CANDIDATES' NEW MEDIA USE IN THE 2007 AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ELECTION

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Abstract

This paper examines use of the internet by candidates in the 2007 Australian national election, as informed by the content analysis of 217 candidates' web presence and matched survey data. Using electorate statistics and comparisons with the 2004 election, the paper shows: an incremental but stochastic adoption of online media that defies the centralised tendencies of inter-party competition, and an equalisation of internet use by major and minor parliamentary parties. Recognising limitations in basic content analysis, the paper utilises a methodology which allows the overall 'intensity' of a online campaigns to be measured and compared.

Introduction

The 2007 Australian national election saw an incumbent Coalition[1] government lose office to the Australian Labor Party (ALP) by a respectable swing of about five percentage points (Mackerras, 2008, forthcoming). The election was notable in that long-serving Prime Minister John Howard, faced a new and relatively unknown ALP leader who positioned his 'time for change' message strongly through an association with new media (notability through 'presidential-style' branding and the use of online video and social networking services).

For the first time, the use of the internet in an Australian political contest was placed strongly within the public and media spotlight during the campaign (Brissenden, 2007), with various authors examining the strategic and tactical deployment of new media (Chen & Walsh, 2008, forthcoming) by the major parties (and particularly the use of video sharing websites; Bruns, Wilson & Saunders, 2007). One area that has not yet been significantly examined, however, is the use of new media by individual candidates (party members and independents) in the campaign. This article sheds light on this area of political practice, highlighting key developments from the previous national election (see: Chen, 2005).

A Caveat on Relevance

In presenting these findings it is important readers note the comparative importance of individual candidates within the Australian political system. With the exception of (some) front bench members[2] and a limited number of 'celebrity' candidates[3], it can be argued that individual candidates are far from the centre of political life in Australia. This is a feature common to many Westminster democracies, such as the United Kingdom and Canada (Small, 2007, p. 51). Being in competition for positions in the Parliament candidates are, *de jure*, the focus of the Australian electoral system, however, their importance in determining electoral outcomes is low when compared with the influence of their leaders' popularity and overall party branding. This is particularly the case when compared with more individualistic political cultures like that of the

1 A coalition of the Liberal Party of Australia and the regionally-based 'the Nationals'.
2 Those members of Parliament who will, or are likely to be considered for, roles in the formal and shadow ministries.
3 A good example of this class of individual in the 2007 campaign was the ALP candidate for the electorate of Bennelong Maxine McKew, who was a high profile television journalist prior to running for Parliament.

United States (a practice common in public discourse about political campaigning in Australia). In his analysis of the 2004 national election, Jackman (2005, pp. 335–47) was unable to identify any statistically-significant effects of candidate quality on election outcome. For Jackman, the most significant determinant of candidate performance was their status as incumbents[4] and overall popularity of their party.

While this can discourage interest in the subject, understanding individual candidate's use of new media has value for two reasons. First, the quality of political representation and use of information technology has been of ongoing concern within the Westminster tradition for sometime, with attempts to increase and improve MP's use of alternative and new communications channels (e.g. Modernisation of the House of Commons Committee, 2004; Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, 2005). Second, the centralisation of political competition in political party machines has been actively resisted in recent years by a number of groups and organisations using new media tools to focus attention on local races, issues, and personalities (in the 2007 campaign through online candidate 'matching' tools and locally-based citizen journalism initiatives; Media Report, 2007). Thus, the relevance of individual candidates, and their use of new media, remains an open question for research, in terms normative and *realpolitik*.

Methods

Researchers interested in the political use of new media have used a range of methodologies at their disposal. These include generalised (e.g. the Australian Candidate Study) and technology-specific candidate surveys (Bivings Group, 2006, p. 8), personal interviews (Ward, Lusoli, & Gibson, 2007), linkage and network analysis (both automated (Ackland, 2004) and hand-coded ((Foot, Schneider, Dougherty, Xenos & Larsen, 2003)), and content analysis (Gibson & Ward, 2000). Of these approaches, the last is common, combining assessments of online content and website functionality to indicate a level of engagement with the medium (generally indicated by extensive online content) and technological sophistication of the campaign (generally indicated by the extent of use, and rapidity of adoption, of new technologies).

While this approach has been useful in observing the development of candidates' websites over many years, it suffers from an increasing array of limitations:

- Focus on supply, rather than demand (Norris, 2003);[5]
- A website-centric view of online political campaigns which may not match the patterns of use of internet users (Rainie & Horrigan, 2007, p. iii);[6]
- Assumptions regarding the importance of a limited set of technological innovations in electoral contexts;
- Difficulties incorporating technological innovations in longitudinal datasets, and;
- Failure to recognise the emerging importance of a range of internet submedia ('channels') and online communities as key target destinations for sections of the community. A good example of this last point is the cultural importance of social networking services to younger internet users, with half of all U.S. teenagers having accounts, and half of this number accessing these services on a daily basis (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 1).

4 Under the Australian system of (a) electoral funding and (b) the provision of parliamentary entitlements, incumbents have a considerable financial advantage over competitors, particularly those from smaller parties.

5 This is particularly problematic at the electorate level, where small audiences often preclude the identification of candidate websites in market share / traffic data.

6 In the 2007 Australian national, internet metrics company Hitwise Pty. Ltd. report only modest spikes in political parties and key candidates websites during election campaigns, with the most significant destination increases (300 per cent) only in the final 7 days of the campaign (R. Hannon, personal communication, January 8, 2008).

Given these limitations, a new methodology was employed for the study of the 2007 campaign which utilised aspects of website content / functionality analysis but included greater attention to the wide range of online tools available for political candidates. The aim of this approach was:

- To identify the number of 'Points of Presence' (PoP) candidates' maintained across a range of channels and content services (websites, email, social networking services, mulitmedia hosting services); and
- To determine the extent of use of each PoP.[7]

Following sampling[8], selected candidates online presence were interrogated using the attached coding frame. Data collection was undertaken during the period 3–6 November 2007. Search tools employed were:

- The Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) *List of Declared Candidates*;
- Google (Australian market leader) search engine;
- The search functions of the social networking / content hosing services studied (Flickr, YouTube, Myspace, Bebo, Orkut, Friendster, Facebook, and Linked In)[9]; and
- Party website search engines to identify and classify candidate's entries within the website ('mini-sites', see below).

In the identification of candidates, ambiguous entries were excluded from analysis. This was common with social networking profiles that could not be identified as definitely belonging to a specific candidate.[10]

Scale Creation

Data interpretation was undertaken using two constructs:

- Plotting depth-width measures: The creation of the depth and width measures was a deliberate attempt to delineate between the increasing ability to have a large number of PoPs and the investment of time and effort to 'populate' each (e.g. to fill a website or content sharing service with content and/or functionality, or to collect nodes and/or subscriptions in social networking and content syndication services). The measures of depth and width were generated from raw data using the creation of artificial scales (0 to 100) for both depth (a compound measure of the extensiveness of online content and number of collected social networking ties[11]), and width (the number of services or sites employed by the candidate). The scales were relative rather than absolute, thus each candidate score is measured against the highest performer within the sample; and
- Intensity: In addition to the depth and width measures, a single compound number was generated to measure the absolute 'intensity' of the candidate's online presence. This measure was useful in determining correlations.

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7 This differs from 'buzz' (e.g. Blog mentions) or network based analysis (e.g. Ackland) in that it retains a focus on material generated by the candidate and their campaign staff directly.

8 The sample employed in the study was drawn from all candidates for the House of Representatives within randomly-selected electorates representing every State and Territory. The source document for selection was the List of Declared Candidates released by the Australian Electoral Commission on 2 November 2007. The population size was 1,053 and the sample size 217 candidates, a sample size of 20.59 per cent, with a margin of error (95 per cent) of 5.93 per cent.

9 Social networking profiles are not commonly identified through Google, requiring each service to be searched individually. This may change in the future with the introduction of tools like the OpenSocial API.

10 Candidates were commonly identified by: Unambitious photo recognition; Use of party of electorate name in profile; Membership of related groups or networks; and/or Highly unique name.

11 Friends, contacts, or connections depending on the social networking service's nomenclature.

Limitations

The approach presents some limitations:

- Exclusion of Senate candidates due to differences in electorates and voting mechanism: Senate candidates were not included in this analysis (differing from the study undertaken in 2004) because of problems of comparability around the presence of a candidate versus their importance as a potential Member of Parliament (e.g. it was likely problematic to include and compare Senate and House of Representatives candidates in the 2004 analysis due to the role of many Senate candidates as ticket fillers). In addition, the noted relationship between constituent-member communication and ballot type introduces an additional variable which is excluded by this decision (as per the observation of Norris, 2004); and
- Construct validity: Understanding of the role of social networking and other 'web 2.0' tools in the average internet user's lived experience remains sketchy in Australia. Thus, the creation of scales based on assumptions about the importance of width is unproven. The use of these scales, however, is in response to the increasingly well-recognised limitations of using basic content analysis (e.g. function or content counts) of candidate websites as *de facto* performance measures.

Survey Data

In addition to the content analysis, a small survey of candidates from the content analysis group was conduced during the month following the election (n=54, response rate 24.88). The survey was distributed via email to those candidates with email addresses, and mail by those without. The survey examined:

- Candidate perceptions of the value of different campaigning communications channels;
- Candidates' self-reported use of each channel;
- Levels of support provided to candidates for the use of new media;
- Use of 'back end' information technology systems; and
- Rates of constituent contact with candidates via online channels.

Results

The results of the research are presented in three parts. First, a descriptive overview of the three major channels studied is discussed. Second, the results of the depth and width analysis of PoPs is provided. Finally, key relations, drivers and correlations are identified and discussed.

Use of New Media

Websites and 'mini-sites'. Following conventional approaches to campaign evaluation, the first channels of interest was websites. While campaign sites (or organisational ones reformatted for the campaign) have been common to Australian political parties since the late 1990s, it is surprising that only 20.74 per cent of candidates reviewed had a website supporting their campaign–especially given developments in content management systems which have increased the ease that feature-rich websites can be developed, launched, and maintained. While this figure is low, there has been an increase in the use of individual campaign websites since the 2004 national election, with strong growth among Nationals and ALP candidates, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Proportion of sampled candidates with websites (*n*=45)

Party	% 2007 (n)	% 2004
The Nationals (NP)	100 (4)	33.33
Country Liberal (CLP)[12]	100 (1)	n/a
Climate Change Coalition (CCC)	100 (1)	n/a
Liberal Party of Australia (LP)	55.17 (16)	44.18
Australian Labor Party (ALP)	48.48 (16)	30
Independent (Ind)	15 (3)	n/a
Australian Democrats (Dem)	11.76 (2)	0
Australian Greens (Grn)	9.38 (3)	8.1

The most revealing determinant that a candidate will have a campaign website is incumbency[13], with 75.76 per cent of candidates from incumbents having a site. This contrasts to the 11.41 per cent of non-incumbents who have a website. This is not influenced by the status of incumbents as government or opposition, demonstrating a strong structural effect on the deployment of websites. Given that MPs have institutional resources (and *responsibilities* to their electorate[14]), it is possibly not surprising that they are disproportionately represented with websites.

Given this growth in the availability of feature-rich hosting software, it is interesting that candidates are not offering websites that are significantly more sophisticated than in the 2004 campaign. As illustrated in Figure 1, well-established site functionalities remain relatively scarce (e.g. search functions in less than one third of sites) and new website components are not widely employed (e.g. embedded video / RSS syndication).[15] While this may reflect a minor role of the website in campaigning overall, the relationship between incumbency and limited functionality of sites may be explained as a function of longevity and obsolescence (incumbents' sites being, on average, older).

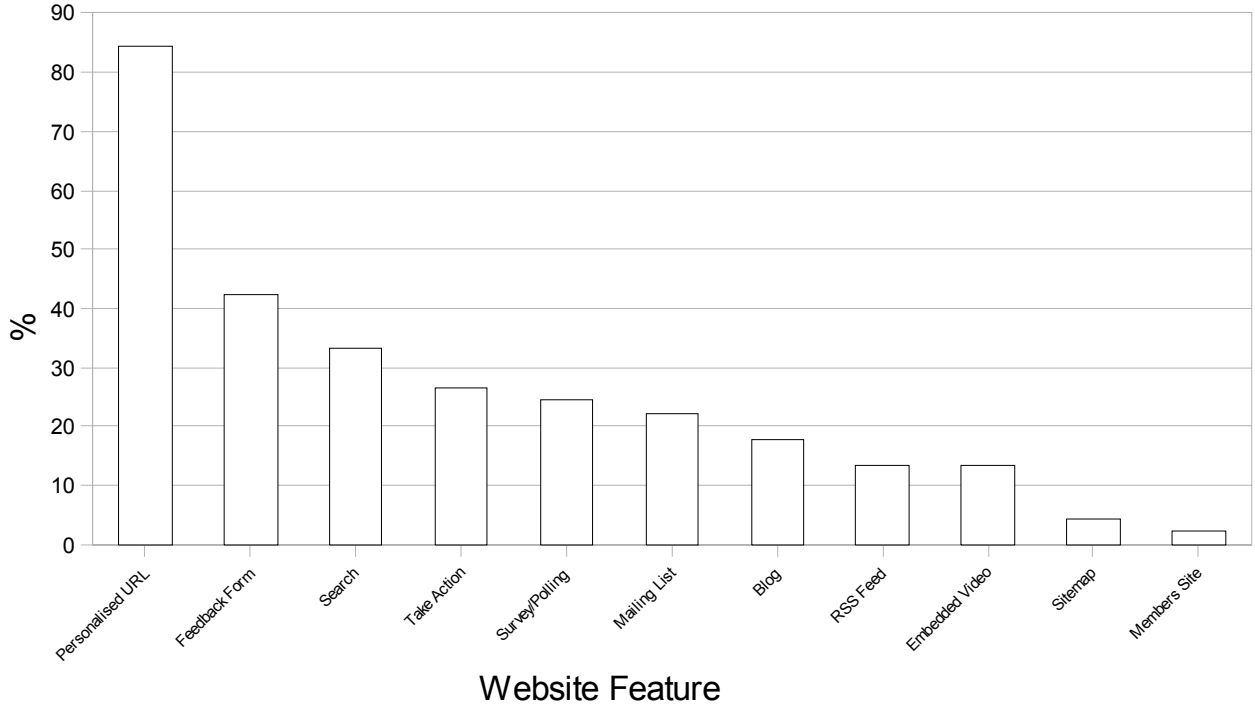
12 Member of the Liberal and National coalition (party of the Northern Territory)

13 In this context an 'incumbent' is a candidate who represents the party currently holding the seat (e.g. either the current MP or a candidates from their party). This classification decision was made on the pre-stated assumption of limited impact of individual candidates.

14 Many candidate sites could be seen as having a greater orientation towards representational functions, rather than campaigning elements. This would support the argument that representatives and candidates' can have different conceptions of their political function (see: Studlar & McAllister, 1994)

15 Excluded from the figure were site components that might have been available, but were not seen in the sample (e.g. push-to-talk, podcasting).

Figure 1: Features of candidates' websites 2007 (*n*=45)



The relevance of personalised candidate websites may be overstated, however. A significant proportion (see Table 2) of candidates representing major political parties had one or more biographical entries on their political party's organisational website(s).[16] For some this was a relatively small entry (photo, name, telephone number), whereas some parties (notably the Liberal Party) provided a number of pages of information on every candidate. The extent to which this was customisable by the candidates is not clear, however one party–the Australian Greens–did provide a blogging tool which was utilised by some candidates (some also had established blogs on other services, like blogger.com). The benefits of these 'mini-sites' lie in their low cost, ease of deployment,[17] and advantages in search engine ranking for new candidates (as most of the major party sites are likely to be indexed on a regular basis by search engines). Overall, if candidates see limited value in websites overall, the provision of these party services may satisfy their perceived need for representation online.

16 The federal nature of the Australian party system creates, in some cases, a layering of state and national party sites.

17 Given this party advantage, there is a normative argument for increased support for independent candidates (such as through the Independent Candidate's Advisory Network established by Peter Andren, Tony Windsor and Bob Katter (http://www.icanonline.net.au/).

Table 2: Proportion of candidates with 'mini-sites'.

Party	%	Party	%
Australian Labor Party	100	Family First (FF)	57.69
Citizens Electoral Council (CEC)[18]	100	Christian Democrats (CDP)[19]	46.15
Liberal Party	96.55	Liberty and Democracy[20]	0.5
Australian Greens	93.75	One Nation[21]	0
Australian Democrats	88.24		

Email. Given the increasing pervasiveness of email in society, it is unsurprising to see a high proportion of candidates–particularly those from parties currently represented in the Parliament–with unique email addresses (Table 3). Only Greens candidates appear to be supported by their party with institutional email, which takes the form of specific addresses for electorates, rather than candidates.[22]

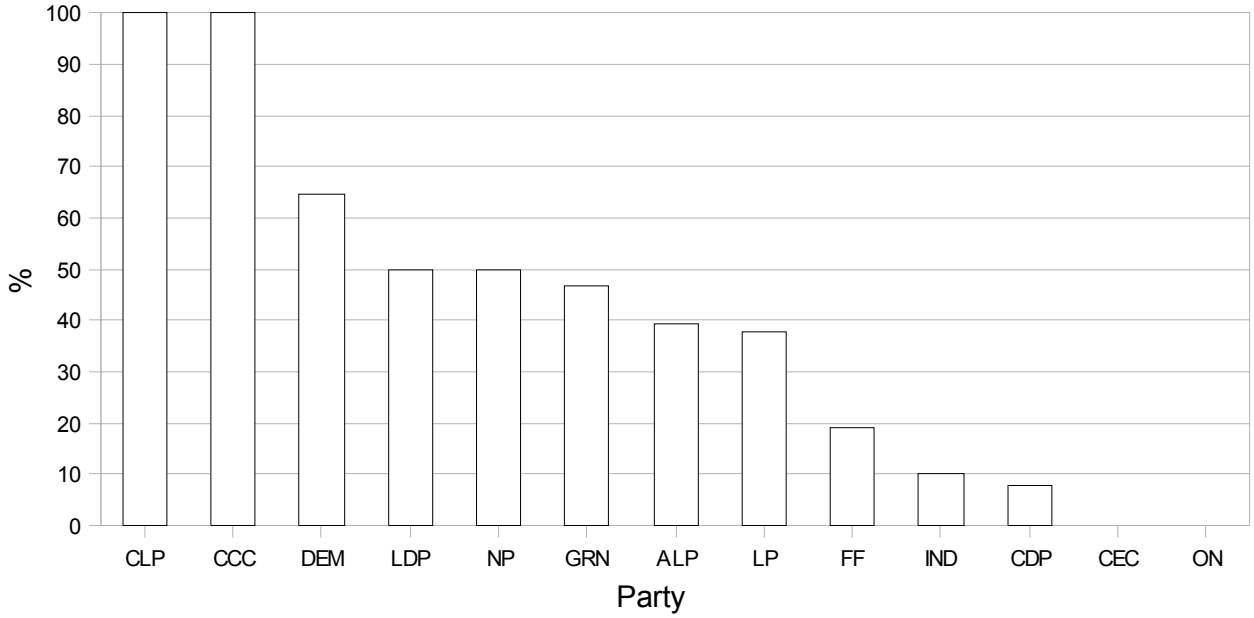
Table 3: Proportion of candidates with a unique email address

Party	%	Party	%
Australian Labor Party	100	Independent	70
Australian Democrats	100	Christian Democrats	69.23
Liberal Party of Australia	96.55	Citizens Electoral Council	55
Australian Greens	93.75	Family First	46.15
The Nationals	75	Liberty and Democracy	33.33

Social networking services. While the use of email and websites have been a story of incremental growth over a number of years, a more dramatic channel adoption is social networking services.[23] In the 2007 election, 31.8 per cent of candidates have profiles on one or more of the eight social networking services studied (YouTube and Flickr are included in this category given the ability to create user profiles, memberships and social networking ties within their services[24]). Unlike websites–strongly correlated to incumbency–social networking service adoption is a mixed story, with high levels of adoption by members of comparatively smaller parties, as illustrated in Figure 2.

18 Lyndon LaRouche group.
19 Rev. Fred Nile group.
20 Libertarian party, formed in 2007.
21 Previously Pauline Hanson's One Nation (now unaffiliated).
22 How these email addresses is supported is unclear at this time, in the 2004 election these were simply remailers that directed email to personal addresses.
23 Social networking services are defined here as technologies that '... that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system'. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007)
24 This portends a future methodological problem: as social networking tools propagate through established online services, the capacity to make delineations between 'candidate site' and 'social networking service' will be problematised.

Figure 2: Use of social networking services by candidates, by party

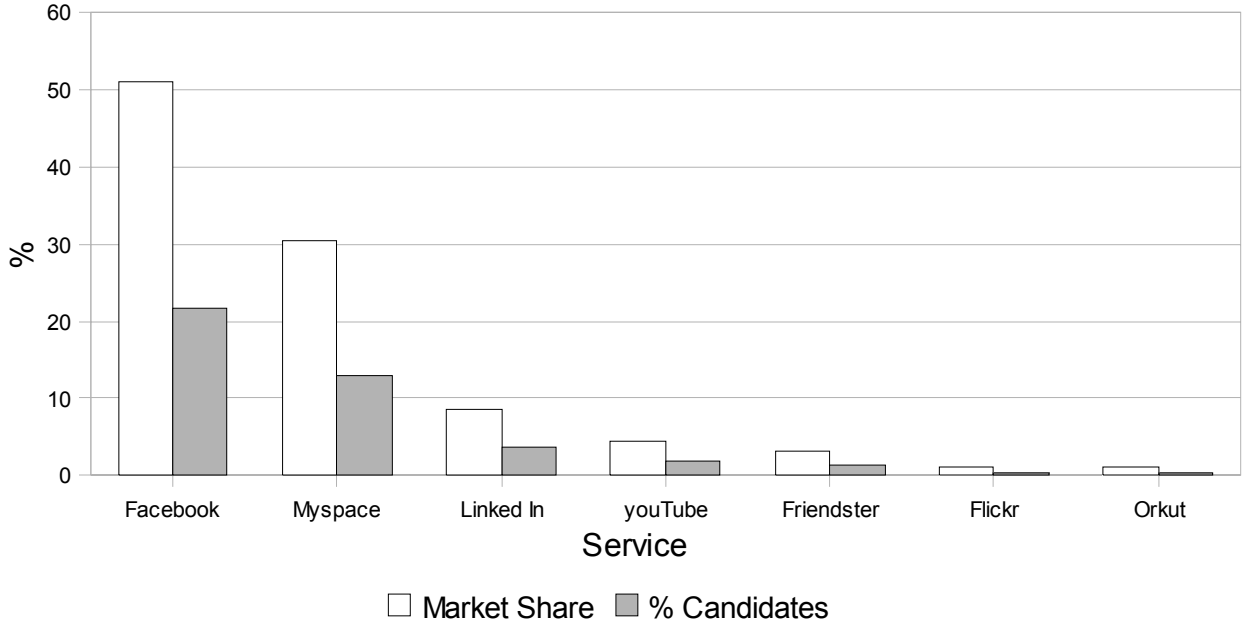


Looking at the 'market share' of services (Figure 3) we see that Facebook is the most popular social networking site for candidates, with Myspace in second place. Additionally, Facebook and Myspace were likely to be specifically employed by candidates as campaigning tools, whereas the other services were more likely to be be 'incidental' identifications (e.g. pre-existing non-campaign specific entries). An interesting point of difference between candidates and parties' use of new media is that comparatively small use of candidate-specific YouTube channels, which centralised party campaign teams were keen to exploit. One reason for this is the lack of 'on hand' material for posting (parties routinely used made-for television commercials on YouTube), however another may have been due to active discouragement from central party strategists who feared a proliferation of amateurish material using party branding.[25]

That the selective use of these services displays rationality should be noted. When comparing popularity of these sites in Australia (raw visitation rates only) we can see a match between the popularity of these services between candidate and the general public, with the exception of Bebo.com (14th most popular destination) and Linkedin.com (which is not in the top 100 destination sites for Australians; Alexa International, 2007).

25 Personal Interview: Peter Davis, National Election Communications Officer, Australian Greens, 19 December 2007.

Figure 3: Popularity of measured social networking services

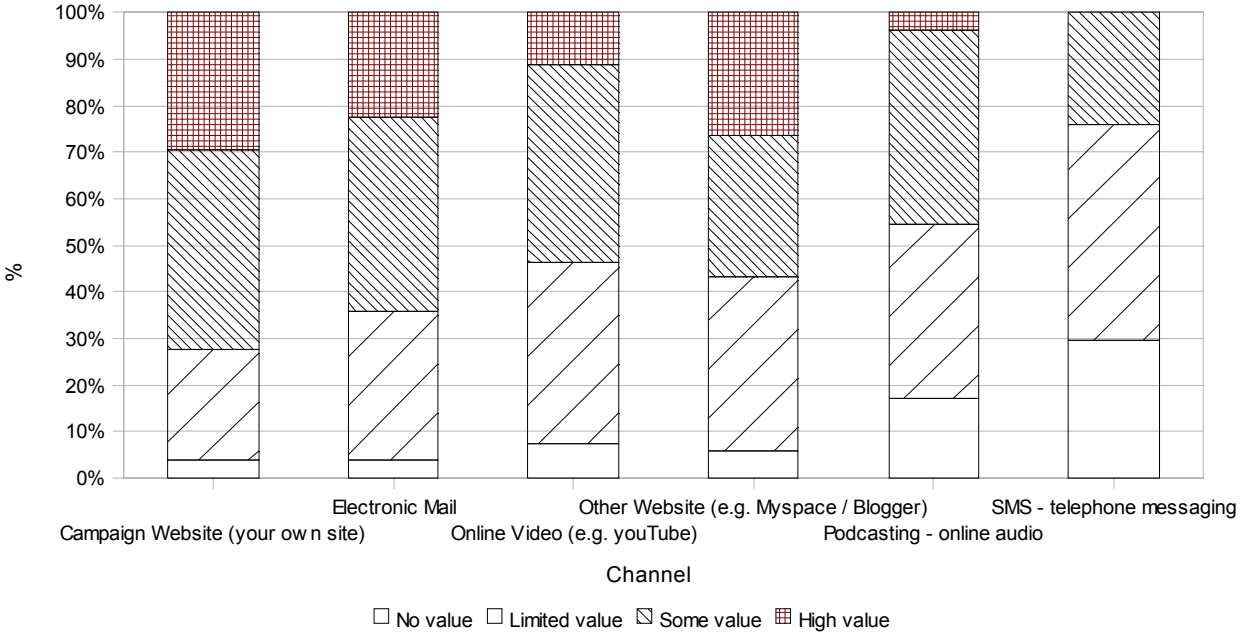


This observation should be considered with some degree of caution, however, given no clear relationship between raw popularity and value in campaigning has been established. Indeed, service functionality (and availability of APIs) may be important in the longer term, as well as the value of different sites in candidate differentiation and market segmentation. Here Linkedin.com, with its professional rather than 'friendship' focus, provides a good example of service selection based on characteristics more commonly shared by candidates (e.g. professional backgrounds) (Betts, 2004). It is possible to envisage a future scenario (one not demonstrated in the current campaign) where different social networking tools are employed tactically (e.g. mass membership services for general campaigning, professional sites for fund raising, etc.). The lack of differentiation through multiple memberships is illustrated by the fact that the number of memberships per candidate is limited to an average of 1.33 (σ=0.53)

The comparatively high level of use of social networking tools presents an interesting means to evaluate the evolution of campaigning technology in Australia. While cautious incrementalism has driven website and email adoption, Figure 4 shows a different picture for social networking services. Based on self-reported assessment of the value of different communications and campaign channels, we see social networks have a disproportionately high percentage of candidates who identified the channel as of 'high value'. The explanation of this would appear to lie in the fit between social networking concepts and the emphasis on interpersonal communication in local campaigns[26]: an example of constructivist learning by candidates.

26 The most highly regarded campaign tool in the survey was 'door knocking'.

Figure 4: Perceived Value of New Media Tools



Depth and Width

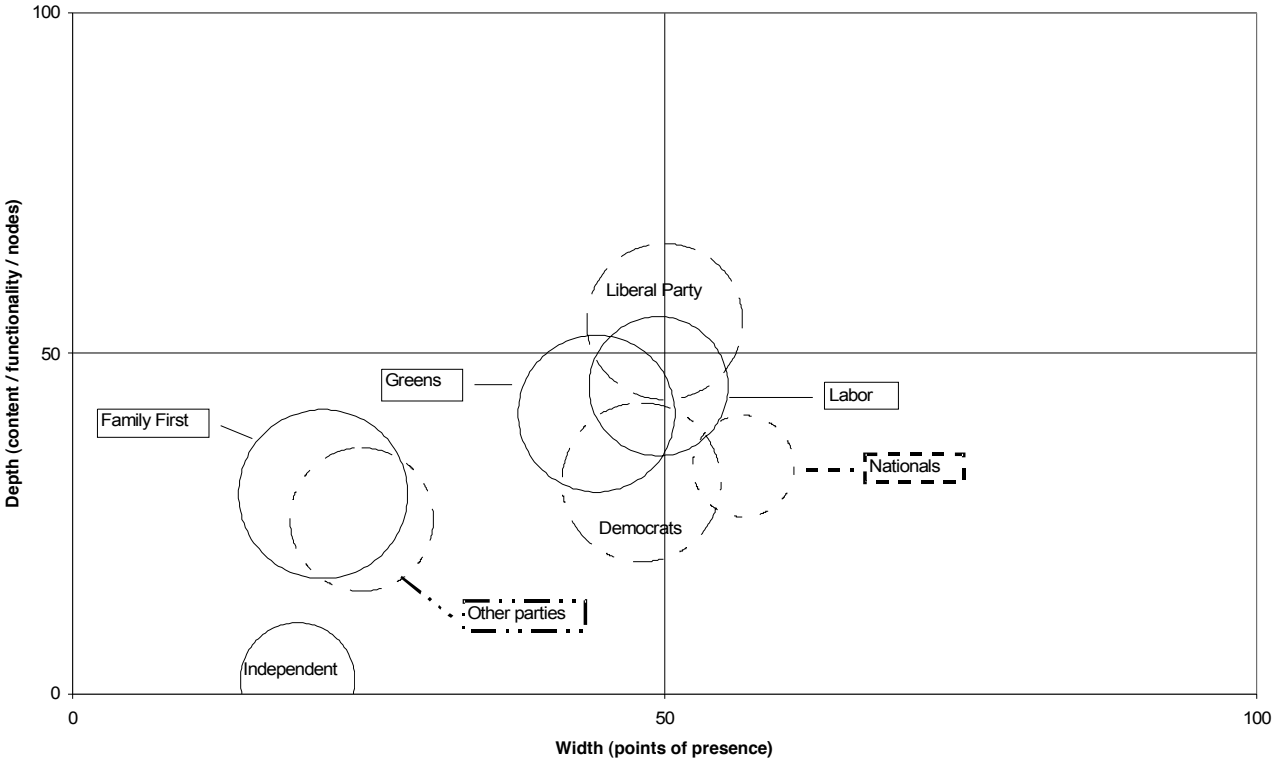
Given the descriptive overview of new media use, it is possible to map data on Points of Presence (width) and the functionality, content and/or social ties of each PoP (depth) as a scatterplot. The resulting matrix allows candidates to be categorised as:

- Focused (Top Left): candidates who use a limited number of PoPs, but who have a large amount of content / investment in those they have;
- Intense (Top Right): a high number of PoPs and–on average–a large amount of content / investment each;
- Scattered (Bottom Left): low levels of content or investment, but a large number of PoPs; and
- Absent (Bottom Right): have limited online presence overall.

Figure 5 shows the average position of candidates, by party as a bubble chart.[27] The centre of each bubble represents the party average (depth-width) and the size of the bubble one standard deviation.

27 Simple and complex (jittered) x-y plots were created, however these proved overly noisy for interpretation.

Figure 5: Candidates' PoP, clustered by party



What is interesting in this Figure is that–while there were a number of Intense users as outliers across the political spectrum–parliamentary parties[28] are tightly clustered together, with other parties and independents generally confined within the Absent users quadrant. The only exception to this is Family First, a party which holds a single Senate seat on the basis of preferencing, rather than its capacity to command a high primary vote.[29] Given correlations between (particularly) website and email use and incumbency, this tight clustering presents some interesting findings:

- First, given the comparative value of different channels in campaigning is not well established (e.g. websites versus social networking services) there are risks associated with collapsing PoPs into single measures which mask differences in the use of channels. Interpretation of the data continues to require channel delineation;
- Second, while this clustered figure points to a degree of access equalisation (as per similar findings, see Small, 2007), it would appear that the different pattern of channel use shows underlying structural differences in the selection and deployment of communications tools by Australian political candidates, and;
- Third, while incumbency advantages in the use of new media appear mitigated (to some degree) by looking at the use of an array of potential communication channels, there remains a 'halo effect' for established political parties. This is interesting in that the halo effect appears to be based on the longevity of the party *in Parliament*, rather than other factors, such as media coverage (Family First received considerable attention since the 2004 election due to its surprise entry into the Parliament and potential role in providing the balance of power). Overall, this

28 For the purpose of this paper a 'parliamentary party' is a political party that, at the issue of writs for the 2007 election, held one or more seats in the national Parliament.

29 Australia maintains (at the national level) a compulsory preferential system of voting.

finding points to experience and organisational capacity as a significant determinant in the deployment of new media (as opposed to financial resources *per se*).[30]

Uptake Drivers

Online Presence, Personal and Electorate Characteristics. As indicated in the discussion of scale creation, collapsing the width and depth assessment into a single metric ('intensity') allows the evaluation of candidates' respective use of online campaigning tools against a number of electorate characteristics.[31] The characteristics (based on AEC and 2006 Census data) utilised are:

- Total size of the electorate (km^2);
- Percentage of the population who speak English at home;
- Average individual weekly income;
- Average age; and
- Incumbent's margin (two-party preferred) at the 2004 national election.

Evaluating intensity against these electorate characteristics provides few strong relationships (as illustrated in Table 4), indicating limited systematic relationships across the sample. Correlations of note are:

- A strong positive relationship between the investment in online campaigning and the margin of the electorate by the Nationals and Citizens Electoral Council candidates, a counter-indicative finding (the safer the seat being contested, the more extensive their intensity);
- A strong positive relationship between electorate size and investment in online campaigning by Nationals candidates, possibly rationally explained by their focus on larger rural and regional electorates which can be difficult to campaign across;
- A slight negative relationship between the size of the electorate's margin (two party preferred) and candidates' online campaigning for parties presently represented in the Parliament (with the exception of the Australian Greens). This is indicative of a ration allocation towards seats that have greater contestability; and
- A modest negative relationship between Liberal candidates' intensity and the electorate's margin (an increase over a similar finding in 2004).

Table 4: Correlation between intensity of online presence and electorate characteristics, by party

	Size	% English	Avg. Income	Avg. Age	Margin
Labor	0.12	–0.04	0.26	–0.08	–0.06
Liberal	–0.14	–0.23	–0.31	0.04	–0.34
Nationals	0.66	0.41	0.31	0.2	0.65
Greens	–0.11	–0.3	0.04	0.14	0.02
Democrats	–0.4	–0.22	0.18	–0.14	–0.38

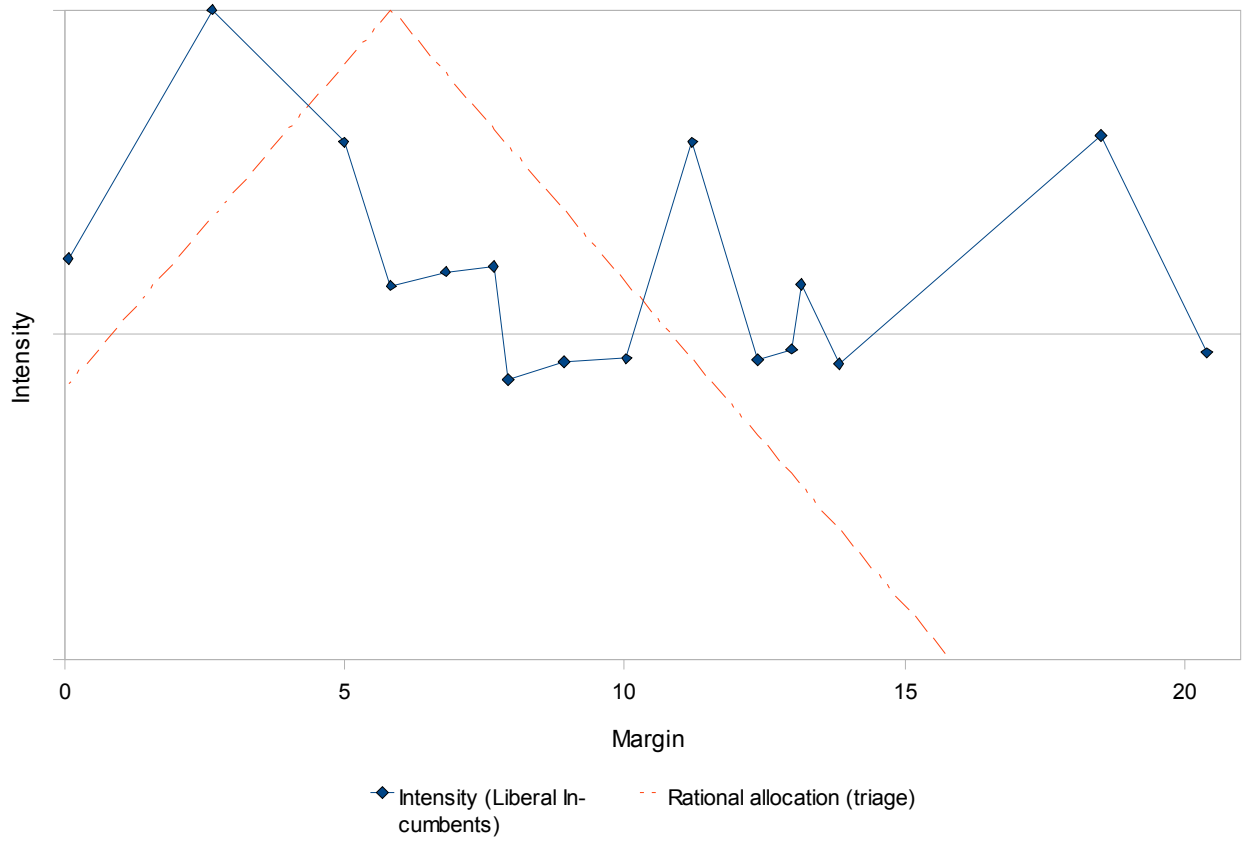
30 Unfortunately, due to a low response from Family First it is difficult to determine these candidates' perceptions of party support, however, the party experienced a number of difficulties with recruitment and candidate discipline during the campaign (Murphy, 2007).

31 One personal characteristics available for analysis is gender: the intensity of a candidates' online presence is weakly positively correlated with being female (0.11).

	Size	% English	Avg. Income	Avg. Age	Margin
Family First	–0.04	–0.06	0	–0.01	–0.17
CEC	0.05	–0.37	0.33	–0.14	0.52
CDP	0.44	0.4	–0.35	–0.02	0.17
Independent	–0.11	0.23	–0.09	0.33	0.1
LDP	0.03	–0.03	–0.1	0.24	–0.08

It should be noted, however, that the relationship between the investment in online campaigning and electoral success is not established, and thus classification of the decision to invest relative to marginality as 'rational' must be viewed with due caution. In addition, while strict rational choice analysis would suggest a linear negative correlation between seat margin and intensity, this may not be appropriate where one or more parties have adopted a 'triage' approach to the campaign. Given some reports that resources were withheld from marginal seats deemed lost due to consistent and reliable grim polling results throughout 2007 (Goot, 2008, forthcoming), a rational allocation of resources towards online campaigning would not be strictly linear with seat margin. This can be explored by comparing the online intensity of Liberal incumbents with a hypothetical resource allocation focusing around seats of a five per cent margin. As we see in Figure 6, this appears borne out to some degree, albeit with a lower triage point and some variability in the 'tail'. The lesson here appears to be a story of quasi-rationality in resource allocation to new media by candidates, indicating the extent of centralised co-ordination and control by parties remains incomplete.

Figure 6: Liberal Party incumbent candidates' intensity (*n*=16) compared with 'triage' strategy

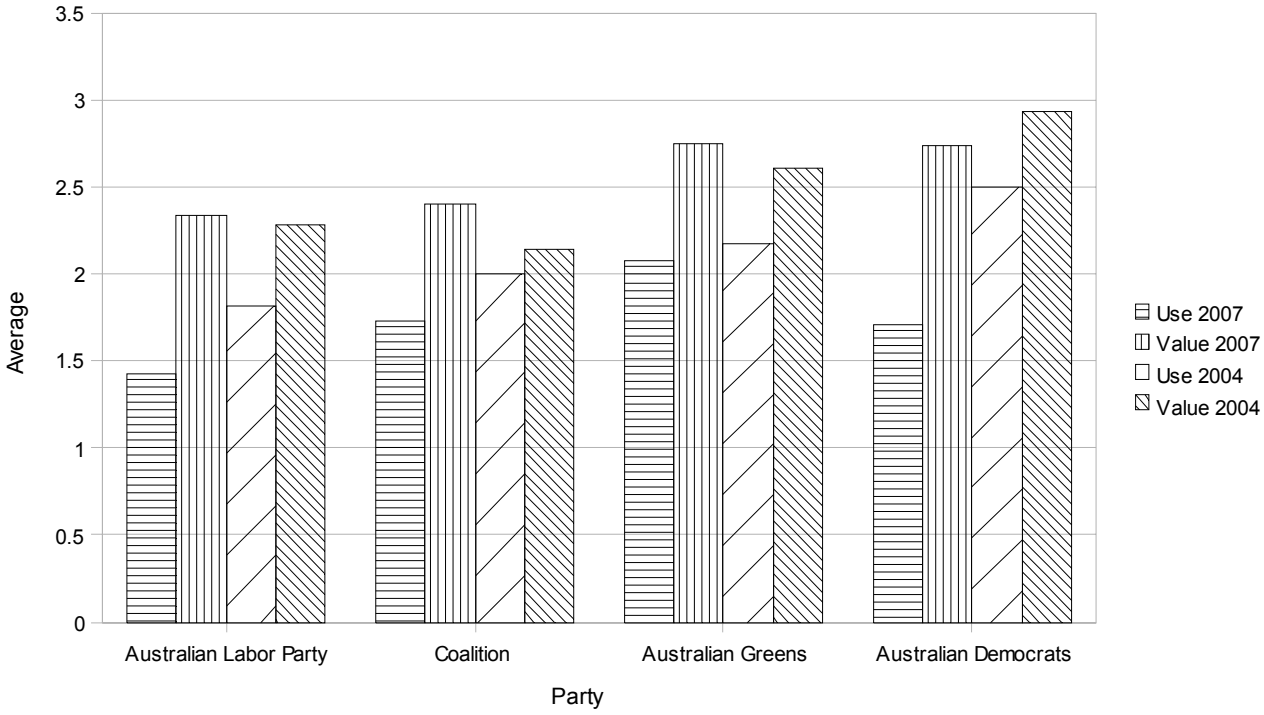


Comparative 'under-utilisation' of communications channels. Matching survey data from candidates that reports their perceptions of the value of different channels and their use of these

channels allows the identification of the 'fit' between the views of efficacy and resource allocation. As in the 2004 study, this is described as either over- or under-utilisation. While this matching process is imprecise, it can give indications of campaigns that are well aligned to value perceptions, and those that are not. This can be informative regarding resource and skills available to individual candidates.

While survey data from 2004 showed a small number of party candidates reporting overuse of specific channels (particularly websites and flyers), in 2007 candidates universally reported under-utilisation across all channels.[32] This was slightly more pronounced in traditional media, and (as illustrated in Figure 7) variations between parties were limited. This would indicate that use–value perceptions are relative given the considerable resource differences between candidates of mainstream and other parties, a finding that needs to be explored further to determine the source of referents (universal, selective inter-party, or intra-party) in candidates' estimation of their campaign (these results would indicate one of the last two).

Figure 7: Use and value perceptions for new media for selected parties, 2007 and 2004 compared



Overall, the survey data indicated that:

- Coalition and Christian Democrat candidates report lower levels underutilisation of all campaigning channels;
- Australian Greens candidates report the highest level of new media use, and the lowest level of underutilisation of these channels; and
- Of all the parliamentary parties, Australian Democrats candidates showed the highest level of channel underutilisation (confirming difficulties experienced by the party as it continued a slide into electoral obliteration).

32 The reason for this is unclear, but may result a dilution of resources over the comparatively long informal campaign.

Conclusions

The 2007 national election does not appear to have been a 'break through' year for the use of new media by candidates in Australia. While there has been a strong uptake in social networking services and an incremental increase in the use of other channels, the overall picture presented in this analysis confirms the cautious approach to technology adoption identified in previous studies of the Australian political class. That candidates' interactions with new media remains problematic is revealed in the stochastic character of the data collected, particularly among emerging campaigning tools which have highly distributed value perceptions (social networking). This does reveal a fascinating view of the learning process of candidates in Australia who, largely without institutional memory and professional campaign management, display stepwise learning processes.

The mixed pattern of technology use does not appear to be mitigated by significant attempts to control or discipline candidate's use of new media by the parties' centralised campaign teams. Given the significantly distorted resources available to the parties of government in Australia, this has democratic value in increasing the comparative visibility advantages of minor party candidates online (particularly compared with their lack of coverage in mainstream new media during the campaign). An alternative (but compatible) view, however, is this finding reconfirms the relative unimportance of local Australian candidates in an era of 'machine politics'.

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Attachment: Coding frame

Search Item	**Analysis Element**	**Quantification**
Email address	Does the candidate has unique (not shared with party or other candidate) email address?	Yes / No
Candidate Website	Does the candidate have a personal campaign website?	Yes / No
If Yes:	How large is the website?	Website textual content was downloaded and measured[33]
	Does the site have a personalised address (e.g. an indicator of search engine optimisation)?	Yes / No
	Does the site provide an RSS/Atom syndication	Yes / No
	Does the website include a blog?	Yes / No

33 Site mirroring was undertaking using the open source HTTrack website copier 3.14 (http://www.httrack.com/) excluding multimedia (audio, video, animations) and client-side scripts. One website was downloaded manually (flash based site).

Search Item	Analysis Element	Quantification
	Does the website include embedded video?	Yes / No
	Does the website include embedded audio or a podcasting service?	Yes / No
	Does the website include any form of push-to-talk VOIP option (e.g. skype)?	Yes / No
	Does the website provide a feedback form	Yes / No
	Does the website provide online surveying or	Yes / No
	Does the website include a search tool?	Yes / No
	Does the website include a sitemap?	Yes / No
	Does the website provide specific information / interactivity to allow the user to make a donation, volunteer time, or purchase	Yes / No
	Does the website provide a link to a members only / activists intranet?	Yes / No
	Does the website provide a subscription option for a mailing list (email or physical mail)?	Yes / No
Party Webpages for Candidate	Does the candidate have a webpage / descriptive entry on the website of their party	Yes / No If Yes: Extent of online content measured using a Likert scale
Flickr	Does the candidate have an identifiable Flickr (photo sharing) account?	Yes / No If Yes: Number of contacts
YouTube	Does the candidate have an identifiable YouTube channel?	Yes / No If Yes: Number of videos posted
Myspace	Does the candidate have an identifiable Myspace account?	Yes / No If Yes: Number of friends
Bebo	Does the candidate have an identifiable Bebo account?	Yes / No If Yes: Number of friends
Orkut	Does the candidate have an identifiable Orkut account?	Yes / No If Yes: Number of friends
Friendster	Does the candidate have an identifiable Friendster account?	Yes / No If Yes: Number of friends
Facebook	Does the candidate have an identifiable Facebook account?	Yes / No If Yes: Number of friends
Linked In	Does the candidate have an identifiable Linkedin account?	Yes / No If Yes: Number of connections