

New Zealand Politicians' use of social media
applications:
A political social capital perspective

Bonnie O'Neill

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of International Communication
Comm.9183

Unitec New Zealand
Department of Communication Studies
2010

Declaration

Name of candidate: Bonnie O’Neill

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of International Communication. The regulations for the degree are set out in the Masters Programme Schedule and are elaborated on in the handbook.

Candidate’s declaration:

I confirm that:

- This thesis represents my own work

- The contribution of any supervisors and others to the research and to the thesis was consistent with the Unitec Code of Supervision

- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee. Approval number: 999

Candidate Signature: Date:

Student ID:1231943

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to find out the extent to which New Zealand Members of Parliament use social media applications for the cultivation of political social capital (PSC). Developed by this researcher from some of the key authors in the field of social capital, PSC describes the social action activated through a network of relationships, using strong and weak ties and the actions of bridging and bonding, for the attainment of political gain. The following investigation therefore uses this theory to understand how and/or if New Zealand Members of Parliament see social media applications as platforms that enable them to leverage their strong and weak network ties for the purpose of advancing their political endeavours, and cultivating PSC for themselves and as a consequence, their affiliated parties. 28 MPs responded to the survey and four key communication personnel were interviewed. Analysis of the data found evidence that 78.68% of NZ MPs use at least one form of social media for their political communication purposes. Facebook and blogging have shown to be the most widely used new media platforms, with responses suggesting that PSC is intended to be cultivated in the forms of, for example further youth engagement and more voter support. The implications of the results of this analysis are discussed, along with limitations of the study and directions for future inquiry.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who contributed to the completion of this thesis.

Firstly, thanks to all the New Zealand Members of Parliament who kindly responded to my survey and to the party members who agreed to being interviewed. Without their contributions this thesis would not exist.

Secondly, many thanks to Peter Thompson and Ed Mason, my principle and associate supervisors, who patiently worked alongside me, giving invaluable guidance and support throughout the entire process.

Thanks to Dr. Donna Henson for making sure everything went smoothly and offering her expert advice and assistance, especially regarding methodological development and data analysis.

Finally, thanks to Arash, Mike and Chelsey for their unconditional support during this period.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	II
ABSTRACT	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
LIST OF FIGURES	VII
LIST OF TABLES.....	VIII
CHAPTER 1	1
RATIONALE.....	1
<i>Research aims</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Thesis structure.....</i>	<i>9</i>
CHAPTER 2	10
LITERATURE REVIEW	10
<i>Definition of terms and theory.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Political use of the internet.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Political use of social media applications</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>NZ MPs' use of social media and their applications</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Gaps in the literature</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Research questions</i>	<i>30</i>
CHAPTER 3	32
METHODOLOGY	32
<i>Research methods.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Data collection and analysis</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Complexities.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Ethical considerations.....</i>	<i>39</i>
CHAPTER 4	40

FINDINGS	40
CHAPTER 5	68
DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS.....	68
CHAPTER 6	81
CONCLUSIONS	81
<i>Answers to specific research questions.....</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Conclusions.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Future research</i>	<i>86</i>
REFERENCES	88
LIST OF APPENDICES	104
1: <i>Information form (Survey)</i>	<i>105</i>
2: <i>Information form (Interview).....</i>	<i>106</i>
3: <i>Consent form (Survey).....</i>	<i>107</i>
4: <i>Consent form (Interview)</i>	<i>108</i>
5: <i>Survey.....</i>	<i>109</i>
6: <i>Interview Questions</i>	<i>115</i>

List of Figures

<i>Figure</i>	<i>Page</i>
Figure 1.1 Galtung's model of media and society	3
Figure 2.1 Political concentric circles	14
Figure 2.2 Influence ripples	16
Figure 4.1 Online analysis of which MPs are using social media	41
Figure 4.2 Age bracket of MPs who answered this survey	44

List of Tables

<i>Table</i>		<i>Page</i>
Table 3.1	Data collection methods and analysis	32
Table 4.1	Total use of social media applications by parties in parliament	40
Table 4.2	Importance of social media applications	46
Table 4.3	Importance of communication functions	48
Table 4.4	Engaging with younger people	49
Table 4.5	Volunteer recruitment/mobilization	50
Table 4.6	Fundraising	51
Table 4.7	General communication with other MPs	52
Table 4.8	General communication with other party members	53
Table 4.9	General communication with the public	54
Table 4.10	General communication with the media	55
Table 4.11	Policy communication with other MPs	56
Table 4.12	Policy communication with other party members	57
Table 4.13	Policy communication with the public	58
Table 4.14	Policy communication with the media	59
Table 4.15	Crisis communication/damage control	60
Table 4.16	Communicating with NZs overseas	61
Table 4.17	Monitoring general public opinion	62
Table 4.18	Gaining feedback on policies/issues	63
Table 4.19	Monitoring activities of other parties/members/MPs	64
Table 4.20	Enhancing personal public image	65
Table 4.21	Sum of responses given for each social media application	66

Chapter 1

RATIONALE

Social media applications (SMAs) such as social network sites (SNSs) (Facebook, MySpace, Bebo), weblogs (blogs) (Twitter, Kiwi Blog, WordPress) and video or picture sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr), are internet based platforms that help people to communicate via multiple media to potentially unlimited numbers of people worldwide (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). They are new media applications that allow almost anyone to voice their opinions, become fans (members of others' pages and profiles), and join online interest groups that may be politically orientated, business and entertainment driven, or just of interest to the user. Facebook for example, has over 350 million active users, spanning over 150 countries and territories and is translated into over 70 different languages (Facebook statistics, 2009). Like many other SMAs, it is a social networking site that facilitates communication between a variety of people, business and organizations from diverse interests and backgrounds.

As communication mechanisms, SMAs have altered the way people function within many of the dimensions of communication that exist, be they interpersonal, cross-cultural, between small groups or on a global scale. It is suggested that they facilitate a two way flow of discourse that is more interactive and instantaneous than any other communication platform available (aside from face to face dialogue and the telephone). It is further suggested that these applications are arenas where journalists are no longer the gatekeepers of communication between the state and civil society; that users and producers of content are able to post and retrieve vast amounts of information, and participate relatively freely in online discussions taking place worldwide. According to Downing, Ford, Gil and Stein (2001) the internet is a place where people of all ages are able to publicize information of both a personal and public nature in a "discourse realm outside of mainstream media" (p. 223). They explain that the internet allows anyone to "speak freely

and still enjoy a wide audience...(as)...their articles are not cut by politically cautious editors, silenced by government scrutiny, or constrained by a need to maximise profit” (p. 223). This does not mean however that the media no longer have any influential part in online information dissemination. Only that its position as the mediator of messages between the state and civil society has, in some arenas changed.

Alongside the general public, politicians around the world are also increasing their use of SMAs for the distribution of political messages (Gueorguieva, 2008; Ward, 2008; Westling & Madison, 2007). Since the introduction of SMAs to politicians’ communication portfolios, the mainstream media’s role in political discourse has radically changed. There is now a shift in the media’s position as the fourth estate or fourth pillar of society (Galtung, 1999; Nordenstreng, n.d.) due to its power and influence potentially weakening in certain online political communication fields.

According to Galtung’s (1999) model of media and society (See Figure 1.1, p. 3), the media floats between three societal pillars: the state, market forces or capital, and civil society; distributing and facilitating the flow of information for and between these societal units (Galtung, 1999; Nordenstreng, n.d.). With the introduction of online communication platforms such as blogging and SNSs, the mainstream media’s control over the distribution of political messages have somewhat lessened. This is due to these messages often being distributed directly between the state and civil society via these SMAs. For example, NZ Prime Minister John Key (and many of his party members) use Facebook extensively to communicate with the public. Although he may, or may not personally be writing the notices posted, the messages are often written about his particular actions or accomplishments in and around parliament (Facebook, 2010). Key’s fans or friends are able to give feedback in the form of posts or comments to the notices published, which opens up a potential opportunity for reciprocal dialogue between the New Zealand public and the state. These applications therefore enable both the state and civil society (including market forces), to bypass the mainstream media, for certain communication purposes, and have a reasonable amount of control over the distribution and retrieval of their own information.

With the introduction of the internet and these new media applications into the political arena, new research and ongoing concerns have risen that academics globally are attempting to address. New research is briefly mentioned here, although addressed in more detail in the literature review. Ongoing concerns are however outlined and discussed below.

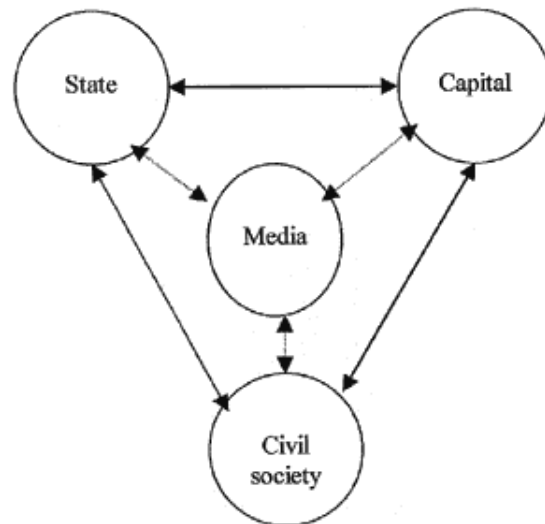


Figure 1.1: Galtung's model of media and society (Galtung, 1999. P. 3)

There are multiple new areas of analysis emerging due to the introduction of the internet and social media into the political arena such as e-democracy (electronic democracy) and computer-mediated political communication systems (CMPC) (Ainsworth, Hardy & Harley, 2005; Alarkon, 2008; Berg, 2008; Cardoso, Cunha & Nascimento, 2006; Garramone, Harris & Pizante, 1986; Parvez & Ahmed, 2006). A number of researchers for example, are investigating topics such as the correlation between the use of SMAs and the winning of elections (Alarkon, 2008; Berg, 2008; Perlmutter, 2008; Thorton, 2008; Williams & Gulati, 2007); often focussing on political elites such as U.S President Barack Obama, who some claim won the 2008 U.S. elections due to his strategic leveraging of Web 2.0 technologies (Fraser & Dutta, 2008). Others are looking at online research involving youth mobilization (Fraser & Dutta, 2008; Fraser & Dutta, 2009; Gueorguieva, 2008; Lee, 2009; McCurry, 2009; Small, 2008), political participation, and civic engagement in general (Byrne, 2007; Erikson, 2008; Garvin, 2008; Mäkinen, & Kuira, 2008; Palser, 2007), with findings displaying varied responses. These wide variations of findings are possibly due to

the relatively new nature of these areas of analysis; indicating a potential need for further longitudinal studies for more conclusive evidence of the internet and its applications' success as democratic enabling (or disabling) devices.

Ongoing discussions have also resurfaced such as interest in the internet's ability, or lack of, to foster a new 'public sphere' (Brundidge, 2009; Fenton, 2008; Pan & Jacobson, 2009; Slade, 2007;). Habermas developed the concept of the public sphere, describing it as a "realm of social life in which people could form public opinion by rational discourse, connecting the dichotomous divide" (Lee, 2006, p. 4). This was supposed to be a place where informed citizens engaged in rational discourse that produced public consensus about social and political affairs in a dominion autonomous of the state (Habermas, 1989). Certain researchers for example, have investigated how these new media platforms can assist in "reinvigorating citizens by involving the new generation in politics through...(arenas such as)...the public blogosphere" (Lee, 2006, p. 1). Lee (2006) concludes that the concept of the public sphere has never actually existed; claiming that the idealized conception developed by Habermas can only be reached in various proximities. In saying this, Lee (2006) appears to believe that although the creation of an ideal public sphere is impossible, the advancement of these technologies "offers unprecedented potentials and thus provides our society with new opportunities" (p. 19) for public engagement and political discourse. This is however a discourse constrained by political, market and societal boundaries (Lee, 2006).

The internet's reputation as a potential facilitator of free speech and open communication is being challenged by a number of scholars. Many researchers believe that certain issues need to be addressed before the internet can be considered an aid to democracy. Concerns such as fragmentation (market and content overload) (Dahlberg, 2007; Slade, 2007), internet control (government censorship) (Endeshaw, 2004; Forney & Steptoe, 2005; Martinsons, Ng, Wong & Yuen, 2005) and the 'digital divide' (national and global divisions of internet access) (Guillén & Suárez, 2005; Hsieh, Rai & Keil, 2008; Scott, 2005; Snyder, 2006; Tucker, 2007) are concerns that are claimed to hinder the internet's ability to facilitate open communication between the state and civil society. Issues such as the 'digital divide' and 'access' are important factors to consider when studying mass

communication and although fall outside of the scope of this investigation, warrants further mention.

The internet appears to be a relatively good communication tool for those who understand, and have access to it. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, many people globally are unable gain access, or use this kind of technology. Statistics show that worldwide internet usage grew in global penetration from 5% in 2000 to 25.6% in 2009 (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001; Guillén & Suárez, 2005; Internet world stats: Usage and population statistics, 2009). Statistics such as these are often cited by political elites who are eager to demonstrate the national and global advancement of technologically enabled communication systems. However, what these kinds of statistics fail to highlight, is that many countries still have low internet penetration per population, with countries such as Africa showing a mere 6.8% of their total population using these new media (Internet world stats: Usage and population statistics, 2009).

According to Tucker (2007), policy makers have “a simplistic view of the issue of internet accessibility” (p. 16). Claiming that politicians often take a different perspective on ‘access’; using a technologically deterministic focus that uses equipment availability as an index of social, political and economic progress (Tucker, 2007). Governments currently view access in terms of the number of computers in, for example, a school or local library. What is not considered are the social issues of computer literacy, language and ethnic differences that impact on one’s ability to utilise this technology (Internet world stats: Usage and population statistics, 2009; Tucker, 2007). It appears that politicians are erroneously assuming that more media technology equals a more democratic and educated population. The reality according to some scholars, is that measuring the quantity of computers in any one place is no sure indication of internet access, and certainly no reflection of the technological advancement of society, when a number of the population are undereducated and unable, for whatever reason, to use this technology (Muhlberger, 2005; Tucker, 2007; Warf, 2007). It could therefore be argued that issues such as access render the use of the internet and SMAs for the marketing of any message (including political messages), in some countries, ineffective. Given that they can only be productive from a communication

perspective if a reasonably large number of stakeholders have access, and are able to use, these new media.

'Access' and the 'digital divide' (like a number of other theories) are crucial factors to consider when analysing any new communication channel. They are social influences that impact on the potential that internet tools such as Facebook and MySpace have for a number of people globally. This researcher understands that these influences undermine, or at least strongly affect the actual potential of SMAs as facilitators of communication between the state and civil society. It is with these influences in mind, that the following, currently unexplored area of enquiry is researched; this being an attempt to understand the extent to which New Zealand Members of Parliament use SMAs for the cultivation of political social capital (PSC).

PSC is a theory developed by this researcher from some of the key authors in the field of social capital. It describes the social action activated through a network of relationships, using strong and weak ties and the actions of bridging and bonding, for the attainment of political gain. The following investigation therefore uses this theory to understand how and/or if New Zealand Members of Parliament feel they can use SMAs to leverage their strong and weak network ties for the purpose of advancing their political endeavours, and cultivating PSC for themselves and as a consequence, their affiliated parties. This theory is explained in more detail in the following literature review. However, before this discussion continues, it is important to mention that this research is a measurement of the MP's perceptions of the usefulness of SMAs for political communication and the cultivation of PSC. It must be understood that the results of this analysis will reflect only what the MPs' think these media will accomplish rather than what these new media applications may actually be achieving. This point will also be discussed further on in this research. For now, a brief outline of the political use of the internet in New Zealand (NZ) is given.

Internet use in NZ is reasonably extensive and growing rapidly among those with access and the ability to use this technology. A report conducted by AUT University in 2007

found that out of the 78% of New Zealanders currently online, 47% are accessing information about the government, 10% keep a blog, 77% check their emails daily and 28% participate in SNSs such as Facebook and MySpace frequently (Bell, Crothers, Goodwin, Kripalani, Sherman & Smith, 2007). They claim that the internet is now rated as a “more important source of information than [sic] television (54%), newspapers (54%),...radio (46%)...(and) slightly higher as an (important)...information source than interpersonal sources such as family and friends (57%)” (Bell et al., 2007, p. 8). In NZ, civic use of the internet appears to be for information retrieval purposes, communication between networks and general dialogue among the wider public (Bell et al., 2007). For the state, the internet is a place where political information can be disseminated to another portion of the population. This in turn potentially increases a politician’s likelihood of cultivating political social capital. For example, if the information transmitted, results in an individual or individuals taking positive action on behalf of the person sending the message, then a form of social capital is cultivated. If the sender is a politician, and the message is calling for political action of any kind, and that action is activated, then PSC is developed. This is however, only if some form of action is taken. It appears then that social media assist, to some extent, in facilitating both civic and state communication needs in NZ. However, the degree to which SMAs are perceived as assisting in the cultivation of PSC for NZ politicians is at this time unclear.

One only needs to look at many NZ political parties’ websites to realise that MPs are in fact using these platforms for multiple purposes such as policy communication and the mobilisation of support and or votes. However there appears to be little research published on the use of SMAs by NZ Members of Parliament or their affiliated parties. The focus of this research is therefore on how NZ MPs use SMAs for the cultivation of political social capital; attempting to understand the motives behind the use of these new media when engaging in political communication with the people of NZ and abroad. This is an important topic to research as the use of SMAs in NZ is growing rapidly within both civic and state arenas. Ultimately, developing PSC is an optimal goal of any politician. However, as more new media platforms are developed, and increasing numbers of people use them, communication issues such as market and audience fragmentation arise. This means that messages are no

longer guaranteed to reach a wide audience as it was, and to some extent still is, with radio and television broadcast. Both senders and receivers of messages need to be clear about which channels they should use and the audience those channels cater to. It is important therefore, to gain some form of understanding firstly, of the intentions of politicians' when engaging with SMAs so that messages are communicated through the right channels, to the right audience. Furthermore, that the audience are able to retrieve the information desired and hopefully take action on causes they believe are worthwhile. This can only be accomplished if both the creator and consumer of the information published understand how and which of these new media applications to use. It is then that social capital in any of its forms may be cultivated through these new media platforms. This study is therefore a beginning to the broader understanding of the political use of SMAs use by NZ MPs. It is also a springboard for further development of this researcher's concept of PSC.

Research aims

As already explained, the aim of this research is to find out to what extent NZ Members of Parliament use SMAs for the cultivation of PSC. Although the empirical aspect of this project is to find out the extent of social media use by NZ MPs, the theoretical aim is to analyse this in terms of political social capital (PSC). PSC is a concept developed by this author for this particular study. The following investigation therefore uses this theory to understand how and/or if NZ MPs use SMAs to leverage their strong and weak network ties to advance their political endeavours, and cultivate PSC for themselves and their affiliated parties. The data collected will be used to show how strong and weak ties are formed, or expected to be formed, through the use of SMAs; creating the potential for cultivating PSC for the person(s) or party(ies) engaging in political communication.

The broad question proposed therefore is:

- **To what extent do NZ Members of Parliament use social media applications for the cultivation of political social capital?**

To answer this question, four sub-questions are proposed:

- Which social media applications do NZ MPs use, and how important are they considered for their political communication?
- For what political communication purpose do NZ MPs use social media applications?
- How do NZ MPs see social media applications facilitating their overall political communication activities?
- Does political social media application use vary depending on age, gender, and/or being a list or constituency member?

Thesis structure

The following thesis begins with defining terms such as ‘social capital’, ‘political social capital’, and ‘Web 2.0’ and ‘social media applications’, so that these concepts can be fully understood within the context of the proceeding research. A detailed literature review of the political use of SMAs in NZ then takes place. Research questions and sub-questions are presented, with research methods then discussed. Research results are presented in chapter four, with chapter five (Discussion and Analysis) examining in detail the findings from the results obtained. A conclusion is then drawn with answers to specific questions given, and limitations of the research considered along with the future of this area of enquiry.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to examine the current body of research surrounding the political use of SMAs by NZ Members of Parliament. More specifically, this review seeks to find out whether researchers have in fact analysed how and/or if NZ MPs use SMAs for leveraging and cultivating PSC. As there appears to be no published research surrounding this area of enquiry, this review takes a broader look at firstly the political use of the internet in general, followed by the political use of SMAs with any research based on NZ MPs' use of social media and their applications finally being assessed.

Research material has been gathered primarily from peer reviewed journals and articles. However, due to the relatively recent development of this area of enquiry, local, national and international news articles, forums and website content are also analysed and used where appropriate.

There is a body of work written about the internet and social media, focussing on issues such as online information and privacy (Boyd, 2008; Christofides, Muise & Desmarais, 2009; Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini, 2007), security (Lavenda, 2008; Sarel & Marmorstein, 2006), access (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Guillén & Suárez, 2005; Hsieh, Rai & Keil, 2008; Scott, 2005; Snyder, 2006; Tucker, 2007) and interpersonal communication (Walther, 1995). However this literature review focuses primarily on the key and peripheral literature surrounding the 'political use' of SMAs.

The first stage of this literature review begins by defining the concepts of 'social capital', 'political social capital', 'Web 2.0' and 'SMAs. Research surrounding a) political use of the internet in general, b) political use of social media in general, and c) NZ MPs' use of social media and their applications then follow.

Definition of terms and theory

Social Capital

Social capital (SC) is a concept that has become both popular and controversial among academic and political elites over the past two decades (Bartkus & Davis, 2009; Halpern, 2005). According to some researchers, SC represents the actions (capital gained) activated through the social networks and associations one belongs to, which in turn hinges upon all the unwritten norms and sanctions that govern their associations (Halpern, 2005; Woolcock, 2008). It is said that the ability and potential to generate community and individual action through networks of associations is what makes social capital of any real value (Halpern, 2005). This is however just one, of a number of variations to the definition of social capital. What appears to be a theme that runs through many definitions is the understanding that, unlike some other forms of capital, social capital is difficult to measure and is not a guaranteed by-product of an involvement within a network. This is due to the actions that arise out of these associations being entirely dependent on an agent's abilities, desires and availability at the time of the request. Simply put, social capital is not something that is assured to be available, like money in your savings account. It is capital, in as much as there are tangible gains often resulting from the leveraging of network ties however these benefits depend entirely on human variables, such as one's desire to take action.

For the purpose of the following research, two key authors in the field of social capital are drawn on for the development of this researcher's notion of what constitutes PSC; Haythornthwaite and Putnam. Putnam (1993) describes social capital as consisting of "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action" (p. 169). He differentiates between the concepts of 'strong' and 'weak' network ties to describe his 'bridging-bonding' axis. Putnam's (2002) notions of strong and weak ties and the bridging-bonding axis are useful for the development of the theory of 'political social capital' (PSC). These concepts illustrate how politicians are able to leverage their strong and weak network associations for the purpose of political/societal gain. This is made possible through both bridging (making new associations through existing friends) and bonding (strengthening already existing close ties) with online networks created using SMAs. Before this theory can be further elaborated on,

the components of strong and weak ties and the bridging-bonding axis must be explained further. Only then can the theory of PSC be fully understood within the context of this thesis.

The strength of a tie (friendship/acquaintance) and the ability to bridge and/or bond a set of ties are important aspects to grasp when attempting to understand social capital. According to Haythornthwaite (2002), “a tie is said to exist between communicators whenever they exchange or share resources such as goods, services, social support or information” (p. 386). The strength of a tie is said to be determined by a number of factors: a) how frequently contact is made, b) how long the association has existed, c) how intimate the tie is, d) the amount of reciprocity involved in the relationship and, e) the nature of the tie. A tie may be family, work or friendship orientated, with contact being made on a regular basis or only on special occasions (Haythornthwaite, 2002; Putnam, 2002). Strong ties can be seen for example, between family members or members of a church congregation. Here one would see examples of bonding taking place. Through continual contact over time, friendships are strengthened (bonded) within those strong units or close relationships. The relationships themselves are considered exclusive in nature; meaning that new relationships/memberships are rarely cultivated due to the members maintaining and being content with the associations they already have (Krueger, Cody & Peckham, 2006; Putnam, 2000).

Weak ties on the other hand, may include connections within a social movement, a relationship with a co-worker or an association with a friend of a friend. The ebb and flow of new members into these networks are welcomed and often encouraged. New acquaintances (weak ties) expand one’s personal network, making it larger through further leveraging and bridging these weak associations for the purposes of broadening one’s network (Krueger et al., 2006). Every new member that enters into the network brings extended network ties with them. Other existing members are then able to connect and access these extended associations due to the open and inclusive nature of the network. Most people will have a range of strong and weak ties that change in strength throughout their lives. These ties “grow in strength as people get to know each other better, and decline

as the reason for the strong association reaches its conclusion” (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 212).

Our ability to get things done and our level of access to certain resources will often depend on the strength of our ties (Haythornthwaite, 2002). People who are strongly tied will be more motivated to share the resources and information that they have available to them. They are ties that can be easily leveraged and used to advance personal and professional needs, however “their close association often leaves them with access only to the same resources as others with whom they are closely tied” (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 387). This is due to memberships within certain networks being exclusive and restricted to elites or select people only. As a consequence, membership is limited and therefore access to resources is confined within the boundaries of what that group can offer. This is why weak ties are at times, considered to be just as, or even more useful as they enable an individual to potentially bridge and leverage distant relationships for the purpose of personal or organisational benefit. For researchers such as Granovetter (1972, 1983) this is the ‘strength of weak ties’; claiming that one may leverage their connection to others outside of the strong tie network. They therefore gain access to the resources and information circulating within other arenas that may not have been accessible otherwise (Haythornthwaite, 2002). For example, the bigger the network membership, and the more open and inclusive the membership is, the larger the pool of knowledge and resources are available in total. Ultimately this pool of resources is accessible to all network members and includes broader ideas, perspectives and experience that may not be accessible in a tighter more exclusive network.

To gain a better understanding of strong and weak ties and the bridging bonding axis, the following model of political concentric circles (Figure 2.1, p. 14) has been developed.

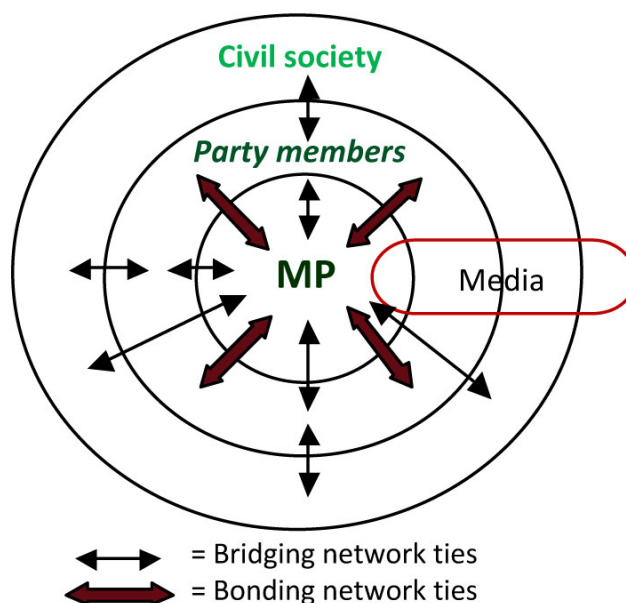


Figure 2.1: Political concentric circles

Figure 2.1 represents the network ties of the MP from a political perspective. Family and friends outside of the political sphere are not included, as this model is created for the specific purpose of explaining the functions of bridging and bonding from a PSC perspective. Within the centre of the concentric circles is the MP. The first circle around the centre point is the MP's close ties. Here one would find other members of his or her political party and some close party supporters. Discourse between these two circles often bonds or strengthens the ties in existence. Although membership is not entirely exclusive, as new members are welcome; political messages frequently remain circulating within this sphere, limiting the potential of the message to reach outer circles of influence. An advantage to having a large set of strong ties is that many of those ties will be willing to assist in political activities that benefit the MPs and their party. As a consequence, PSC is easily cultivated.

The third circle in figure 2.1 contains the public or civil society. When messages are able to filter out to this sphere, the bridging axis is taking place. The communication is bridging out to spheres outside of one's close network ties, often via both friends of close

friends or friends of associations within civic networks. If as a consequence, political action is activated within the civic sphere or outer circle of weak ties, for the benefit of the MP sending the message or request for action, then again PSC is cultivated.

The media (both mainstream and social media) holds a diverse place than those residing in the MPs close and distant concentric circles. This is due to the media playing a varied role in the dissemination of information in and between each political sphere. As there are a wide range of media platforms available (both new and old), the media can at times facilitate both the bridging and bonding of network ties. For example social media are applications that can assist in the bonding of close associations while bridging out to wider networks through their online friend's associations. Also, old media such as the television and radio can broadcast messages to a mass audience, also bridging out to distant concentric circles which in turn may or may not result in action taken by the wider public. They therefore hold a place in this model that crosses each sphere.

Further understanding can be gained through the introduction of Katz and Lazarsfeld's 'personal Influence' theory (Kadushin, 2006) developed from, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's (1948) 'two-step flow of communication' model. Lazarsfeld et al (1948) published a paper called 'The People's Choice', which analyzed the decision-making processes of voters during a presidential election campaign in 1940. They found that the flow of mass communication was not as direct as firstly presumed; that information distributed on a mass scale was firstly received by 'opinion leaders' (those seen as leaders in their particular fields of interest), who then filter and pass this information on to their acquaintances (who are often influenced by their opinions) (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). Figure 2.2 (p. 16) is a model developed by David Armano (2007) that demonstrates what he calls 'influence ripples' in word of mouth marketing using social media; where people who are perceived as being important, or leaders in their fields can easily distribute messages to those within their sphere of influence. This diagram embodies Lazarsfeld's et al., (1948) concept of 'opinion leaders'; exemplifying also the nature of the bridging/bonding axis and how strong and weak ties can be leveraged for the benefit of the individual posting the message.

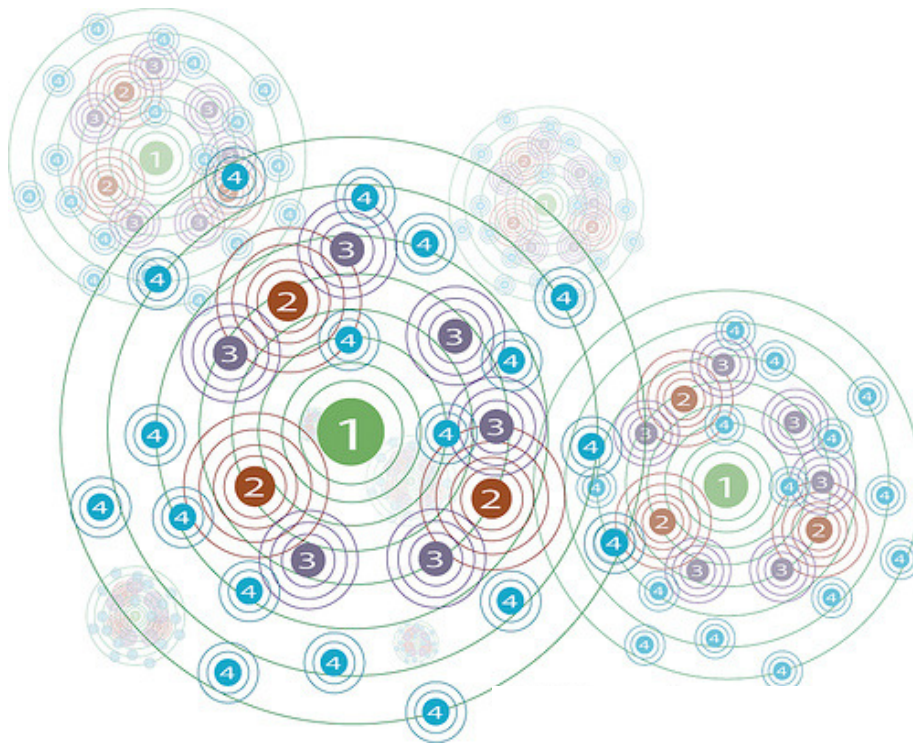


Figure 2.2: *Influence Ripples* (Armano, 2007)

The core circle is the original messenger. Each subsequent circle or ripple is the messaging bridging out to further circles of friends, with those friends or acquaintances often being influential individuals to whom others pay attention. The message moves through other agents with little assistance from the original author. This is no guarantee that the message will reach every single person in the extended concentric circles. However the person posting the message can rely on the possibility that those under his or her sphere of influence are also able to have a catalytic influence over those within their circles of influence. Through bridging into other spheres, the politician (messenger) raises his or her potential to cultivate PSC by accessing and potentially influencing wider social spheres into taking actions resulting in political gain.

Political Social Capital

There are a number of other theorists that define social capital in different terms due to its use in different contexts (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Bourdieu, 1985; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1998; Loury, 1992; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Ostrom & Ahn, 2003). Due to the theory of social capital being so broad and used in so many contexts, the concept of PSC has been developed. This author draws on Putnam's (1993), Granovetter's (1972, 1983) and Haythornthwaite's (2002) combined definitions of strong and weak ties and the bridging/bonding axis, to describe 'PSC' as: 'the social action activated through a network of relationships, using strong and weak ties and the actions of bridging and bonding, for the attainment of political gain.' This theoretical concept is developed specifically for the analysis of politicians when using SMAs such as Twitter, Facebook and blogging for their political advancement. The combined definitions of strong and weak ties and the bridging/bonding axis enable this researcher to analyse and understand how and why these new media are being used purely from a political gain perspective.

A further differentiation can be made in the types of PSC to be had. For example, party members can create PSC within their own parties, for example through gaining other members support on policies or ideas and therefore advancing politically within their own party ranks. They can cultivate PSC within parliament by gaining support and votes from other party members, or they can cultivate PSC within the public by acquiring more party members and mobilizing support within the civic arena. These levels of PSC will also depend on the strength of the MPs ties and their ability to leverage these ties for their political benefit.

PSC is therefore the basis from which the findings of the following research are analysed; forming the theoretical framework that will help to determine how or if NZ MPs use SMAs to leverage and create network ties for the advancement of their political aspirations. From this point, the following concepts of Web 2.0 technology and social media platforms, and their applications are now defined.

Web 2.0

The concept of 'Web 2.0' was coined by Tim O'Reilly, founder and CEO of O'Reilly Media, and Dale Dougherty, web pioneer and O'Reilly V.P, at a brain-storming session after the dot-com bubble burst around 2002 (O'Reilly, 2005). O'Reilly (2005) explains that Web 2.0 is different from that of Web 1.0. He describes the Web 2.0 platform as consisting of several defining principles:

- Rather than being packaged, services are home grown applications with specialized databases
- The architecture is one of participation; where the more people use it, the better and often bigger it gets
- Users are trusted as co-developers
- Collective intelligence is harnessed
- leveraging algorithmic data management through links and permalinks is utilised
- Multiple devices can be used to access the service
- User interfaces are lightweight and easily accessible.

According to O'Reilly (2005), Web 2.0 can be described as a place where "users pursuing their own 'selfish' interests build collective value as an automatic byproduct [sic]" (p. 8). This is where new media applications hold their value in the creation of social capital. The users have complete control over their utilisation of the media; cultivating alliances and network ties among multiple areas of interest through the numerous SMAs now available. These alliances can be leveraged for the purposes of personal and or collective gain for whoever is using the application; be they from the state, capital or civic arenas.

Web 2.0 and social media both fall under the category of 'new media' (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer & Johnston, 2009; Fraser, 2009; Lee, 2009; Stafford, 2008). 'Old' or 'traditional' media, such as newspapers, radio and television comprise of primarily one-way communication that is delivered with little or no participatory expectation from the sender (Lee, 2009). 'New media' such as social media on the other hand, are a combination of authorship-centric communication platforms that allow the user to create and publish

content specific to their needs and intentions (Solis, 2007). Here is where individuals within the state, capital and civil society are able to create their own messages, communicate directly between each other, create networks if interest and as a consequence raise their potential to cultivate social capital and PSC for themselves and those they are affiliated with.

Social Media Applications

SMA's such as blogs, wikis and forums are new forms of interactive media that "facilitate conversation and interactions between people" (Solis, 2007, p. 1). Solis, among others, describe social media as a fusion of technology and sociology; where information, insights, opinions, media and profiles can be created, shared, discovered and read in new and innovative ways (Perlmutter, 2008; Solis, 2007). SMA's are the platforms that use Web 2.0 technology. There are hundreds of these new media applications available, and it would be beyond the scope of this research to provide a complete overview. However according to Alexa (2010) some of the more popular social media platforms in New Zealand are: Facebook (3rd), YouTube (5th), blogger.com (11th), Twitter (12th), Bebo (14th), WordPress (16th), Flickr (26), LinkedIn (34th) and MySpace (45th) (n.p.).

Although outwardly similar, each of these platforms provides the user with a different function. For example, Facebook is an inclusive social networking site that allows users to engage in conversations with a vast number of people from around the world. LinkedIn on the other hand is more exclusive and provides a different function. It is still a social networking site, however subscribers are "experienced professionals from around the world, representing 150 industries and 200 countries...(and is where one)...can find, be introduced to, and collaborate with qualified professionals that you need to work with to accomplish your goals" (LinkedIn, 2010, n.p.). Also, even though Facebook, MySpace and Bebo are all social networking sites that appear to function in the exact same capacity, they cater to very different demographics. Bebo for example is known as the place for younger people (Quantcast, 2010), whereas Facebook is considered to be a site for a more mature audience having 44% of their subscribers aged between 18 – 34 and 13% of their subscribers over the age of 50 (Quantcast, 2010). MySpace on the other hand is known for its creative

industry connections; often being the place to go to connect with famous musicians and other music lovers.

Although these applications vary in the kinds of information sharing and communication tools they offer, they all however function as interactive communication platforms. They connect both friends and strangers, maintain relationships and assist in the sharing of personal and organizational information (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). What makes these applications so appealing is their potential for global exposure while bypassing traditional (old) media channels (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). This opens up whole new avenues of communication for those in politics as the media no longer have full power and control over the dissemination of messages in and between the state and civil society. It might be argued however, that these new platforms add to the already well documented issues of information quality versus quantity, and market, audience and content fragmentation (where the audience have to be selective of what they choose to view or participate in due to the sheer quantity of information available) (Stevenson, 1995; Tewksbury, 2005; Thusu, 2006; Wheeler, 1997). A rising concern is the potential loss of a coherent civil society due to the plethora of informative channels and distractions available that both fragment and insulate segments of society. This is an important area of concern that is discussed further on in this analysis.

For the politician, this technology still offers an additional opportunity for the potential cultivation of PSC. This is due to politicians having more channels to broadcast up-to-date information to previously under-engaged demographics such as younger social groups and those in remote areas (Cohen, 2007; Drummond, 2006; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Sanson, 2008; Wang, 2007; Ward, 2005). This is related to the fact that SMAs involve 'pull' rather than 'push' marketing techniques, whereby content producers use "non traditional and social media to attempt to entice already interested consumers...consist(ing) of creating valuable content for a defined audience which leads to the interested consumer seeking out next steps" (Phelps, 2009, n.p.). Unfortunately this brings to light another area of concern, as only those people already interested in the topic, person or organization may be seeking out the information being provided. This means that

the MPs messages may only be circulating amongst those already interested in the topics being discussed. With this in mind, the key literature surrounding the political use of the internet is now assessed.

Political use of the internet

In the early 1990's, politicians became aware of the growing importance of the internet for their political communication purposes (Gibson, 2004). Old media such as the television and radio were still the predominant channels of communication between the state and society. However by 1996, political players were beginning to see the internet as an important alternative to the mainstream media. High profile websites were being developed; signifying the first phase of serious political internet campaigning (Gibson, 2004). Although these websites were often seen as stagnant and somewhat lifeless, they offered an important alternative to traditional (newspapers and television) communication platforms available at that time (Gibson, 2004, Iyengar & McGrady, 2007). The introduction of an electronic mailing system (e-mail) made communication between the state and civil society even more reciprocal; assisting politicians in gaining valuable societal feedback and offering further methods of message distribution and voter persuasion (Gibson, 2004, Iyengar & McGrady, 2007). This two way communication was apparent in the 1997 British general election (often called the "first internet election" (Gibson, 2004, p. 2)). It was during this time, that experts observed new information and communication technologies (ICTs) being used extensively by political parties to communicate with voters (Gibson, 2004).

The internet now plays a major role in political campaigning globally (Calenda & Mosca, 2007; Iyengar & McGrady, 2007; Leberecht, 2008). Cavanaugh (2000, as cited in Wang, 2007) likens the internet to "a political Walmart...provid(ing) a one-stop shopping source for political information, video clips, candidate speeches and issue positions, up-to-date results, and ballot information" (p. 381). More importantly, unlike traditional media, the internet allows the participant to select the extent, and type of political information they want to engage in (Wang, 2007). For example, people interested in certain issues or topics can search, using a search engine such as Google, to find exactly what they are

looking for. Individuals no longer need to wade through, or listen to a mass of information, before hearing the content they are seeking. For some, this points to the internet as being a democratic vehicle that enables freer political engagement and communication (Kellner, 2004; Kincaid, 2008). However, for others, the internet is fraught with issues that undermine its democratic potential, rendering it inadequate as a replacement for traditional (face-to-face, television, newspapers) campaign tactics (Couper, 2000; Johnson, 2002; Milne, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1999; Schoen & Faas, 2005; Selm & Jankowski, 2006; Taylor, Bremer, Overmeyer, Siegel & Terhanian, 2001). One concern already mentioned, that researchers appear to discuss frequently when analysing the use of the internet, is audience and content fragmentation.

Fragmentation describes the prospective relationship between information and audiences (and hence commercial revenue), and how this relationship can be influenced by the volume of content and communication channels available (Tewksbury, 2005). A number of researchers have highlighted the potential for new media such as the internet to fragment, or disperse its potential market or audience (Tewksbury, 2005; Thusu, 2006; Wheeler, 1997). They claim that due to the sheer volume of web pages available, people are narrowing “their focus of their media consumption to pursue their individualized interests and needs” (Tewksbury, 2005, p. 332). The combination of content volume and individuals’ time constraints has caused fragmentation of both audience consumption and of the information available. Not only is this a problem for content providers when attempting to gain mass audience attention, it ultimately “renders many blind to the necessary linkages and interconnections with others in opposition or in counterhegemonic [sic] struggles” (Kellner, 1995, p. 20). If this is true, then the internet may be perpetuating fragmentation on a global scale; creating a world where people will be attentive only to issues that matter to them, at the expense of having a balanced and well informed perspective (Muhlberger, 2005). Communication between the state and civil society via the internet hinges upon the audience wanting to find or are interested in the topics being discussed. In the case of social media, this problem is somewhat countered by the links that many web pages offer to other similar or related sites. However those links are unlikely to take the reader to pages in opposition to the content at hand. In saying this, the content posted on a politicians ‘wall’

(main page of his or her social media site), automatically feeds into their friends and fans 'walls', and onto their subsequent friends' 'walls' etcetera. Messages are therefore not limited to reaching only those interested, but may potentially reach a much wider audience.

The rise of the internet as a major political communication platform has seen the emergence of new academic research covering multiple themes and paradigms of analysis relating to the internet and political communication (Calenda & Mosca, 2007; Iyengar & McGrady, 2007; Leberecht, 2008; Parker, 2006). The internet's ability to improve (or damage) civic engagement has been a focal point for many researchers (Baločkaitė, Morkevičius, Vaidelytė, & Žvaiauskas, 2008; Calenda & Mosca, 2007; Flew & Wilson, 2008), with a number of these researchers taking a particular interest in youth mobilization and engagement (Drummond, 2006; Wang, 2007; Ward, 2005). Ward (2005) for example, undertook an exploratory study of political youth websites during the European parliamentary elections of 2004. Using a quantitative, website content analysis approach, Ward (2005) "evaluates the websites of youth branches of political parties and youth organizations in Britain and Ireland to determine the amount and nature of information provided and engagement opportunities offered" (p. 233). He found that biographical content was the most common information to be found with issue positions almost entirely absent from three quarters of the websites analysed. This may be due to political communication strategists assuming that many young citizens would be more interested in the politicians themselves rather than issue positions and party ideals. What may be a consequence of this assumption is a youth uninformed on important political positions and therefore potentially making decisions (such as votes) based on peripheral and mostly insignificant information (possibly a cunning strategy from a political marketing perspective).

Other researchers have also taken a content focussed approach to analysing how politicians use the internet (Cullen & Houghton, 2000; Edwards, 2008; Gulati & Williams, 2007; Jarim & Wang, 2006; Ward, 2005; Ward, Lusoli, & Gibson, 2007). Edwards (2008) for example, used 'speech act theory' (which involves the creation of social relations through communication (Searle, 1979)), as a framework for analysing how Dutch politicians

communicate online with citizens. He claims his findings indicate that few Dutch politicians participate effectively online, as they frequently pass up valuable opportunities to use the internet to engage with the public.

Gulati and Williams (2007) on the other hand, looked at political website development from a historical perspective. They used a statistical analysis approach to examine the extent of house candidates' web presence in the United States (U.S.) 2006 elections, compared to previous election periods. Their findings indicated that "political campaigners resist using human-interactive features because they undermine their ability to control the message and maintain ambiguity in their communications" (Gulati & Williams, 2007, p. 446). The question arises here as to how one can come to this conclusion from an analysis of a technology, not of a producer of the content of that technology. Interestingly enough, it is around this time that social networks were growing in popularity, however still unpopular with politicians in general. With the strategic use of social media by U.S. politicians in the 2008 elections (Erikson, 2008; Garvin, 2008; Small, 2008; Thorton, 2008; Wright, 2008) these findings may now be outdated.

A number of other angles of enquiry have emerged in this area. For example, some researchers focus on structural issues of online communication and politics (Park, Kim & Barnett, 2004), while others address issues such as political transparency (Sifry, 2009), the digital divide within the political arena (Herrnson, Stokes-Brown & Hindman, 2007) and issues of internet regulation in presidential debates (Sampedro & Pérez, 2009). Other areas being studied include participant motivation and the use of computer-mediated political communication systems (Garramone, Harris & Pizante, 1986) and chat drift, synchronicity and civility in online political discussions (Ng & Detenber, 2005; Stromer-Galley & Martinson, 2009). Research has further emerged surrounding issues such as electronic communities and the transmission of information, focusing on how these virtual communities influence the formation of political attitudes (Hill & Hughes, 1997). In addition, studies have also been conducted examining the potential for political discussions in collaborative virtual environments (CVEs). Kaimakamis and Charitos, (2006) for example, found that those participating in real time online interactions or CVEs rarely engage in

political communication during this time. Investigations have also been made into civic participation in political processes through CMPC (computer mediated political communication) (Arabi, Lee, Won & Yeo, 2007). Arabi et al (2007) examined the political discussions of the two most popular on-line computer networks in Korea. They found that CMPC in Korea is still in the developing stages as public access to government established political forums is complicated with private information often being stored in an un-secure manner. Their results did however find that CMPC has facilitated in the gradual influx of information flowing from the political sphere into civil society.

Although research in the political use of the internet has produced a variety of perspectives, the majority still appear to be focussed on civic engagement during election periods, further angling research from a reader/user perspective. There appears to be little research either pertaining to the political use of the internet outside of a campaigning period, or from an authorship centric/producer standpoint. As technology has developed, and become more user-centred, further areas of research have however emerged. The following section examines current research surrounding the use of 'SMAs' as strategic political communication tools globally.

Political use of social media applications

Political communication is changing due to the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Flickr (Gueorguieva, 2008; Ward, 2008; Westling & Madison, 2007). Some researchers go as far as claiming that these communication platforms are indispensable campaign tools that have the power to influence the outcome of elections and help shape policy debates (Alarkon, 2008; Berg, 2008; Perlmutter, 2008; Thorton, 2008; Williams & Gulati, 2007). This may be in response to U.S President Barack Obama's use of new media applications in the 2008 presidential elections (Fraser & Dutta, 2008, p. 2). If his win was due, like some claim, to his use of SMAs, then it would be interesting to discover if Obama also used these new media platforms to mobilize support within the Democratic Party itself, creating intra-party alliances (PSC) to win his nomination.

Numerous themes are apparent within this area of research. Youth mobilization is again a subject often analysed in a number of articles (Fraser & Dutta, 2008; Fraser & Dutta, 2009; Lee, 2009; Gueorguieva, 2008; McCurry, 2009; Small, 2008). Sanson (2008), in his study titled 'Facebook and youth mobilization in the 2008 presidential election' claims that, "campaigns are ... capitalizing on the interactive nature of Facebook by identifying the producers and consumers of information and targeting young influential supporters" (p. 162). Sanson (2008) sees these social media platforms as changing how millennials (those born 1980-2000 (Small, 2009)) vote; creating a new form of politics that is more inclusive, responsive and dialogic between politicians and the public, and between party members themselves.

Alongside youth mobilization, are studies on political participation and civic engagement in general (Byrne, 2007; Erikson, 2008; Garvin, 2008; Mäkinen, & Kuira, 2008; Palser, 2007). Mäkinen and Kuira (2008) for example, analysed the role of new media during the two months after the 2008 elections in Kenya. They found that social media platforms such as wikis, weblogs, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and Twitter functioned as important channels for citizen communication and participatory journalism. They explained that "social media generated an alternative public sphere, which widened the perspectives about the crisis and established new kinds of citizen participation in discussing the situation" (Mäkinen, & Kuira, 2008, p. 329). Their findings highlight the important role that social media can play, especially in violent or dangerous circumstances, and in media ecologies where the mainstream media are state controlled or generally unreliable. They use an example where SMS (text messaging) was used to alert people about critical spots of violence in and around the country, with these alerts possibly saving many lives. However, issues of access and the digital divide have been overlooked in this argument as in reality, in countries such as Kenya the internet and new technologies such as cell phones and computers are restricted to the elite even more so than in developed countries.

A number of other areas of enquiry have also emerged. For example, topics such as microtargeting (Carlton, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; Ravindran, 2008; Sanson, 2008), volunteer recruitment (Gueorguieva, 2008), viral campaigning (Williams & Gulati, 2007) political

blogging (Alarkon, 2008; Coleman & Wright; 2008; Gandolfi, 2006; Lim, Swee, Tan, & Detenber, 2009; McGinty, 2007; Perlmutter, 2008; Stafford, 2008; Wright, 2008) and online political discussion catalysts (Himmelboim, Gleave & Smith, 2009) are growing areas of interest being explored. Researchers such as Carlton (2009) and Ravindran (2008) for instance, examine the potential of microtargeting through social media in the political sphere; explaining that savvy marketers (political and otherwise) are becoming aware of the power of social media and their applications. They claim that these marketers understand that gaining support via microtargeting within social media, involves engaging directly with consumers (civil society) through their unique motives for using a particular SMA (Carlton, 2009). According to Carlton (2009), “social media presents marketers with otherwise unavailable opportunities to target consumers based on their *interests and personalities*, not simply...(their)...demographics” (n.p.). Carlton (2009) explains that on SNSs such as MySpace, marketers are able to target their messages through the individuals’ self articulated passion categories, such as health, fitness, fashion and political interests. This is what is claimed to be ‘connected marketing’; where already expressed interests are targeted rather than particular demographic groups.

A number of news articles have been written regarding the management of a politician’s image in the social media arena (Azhar, 2007; Capell, 2006; Politicians’ campaigns invade MySpace, 2006). However, there appears to be few published studies that address this subject. Erikson (2008) used a semiotic analysis approach to analysing online political identity management within the framework of fandom in SNSs. Drawing on a quote from Habermas, Erikson (2008) explains that we live in a world where “all of our relations are mediated by images. The ability to control, alter, or influence a politician’s image marks a new way of doing politics, that may be more influential than engaging public authorities in a debate over the general rules of governing relations” (Habermas, 1991, as cited in Erikson, 2008, p. 14). What Erikson (2008) concludes, is that social media platforms are providing fans and users in general with more power to influence a political candidate’s image. This is exemplified in the numerous pictures, videos and blogs depicting politicians in various compromising situations both within, and outside of, the political arena. Unfortunately, this

also suggests that new media will tend to further trivialise politics and hollow out demographic processes into a mere game of image manipulation.

The literature in this area is evidently limited with topics such as this warranting further attention, however again not within the scope of this research. What is of interest to this researcher is how NZ Members of Parliament use SMAs. More specifically, how NZ MPs use SMAs for the cultivation of PSC. The following section attempts to uncover what research is available within this area of enquiry.

NZ MPs' use of social media and their applications

A number of online discussions and news articles have been published concerning NZ politics and new media. For example, blog sites such as Kiwiblog, (Farrer, 2009), peoplepoints (Reynolds, 2009) and Just Left (Just Left, 2009), are examples of social media blogging sites where political and general issues are openly discussed and debated. Oliver Woods (2009) in his weblog 'Oliver Woods: New Zealand politics, political economy, and other stories', writes an interesting blog called 'John Key, National and social media/digital civil society'. His blog discusses the influence, through mass weblog discussions, an online coalition of mixed political supporters can have when facing new and unwanted Acts of Parliament. Woods (2009) claims that NZ Prime Minister John Key was persuaded to back down from a total amendment of section 92A of the Copyright Amendment Act. The Act was to be modified "in order to harmonise our legal framework with the USA and Australia" (n.p.), something locals found difficult to accept. Wood (2009) states that:

What really is amazing is the fact that most media are attributing the backdown [sic] to the co-ordinated online 'Blackout' campaign by the excellent Creative Freedom Foundation. The issue had created an unlikely coalition of online activists from the left and the right, including National's usual unofficial spokesman in the blogosphere, David Farrar. The widescale [sic] blog and website blackout demonstrated the influence that online citizen-journalists and bloggers can have. It reinforces the fact

that websites are becoming an extremely valuable part of civil society that can speak with a united voice when it feels threatened (n.p.).

Woods (2009) further discusses how there are few NZ politicians who really understand the importance of social media with the exception of PM John Key and a handful of other National MPs. John Key currently boasts over 17,000 Facebook supporters, creating what Woods (2009) considers to be a coalition of bloggers and tech fiends; forming a potentially powerful and influential network of 'soft supporters'. These 'soft supporters' comprise of individuals, mostly online, who rather than physically (like hard supporters), are background discussion perpetuators, who generate and circulate content of a political nature using internet enabled platforms such as blogs and SNSs. Like hard supporters, they are strong network ties that use computer aided communication platforms such as blogging to strengthen and bond with their associations; often leveraging these ties to mobilise support and potentially cultivating PSC for the politician or party central to the network.

Newspaper articles discussing NZ politicians' use of social media platforms are becoming more frequent, however still sporadic. For example, the NZ Herald published a story in May, 2009, titled 'Key ahead in Facebook race for voters' (McNeilly, 2009). The article discussed the importance of social networking in NZ politics and the fact that Prime Minister John Key uses Twitter and YouTube for political communication purposes. Another article, published in the Manukau Courier in March, 2009 (Udanga, 2009), is of an interview with Manukau Mayor, Len Brown, who has launched his own Facebook page for the purpose of being more accessible (and more likely visible) to younger constituents. He is quoted as saying that "this technology is a powerful and direct conduit for us as a community and as a city to talk about issues of concern" (Brown, 2009, as cited in Udanga, 2009, n.p.). In 2007, the National Business Review published a story titled 'Politicians will be haunted by their past on the internet' (Thomas, 2007). It discussed the potentials and pitfalls of Web 2.0 platforms for politicians; highlighting issues such as power and control of messages, crisis situations arising from growing citizen journalism, and the need for the engagement of young voters.

Aside from these kinds of publications, there appears to be, at the time of writing this thesis, no academic research pertaining to this area of enquiry. Furthermore, even though there is international based research discussing social capital in the political arena (Birner & Wittmer, 2009; Ikeda & Richey, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Social capital, 2003), to date, there appears to be nothing published regarding NZ politics from a PSC perspective.

Gaps in the literature

It appears that the political use of the internet and the political use of social media by politicians outside of New Zealand are being studied by a number of researchers. It is also clear that the majority of this research is being done during or around elections; not taking into consideration the online behaviour of politicians outside of campaign periods. Furthermore, the majority of the research being done appears to be focussed on civic engagement and participation from a user centred perspective.

What has therefore emerged is the apparent gap in the literature concerning New Zealand MPs' use of SMAs for political communication purposes. More specifically, there appears to be a gap in the literature regarding the use of SMAs by NZ Members of Parliament from a PSC perspective. The literature surrounding the use of SMAs by politicians overseas and in NZ will therefore be enhanced by a further integration of a NZ perspective that focuses on the cultivation of PSC by producers not consumers of online political content.

Research questions

The broad question that therefore remains unanswered is:

- **To what extent do New Zealand Members of Parliament use social media applications for the cultivation of political social capital?**

To answer this question, four sub-questions are proposed:

- Which social media applications do NZ MPs use and how important are they considered for their political communication?
- For what political communication purpose do NZ MPs use social media applications?
- How do NZ MPs see social media applications facilitating their overall political communication activities?
- Does political social media application use vary depending on age, gender, and/or being a list or constituency member?

The following section explains the methods used to collect the data needed to answer these questions. The findings from the data collected then follow.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The following table (3.1) illustrates what data was needed, the data collection methods and how the information was interpreted for each sub question being asked. An insight into the development of the sub-questions is presented. This is followed by a discussion of the methodological design of this project. Participant sample and selection processes are examined followed by procedures, data collection and analysis methods.

Research Question	Data needed to answer research questions	Method of data collection	How data is analysed /interpreted
1) Which social media applications do NZ MPs use, and how important are they considered for their political communication?	MPs' perceptions on the types and value of different SMA used, indicated on a Likert scale	Survey questionnaire Structured questions Online analysis	Exploratory data analysis & frequency distribution to understand which SMAs are being used for political communication purposes
2) For what political communication purpose do NZ MPs use social media applications?	MPs' perceptions on the relative importance and purposes of the different SMA used, indicated on a Likert scale and by using structured questions	Survey questionnaire, Structured & open questions Interviews with communication personnel and politicians	Exploratory data analysis, frequency distribution & thematic analysis to understand politicians' use of SMAs for PSC cultivation
3) How do NZ MPs see social media applications facilitating their overall political communication activities?	Descriptive statistics on SMA use by NZ MPs in response to interviews, a survey which included a Likert scale	Survey questionnaire Semi-structured /open questions Interviews with communication personnel and politicians	Thematic analysis to understand if MPs use SMAs for political social capital cultivation
4) Does political social media application use vary depending on age, gender and/or being a list or constituency member?	Survey data about age, gender, list or constituency membership from MPs	Survey questionnaire Structured questions Semi-structured Interviews	Exploratory data analysis & frequency distribution to understand the potential impact of age, gender, list or constituency membership on SMA use by MPs

Table 3.1: Data collection methods and analysis

Research methods

Development of sub-questions

The aim of this research was to find out, the extent to which NZ MPs use SMAs for the cultivation of political social capital. To answer this question, a number of angles needed to be analysed such as what, why, and how were SMAs being used in a political communication capacity. In addition, it was important to find out if there were any factors that influenced the use of SMAs by NZ MPs such as age and gender? The following sub-questions were therefore developed: 1) Which SMAs do NZ MPs use and how important are they considered? (Two separate questions could have been asked, however it was easier for data analysis and the management of information to contain them within the same sub-category) 2) For what political communication purpose do NZ MPs use SMAs? 3) How do NZ MPs see social media applications facilitating their overall political communication activities? And 4) Does political social media application use vary depending on age, gender and/or being a list or constituency member? The following discussion explains the methods used to answer these questions including how MPs use, and their perceptions of, SMAs for the cultivation of PSC.

Methodological design

To answer these questions, statistical, quantitative and more contextual in-depth qualitative information was needed. This was due to the sub-questions asking for both frequencies and perceptions on the use and importance of SMAs in a political communication context. Due to the need for both statistics and perceptual understandings, a mixed methodological approach was decided upon. It included both a survey and a set of interviews with political and communication personnel that were active users of SMAs in the political arena. This allowed for a methodological triangulation of data (Collis & Hussey, 2003); whereby the survey findings (which were predominantly quantitative) would be enriched by the qualitative data emerging from the interviews. This further allowed critical motives and expressions to emerge that may not have been identified with the use of a single methodological approach to the study (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Wisker, 2001). Using both positivistic and phenomenological data gathering techniques enable the limitations of each method to be overcome. For example, using only positivist or statistical data that

measures frequencies would produce empirical evidence of measurements and averages of for example the use of SMAs. This paradigm on its own however, lacks the ability to gain contextual information and explore deeper motives behind the use of these new media applications. These are motives and expressions that can be unearthed by incorporating a phenomenological approach, such as interviews using an open or semi-structured approach. Interviews on their own, on the other hand also lack the empirical data needed in many investigations, as they are predominantly recordings of personal observations and opinions that may appear to lack the measurable and quantifiable data often required in certain research.

The survey contained both structured (simple and specific) and semi-structured (multiple choice and open) questions depending on the information sought. The structured questions helped to answer 'what' and 'how' SMAs are used, while the semi-structured questions assisted in answering those enquiries that called for opinion and personal preferences (A guide to good survey design, 1995; Collis & Hussey, 2003; Gillham, 2000). For example, survey question two asked, 'From the following SMAs listed below, indicate by using the scale provided, how important these SMAs are for your political communication purposes (see Appendix 5). A list of 12 SMAs were given based on research into the most popular new media applications in NZ. The MPs then indicated the importance of each application using a Likert scale that ranged from 1-5 (with 1 being highly unimportant and 5 being highly important). This resulted in the researcher being able to determine both which SMAs were being used and how important they were perceived to be.

Due to the concept of PSC being new, it was fair to assume that directly asking if the MP used these new media platforms for PSC cultivation was pointless. For this reason, a set of 17 communication functions were developed based on major themes arising from the literature review. These functions were a mixture of political communication outcomes that could in many cases (but not all) assist in the cultivation of PSC through SMAs. For example, fundraising and volunteer recruitment were direct examples of functions that produced PSC, as the funds and mobilization is the capital gained. Other examples were less obvious and hinged on the SMA successfully triggering an action that was of political gain to the

messenger. For example, engaging with younger people is a communication function often discussed as being important in the literature review. However this function on its own is just another avenue for the dissemination of political communication. It is only if, or when the younger constituents then vote or take action in a politically beneficial way for the MP, that PSC is cultivated. These themes became the basis from which sub-questions two and three (2: For what political communication purpose do NZ MPs use SMAs? & 3: How do NZ MPs see SMAs facilitating their overall political communication activities?) could be answered. Firstly, the MPs were asked to rate the importance of each communication function using the same Likert scale as before (see Appendix 5). They were then asked to specify which SMAs they felt were most effective in facilitating these political communication functions. By comparing the data from each of the tables (including the table used to answer sub-question one), it could be determined if the MPs were using SMAs for the purpose of cultivating PSC.

Further questions were asked such as age, gender and if the MP was a list or constituency member. This was for the purpose of determining if these variables impact on the use of these new media applications. This data therefore assisted in answering sub-question four. It was further asked within the survey 'who was answering the survey?' (MP/other), and 'if 'other', are you the primary person managing the SMAs under investigation?' This was to gain an insight into whether or not MPs managed their own SM or not. It was discovered, when contacting the secretaries of every Parliamentary Member prior to sending out the survey, that many of these secretaries did in fact assist in the management of their MPs SMAs. They also indicated that, if the MP was unable to answer the survey themselves, it would likely be passed on to them. From this information, it could be assumed that even though the MPs themselves may not have responded, those answering the survey on behalf of the MP had a good understanding of the use of these new platforms for their MPs political communication purposes. Therefore, the fact that the MP was not participating, had little bearing on the validity of the results.

Interview questions were semi-structured. The questions developed, were for the purpose of clarifying data collected from the survey. However, the interviews themselves

remained open so that other topics deemed important by the interviewee or that arose out of other discussions could be included in the analysis.

The important point to restate is that this research was an investigation into why SMAs were being used by NZ MPs to determine if it was for the purpose of cultivating PSC. The investigation measured MPs perceptions of the usefulness of SMAs when attempting to facilitate certain communication functions. These functions in turn held the potential to cultivate PSC for the politician concerned. It is therefore imperative that the reader understands that the results gained are a measure of the MPs perceptions of what these SMAs can do, not a conclusive evaluation of what these application really achieve for the producer of the content.

Sample and interview participant selection

Initially, the aim was to research the extent to which SMAs are used by NZ political party members. However, it became apparent that this was a large sample size that included a number of influential variables. For instance, variables such as one's position in the party could influence the use of SMAs, especially when looking at the cultivation of PSC. For example, some party members may be the PSC themselves, especially if they are volunteers who are actively involved in many aspects of the organisation. Other members such as secretaries may have no part at all to play in the political use of SMAs. It was therefore decided that a more manageable study would be better. For this reason, New Zealand Members of Parliament were chosen to be investigated on their use of social SMAs applications for the cultivation of PSC. As there were 122 NZ MPs in the House of Representatives at the time of drawing up the survey, 122 NZ MPs became the unit of analysis under investigation.

The post survey interviewees were both self-selected based upon an email sent to all MPs asking permission to interview them, and strategically selected for their active use of SMAs for political communication purposes and/or their role in their party's communication strategy. For example one interview was with the communications manager for one of the larger parties residing in government today. Others were with MPs who had indicated on

their survey that they would be happy to be interviewed. Fortunately, in all cases, each interviewee had an active interest in using SMAs for their political communication purposes. The interviewee number was selected based on the amount of further information needed to adequately triangulate the data gathered, and who was available to be interviewed at that time. Therefore 122 MPs were surveyed, and four interviews took place; bringing the total number of participants to 126.

Data collection and analysis

A survey was sent out to all 122 NZ Members of Parliament. It was posted, employing a questionnaire (see Appendix 6) containing both closed and open-ended questions. These were answered within a three week timeframe from the time of posting the survey. Thus a period of around 21 days was allowed for the survey process. After two weeks, a reminder in the form of an e-mail was sent out to all participants in the hope that more were able to respond. A phone call was also made to the secretaries/gatekeepers, and when possible, the communication managers from each party, prior to the MPs being sent the survey to improve the rate of survey return. Key politicians and communication personnel chosen for the unstructured interviews based on their use of SMAs were also contacted via telephone and email.

Two main methods of analysis were employed. Firstly, the nature of the research was exploratory, meaning that it is a new area being explored due to there being little or no other research or information available pertaining to this particular area under investigation (Collis & Hussey, 2003). For this reason exploratory data analysis techniques such as frequency distribution and dispersion measurement were used to analyse results from the questions that started with 'From the following list of?' (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Gillham, 2000). The more complex, statistical data arising from the research were presented in tables that indicated response rates (*n*), mean (*m*) and standard deviations (*SD*) (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

Where open-ended questions were used in both the survey and the interviews, such as ‘If you don’t use SMAs, please comment on your reasons why?’ a thematic analysis of the text has taken place with the data being incorporated throughout both the findings and discussion and analysis chapters. Major and reoccurring themes in the qualitative data were noted and compared with the data obtained from the survey. This enabled patterns in the combined data to emerge. Furthermore, it allowed for conflicting information to surface which aided in the deeper understanding of the perceptions surrounding the usefulness of SMAs in the cultivation of PSC.

To recap; ‘political social capital’ is understood as, ‘the social action activated through a network of relationships, using strong and weak ties and the actions of bridging and bonding, for the attainment of political gain’. The data collected from the survey and interviews, has therefore been used to show the extent to which NZ MPs perceive SMAs as being useful in facilitating certain political communication functions that in turn potentially cultivate PSC. For example, if an MP clearly believes that by using SMAs to communicate with other MPs from their party (close ties), or to mobilize support within the general public (weak ties), some form of political gain will result, then this would indicate that they do use these applications to maintain and cultivate PSC.

Complexities

Due to the unit under analysis being Members of Parliament, it is understandable that many were unable to participate. The main reasons given were that firstly, many MPs were just too busy at that time, while others (from the National Party in particular) were unable to respond due to there being a party regulation against members responding to individual surveys. Some just flatly refused due to not being interested in the subject, while others had already responded to a number of surveys from other students and had had enough for the time being. Nevertheless a total of 28 useable surveys were returned out of the 122 surveys sent out. The majority of the responses were from the Labour Party (50%), with the remaining scattered over National (14.3%), ACT (14.3%), the Green Party (17.9%) and United Future (3.5%). Unfortunately, no response came from the Progressive or Māori

Parties. Interestingly enough, one communications advisor for the ACT party was adamant that none of his MPs would be able to, or want to respond; he was proven wrong.

Attaining interviews was even more difficult with only four people (two MPs and two communication personnel) participating. Fortunately, a large number of interviews were not required, as those that did participate were communication personnel and MPs who demonstrated an excellent understanding of social media and used many of the platforms frequently for their political communication purposes. The responses in this instance were a 50/50 split between National and Labour representatives. To compensate for the response rate possibly being perceived as unrepresentative of the parties in parliament, an online review of all the social media used by all 122 NZ MPs was also undertaken. This did not involve analysing the content of the SMAs utilised, but only investigating which of these applications were being used by New Zealand Members of Parliament as a part of their political communication portfolios. This data is also included in the analysis section of this thesis to give more depth to the overall findings.

Ethical considerations

Due to the participants being important public figures, it was requested by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) that a number of precautions be put in place. Firstly, all surveys and interviews were conducted with a confidentiality/anonymity agreement in place. All data collected was to be kept in a secure, locked and computer protected place at Unitec for a period of five years. The only people who could have access to this information were to be the two supervisors and the researcher herself. And finally, direct permission was to be requested by the Speaker of the House to undertake this research.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The following chapter presents the data and statistics obtained from the surveys and interviews that took place. While each graph and table is accompanied by a description of the statistical findings, and includes some data obtained from the interviews, a more in-depth discussion takes place in chapter 5 (Discussion and Analysis).

Table 4.1 Total use of social media applications by NZ parties in parliament

Parties in govt	N^o of MPs (MPs)	% of Govt	Non use of SMAs (nu)	N^o of MPs using SMAs	% of SMA use per party
National	58	47.53	9	49	84.48
Labour	43	35.25	9	34	79.06
Green	9	7.38	2	7	77.77
ACT	5	4.10	1	4	80.
Progressive	1	.82	1	0	0
Maori Party	5	4.10	3	2	40.
United Future	1	.82	1	0	0

MPs = number of MPs in parliament; nu = number of politicians not using SMAs

An online analysis of NZ MPs social media use reveals that out of the 122 NZ Parliamentary Members to date, 96 (78.68%) use at least one form of social media for their political communication purposes. Table 4.1 is an indication of the percentage of social media used by each party based on this online analysis. What can be seen, is that National (MPs = 58, 84.48%), ACT (MPs = 5, 80%) and Labour (MPs = 43, 79.06%) have the highest percentage of SMA use per party, with others showing a lower level of SMA employment.

Figure 4.1: Online analysis of how many MPs are using specific SMAs

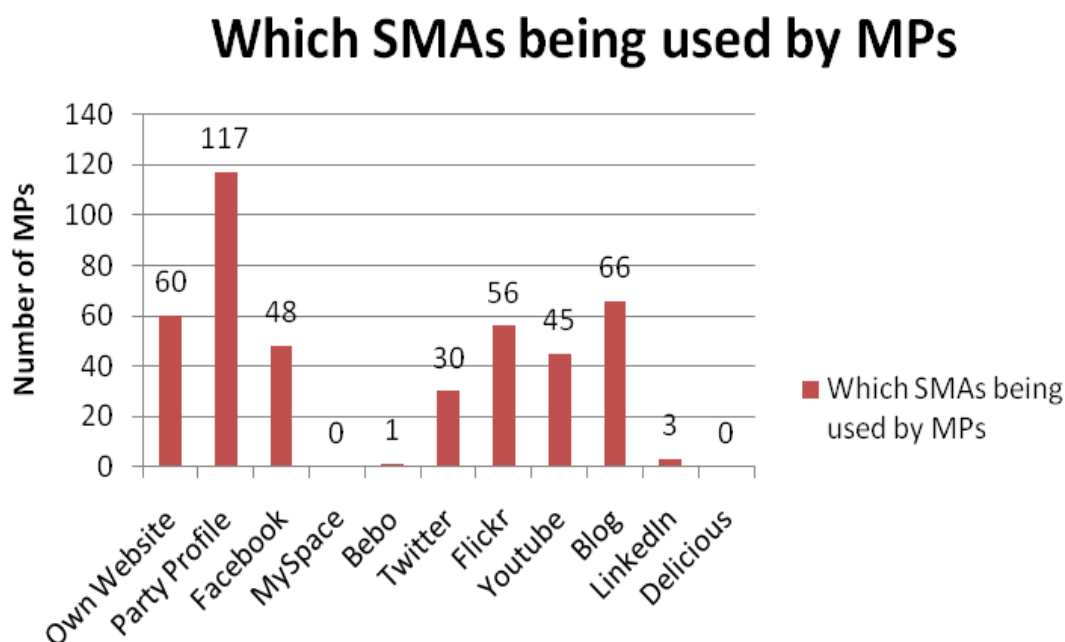


Figure 4.1 shows further results obtained from the online analysis of NZ MPs' use of social media for their political communication. The findings show that blogging is the most widely employed SMA with 66 MPs (54.10%) actively using this application, followed by Flickr (56 MPs, 45.10%), Facebook (48 MPs, 39.34%), YouTube (45 MPs, 36.88%), and Twitter (30 MPs, 24.59%). Three MPs appear to be using LinkedIn, while only one MP seems to be using Bebo. Finally, MySpace and Delicious show no current users registered at the time of conducting this research. 117 (95.90%) MPs do however have a party profile and 60 (49.18%) MPs also appear to have their own websites, with many incorporating SMAs into these platforms. Party profiles are not considered in this analysis as they are an indication of an online presence that may be required by the party, not any indication of the perceived importance of SMA use by any one MP. However, it is included in the table for interest purposes.

Q1a) Who is answering this survey (MP/Other)?

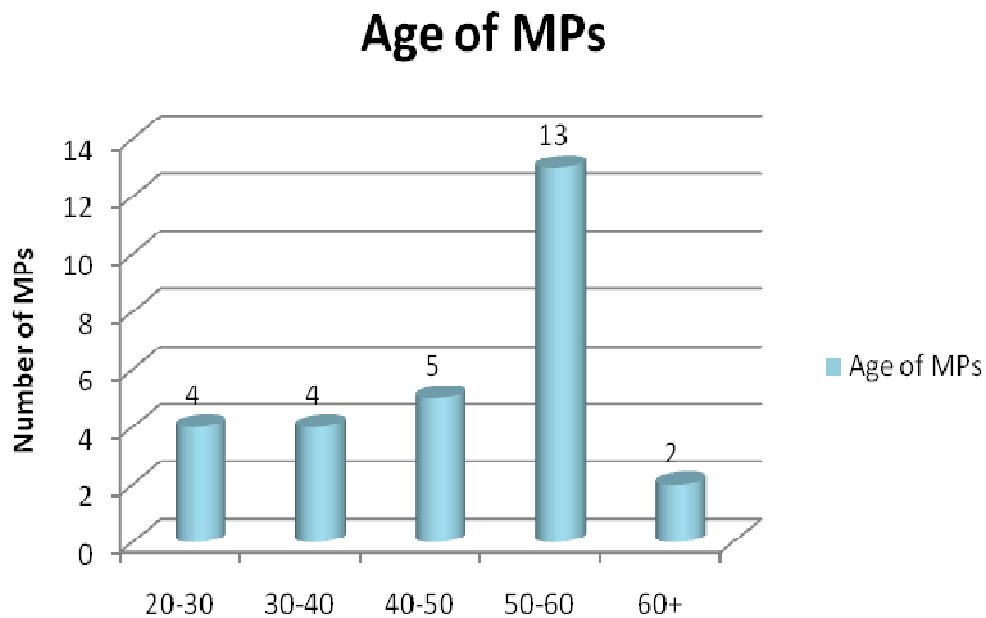
Question 1a's intention was to find out if the MPs themselves were answering the surveys, or whether they had someone else fill out the form for them. The results show, that out of the 28 MPs surveyed, 17 (61%) answered their own questionnaire while 11 (39%) had another person answer the survey on their behalf. As noted in the methodology section, telephone conversations with secretaries prior to sending out the survey revealed that, if the MP was not going to answer the survey personally, then they (the secretary) would be. Furthermore that most of the secretaries and assistants did have control over the management of the SMAs in question. Out of the 28 MPs responding or being responded on behalf, three were Ministers, leaving the remaining 25 participants as general and list MPs. The data may or may not be reflective of a number of variables, for example, interest in the subject, management of the media itself, age, being in opposition or not and if the MP is a constituency or list member. The impact of these potential variables may however become more evident once a comparative analysis of the data takes place in the analysis and discussion section further on.

Q1b) Are you the primary person managing the social media applications under investigation?

The aim of question 1b was to determine how many of the MPs were managing their own social media and how many had others managed it for them. The data indicates that 9 (32.14%) out of the 28 MPs do manage their own social media, while 2 (7.14%) claimed that someone else managed their content for them. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown, 17 (60.71%) decided not to respond to this question.

According to the interview transcripts, those higher up in the political ladder have access to more resources than those MPs at the lower levels in parliament. Therefore, it is more likely that the Ministers for example, would have their social media managed by someone else. Whereas MPs lower in the ranks would more likely be managing their social media on their own or with some guidance from the party's communication personnel. It is important to note however, that the interviewees also mentioned that even those who had their SM managed by others still played a key role in the content posted; with desired content often being sent via portable devices such as their Blackberries to their communication personnel to be posted at real time. Further concerns were raised that influence the management and use of social media by NZ MPs. For example, parties in opposition, apparently have far fewer resources than the ones elected. Interviewees claim that the government has communication personnel at hand that manage the majority of the governing MPs media content. Again this is not to say that these MPs do not have some control of the messages themselves, only that they have far more resources available, which assist in the utilisation and management of the vast amount of content needed for the strategic use of these new media platforms.

Figure 4.2: Q1c) Age bracket of MPs who answered this survey



Without the knowledge of the ages of all NZ MPs, it is difficult to determine the relevance of this data. Figure 4.2 indicates that the majority (46.42%) of the respondents are aged between 50 – 60 years old, with 17.85% being 40 – 50, 14.28% aged between 20 – 30 and 30 – 40 respectively, with only 7.14% being 60 years old or over. As more MPs are likely to be in their senior years and 78.68% of MPs use some form of social media, then it would be fair to say that age is not a defining factor in the use of SMAs for political communication purposes.

Q1d) Indicate your gender (For the MP)

Question 1d asked for the gender of the participants of the survey. Data revealed that 50% of the respondents were male and 50% female. Out of the 122 current NZ Members of Parliament, 39 (32%) MPs are female and 83 (68%) male (New Zealand Parliament, 2010). Comparing the data obtained from the survey with the data retrieved from the NZ parliamentary website, it could be possible (however not proven) that there are more females who are generally interested in this topic of enquiry than males due to there being less females in parliament however an equal gender response rate of the survey.

Q1e) Are you a list or constituency member?

The data shows that a much higher number of survey participants are list MPs ($n = 17, 60.71\%$) than constituency members ($n = 10, 35.71\%$), with only one respondent ($n = 1, 3.57\%$) failing to answer this question. Currently in parliament there are 70 (57.37%) general electorate and Maori electorate MPs and 52 (42.62%) members selected from party lists (New Zealand Parliament, 2010). This may indicate that list MPs are more interested in this area of enquiry.

Interviewees claimed that list members, due to not being constituent MPs, often have to work harder to gain support and votes, and are therefore more likely to engage in using new media platforms such as Facebook and blogging for their political communication purposes. However, without further investigation into list and constituent MPs' comparative use of SMAs, this claim is somewhat speculative.

Table 4.2: Q2) Indicate by using the scale provided, how important these social media applications are for your political communication purposes?

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>Mean (m)</i>	<i>Std. deviation (SD)</i>
Facebook	28	3.43	1.14
MySpace	8	1.63	.74
Bebo	11	1.82	.98
Twitter	19	2.89	.94
Flickr	11	2.27	1.19
YouTube	20	3.50	.95
Blogs	25	4.25	.78
Text Messaging	18	3.72	1.27
FriendFeed	5	1.4	.55
LinkedIn	8	1.38	.52
Delicious	5	1.6	.55

Note: The scale used ranged from 1 = Highly unimportant to 5 = Highly important

The above data shows that Blogs ($m = 4.25$, $SD = .78$, $n = 25$) are rated as highly important followed by Facebook ($m = 3.43$, $SD = 1.14$, $n = 28$), text messaging ($m = 3.72$, $SD = 1.27$, $n = 18$) and YouTube ($m = 3.50$, $SD = .95$, $n = 20$) all being considered moderate to important. YouTube however, appears to have a smaller standard deviation rate than Facebook and text messaging, indicating that more participants consider this SMA as an important rather than moderately important political communication platform. Twitter ($m = 2.89$, $SD = .94$, $n = 19$) appears to be unimportant however, although Flickr ($m = 2.27$, $SD = 1.19$, $n = 11$) only had a response rate of 11, the responses appear to be scattered between those who felt it is important to those who consider it highly unimportant. Bebo ($m = 1.82$, $SD = .98$, $n = 11$), MySpace ($m = 1.63$, $SD = .74$, $n = 8$), FriendFeed ($m = 1.4$, $SD = .55$, $n = 5$), LinkedIn ($m = 1.38$, $SD = .52$, $n = 8$) and Delicious ($m = 1.6$, $SD = .55$, $n = 5$) are all rated as highly unimportant with low standard deviation and response rates, indicating that most respondents agree with this rating.

Table 4.3: Q3) From the following list of political communication functions, indicate using the scale provided, how important you feel these communication functions are for your political communication activities?

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>Mean (m)</i>	<i>Std. deviation (SD)</i>
<i>Engaging with younger people</i>	28	4.46	.64
<i>Policy communication with the public</i>	27	4.4	.81
<i>General communication with the public</i>	26	4.27	.72
<i>General communication with other party members</i>	27	4.26	.81
<i>General communication with the media</i>	27	4.23	.91
<i>Volunteer recruitment /mobilization</i>	26	4.19	.76
<i>Enhancing personal public image</i>	27	4.11	.89
<i>Policy communication with the media</i>	26	4.0	1.02
<i>Policy communication with other party members</i>	24	4.0	1.06
<i>Monitoring general public opinion</i>	27	3.93	1.04
<i>Communicating with NZs overseas</i>	25	3.96	1.14
<i>Gaining feedback on policies/issues</i>	26	3.85	1.05
<i>Fundraising</i>	25	3.8	1.0
<i>Monitoring activities of other parties' /members /MPs</i>	28	3.75	1.04
<i>General communication with other MPs</i>	28	3.64	1.34
<i>Policy communication with other MPs</i>	26	3.58	1.36
<i>Crisis communication / damage control</i>	24	3.38	1.21

Note: The scale used ranged from 1 = Highly unimportant to 5 = Highly important

Communication functions are drawn from the literature review and are ranked in order of perceived importance

Table 4.3 is an indication of the perceived importance of key political communication functions for NZ MPs. The response rate (n) appears high for all functions; ranging from 28 – 24. Also the scores appear reasonably high for all categories, indicating that each function holds some importance for each participant. The scale however is not an objective measure of the importance of these functions, as respondents may give slightly different ratings for each purpose mentioned. What does make these findings interesting, are the relative measures that allow these functions to be compared.

Engaging with younger people ($m = 4.46$, $SD = .64$, $n = 28$) rated as a highly important political communication function for many participants, alongside policy communication with the public ($m = 4.4$, $SD = .81$, $n = 27$), general communication with the public ($m = 4.27$, $SD = .72$, $n = 26$), general communication with other party members ($m = 4.26$, $SD = .81$, $n = 27$) and general communication with the media ($m = 4.23$, $SD = .91$, $n = 27$). Volunteer recruitment and mobilization ($m = 4.19$, $SD = .76$, $n = 26$), enhancing personal public image ($m = 4.11$, $SD = .89$, $n = 27$), policy communication with the media ($m = 4.0$, $SD = 1.02$, $n = 26$) and policy communication with other party members ($m = 4.0$, $SD = 1.06$, $n = 24$) all rated as important political communication functions with volunteer recruitment and enhancing personal public image having lower standard deviation rates and therefore more consistent ratings of perceived importance. Monitoring general public opinion ($m = 3.93$, $SD = 1.04$, $n = 27$), communicating with New Zealanders overseas ($m = 3.96$, $SD = 1.14$, $n = 25$), gaining feedback on policies and issues ($m = 3.85$, $SD = 1.05$, $n = 26$), fundraising ($m = 3.8$, $SD = 1.0$, $n = 25$), monitoring activities of other parties/members/MPs ($m = 3.75$, $SD = 1.04$, $n = 28$), general communication with other MPs ($m = 3.64$, $SD = 1.34$, $n = 28$), policy communication with other MPs ($m = 3.58$, $SD = 1.36$, $n = 26$) and crisis communication and damage control ($m = 3.38$, $SD = 1.21$, $n = 24$) all ranked as moderately important to important. However, as the mean score appears to decrease, the standard deviation rate increases, indicating that from monitoring activities of other parties /members /MPs to crisis communication and damage control, participants had a wider variation of viewpoints, thus rendering these functions potentially less important for some and more important for others, than the data initially suggests as the range would have had to be spread across answers ranging from highly unimportant to highly important for this data to be revealed.

Q4) Which social media applications do you feel are most effective in facilitating the following political communication functions?

Table 4.4: Q4a) Engaging with younger people

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	26	92.85
MySpace	2	7.14
Bebo	4	14.28
Twitter	6	21.42
Flickr	3	10.71
YouTube	5	17.85
Blogs	7	25
Text Messaging	5	17.85
FriendFeed	2	7.14
LinkedIn	2	7.14
Delicious	2	7.14

Table 4.4 reveals the results pertaining to the perceived importance of SMAs when attempting to engage with younger people. Nearly all respondents mention Facebook ($n = 26$, 92.85%) as being perceived as a significantly more important platform than all other SMAs when talking about connecting with younger people. All other social media shows a minor level of perceived usefulness overall.

Interview data revealed that engaging with younger people is an important focus for politicians utilising SMAs. According to one interviewee, taking demographics into consideration, it is the younger generation who are using social media; therefore it is a critical political communication tool for this purpose. Furthermore, that although increasingly older generations are taking these applications up, they are still more reliant on using more traditional media as their primary information resource.

Table 4.5: Q4b) Volunteer recruitment/mobilization

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	13	46.42
MySpace	1	3.57
Bebo	1	3.57
Twitter	1	3.57
Flickr	0	0
YouTube	2	7.14
Blogs	4	14.28
Text Messaging	6	21.42
FriendFeed	0	0
LinkedIn	0	0
Delicious	0	0

As before, table 4.5 shows Facebook ($n = 13$, 46.42%) as being seen as the most useful social media application for generating volunteer recruitment and mobilization. FriendFeed, LinkedIn and Delicious by comparison had a zero response rate indicating no perceived importance of these SMAs for this political communication function. The overall response rate is also noticeably low, indicating that social media is yet to be considered an important tool in this area under examination by the respondents of this survey.

Interviewees had a mixed response to this area of enquiry, suggesting on one hand that at this time SMAs are not widely used for volunteer recruitment and mobilisation, however could well be in future as the use of this technology progresses. However on the other hand, it is claimed that social media such as Facebook and Twitter are tools being incorporated into mobilizing strategies as it has a potentially wide and instant reach that enables politicians to rally support (bridge and leverage weak ties) quickly and in large numbers. It appears however, that the difficulty lies in moving people up the scale from being for example, someone who will happily send emails, to becoming active members who are willing to deliver leaflets, becoming donators or even event organisers.

Table 4.6: Q4c) Fundraising

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	8	28.57
MySpace	0	0
Bebo	1	3.57
Twitter	1	3.57
Flickr	0	0
YouTube	2	7.14
Blogs	5	17.85
Text Messaging	3	10.71
FriendFeed	0	0
LinkedIn	0	0
Delicious	0	0

Fundraising is another political communication function of interest in this research. Table 4.6 indicates how important MPs perceive social media to be for facilitating this communication function. As with the previous tables, Facebook ($n = 8$, 28.57%) has proven to be of greater importance than other SMAs. Blogs ($n = 5$, 17.85%) rated second with text messaging ($n = 3$, 10.71%) and YouTube ($n = 2$, 7.14%) following close behind. Overall, it appears that Facebook and blogs (still only slightly) are the only social media that have any real perceived use for political fundraising purposes, with all the other SMAs considered almost useless. As with volunteer recruitment and mobilization, interview data reveals that there is a mixed opinion of the value of social media for this function, with some believing in its utility while others feel they have yet to see some tangible evidence of SMAs worth for fundraising purposes.

Table 4.7: Q4d) General communication with other MPs

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	7	25
MySpace	0	0
Bebo	0	0
Twitter	1	3.57
Flickr	0	0
YouTube	0	0
Blogs	6	21.42
Text Messaging	7	25
FriendFeed	0	0
LinkedIn	0	0
Delicious	0	0

Communication with other MPs through social media also appears to be unimportant overall for NZ MPs. Facebook ($n = 7$, 25%) and text messaging ($n = 7$, 25%) both ranked highest with blogs ($n = 6$, 21.42%) close behind. Twitter ($n = 1$, 3.57%) was mentioned only by one participant, while MySpace, Bebo, Flickr, YouTube, FriendFeed, LinkedIn and Delicious had no response at all. Judging from the above information it would seem that the majority of the MPs surveyed see little use for social media when attempting to communicate with other MPs. Those that do however feel that certain social media can be used to connect with other MPs, appear to find Facebook, text messaging and blogs most useful.

Table 4.8: Q4e) General communication with other party members

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	13	46.42
MySpace	1	3.57
Bebo	1	3.57
Twitter	2	7.14
Flickr	1	3.57
YouTube	2	7.14
Blogs	8	28.57
Text Messaging	5	17.85
FriendFeed	1	3.57
LinkedIn	1	3.57
Delicious	1	3.57

Using Social media to communicate with other party members such as members of the public who have joined the party, appears to be a little more important for NZ MPs. Facebook ($n = 13$, 46.42%) again ranks highest in perceived usefulness with all others gaining minor support. It is interesting that Facebook, a highly public social media platform compared to text messaging which is highly private, is seen as most useful when communication with others within their particular party. This may reflect the strategic nature of using these SMAs when engaging in political communication. MPs may feel that by allowing or encouraging the public to see this open discourse between party members, makes them seem more available and easier to communicate with. This is however only a speculation of this researcher and not based on any evidence.

Table 4.9: Q4f) General communication with the public

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	12	42.85
MySpace	1	3.57
Bebo	2	7.14
Twitter	4	14.28
Flickr	2	7.14
YouTube	5	17.85
Blogs	14	50
Text Messaging	2	7.14
FriendFeed	1	3.57
LinkedIn	1	3.57
Delicious	1	3.57

Table 4.9 demonstrates that certain social media are perceived to be useful when communicating with the public. In this instance blogs ($n = 14$, 50%) are seen as more useful as is Facebook ($n = 12$, 42.85%), both far outweighing the perceived importance of all the other SMAs listed.

Data obtained from interviews also suggest that social media are invaluable tools for communicating with the public. Interviewees claim that the time and effort to contact large numbers of people are minimised to a couple of clicks of a computer mouse. Also, that SMAs hold an enormous amount of advertising potential for an incredibly low entry cost, making SMAs key tools in political communication strategies.

The problem here however, is that the actual potential of these new media platforms have yet to be analysed from a consumer perspective. Little is known about how many people, or who these messages are actually reaching. These messages may therefore only be circulating around groups already interested in the subject at hand.

Table 4.10: Q4g) General communication with the media

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	5	17.85
MySpace	1	3.57
Bebo	2	7.14
Twitter	3	10.71
Flickr	1	3.57
YouTube	1	3.57
Blogs	14	50.
Text Messaging	3	10.71
FriendFeed	1	3.57
LinkedIn	1	3.57
Delicious	1	3.57

It appears from the survey data, that for some New Zealand MPs, blogging ($n = 14$, 50%) is perceived as the most beneficial new media application to use when communicating with the mainstream media. According to those interviewed, SMAs such as blogging can be used strategically to make publically available information that may not make mainstream news. It is claimed however that this new medium can both benefit and harm the MP, as just like many mainstream news information, blogs for example, can be incredibly one-sided; failing to present a balanced viewpoint on important issues or situations. In saying this, researchers such as Richard Davis (2010), (Brigham Young University political science professor and author of 'Typing Politics') claim that "people who closely follow both political blogs and traditional news media tend to believe the content on blogs is more accurate" (n.p.). Many journalists now look to political blogging for their new stories; selecting bites of information that is then rewritten (sometimes completely out of context from the original information published), for the mainstream media channels.

Table 4.11: Q4h) Policy communication with other MPs

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	3	10.71
MySpace	0	0
Bebo	0	0
Twitter	2	7.14
Flickr	0	0
YouTube	1	3.57
Blogs	10	35.71
Text Messaging	0	0
FriendFeed	0	0
LinkedIn	0	0
Delicious	0	0

Only four SMAs are mentioned in table 4.11: blogs ($n = 10$, 35.71%), Facebook ($n = 3$, 10.71%), Twitter ($n = 2$, 7.14%) and YouTube ($n = 1$, 3.57%). As table 4.11 demonstrates, blogs are perceived as being far more useful in facilitating policy communication with other MPs, with the next, and far less important social media being Facebook.

Table 4.12: Q4i) Policy communication with other party members

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	3	10.71
MySpace	0	0
Bebo	0	0
Twitter	1	3.57
Flickr	0	0
YouTube	2	7.14
Blogs	12	42.85
Text Messaging	3	10.71
FriendFeed	0	0
LinkedIn	0	0
Delicious	0	0

Policy communication with other party members is, like policy communication with other MPs, relatively unimportant when considering the use of social media. In saying this, once again blogs ($n = 12$, 42.85%) appear to stand out as the preferred social media application for those who feel this platform is useful for this political communication function. Facebook ($n = 3$, 10.71%) and text messaging ($n = 3$, 10.71%) had slight ratings with YouTube ($n = 2$, 7.14%) and Twitter ($n = 1$, 3.57%) also being mentioned. MySpace, Bebo, Flickr, FriendFeed, LinkedIn and Delicious all had a zero response indicating that there is no potential value in these applications for this particular communication purpose.

Table 4.13: Q4j) Policy communication with the public

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	7	25
MySpace	0	0
Bebo	1	3.57
Twitter	3	10.71
Flickr	0	0
YouTube	6	21.42
Blogs	13	46.42
Text Messaging	1	3.57
FriendFeed	0	0
LinkedIn	0	0
Delicious	0	0

As a political communication function, one would assume that effective policy communication with the public would rank high as a desired political outcome. As table 4.13 demonstrates, social media SMAs are to some extent perceived as being useful tools that facilitate this desired outcome. Blogging ($n = 13$, 46.42%) has again way surpassed all other social media with Facebook ($n = 7$, 25%) receiving almost half of that response rate.

As with interview data discussing table 4.8 'general communication with the public', policy communication with the public is considered by the interviewees an important political communication function. Interview data confirms that certain social media applications such as blogs and Facebook are perceived to be vital communication tools that aid in the facilitation of this function, and are being increasingly used by politicians nationwide.

Table 4.14: Q4k) Policy communication with the media

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	4	14.28
MySpace	1	3.57
Bebo	1	3.57
Twitter	3	10.71
Flickr	2	7.14
YouTube	3	10.71
Blogs	13	46.42
Text Messaging	2	7.14
FriendFeed	1	3.57
LinkedIn	1	3.57
Delicious	1	3.57

Policy communication with the media may not appear to be an important political communication function at a glance due to its low response rate in general. However table 4.14 shows that it rates just as important as ‘policy communication with the public’ when discussing the use of SMAs. As in table 4.13, blogs ($n = 13$, 46.42%) out rank all other social media with Facebook ($n = 4$, 14.28%) on the other hand gaining a mere four responses.

Interview data discussing the importance of ‘general communication with the media’ (see table 4.9, p. 64), relates also to the use of SMAs perceived as useful in the facilitation of policy communication with the media. The same benefits, issues and concerns apply with SMAs such as blogs and Facebook being perceived by interviewees as being strategic tools to utilise to facilitate this function.

Table 4.15: Q4I) Crisis communication / damage control

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	4	14.28
MySpace	1	3.57
Bebo	1	3.57
Twitter	2	7.14
Flickr	1	3.57
YouTube	1	3.57
Blogs	8	28.57
Text Messaging	2	7.14
FriendFeed	1	3.57
LinkedIn	1	3.57
Delicious	1	3.57

Table 4.15 is an indication of how useful social media is perceived to be for New Zealand MPs when engaging in crisis communication and damage control. Although at minimum, one response was given for each social media application listed, the overall response rate was very low, indicating a general disinterest in using SMAs for this political communication function. This may indicate an assumption that in a crisis situation the mainstream media will be accessible. As before however blogs ($n = 8$, 28.57%) ranked highest followed by Facebook and the remaining SMAs. Data gathered from interviews however, suggest that SMAs such as blogging and Facebook assist greatly in communicating with the public in crisis situations and when damage control is needed. Contrary to the data in table 4.3, interviewees claim that being able to interact with the public in real time and being able to respond to potentially damaging messages by giving their side of the story, unedited by mainstream media, is important and SMAs assist greatly in this political communication function.

Table 4.16: Q4m) Communicating with NZs overseas

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	17	60.71
MySpace	0	0
Bebo	1	3.57
Twitter	3	10.71
Flickr	1	3.57
YouTube	1	3.57
Blogs	9	32.14
Text Messaging	0	0
FriendFeed	0	0
LinkedIn	0	0
Delicious	0	0

Certain SMAs appear to be perceived as useful when communicating with New Zealanders overseas. In this instance, Facebook ($n = 17$, 60.71%) has emerged in table 4.16 as a reasonably useful tool when engaging in political communication with internationally placed Kiwis; possibly due to its potentially wide use and geographical reach. Blogs ($n = 9$, 32.14%) also appear to be perceived as useful yet marginally in comparison with Facebook.

Little was said by interviewees regarding this political communication function. It appears that the main focus of MPs and party communication personnel is to gain votes from as many people as possible; getting the message out in whatever medium available. The fact that SMAs like Facebook have the potential to reach a global audience means that New Zealanders overseas are possibly getting the messages anyway, and therefore MPs may not feel that they need to focus their time on facilitating this function.

Table 4.17: Q4n) Monitoring general public opinion

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	11	39.28
MySpace	4	14.28
Bebo	3	10.71
Twitter	4	14.28
Flickr	2	7.14
YouTube	2	7.14
Blogs	12	42.85
Text Messaging	3	10.71
FriendFeed	2	7.14
LinkedIn	2	7.14
Delicious	2	7.14

According to the results in table 4.17, SMAs are perceived as useful by some MPs for the purpose of monitoring general public opinion. The data shows that overall every social application listed is used by at least two MPs for this particular political communication function. Blogs ($n = 12$, 42.85%) score highest with Facebook ($n = 11$, 39.28%) ranking close behind in perceived usefulness. MySpace ($n = 4$, 14.28%) and Twitter ($n = 4$, 14.28%) are both ranked evenly, however substantially lower than Facebook and blogs. Bebo ($n = 3$, 10.71%) and text messaging ($n = 3$, 10.71%) are mentioned however only by a small number of respondents.

Table 4.18: Q4o) Gaining feedback on policies/issues

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	6	21.42
MySpace	1	3.57
Bebo	2	7.14
Twitter	2	7.14
Flickr	1	3.57
YouTube	2	7.14
Blogs	17	60.71
Text Messaging	2	7.14
FriendFeed	1	3.57
LinkedIn	1	3.57
Delicious	1	3.57

Table 4.18 indicates that certain SMAs are perceived as useful tools when feedback is sought by NZ MPs on policies and political issues. Each social media application listed has scored at least once with blogs ($n = 17$, 60.71) again emerging as being perceived as significantly more useful than all other SMAs. Facebook ($n = 6$, 21.42%) is ranked second, although far less important than blogs in this instance.

Interviewees claim that feedback is one of the major benefits of using social media platforms. They say it is a different and convenient way for people to give feedback to the politicians and also for the politicians to gauge what the public thinks on issues and public concerns. However, even though these benefits are noted, it is further claimed that the difficulty lies in knowing what feedback to listen to as there can be a huge number of responses to any one issue. On top of this, is the concern that the feedback may be coming mostly from those in opposition looking for an argument, or from one extremely vocal person who already agrees with the point being made. This is when social media potentially becomes a hindrance; perpetuating nonsensical mud-slinging between parties rather than opening up debates between those outside of the central political arena.

Table 4.19: Q4p) Monitoring activities of other parties/members/MPs

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	11	39.28
MySpace	2	7.14
Bebo	3	10.71
Twitter	7	25
Flickr	2	7.14
YouTube	3	10.71
Blogs	13	46.42
Text Messaging	2	7.14
FriendFeed	2	7.14
LinkedIn	2	7.14
Delicious	2	7.14

Table 4.19 shows the results from the question ‘Which SMAs do you feel are most effective in facilitating the monitoring of activities of other parties/members/MPs? A number of MPs have indicated that they feel at least one of the SMAs mentioned are useful, however again it is blogs ($n = 13$, 46.42%) and Facebook ($n = 11$, 39.28%) that are emerging as the preferred new medium of choice.

Table 4.20: Q4q) Enhancing personal public image

	<i>Response rate (n)</i>	<i>% of perceived importance</i>
Facebook	17	60.71
MySpace	2	7.14
Bebo	2	7.14
Twitter	4	14.28
Flickr	6	21.42
YouTube	4	14.28
Blogs	12	42.85
Text Messaging	2	7.14
FriendFeed	2	7.14
LinkedIn	2	7.14
Delicious	2	7.14

Table 4.20 demonstrates the perceived utility of SMAs when considering the MPs personal public image. In this instance Facebook ($n = 17$, 60.71%) appears to be perceived as moderate to highly valuable with blogs ($n = 12$, 42.85%) being considered moderately useful for this political communication function.

Data obtained from interviews suggest that there is definitely a component of self promotion in social media use. Furthermore, it is claimed that even though politicians represent themselves, they are also carrying the reputation of the whole organization and the names that are behind their fellow politicians. This is apparently a collective responsibility with the same principles applying to all media use. Nevertheless, in the words of one political communication expert, “there is a little bit of a film star in every politician, they see it as an opportunity to write their own reviews” (personal communication, October 29, 2009). However, it is claimed that these are also reviews, views and responses they feel are serious issues worth discussing rather than sole self promotional tactics.

Table 4.21: Sum of responses given for each social media application discussed in order of perceived importance in the facilitation of the communication functions examined above.

	<i>Sum of responses overall (n)</i>	<i>Possible response rate overall</i>	<i>Total % of responses</i>
Blogs	177	476	37.18
Facebook	167	476	35.08
Twitter	49	476	10.29
Text Messaging	48	476	10.08
YouTube	44	476	9.24
Bebo	25	476	5.25
Flickr	22	476	4.62
MySpace	18	476	3.78
FriendFeed	14	476	2.94
LinkedIn	14	476	2.94
Delicious	13	476	2.73

Table 4.21 is an aggregation of the total number of responses each SMA received when discussing the political communication functions listed. The above data was calculated by adding up all the responses for each social media application listed. This was then calculated against the total number of responses possible.

Out of the 476 responses possible for each SMA in each category, blogging ($n = 177$, 37.18%) and Facebook ($n = 167$, 35.08%) have stood out in all categories as being perceived as the most useful SMAs for the political communication functions specified. Although Twitter ($n = 49$, 10.29%) is often cited in the media as a major player in the social media arena for personal and business communication purposes, it ranks only marginally higher in usefulness than text messaging ($n = 48$, 10.08%) for politicians.

The following chapter analyses the data presented above, using PSC as a framework to determine and understand how New Zealand members of parliament use SMAs for their political communication purposes. In doing so, it may then become apparent if NZ MPs do use these new media platforms for the cultivation and leverage of PSC for themselves and/or their political parties.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The following discussion and analysis looks at all of the data presented in chapter five, to determine the extent to which New Zealand Members of Parliament (MPs) use SMAs for the cultivation of PSC. A comparative analysis of the data sets takes place incorporating additional data from the interviews that were conducted with certain MPs and communication personnel. The following chapter is therefore structured into four main sections based on the sub-research questions proposed, with a final section that includes areas worth considering that fall outside of the scope of the questions discussed.

To recap, the broad question is: 'To what extent do NZ Members of Parliament use SMAs for the cultivation of PSC?' Remembering that PSC equates to, 'the social action activated through a network of relationships, using strong and weak ties and the actions of bridging and bonding, for the attainment of political gain.' The sub-questions are a) Which SMAs do NZ MPs use? b) For what political communication purpose do NZ MPs use SMAs? c) How do NZ MPs see SMAs facilitating their overall political communication activities? And d) Does political social media application use vary depending on age, gender, and/or being a list or constituency member?

Which social media applications do NZ Members of Parliament use and how important are they considered for their political communication?

Data from the online analysis of SMAs presented in table 4.1 (p. 40) and figure 4.1 (p. 41) indicates which SMAs are being used by NZ MPs for their political communication purposes. The findings show that blogging is the most widely employed SMA with 66 MPs actively using this application, followed by Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Survey data showed similar results with blogs and Flickr also being perceived as more important for political communication purposes than Facebook. Cross-referencing qualitative data with

the quantitative data collected confirms that blogging and Facebook are perceived as being the most valuable online communication platforms overall. In terms of cultivating PSC, MPs appear to leverage their strong ties, for example their Facebook friends/fans, to bridge and leverage their friends' strong and weak ties, thus exposing their messages to as many people (with a number being opinion leaders in their sphere of influence) as they can. If any one of these fans then chooses to support the MP by taking actions such as voting or volunteering, then PSC is cultivated.

Some conflicting evidence arises however in the case of the online photo sharing application Flickr. Data from the online analysis shows that a high number of MPs are using this application (more so than Facebook), however in the survey, Flickr is not nearly as important as blogging and Facebook in terms of perceived importance in facilitating political communication. Also, it appears that for a number of interviewees, Twitter is also a valuable platform for the mass distribution of political messages. This micro-blogging tool enables their MPs (or themselves) to get messages out to their supporters quickly and in real time. However, the survey demonstrates that Twitter is substantially lower in perceived importance than blogging, Flickr and Facebook.

For what political communication purpose do NZ MPs use social media applications?

To answer this question, a survey question was firstly developed asking the participants to rate the importance of 17 key political communication functions (Table 4.3, p. 48). Many of the communication functions listed were perceived as highly important, however some, although having a high mean score and had quite high standard deviation rates. The following section looks at the results from the survey and interviews, selecting the functions that were perceived as being both most important and highlighting areas that were most theoretically significant to PSC.

Engaging with younger people

Youth engagement rated as a highly important political communication function for both questions asked in the survey and for those having been interviewed. All 28 Members of Parliament responded in question three (Table 4.3, p. 48), with the majority of participants rating youth engagement as a highly important political communication function. Question 4/a (Table 4.4, p. 49) asked which social media application they perceived would be most effective in facilitating the engagement with younger people. Results show that Facebook was perceived as being substantially more important than any other social media application, having 26 out of 28 respondents (92.85%) mentioning this platform.

Interview data and data obtained from the quantitative questions in the survey also supported these findings, suggesting that youth engagement is a major expectation when MPs use these platforms. They further claim that MPs who do not use this new medium may ultimately miss out on engaging with a large portion of the population. In the words of one interviewee “a communication strategist’s job is to make sure we can communicate with as much of the population as possible...any communication strategist worth their salt would understand the exploding power of the internet and the divergence of communication opportunities that now exist for the MPs” (personal communication, interviewee 1, October 29, 2009). Unfortunately, just because many young people use SMAs such as Facebook, does not mean that they will sign up to a party or become an MP’s friend or fan.

The act of using SMAs to disseminate political messages to the wider population is not in itself an example of cultivating PSC. Where PSC is intended to be cultivated by the MP in youth circles, is when the person posting the messages are relying on the influence leaders within those circles to buy into, and then promote the party’s or MP’s ideals to their friends or close network ties. MPs hope that they will disseminate and encourage, through supporting the message, their friends and fans (or those close ties within their sphere of influence) to take some form of political action. This action may be in the form of greater

party/personal support and therefore votes, or mobilizing support within, for example, tertiary institutions where there are large numbers of potential young voters.

One example given of leveraging close ties was of the famous New Zealand musician 'Savage' who gave Len Brown an endorsement on stage at the music awards in 2009. Someone posted a tweet (micro-blog) on Twitter at the same time it happened, which generated more tweets from Savage's (often young) friends and fans. This led to some of those fans now following and supporting Mr Brown in his campaign to become the next mayor of Auckland's Super City.

Policy and general communication with the public

Policy communication with the public (Table 4.3, p. 48; Table 4.13, p. 58) and general communication with the public (Table 4.3, p. 48; Table 4.9, p. 54) also ranked high in perceived importance with both having a large portion of participants responding. In this instance however, data obtained indicates that in both cases, respondents believe that blogs are a more effective political communication platform than any other social media mentioned. Facebook also showed some level of perceived usefulness however on a much lower scale than that of blogging.

Blogging differs from social networking sites like Facebook as it does not have a visible network of ties readily available. This means that you don't have to sign up as a 'friend' to have access to the content. It is more like traditional media channels only communication can potentially be two-way rather than one-way. What makes blogging valuable for the cultivation of PSC is its ability to be easily integrated into other new media platforms in the form of links and as a feature of, for example, social media savvy websites such as The Huffington Post (The Huffington Post, 2010), who uses a number of social media platforms (including blogging) to both enhance and market the website's content.

When done properly, these links create a network of networks that circulate information in multiple spheres, encouraging a sense of connection between users.

Information is distributed among diverse demographics through both strong and weak ties; raising the potential for cultivating PSC in the form of further support, mobilization and votes. Network ties are not only bridged through loose tie associations, but close ties are strengthened (bonded) as that sense of connection grows within the strong tie network.

General communication with other party members

General communication with other party members (Table 4.3, p. 48; Table 4.8, p. 53) is a political communication function that is also rated as highly important. In this instance, Facebook is perceived as the most useful social media platform that facilitated this function with 46.42% of respondents showing a positive response for this application. Blogs and text messaging were also noted however on a much lower scale, with the other applications appearing to be of little use for the MPs.

Communicating with other party members through social networking sites such as Facebook is a strategic way of having, what at times has the appearance of a private conversation in a public domain. Strong network ties are reinforced as friendly voices and shared ideals support one's own views. Both strong and weak network ties are able to see these conversations in the form of wall posts and discussion pages. Political viewpoints and information are often presented in a way that may make the viewer feel that they are stumbling upon important information without the marketed hype that usually accompanies political messages. This is not to say however that the consumer of the message is not aware of the marketing strategies of political communication personnel, as many go to these sites for the specific purpose of finding the intended information being made available. However, the way the conversations take place is informal and appears open for further discussion. The intentions of the sender appear transparent, which in turn builds trust and cultivates a feeling of openness and honesty about the politician. This further makes the messengers appear approachable and one of 'us' (the public) not one of 'them' (the state). Also, the viewer gets to feel that they have power over the content they receive. More specifically, they feel that they are not being spoon fed messages and they are selecting the information they want to process on their own accord. As a result, the

information they do take on board is often in alignment with their own ideals, which then gets passed on to wider circles through strong and weak network ties.

Two things may happen in this communication situation: a) strong ties get to have their own viewpoints validated, the close network is strengthened and the potential for cultivating PSC within this tight circle is therefore raised, and b) people (weak ties) who get these messages as a result of hearing them on their influential friends SMAs may or may not buy in to the messages. If they do, it is then possible that they take actions that will benefit the MP or party. Either way, MPs understand the importance of maintaining the ties in existence and are further aware of the need to rally support in wider concentric circles. Also they believe that SMAs will facilitate this function. If communicating with other MPs using SMSs does facilitate this function, and as a consequence, more people buy into the ideals perpetuated and take actions that are of benefit to the politician, then PSC is cultivated.

General and policy communication with the media

General (Table 4.3, p. 48; Table 4.10, p. 55) and policy (Table 4.3, p. 48; Table 4.14, p. 59) communication with the media are also highly rated as highly important political communication functions. The mainstream media still play a major part in the dissemination of information between the state and civil society. They are therefore stakeholders that are, for the MP, indispensable. For this reason, MPs are using SMAs as strategic tools that allow messages to filter into the mainstream media. As far as social media is concerned however, only blogging was seen as being an effective facilitator of this function. Interviewees mention the importance of blogging in terms of knowing that journalists monitor some of the larger blog sites. They claim that some of the key themes that are discussed on blog sites are often transferred into mainstream media, or picked up on by news generators to produce more news for mainstream media outlets. Key political information is deliberately filtered into the mainstream media through leveraging weak ties (journalists), thus bridging into further areas of utility (mainstream media) for the MP. Interestingly, the blog posted is also a form of social capital for the journalists as they benefit directly from being able to access political information quickly and often in real time. This can give a journalist the edge

over other members of the press. No longer are messages having to be sought through PR and communication personnel; they are directly sourced from the politician themselves (or their communication strategists who post messages for them). Social capital is cultivated for the journalist and PSC is cultivated and maintained for the MPs. This is through those journalists monitoring the blog sites and feeding the mainstream media outlets with the key political communication intended by the MP or their communication personnel.

Volunteer recruitment and mobilization

Data shows that volunteer recruitment and mobilisation (Table 4.3, p. 48; Table 4.6, p. 51) are important political communication functions that are assisted by the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The overall response rate in table 4.5 is, however low, with interviewees also giving a mixed response to these functions. Some claimed that although their intention is to recruit and mobilise support, there is a lack of empirical evidence to show if in fact this support is being generated from these platforms. They are concerned that if these applications do not produce the results desired, then they are wasting valuable time and resources that could be focused elsewhere. On the other hand, others interviewed claimed that Facebook and Twitter were immensely important applications for these political communication functions. They are said to have a wide and instant reach into often untapped demographics (weak ties), enabling MPs to rally support in a short period of time. It is more likely however that these messages mainly circulate among those that have already shown an interest in volunteering (strong ties).

Interview data revealed that social media assist in gaining support for the MPs in their particular areas of interest, for example the environment. This is because there are increasing networks of people hooked in with politicians through social networking in a way that they have not been able to before. Bridging takes place between dispersed civic members, forming a strong network based on a shared political interest. This network can then focus their concerns towards MPs they know have a vested interest in the same topic. Both the MP and the public benefit from this targeted exchange. One (the MP), having access to, and disseminating his or her views to people already concerned with the topic at

hand, and the other (the public) having a direct channel to communicate their apprehensions and support.

This is another example of the increasing potential to cultivate both social capital and PSC. The public gain a form of social capital in the shape of readily available information and the ability to respond to particular issues and ideals being discussed. The politician on the other hand, gets to open up channels of discourse that engages the public and increases the potential for swaying the person taking part in the conversation to their way of thinking. If this happens, and the individual then joins the party or helps in some way that is of political gain to the MP, then PSC is cultivated.

Monitoring general public opinion

Survey participants had a mixed response to the value of both monitoring general public opinion and which SMAs were best as a facilitator of this function. Although the mean score was 3.93, indicating this function as being moderately important to important, the standard deviation rates were also high ($SD = 1.04$). This means that the responses ranged from unimportant to highly important, with only Facebook ($n = 11$, 39.28%) and blogs ($n = 12$, 42.85%) showing any perceived usefulness in facilitating this communication activity. However, data obtained from the interviews show that the public's opinions are definitely monitored, however not through Facebook or blogs, but by social media monitoring applications such as Social Mention and TweetReach. "Social Mention is a social media search and analysis platform that aggregates user generated content from across the universe into a single stream of information (Social Mention, 2010, n.p.). According to Social Mention (2010), it is a social media monitor that tracks over 100 new media platforms. This allows the user to easily follow and measure what people are saying about them, their company, their products, "or any topic across the web's social media landscape in real-time" (Social Mention, 2010, n.p.).

TweetReach is also a social media monitor, however only for Twitter, and it tracks how many people read a person's tweet (the total number of different people who would

have seen tweets on this topic in their Twitter stream) (NevilleHobson.com, 2010). MPs and communication personnel are able to track people's responses and opinions on any key political themes or issues previously posted. Messages can then be targeted and tailored to meet the opinions and ideals of the participants. This enables MPs to create content and messages that they think are more appealing to the reader; enhancing their political image and further raising the potential for gaining PSC in the form of further support and votes.

Policy communication with other MPs, enhancing personal public image, communicating with New Zealanders overseas, fundraising, monitoring activities of other parties/members/MPs, general communication with other MPs, policy communication with other MPs and crisis communication and damage control all ranked as moderately important to important. However, as the average mean score decreased, the standard deviation rate increased, indicating that participants had a wider variation of viewpoints. This renders these functions potentially less important for some and more important for others, than the data initially suggests. Furthermore, although some of these political communication functions may hold the potential to cultivate PSC for the MP, it appears that social media use for these functions are still in its infancy.

How do NZ MPs see social media applications facilitating their overall political communication activities?

Data gathered from the survey and interview questions indicate that a number New Zealand MPs and communication personnel see SMAs as valuable aids in their political communication portfolios. For example, SMAs are seen as enabling MPs to access previously under-engaged demographics such as youth populations and those living in remote areas. Furthermore this new media allows for a two way flow of discourse that encourages feedback and dialogue between MPs and the public. These applications enable MPs to publicise party and polity information at an incredibly low entry cost as the majority of SMAs are free for all users. MPs are able to engage with the general population on specific areas of concern, creating networks of interest that opens up further discussions and

debates. This enables the MP to gauge what civil society think on important issues, giving them the advantage of knowing what society does or does not want. Finally, when controversial topics arise in the mainstream media outlets, or when a politician is targeted for a mistake he or she may (or may not) have made, the MP is able to post their own perspectives without being constrained by journalistic biases. What is important to note however, is that although social media use is growing in the New Zealand political arena, it is still only one part of the MP's overall political communication portfolio as face-to-face communication and the mainstream media are still perceived as the most important communication channels available for political communication purposes.

Does political social media application use vary depending on age, gender and/or being a list or constituency member?

Does political social media application use vary depending on an MP's age?

Without knowing the age of every individual New Zealand Member of Parliament, it is difficult to determine the influence age has on social media use. What is apparent from the surveys is that the majority of respondents were aged between 50 – 60. This may or may not be an indication of the average age bracket of all NZ MPs, nor if this age bracket has a high usage of social media or not. However, some conclusions can be made by looking at figure 4.1 (p. 40). For example, data shows that 54.10% of all NZ MPs are using blogs for their political communication purposes and only 26 (21.31%) MPs use no social media at all. This would mean that a reasonable number of MPs aged between 50 – 60 must be using one or more of these platforms for their political communication purposes. It could be assumed that the younger MPs would be the highest users of these applications, however without further evidence this statement remains simply an opinion of this researcher and requires further research for any conclusive statements to be made. The evidence does suggest however, that SMAs are being used across most age ranges.

Does political social media application use vary depending on an MP's gender?

Again the relationship between gender and social media use for political communication purposes is difficult to determine as it is an individual variable that is difficult to measure without specific data. However, some insight may be gained through comparing the data from the survey (question 1d) with the information available in the official New Zealand parliamentary website. It appears that 50% of the survey respondents were male and 50% female. The data available on the NZ parliamentary website claims that out of the 122 current NZ Members of Parliament, 39 (31.96%) MPs are female and 83 (68.03%) male (New Zealand Parliament, 2010). This may indicate that there are more females who are generally interested in this topic of enquiry than males due to there being less females in parliament however an equal number of males and females that answered the survey. In saying this, there is no evidence to substantiate this statement and it therefore remains unclear what impact gender has on social media use.

Does political social media application use vary depending on an MP being a list or constituency member?

Data obtained from the survey shows that a much higher number of survey participants were list MPs than constituency members. Currently in parliament there are 70 (57.37%) general electorate and Māori electorate MPs and 52 (42.62%) members selected from party lists (New Zealand Parliament, 2010). This opposing data may indicate that list MPs are more interested in this area of enquiry, or may be forced to use alternative media channels due to having less support than those MPs elected by their constituencies. Data obtained from the interviews support this assumption, suggesting that list members, due to not being constituent MPs, have to work harder to gain support and votes, and are therefore more likely to engage in using new media platforms such as Facebook and blogging for their political communication purposes. However, like age and gender, without further investigation these statements are only assumptions that lack empirical evidence and are therefore inconsequential to the findings of this research.

Further areas to consider

Data obtained from the interviews have highlighted areas of concern that impact on the use of SMAs by NZ MPs. Themes such as trust and authenticity of the messages being posted are claimed to be an issue. MPs are concerned that their messages will be taken out of context and republished on other social media sites; creating damaging publicity for both their party and themselves. This is not a new concern however, only one transferred from mainstream media to new media platforms. Many politicians have had sound-bites of their information republished, which although may not have been changed, lacked the context of the original message. The public may also be wary of online information unless it appears to come from party websites. Voters are aware that anyone is able to post messages online; creating fictitious identities, and posting unreliable and often fabricated content.

Further concerns such as message control and audience/content fragmentation are discussed. Not only is the market and audience fragmented due to the immense quantity of social media sites available, the messages themselves are fragmented over the multitude of platforms discussing the same topic. Cultivating PSC then becomes difficult on a number of levels. From one perspective, politicians need to select which SMA to use so that their messages reach their target audience. However unless they have concrete evidence (which they do not) that can prove which SMAs effectively broadcast their messages to particular audiences, they are only guessing as to which new media channels will work. Furthermore, that if this is the case, then the additional time and effort it takes to write comments and maintain social media platforms is totally wasted. From another angle, potential, and actual voters are forced to be selective of which SMA to get their information from. This is due to there being so many new media applications available. What arises is the problem of 'preaching to the converted', as people often select those sites that already impart with information that confirms their previously conceived opinions. Basically, only those people already interested in the topic, person or organization will be seeking out the information being provided. This would mean that even if the MPs wanted to cultivate further PSC in the

form of new supporters and increased votes, they would only be doing so in as much as they are strengthening the strong ties already in existence.

These concerns are valid, as they do exist as potential influences over the use of SMAs by politicians and potential voters. However, this research was a measure of the perceived importance of SMAs for the cultivation of PSC, not a measurement of the actual PSC cultivated by SMAs itself. From this perspective, taking into account Armano's (2007) model of influence ripples (see Figure 2.2, p. 16), and Lazarsfeld's et al., (1948) 'two-step flow of communication' model, MPs not only perceive SMAs as being facilitators of their political communication, but use them with the intention of cultivating many forms of PSC. This is through believing that they can gain politically through leveraging their strong and weak network ties. For example, MPs potentially cultivate PSC within strong network ties such as with members within their own party. They use SMAs to attempt to bond with other politicians for the purpose of gaining inter-party support on an issue or policy they believe in. It also appears that MPs attempt to cultivate another form of PSC through bridging weak network ties. MPs rely on influence leaders within their political circle of close ties to disseminate information on their behalf, with those messages filtering out to the wider community (weak ties). The politicians rely on the possibility that the people who trust these opinion leaders may also take on their political views and in turn take actions that will benefit the MPs.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

The following chapter concludes this thesis. Specific research questions are answered based on the results obtained from the discussion and analysis taken place. Sub-research questions are initially answered followed by a discussion on areas for further research. A final conclusion is then drawn answering: 'To what extent do NZ Members of Parliament use SMAs for the cultivation of PSC?'

Answers to specific research questions

Which social media applications do NZ MPs use and how important are they for their political communication purposes?

It is evident from the data retrieved from the survey and interviews that New Zealand Members of Parliament are using a number of SMAs for their political communication purposes. Out of the hundreds available, online evidence shows that blogging, Flickr, Facebook and YouTube are the preferred new media for NZ MPs. However, as far as perceived usefulness in facilitating political communication is concerned, blogs and Facebook are the social media of choice, with other platforms being seen as being far more limited in value. Interestingly however, data obtained from the online analysis reveals that Flickr is more widely used than Facebook, however perceived in the survey as being a far less effective communication platform for many PSC functions. It could be that the wide use of Flickr is not for its perceived usefulness in cultivating political social capital, but is widely used for the sole purpose of giving journalists easy access to good photos. It would therefore be fair to say that the beneficiaries are the journalists themselves, as they appear to gain professional social capital as a direct consequence.

For what political communication purpose do NZ MPs use social media applications?

From the survey data collected it appears that there were a number of reasons why NZ MPs chose to use SMAs. This was determined by analysing the perceived importance of a list of 17 political communication functions by NZ MPs alongside the perceived importance of certain SMAs in facilitating these communication functions. Results show that to some degree, many of the SMAs listed were seen as important communication aids to the 17 functions. However, certain political communication functions were perceived as even more significant than others; even more so when SMAs were used as the platforms that facilitated these political outcomes.

Both quantitative and qualitative data retrieved from this research shows that NZ MPs use SMAs such as Facebook to engage with younger people; widening their political reach and disseminating their ideals to a somewhat under-engaged demographic in New Zealand. Research also reveals that blogs are often used to propagate party policies and MPs' viewpoints with the general public and the media. As a result, an MP's opinions and party's values are heard by more members of the public in the hope that this public will then discuss these ideals with their strong network ties, such as other party members. Further analysis of the data obtained demonstrates that blogging is perceived as an important new media platform that also allows MPs to feed party policies and general party ideals to the mainstream media. Important political information is deliberately discussed on strategically chosen blog sites. This information is then filtered into the mainstream media through journalists who monitor and gather their article information through these blogs. This not only raises the potential for the MP to cultivate PSC, but ultimately assists in cultivating a form of professional capital for the journalist, as information is easy to obtain and can often be retrieved in real time. Data from this research further shows that volunteer recruitment and mobilisation are important political communication functions that are seen by the politician to be assisted by the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Support is believed to be generated for the MPs in their specific areas of interest by targeting people who share their particular concerns, for example on topics such as the environment or health care. Weak ties are potentially bridged via the

ripple effect of using opinion leaders within the social media platforms. These newly formed online associations that are based on a similar awareness of the importance of the issue being discussed are then bonded through the MP publicising information regarding the topic at hand and enabling open discourse between network members. Finally, social media are also seen to be used to monitor the public's opinions. This is not however done through the SMAs initially listed, but through particular social media monitoring websites such as Social Mention and TweetReach. These are both perceived as tools that assist in helping MPs assess what is being said and understand their public's views on current issues in parliament, therefore potentially gaining them a competitive advantage over their fellow politicians.

How do NZ MPs see social media applications facilitating their overall political communication activities?

The information gained from this research proves that SMAs are perceived to be a valuable part of an MP's political communication portfolio. It is clear that MPs believe that these new media platforms assist them in a number of ways. For example, they are seen to be able to disseminate political ideals amongst wider demographics, therefore raising the possibility of cultivating additional support and potential votes. Furthermore, it is believed that these new media facilitates a two way flow of discourse; opening up important channels of communication that encourages feedback and dialogue between MPs and constituent members. Benefits such as low entry cost and the ability to engage with the public on specific areas of concern such as the environment and healthcare are apparent. Moreover, the data obtained from the interviews reveals that SMAs assist the politician in defending themselves when controversial topics arise in the mainstream media. MPs are able to post their own perspectives on personal and party issues without being censored by journalistic viewpoints.

Does political social media applications use vary depending on age, gender, and/or being a list or constituency member?

Impact of the MP's age

Information gained from the survey has revealed that a large number of NZ MPs are using SMAs such as Facebook, blogs and Flickr for their political communication purposes. Therefore, even though some may assume that the younger MPs would be the highest users of these platforms, it appears that many MPs of diverse ages are also using these new media applications; thus indicating that age has no significant affect on SMA usage. In saying this, further information is needed before any conclusive answers can be gained regarding this question.

Impact of the MP's gender

Data retrieved from this research shows that half of the survey respondents were male and the other half female. Furthermore, that as there are 39 female MPs and 83 male MPs in total in parliament to date, it may be assumed that that more females are generally interested in this topic of enquiry than males. Research is inconclusive however regarding the impact age has on an MP's use of SMAs for political communication purposes.

Impact of the MPs being list or constituency members

Research reveals that list members, due to not being constituent MPs, may need to work harder to gain support and votes. They are therefore, according to interview data, more likely to use these new media platforms for their political communication purposes. Evidence shows that a much higher number of survey participants were list MPs rather than constituency members. Furthermore, that currently in parliament there is a higher percentage of general electorate and Māori electorate MPs compared to the MPs who were selected from party lists. Therefore, it could be assumed that list MPs are more interested in this area of enquiry; possibly being encouraged to use alternative media channels due to having less civic support than those MPs elected by their constituencies. However, like age and gender, without further investigation this statement remains an assumption that requires further research for this question to be adequately answered.

Conclusions

To what extent then, do NZ Members of Parliament use social media applications for the cultivation of political social capital?

From the research gathered and the results established from the analysis of this data, it would appear that New Zealand Members of Parliament use these new media platforms extensively for the purpose of cultivating PSC for both themselves and as a consequence, their affiliated parties. Results show that PSC is perceived to be cultivated through leveraging their strong and weak online ties, for example, their Facebook friends/fans, for the purpose of publicizing their messages to as many people as possible. Wider demographics are thought to be reached and personal ideals presented (potentially uncensored by mainstream media) which in turn is believed to activate support and mobilization from within these weak network ties. Close friendships and strong network associations are thought to be bonded through the dissemination of shared ideals, and opinion leaders within the concentric circle are expected to spread these established beliefs amongst their own particular friends and fans. It is believed that through these processes, PSC is cultivated for the party and MP concerned.

Evidence shows that key political information is posted on weblogs by MPs and communication personnel, which then enters into the mainstream media through journalists monitoring these sites. Journalists are used as conduits to disseminate information; gaining publicity for the MP, their party and their party's political ideals. The blogs are a form of social capital for the journalist as they benefit directly from being able to access political information quickly and often in real time. No longer do messages have to be sought through PR and communication personnel as they are directly sourced from the politician themselves. PSC is intended to be cultivated and maintained by MPs, through those journalists monitoring the blog sites and feeding the mainstream media outlets with key political communication intended by the MP or their communication personnel.

Although social media use by NZ MPs is still in its infancy, New Zealand Politicians do use SMAs extensively. The motives behind the use of SMAs by NZ MPs appear to lie in their ability to use these new media platforms to fulfil specific communication functions. These are functions that are further expected to eventuate in the mobilization and activation of additional support that results in political gain for both the MPs and their party's. What remains unclear however, is if all of the MPs are entirely aware of the benefits these new media applications provide, or if they are just using these new platforms because they are advised to by their communication personnel. This statement is made on there being discrepancies in the data, with certain social media platforms being used, yet considered unimportant political communication facilitators. What is clear however is that New Zealand Members of Parliament are using SMAs for the cultivation of PSC whether they realise it or not.

Future research

There are a number of themes surrounding this area of analysis that warrants further research. To fully understand the extent to which SMAs assist New Zealand Members of Parliament (or any politicians for that matter) in their political communication activities, much more needs to be understood. Further research needs to be conducted surrounding how these new media are being perceived and received by members of the public, and if the messages are in fact assisting in furthering politicians political endeavours. Only then could one determine if the political communication intentions of the MPs are being fulfilled by these new media platforms. Finally, this research would benefit from a longitudinal study over another election period to determine if in fact social media is helping politicians in becoming elected Members of Parliament and further assisting in parties gaining the votes needed to win elections. Then the actual benefits of social media may be able to be ascertained.

PSC was a useful concept in this research as it helped analyze how and why NZ MPs use SMAs through bridging and bonding with their strong and weak network ties. Through

incorporating Lazarsfeld's et al (1948) two step flow of communication model and David Armano's (2007) model of influence ripples, the actions of bridging and bonding were easily understood within the context of SMA use. These models assisted in describing how messages travelled in the social media arena, and further helped explain the concepts of strong and weak network ties from a political perspective.

This theory is not only useful in a political setting, but with some adaptation, can also be easily used as a tool to analyse how businesses use social media for the cultivation of other forms of social capital such as professional and organizational capital. These concepts have yet to be developed, however it is hoped that the further development of PSC may assist those interested in taking up these new areas of analysis.

References

- A guide to good survey design*. (1995). Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.
- Acquisti, A., & Gross, R. (2006). Imagined communities: Awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the Facebook. Retrieved March 18, 2009, from <http://privacy.cs.cmu.edu/dataprivacy/projects/facebook/facebook2.pdf>
- Adler, P., & Kwon, S. (2000). Social capital: Prospects for a new concept. *Academy of Management Review*, 27(1), 17-40. Retrieved from <http://www.aom.pace.edu/amr/>
- Ainsworth, S., Hardy, C., & Harley, B. (2005). Online consultation: E-Democracy and e-resistance in the case of the development gateway. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19(1), 120-145. doi: 10.1177/0893318905276562
- Alarkon, W. (2008). Bullies or saviors? *Politics (Campaign & Elections)*, 29(11). Retrieved from <http://www.campaignsandelections.com/>
- Alexa. (2010). The top 100 sites in New Zealand. Retrieved February 4, 2010, from <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries;4/NZ>
- Arabi, A., Lee, B., Won, S., & Yeo, E. (2007). CMPC (Computer Mediated Political Communication) and its impact on the political process in Korea. *Journal of Communication*, 1(1). Retrieved February 10, 2010, from <http://www.scientificjournals.org/journals2007/articles/1069.htm>
- Armano, D. (2007). Influence ripples + social media fragmentation. Retrieved January 26, 2010, from http://darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion/2007/09/influence-rippel.html
- Azhar, A. (2007). When politicians invade MySpace. *B&T Weekly*, 57(2621), p. 8. Retrieved from <http://www.bandt.com.au/Subscribe.asp>
- Baločkaitė, R., Morkevičius, V., Vaidelytė, E., & Žvaiauskas, G. (2008). The impact of ICTs on democracy: Positive and negative scenarios. *Social Sciences*, 1(39), 81-92. Retrieved from <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P& P=AN& K=32471954&EbscoContent=dGJyMNHr7ESeprY4zOX0OLCmrlGegK5Sr6%2B4TbGWxWXS& ContentCustomer=dGJyMPPk54zi2bmF39%2FsU%2Fipt02u& D=sih>

-
- Bartkus, V., & Davis, J. (Ed.). (2009). *Social capital: Reaching out, reaching in*. UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Bell, A., Crothers, C., Goodwin, I., Kripalani, K., Sherman, H., & Smith, P. (2007). World internet project NZ: The Internet in New Zealand 2007 final report
http://www.aut.ac.nz/resources/research/research_institutes/ccr/wipnz_2007_final_report.pdf
- Berg, J. (2008). Trickle-down webonomics: *Politics*. Retrieved May 19, 2009, from
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7703/is_200811/ai_n32302430/
- Birner, R., & Wittmer, H. (2009). Converting social capital into political capital. How local communities gain political influence? A theoretical approach and empirical evidence from Thailand and Colombia. *Paper submitted to the 8th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the study of Common Property*. Retrieved May 19, 2009, from <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/archive/00000221/00/birnerr041300.pdf>
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). The forms of capital. In Richardson, J (Ed.). *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. (pp. 241-58). New York: Greenwood.
- Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2008). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 210-230. Retrieved from
<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/117979306/>
- Boyd, D. (2008). Facebook's privacy trainwreck [sic]. *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 14(1), 13-20. Retrieved March 14, 2009 from
<http://www.danah.org/papers/FacebookAndPrivacy.html>
- Brundidge, J. (2009). Political Discussion and News Use in the Contemporary Public Sphere: The "Accessibility" and "Traversability" of the Internet. *Conference Papers; International Communication Association, 2009. Annual Meeting*, 1-38. Retrieved from
<http://libproxy.unitec.ac.nz:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&jid=137V&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live>
- Burt, R. (1992). The social structure of competition. In *Structural holes: The social structure of competition*. (pp. 8-30). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

-
- Byrne, D. (2007). Public discourse, community concerns, and civic engagement: Exploring black social networking traditions on BlackPlanet.com. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 319-340. Retrieved March 14, 2009, from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/byrne.html>
- Calenda, D., & Mosca, L. (2007). The political use of the internet: Some insights from two surveys of Italian students. *Information, Communication & Society*, 10(1), 29-47. doi: 10.1080/13691180701193028
- Capell, K. (2006). Europe's politicians embrace Web 2.0. *Business Week Online*, 00077135. Retrieved March 15, 2009, from http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/oct2006/db20061024_653130.htm
- Cardoso, G., Cunha, C., & Nascimento, S. (2006). Bridging the e-democracy gap in Portugal. *Information, Communication and Society*, 9(4), 452-472. doi: 10.1080/13691180600858630
- Carlton, S. (2009). Moving beyond the old online model. Retrieved August 18, 2009, from <http://www.iab.org.nz/search/results/bef98143abdc7c3c5baf5a4ba892f199/>
- Chaffey, D., Ellis-Chadwick, F., Mayer, R., & Johnston, K. (2009). *Internet marketing: Strategy, implementation and practice* (4th ed.). England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Christofides, E., Muise, A., & Desmarais, S. (2009). Rapid communication. Information disclosure and control on Facebook: Are they two sides of the same coin or two different processes? *CyberPsychology and Behaviour*, 12(3), 341-346. doi: 10.10b9/cpb.200B.0226
- Cohen, N. (2008). The valorization of surveillance: Towards a political economy of Facebook. *Democratic Communiqué*, 22(1), 5-22. Retrieved from <http://udc.igc.org/communique/index.html>
- Coleman, J. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology* 94, 95-120. Retrieved March 16, 2009, from <http://econ.tau.ac.il/papers/publicf/Zeltzer2.pdf>
- Coleman, S., & Wright, S. (2008). Political blogs as representative democracy. *Information Polity*, 13, 1-5. Retrieved from <http://www.iospress.nl/>

-
- Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2003). *Business research*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Couper, M. (2001). Web surveys: A review of issues and approaches. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64, 464-494. Retrieved March 18, 2009, from <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/soc522a/PDF%20readings/Couper.pdf>
- Cullen, R., & Houghton, C. (2000). Democracy online: An assessment of New Zealand government web sites. *Government Information Quarterly*, 17(3), 243-267. doi: 10.1016/j.physletb.2003.10.071
- Dahlberg, L (2007). Rethinking the fragmentation of the cyberpublic: From consensus to contestation. *New Media & Society* 9(5), p. 827-847. doi: 10.1177/1461444807081228
- Davis, R. (2010). Political blogs more accurate than newspapers, say those who read both. Retrieved January 18, 2010, from <http://news.byu.edu/archive09-May-blogs.aspx>
- DiMaggio, P., Hargittai, E., Neuman, R., & Robinson, P. (2001). Social implications of the internet. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 307-338. Retrieved from <http://www.annualreviews.org/pricing/pricing.asp>
- Downing, J., Ford, T., Gil, G., & Stein, L. (2001). *Radical media: Rebellious communication and social movements*. California: Sage Publications.
- Drummond, G. (2006). Political parties' use of web based marketing: Some preliminary findings relating to first-time voters in the 2005 general election. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 11, 181-191. doi: 10.1002/nvsm.23
- Dwyer, C., Hiltz, R., & Passerini, K. (2007). Trust and privacy concern within social networking sites: A comparison of Facebook and MySpace. *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Conference on Information Systems*. Keystone, Colorado. Retrieved March 18, 2009, from <http://csis.pace.edu/~dwyer/research/DwyerAMCIS2007.pdf>
- Edwards, A. (2008). What e-politicians do with words: Online communication between councillors and citizens. *Information Polity*, 13, 233-248. Retrieved from <http://www.iospress.nl/>

-
- Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social networks. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4). Retrieved March 18, 2009, from <http://jmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/ellison.html>
- Endeshaw, A. (2004). Internet Regulation in China: The never-ending cat and mouse game. *Information & Communications Law*, 13(1), 41 – 57. doi: 10.1080/1360083042000190634.
- Erikson, E. (2008). “Hillary is my friend”: MySpace and political fandom. *Rocky Mountain Communication Review*, 4(2), 3-16. Retrieved from http://www.humis.utah.edu/humis/docs/organization_951_1219418675.pdf
- Facebook statistics. (2009). Retrieved April 26, 2009, from <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>
- Facebook. (2010). John Key. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://www.facebook.com/pages/John-Key/12635800428>
- Farrer, D. (2009). Kiwiblog. Retrieved May 7, 2009, from http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz/about_kiwiblog
- Fenton, N. (2008). New politics, new publics? Conference papers: International Communication Association, 2008 annual meeting, p1. Retrieved from <http://libproxy.unitec.ac.nz:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&jid=137V&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live>
- Flew, T., & Wilson, J. (2007). Citizen journalism and *political* participation: The Youdecide 2007 project and the 2007 Australian federal election. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 35(2), 17-37. Retrieved from <http://www.copyright.com.au>
- Forney, M., & Steptoe, S. (2005). China’s web watchers. *Time South Pacific*, 40. Retrieved from <http://www.timeinc.com>
- Fraser, M., & Dutta, S. (2009). Five ways Web 2.0 is changing the face of American politics. *Infonomics*, 23(2), 47. Retrieved from <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=37595958&EbscoContent=dGJyMNHr7ESeprY4zOX0OLCmrlGegK9SsK64SbSWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPPk54zj2bmF39%2FsU%2Fipt02u&D=bth>

-
- Fraser, M., & Dutta, S. (2008, September 24). Obama and the Facebook effect. *Media Week*, 18(42). Retrieved from <http://vnuemedia.com/sites.html>
- Galtung, J. (1999). State capital and the civil society: A problem of communication. In Vincent, R., Nordenstreng, k., & Traber, M. (1999). *Towards equity in global communication-MacBride Update*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, pp. 3-20.
- Gandolfi, P. (2006). Political Communication on the internet age: Political blogs and web sites in Italy. Retrieved January 23, 2010, from <http://www.tesionline.com/intl/thesis.jsp?id=20625>
- Garramone, G., Harris, A., & Pizante, G. (1986). Predictors of motivation to use computer-mediated political communication systems. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 30(4), 445-457. doi: 10.1080/08838158609386636
- Garvin, P. (2008). Government sociability. *Searcher*, 16(10), 46-49. Retrieved June 2, 2009, from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb4328/is_200811/ai_n32300642/
- Gibson, R. (2004). Web campaigning from a global perspective. *Asia Pacific Review*, 11(1), 95-126. Retrieved from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/alphalist.html>
- Gillham, B. (2000). *Developing a questionnaire*. London: Continuum.
- Golding, P., & Murdock, G. (2000). Culture, communication and political economy. In J. Curren & M. Gurevitch (Eds.). *Mass media and society* (3ed., pp. 70-92). London: Arnold.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1972). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380. Retrieved June 5, 2009, from <http://www.istor.org/pss/2776392>
- Granovetter, M. S. (1983). The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited. *Sociological Theory*, 1, 201-233. Retrieved from <http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journal.asp?ref=0735-2751>
- Gueorguieva, V. (2008). Voters, MySpace and YouTube: The impact on alternative communication channels on the 2006 election cycle and beyond. *Social Science Computer Review*, 26, 288-300. doi: 10.1177/0894439307305636
- Guillén, M., & Suárez, S. (2005). Explaining the global digital divide: Economic, political and sociological drivers on cross-national internet use. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 681-708. Retrieved from <http://www.us.ebsco.com/online/direct.asp?AccessToken=>

-
- Gulati, J., & Williams, C. (2006). Closing the gap. Raising the bar: Candidate web site communication in the 2006 campaigns for congress. *Social Science Computer Review* 25, 443-465. doi: 10.1177/0894439307305624
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of a bourgeois society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, J. (1991). The public sphere. In C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (Eds.), *Rethinking popular culture: Contemporary perspectives in cultural studies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Halpern, D. (2005). *Social capital*. UK: Polity Press.
- Haythornthwaite, C. (2002). Strong, weak, and latent ties and the impact of new media. *The Information Society*, 18, 385 – 401. doi: 10.1080/01972240290108195
- Herrnson, P., Stokes-Brown, A., & Hindman, M. (2007). Campaign politics and the digital divide: Constituency characteristics, strategic considerations, and candidate internet use in state legislative elections. *Political Research Quarterly*, 60(1), 31-42. doi: 10.1177/1065912906298527
- Hill, J., & Hughes, J. (1997). Computer-Mediated Political Communication: The USENET and Political Communities. *Political Communication*, 14(1), 3-27. Retrieved January 23, 2010, from <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a713838756>
- Himmelboim, I., Gleave, E., & Smith, M. (2009). Discussion catalysts in online political discussions: Content importers and conversation starters. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, 771-789. Retrieved January 23, 2010, from <http://www.connectedaction.net/2009/08/26/paper-in-the-journal-of-computer-mediated-communication-discussion-catalysts-in-political-discussions/>
- Hoffman, A. (2008). Technology is the Deciding Factor in Election Campaigns. Retrieved January 12, 2010, from <http://blog.summation.net/2008/08/technology-is-the-deciding-factor-in-election-campaigns.html>

-
- Hsieh, J., Rai, A., & Keil, M. (2008). Understanding digital inequality: Comparing continued use behavioral [sic] models of the socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged. *Mis Quarterly*, 32(1), 97-126. Retrieved from <http://www.misq.org/index.html>
- Ikeda, K., & Richey, S. (2005). Japanese network capital: The impact of social networks on Japanese political participation. *Political Behaviour*, 27(3), 239-259. doi: 10.1007/s11109-005-5512-0
- Internet world stats: Usage and population statistics*. (2009). Retrieved December 15, 2009, from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.html>
- Iyengar, S., & McGrady, J. (2007). *Media politics: A citizen's guide*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Jarim, K., & Wang, J. (2006). The race of online campaigning: Comparing the usability of candidate web sites in the 2004 U.S. presidential election. October, 2005, Conference Papers. *International Communication Association*. Retrieved March 16, 2009, from http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/9/1/4/0/pages_91409/p91409-1.php
- Johnson, D. (2002). Elections and public polling: Will the media get online polling right? *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(12), 1009-1023. Retrieved from <http://www.wiley.com>
- Just Left. (2009). Retrieved May 7, 2009, from <http://jtc.blogs.com/>
- Kadushin, C. (2006). Personal Influence: A Radical Theory of Action. *The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 608(1), 270-281. doi: 10.1177/0002716206292575
- Kaimakamis, N., & Charitos, D. (2006). Computer mediated political communication: An empirical approach towards representing political action in the spatial context of collaborative virtual environments: The rise of a virtual-space dependent public sphere. Retrieved January 23, 2010, from <http://www.media.uoa.gr/~charitos/papers/conf/KAC2006.pdf>
- Kellner, P. (2004). Can online polls produce accurate findings? *International Journal of Market Research*, 46(1), 3-21. Retrieved from <http://www.ijmr.com/>

-
- Kincaid, J. (2008, July 28). Predict the future on WashingtonPost.com. *Washington Post*. Retrieved July 29, 2008, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/07/28/AR2008072800854.html>.
- Krueger, J., Cody, S., & Peckham, M. (2006). Bridging and bonding in cyberspace? The impact of online communities on social capital and political participation. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Marriott, Loews Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Convention Centre, Philadelphia, PA*, Retrieved August 25, 2009, from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p152576_index.html
- Lavenda, D. (2008). Does blogging have a place in the workplace? *British Journal of Administrative Management*, 63, 27-29. Retrieved from <http://www.instam.org/?p=jou>
- Lazarsfeld, P., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948). *The People's Choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign*. (2nd e.d.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Leberecht, T. (2008, July 27). Obama on video: a new way for new media. *Cnet.com*. Retrieved July 27, 2008, from http://news.cnet.com/8301-13641_44.html.
- Lee, B. (2009). Millennials move on. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 7(2), 63-64. Retrieved May 1, 2009, from http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/millennials_moveon/?cmpid=news
- Lee, J. (2006). The Blogosphere and the Public Sphere: Exploring possibility of the blogosphere as a public sphere. Conference papers: International Communication Association, 2006 annual meeting, p. 1-23. Retrieved from <http://www.icahdq.org/>
- Lim, C., Swee, D., Tan, K. & Detenber, B. (2009). "The impact of status cues in computer-mediated communication on perceptions of online political discussions". *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association*. Sheraton New York, New York City, NY. Retrieved January 23, 2010, from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p12864_index.html
- LinkedIn. (2010). Retrieved February 16, 2010, from <http://press.linkedin.com/about>

-
- Loury, G. (1992). The economics of discrimination: Getting to the core of the problem. *Harvard Journal for African-American Public Policy*, 1, 91-110. Retrieved from <http://adh.sagepub.com>
- Mäkinen, M., & Kuira, M. (2008). Social media and post election crisis in Kenya. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13, 328-335. doi: 10.1177/1940161208319409
- Martinsons, M., Ng, S., Wong, W., & Yuen, R. (2005). State Censorship of the Internet in China. *Communications of the ACM*, 48(4). Retrieved from <http://www.acm.org/cacm/>
- McCurry, J. (2009, April 27). Disgruntled Japanese turn to resurgent communists. *TheGuardian.co.uk*. Retrieved April 28, 2009, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/27/japanese-communist>
- McGinty, M. (2007). Shaking hands, kissing babies, and...blogging? The internet and technology seek to influence politics as usual. *Communications of the ACM*, 50(9), 21-24. Retrieved from <http://www.acm.org/publications>
- McNelly, H. (2008, May 24). Key ahead in Facebook race for voters. *NZ Herald*. Retrieved April 3, 2009, from http://nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/print.cfm?c_id=&objectid=10
- Milne, G. (2008, July). ALP's secret web weapon. *The Australian*. Retrieved July 29, 2008, from <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0.25197,239783647583,00.hl>.
- Muhlberger, P. (2005). Human agency and the revitalization of the public sphere. *Political Communication*, 22, 163-178. doi: 10.1080/10584600590933160
- Nahapiet, J., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(2), 242-266. Retrieved from <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=533225&EbscoContent=dGJyMNHr7ESeprY4zOX0OLCmrlGeqLBSrqm4SbeWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPPk54zj2bmF39%2FsU%2Fipt02u&D=bth>
- NevilleHobson.com. (2010). See how far your tweets go with TweetReach. Retrieved February 1, 2010, from <http://www.nevillehobson.com/2009/11/05/see-how-far-your-tweets-go-with-tweetreach/>

-
- New Zealand Parliament. (2010). Retrieved January 13, 2010, from <http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/MPP/>
- Ng, E., & Detenber, B. (2005). The impact of synchronicity and civility in online political discussions on perceptions and intentions to participate. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10(3). Retrieved January 23, 2010, from <http://icmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue3/ng.html>
- Nordenstreng, K. (n.d.). Media and society. Retrieved February, 12, 2010, from <http://sockom.helsinki.fi/commedia/Nordenstreng%20Media%20and%20Society.pdf>
- O'Reilly, T. (2005). What is web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software. Retrieved May 1, 2009, from <http://oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-2.0.html>
- Ostrom, E., & Ahn, T. (2003). *Foundations of social capital*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Palser, B. (2007). Politics 2.008. *American Journalism Review*, 29(3), 1-4. Retrieved from <http://www.ajr.org>
- Pan, L., & Jacobson, T. (2009). Audience participation: Media power in the emergent public spheres in China. Conference Papers; International Communication Association; 2009 annual meeting, p1-22. Retrieved from <http://libproxy.unitec.ac.nz:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&jid=137V&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live>
- Park, H., Kim, C., & Barnett, G. (2004). Socio-communicational structure among political actors on the web in South Korea: The dynamics of digital presence in cyberspace. *New Media & Society*, 6, 403-423. doi: 10.1177/1461444804042522
- Parker, D., & Song, M. (2006). Ethnicity, social capital and the internet: British Chinese websites. *Ethnicities*, 6, 178-202. doi: 10.1177/1468796806063751
- Parvez, Z., & Ahmed, P. (2006). Towards building an integrated perspective on e-democracy. *Information, Communication and Society*, 9(5), 612-613. doi: 10.1080/13691180600965609
- Perlmutter, D. (2008). Political blogging and campaign 2008: A roundtable. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13, 160-170. doi: 10.1177/1940161208315742

-
- Phelps, S. (2009). To interrupt or to entice . . . that is the question? Push vs. pull marketing. Retrieved February 2, 2010, from <http://9inchmarketing.com/2009/05/10/to-interrupt-or-to-entice-that-is-the-question-push-vs-pull-marketing/>
- Politicians' campaigns invade MySpace. (2006, October 17). *USA Today*, 07347456, pg 1. Retrieved May 15, 2009, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-10-16-politicians-social-sites_x.htm
- Putnam, R. (1993). The prosperous community: Social capital and public life. *American Prospect*, 13, 35-42. Retrieved June 15, 2009, from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/DETOC/assoc/13putn.html>
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone*. New York: Touchstone.
- Putnam, R. (2002). *Democracies in flux: The evolution of social capital in contemporary society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Quantcast. (2010). Retrieved February 16, 2010, from <http://www.quantcast.com/>
- Ravindran, V. (2008). The 2008 tools campaign: Microtargeting. Retrieved September 7, 2009, from http://www.newpolitics.net/content_areas/new_tools_campaign/microtargeting
- Reynolds, P. (2009, April 27). NZ Politicians on Twitter: Can we have some real ones? *Peoplepoints*. Retrieved May 7, 2009, from <http://www.peoplepoints.co.nz/2009/04/new-zealand-politicians-on-twitter-can.html>
- Rosenblatt, A. (1999). On-line polling: Methodological limitations and implications electronic democracy. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 4(2), 30-44. doi: 10.1177/1081180X99004002004
- Sampedro, V., & Pérez, F. (2008). The 2008 Spanish general elections: "Antagonistic Bipolarization" geared by presidential debates, partnership and media interests. *The International Journal of Press and Politics*, 13, 336-344. doi: 10.1177/1940161208319293

-
- Sanson, A. (2008). Facebook and youth mobilization in the 2008 presidential election. *Journal of Communication, Culture & Technology*, 8(3), 162-174. Retrieved June 1, 2009, from <http://gnovisjournal.org/journal/facebook-and-youth-mobilization-2008-presidential-election>
- Sarel, D., & Marmorstein, H. (2006). Addressing consumers' concerns about online security: A conceptual and empirical analysis of banks' actions. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, 11(2) 99-115. doi: 10.1057/palgrave.fsm.4760025
- Schoen, H., & Faas, T. (2005). When methodology interferes with substance: The difference of attitudes toward e-campaigning and e-voting in online and offline surveys. *Social Science Computer Review*, 23, 326-333. doi: 10.1177/0894439305275854
- Scott, W. (2005). Regulation and internet use in developing countries. *Economic Development and Cultural Countries*, 53(2), 501-523. <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/>
- Searle, J. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Selm, M., & Jankowski, N. (2006). Conducting online surveys. *Quality & Quantity*, 40, 435-456. doi: 10.1007/s11135-005-8081-8
- Sifry, M. (2009). A see-through society. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 47(5). Retrieved from <http://www.cjr.org>
- Slade, C. (2007). Fragmenting citizenship. Conference papers: International Communication Association, 2007 annual meeting, p1. Retrieved from <http://libproxy.unitec.ac.nz:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&jid=137V&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live>
- Small, T. (2008). The Facebook effect? On-line campaigning in the 2008 Canadian and US elections. *Policy Options*, 85-87. Retrieved from <http://www.cjr.org>
- Snyder, B. (2006). Staring into a digital divide. *Advertising Age*, 77(24), 3-38. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&site=ehost-live&scope=site&db=ufh&AN=21167827>

-
- Social capital. (2009). Evolution of social capital theory. Retrieved May 21, 2009, from <http://www.gnudung.co./literature/evolution.html>
- Social Mention. (2010). Social media monitor. Retrieved February 1, 2010, from <http://www.socialmention.com/about/>
- Solis, B. (2007). The definition of social media. Retrieved May 1, 2009, from <http://www.webpronews.com/blogtalk/2007/06/29/the-definition-of-social-media>
- Stafford, A. (2008). Web 2.0 politics: Tagged, tweeted, and widgeted. *PC World*, 26(10). Retrieved from <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P& P=AN& K=34468067&EbscoContent=dGJyMMvl7ESeprc4zOX0OLCmrlGeprFSr6i4SrCWxWX S& ContentCustomer=dGJyMPPk54zj2bmF39%2FsU%2Fipt02u& D=a9h>
- Stevenson, N. (1995). Perspectives in media cultures and social theory. In *Understanding media cultures- Social theory and mass communication* (pp. 178-195). London: Sage.
- Stromer-Galley, J., & Martinson, A. (2009). Coherence in political computer-mediated communication: Analyzing topic relevance and drift in chat. *Discourse & Communication*, 3(2), 195-216. doi: 10.1177/1750481309102452
- Taylor, H., Bremer, J., Overmeyer, C., Siegel, J., & Terhanian, G. (2001). Using internet polling to forecast the 2000 elections. *Marketing Research*, 13(1), 26-30. Retrieved from <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P& P=AN& K=4448308&EbscoContent=dGJyMMvl7ESeprc4zOX0OLCmrlGeprFSr6u4SbWWxWXS & ContentCustomer=dGJyMPPk54zj2bmF39%2FsU%2Fipt02u& D=bth>
- Tewksbury, D. (2005). The seeds of audience fragmentation: Specialization in the use of online news sites. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 49(3), 332-348. Retrieved from <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P& P=AN& K=18449456&EbscoContent=dGJyMMvl7ESeprc4zOX0OLCmrlGeprFSr6y4Ta%2BWx WXS& ContentCustomer=dGJyMPPk54zj2bmF39%2FsU%2Fipt02u& D=a9h>
- The Huffington Post. (2010). The internet newspaper: News, blogs, video community. Retrieved February 27, 2010, from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>
- The OpenNet Initiative. (2009). Retrieved August 3, 2009, from <http://opennet.net/research/regions/mena>

-
- Thomas, B., & Young, D. (2007, September 20). Politicians will be haunted by their past on internet. *The National Business Review*. Retrieved April 24, 2009, from <http://www.nbr.co.nz/print/19070>
- Thorton, L. (2008). New media and the man. *American Journalism Review*, 30(6). Retrieved from <http://www.ajr.org>
- Thussu, D. (2006). *International communication: Continuity and change* (2nd ed.). London: Hodder Arnold.
- Tucker, P. (2007). A new ruler for the digital divide. *Futurist*, 41(2), 16. Retrieved from <http://www.wfs.org/wfs>
- Udanga, R. (2009, March 15). Look for Len online. *Manakau Courier*, pg. 1.
- Walther, J. (1995). Relational aspects of computer-mediated-communication: Experimental observations over time. *Organization Science*, 6(2), 186-203. doi: 10.1287/orsc.6.2.186
- Wang, S. (2007). Political use of the internet, political attitudes and political participation. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 17(4), 381-395. doi: 10.1080/01292980701636993
- Ward, I. (2008). Kevin07. Labour's pitch to generation YouTube. *Social Alternatives*, 27(2), 11-15.
- Ward, J. (2005). An opportunity for engagement in cyberspace: Political youth websites during the 2004 European parliament election campaign. *Information Polity*, 10, 233-246. Retrieved March 11, 2009, from <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P& P=AN& K=19891982& EbscoContent=dGJyMMvl7ESeprc4zOX0OLCmrlGeprFSsKm4SbCWxWXS& ContentCustomer=dGJyMPPk54zj2bmF39%2FsU%2Fipt02u& D=bth>
- Ward, S., Lusoli, W., & Gibson, R. (2007). Australian MP's and the internet: Avoiding the digital age? *The Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 66(2), 210-222. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8500.2007.00529.x
- Warf, B. (2007). Oligopolization of global media and telecommunications and its implications for democracy. *Ethics, Place and Environment*, 10(1), 89-105. doi: 10.1080/13668790601153465

-
- Westling, M., & Madison, U. (2007). Expanding the public sphere: The impact of Facebook on political communication. Retrieved March 11, 2009, from http://thenewvernacular.com/facebook_and_political_communication.pdf
- Wheeler, M. (1997). A changing landscape - The globalization of the media: Liberalization or constraint? In *Politics and the mass media* (pp. 175-206). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Williams, C., & Gulati, G. (2007). Social networks in political campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 midterm elections. Retrieved March 11, 2009, from http://www.bentley.edu/news-events/pdf/Facebook_APSA_2007_final.pdf
- Wisker, G. (2001). *The postgraduate research handbook: Succeed with your MA, MPhil, EdD and PhD*. London: Palgrave.
- Woods, O. (2009). John Key, National and social media/digital civil society. Retrieved January 24, 2010, from <http://aucklandcentral.blogspot.com/2009/02/john-key-national-and-social.html>
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society*, 27(2), 151-208. Retrieved from <http://www.springerlink.com/home/main.mpx>
- Wright, S. (2008). Read my day? Communication, campaigning and councillors' blogs. *Information Polity*, 13, 81-95. Retrieved March 14, 2009, from http://www.icele.org/site/scripts/news_article.php?newsID=264/

List of Appendices

<i>Documents/Statements/Articles</i>	<i>Page Number</i>
--------------------------------------	--------------------

1: Information form (Survey)	105
2: Information form (Interview)	106
3: Consent form (Survey)	107
4: Consent form (Interview)	108
5: Survey	109
6: Interview questions	115

1: Information form (Survey)



Information Form (MPs or Media/Assistant Secretary)

Bonnie O'Neill is a student in the Department of Communication Studies at UNITEC Institute of Technology, Auckland. She is enrolled on the Master of International Communication programme, and is conducting research into:

The extent to which NZ politicians use social media applications for the cultivation of political social capital

This research intends to find out what social media applications such as Facebook and MySpace are being used by current NZ Members of Parliament for political communication purposes. The project has been explained to the Speaker who has granted permission for the research to proceed, but the consent of individual MPs to participate is now being sought. Bonnie would therefore like to survey all NZ MPs about their perceptions and use of social media applications when engaging in political communication. This survey requires that you answer a number of open and closed questions that should take no longer than 20 minutes of your time. If the intended MP does not personally manage their own social media, then it is requested that they refer the survey on to the media/assistant secretary who does.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This does not stop you from changing your mind if you wish to withdraw from the project. However, because of time constraints, any withdrawals must be done up to 2 weeks after you have been surveyed. Your name and any information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected file and in a locked cabinet at Unitec, and only you, the researcher and the supervisors will have access to this information.

If you have any concerns about the research you may contact Bonnie on:

Phone: 021 0203 7733

e-mail: bonnie@bonnieoneill.co.nz

Alternatively, you may contact the project supervisor:

Peter Thompson
Department of Communication Studies
UNITEC Institute of Technology

phone: 815 4231 ext 8804
e-mail: pthompson@unitec.ac.nz
Private Bag 9025, Auckland

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (999)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

2: Information form (Interview)



Information Form (Interview)

Bonnie O’Neill is a student in the Department of Communication Studies at UNITEC Institute of Technology, Auckland. She is enrolled on the Master of International Communication programme, and is conducting research into:

The extent to which NZ politicians use social media applications for the cultivation of political social capital

This research intends to find out what social media applications such as Facebook and MySpace, are being used by current NZ Members of Parliament for political communication purposes. The project has been explained to the Speaker who has granted permission for the research to proceed, but the consent of individual party members to participate is now being sought. Bonnie would like to interview select political communication advisors/personnel about their perceptions and use of social media applications when engaging in political communication. She would like to have a meeting for about 45 minutes to talk about these kinds of things and will come to a place of your choosing at a time convenient to you. The interview will be taped and then transcribed (by herself only) later. All features that could identify you will be removed and the tapes used will be erased once the transcription is done.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This does not stop you from changing your mind if you wish to withdraw from the project. However, because of time constraints, any withdrawals must be done up to 2 weeks after she has interviewed you. Any information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected file and/or in a secure place at Unitec, and only you, the researcher and the supervisors will have access to this information.

If you have any concerns about the research you may contact Bonnie on:

Phone: 021 0203 7733

e-mail: bonnie@bonnieoneill.co.nz

Alternatively, you may contact the project supervisor:

Peter Thompson
Department of Communication Studies
UNITEC Institute of Technology
Private Bag 9025, Auckland

phone: 815 4231 ext 8804
e-mail: pthompson@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (999)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence

3: Consent Form (Survey)



Consent Form (MPs or Media/Assistant Secretary)

(To be returned with the survey)

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this if I don't want to and I may withdraw up to 2 weeks after this survey takes place.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and any information provided will be aggregated and presented in the thesis in a manner that will ensure that no individual will be able to be identified, and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and their supervisors. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a password protected computer at Unitec and in a secure cabinet at Unitec, accessible only by the researcher and supervisors for a period of 5 years.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have read and understood the information sheet and give my consent to participate in the research.

Participant Signature: *Date:*

Participant Name:.....

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (999)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

4: Consent form (Interview)



Consent Form (Interview)

(Please return with the survey)

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this if I don't want to and I may withdraw up to 2 weeks after this survey takes place.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and any information provided will be aggregated and presented in the thesis in a manner that will ensure that no individual will be able to be identified, and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and their supervisors. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a password protected computer at Unitec and in a secure cabinet at Unitec, accessible only by the researcher and supervisors for a period of 5 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have read and understood the information sheet and give my consent to participate in the research.

Participant Signature: *Date:*

Participants Name:.....

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (999)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

5: Survey



Research questionnaire on: NZ politicians' use of social media applications

This is a questionnaire about the use of social media application by NZ MPs for political communication purposes. Social media applications are online communication applications such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and blogs.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. If the question does not apply to you, leave it blank. If the question requires a detailed response, answer as fully as possible within the space allocated. Thank you.

Q1: a) Who is answering this survey	MP / Other
b) If 'other', are you the primary person managing the social media applications under investigation?	Yes / No
c) Indicate your age bracket (For the MP) (20 – 30) (30 – 40) (40 – 50) (50 – 60) (60+)	
d) Indicate your gender (For the MP)	Male / Female
e) Are you a list or constituency MP? (For the MP)	List / Constituency

Q2: From the following social media applications listed below, indicate by using the scale provided, how important these social media applications are for your political communication purposes? Leave the row blank if you do not use that particular type of application.

5	4	3	2	1
Highly important	Important	Moderately important	Unimportant	Highly unimportant

Social media applications	Don't know	Scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
Facebook						
MySpace						
Bebo						
Twitter						
Flickr						
YouTube						
Blogs						
Text Messaging						
FriendFeed						
LinkedIn						
Delicious						
Other (Specify)						

Q3: From the following list of political communication *functions*, indicate using the scale provided, how important you feel these communication functions are for your political communication activities?

5	4	3	2	1
Highly important	Important	Moderately important	Unimportant	Highly unimportant

Political Communication Functions	Scale					Don't know
	1	2	3	4	5	
Engaging with younger people						
Volunteer recruitment/mobilization						
Fundraising						
General communication with other MPs						
General communication with other party members						
General communication with the public						
General communication with the media						
Policy communication with other MPs						
Policy communication with other party members						
Policy communication with the public						
Policy communication with the media						
Crisis communication / damage control						
Communicating with NZs overseas						
Monitoring general public opinion						
Gaining feedback on policies/issues						
Monitoring activities of other parties/members/MPs						
Enhancing personal public image						
Other (specify)						

Q4: Using the list provided in Q2, which social media applications do you feel are most effective in facilitating the following political communication functions?

Political Communication Functions	All SMAs in Q: 1	Social media applications
Engaging with younger people		
Volunteer recruitment/mobilization		
Fundraising		
General communication with other MPs		
General communication with other party members		
General communication with the public		
General communication with the media		
Policy communication with other MPs		
Policy communication with other party members		
Policy communication with the public		
Policy communication with the media		
Crisis communication / damage control		
Communicating with NZs overseas		
Monitoring general public opinion		
Gaining feedback on policies/issues		
Monitoring activities of other parties/members/MPs		
Enhancing personal public image		
Other (specify)		

Q5: If you **don't** use social media applications, please comment on your reasons why not.

Q6: If you **do** use social media applications, please comment on your reasons why.

End of questions

Thank you for participating!

If you have any further comments or observations about your use of social media applications when communicating for political purposes, please feel free to make comments in the space provided below, or contact me directly (see contact details below).

Follow-up contact:

Please list your contact details below if: (delete as appropriate)

- 1) You would be willing to allow me to contact you for the purpose of clarification/ follow-up interviews.
- 2) You would like a summary of the eventual research findings.

Please return you completed form to:

Bonnie O'Neill
PO Box 80256
Green Bay
Waitakere
Auckland

Any further comments: (Continue over page if necessary)

6: Interview Questions

Interview Questions on the political use of Social Media Applications
(Facebook, Blogs etc) by NZ MPs

Bonnie O'Neill

2009

- 1) How far is social media governed by party policy/strategy?
- 2) How far is it left to the individual?
- 3) Are there any tensions between what the politicians want to do with social media and what the communication strategists see as functional/beneficial?
- 4) In what ways do social media make the party communication strategists' job harder or easier?
- 5) What are the benefits of social media use for the politician?
- 6) What are the drawbacks?
- 7) How important is social media for MPs political communication?
- 8) Why are they important?
- 9) What do MPs want to achieve by using social media
- 10) What factors influence the use of social media by MPs?
- 11) Do MPs have specific people who handle their social media?

