there are just announcements. Bill¹⁶⁶ had a rather hard view of MPs who don't post for themselves:

I think they should just harden up and do it themselves. If they don't have the time to do it then they shouldn't have a profile... if their reasons [for having a profile] are to get in with their supporters and whatnot and have their supporters listen to them. If they're not really voicing their opinions, it's their aide, then why do it?

Although this was just the view of a single interviewee, it would seem plausible to infer that members of the public in general will be somewhat sceptical that cabinet ministers or even backbench MPs are personally posting on their profiles, thus the value of this form of communication loses some value with the public.

The second theme apparent in the interviews with young people was that it is not likely that MPs can utilise SNS fully. Social networking sites are set up to encourage communication and networking and yet from the interviewee's point of view, it is not likely that MPs can use these sites effectively in that manner. John¹⁶⁷ commented that:

I just don't suppose that they would have the time, the active time, to reply to everyone's posts... they would probably have a crack at it but they'll have other things to do. I just think that Facebook for MPs is more useful just for letting people know what they're doing and where they are.

Bill had a similar opinion about the usefulness of these sites for MPs:

[MPs use these sites] to boost their public profile. If you don't know that they're MPs and they're on Facebook then they can use it as a way to advertise themselves... I mean if someone's sitting on the fence and then they get a message from their local MP saying vote for me this is what I'm going to do, they might do the whole 'oh they've gone the extra mile'

What these responses show is that the truly communicative nature of SNS is not thought to be high on the priority list of those MPs using the sites. Instead these members of the public see SNS being useful for MPs in terms of information provision and vote getting.

The third theme that was identified from the interviews of the two young people is that MPs who do use SNS need to be careful about the type of information they provide on their profiles. This result was interesting because it seems that the public is aware of the inherent dangers of these sites for MPs and acknowledges the fact that MPs may have to watch what they say on the sites. John felt that any MP using a site like Facebook would be

¹⁶⁶ Name has been changed for anonymity.

¹⁶⁷ Name has been changed for anonymity.

so inundated with requests and messages that they would be unlikely to post any personal information about themselves, instead he thought they would post about “any campaigns they’re going for or which part of the country they’re going to be in to do a speech or anything like that.” Bill agreed with this and added that it made sense for MPs to have separate private and public profiles because:

they could screw up if they were combined into one, like if they were talking to a mate and inadvertently mentioned something about the opposition that’s not very flash or something and it then goes public then he could be in the crap... some MPs aren’t really known for biting their tongue.

This acknowledgement that SNS are public and open means that MPs do need to be careful about what they say. What is interesting here is that few MPs actually maintain a public and a private profile. Generally speaking they only have one.

The fourth and final theme identified from the interviews was that despite MPs being on SNS there is still a feeling of distance and disconnect between them and young people. Both interviewees acknowledged that they had never gone searching for an MP on a SNS but both also said that they had never had an MP approach them. In conjunction to this both interviewees were sceptical about an MP talking to them even if they were a friend of theirs on Facebook. John said:

[if I posted something on an MPs’ profile] I’d probably expect a bit of feedback from other people, like the other friends, like a discussion, but I wouldn’t expect direct feedback from the MP... [because] they’d have that many emails and updates and personal messages they would probably just miss it or it’s just not interesting or relevant

When asked if this lack of communication would bother him John said:

Well if I thought it was interesting and relevant I guess I’d be a bit pissed off if they didn’t [reply] but I still wouldn’t expect them to. It would be like sending a letter to Bill Gates or something and inviting him to your birthday party; it’s just not going to happen... there will always be that distance though.

This is interesting because the bridging of the gap between politicians and constituents seems to be one of the most popular reasons for MPs using these sites.

The themes identified from the interviews with young people serve to remind us of some of the obvious issues associated with MPs’ use of these sites, from a member of the public’s point of view. Firstly, MPs who do not post their own information on these sites

lose respect from the public. Secondly, MPs are not expected to use SNS in the same way as the general public and hence are not utilising these sites fully. Thirdly, MPs are expected to be careful about the type of information that they post on their profiles and are not expected to post the same information as the public. Finally, the interviews showed that there is still a feeling of disconnect between MPs and young people, despite their mutual use of social networking sites.

This chapter has analysed the data from the content analysis, coffeegeek.co.nz website, online survey, interviews with MPs and interviews with young people. The next chapter will attempt to relate these results to the questions put forward at the start of this study.

Discussion

The Internet has been hailed by many scholars as having the potential to reshape the way that communication takes place amongst citizens and between citizens and government. Many other scholars have shown that despite having this potential many platforms available on the Internet are not being sufficiently utilised to make this happen. As new media technology continues to change and evolve, more opportunities are opening for MPs and constituents to 'bridge the gap' that divides them and this can potentially lead to a revitalisation of democracy by fostering greater interactivity between those who govern and the governed. Whether or not this is occurring on social networking sites in the New Zealand context has been the focus of this study. This chapter relates what I learned from the case study to the questions posed in the Introduction.

1. Are MPs trying to connect with voters in general or youth voters in particular through SNS?
2. How successful are these sites at connecting MPs and voters?
3. What type of information is provided by MPs' profiles on social networking sites?
4. What type of communication channels are established through MPs' profiles on social networking sites?
5. Are MPs establishing durable communication channels through SNS?

Are MPs trying to connect with voters in general or youth voters in particular through SNS?

This question was an important one to include in this study because numerous scholars have produced research that shows that young people are becoming increasingly disengaged from politics. Much of this research has been focussed on the British example.¹⁶⁸ Phelps found, in a study conducted on voter turnout in the 2005 British elections, that political disengagement could be influenced by the political era in which

¹⁶⁸ Matt Henn, Mark Weinstein and Sarah Forrest, "Uninterested Youth? Young People's Attitudes towards Party Politics in Britain," *Political Studies* 53, no.1 (2005): 556-578, Matt Henn, Mark Weinstein and Dominic Wring, "A generation apart? Youth and political participation in Britain," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4, no. 2 (2002): 167-192, Matt Henn and Mark Weinstein, "Young people and political (in)activism: why don't young people vote?," *The Policy Press* 34, no. 3 (2006): 517-534, Matt Henn, Mark Weinstein and Sarah Hodgkinson, "Social Capital and Political Participation: Understanding the Dynamics of Young People's Political Disengagement in Contemporary Britain," *Social Policy and Society* 6, no. 4 (2007):467-479, and Richard Kimberlee, "Why Don't British Young People Vote at General Elections?," *Journal of Youth Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 85-98.

youths come of age.¹⁶⁹ In the case of America, Bennett gives a good overview of the reasons why young Americans are disenchanted with politics, among other things, young people do not trust politicians, the political system and have only the slanted view of the mass media to rely on for information.¹⁷⁰ In a study conducted in Canada by Young and Thomas, they found that youth disengagement was a gendered phenomenon and that young women were far less likely to become involved in the political process than young men.¹⁷¹

Other scholars have suggested that the Internet could be the catalyst that encourages young people to become more involved in politics.¹⁷² Ward's study into youth organisation websites suggests that these organisations view political engagement as more complex than just voting every few years and suggests that these sites have the potential to encourage long-lasting interactivity.¹⁷³ Tedesco found that interactive features on political websites help young users feel more engaged in the political process and have the potential to encourage further interest in politics.¹⁷⁴ Whether New Zealand MPs are aware of the potential of the Internet in general, and SNS in particular, to connect them with youth voters could be partially explained by answering the question '*Are MPs trying to connect with voters in general or youth voters in particular through SNS?*'

It should be noted that social networking sites are often stereotyped as being the domain of the younger generation. This is not altogether surprising. In a study conducted by the Auckland University of Technology it was found that 83 percent of New Zealanders use the Internet; of these users nearly half use a social networking site.¹⁷⁵ It was also found

¹⁶⁹ Edward Phelps, "Young Voters at the 2005 British General Election," *The Political Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2005): 487.

¹⁷⁰ Stephen Bennet, "Why Young Americans Hate Politics, and What We Should Do about It," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 30, no. 1 (1997): 47-53.

¹⁷¹ Melanee Thomas and Lisa Young, "More Subject than Citizen: Age, Gender and Political Disengagement in Canada," (paper submitted for presentation at the *Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association*, York University, June 1-3 2006): 19.

¹⁷² Justine Cassell et al., "The Language of Online Leadership: Gender and Youth Engagement on the Internet," *American Psychological Association* 42, no. 3 (2006): 436-449, Stephen Coleman, "Digital voices and analogue citizenship: Bridging the gap between young people and the democratic process," *Public Policy Research* 13, no. 4 (2006): 257-261, and Arthur Lupia and Tasha Philpot, "Views from inside the Net: How Websites Affect Young Adults' Political Interest," *The Journal of Politics* 67, no. 4 (2005): 1122-1142.

¹⁷³ Janelle Ward, "An opportunity for engagement in cyberspace: Political youth Web sites during the 2004 European Parliament election campaign," *Information Polity* 10, no.1 (2005): 244.

¹⁷⁴ John Tedesco, "Examining Internet Interactivity Effects on Young Adult Political Information Efficacy," *American Behavioural Scientist* 50, no. 9 (2007): 1192-93.

¹⁷⁵ Phillpa Smith et al., "World Internet Project New Zealand: The Internet in New Zealand 2009," *Institute of Culture, Discourse and Communication* (Auckland, AUT University: 2009),

that Facebook is the most popular SNS amongst New Zealand users with 75 percent of SNS users reporting that this is their preferred networking site.¹⁷⁶ Of all New Zealand users of the Internet it was found that 80 percent of those under the age of 30 used a SNS. Only 44 percent of those in their forties use SNS and only 21 percent of those in their sixties.¹⁷⁷ Hence it makes sense for New Zealand MPs to try and target younger voters through social networking sites.

While none of the MPs that were interviewed said that their use of SNS was directly related to connecting with younger voters they did allow that this was a consideration when deciding to use the sites. Roy explained that despite Invercargill being “significantly higher in superannuates than others” his use of SNS was not in order to connect with any specific group but rather because “in every sector the younger group are probably there now. They’re getting their grandmas and granddads going, it’s just an increasing area so we’ve got to be there.” Both Turei and Curran acknowledged that they receive quite a few friend requests from younger voters but Turei pointed out that while “it is a predominantly younger audience” they are seeing “more and more older people... getting involved with Facebook as they’re trying to keep up with their kids and their grandkids.” Turei also made the case that connecting with younger voters now through forums such as Facebook means that they can keep them voting for the Green Party throughout their life stages.

Interestingly Hodgson does not use social networking sites despite his electorate including a university with over 20,000 students. Hodgson described the university as a ‘transit camp’ and said that they advertise in that area heavily during election time but felt that his time was better spent concentrating on the “52 thousand people in the electorate [where he was] about to put out a questionnaire to eight thousand people [and] a newsletter that goes out to thirteen or fourteen hundred people several times a year.” Hogson felt that “for politicians [Facebook] is an inefficient medium” when compared to more traditional methods of connecting with voters. For the MPs that are already using SNS it seems that they are doing so primarily because it is useful for connecting with younger voters but also because more and more older voters are also using these sites.

http://www.aut.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/122829/WIPNZ-2009-Full-Report---Final_Fig-68-fixed.pdf, accessed 11 October 2010: 2 and 13.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 13.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 49.

Perceptions from users of SNS of what age group MPs are trying to target through these sites are different to the answers that the MPs gave. In the online survey 42 percent of respondents mentioned younger voters when asked why they thought MPs were using social networking sites. This would suggest that for many users of SNS their perception of why MPs are using these sites is more categorical than the MP's perceptions of why they are using the sites. The survey also showed that many respondents did not believe that these sites were particularly effective at connecting MPs with young people or the general public. Fifty-eight percent of respondents felt that SNS were less than relatively effective at connecting MPs with young voters; while 73 percent felt they were less than relatively effective at connecting MPs with the general public. Hence it is difficult to definitively answer the question: 'are New Zealand MPs trying to connect with voters in general or youth voters in particular through SNS?' But from the MP's point of view it can be concluded that SNS provide a forum for connecting with younger voters but increasingly with older voters or 'voters in general' as well. This suggests that the MPs themselves are not terribly concerned with using these sites to re-engage youth in politics but rather they see it as a chance to extend their regular communication networks.

How successful are these sites at connecting MPs and voters?

Creating connections between MPs and voters on social networking sites can be as simple as accepting a friend request or as complicated as an in-depth discussion. Connections in these terms do not have to be necessarily communicative or on-going, that will be covered later, but rather can be about simple linkages across or through SNS. The connections that are established through these sites have the potential to lead to greater interactivity between MPs and constituents and perhaps to greater levels of trust and intimacy. In order to assess how successful these sites are at encouraging communication and interactivity we must first determine how successful they are at connecting MPs and voters. This question is particularly important because it looks at the potential of these sites to cut out the intermediary. It is important for politicians to create an 'illusion of intimacy' in order to shorten the gap between them and the public.¹⁷⁸ Many scholars have

¹⁷⁸ Stephen Coleman and Giles Moss, "Governing at a distance – politicians in the blogosphere," *Information Polity* 13, no. 1 (2008): 8.

highlighted the ways in which this could be achieved.¹⁷⁹ Pels outlines how political style has the potential both to mark the representative gap and bridge it.¹⁸⁰ He highlights how, with the advent of professionals to look after a politician's 'style', citizens are no longer expected to wade through political tomes in order to make informed decisions but rather can simply 'relate' to one politician or another and vote accordingly.¹⁸¹ Balkin looks to the mass media as being culpable for much of the distance established between politicians and constituents and believes that with increased diversification of political coverage within the mass media there could be a lessening of this distance.¹⁸² With the advent of the Internet, 'illusion' has possibly turned into reality and this is reflected in some of the literature on how new media technology can help 'bridge the gap' between politicians and constituents.¹⁸³ Coleman looks at the potential for direct representation on the Internet, outlining how this could possibly work and clarifying some of the sticking points in the literature regarding appearance versus reality.¹⁸⁴ Coleman maintains that for direct representation to work online then there needs to be a concerted effort on the politician's behalf to establish two way communications; something that is entirely possible through the Internet.¹⁸⁵ Williams also acknowledges the potential of the Internet for increased two-way communication which could lead to direct representation but found that for the majority of politicians, interactive features on websites and blogs are not at the top of the priority list.¹⁸⁶ In order to encourage two-way communication and lessen the gap between politicians and constituents it is essential for the first step of actual connection to be pursued by those using new media.

¹⁷⁹ Danny Hayes, "Has Television Personalised Voting Behaviour?," *Political Behaviour* 31, no. 2 (2009): 231-260, Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, "Political power beyond the State: problematics of government," *The British Journal of Sociology* 61 (2010): 271-303, and John Street, "Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation," *Political Studies Association* 6, no.1 (2004): 435-452.

¹⁸⁰ Dick Pels, "Aesthetic Representation and Political Style," in *Media and the restyling of politics: consumerism, celebrity and cynicism*, ed. John Corner and Dick Pels (London: Sage, 2003): 41-66.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹⁸² J.M. Balkin, "How mass media simulate political transparency," *Journal for Cultural Research* 3, no. 4 (1999): 408.

¹⁸³ Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 338-339, Ian Budge, *The New Challenge of Direct Democracy* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996), 1, Colin Challen, "Think global, talk local: Getting the party political message across in the age of the Internet," *Journal of Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (2001): 254, and Stephen Coleman, "The Lonely Citizen: Indirect Representation in an Age of Networks," *Political Communication* 22 (2005): 197-214.

¹⁸⁴ Stephen Coleman, "New mediation and direct representation: reconceptualizing representation in the digital age," *New Media Society* 7, no. 2 (2005): 177-198.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁸⁶ Andy Williamson, "The Effect of Digital Media on MPs' Communication with Constituents," *Parliamentary Affairs* 62, no. 3 (2009): 525.

The potential for connectedness on SNS is obvious. It is simple for an MP or an individual to seek one another out and become *friends*. However, the extent to which this is actually happening is difficult to measure. While there are plenty of examples of MPs with large numbers of friends and fans there is always potential for further growth. The online survey showed that only 34 percent of respondents had ever viewed a MP's profile on a social networking site. Only 19 percent of respondents had become a friend/fan and only nine percent had ever commented on a MP's profile. This suggests that for many users of SNS the presence of MPs on these sites goes completely unnoticed. As mentioned earlier, these same respondents also felt that SNS were not very effective at connecting MPs with the general public, although they did think they were slightly more effective at connecting MPs with younger voters. Fifty-eight percent of respondents felt that SNS were less than relatively effective at connecting MPs with young voters; while 73 percent felt they were less than relatively effective at connecting MPs with the general public. It is unclear from these results whether this is thought to be because of the type of forum itself or because of some fault in the use of these sites by MPs.

The interviews with MPs provide some more insight into this issue. One perspective on why connection rates are perhaps not as high as they could be is because MPs are reluctant to 'trawl' for friends on the sites. Woodhouse outlined his aversion to this tactic: "All I need to do is go out and find friends but I don't want, you know, I actually want people to connect because they want to, rather than me pushing myself on them, even though it's life." Turei was also reluctant about looking for friends:

If I know other people I might go and see if they've got contacts that I haven't seen for ages and stuff like that... but I don't go through and just trawl through everybody's membership lists or their friend lists. I know that some other MPs do that in other parties but I think that's yuck and kind of contrary to the spirit of the thing, it's not really about that.

This hesitation to actively seek out people purely to increase their amount of friends could contribute to the general lack of connections that is occurring. Woodhouse explained that he expected his page to attract more users in time. In his own words:

It will grow; we'll get up to those numbers. The key to that is getting momentum inside the university because it's an exponential growth thing, once you hit a sort of critical mass and people are interested in what you have to say and looking at your photos and stuff, then it will just kind of grow.

However noble these sentiments are it seems that only those that are already interested in politics are likely to put in the effort to find a MP's profile and so it is unlikely that *new* connections are taking place. This does not bode well for proponents of direct representation. If this first essential step is not taken then there is little hope for lessening the gap between politicians and constituents through SNS.

What type of information is provided by MPs' profiles on social networking sites?

The type of information provided by MPs on social networking sites can give some insight into the perceived usefulness of these sites for MPs. Party centric information such as *party histories* and *party reports* show a commitment to furthering the party message. Individualised information such as *individual political history* and links to *candidate websites* show more of a commitment to furthering the MP themselves as a separate entity from the party. This question is an important one because it can be used to determine whether or not these sites are more effective at providing information than other forums on the Internet. Party websites, candidate websites and politicians' blogs have all been shown to be geared towards information provision.¹⁸⁷ Margolis, Resnick and Wolfe highlight how the Internet is populated by "consumers of information, products and services"¹⁸⁸, meaning that many political party websites provide information functions in order to fulfil the demands of these consumers, rather than focussing attention on expanding interactive functions. Stromer-Galley likewise found that candidate websites tend to focus on information provision rather than interaction and also found that they go so far as to put up a 'facade of interaction' through interactive functions that leave the viewing public as far from their elected official as they were before 'interacting' with the

¹⁸⁷ Julian Bowers-Brown, "A marriage made in Cyberspace? Political Marketing and UK party websites," in *Political Parties and the Internet*, ed. Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (London: Routledge, 2003), 98-119, Andrea Römmele, "Political Parties, Party Communication and New Information and Communication Technologies," *Party Politics* 9, no. 1 (2003): 7-20, Darren Lilleker and Casilda Malagón, "Levels of Interactivity in the 2007 French Presidential Candidates' Websites," *European Journal of Communication* 25, no. 1 (2010), 25-42, Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, "Just Public Relations or an Attempt at Interaction?: British MPs in the Press, on the Web and 'In Your Face'," *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 4 (2004): 507-533, James Janack, "Mediated Citizenship and Digital Discipline: A Rhetoric of Control in a Campaign Blog," *Social Semiotics* 16, no. 2 (2006): 283-301, and Ross Ferguson and Barry Griffiths, "Thin Democracy? Parliamentarians, Citizens and the Influence of Blogging on Political Engagement," *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, no. 2 (2006): 366-374.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Margolis, David Resnick and Joel Wolfe, "Party Competition on the Internet in the United States and Britain," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 4, no. 4 (1999): 43.

sites.¹⁸⁹ Politicians' blogs do little better. Auty found in a 2005 study of politicians' blogs that they are generally used as a top-down form of communication, with little or no two-way communication happening on the blogs included in the study.¹⁹⁰ The type of information provided by each of these forms of communication on the Internet is slightly different. Ward, Gibson and Nixon outline three main uses of political party websites by the parties that establish them; as an administrative tool, as an active campaign tool and as participatory and organisational tools.¹⁹¹ Ward, Gibson and Nixon emphasise that these sites are mainly used for information purposes.¹⁹² Ward and Lusoli similarly provide three informational uses of candidate websites; for background information (party history etc), specialised information (roles of MPs) and snapshot information (results of last election).¹⁹³ Blogs are different again and Williams et al. outline how blogs are used mainly to provide small snippets of information on any given subject.¹⁹⁴ The question now is what types of information are available on social networking sites and are they being used to provide information that is available elsewhere on the Internet or to provide information that is unique to this format.

The type of information that is provided on MP's profiles on SNS is bound to vary from MP to MP. The content analysis did show that the most common information functions on the MP's profiles were *regular updates*, *party reports* and *links to external pages*. It was common for MPs to have a link to their party website or their own website available on their Facebook profile, suggesting that MPs have no problem using their profiles to redirect visitors to these sites. The least common information functions on the profiles were *party histories*, *different language options*, *become fan* links and *events schedules*. *Party histories* can generally be found on a party site so perhaps the MPs did not feel the need to reiterate this information. *Event schedules* likewise are often found on MPs' individual websites. The overall information scores by party suggest that the Act

¹⁸⁹ Jennifer Stromer-Galley, "On-Line Interaction and Why Candidates Avoid It," *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 4 (2000): 127.

¹⁹⁰ Caroline Auty, "UK elected representatives and their weblogs: first impressions," *Aslib Proceedings* 57, no. 4 (2005): 354.

¹⁹¹ Stephen Ward, Rachel Gibson and Paul Nixon, "Parties and the Internet," in *Political Parties and the Internet*, ed. Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (London: Routledge, 2003), 12 - 13.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Stephen Ward and Wainer Lusoli, "'From Weird to Wired': MPs the Internet and representative politics in the UK," *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 11, no. 1 (2005): 71.

¹⁹⁴ Andrew Williams et al., "Blogging and Hyperlinking: use of the Web to enhance viability during the 2004 US Campaign," *Journalism Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 184.

Party MPs use their profiles the most for information provision with a score of 63 percent. As mentioned in the previous chapter, all the Act Party profiles looked to be centrally managed as they all contained the same information functions. Discarding United Future and the Progressive Party (neither of which had profiles on Facebook) the party with the lowest information score was the Labour Party with 21 percent. This could show a commitment to interactive functions over information functions or it could simply show a lack of commitment to including information functions.

Apart from the Act Party the majority of MP's profiles seem to have been set up and controlled by the MPs themselves. There were differences in the types of information functions available on profiles across members of the same party. The profiles were generally geared towards providing information on the MP themselves rather than on their political party which could suggest that these sites are seen as a means of promoting the MP before the party. The personalised nature of these profiles makes them stand out from party websites and blogs. Based on the results of the content analysis it would seem that SNS are being used to provide smaller more detailed information about individual MPs. With many MPs updating regularly on these sites (56 percent) and generally updating about their own activities and roles in the political framework these sites can be viewed as a personal campaign/advertising/communicative tool for New Zealand MPs.

The interviews with MPs also give some insight into the importance placed on information provision through these sites, specifically in terms of increasing name recognition. Woodhouse outlined how "politics is often about profile, it's about frequency of message, it's about getting your face out there and actually Facebook's not a bad way of doing that." For Roy the value attached to SNS is different:

one of my reasons of involvement is to put things on so that people who go in and hit google and put in a subject are going to be drawn to me. So actually dispensing information and making those kinds of connections rather than just the social stuff which politically may or may not have as much value as some people think.

He did not feel that he needed to gain more name recognition but felt that SNS are useful for him in terms of getting more information out in the public sphere. Hodgson acknowledged the usefulness of SNS for increasing name recognition but felt no need to use SNS because "outside of the university ... my name is well recognised and we know that, we measure it. There's no issue. So I've got no recognition issues and I've been

around long enough that I've met most people at school fairs, or whatever it is." It seems that some MPs have a narrow view of the usefulness of SNS in terms of information provision. The fact that Roy uses the sites despite not needing to increase name recognition (the same could be said of Turei) suggests that other MPs see greater potential in the sites for information provision.

The interviews with young people also showed an expectation that MPs would use the sites for information provision. Bill outlined the reasons why he thought MPs were using SNS as being to "boost their public profile. If you don't know that they're MPs and they're on Facebook then they can use it as a way to advertise themselves." John thought that an MP's profile on Facebook would likely have information about their latest activities and "campaigns they're going for, which part of the country they're going to be in to do a speech or anything like that. Awareness or something like that." Some of the results from the survey also show a belief that MPs are using the sites to advertise. Twenty-eight percent of respondents made reference to the words 'advertising', 'getting profiles out there' and 'exposure' in their response to the question: 'Why do you think that New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites?' Some of the answers gave the impression that this was a good way to be utilising new media while others were more scornful: "they're easy and cheap, the buzzword in marketing right now, and make them feel like they're 'out there' in the public eye even if it's only their existing supporters and journalists who seek them out."

What can be gathered from all of these results is that MPs are using SNS for information provision in one form or another. Many MPs provide personalised information on their Facebook profiles and redirect visitors away from the site for more detailed information on their party. Many MPs also see value in these sites for increasing name recognition. The more a MP's name is 'out there' the more likely it is that constituents will recognise the name. This perception of how the sites can be used for information provision and advertising is reiterated by the two young people that were interviewed and by the online survey respondents. The way that MPs are using SNS for information provision seems to have little in common with how they use party websites and candidate sites except for the usefulness of all of these forums for increasing name recognition. It is more likely that SNS are used in the same way as blogs, in order to provide small snippets of information on any given subject, but are more personalised than blogs.

What type of communication channels are established through MPs' profiles on social networking sites?

Social networking sites have the potential to establish new communication channels between MPs and constituents or at the very least to extend existing communication channels. The extent to which MP's profiles are doing this has yet to be analysed. This question is an important one because it will show whether or not these sites are living up to expectations as far as increasing the volume of communication between MPs and constituents. As briefly outlined in the previous section, party websites, politicians' websites and politicians' blogs have all been shown to promote information provision over communication. The extent to which these forms of Internet use promote communication is limited and it has been shown by scholars that politicians are not utilising these communication possibilities fully.¹⁹⁵ Gibson and Ward found in a study of political party websites that political parties were not exploiting the potential of the Internet to establish and encourage communication networks.¹⁹⁶ Likewise Davis found in a study of candidate websites that while many candidates had quite good interactive features on their websites, they failed to utilise them to foster public discussion or for direct discussion with the citizens visiting the sites.¹⁹⁷ Blogs have, on the whole, been found to be more interactive than party websites and candidate websites but Ferguson and Griffiths feel that "political blogging appears to be stunted" because of the lack of deliberative debate that occurs through politicians' blogs.¹⁹⁸ The type of communication that is taking place through these mediums seems to be slightly different for each medium but generally focussed on promotion rather than interaction.¹⁹⁹ Perhaps SNS are having better luck at establishing communication channels between MPs and constituents.

¹⁹⁵ See footnotes 22 through to 29.

¹⁹⁶ Rachel Gibson and Stephen Ward, "U.K. Political Parties and the Internet: "Politics as Usual" in the New Media?," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 3, no. 3 (1998): 20.

¹⁹⁷ Richard Davis, *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁹⁸ Ferguson and Griffiths, "Thin Democracy?," 373.

¹⁹⁹ Römmele, "Political Parties, Party Communication," 15, Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, "Just Public Relations," 530, and Scott Wright, "Political blogs, representation and the public sphere," *Aslib Proceedings* 61, no. 2 (2009): 162.

Social networking sites are inherently interactive, in order to use them one must “socialise” and “network”. This requires more than just adding individuals as friends. For MPs while the first step is to connect with the public (becoming friends on these sites), if the interaction ends there then this communication phenomenon is not being utilised to its full extent. The content analysis showed that the most common type of communication functions available on MP’s Facebook profiles were *profile navigation tools*, *become friend* buttons and the ability to send a private message. The least common communication functions included *volunteer services* links, *join party* links and *donate money* links (none of the profiles had any of these options), and also the ability to *submit a message* on the profile without first having to become a friend or fan of the MP. The fact that a large majority of MPs included the function to *send a private message* and to become a *friend* rather than a *fan* suggests that they are willing to communicate through these sites. The complete lack of *volunteer* links, *join party* links and *donate money* links supports the idea that the majority of MP’s profiles are not centrally managed by their political party but are rather set up and actually run by the MPs as individuals. It is also interesting to note that there was little or no difference in the average communication scores of each party. There is no real variation in the types of communication functions that are used by MPs on these sites.

The types of communication channels that appear to be established through these sites are more personalised and direct. If an MP uses SNS correctly, then not only can they reach hundreds, possibly thousands, of people with one post but they can actually have discussions with these individuals. Turei and Curran both emphasised how they use these sites for social interactions. Curran said that “the integral use of social media is as a way to communicate with people and have a dialogue with them rather than talk at them. That’s why I’m passionate about open and transparent government” and that “you’re communicating with them [constituents] in a way that you wouldn’t normally do. It can be quite personal and I get... golly I didn’t think an MP would be doing this.” Turei also uses SNS to communicate with people in new ways saying that “my purpose is to use it to talk to people about stuff, their stuff, my stuff, personal stuff, political stuff” and also “if the point of these tools is to talk to people then you need to be able to engage with the tool directly and quite personally.”

This view of the interactive potential of SNS was not shared by all the MPs. Roy said that his purpose for using the sites was revolved around “actually dispensing information... rather than just the social stuff which may or may not have as much value as some people think.” Hodgson did not dismiss the communicative potential of SNS but rather prefers to spend his time connecting with people face-to-face and felt that sending out things like pamphlets has “a different value to Facebook and I think probably a higher one.” Woodhouse recognised the value of SNS for communication but framed it in these terms: “I think the parties now are much more tuned in to electronic media generally as a means of communicating *to* its constituency and I think we’ll see a big ramping up of that in the next election” [emphasis added by author]. Woodhouse sees the communication value of social media in terms of what the party or the MP can communicate *to* the public, rather than in terms of how they can communicate *with* the public.

This view of how SNS can be used to communicate to the public also came through in the interviews with the two young people. John commented that if he asked an MP a question on a Facebook profile then he would not expect an answer back because “it would be like sending a letter to Bill Gates or something and inviting him to your birthday party; it’s just not going to happen.” John explained that his belief that MPs would not use these sites to actively communicate with the public was because he did not believe “that they would have the time, the active time, to reply to everyone’s posts... I just think that Facebook for MPs is more useful just for letting people know what they’re doing and where they are, at rallies and whatnot.” The online survey responses were more positive. Thirty-nine percent of respondents used the words, ‘communicate’, ‘connect’, ‘interact’, and ‘to get in touch’, somewhere in their answers to the open-ended question. While most of these answers were quite positive in nature, there were some that expressed doubts about the way MPs are communicating on these sites. One respondent wrote:

I don’t know but if they actually answered your questions or concerns it might have some impact but at this stage I think they’re only using it the same as everyone else to keep in contact with people they know, they need to make a better effort to keep communication lines open between them and young voters.

Another respondent said, “do they really? It’s probably not even them answering, it will be someone else. If I write to someone I expect them to answer the letter not a photocopied answer then they sign it.” What is clear from these responses in the interviews and the

survey is that some people have doubts about the extent to which MPs are utilising the communication capabilities of SNS.

These are mixed results. The results from the content analysis suggests that MPs are making at least a token effort at using these sites to communicate with the public and are doing so as individuals rather than as part of a party initiative. The interviews with MPs suggests that for some MPs these sites are viewed as a communication vehicle which can and does encourage true two-way communication between MPs and constituents. For other MPs they have no compunction about suggesting that the social aspect of these sites is perhaps overrated and they are more useful for providing top-down information or for communicating *to* the public. Finally, the interviews with two young people show a certain amount of disbelief in the ability of MPs to utilise SNS for communication and the online survey results suggest that while many believe MPs are attempting to use SNS for communication others feel that this is a token and ineffective effort.

From the above comments it appears we that any communication channels that are established through SNS are bound to be convoluted in nature and perhaps are different for every individual who uses the sites, MPs or constituents.

Are MPs establishing durable communication channels through SNS?

The results are also mixed with regards to whether or not MPs are establishing durable communication channels through social networking sites. Different researchers have come up with different results. Some report that the relationships established between politicians and young voters on SNS are evident and have the potential to engage voters further.²⁰⁰ Others argue that while there are some examples of MPs communicating with citizens on SNS they are outweighed by the vast majority of MPs who do not seem to use the medium to its full potential.²⁰¹ This study was intended to show a snapshot of how MPs are using SNS and so there is no way to conclusively decide if durable communication channels are being established by New Zealand MPs. There are however some things that we can learn from the results.

²⁰⁰ Kaye Sweetser and Ruthann Lariscy, "Candidates Make Good Friends: An Analysis of Candidates' Uses of Facebook," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 2, no. 3 (2008): 196.

²⁰¹ Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, "MPs and E-representation: Me, MySpace and I," *British Politics* 4, no. 2 (2009): 256-257.

The interactivity levels on Twitter which were obtained from coffee.geek.nz provide insight into whether or not MPs are establishing durable communication channels through SNS. These interactivity levels show how often MPs reply to posts made by others (this feature of the website is ongoing so interactivity levels could be tracked over a period of weeks or months if so desired). While only one week's worth of interactivity levels was used in this research it seems fairly safe to assume that those MPs that were most active in that week are likely to remain active. Certain MPs had rather high interactivity levels, for example, Metiria Turei (56 percent interactivity level), Clare Curran (40 percent), Chris Hipkins (42 percent), Jacinda Ardern (43 percent) and Darren Hughes (43 percent). Other MPs had interactivity levels of zero; in fact 57 percent of those New Zealand MPs using Twitter had an interactivity score of zero. This does not mean that they do not post on the site, but that they do not reply to others posts or to questions asked of them. In terms of political parties, Labour and the Greens had very similar modest overall interactivity scores while National and Act had similar low scores. From this we can see that while some individual MPs were considerably active on the site, political parties as a whole are not. It would also appear that if durable communication networks are to be established through SNS then it will come about as a choice of the individual MP. If an MP is not interested in communication then they will not encourage it.

The interviews with MPs also shed light on whether or not the communication channels established through SNS by MPs are durable ones. For Turei and Curran the potential of these sites is endless and they are strongly committed to keep these communication lines open. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Turei made the case that connecting with younger voters now through forums such as Facebook means that they can keep connected with them throughout their life stages and hence keep them voting for the Green Party. Curran advocated for durable communication in a different way, namely through the Open Labour initiative which will invite public submissions on party policy through Facebook and Twitter. Curran said that "social media is... certainly not the answer to everything but it's about using our new technologies as a tool to bring people in politics closer together... I want us to develop a meaningful policy on open and transparent government." For other MPs it could be less a case of not committing to durable communication and more a case of placing value on different forms of communication. Hodgson felt that personalised emails and newsletters were likely to have a higher value

than things like Facebook. Woodhouse commented that he doesn't think "the social media sites will ever replace, for politicians, the importance of actually getting out there and connecting with people physically. You know a smile and a handshake is going to always be better than a blog on a website and I hope that never changes." Roy said something similar:

Politics is about interacting with people and the highest value you can put on that is the one to one stuff... So you go to the pubs and the sports days and all of that, that's where people want to see their MPs, like the policeman on the beat walking around... that's what they see as effective.

The differences in views of how effective SNS are for connecting the public with MPs and the different values attributed to it by different MPs could impact on how open and durable the communication channels are on these sites.

Whether or not SNS are encouraging durable communication channels between MPs and constituents seems entirely dependent on the MP. The nature of the sites means that they are inherently interactive and communicative but they will not do the communicating for MPs. Some MPs seem committed to utilising these sites to their full extent while others do not place enough value on them to use them in this way. They would rather pursue more traditional methods of interacting with the public. Perhaps if a push came from within a political party to fully utilise the sites then we would see a difference, but as things stand MPs are left to their own devices when it comes to SNS. They can create a profile, provide information and communicate if they want to. If they decide they do not want to then they will not. Durable communication channels can only be established through these sites if New Zealand MPs make the decision to do so.

Conclusion

The methodology chapter of this study set out the framework for this research and placed particular emphasis on the fact that this research was conducted as a case study of how some MPs in New Zealand are using social networking sites. Bent Flyvberg argues that from case studies we can derive context dependent knowledge, learn to understand more complex problems, test existing hypothesis and generate new ones, summarise, and generalise.²⁰² Context dependent knowledge can be found throughout the entirety of this study. The preceding chapters have developed a rich, context dependant, overview of how and why some New Zealand MPs are using SNS, and the perceptions of two young people and some MPs regarding this use of SNS. An understanding of the complexity of the research topic is evident through the methodology that was chosen and the way in which this methodology evolved and changed as new questions were raised. The hypotheses that this study tested were set out in the Introduction. First, it was expected that MPs' use of social networking sites would tend to mirror their use of other platforms on the Internet for information provision, but that there may be some differences in use due to the inherently interactive nature of social networking sites. Second, it was likely that MPs were not utilising these sites fully, again mirroring their use of other platforms on the Internet, and were likely unaware of (or did not place much importance on) the potential of these sites for enabling true interaction and communication between politicians' and constituents. Finally, it was predicted there would be a difference in how MPs view their use of social networking sites and how citizens view MPs' use of these sites. All of these hypotheses were supported to some extent by the results of this research. This can be better appreciated through a summary of the findings of this research.

Firstly, respondents to the survey did not think that SNS were very effective at connecting MPs with the general public and felt SNS were only slightly more effective at connecting MPs with younger voters. SNS provide a forum for connecting with younger voters but increasingly with older voters or 'voters in general' as well. The MPs themselves were not specifically setting out to use these sites to re-engage youth in politics but saw it as a chance to extend existing communication channels. Secondly, it seemed that for many users of SNS the presence of MPs on these sites went virtually unnoticed and users were

²⁰² Bent Flyvberg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research," in *Qualitative Research Practice*, ed. Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber Gubrium and David Silverman (London: Sage, 2004), 420-434.

unwilling to seek them out. Some MPs did not wish to trawl for friends and so we can conclude that only those that were already interested in politics were likely to seek them out, meaning that the first step towards direct representation, those all-essential *connections*, were taking place at only a limited rate. Thirdly, all MPs were using SNS for information provision in one form or another, either to increase name recognition or to better validate their positions on issues. This use of SNS was also obvious to the young people that were interviewed and to the respondents of the online survey. The way that MPs were using SNS for information provision seemed to have little in common with how they used party websites and candidate sites except for the usefulness of all of these forums for increasing name recognition. It was more likely that SNS were used in the same way as blogs, in order to provide small snippets of information on any given subject. Fourthly, MPs were making at least a token effort to communicate with the public through SNS but it was unclear whether or not the communication channels established on these sites were connecting MPs with individuals they would not normally connect with or simply extending existing networks. It should also be pointed out here that any communication channels that were established through SNS were bound to be convoluted in nature and were likely different for every individual who used the sites, MPs or constituents. Finally, the research found that durable communication channels were only possible through SNS if the MP was willing to make them work. Some MPs seemed committed to utilising these sites to their full extent while others placed more value on traditional means of interacting with the public.

Some generalisations can also be made about this study. From this specific case study it can be generalised that the ways in which SNS are used by some New Zealand MPs tend to mirror the ways in which other communicative forums available on the Internet are used. Secondly, it seems that some New Zealand MPs are unaware of or simply not committed to utilising the communicative functions of these sites fully. Finally, there is a general disconnect between how MPs view their use of SNS and how young people view MPs' use of SNS. A more cynical view of how and why MPs are using SNS is evident in the survey responses and interviews with two young people.

Further research needs to be conducted into the longevity of the conversations that can occur on SNS. As this study was only a 'snapshot' of how some New Zealand MPs are using SNS it cannot answer questions relating to how SNS use changes over time or if

the communication channels that are established on these sites are being used consistently and fully. Future research could look at how MPs are using these sites over time, how they are using them during election campaigns, or take the form of a comparative work on how SNS use changes between election and non-election years. It would also be helpful to compare how New Zealand MPs use SNS to other politicians around the globe and discover if we can learn anything from other countries. Most importantly research into this subject should be on-going. As social media technology changes, so will politicians' use of the technology. Further research into this area may provide some answers about how to encourage full utilisation of the technology. New Zealand MPs should be given the chance to learn what it is the public want to see from them on social networking sites and to embrace it fully.

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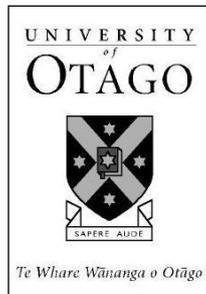
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Appendices

Appendix One: Ethical Approval



Form devised May 1995; updated May 1997; June 1998; May 1999, Dec 2000, June 2002

ETHICAL APPROVAL AT DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL OF A

PROPOSAL INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (CATEGORY B)

PLEASE read the important notes appended to this form before completing the sections below

NAME OF DEPARTMENT: Politics

TITLE OF PROJECT: Social Networking Websites and MPs.

PROJECTED START DATE OF PROJECT: 22nd March 2010

STAFF MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR PROJECT: Chris Rudd (Supervising Lecturer)

NAMES OF OTHER INVESTIGATORS OR INSTRUCTORS: (Please specify whether staff or student. If student, please give the name of the qualification for which the student is enrolled)

Annastasha Mason (Master of Arts)

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT: Please give a brief summary (approx. 200 words) of the nature of the proposal:-

The use of the Internet by various political actors for various political means has been explored and documented by a number of scholars. However, because of the ever changing nature of the Internet the literature on its use by political actors is increasingly out of date and incomplete. With the arrival of social networking sites new research has already been conducted to discover its effects on civic engagement and political participation. Further research into how political actors, such as MPs, are using these sites will complement the research that has already been conducted.

This research aims to evaluate how and why New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites and perceptions of this use of social networking sites. It will attempt to do this by answering the following questions:

- f) Are MPs trying to connect with voters in general or youth voters in particular through social networking sites?
- g) Are they establishing durable communication channels?
- h) What type of information is provided by MP's profiles on social networking sites?
- i) What type of communication channels are established through MP's profiles on social networking sites?, and
- j) How successful are these sites at connecting MPs and voters?

Each of these questions will be answered through a three part methodology. A content analysis of MP's profiles on social networking sites will be carried out to determine how the sites are being used. Interviews with a variety of MPs who use these sites should provide an answer to the question of why MPs are using these sites. Interviews with a few young people will also be conducted to determine how they view MPs' use of social networking sites. Finally, an online survey will be used to attempt to determine if these sites are successful at engaging the public and establishing new and durable communication networks.

DETAILS OF ETHICAL ISSUES INVOLVED: Please give details of any ethical issues which were identified during the consideration of the proposal and the way in which these issues were dealt with or resolved:-

The research into MPs' use of social networking sites involves interviews with some New Zealand MPs. These interviews will be brief, only a few questions at most, and the specific MPs will be identified. The interviews will be conducted in person.

The research will also include interviews with young people, probably only two or three. These interviews will also be brief and the participants will be completely anonymous. The interviews will be conducted by telephone.

This research also requires a survey of social networking users. This will be an Internet survey that will be completely anonymous.

Applicant:

.....

Date:

ACTION TAKEN

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved by Head of Department | <input type="checkbox"/> Approved by Departmental Committee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Referred to University of Otago
Human Ethics Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Referred to another Ethics Committee |

Please specify:

DATE OF CONSIDERATION:

Signed (Head of Department):

Appendix Two: Sample of Questions Asked in Interviews with MPs

1. Do you use social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter?
2. If no, why not?
3. If yes, why do you use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter? Is your use of these sites aimed at connecting more with young people or the public in general?
4. Do you update your profile yourself?
5. If yes, do you interact with the public through the site? E.g. answering posted questions
6. Do you feel that social networking sites are effective at establishing communication channels between MPs and the public?
7. Are they useful to you as an informational/advertising tool?
8. Do you think that social networking sites are as useful for communication with the public as more traditional means of communication?

Appendix Three: Consent Form for MPs

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. Any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed;
4. The results of the project may be published and available in the library;

Interviews:

5. This project involves a semi-structured questioning technique where the precise nature of some of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without disadvantage of any kind.
6. I will be identified by name and/or position.

Surveys:

7. Questions will be limited to my experiences and opinions of MPs' use of social networking sites and demographic questions. I may decline to take part in the project at any stage without any disadvantage of any kind.
8. My identity will be kept completely anonymous.

I agree to take part in this project.

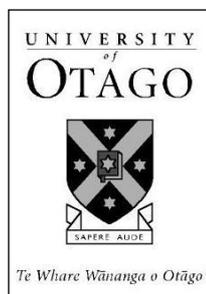
.....

.....

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Politics, University of Otago.



Appendix Four: Sample of Questions Asked in Interviews with Young People

1. Do you use a social networking site?
2. What is your main reason for using the site?
3. Do you use it regularly?
4. Have you ever looked at a New Zealand MP's profile on a social networking site?
5. How do you feel about New Zealand MPs using these sites?
6. Do you have any thoughts on why they would be using social networking sites?

Appendix Five: Consent Form for Young People

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. Any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed;
4. The results of the project may be published and available in the library;

Interviews:

5. This project involves a semi-structured questioning technique where the precise nature of some of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without disadvantage of any kind.
6. I will not be identified by name and/or position. Only the researcher, and possibly their supervisor, will be privy to my identity regarding the concerned information.

Surveys:

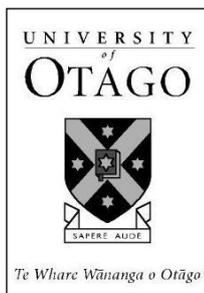
7. Questions will be limited to my experiences and opinions of MPs' use of social networking sites and demographic questions. I may decline to take part in the project at any stage without any disadvantage of any kind.
8. My identity will be kept completely anonymous.

I agree to take part in this project.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Politics, University of Otago.



Appendix Six: Content Analysis Framework

	<i>Communication Function</i>	<i>Information Function</i>
Can send a private message/email	*	
Individual political history/ biography		*
Party information/history		*
Press releases/media section		*
Become a friend of	*	
Become a fan of or follow		*
Regular updates		*
External email address	*	
Submit messages	*	
Links to external websites other than party or personal		*
Reports on Party activities		*
Schedule of events		*
Link to listserv/discussion	*	
Link to volunteer services	*	
Link to join party	*	
Donate Money	*	
Profile navigation tools	*	
Any multimedia video or audio		*
Sign up for regular updates	*	
Available in different languages		*
Links to party site		*
Links to personal website		*
RSS Feed		*
Total	10	13

Each of the functions will be coded as simply present (1) or not present (0) making the maximum total score for the combined communication and information functions 23.

Appendix Seven: Survey Questions

1. This survey is on social networking sites and how MPs and the public are using these sites to interact. Attached is an information sheet that you should read so that you know how the information you provide is going to be used. The survey itself should only take about 5 minutes. Thank you for your participation.

Take me to the information sheet

Start the survey

2. What is your age?

Under 18

18-24

25-30

31-40

41-50

51-60

60+

3. What is your gender?

Male

Female

4. What is your occupation?

5. Are you a member of a political party?

Yes

No

6. Are you involved in politics through some other means not associated with a political party?

Yes

No

7. Do you follow news about politics in the traditional media? E.g. newspapers, television, radio.

Yes

No

8. Do you use any social networking sites? E.g. Facebook, Bebo, Myspace.

Yes

No

9. Do you communicate with friends about politics on this site(s)?

Yes No

10. Have you viewed a New Zealand MP's profile on a social networking site?

Yes No

11. Have you become a friend/fan/member of a New Zealand MP's profile on a social networking site?

Yes No

12. Have you ever commented on a New Zealand MP's profile on a social networking site?

Yes No

13. Have you ever used a social networking site to get into direct contact with a New Zealand MP?

Yes No

14. Did the MP reply?

Yes No

15. Do you have regular contact with a New Zealand MP through their profile on a social networking site? (please tick the number that best corresponds to your answer)

1. No, never

2. .

3. .

4. Occasionally

5. .

6. .

7. Often

16. Do you think a New Zealand MP would reply if you tried to contact them using a social networking site?

Yes

No

17. How effective do you think social networking sites are at connecting New Zealand MPs with young voters (18-24 year olds)? (please tick the number that best corresponds to your answer)

1. Not effective at all

2. .

3. .

4. Relatively effective

5. .

6. .

7. Very effective

18. How effective do you think social networking sites are at connecting New Zealand MPs with voters in general? (please tick the number that best corresponds to your answer)

1. Not effective at all

2. .

3. .

4. Relatively effective

5. .

6. .

7. Very effective

19. Why do you think that New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites?

Appendix Eight: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

The aim of this project is to assess how and why New Zealand MPs are using social networking sites on the Internet. The project also seeks to determine how successful these sites are at connecting MPs and voters.

What Type of Participants are being sought?

This project involves interviews with New Zealand MPs and interviews with young people who will not be identified by name. It also involves surveys of social networking site users.

What will Participants be Asked to Do?

MPs: Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to answer a few questions in regards to your use, or lack of use, of social networking sites on the Internet.

Young People: Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked a number of questions regarding your experiences of social networking sites in general and the use of these sites by New Zealand MPs in particular. Your opinions and views on the use of these sites by New Zealand MPs will be the main focus of the interview.

Survey Participants: Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked a number of questions regarding your experiences of social networking sites in general and the use of these sites by New Zealand MPs in particular. This will take no longer than 5 minutes to complete.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?

The interviews with MPs will involve general questions being asked about why MPs are using social networking sites. Questions will be open ended and general in nature, but the interview will not take very long as the main question to be answered is simply why MPs are using these sites. Similarly the interviews with young people will involve general questions about perceptions of MPs' use of social networking sites. As a consequence, although the Department of Politics, the University of Otago, is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interviews, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable, you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

The surveys will involve questions on the demographic make-up of social networking users. They will also ask about the participants' experiences and opinions of the presence of MPs on social networking sites.

The information obtained in these interviews and surveys will be used in the writing of the interviewer's Politics thesis, a requirement of the Otago University Politics Master of Arts degree. New Zealand MPs will be identified in the thesis but all other participants will remain anonymous. Only the researcher and possibly her supervisor will know the identity of those young people who take part in the interviews. The survey will be completely anonymous.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned above will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

What if Participants have any Questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Annastasha Mason

or Dr Chris Rudd

Department of Politics

Department of Politics

Phone: 0274034074

Phone: (03) 479 8664

Email: annastashamason@hotmail.com

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Politics, University of Otago.

