E-LECTORAL ENGAGEMENT:

MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

A report for the

AEC
Australian Electoral Commission

by

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

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Citations

Cite this report as follows (APA style) or in other equivalent formats:

Macnamara, J., Sakinofsky, P., & Beattie, J. (2012). E-lectoral engagement: Maintaining and enhancing democratic participation through social media. Report to the Australian Electoral Commission by Australian Centre for Public Communication, University of Technology Sydney, May.

Contents

Introduction

Under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, including amendments, Australia's federal electoral system requires all eligible Australian citizens to:

1. **Enrol** on the electoral roll (including maintaining the currency of their details such as residential address); and
2. **Vote** in elections.

Furthermore, while votes are cast in secret and cannot be individually checked, there is an expectation that citizens **vote formally** (i.e. cast their votes in accordance with the procedures so they are valid and, therefore, able to be counted).

The role of the Australian Electoral Commission

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is charged with the responsibility of facilitating and implementing the electoral policies of the government – i.e. conducting elections according to the electoral law in force at the time.

The focus of the AEC is on encouraging citizens to:

1. Enrol to vote;
2. Maintain their electoral enrolment (e.g. when changing addresses); and
3. Vote formally in elections.

To achieve its objectives, the AEC conducts ongoing and election-specific campaigns which seek to educate and persuade citizens in relation to their enrolment and voting responsibilities. These campaigns use a range of direct and mediated communication.

Recently, the Australian Government has made a public commitment to engagement with citizens facilitated by technologies such as social media. The Australian Government's *Declaration of Open Government* reads, in part:

> The Australian Government ... declares that, in order to promote greater participation in Australia's democracy, it is committed to open government based on a culture of engagement, built on better access to and use of government held information, and sustained by the innovative use of technology (Department of Finance and Deregulation, 2010a).

In line with this policy, the Australian Electoral Commissioner's Advisory Board on Electoral Research (CABER) recommended that the Commission investigate the potential for new forms of social media to contribute to achievement of the objectives of the AEC, particularly in relation to engaging young people.

The AEC commissioned the study reported here to explore how social media are being used by election management bodies (EMBs) in Australia and internationally, as well as how other relevant government bodies and agencies are using social media to engage citizens as part of achieving their goals and objectives.

Findings will be used to inform future engagement with voters by the AEC through social media, noting that the Commission must discharge its responsibilities with strict political neutrality (Australian Electoral Commission, 2011a, p. 2). The challenges of maintaining political neutrality in the dynamic environment of Web 2.0-based interactive media, as well as other challenges and potential benefits, are explored in this study.

Aim of this research study

In line with the research brief, the aim of this research was:

> To examine approaches taken to social media by other government agencies and EMBs in order to inform AEC participation in social media. The research will focus on the key areas of development of social media policies that facilitate communication with the public consistent with public service values and political neutrality and on measuring the effectiveness and value for money of social media engagement, particularly in reaching specific demographics such as young people. It will contextualise these findings within the existing academic research in the area and will itself contribute to the body of knowledge (Australian Electoral Commission, 2011a, p. 5).

Definitions

Democracy	This report notes that there are many models of democracy with varying forms and levels of citizen participation. Models relevant to Australia are discussed in this report in order to contextualise the analysis and findings.
e-democracy	This term is used to denote electronic, mainly online, forms of democratic participation ranging from information distribution and retrieval to "the use of Web technologies to engage citizens in debate, discussion, consultation and online voting" (Kearns, 2002, p. 11)
e-government	This term mostly refers to the electronic delivery of services by government (American Society of Public Administration and United Nations Division for Public Economics and Public Administration, 2002, p. 1; Hernon, Cullen & Relyea, 2006). In some cases, the term e-government is used broadly to encompass all online contact between governments and citizens (e.g. Silcock, 2001), but usually other terms such as e-democracy and Government 2.0 are used to refer to democratic participation online.
Engagement	The term 'engagement' is often used to denote superficial levels of interaction such as visiting a Web site, views, clickthroughs, etc. Such actions are termed "fragments of behaviour" by psychologists and not regarded as cognitive, affective or participatory engagement. In this study, engagement is taken to mean two-way interaction in which some significant level of cognitive, affective and/or participatory response is involved (Macey & Schneider, 2008).
Government 2.0	"Government 2.0 is about the use of technology to encourage a more open and transparent form of government, where the public has a greater role in forming policy and has improved access to government information" (Department of Finance and Deregulation, 2010b). This term was also used by the Australian federal government for the name of the taskforce established in 2009 to facilitate "greater information disclosure, digital innovation and online engagement" (http://gov2.net.au/about/index.html).
New media	In this study, this term is not used, noting that it is temporal and soon outdated and that some so-called 'new media' have already been in use for more than a decade (Macnamara, 2010a). However, it is often used to denote internet-based and other digital media.
Public sphere	This term is widely used to denote what Jürgen Habermas (1989, 2006) conceived as "part of the bedrock of liberal democracies (2006, p. 412) – the public spaces and forums in which citizens come together and engage in "rational-critical debate" to become informed, contribute to political discourse, and reach consensus expressed in the form of 'public opinion'. The public sphere in

	contemporary societies is largely a mediated space (Dahlgren, 2009), populated by 'political actors' such as politicians; political parties; journalists; various representatives such as those from industry organisations, unions, environmental groups, etc; and sometimes citizens (depending on the form of democracy and the levels of participation it enables).
Social media	For the purposes of this project, social media have been defined as "online tools and Web sites that facilitate many-to-many communications between users. Specific examples include Facebook and Twitter, but may also include more regional or niche services, and more longstanding collaborative environments such as web-based forums and wikis" (Australian Electoral Commission, 2011a, p. 3). More specifically, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as internet-based applications built on the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0, described by Tim O'Reilly, who coined the term, as a second generation of Web-based services that feature openness for participation, collaboration and interactivity (Boler, 2008, p. 39; O'Reilly, 2005).
Web 2.0	The term Web 2.0 is widely attributed to Tim O'Reilly who used it as the theme of a conference in 2004 referring to a second generation of Web-based services that feature openness for participation, collaboration and interactivity (O'Reilly, 2005. A recent media text provides the following definition: "Web 2.0 refers to internet applications that facilitate user interaction, collaboration and information sharing" (Croteau, Hoynes & Milan, 2012, p. 100).

Executive summary – key findings

Benefits and opportunities

1. A number of electoral management bodies (EMBs) and other government departments and agencies, as well as political parties and politicians in Australia and internationally, have demonstrated that **social media afford new opportunities for engaging citizens in democratic processes**. These opportunities have both *quantitative* and *qualitative* dimensions, as follows:

   a. Because the readership, listenership and viewership of traditional media (press, radio and television) are declining among most demographic groups, particularly among young people, and use of social media is increasing rapidly, **these forms of media offer increased access to voters and potential voters**;

   b. Because social media are interactive, they offer qualitatively improved opportunities in mediated communication. Whereas traditional mass media primarily involve one-way transmission of information top-down from elites (government, businesses, institutions, etc), **social media provide two-way interactive and participative engagement with citizens** – specifically, they allow citizens to have a say and be heard (to some extent[1]), they allow citizens to ask questions and seek information directly relevant to their needs and interests, and they afford discussion and participation. Psychological research shows that *engagement* is enhanced through the affordance of voice and participation and, conversely, that it is much less achieved through one-way information flow.

2. Social media can **offer cost savings** compared with use of traditional mass media, as well as access to **low-cost and no-cost metrics** for measurement and evaluation.

Contingent factors affecting and limiting e-democracy initiatives

3. However, there are a number of contingent factors that mitigate the effectiveness of organisational use of social media, including the following:

   a. A substantial proportion of **social media use is personal and entertainment-orientated**, focussed on self-identity construction and what organisations regard as trivia;

   b. Because social media are usually open to anyone to comment, **social media can disseminate criticism**, as well as other disruptive information such as spoofs, parodies, 'send-ups' and satire. There are, therefore, **risks to assess and manage**;

   c. Social media sites **need to attract audiences**. Audiences are not pre-assembled, as they are with mass media. New social media sites start 'from scratch' in terms of audience and need to engage in *audience-making* as well as content production – a factor overlooked in many social media initiatives (see Macnamara, 2012 and footnote 1). Static informational sites usually do not attract significant audiences. Rather, content needs to be attractive to target demographics, often requiring multimedia and interactive content (even games), as well as opportunities for visitors to comment and even contribute their own content.

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[1] At least two key issues mitigate the affordance of voice in social media: (1) the availability of an audience, with many social media sites having very small numbers of readers, friends, followers, etc and (2) whether anyone is listening. Recent research points to a need for 'audience making' by the hosts of social media sites and the importance of listening in social media (see discussion of the 'work of listening' and the 'architecture of listening' on pp. 26 and 78).

Many social media sites have relatively small audiences – e.g. in 2010, 97 per cent of Twitter users had fewer than 100 followers (*DigitalBuzz*, 2010) and, at March 2011, the average Facebook user had just 130 friends (Kraut & Resnick, 2011, p. 97);

d. Interactivity in social media, which in successful sites can result in substantial numbers of inquiries, questions and comments requiring reception, consideration and response, **can have considerable resource implications** for host organisations. Technology can partly provide solutions (such as automated monitoring, alert systems and acknowledgements). However, consideration of comments, questions and inquiries also requires human resources and can take considerable time of staff and management to listen and respond. Organisations engaging in social media **need to have an "architecture of listening"** (as well as for talking) **and be prepared to do the work of listening** (Macnamara, 2012). This requires human resources as well as technology (see p. 26);

e. **Failure to listen and respond appropriately in social media can result in damage to the organisation** and be worse than not using social media at all. Becoming overwhelmed by or ignoring citizens' comments, questions and inquiries usually causes resentment and may lead to criticisms of the organisation online across multiple platforms and sites. Furthermore, heavy moderation (such as removing critical comments) can offend social media users who have high expectations in terms of freedom of expression. 'Light moderation' policies are recommended and these require tolerant and supportive management.

Further macro-level contingent factors relating to the use of social media for political engagement warrant a separate main point (see point 4).

Macro-level considerations affecting e-democracy initiatives

4. In the political environment, **social media are most effective in engaging citizens in new, non-traditional forms of political participation** such as single 'issue politics' and direct action (e.g. Occupy and Kony 2012). Research indicates that social media are less effective in engaging citizens in traditional forms of political participation. While generalisations should be avoided, to a significant extent social media users:

- Are most closely associated with *actualising citizens* rather than *dutiful citizens* – that is, citizens seeking self-expression, to have their say and be listened to and to participate on their terms rather than through formal institutional processes such as elections (Bennett, et al., 2011, p. 839);
- Seek *maximalist* rather than *minimalist* forms of democratic participation (Carpentier, 2011, p. 17) – the former including *micro-participation* (such as regular consultation, local and special interest group participation and online engagement) **as well as *macro-participation*** (e.g. voting in elections);
- Engage in multiple sites of information and participation – i.e. *multi-sited* participation rather than *mono-sited* participation (Carpentier, 2011, p. 18);
- Engage in *agonistic* rather than *deliberative* ways involving diversity of views rather than consensus, dissent as well as consent, and expression of views and political struggle rather than "rational debate" and deliberation advocated in deliberative forms of democracy (Carpentier, 2011; Mouffe, 1994; Shaw, 2012) (see pp. 22–25).

Some researchers identify the emergence of "**a new civic paradigm**", particularly among young people. Longer term and more broadly, beyond the scope of this study, governments may need to review and reconsider the ways in which citizens are afforded democratic participation, including the way elections are conducted (see pp. 22–25).

5. The contingent factors identified in findings 3 and 4 indicate that **social media can provide effective channels for electoral management bodies (EMBs) to engage citizens in traditional democratic processes such as enrolling to vote and voting formally in elections to some extent. But social media do not offer a panacea for political engagement and for reinvigorating the public sphere.** Case studies presented in this report from Australia, New Zealand and other countries show examples of effective engagement, as well as limitations to be noted and lessons to be learned.

6. The changing nature of civic engagement and political participation referred to in finding 4, together with the relatively small audience size of many social media sites (compared with large mass media), mean **that social media offer complementary and supplementary channels of communication and should be integrated within overall communication strategies.**

Key practical and operational considerations for EMBs

7. From analysis of case studies of electoral management bodies undertaking initiatives to engage citizens in democratic participation online, a number of important practical and operational considerations and themes are identified, including most notably the following:

   a. **Loss of control of the message** – that communicators ever had control is disputed by communication and social science scholars, noting that audiences interpret information in various ways and that meaning is influenced by social interaction, culture and many factors other than media messages. Even if communicators could control the messages they distribute, they undoubtedly have never been able to control meaning, which is the central element of communication. Notwithstanding, in social media there is even less control over messages and channel use. Some see social media as the 'Wild West', while others see it as a *democratisation* of media and public communication. Whichever view is taken, the lack of control of conversations and even topics in social media engagement needs to be recognised and accepted by organisations participating online and this is a key issue for government bodies engaging in social media (See 'governance');

   b. **Resource implications** – Four out of five EMBs studied and more than 50% of all case studies reported resourcing as a key issue in establishing, maintaining and engaging in social media. Stagnant, out-of-date sites can have negative impact on an organisation. Furthermore, the 24/7 nature of social media places heavy demands on staff (including overtime) and the potential for large volumes of public comment and discussion poses a challenge to organisational listening and capability to respond;

   c. **Supportive senior management** – senior management needs to be supportive of social media initiatives and prepared to take some risks. These can be mitigated through planning, the engagement of staff with experience and expertise in social media platforms and adherence to the protocols and conventions of social media, but some risks remain. This also means that **there needs to be trust** by senior management in staff responsible for social media engagement. Without senior management support and leadership, e-democracy initiatives either do not get off the ground or remain limited in scope;

   d. **The need for a champion and specialist expertise** – in addition to having senior management 'on side', most organisations achieving some success in social media report leadership by a champion within the organisation and also engagement of specialist staff or consultants to assist and advise;

   e. **Decentralisation of communication** – effective social media engagement is, to a significant extent, a reversal of the centralisation of corporate and organisational communication that has occurred over the past 100 years into PR and communication

departments and units. To meet the diverse and large-scale demands of social media engagement and also to be authentic, a key requirement of social media engagement, online communication needs to be delegated to a number of staff in an organisation – even all staff. This has significant implications for training and governance (see next point);

f. **Social media governance** – decentralisation of communication through social media should be done only within a sound governance framework. Governance in the context of social media is identified in European and Australasian research studies as including:

- **Social media policies**;
- Specific **social media guidelines** for staff;
- **Training** of staff; and
- **Monitoring** of social media (Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012);

g. **Most EMBs, departments and agencies start using social media internally, before going public**. This offers a learning ground and minimises risks. However, overall, internal social media tools such as Yammer (an internal microblogging service) and 'white box' social networks are rarely used on an ongoing basis by government organisations. This could be a neglected area of engagement for some;

h. **Most social media use by EMBs is event-based – that is, focussed on election periods**, with many struggling to find ways to keep citizens interested in non-election periods. Some even commented to the effect that, if you don't have something interesting to present, don't engage in social media. However, this opportunistic approach is contrary to the ongoing conversation nature of social media. Online engagement focussed on **listening** can continue during periods in which the organisation does not have much to day. Others can be prompted to speak, such as by posing questions and discussion topics for citizens to give their views. Making a site interesting does not have to rely on the organisation speaking; *crowdsourcing* and collaboration can be tapped to create interesting content (e.g. asking young people to tell their stories of political engagement);

i. While basic metrics are plentiful in internet-based media (such as page visits, views, downloads, 'likes', 'followers', etc) and widely used, **outcome-orientated measurement and evaluation are not extensively undertaken at this stage**. Also, even at output level, **most government social media users rely on free platform measurement tools** such as Google Alerts and Facebook Insights for broad quantitative metrics, with **less paid attention to demographics and even less to qualitative analysis**. This is an issue for sector-wide development;

j. Importantly, **no EMBs and few government departments and agencies reported social media 'disasters' or major controversies. A majority report that social media sites largely self-moderate**, with users correcting inaccurate information and challenging extreme or offensive comments and content;

k. **Political neutrality and privacy** were not seen as issues by most EMBs and government departments and agencies interviewed. Most believe political neutrality is already well-established in Public Service procedures and existing codes and guidelines apply to social media. Also, neutrality is already well-ingrained in Public Service culture. Notwithstanding, EMBs engaging online in relation to voting and elections are likely to need guidelines and training in 'managing conversations', as online discussion will almost certainly include topics such as online voting (a matter for the Parliament on which EMBs cannot comment). Simply saying 'no comment' or refusing to accept citizens' comment on such issues will stifle the conversation. Publication of user-friendly but clear **'terms and conditions'** on EMBs sites will be an important step, as well as **sensitive moderation**;

8. **High levels of citizen engagement in social media necessitate creative approaches and adoption of social media practices** which are grounded in informality, irreverence including satire, entertainment and humour, and high levels of interactivity including collaboration and acceptance of user generated content. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) used humour to some extent in tweets, which generated a higher number of followers than other government sites, but overall few government organisations are prepared to venture too far in these areas due to conservatism and fear. **Elections New Zealand communication using *Orange Man*** (see pp. 40–41) **and the 2012 London Mayoral election 'Bite the Ballot' campaign** (see pp. 72–74) **are noteworthy examples** of a creative and entertaining approaches and, interestingly, these campaigns have attracted compliments and little criticism. Finding the right tone of voice online is an important step.

9. Government department and agencies, like corporations, are **increasingly appointing Digital Managers, Online Community Managers and other similar specialist positions, or appointing specialist in agencies, to develop and manage social media engagement**, particularly in the early stages of development to bring focus and specialist expertise to this area. But, increasingly, social media engagement is likely to become mainstream public communication and be integrated into overall communication strategies. Digital and online will increasingly become *de rigueur*.

10. **To a significant extent, government department and agencies view social media engagement as a 'no choice' situation**. With large-scale public adoption and use, social media are increasingly spaces in which citizens congregate and converse, access information, form opinions, and have their say. To not engage in social media will inevitably result in further alienation of democratic political processes and government from citizens. Conversely, social media engagement is a further way of taking government to the people and bringing people to government.

Further research

11. Overall, this study shows that social media use by government departments and agencies is still largely at a nascent stage, and often experimental in nature. This is also confirmed in relation to corporate use of social media (e.g. Macnamara, 2011b; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). Therefore, further research will be useful in this field. **One key area for further research identified in this study is in relation to evaluation of social media communication and engagement**. As discussed in finding 7(i), most organisations rely on basic quantitative metrics and free online tools. More sophisticated evaluation of *outcomes* in relation to objectives is desirable. **A second area for future research that would offer direct insights from key stakeholders would be to conduct in-depth qualitative research among a cohort of social media users** such as young people after a trial period of engagement. This could utilise interviews (e.g. by online chat, Skype or e-mail), participant diaries recording observations, feelings and outtakes during e-democracy engagement, and/or netnography (observation of online behaviour).

Academic and professional research findings to date

Social and political scientists and governments around the world have been concerned for some time about what is described as the *democratic deficit* comprised of declining citizen interest and participation in democratic politics (Castells, 1998; Curran, 2011, p. 86; Dahlgren, 2009; McAllister, 2002), declining citizens' trust in representative institutions as well as politicians (Gibson, Lusoli & Ward, 2008, pp. 111–113) and "a growing sense of popular alienation from formal political institutions and processes" (Castells, 1998; Flew, 2008, p. 83).

Research shows that young people[2], in particular, are less interested in many traditional forms of democratic political participation than older people (e.g. McAllister, 2011). Young people are over-represented among those who do not vote and among those who do not even enrol to vote. For instance, in the September quarter of 2011, the estimated national participation rate of 18–25-year-olds on the Australian national electoral roll was 76 per cent, which was substantially lower than any other age group (the next lowest, 26–29-year-olds, was 86 per cent).

Furthermore, media use and engagement data indicate that young people are making up an increasingly small share of traditional media consumers. Audience research shows substantial declines in readership of newspapers and viewing of television (Este et al., 2008, p. 7–8; Newspaper Association of America, 2008; Pérez-Peña, 2009) and young people make up the largest group in what is termed 'audience fragmentation' (Anderson, 2006; Jenkins, 2006).

Young people are increasingly heavy users of social media, including social networks and SMS text messaging. Researcher Sally Young (2011) reports that, when young people do access mainstream media, they are most likely to do so via online editions. This means that the traditional media communication strategies aimed at increasing citizen participation in elections are increasingly going to miss those age groups with the lowest participation levels.

A number of government departments and agencies have sought to redress this deficit in democratic participation and reinvigorate the *public sphere* (Habermas, 1989, 2006) through use of interactive social media to engage citizens in policy making, consultation and other democratic processes such as elections.

While analysis has shown that the widely-cited 2008 Obama presidential campaign used social media largely for fund-raising and for gaining voter turnout (because of voluntary voting in the US), a Pew Internet and American Life Project study reported that 46 per cent of Americans used the internet to access news about the campaign, share their views and mobilise others (Smith & Rainie, 2008, p. i).

Scholarly research in relation to e-electioneering and online public consultation indicate that social media do not offer a panacea for democratic engagement, with identification of a number of limitations and challenges, as discussed in the following section. However, studies do show that social media are being increasingly used by government agencies as well as political parties for distributing information on political and civic affairs and for citizen engagement (e.g. Chen, 2008; Chen & Walsh, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009; Flew & Wilson, 2008; Gibson & McAllister, 2008; Gibson, Williamson & Ward, 2010; Goot, 2008; Macnamara, 2008, 2010a; 2010b, 2011a); Macnamara & Kenning, 2011; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Smith & Rainie, 2008).

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[2] Definitions of 'young people' vary. A Commonwealth definition identifies young people as aged 15–29 years (http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/180392/), while psephologists categorise this rather wide range into two groups: 18-24 and 25-30 (Russell, 2011, p. 4).

The unprecedented growth of social media is undeniable. At the beginning of 2012, Facebook had 845 million active users (Facebook, 2012), four billion videos a day were being viewed on YouTube (YouTube, 2012) and 250 million tweets were being sent every day via microblogging site Twitter (Fenton, 2012, p. 124) – increasing to 340 million tweets a day in April 2012 (Parkinson, 2012).

The AEC is therefore rightly keen to identify opportunities for engagement with citizens via social media and to ensure that it has a sound understanding of the challenges, issues to address (e.g. privacy, political neutrality, etc), policy implications, and effectiveness of such engagement.

Internet cyberoptimism and 'cyberbole' versus cyberpessimism

Debate over the capabilities, affordances and effects of online social media can be broadly summarised as falling into two competing discourses – one of cyberoptimism and what Steve Woolgar (2002) calls 'cyberbole' and the other characterised by cyberpessimism and, in some cases, 'moral panic'. Yochai Benkler notes "mid-1990s utopianism" in relation to the internet (2006, p. 260), some of which has continued into the 21st century, while prominent internet researcher, W. Lance Bennett, points to a "narrative of despair" (2008, p. 4) at the other extreme.

Some of the key arguments and viewpoints presented in research over the past two decades are worth briefly summarising to establish the context of social media engagement with citizens and identify major issues and challenges, as well as opportunities.

The digital divide

Despite considerable enthusiasm about the internet, and Web 2.0 in particular, social scientists point to a continuing 'digital divide' between those with internet access and those without (first identified by the US National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2000 and more recently discussed by Norris, 2001; Novak & Hoffman, 1998; Rice, 2002, p. 106). Statistics support this concern, with internet users totalling 2.27 billion in 2011 (Internet World Statistics, 2012) – just one-third of the global population. However, Australia has one of the highest internet and broadband access rates in the world, with access surpassing 80 per cent of the population in 2009.

Nevertheless, drawing on the work of a number of internet researchers, Macnamara (2010a) summarises that there are three types of digital divide: technological access, social and cultural access (based on education, gender, class, ethnicity, etc), and digital media literacy. Even though most Australians have physical access to the internet, social and cultural issues and digital media literacy remain factors to consider and reinforce the **need for multimodal, multimedia communication**. Media researcher, James Curran, notes that the much-acclaimed 2008 Obama presidential campaign spent a record $235.9 million on traditional television advertising (Curran, 2012, p. 13). Despite gaining significant attention, social media was only one part of his campaign.

Cyberoptimism and *cyberbole* that lead to assumptions and generalisations about young people being universally online and digitally literate – evident in frequent use of Mark Prensky's (2001) widely quoted term "digital natives" and in categorisations such the 'Dotnet' generation (Bennett, 2008, p. 8), Generation 'txt' (Trenholm, 2008, p. 330) and Generation @[3] (Hempel & Lehman, 2005) – are not borne out in research. Even since the widespread availability of social media, studies in universities show that a significant percentage of young people are not digitally literate – and usually too embarrassed to say so (e.g. James, 2008; University of Technology Sydney,

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[3] The @ symbol was used to connect user names and computer hosts in e-mail addresses by computer engineer Ray Tomlinson in 1971 and introduced with the first internet e-mail in 1972. However, the @ symbol dates back to the Middle Ages when it was used by monks to denote the Latin 'ad' meaning 'at' in texts. From the 19th century onwards, it became widely used in bookkeeping and accounting, hence its inclusion on the QWERTY computer keyboard.

2008). Furthermore, analysis of user data for social networks such as Facebook show 25–54 year olds equalling or outnumbering young users. So generalised assumptions that young people can be reached through social media and, conversely, that older people cannot be, need to be avoided and careful audience analysis undertaken. Furthermore, many disengaged citizens such as those in remote areas and low socioeconomic groups are not yet part of the growing 'digital universe'.

Audience fragmentation

Other scholars point to 'audience fragmentation' as a negative impact of the internet. As a Forrester Research report stated in relation to television, "monolithic blocks of eyeballs are gone" (cited in Jenkins, 2006, p. 66). In addition to identifying the loss of mass audiences as a prime contributor to the collapse of traditional media business models, some researchers argue that a corollary of the loss of mass audiences is that many people congregate in what have been variously termed "**digital enclaves**" (de Sola Pool, 1990; Sunstein, 2007), "**echo chambers**" (Leonard, 2004), "**public sphericles**" (Fraser, 1992; Gitlin, 1998; Goode, 2005; Warner, 2002) and other terms, instead of participating in the broader *public sphere*. This is considered problematic by these scholars because they argue that small digital communities and forums attract like-minded participants (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007; Sunstein, 2007, 2009) and, thus, are not exposed to diversity in views and alternative information sources.

It should be noted, however, that some research disputes these claims (e.g. Brundidge, 2006; Dalton, 2006; Habermas, 2006; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012), instead showing that online communities overlap and that 'issue orientated' online forums often include people with varying backgrounds, political affiliations and viewpoints. Most recently, a network analysis by Webster and Ksiazek (2012) reported "very high levels of audience overlap" and concluded that there is "little evidence of ideological segmentation in media use" (p. 50).

Another significant challenge presented by audience fragmentation and the proliferation of sources of information and news is that many sites struggle to gain audiences of any significance size (Levine, 2008). This is particularly the case with new start-up sites. The oft-misquoted adage 'build it and they will come'[4] has been shown to be untrue. Like the Ralph Waldo Emerson inspired claim "build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door"[5], this assumption is refuted by marketing theory and practice which consistently show that even the best products and the most well-known organisations, speakers, actors, authors and so on require marketing.

'**Audience-making**', identified by James Ettema and Charles Whitney (1994) as a major activity of traditional mass media – also referred to as 'audience manufacture' by Fernando Bermejo (2009) – becomes the responsibility of site hosts in the case of social media (Macnamara, 2012). Hosts of social media sites, such as Facebook pages, Twitter profiles, YouTube channels, etc, need to recognise the requirement for 'audience-making', as "attracting an audience is a prerequisite for achieving economic, social, or political objectives" (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012, p. 41). It needs to be noted that, in 2010, 97 per cent of Twitter users had fewer than 100 followers (*DigitalBuzz*, 2010) and, as at March 2011, the average active Facebook user had just 130 friends (Kraut & Resnick, 2011, p. 97).

This raises a key question for organisations – whether to engage in social media only through hosted (owned) sites, or in others' sites, or both. Hosted/owned sites offer greater control of content through moderation and data security and privacy – key factors for government. However, an old adage in marketing is 'fish where the fish are'. If target citizens are assembling in other sites, organisations need to give consideration to engaging in those sites. For instance, the UK

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[4] This statement was actually written by scriptwriters and used in the Kevin Costner film 'Field of Dreams'.
[5] This statement is also misquoted and is not found in Emerson's writings. A longer similar statement was attributed to him by others (see Britannica.com, 2012).

government has found that one of the most effective ways to engage with young mothers was through www.netmums.com, rather than establish a new site and try to get mothers to come to it.

Loss of social capital

Other sceptical views of online communication include the argument that it contributes to a decline in social capital, as argued by Robert Putnam (1995, 2000, 2004) and investigated by many others since. This is largely based on the *displacement hypothesis* which proposes that online (machine) interaction reduces or replaces human interaction (Sparks, 2006, pp. 72–73). At the extreme, Joseph Lockard argued that "cyberspace is to community what Rubber Rita (an inflatable sex toy) is to human companionship" (cited in Flew, 2008, p. 52).

While not dismissing this argument, it has to be recognised that the same concerns were expressed in relation to television viewing in the late 20th century, but found to be largely unwarranted. Furthermore, a number of studies indicate that online engagement can increase social capital among many groups from youth to the elderly (e.g. Cole, 2000; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman & Robinson, 2001; Howard & Jones, 2004; Kiel, 2005; McKenna & Bargh. 1999; Mundorf & Laird, 2002; Wellman & Haythornthwaite (2002).

Lurking

Related to concerns about loss of social capital is a view, based on considerable statistical data, that 90 per cent or more of internet users 'lurk', with only 10 per cent actively participating in discussion or contribution of content (e.g. Lange, et al, 2008; Heil & Piskorski, 2009). Forrester Research's six-rung Ladder of Participation is only slightly more optimistic, estimating that only 13 per cent of adults online are 'creators', compared with 52 per cent classified as 'inactives' and 33 per cent who are 'spectators' (Li, 2007).

The '**90:9:1**' principle extends this concern over what researcher Jakob Nielsen (2006) calls '**participation inequality**' even further. This maintains that 90 per cent of internet users are largely inactive ('lurkers'), nine per cent are occasional commentators and 'editors' (they comment on or correct others' content) and only one per cent are 'creators' of original content.

However, other scholars argue that 'lurking' online is not entirely passive. They point out that even online users who are not creating content or commenting are often listening, learning, engaging cognitively in what they are viewing (i.e. thinking about things) and, therefore, are becoming informed and potentially forming or changing opinions.

The concept of the *monitorial citizen*, the citizen who uses various forms of media to monitor social and political developments and becomes active only when he or she decides to intervene (see see Kearne, 2009; Schudson, 2003, p. 55), further informs our understanding of online citizenship.

Loss of privacy

Recently, a growing concern about social media, particularly social networks such as Facebook which capture extensive personal information in user profiles, relate to loss of privacy and the risk of breaches of confidentiality.

Government departments and agencies have particular responsibilities in relation to privacy and confidentiality and, although most content of social media does not pose risk, the privacy policies of public social media sites considered for use need to be carefully scrutinised and trends such '**behavioural targeting**' of citizens based on profile data captured online by third parties need to be borne in mind. Clear privacy policies need to be explicitly stated on social media sites and networks.

Colonisation by power elites

A long tradition of *political economy* research has identified that media have become controlled by political and economic elites and propose that the internet and social media are at risk of similarly becoming colonised and used to advance the interests of centralist governments, neoliberal capitalism and market states which perceive citizens as 'consumers'. Political economists, from the neomarxist founders of the Frankfurt School (e.g. Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse) to contemporary critics such as Robert McChesney, Vincent Mosco, Herbert Schiller, Graham Murdock and Peter Golding warn of the use of government and market power and hegemony to impose regimes, laws, institutions and practices on citizens.

Activists and many citizens remain cynical of government communication campaigns, particularly those involving one-way information transmission and those seeking compliance with existing political and institutional systems and structures. They see increasing use of the internet and social media by government and big business as an attempt to maintain power and the status quo.

"It is inevitable that as soon as a form of technology is seen to be a useful means of relaying information and connecting with people, particularly people who may otherwise not engage with their message, then political elites will try to find ways of exploiting it to their advantage."
Natalie Fenton
Professor of Media and Communications
Goldsmiths College, University of London

On the other side of the coin, there has been much excitement and even euphoria about social media, manifested in discourses of democraticisation of media, empowerment of individuals, reinvigoration of the public sphere, and even creation of a global public sphere (Castells, 2010).

The new public sphere

A number of prominent writers including Howard Rheingold (1993, 2002) Manuel Castells (1996, 2004, 2010), Yochai Benkler (2006) and Henry Jenkins (2006) see major social benefits arising from online social networks, including the emergence of a new public sphere.

As far back as 1993, Rheingold optimistically described the internet as "a road to revitalise an open and thorough debate among citizens who wish to nourish the roots of a democratic society" (1993, p. 279). More recently, he wrote of the potential for 'smart mobs' to quickly assemble around issues and influence politics and social change in what he called "the next social revolution" (Rheingold, 2002). While Rheingold, like Nicholas Negroponte[6] before him, is criticised for naive optimism, his focus on 'smart mobs' and new forms of democratic participation and engagement by young people was prophetic and the changing nature and forms of political participation will be revisited later in this literature review.

In his most recent writing, Castells (2010) has conceived of a global public sphere in which citizens around the world interact and collaborate to agree on solutions to problems and ways to address issues. As Australian media researcher, Terry Flew notes, a number of cultural studies analyses have seen a "transcendent capability" in new forms of social media, suggesting that they will transform society and the public sphere of political debate into a more open, connected, informed and equitable public space (Flew, 2008, p. 38).

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[6]   Author of *Being Digital* (Knopf, New York, 1995).

New media and business models

Mark Deuze (2007) says new forms of internet media will create new opportunities for journalists and writers working as independent freelancers and contractors, rather than on salaries for large media oligopolies. Dan Gillmor's (2006) *We the Media* and Clay Shirky's (2008) *Here Comes Everybody* took this concept further, proselytising that, in future, everyone will be a publisher and a broadcaster – or a least a narrowcaster or 'slivercaster' (in internet terminology).

John Battelle, co-founder of *Wired* magazine and author of *The Search: How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture,* predicts that information search and retrieval will soon enter a stage that he calls "**ubiquity**" in which almost all of the world's information will be available online (2005, pp. 258–279) – albeit he issued warnings about surveillance and loss of privacy with the evolution of Web 3.0 (the Semantic Web).

Chris Anderson (2006) in *The Long Tail* espoused new opportunities for business, including the capability to market low volume products via the internet, taking advantage of cost savings in warehousing, retail space and marketing.

Many such developments and forecasts are beyond the focus of this research, so we will turn our attention back to understanding the public sphere and practices of citizenship in contemporary society – and particularly to establishing a realistic grounded understanding of how interactive social media can enable and facilitate democratic participation.

Leo Marx (1964) provided an early critique of the "rhetoric of the technological sublime" in *The Machine in the Garden*, a theme taken up by Vincent Mosco (2004) in his book *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power and Cyberspace.* Eminent sociologist Zygmunt Bauman accuses Manuel Castells, Yochai Benkler (2006), Scott Lash (2002) and other internet optimists of "internet fetishism fallacy" (cited in Deuze, 2007, p. 33). Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000) say that Castells "overestimates the transformative impact of new media technologies … and underestimates the extent to which new media are incorporated into an already existing repertoire of sociocultural activities and relationships".

That existing repertoire of sociocultural activities and relationships includes continuing widespread reliance on traditional media and traditional forms of political engagement (such as attending meetings and rallies, participating in political parties and unions, etc). The largest media audiences in Australia and worldwide are still gained by mass media such as television. A study of political social media use during and after the 2010 Australian federal election showed that only 124,344 citizens were 'following' the 10 most active politicians on Twitter at the time of the election – a relatively modest number in a nation with more than 11 million voters. The Prime Minister of the nation was attracting less than 50,000 'followers' on Twitter in October 2010 shortly after her election (Macnamara, 2011a). Therefore, **social media complement rather than replace other media and need to be integrated with other public communication**.

Studies that seek to *synthesise* various data and arguments (in the true spirit of Hegel's dialectic form of argument), rather than advocate a particular *thesis* or *antithesis*, most often come to a conclusion that the internet, and social media in particular, offer a combination of functions and dysfunctions, benefits and risks, opportunities and challenges. A number of positive and negative effects of online communication, drawn from a wide range of research studies over the past two decades, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Impacts and effects of the internet and emergent media, based on DiMaggio et al. (2001), as updated in Macnamara (2010a, p. 336).

IMPACT	POSITIVE EFFECTS	NEGATIVE EFFECTS
Social equity	Increased access to information Declining cost of information access Access to communities unlimited by geography Online education	'Digital divide' means those without digital access or literacy miss out Online pornography, paedophilia and financial fraud
Community	New forms of social interaction Opportunities for collective intelligence and knowledge communities to share knowledge through collaboration	Loss of social capital through reduced personal interaction Creation of digital enclaves of like-minded people feeding each others' prejudices Loss of privacy
Politics	New opportunities for political engagement A more effective 'public sphere' of debate Opportunities to reach isolated communities and for isolated communities to reach politicians and institutions	Domination by power elites which colonise cyberspace Popular culture corruption of politics, lowering of political debate (e.g. spoofs, parodies and entertainment) Creation of pseudo-organisations
Organisations	Flexible organisations – e.g. home working Networked interaction for collaboration More horizontal channels of communication	New forms of internal surveillance (e.g. e-mail) Online communication remains top-down Online becomes a low-trust environment
Business	Engagement with stakeholders Low-cost e-commerce (online sales) 'Long Tail' business models to reach small niche markets (Anderson, 2006) Market research from tracking user Web trails (e.g. clickstreams) New forms of individual marketing	Fragmentation of 'audiences' requiring more micro-targeting Increased opportunities for criticism and public attack Loss of control over messages and brands in participatory media
Culture	Demassification of access to content Everyone can become a media producer	Fragmentation, hyper-segmentation, digital enclaves

A further key factor about social media listed in Table 1 and warranting comment is that a substantial proportion of online activity is related to **entertainment**, rather than seeking information or engaging in politics. Drawing on Papacharissi, 2007, Scammell, 2000 and others, Natalie Fenton (2012) notes that "mass self-communication [a term coined by Manuel Castells] through social media is more likely to be largely self-referential and motivated by personal fulfilment" (p. 135). She says further: "... people rarely have democratic enhancement at the top of their agendas and use the internet far more for entertainment purposes than for informational gain (p. 126).

Boring!

A key failure factor identified in research in relation to social media is, in simple terms, boring sites. W. Lance Bennett and colleagues report that "the lack of many Web 2.0 features diminishes the appeal of most formal civic engagement sites" (Bennett, Wells & Freelon, 2011, p, 837) – a finding also reported by Stephen Coleman (2007 and 2008) and a European Commission study (2007). Specifically, a US study reported that an analysis of 73 youth civic sites found generally low levels of interactive features, which are shown to be fundamental elements of Web 2.0 and much-sought by young Web users in particular (Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee & Philippi, 2008).

Coleman (2008) analysed the degree of communication freedom afforded to young users in a collection of civic engagement sites in the UK. He found that successful activist sites "were largely built by youth and gave users high levels of autonomy", whereas institutional and government sites were "heavily managed" (as cited in Bennett, et al., 2011, p. 838).

Research in the field of video and computer games, as well as social media, indicate that young people, and increasingly most Web users, expect high levels of interactivity as well as multimedia features such as sound and animation and high standards of design including colour and youth-orientated aesthetics.

A recent comprehensive research-based text giving information and guidelines for building and maintaining successful online communities is ***Building Successful Online Communities: Evidence-Based Social Design***, compiled and edited by eminent and long-time internet researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Robert Kraut and Paul Resnick (2011). This book provides many important findings and recommendations spanning:

- Setting up a successful online community and attracting participation (a wide range of techniques are described);
- Encouraging contributions and participation;
- Gaining commitment to the online community;
- Regulating online behaviour;
- Maintaining participation;
- Dealing with newcomers (who may be unaware of previous discussions and unfamiliar with the conventions and practices of the site);
- Dealing with idiosyncrasies and dysfunctions of online communities, such as 'sock puppets', 'trolls' and 'griefers', 'spammers', 'shilling', 'creepy' behaviour, 'flame wars' and so on.

This book is highly recommended additional reading, as a practical supplement to this report.

Beyond production values, formats and online community management techniques, attracting and engaging citizens in social media sites focussed on political participation are also affected by the expectations of citizens in terms of forms of political participation they value and find attractive.

What kind of democratic participation do citizens want?

Perhaps the most fundamental issue to be addressed in developing a strategy to engage citizens in political participation is identifying the kind of democracy that citizens want. This directly informs the level and forms of citizen participation that are desirable and realistically achievable.

Models of democracy

There are multiple models of democracy in existence worldwide – and even variations within democratic countries such as Australia. Noted thinker on the 'public sphere', Jürgen Habermas identified and discussed what he saw as three main forms of democracy in contemporary societies: *liberal*, *republican* and *deliberative* models, each with significant differences. Others propose further alternatives and variations, with at least five main models of democracy advocated.

1. **Liberal democracy** privileges individual freedom, often adopting voluntary voting, and functions by groups and power centres aggregating the views of private citizens largely through informally gauged public opinion. *Liberal pluralist* democracy, as discussed by James Curran and others, involves diverse interests competing in a 'marketplace of ideas' and the "media marketplace" (Curran, 2011, p. 80) – albeit critics point out that those diverse interests are not systematically or equitably represented because of power imbalances.

2. What Habermas calls **republican democracy** most closely aligns with what others call **representative democracy**. This involves political engagement primarily through representatives such as elected politicians, political parties, trade unions and advocacy organisations. While being seen as practical (because not everyone has time or wants to be directly involved in politics), this model faces criticism for leaving participation in the hands of elites which, at various times, may pursue their own interests and power and not truly represent the interests of all citizens. This model is also similar to what James Curran refers to as the '**rational-choice' perspective** of democracy (2011, p. 80).

3. **Deliberative democracy**, strongly advocated by Habermas (1989, 2006), stresses the importance of active citizen engagement in thinking about political issues, discussion and debate, and expression of public opinion (see also Held, 2006). A key requirement for deliberative democracy, according to Habermas (1989) is the widely discussed ***public sphere*** which Habermas conceived as a forum of "rational-critical debate" in which "citizens come together and confer freely about matters of general interest" to become informed, contribute to political discourse, and reach consensus. Habermas describes the public sphere as "part of the bedrock of liberal democracy" (2006, p. 412). Habermas (1989, 2006) and others such as David Held (2006) argue that a deliberative form of democracy is preferable to republican or representative models as it involves a larger number of people which avoids representatives becoming a 'power elite' and it involves reflective thinking about issues by citizens.

   However, the Habermassian public sphere has been criticised as utopian and unachievable by some scholars because of its "idealisation of public reason" (Curran, 2002, p. 45). Others argue that it remains unrealised because of social inequities that need to be addressed such as unequal distribution of power and limitations restricting individuals' access to this discursive space – e.g. domination by white bourgeois men (Howley, 2007, p. 345). Still others point out a general disinterest in politics by many or most citizens. Peter Dahlgren says that we have to accept that democracy is to a great extent representative", although he does note that "within representative democracy ... there is plenty of room for expanded engagement" (2009, p. 15).

   Some equate Habermas' deliberative model with direct democracy, although others such as Nico Carpentier see deliberative democracy having distinct differences to direct models (2007, pp. 223-4). Carpentier sees deliberative approaches requiring all citizens to think about and discuss political issues, but implementation of decisions and day-to-day functioning of politics is left to key 'political actors'.

4. In contrast, **direct democracy**, or what some call **participatory democracy** (e.g. Carpentier, 2011), seeks the involvement of citizens in a wide range of political activities beyond electing representatives and expressing opinion. It is fair to say that most regard direct democracy as impractical. Peter Dahlgren says "there is not much chance that a vast majority of people of a Western liberal democracy will become 'active citizens' or even well-informed citizens" (2009, p. 13). James Curran refers to the "chimera of direct democracy which works well only in small participatory polities" (2011, p. 80).

5. **Radical democracy** has similarities to direct democracy in that it seeks high levels of engagement by citizens (Carpentier, 2011, pp. 36 –38; Curran, 2011, pp. 81–82). However, it has other fundamental differences. Drawing on leftist political thought grounded in neomarxism, socialism and New Left thinking, radical democratic theory challenges liberal pluralist models for "ignoring the enormously unequal resources available to different groups in society" (Curran, 2011, p. 81). Furthermore, even more importantly from the perspective of operationalisation, it sees the underlying assumption of the possibility of consensus manifested in 'public opinion' as naive and illusory. Instead of consensus-orientated aims which arguably repress divergent views under the mantle of consensus and singular 'public opinion', radical approaches to democracy largely adopt an ***agonistic*** approach.

Deliberative v agonistic democracy

While differentiating and rejecting antagonism, agonism accepts and even encourages political conflict in non-violent terms. It encourages the expression and 'thrashing out' of all views. A leading proponent of agonistic approaches, Chantal Mouffe (1994) says:

> The prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions, nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilise these passions, and give them a democratic outlet (cited in Carpentier, 2011, p. 21).

In his latest book, Nico Carpentier says "in such a pluralist democracy, decision-making takes place on the basis of political struggle and debate" (2011, p. 21). "Far from jeopardising democracy, agonistic confronting is in fact its very condition of existence", according to Mouffe, 1999, p. 756), as it allows diverse viewpoints to be heard and gain consideration. A recent Australian study of political blogs notes that "an understanding of politics as agonistic rather than deliberative" and attention to the "affective dimensions" of politics as well as "the role of listening" (further discussed later) informs analysis of political blogs and provides a framework for understanding the public sphere today (Shaw, 2012, pp. 41, 44).

Of these models of democracy, with their varying roles for political representatives/actors and citizens, Australia primarily has a *representative* system of democracy, with some elements of *deliberative* democracy, and occasional pockets of *radical* democracy. However, of relevance to this study, is that **social media users interact most often in direct, participatory and agonistic ways and much less so in deliberative and representative ways**.

This affects the kind of discussions that users expect, and even the range of topics discussed, in social media. In general, social media political discussions are informal, frank, colloquial, humorous, satirical, sometimes emotional, occasionally heated, lacking deference to authority and even anti-establishment, passionate and personal. They are much less often formal, diplomatic, rational or objective.

Examples of the tone of social media communication, even among altruistic citizens, include the knitting hobbyist who started and promoted a 'Knitters Without Borders' challenge following the 2004 Asian tsunami and raised $1 million for Doctors Without Borders under the screen name *Yarn Harlot* (cited in Kraut & Resnick, 2011, p. 101). Also, during the 2010 federal election campaign, Prime Minister Julia Gillard's official Facebook carried this comment from a visitor:

> DO USE KNOW WHO I HATE THE MOST IN THE WORLD SHE IS A BULLSHIT ARTEST SHE LIES I HATE THE PROMISESE SHE MAKES I FELL LIKE KICKING HER ASS RIGHT NOW AND THTA IS JULIA FILLARD I FELL LIKE KICKING HER ASSS [emphasis and errors in original] (cited in Macnamara & Kenning, 2010, p. 19).

Online political comment and participation does not follow traditional practices and protocols and any organisation planning to engage online needs to be prepared for non-traditional expressions of political, civic and personal views that occur online. This requires considerable tolerance and flexibility in moderation policies as well as in recognition of what constitutes appropriate comment.

Minimalist v maximalist models of democracy

A useful way of gaining further insights into the level and forms of participation afforded to and expected by citizens today is through Nico Carpentier's analysis of minimalist and maximalist models of political engagement, outlined in his recent book *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological Democratic Struggle* (2011).

These paradigms are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Minimalist and maximalist forms of democratic participation (Carpentier, 2011, p. 17).

Minimalist democratic participation	Maximalist democratic participation
Focussed on representation and delegation of citizens' rights and power	Balances representation and participation
Participation limited to elite selection	Attempts to maximise citizens' participation
Focussed on macro-participation (e.g. voting at periodic elections)	Combines micro-participation and macro-participation
Narrow definition of politics as institutionalised politics	Broad definition of the political (including 'the personal is political' and political as a dimension of the social)
Unidirectional participation	Multi-directional participation [including peer-to-peer and bottom-up, as well as top-down]
Focussed on a homogenous popular will [i.e. dominant public opinion]	Focussed on heterogeneity

Carpentier's model identifies key differences between maximalist and minimalist democratic participation as:

- A broadening of opportunities for citizens to engage in **micro-participation** (e.g. participation in small groups, local community forums, even school elections). In contrast, Carpentier notes that, in minimalist models, "the political role of citizens is limited to the election of political representatives at the macro-level" (p. 17);

- **Multi-directional** participation, including peer-to-peer discussion and debate and a broader definition of politics beyond institutional politics, "without ignoring participatory practices within the field of institutionalised politics" (p. 18). The Edelman Trust Barometer (2012) found 'someone like me' more trustworthy than government officials and even NGO spokespersons.

A third key characteristic of maximalist participation is that it is "**multi-sited**", compared with minimalist models which are wholly or largely "mono-sited" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 18). Emphasis on the ballot box is an example of largely mono-sited democracy, whereas multi-sited democracies afford multiple opportunities to citizens to engage in consultation, debate and advocacy such as 'citizens' parliaments', open public consultation forums, online sites seeking public comments, etc.

The Australian Government has engaged in some multi-site democratic engagement, such as major online and offline consultation projects, which are aligned with contemporary broadening notions of political participation. The objectives of the Australian Electoral Commission may be achieved by affording additional forms of citizen participation, such as supporting non-government elections (e.g. schools councils, youth groups or voting on issues) to educate and rehearse citizens in voting and show them the benefits of electoral participation. This is similar to a recommendation of former New Zealand Electoral Commissioner Catt (2010, p. 21).

Also, the shift to multi-sited democracy informs social media strategy of the Commission by suggesting that one site may not be an effective approach. Rather, many organisations find that **participation in multiple social media and networks is required to reach different groups and also afford multiple contacts with 'mobile citizens'**. Thus, a social media strategy for the AEC may require participation through hosted blogs, an AEC Facebook page, Twitter, an AEC YouTube channel and customised wikis or other forms of discussion board for debating issues, as well participation by AEC staff in other networks and communities (e.g. youth groups, GetUp, http://www.reach.org.au; the myriad youth groups linked through http://youthportal.com.au/, online indigenous groups, online multicultural communities, etc.

Dutiful v Actualising citizenship

A further useful typology for understanding different expectations of citizenship and also changing conceptualisations of citizenship within democratic systems is offered by Michael Schudson's concept of the "**dutiful citizen**" (DC) and W. Lance Bennett's model of the "**actualising citizen**" (AC). The dutiful citizen accepts responsibilities in relation to civic and political participation and also accepts traditional modes of participation, notably through organised groups (from civic clubs to political parties) and their activities (town hall meetings, rallies, etc), becoming informed through traditional media, and voting in elections. However, this type of citizen is in decline in many contemporary societies, according to studies by Couldry, et al. (2007), Putnam (2000), Schudson (1998) and Bennett, et al. (2011).

On the other hand, looking deeper into trends, researchers observe that what Bennett calls the actualising citizen – or *actualising citizenship* – is on the increase. Bennett says:

> This citizenship typology enables us to think about a generational shift away from taking cues as members of groups or out of regard for public authorities (opinion leaders, public officials, and journalists) and toward looser personal engagement with peer networks that pool (crowd source) information and organise civic action using social technologies that maximise individual expression (Bennett, et al., 2011, p. 839).

The authors go on to observe that 'this scheme points to the growing importance of participatory media" and, citing similar views by Jenkins (2006) and researchers engaged in The Pew Internet and Public Life Project (2007), they declare "**the rise of a new civic paradigm**".

Drawing on research by Bennett, Coleman, Jenkins and others, Bennett, et al. (2011) concluded that:

> Traditional organisations ... signal primarily to dutiful citizens through relatively limited offerings of interactive affordances for sharing knowledge, expressing views, creating groups or networks, or proposing action (p. 843).

Conversely, actualising **citizens operating within the 'new civic paradigm' seek their information from peers and networks, increasingly accessed through social media**, **focus on particular issues, causes and projects** rather than broad-based notions of citizenship and politics and **take more direct action** instead of relying on representatives. Some shun traditional political institutions such as political parties, distrust politicians, and are cynical about government generally. An alarming number, insofar as this research project is concerned, believe voting has little value.

The latter can be addressed to some extent through education and persuasion. However, research suggests that there is a significant generational shift occurring in political participation.

It is not a case of citizens disengaging from politics and civic life, as widely claimed; it is a case of citizens disengaging from traditional modes of democratic engagement and seeking new ways to participate in politics and civic life.

For instance, in a study of 15 nations, Pippa Norris (2003) found declining "citizen-orientated activism" (i.e. general citizen engagement in politics), particularly in relation to voting and elections, and rises in **cause-orientated activism** ranging from Kony 2012 and Occupy to the Liquid Feedback 'interactive democracy' site in Germany (http://liquidfeedback.org).

This trend has been noted by a number of researchers, particularly among young people. For instance, in an analysis of political participation among youth in Australia, Philippa Colin (2008) concluded in part:

The internet is significant in shaping the relationship between youth participation policies and **new political identities** in the following ways: it is a unique and autonomous platform for the realisation of **project-based political identities**; it is a legitimising space for **new political practices** of young people" (p. 527) [emphasis added].

William Dutton (2007) goes as far as saying that the internet, and social media in particular, will result in the emergence of a '**Fifth Estate**' that extends beyond the self-proclaimed Fourth Estate (mass media) to become an alternative source of news and analysis and provide sites of advocacy and political action by and on behalf of citizens.

W. Lance Bennett and his colleagues (2011) note that "emerging forms of engagement may not be captured by studies based on earlier conceptions of citizenship" (p. 837). So, to some extent, political organisations including electoral management bodies are entering new terrain.

Changing concepts of political participation

Table 3 summarises our analysis of views and recent research that identifies new forms of political participation, compared with traditional forms of political participation. This does not signal or mark the 'end of traditional forms of political participation'. Such predictions are as likely as other examples of *endism* to be untrue (e.g. the end of newspapers, the end of television, the end of advertising, etc). However, these significant shifts need to be noted by governments and organisations seeking to engage with citizens, and youth in particular.

Table 3. Traditional versus new forms of political participation.

Traditional political participation	New forms of political participation
Membership of a political youth group, political party, union, etc	Single issue and cause support (e.g. Occupy, Kony 2012)
Attendance at official political meetings, rallies, etc	Online 'Following', 'Liking', viewing videos, etc
Formal submissions and Ministerial letters	Online comment (Wall posts, blogs, user-generated videos, etc)
Voting	Informal (protest) voting or not voting
Reading traditional media	Social network peer-to-peer interaction
	Cybergraffiti, mash-ups, etc

Natalie Fenton from the Leverhulme Media Research Centre at the prestigious Goldsmiths College, University of London, says the very "ontology of the political" (i.e. what it means to be political and politically engaged) is changing (2012, p. 142). Changing notions of democratic participation pose challenges for governments and government agencies in their efforts to engage citizens.

Engaging Youth

Actualising notions of citizenship and political participation are particularly relevant to young people.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) devoted a series of research monographs to exploring uses of digital media by youth in 2008. In one of the texts, *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*, editor W. Lance Bennett noted that "younger generations have disconnected from conventional politics and government in alarming numbers" (2008, p. 1). He added: "the world of politics and government seem distant, irrelevant, and inauthentic to many citizens, particularly young demographics" (p. 13).

More recently, in an October 2011 research article titled 'Communicating civic engagement: Contrasting models of citizenship in the youth Web culture', Bennett and colleagues noted "fragmentation of an old civic order" and "emerging civic styles". In short, they noted declining interest in and support for joining political parties and traditional activist organisations and also voting, in favour of emergent forms of citizen engagement through single issue politics via direct action (e.g. Occupy, Kony 2012) and various forms of online action (e.g. commenting, 'liking', 'following', linking, tweeting and retweeting, videos, etc).

Bennett et al. refer to "emerging forms of engagement" that need to be recognised. They found that "earlier work examining youth engagement online has generally failed to account for different conceptions of citizenship that may be communicated by different kinds of organisations" (2011, p. 836).

Youth engagement online is frequently characterised by:

- **Biopolitical** strategies (e.g. the alter/anti-globalisation movement), discussed by Curran (2011, pp. 38–39);
- **Carnivalesque** practices (Curran, 2011, p. 38);
- **User-generated content** including videos, often including **humour**, **send-ups**, **spoofs**, **parodies** and **satire** (some researchers call for citizens to be able to express their views in their own language and cultural context rather than being bound to a liberal bourgeois concepts of political discourse that requires reasoned and rational debate through formal submissions, letters, voting, etc);
- **Linking** and **sending links**, **retweets**, **social networking**, etc;
- **Games**;
- '**Smart mobs**' (Rheingold, 2002);
- **Cybergraffiti**;
- **Hacking** (i.e. attacking organisations that cause citizen outrage.

Bennett and a number of other scholars including eminent UK media researcher Nick Couldy also identify another important point about online engagement sites. In his latest book, Couldry draws on W. Lance Bennett to point out: "**interactive sites contribute little, for example, to young people's sense of engagement if those same young people do not believe that their contributions are being listened to**" (Couldry, 2012, p. 125).

The importance of listening – not just talking

Indeed, listening is identified as a vital element of interaction and engagement for people of all ages by many scholars (e.g. Couldry, 2010; Crawford, 2009; Dreher, 2009; Husband, 2009; Macnamara, 2012). This has important implications for the design, planning, structure and resourcing of online spaces for citizen engagement. Often most focus is on content – providing information – with little consideration for how the contributions of participants will be acknowledged, considered, responded to, and acted on if required. Macnamara (2012)[7] identifies the "**work of listening**" and the need for an "**architecture of listening**" in organisations as key elements for effective online engagement, particularly when large-scale listening is required, such as when hundreds or thousands of citizens engage in discussion. A recent Australian study by Judy Burnside-Lawry from the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University noted "the lack of empirical research in the area (2011, p. 149).

See further discussion of listening online under 'International e-democracy initiatives and learnings' in the USA in relation to the MIT Deliberatorium.

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[7] This article is currently in print at *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*. A copy can be provided on request.

Get them while they're young

A number of studies indicate that voting, and some other forms of political participation, are **habitual**. In her 2010 report to the Australian Electoral Commission, Dr Helena Catt made this point based on Australian Election Study research and recommended that a key focus for the Commission should be on "catching the newly eligible" and recommended a number of "interventions" for increasing the exposure of young people to elections (e.g. in schools), to information about voting and elections, and to socialising processes related to democratic participation (Catt, 2010).

Overseas studies support a focus on young people and development of early participation habits. Writing in the US, Russell Dalton, states that "it is important that young people are drawn into the world of participatory politics". He adds:

> Participation among youth provides the foundation for political activity throughout the life cycle … political participation can be habit forming and this is an argument to begin the habit early in life (Dalton, 2011, p. 11).

The Australian federal government has a number of existing initiatives in place addressing young people and the internet – such as its **Youth Advisory Group on Cybersafety** (https://yag.gov.au). Some lessons may be learned from the experiences of this program, in place since 2009 – albeit it is noted that this initiative targets youth aged 8–17 (Youth Advisory Group, 2012).

Another existing Australian federal government online initiative aimed at youth is the Web site of the **Australian Youth Forum** (http://www.youth.gov.au/ayf/Pages/Default.aspx) which targets young people aged 15–24 and encourages them to get involved and have their say on a range of issues. The Australian Youth Forum site promises to put young people in direct communication with the government through a number of initiatives, including the Web site, online forums and outreach visits by the relevant Minister and a Youth Engagement Steering Committee. Again, this initiative of the Australian Government Office for Youth within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), working with the national youth peak body, **Australian Youth Affairs Coalition**, may have useful learnings for the AEC. However, it is noted that parts of the site have not been updated since 2010 and the Web page on 'How the AYF works' states: "The first forum is planned to take place in February 2009" (Australian Youth Forum, n.d., para. 5).

Government-citizen online engagement

Eminent UK media researcher, James Curran, in his latest co-authored book, *Misunderstanding the Internet* (Routledge, 2012) draws on 2010 research by Sonia Livingstone and others to conclude that there are three limitations of online dialogue with government as follows:

- Citizens' inputs are often disconnected from real structures of decision-making;
- Citizens tend not to take part in these consultations partly for this reason; and
- Sometimes e-democracy means no more than one-sided communication in which government provides information about services and promotes their use (i.e. there is little or no listening).

Nevertheless, despite the many limitations and challenges, governments in Australia, as elsewhere, are having some success in engaging citizens online. In addition to early trials discussed by the **Government 2.0 Taskforce report** and analysed in studies such as Macnamara (2010b) in the *Australian Journal of Political Science*, recent reports such as *Local Government and Community Engagement in Australia* produced by the Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government (2011) provides a review of a wide range of initiatives at local government level. Some of the key priorities identified in the ACELG report were:

- Creating a supportive organisational culture;
- Reframing community engagement to be viewed as core business and not confined to individual projects;
- Being clear about limits to consultation;
- Getting back to communities on how their inputs were used;
- Integrating outcomes of consultation into decision making (referred to "articulation to policy making and decision making" in Macnamara, 2010b);
- Operating within resource constraints;
- Having adequate staff and support systems inside council to do this work
- Rethinking how community engagement skills are developed;
- Effectively meeting the challenges for engaging rural, remote and Indigenous communities;
- Providing the information needed for effective participation (pp. 3–4).

The ACELG report also noted that a number of councils involved in online citizen engagement projects received training – for instance, the Local Government Association of Queensland. Training is provided both in-house and externally, with staff from a number of councils completing the **IAP2 qualification in public participation**.

The **International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)** Australasia also has a wide range of information and resource materials, including State of the Practice (SOTP) reports, on its Web site – http://www.iap2.org.au/.

A number of electoral management bodies (EMBs) in Australia also have sought to engage citizens online as part of achieving their objectives of gaining enrolment to vote and voting. These are examined in this study using primary research which is reported in the following section.

Why people don't vote

The *Mobilise the Franchise* report by former New Zealand Electoral Commissioner, Dr Helena Catt, identified a number of reasons that citizens do not participate in elections, including "accidental straying" of habitual voters; those who "generally vote" but for whom voting is not habitual; those with "weak intention" who are easily distracted by other things; and those who belong to groups with no culture of electoral participation (Catt, 2010, pp. 12–16).

A study for the UK Electoral Commission conducted by Dr Andrew Russell and colleagues, Dr Edward Fieldhouse, Dr Kingsley Purdam and Dr Virinder Kalma from the University of Manchester reported six key reasons that citizens do not vote:

- Disillusion – the view that it makes no difference who wins;
- Apathy – a lack of interest in politics [or at least the forms of participation offered];
- Impact – the view that an individual vote won't make a difference;
- Alienation – the view that politics is 'not for young people';
- Knowledge – not knowing enough about politics to cast a vote;
- Inconvenience – voting is too time consuming (Electoral Commission, 2002, p. 6).

It has to be noted that communicative interventions through social media – or communicative interventions of any kind for that matter – cannot address all of these reasons for non-participation. 'Inconvenience', for instance, is tied to the current form of 'paper' enrolment and voting in Australia. The 'e-generation' would likely find electronic voting more convenient and attractive. This is a matter for the Parliament and beyond the scope of this report. Also, 'disillusion' and 'apathy' are likely to be connected to underlying beliefs and views of the political system and political practice (i.e. the style of politics being practised, which is also beyond the scope of this report).

However, a number of the barriers to electoral participation relate to awareness, attitudes, knowledge and perceptions. These can be addressed, at least to some extent, through provision of information, engagement in discussion with 'influencers' and participation (learning by doing). Social media offer increased opportunities for these to occur – albeit within the limitations and modes of participation identified in the research reported.

Summary from the research literature

A growing body of evidence indicates that online citizen engagement is possible and is being undertaken by governments and government agencies, as well as political parties, non-government organisations, activist groups and companies. The 2008 Obama campaign stands as an international political exemplar. Democratic uprisings in the Middle East, referred to as the 'Arab Spring' are also widely cited as evidence of the effectiveness of social media in engaging citizens in democratic participation – although Couldry (2012) notes that "the actual role of social networking in the Arab insurrections has probably been exaggerated" (p. 130). In many areas, social media and networks are engaging citizens in participation – for example the hobbyist knitting and crochet online community *Ravelry* had more than 1.2 million members as at March 2011 (Resnick & Kraut, 2011, pp. 1–2). A number of examples of successful online sites relevant to electoral engagement are discussed in the following case studies and the section on "International e-democracy initiatives and learnings'.

However, the evidence so far suggests that **online social media and networks have a range of functions as well as dysfunctions and present challenges as well as opportunities**. Major **risks of establishing online sites include possible:**

- **Criticism** of the organisation and/or its programs;
- **Off-topic discussion**;
- **Loss of control of messages**;
- **'Hi-jacking' of discussion by vested interests or 'trolls'** (extreme cases of the above);
- **'Flame wars'** between participants;
- **Breaches of privacy and even legal action** (e.g. for defamation) (Kraut & Resnick, 2011; Macnamara, 2010a, 2010b).

Also, **sites can allegedly become 'digital enclaves' or 'echo chambers' for small groups of like-minded citizens** who dominate discussion (de Sola Pool, 1990; Leonard, 2004). However, there are practices to mitigate these risks (see following points).

Benefits available through social media include:

- Their wide adoption and use, offering **additional opportunities to reach and engage citizens**;
- Their **interactive functionality** which affords *dialogue* (listening as well as talking). As well as serving as a **free source of 'real time' research**, this *participation* **enhances engagement** (noting that participation, in most instances, is a prerequisite for engagement);
- Opportunities to take advantage of **peer-to-peer influence** – significant for young people in particular;
- **Lower cost communication and engagement** (compared with mass media advertising);
- **24/7 communication** (in social media 'prime time is my time' (Negroponte, 1995).

However, to achieve these benefits, **content and practices from the physical world cannot be simply transferred online** – referred to as 'shovelware'. Online sites are expected to take advantage of the interactive functionality, as well as the philosophies, protocols and conventions of Web 2.0. Social media users expect high levels of creativity (including multimedia and multimodal content) and interactivity and user-functionality including the facility to comment and even

contribute user-generated content (UGC). They also expect a 'lighter', informal and even irreverent tone, as discussed in this report.

The guide to successful online communities by Kraut and Resnick (2011) emphasises that **specialist knowledge is required to be successful online** which, in turn, suggests that specialist staff are required to develop and lead online engagement projects and provide training to others. This is not to say that, once established, management and all staff cannot participate. But most specialists agree that '**evangelists**' and '**ambassadors**' are required in the initial stages, followed by the 'early adopters' and then others (Macnamara, 2011b).

Social media complement rather than replace other media and need to be integrated with other public communication, given the 'digital divide' which includes those without internet access, as well as citizens who do not engage online for social, cultural or media literacy reasons.

In the broader context of democratic participation, research points to a number of key issues to consider including:

- Growing **disenchantment with traditional forms of democratic participation and political engagement** – and, to some extent, this includes voting in elections which some see as too infrequent and not effective (particularly in an era of 'hung parliaments');

- The rise of **actualising citizens rather than dutiful citizens** seeking new ways to express their views politically, rather than adhere to traditional political participation practices;

- A search for **maximalist forms of democracy rather than minimalist forms**. This is not a new effort at achieving direct or participatory democracy, but rather a movement towards new forms on political engagement, often online;

- Pursuit of **self-expression and political participation at multiple sites, rather than at single sites**. Media and audience fragmentation have resulted in multiple sites offering information and engagement, attracting mostly small groups with shared interests;

- Successful **online sites tend to be issue-orientated or focussed on specific interests, rather than generalist**. The contemporary citizen is increasingly socially, politically and culturally mobile – a 'grazing' consumer of media and information gained from multiple sources (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012, p. 51);

- **Social media users interact most often in direct, participatory and agonistic ways and much less so in deliberative and representative ways**. This results in informal, personalised, emotional, colloquial, argumentative and other unconventional modes of participation. Traditional organisations seeking to engage successfully in social media need to adapt their strategy and mode of engagement to the protocols, conventions and practices of social media and networks.

A useful overall summary is provided in the conclusion of a recently published analysis of internet use and democratic expectations and demands online:

> In summary, our study demonstrates the relationship between the internet and citizen attitudes about democracy may be more nuanced than previous research has suggested and somewhat contingent upon the technological and political context in which citizens are embedded. Nevertheless, our study supports the basic premise that the internet may foster political change by socialising citizens into the political beliefs required for democratic citizenship and in turn promote successful and sustainable democracies (Nisbet, Stoycheff & Pearce, 2012, p. 263).

Electoral management bodies' e-democracy initiatives and learnings

This section presents findings from analysis of five case studies of citizen engagement through social media by electoral management bodies (EMBs) directly relevant to the work of the Australian Electoral Commission.

NSW Electoral Commission

Background

The NSW Electoral Commission is located in Sydney and responsible for the registration of political parties, enrolment of electors, electoral rolls, and the conduct of elections in the State. The Commission was a particularly interesting one to study, as a state election was held in NSW in 2011.

Objectives

The key objectives of the NSW Electoral Commission social media strategy during 2011 were:

1. To spread messages virally online via online social networks and direct conversations;
2. To hear what people were saying about the election;
3. To reach younger audiences that may be missed by traditional communication methods.

Platforms

The NSW Electoral Commission used the following online platforms to reach their targeted audiences during the run up to the 2011 State election.

- **Vote NSW Web site** – http://vote.nsw.gov.au/
  The Web site carries a large amount of information for NSW voters and has an 'election clock' counting down until the next election. Social media channel icons/links are shown on the page for citizen engagement.

- **Facebook Community Page** – https://www.facebook.com/NSWElections
  Coordinated by NSW Electoral Commission and its advertising agency, the Facebook page was active primarily during the peak period of the election campaign. At the time of writing, the page had 1,065 'Likes'.

  Notable was that the community itself was "pretty self moderated ... a nice community." No significant criticism or conflict between participants was reported.

  Facebook advertising was employed to increase 'Likes'. This was managed by the advertising agency and was successful in attracting an increased audience.

  However, it is interesting to note that Facebook and Twitter icons are not currently on the NSW Electoral Commission homepage http://www.elections.nsw.gov.au/.

- **Twitter** – https://twitter.com/#!/NSWelections
  The account had 343 followers at the time of writing. The platform was used for broadcasting messages and primarily linking to items on the Web site.

- **YouTube** – http://www.youtube.com/user/NSWelections

The channel had 23,415 views to mid-May 2012 and videos posted range from 'How to Vote' to showing new voting innovations such as iVote.

- **SMS Reminders**
  SMS reminders allowed electors to register for an e-mail and/or SMS to be sent whenever a Local Government or State Parliamentary election event for which they were enrolled was pending. It appeared to be a good 'push' technology, although usage figures were not available.

Planning and strategy

Interest in online engagement had already been building in several States and, in 2011, a three-day national meeting was held for communication staff from all Australian state electoral commissions, attended by all states and territories except Tasmania and ACT. Commission staff looked at legislation, requirements, risks and management issues around online engagement.

The NSW social media initiative came from the Commission's advertising agency which suggested the use of online engagement channels. This was coupled with a project within the Commission to set up its own Facebook account. Staff noted:

> It was clear we needed a Commission-wide approach.

A social media strategy was developed by the advertising agency and it was also **integrated into the overall communication strategy**.

The stakeholder group was extremely broad.

> All the electors of NSW so that's everyone from 18 to 70. The parliament candidates and participants in the election, the registered political parties, so just basically everybody ... we need to skew it to a younger audience who are the most disengaged from the electoral process and who are the very people who aren't using traditional media like they used to. So we were really looking to reach those people.

The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) audience was not targeted in social media engagement to date. However:

> For the upcoming local government elections, we will try and see if we can link in to those people.

Once approval was given, the social media strategy was developed and then the online platforms were set up by the external advertising agency.

> It was an organic process where social media was actually offered to us as another advertising channel in the run up to the 2011 State elections.

Community guidelines were developed for each platform. For instance, the guidelines for Facebook are in the Notes tab at https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=186395708061798 and explain the code of conduct for the page.

> Our basic principle was as an apolitical body ... the rules basically were that we would accept no partisan political comments and no posts from nominated candidates or parties of any kind.

Content calendars were developed and three weeks of content was pre-prepared for the kickoff of the platforms. The advertising agency was originally employed to produce content, but the Commission found that, in reality, its staff produced much of the material simply because the agency continually looked to them for guidance. This has implications for resourcing.

Event-based or ongoing conversation

Social media are mainly used by the NSW Electoral Commission for **information transmission**.
> The main objective was to get out the messages about the election much as an advertisement might, rightly or wrongly, this is how we saw it.

However, this approach is being reviewed and the Commission is planning to use social media in more interactive ways in future.

Social media use by the NSW Electoral Commission is **predominantly event-based, centred around elections**. This is partly the result of resource limitations.

> Between election periods, there's not really that much for us to say ... and also we don't necessarily have the resources to manage a very proactive social media presence when we don't need to, considering that the last lot was only really possible because it was being supported by an outside provider"(advertising agency).

The Commission is planning to bring social media channels "back to life" in the second half of 2012 when the cycle for NSW local government elections begins.

Management – leadership and oversight

Senior staff of the Commission clearly understand a role for social media and were encouraged by the Commission's advertising agency which discussed the new channels and how they could be used. Staff report that the NSW Electoral **Commissioner was "fairly risk tolerant** and saw the advantages of it" after the advertising agency put together a brief.

However, there is no clear champion or advocate of social media within the organisation.

> If there was somebody in here at the moment who was really pushing for it we'd be posting more. The question is if we had a full time social media officer on the payroll, I'm sure if they had nothing better to do than post stuff and whatever, then obviously we would be a lot more active.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

The NSW Electoral Commission did not have a social media policy for staff during the last election Instead, general guidelines were issued in the form of a "common sense social media reminder".

> Basically it said in support of our code of conduct which covers public comment, this is an opportune time to remind everyone about their private social media use ... it just says the reputation for impartiality in the conduct of the election is crucial.

Since then, a more detailed social media policy is in development. The senior executive responsible said: "I don't want to go through another of these (elections) without it."

Training and resourcing

The Commission took a partnership approach with its advertising agency during the start-up phase of its social media engagement strategy. The agency trained internal Commission staff and also became actively involved in responding to posts and moderating platforms as part of their retainer agreement during the peak period. **During the period of the 2011 election, four staff (two in-house and two from the advertising agency) worked on the social media platforms**.

The agency was given guidelines based on the telephone call centre response manual so they could quickly respond to questions on the online platforms.

There appeared to be a certain comfort and confidence gained from employing an outside supplier for the initial phase.

> It's the comfort of knowing these people are monitoring it ... if things go really pear-shaped then there's someone you can deal with on the spot.

It is unclear, however, how future social media engagement will be managed, as contracting an advertising agency to do much of the work is expensive.

Monitoring and measurement

The advertising agency supplied **weekly metrics reports** both qualitative and quantitative regarding each social media platform (although these were not reviewed by the researchers). The advertising agency also supplied detailed **monitoring** to the Commission, including qualitative analysis such as *sentiment* (positive, negative, neutral). Real-time monitoring was one of the main services the Commission sought and valued during the election.

However, post-election, the Commission's staff monitor social media manually.

In terms of assessing the overall effectiveness of social media use, the response echoed the Econsultancy (2010) report on UK public sector online engagement which concluded in relation to measurement that "success is a lack of failure". The senior executive interviewed summarised:

> Well it didn't blow up in our face. No disasters. We didn't pussyfoot around, we went in there and we allowed comment and we dealt with everything as it came. So you know, I believe it was a successful experiment in full.

Key learnings

- **Content** is a key component of social media and it is important to have engaging content. Initially, the Commission used basic content such as 'how to vote', but is now more prepared to look for more interesting content such as photos and videos to increase engagement.

- **Resourcing** – be prepared for resourcing implications. Social media use is not costly in dollar terms, but it is in employee time.

- **The 24/7 nature of social media** – new rules of engagement apply as social media operate 24/7 and response time expectations are demanding.

  > I think you can probably ignore somebody for about a day and then it's just considered to be rude in that world, and you'll get criticised for it.

- **Monitoring** – even if you don't have a proactive social media strategy, you need to monitor what is being said.

- **Approval processes** need to be simplified and quick if you are going to be successful.

  > You can't have this really structured approval processes for posts and everything. You need to be able to move quickly.

- **Learning as you go** what works in social media. The word 'experimental' was used throughout the interview, reinforcing that many learnings were gained through experience.

- **Tone** – getting the tone right within the content is very important.

We felt at the time anyway, that we had to play a very straight bat ... you just don't want to tip the line of something that's inappropriate. As they felt more comfortable with the new media they agreed with the agency that the tone needed to be more engaging "if you're not getting through the messages you want, what's the point.

Main opportunities

- Social media has allowed the Commission to **give responses in real-time** to users by simply pointing a link back the back to the Web site. As a customer service style tool it has proved to be very efficient.

- From a financial cost perspective (not employee time), **social media is affordable**. Social media platforms are primarily free and setup costs are not prohibitive.

- Using **social media to reach CALD audiences** if successfully implemented in future would bring another key strength to the online engagement.

Main challenges

- **Resourcing** – social media takes a great amount of time and correct levels of staffing are critical.

- **Content** – having engaging content in the down-period of the election cycle.

- **Metrics** – having time and expertise to interpret the great volume of metrics that is currently available from internet-based social media. As social media is still relatively new, it is hard to identify key benchmarks for each platform. As the industry matures these should become clearer.

- **Control** – organisations need to understand that they **do not have control**. Despite mostly self-moderation, the Commission reported "troublemakers on the site" (Facebook) and the need for protocols to deal with problem posts. The spokesperson also commented: "On Twitter it's truly the Wild West. I mean, people can say whatever they like and there's nothing you can do."

Victorian Electoral Commission

Background

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) is located in Melbourne, with a staff of around 60 people and currently with a team of **three working within the Communications Unit specifically on online engagement**. There are plans underway to increase the team to four.

There has been a **high level of support for the development of social media from the Commissioner**, and other **champions at every level within the organisation, as well as the head of the Communications Unit**, who recruited a Senior Communications Officer specifically to develop its social media capabilities.

Objectives

Our key objective is to actually make social media a really viable communications outlet. We approach it on the basis that traditional media reaches traditional people and social media is going to help us target

… youths. … We want to have an active enough presence that people come to us through there and we can really cost-effectively communicate with people, target certain parts of the community and provide a real service.

Platforms

- http://www.vec.vic.gov.au
  The VEC has a legislative requirement to use extensive advertising to reach the citizens of Victoria to encourage them to enrol and to vote formally in state and local government elections. While there is no legal requirement to incorporate online engagement as part of the advertising component, it has become a new direction which senior management wished to incorporate into its promotional mix to reiterate its messages and to engage with publics, particularly young people and Victorians living abroad (primarily in the UK), as well as culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

- **Facebook** – http://www.facebook.com/electionsvic

- **YouTube** (as a video repository) – http://www.youtube.com/user/ElectionsVictoria

- A **blog** managed by the VEC's education unit – http://passporttodemocracy.edublogs.org/.

The VEC also used registered accounts with **Twitter**, **Tumblr** and **Flickr** and, for the election, the Commission also built an **application for iPhones** and provided an **SMS** service.

Planning and strategy

For the 2010 State Government election, the VEC wanted to be proactive in its use of online engagement as a cost-effective way of targeting publics, in addition to traditional media.

> The cost saving and the vibrancy of a lot of the social media platforms mean that we can actually engage and get people talking about issues and getting people more involved. Ultimately it's a lot cheaper to do that on a social media platform than it is through a press ad.

Senior management understood the need for online engagement, but was very **cautious and fearful** when it was introduced. A conservative approach was taken, using an advertising agency to undertake **research** and conduct a **risk assessment**. YouTube and Facebook sites were launched first. The Commission developed a basic policy and strategy and moved slowly to overcome a degree of caution within senior management.

In 2011, the VEC participated in a three-day national meeting of communication staff from all Australian electoral commissions (attended by all states and territories except Tasmania and ACT). All had similar views about the importance of online engagement, but were at different levels of usage.

After undertaking initial research, there was **no formal social media strategy** developed. The decision was made to set up a Facebook page linked to the VEC Web site, and monitor activity. Progress was non-controversial.

Social media were **integrated into the overall communication strategy**.

Management – leadership and oversight

The branch manager of the VEC Communications Unit understood the need for specialist staff and recruited a **senior communications officer to manage online engagement**. He became the **champion** of social media use within the VEC, with the support of management. Interviewees

believe the team is highly regarded by management, recognised as breaking new ground, and expectations are high for the local government elections in October 2012.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

A **social media policy for staff** was being approved by senior management at the time of the interview and will be available on the intranet following approval.

Training and resourcing

There is no direct training for staff. Familiarisation is undertaken informally, through discussions and meetings.

Measurement and monitoring

VEC has measured the effectiveness, including cost effectiveness, of its online engagement strategy using **Google Analytics** and **Facebook Insights**. Web metrics are collected to identify the number of people reached, views, likes, followers and downloads. There is no monitoring of Twitter, other than informal monitoring through staff searches.

> We can't equate a one-to-one between someone clicking through our ad to get to the enrolment form (with the help of the AEC it's now a direct enrolment form online) [but] … we can say this many people saw the ad and got the enrolment form on their screen, but it doesn't necessarily mean they enrolled.

Key learnings

- Platforms like Facebook change rapidly. As a result, **social media policies and guidelines need to be regularly updated**.

  You can't hit a moving target like social media with a nice succinct document, but you can't do anything in government without sign off in policy around it.

- **Don't use big documents – use humour and light-hearted posts** that are quick, immediate and visually appealing.

- **Numbers increase when the posts are linked to major events**.

- **Self-moderation (self-regulation) of sites is achievable** – a lesson learned from the NSW elections.

- The **unexpected** nature of social engagement.

  Not that we don't know what we're doing, but we can do the right things and still not really know what to expect.

Main opportunities

- **Use Victorian local government elections in 2012 as a test case** in preparation for the next state government election.

- Use of the VEC's social media pages was very modest compared with its mainstream communication campaign reach. However, the low cost of administering social media sites and the user base growth suggests that **social media offer cost-effective channels** that should not be overlooked in future communication plans.

Main challenges

- The **difficulty in measuring behavioural change** causally linked to communication.
- **Maintaining interest in social engagement between elections**.

  I think it's going to be a challenge keeping people engaged and trying to bring them to our site because it's not perhaps the most exciting organisation.

Specific findings from November 2010 state government election

A report on the outcomes of the election provided detailed information on VEC social media online engagement. A summary of some key findings is provided below.

Cultural and linguistic diversity – accessibility

- **Information was provided in 22 languages** on the VEC Web site. Also, **audio files in two non-English languages were available** to assist people experiencing difficulty with literacy in those languages.

- VEC's **interactive virtual voting** experience was available in 18 languages, providing a voting simulation and a demonstration of how to complete Upper and Lower House ballot papers.

Election landing page

- The VEC developed an **election-specific Web site landing page** (www.131vec.com.au) with linked icons direct to information for each stage of the election. More than 190,000 page visits were registered during October and November 2010. However, it is not immediately apparent why the name '**131VEC**' was chosen and the '**branding**' gives no clue to visitors what the site is about (e.g. compare this to 'Bite the Ballot' and 'YouthVoteLondon' discussed under 'International e-democracy initiatives and learnings'.)

- The landing page included a link to a **special page for overseas voters** (in response to feedback from that group).

- Information about **where to vote and the availability of online checking of enrolment details were the most popular pages**, followed by how to vote outside your electorate, general state election information. and downloadable enrolment forms.

VEC Web site

- The VEC Web site included a **voting centre search facility** to identify and locate early voting centres and election day voting centres. After an address was entered, a search returned the details of the five voting centres nearest that address – or, prior to election day, two early voting centres. Details included the voting centre address, Melway map reference, accessibility rating, details of any access limitations, and noted whether the voting centre was within the electoral district related to that address. Electors could also search by locality or postcode, which proved helpful for those away from their enrolled address on Election Day.

- During the campaign **211,353 search requests** were recorded. On election day 30,840 visits were recorded.

- In addition, the **Vote Victoria 'app'** had 2,727 downloads on election day.

- During November, the VEC had more than **600,000 visits to its homepage**.

- The site averaged just over **11,000 unique visits a day** from Monday to Friday prior to election day and **21,163 unique visits on election day**.

SMS

- The VEC offered **SMS text enrolment and SMS enrolment and reminder services**. In direct response to SMS requests, 762 enrolment forms were distributed, and a post-election analysis revealed that 57 percent of these resulted in new or updated enrolments. A total of 5,466 requests for an SMS reminder were received, peaking on election eve with 893 requests in a single 24-hour period.

- Key to the success of the SMS project was the fact that both phases (enrolment and reminder) were highlighted in the mainstream communication campaign. An analysis of advertising schedules against incoming SMS requests showed that use rates peaked for all media within moments of ads being seen. Television was the most successful medium. Outdoor advertising was the weakest.

Vote Victoria (iPhone application)

- An **iPhone application** was developed by Information Victoria as a test case for government/private partnerships with consulting firm Deloitte. Functionality was limited to three key features: a **GPS-assisted voting centre locator**, a page for **general electoral information** and a **facility to access live results**. Vote Victoria was listed in the iTunes App Store on 18 November. It was downloaded 5,165 times during the 10 days it was live, and its average review score on iTunes was 4.5 of a possible 5 stars.

Facebook and YouTube

- The official **VEC Facebook page and YouTube channel** were launched on 23 September 2010. By election day, the Facebook page had 117 'likes'/fans, with 75 checking the VEC's posts daily. The VEC's Facebook page and YouTube channel were promoted by VEC staff to contacts and friends. On 15 October, linked icons were included in the footer of the VEC's Web site.

- There were **6,007 views of VEC posts** to its Facebook page during the campaign.

- **Feedback from users was posted 22 times** during the campaign, none of which was negative, partial or inappropriate. No user posts had to be removed.

These initiatives demonstrate significant innovation by VEC, but the numbers reported above show the **relatively small audiences accessed by social media** in many cases – and emphasise their role as complements and supplements to traditional (mass) media. However, **social media engagement should be thought of in qualitative, rather than only in quantitative terms**.

Elections New Zealand

Background

The NZ Electoral Commission (operating under the 'brand' of *Elections New Zealand*) is responsible for the administration of parliamentary elections and referenda, enrolment services, the allocation of time and money for the broadcast of election programmes, servicing the work of the

Representation Commission, and the provision of advice, reports and public education on electoral matters. The Commission has 22 staff with one staffer in the Communication team.

(NOTE: On 1 July 2012 the statutory responsibilities of the Electoral Enrolment Centre of NZ Post will be transferred to the Commission in accordance with the Electoral (Administration) Amendment Act 2011. After the transfer, the EEC will continue to provide enrolment services under contract to the Commission.)

Objectives

The key objectives for the 2011 communication strategy were to:

- Inform people about the need to be enrolled to vote, to be correctly enrolled (with the right name and address) and how and when to do it;
- Contribute to achieving the maximum number of enrolments and accuracy levels;
- Contribute to voters knowing and understanding how, when and where to vote;
- Help make it as easy as possible for people to vote;
- Help ensure political parties, candidates and others know their rights and obligations in relation to electoral legal requirements;
- Provide voters with co-ordinated information about the **election** and the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) voting system **referendum**;
- Contribute to public confidence in the administration of the electoral system;
- Contribute to achieving the business objectives of the electoral agencies;
- Contribute to lower compliance costs for voters, parties, candidates and third parties.

While not new, a key feature of recent Elections New Zealand online communication was **Orange Elections Man** character – or simply *Orange Man*. While the Elections NZ Web site did not officially name the character, media coverage and public discussion dubbed the character 'Orange Elections Man' soon after 'his' creation in 2002 by advertising agency, Y&R. For instance, the following appeared in *New Zealand Listener*:

> Not since fictional US banker Ira Goldstein charmed Kiwi hearts has an advertising creation entered the New Zealand consciousness as effectively as the Orange Elections Man. As ubiquitous in election year as immigrant bashing, Orange-man is everywhere – in your letterbox, on television, the Internet, your cellphone, billboards and the backs of buses. He's also a reason that New Zealand has one of the highest rates of electoral enrolment in the world. Now that the election date has been set, he talks to the Listener about democracy, castration and poor employment conditions for computer-animated figures. How did it all begin? It's your everyday zero to hero story, basically – only I was actually zeros and ones. How so? Binary code, pixels, you know. One moment I was a meaningless chunk of space on a designer's hard drive at advertising agency Y&R, the next it was a three dimensional animated face of the New Zealand democratic process (Smith, 2005).

Figure 1. The 'Orange Elections Man' character developed for and used by Elections New Zealand.

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Platforms

The NZ Electoral Commission used the following online platforms to reach its target audiences.

- **Web site** – http://www.elections.org.nz/
  The Web site carries a great deal of information for NZ voters such as enrolment information including maps of electorates, details on how to enrol and vote, election results and information on referenda as well as general elections. The site has a large area devoted to New Zealand **Maori language information** and the site prominently displays RSS and Facebook icons as well as their **ambassador *Orange Man***. A relatively high level of interactivity on the site is evident in Figure 2 below which shows single click links to 'enrol', 'have your say' on the MMP referendum, access maps and election results, etc.

Figure 2. The Elections New Zealand Web site home page.
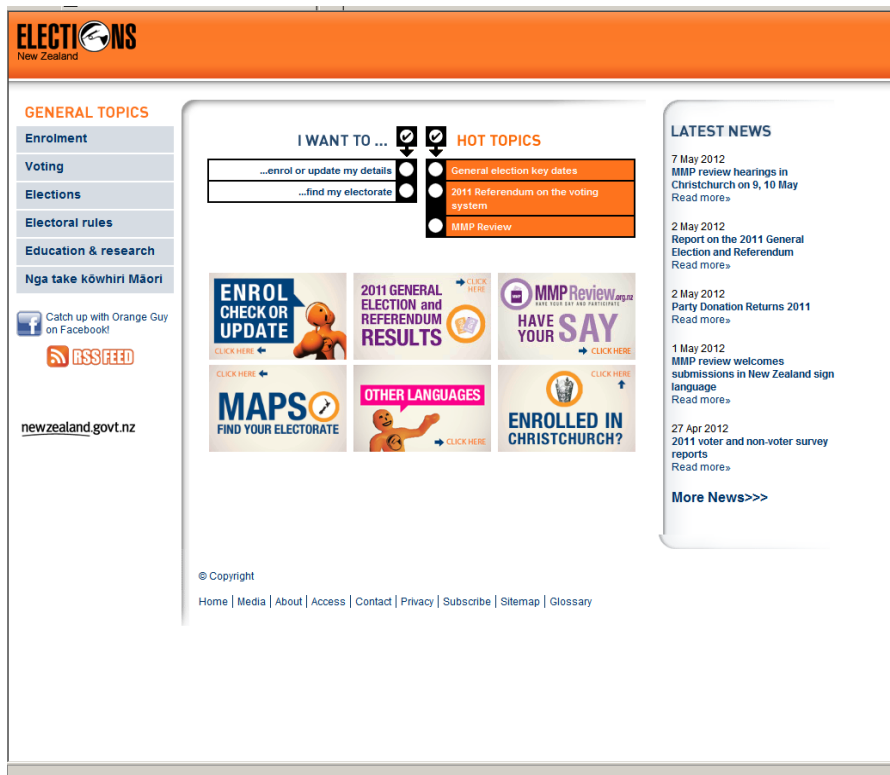
- **Facebook Community Page** – https://www.facebook.com/IvoteNZ
  The Facebook Page is hosted by the NZ Electoral Commission *Orange Man* character who appears on the Web site, in advertising and in educational videos.

  The page was promoted during peak periods via **Facebook advertising and Search engine advertising**.

  The key objective for Facebook was to engage directly with people and answer questions.

  Because you know if one person is asking it there's going to be lots of others that have the same questions.

  During the 2011 general election campaign, all online advertising targeted at young people pointed to the Facebook page.

An important point is that citizens can begin the **enrolment process on the Elections New Zealand Facebook page**; they do not need to leave the site to complete an enrolment application.

Also of note is the Commission identified **two distinct users of the Facebook page** – '**Newbie voters**' (a key target audience) and '**political junkies**' (scientists, commentators, psephologists, etc). This has been challenging for the Commission from a content perspective, given the two groups have very different needs in information and participation.

Sometimes I have to post something really dumb ... to keep it relevant and also so it's not too intimidating ... you know for first timers or newbie's coming in to suddenly see this in depth conversation about some nuance of political systems ... Yeah, if I have to dumb it down to the extent that they go ... 'That is ok'. Yeah, it's about kind of sticking to remembering who your main audience is.

At the time of writing, the Facebook page had garnered 10,538 'Likes'.

The Facebook page has been **mostly self-moderating** with little need for intervention by Commission staff.

- **YouTube** – http://www.youtube.com/user/ReferendumNZ?ob=0
The channel was used intensively during the 2011 general election. It primarily stored television commercials, innovative tools such as an interactive tool to help voters decide the electoral system they wanted in the referendum, and specific videos on topics such as the Single Transferable vote (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yV9buU8_bw).

To date, the site has had more than 42,368 views, with videos such as the above garnering 8,767 views.

While Commission staff use **Twitter** personally, the NZ Electoral Commission has chosen not to be on Twitter because management does not believe "punters" seen as a large part of their audience are on that platform. The Commission is also concerned about the immediacy of the tool and the fact that it would take considerable resourcing to manage professionally.

Planning and strategy

The NZ Electoral Commission refers to its online engagement as "reactive and iterative" and currently **does not have a formal social media strategy**, although they are currently working on one and they do have a formal communication strategy in place.

Senior management are supportive of social media use and there has been a tradition of "trying out" new communication platforms, starting with use of the Bebo social network in 2008.

No specific research on social media was done before the social platforms were launched.

The Commission's **advertising agency took the lead** in social media.

The Commission's overarching communication strategy lists its key audiences as:

- Voters and non-voters in New Zealand and overseas;
- First time enrolees;
- Those already enrolled who may have moved house; and
- Citizens not enrolled.

Within these groups there is particular emphasis on those who are traditionally hard to reach with electoral information including:

- Maori people;
- Pacific Peoples (*Pacifica*);
- 18–24 year olds;
- People from other ethnic backgrounds;
- People with disabilities; and
- Those who have changed their address and not updated their enrolment details.

Event-based or ongoing conversation

The NZ Electoral Commission approach has been **primarily event-based** – i.e. focussed on elections and referenda. Based on trial and error, the Commission believes that key stakeholders are not interested in the low periods of the electoral cycle.

There was interactivity in the Commission's Web site and social media sites, although substantial levels of dialogue and conversation were not evident.

Management – leadership and oversight

Management initially approached its advertising agency for advice on social media and the agency suggested Bebo as a first step in the 2008 general election. But that "kind of died a death".

Currently, the manager in charge of communication sees herself as a champion of online engagement and she demonstrates significant enthusiasm and passion for such engagement. She believes that **an internal champion is vital to drive social media initiatives**. She manages both traditional media channels and social media platforms for the Commission, ensuring integration.

During the 2011 election campaign, management of the Elections New Zealand Facebook page was outsourced to the creative director who invented *Orange Man*. He was considered to have the right tone of voice for *Orange Man* which was considered critical to the success of online engagement.

Staff argued that whoever has the job of managing social media needs to have the freedom to respond and not have layers of bureaucracy to go through for approvals.

> You need to be reactive and I don't think it's something that you can get into if you don't give people or the person who is responding the freedom to actually respond. You can't, you know, faff around.

Staff reported that there is **still some reticence in relation to social media among senior management**.

> I think it comes back to that loss of control.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

The organisation **has a social media policy**. The impetus for this came when the Commission's Facebook page management was outsourced. 'Rules of Engagement' were developed for the external person managing the page. However, there are currently no rules of engagement on the Facebook page. A "common sense" approach is used, according to senior staff involved.

The 'black ban' on political comment on election day that exists in New Zealand meant that the Commission had to carefully manage discussion on that day. This included providing advice to bloggers and political Web sites about what could be done and what could not be done under the law on election day. Five people were referred to the police for statements they made on election

day in 2011 and there was some resulting controversy about the Commission "trying to control the internet".

Training and resourcing

No formal social media training has been provided to staff or contractors involved in the Commission's social media activities, although the head of communication attended the Australasian Electoral Educators Network meeting in Sydney in 2011 and reported "valuable knowledge sharing".

The Commission looks to its younger staff as 'digital natives' "coming through the organisation who know how to negotiate social media in a way that older people don't" (albeit noting that research shows generalisations of social media use based on age are not fully supported by data).

The Commission spent $5,000 in the peak periods of the 2011 general election for *Orange Man* (the contractor person at the advertising agency) to monitor and respond to public questions and comments on its Facebook page. The senior communication staff member responsible for social media reported spending one hour a week on maintaining and managing the sites during low activity periods, but this peaks to 10–15 hours a week in the busy pre-election period.

The Commission is planning a $4,000 upgrade to its Facebook page in the second half of 2012.

Measurement and monitoring

Due to limited resources, **no comprehensive measurement has been done** to gauge the effectiveness of social media use. **Google Analytics** and platform analytic programs are used and the advertising agency sends reports through with some overall metrics. Nevertheless, the Commission feels its use of social media has been successful.

> I think we have been really successful but that's because we might have set our expectations quite low. I think there's a lot more that we can do but ... it's going to have to be next time round (2014).

Key learnings

- **Posting too regularly in periods of low electoral activity causes people to leave sites** such as a Facebook page. This would appear to be the result of low interest during non-election periods – and thus low relevance of information. The Commission does not plan regular social media activity until the next election period.

- **Provide content that is relevant your key audience** – The Commission noted that 'political junkies' can move the conversation on platforms such as Facebook in a direction that is not relevant to wider audiences. Being aware of this and steering the conversation is vital – or, alternatively, provide separate 'rooms' and forums for different audiences.
- **Jump in** – social media move rapidly, so don't wait. Be flexible and responsive.

- **Get the tone right in social** – use of *Orange Guy* meant that the Commission's tone was able to be informal, slightly colloquial and even slightly irreverent and which the Commission could not normally be.

- **Choose platforms wisely**. It is not necessary to be on all platforms. Work to your resources and go where your audiences are.

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Main opportunities

- Further **engage with Maori and Pacifica** citizens who are hard to reach.
- Utilise more **user generated content** (UGC) and **storytelling** on all platforms (i.e. encouraging people to upload videos about how they vote and why it is important to them).

Main challenges

- **Resourcing** – social Media takes a lot of time and appropriate levels of staffing are critical. The Commission is highly under resourced in the communication department, according to staff interviewed.

A detailed official **report on the conduct and management of the 2011 New Zealand general election** is available online (see Elections New Zealand, 2012 under 'References').

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Electoral Commission of Queensland

Background

The Electoral Commission of Queensland (http://ecq.qld.gov.au/default.aspx) is located in Brisbane and has a staff of almost 40 full time equivalent. Its communication function is outsourced to a PR agency and an advertising agency, but for the 2011 state election, the decision was made to use Facebook as a community engagement platform managed internally by the Funding and Disclosure branch. One of the reasons for this was the age of the team members and their interest in the area.

The ECQ employs an Education and Awareness Officer, but her focus is in different areas and social media responsibility was delegated elsewhere.

Objectives

Commission staff **stated no clear objectives** for using social media "we just wanted a presence". However, from discussions implicit objectives could be identified as follows:

- To **gain electoral enrolment**, particularly among 'hard to reach' audiences and young people;
- To **engage with youth**;
- To **learn from a trial**.

Platforms

The ECQ **used only Facebook** during the 2012 Queensland state election (http://www.facebook.com/electoralcommissionqld).

Twitter and YouTube were considered but, as this was the Commission's first foray in social media, it was decided to trial one platform with a wide reach. Facebook was selected as it is the most popular social media platform. Also, Facebook was seen as incorporating tools, such as privacy settings and the facility for Community Pages and forums, which afforded some control over the medium.

Planning and Strategy

The ECQ **does not have a social media strategy** at this stage. Once evaluation of the 2012 trial is complete, the Commission will plan its next stage.

Local government elections are being conducted in Queensland on 16 June 2012. So the review will occur after these elections are completed.

The Commission is **considering social media engagement in non-election periods** as part of this review.

Management – leadership and oversight

The impetus for the trial of social media was recognition of the statistic that 80 per cent of the Australian population use the internet and that social media use is growing rapidly. It was deemed important to be part of 'the revolution' – to listen, post, get into the space, to be seen, to embrace the media.

The Executive Office head drove the process to initiate and gain approval for the trial and invited a senior staff member to lead the project. This senior staff member and a colleague 'championed' social media in the Commission – the trial in particular.

The Commission's staff report that, at the start, management and staff were "quite hesitant", not knowing where it would take them.

> What we didn't want to do was add to the hype or add to the additional level of [media] scrutiny by providing another forum where people could vent frustrations and anger and we wouldn't be able to respond to those effectively.

Because of this hesitancy and concerns, the Commission took a conservative approach. Only **four ECQ staff were approved to use social media** for official purposes during the trial.

Furthermore, the Facebook Community Page established accepted only 'likes' and comments on the Commission's posts. **Citizens could not initiate posts on the page**. The Commission reasoned that, if an open forum was provided, it would have required a full-time person to manage and respond. Thus, the trial was a very controlled and limited engagement in terms of interactivity.

Training and resources

No training was provided to staff. Given only four staff were involved in the trial, this was probably unnecessary at this stage.

As noted above, **limited staff resources were assigned to the trial**.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

The Commission has **no social media policy**. If a comprehensive social media strategy is developed following the 2012 trial, guidelines for staff use will be incorporated, in line with the Queensland Government guidelines.

Monitoring and measurement

The Commission **used Google Alerts** to track keywords in social media. Staff also undertook manual media monitoring of Facebook. The main metric counted was 'likes'. The Commission's Facebook page had **450 'likes'**, which staff considered a significant number. However, this

illustrates the comparatively small audiences of social media, compared with traditional press, radio and television which, while not reaching some key audiences, can reach hundreds of thousands of citizens.

Nevertheless, while not a large number in media audience terms, **in terms of cost-effectiveness, Facebook engagement was considered successful**.

> We think we've done remarkably well considering it was a pilot.

To be fair, it also should be pointed out that the Commission staff had a short time frame to prepare for the 2012 state election.

Key learnings

- We have **learned to use Facebook better** – how to reach audiences.

- Any fears and trepidation that existed were unrealised – **all posts and comments were constructive**.
- In future, the Commission is likely to **use a broader range of media such as SMS** to generate interest and linking to sites (i.e. 'drive traffic').

- **Successes are hard to gauge**. It could have been done better if we'd known what the impact of social media could be.

- The approach **wasn't broad enough** and was only **minimally integrated with other communication**.

- **Make sure it social media is integrated** with the overall communication strategy.

- Social media is a separate section in the organisation, but there may be a **shift in resources** next time to support more activity.

- We **didn't put our toe in the water far enough**.

Because of the very narrow focus and management of the trial using Facebook, **political neutrality and privacy were not major concerns**.

The experiences of the Queensland Electoral Commission were at a 'pilot' stage. Staff believe it is "too early to assess impact on the organisation" and this is a reasonable position. Collaboration and sharing with other electoral commissions will be useful for ECQ.

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ACT Electoral Commission

Background

The Commission has six employees and is the smallest Electoral Commission in Australia.

The idea of integrating social media into the Commission's communication was sparked by national Electoral Commission meetings and the ACT Commission's following of what other state electoral commissions were doing.

Leading up to and during the 2008 election, social media was not seen as relevant by the Commission, but in the lead-up to the October 2012 ACT elections, the Commission recognised the importance of integrating social media into the overarching strategy. Accordingly, the Commission is currently "embarking on a social media journey". Management has recently commissioned an external provider to draft a *Social Media Strategy*.

Objectives

The social media strategy will be integrated within the overall communication strategy and key objectives will include:

- **Convey key messages** of Elections ACT to a broad audience. Key messages relate to increasing participation, increasing voter turnout, increasing awareness of the election and filling ballot papers out correctly;
- **Target young people**, particularly 18–19 year olds;
- **Make Elections ACT's online presence an authoritative source of information**;
- **Enhance the reputation** of Elections ACT.

The Commission has noted falling participation rates have now extended beyond very young people up to those 30 years of age, leading to a conclusion that the Commission needs to try different communication channels.

> We're getting a real sense that young people are of a generation that does everything electronically – they don't fill in forms.

Platforms

The Commission is planning to use the following platforms:

- **Web site**;
- **Facebook**;
- **Twitter**; and
- **YouTube**.

YouTube is seen as ideal as the Commission plans to **use video content for "humanising"** the voter experience and imparting information to simply explain voting.

It also plans to use **targeted Facebook advertising** and conduct **competitions** to help increase engagement.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

The Commission has adopted the **Commonwealth Public Sector Commission *Social Media Guidelines*** and the **ACT Government *Social Media Policy*** and plan to build on these documents.

Its Facebook page will also have a Code of Conduct to ensure appropriate behaviour.

Once the social media strategy has been developed, four employees at the Commission will manage it only a daily basis. An external provider is also going to be supplying training to the in-house team to ensure they are prepared for the maintenance and moderation of the platforms.

Event-based or ongoing conversation

The Commission is still deciding whether it will use an event-based or ongoing conversation approach.

> There are things that happen between elections, but they're not that big and sexy ... But, on the other hand, there is a sizable part of our community – at least there's a vocal minority in our community –who are interested in electoral things.

Tone is recognised as an important element in content. The Commission believes its online engagement will **not be as informal as the *Orange Man*** used by Elections New Zealand, but will be less formal than other Commissions.

Monitoring and measurement

Monitoring is done using free tools such as **Google Alerts**, although external professional services such as **Radian6** were suggested by its agency.

Measurement is mostly restricted to platform analytics such as **Facebook Insights**. But the Commission sees the "proof of the pudding" in "participation rates by age group*"*.

The ACT Electoral Commission noted that Victoria and NSW have introduced new ways of enrolling and voting which has "muddied the water somewhat" and increased expectations among young people in relation to voting.

Key learnings

- **Do research** – the Commission has spent considerable time researching the efforts from other Government departments regarding Social Media and found this very valuable.

- **Be hands on – get involved yourself**. Using the platforms such as Facebook at home gives you a feel for "how it works".

Main opportunities

- **Integrate messages** across all communication.

Main challenges

- **Resourcing** – the Commission has an extremely small team.

Other government departments and agencies' e-democracy initiatives and learnings

Australian Bureau of Statistics – Census 2011

The mission of the ABS is to assist and encourage informed decision-making, research and discussion within governments and the community, by providing a high-quality, objective and responsive national statistical service. It is located in Canberra.

For the national census of 9 August 2011, a dedicated communication team was established and the Bureau used social media. Being a focused event (similar to elections), the experiences of the ABS are informative for the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC).

Objectives

A key objective was to use social media as a site in which the ABS could **communicate in a more informal way aligned to youth culture and media practices**. The Bureau noted that young people increasingly do not consume traditional media to the extent that previous generations did. Traditional advertising was not gaining 'cut through' with young people. Also, the **instantaneous** nature of social media was seen as a benefit to exploit.

The ABS could not post videos on its official Web site, so it decided to use YouTube. It is interesting that government policies and bureaucracy poses such limitations and this demonstrates that government still has a way to go to adapt to contemporary media practices.

A Facebook page was created with the intention of attracting a large number of 'likes' / 'fans'. However, it has largely become a sharing forum for the 30,000 census collectors rather than for the public. This is an example of unintended outcomes in social media. As noted in *The 21st Century media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* (Macnamara, 2010a), communication practices can be 'emergent' in social media, developing organically. **While not achieving its original objectives, Facebook use by the ABS nevertheless contributed to knowledge sharing and network building among census collectors** – a not inconsequential achievement.

> Our intent with Facebook was to try and garner a large number of fans. Then we hoped the message would spread. I wouldn't say that was our most successful platform. It became more of a sharing forum for collectors who were working on the census. They got right into Facebook and were sharing stories or anecdotes or asking for advice from other collectors about things that were happening in their area.

ABS established a Twitter profile with the intention of attracting high profile followers. In reflecting on the census, staff felt that Facebook was an effective medium to foster collaboration, but Twitter was more successful overall in communicating key messages and influencing behaviour (although behaviour change was not empirically measured).

Objectives also **included governance and evaluation**.

Platforms

- **Web site** – http://www.abs.gov.au
- **Facebook** (special census page) – http://www.facebook.com/pages/Australian-census/123245484386599?nr=134660766566759
- **Facebook** (main ABS page) – http://www.facebook.com/absstats
- Twitter – http://twitter.com/#!/ABSStats (no longer census-specific)
- **YouTube**.

Planning and strategy

As well as the ABS's ongoing planning in relation to social media, a **separate strategy was developed for the 2011 census**. This 'event' was **used as a 'pilot'** for the organisation's foray into social media. (NOTE: The Bureau has indicated that it is prepared to provide AEC with a copy of its social media strategy.)

Research was conducted by the Bureau to inform what platforms to use. Social media engagement was described as a "mini-strategy" within the Bureau's overall communication strategy.

The **target audience of the ABS's social media strategy was primarily young people**. A secondary audience was traditional media (i.e. influencing them to 'pick up' information and stories from ABS social media, referred to as *remediation* (Bolter & Grusin, 2000; McLuhan, 1964) and *intermediation* (Danielian & Reese, 1989; Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 232) in media studies).

After the census (from October 2011), the ABS let its social media sites become dormant. The Bureau plans to re-activate them in when the census data is released.

Management – leadership and oversight

The impetus for social media use came from within the ABS corporate communication and census PR teams, although it is noteworthy that none of these staff had specialist digital/social media backgrounds or expertise.

Senior executives of the ABS "talked about using social media", but did not have a detailed understanding of the platforms and what was involved. For instance, staff reported that senior **management "didn't fully understand the lack of control**. If they did, they may not have been so keen".

> There was a little bit of fear associated with not being able to control and how you should moderate it.

Only a select few staff are approved to engage in social media on behalf of the ABS. This includes the corporate communication team whose staff use social media to gain customer insights (use social media for research and listening) and posting comments and responding to comments. The census PR team, which totalled 12 staff during the census period, spent from 40 to 80 per cent of their time on social media engaging online in relation to census issues.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

The ABS has developed a social media policy and this is available in printed form and online in the Bureau's intranet and also linked from the main ABS Twitter account (see http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Twitter+Policy).

Monitoring and measurement

Measuring was "pretty basic". The Bureau did not use specialist online measurement tools such as Hootsuite or an external specialist monitoring agency, relying instead on platform tools such as those available in Twitter.

However, the ABS was the "most popular" of all the federal government departments on Twitter during the period with 17,000 followers.

Anecdotally, communication team members said they will be entering the annual awards of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) and the Australian Marketing Institute (AMI) awards.

Also, staff have been invited to give presentations at a number of conferences to report on their experiences, which the team feel gives their achievements legitimacy.

A **consultant has been paid to evaluate the results** to inform the next stage and, with a small communication team, the Bureau is considering using additional external services in future.

Training and resourcing

Training was **conducted in-house**. The communication team taught themselves or learned from other staff members who had some previous experience.

The **main investment was in staff resourcing**, which was "more than ... anticipated".

Political neutrality

The need for political neutrality is something that ABS staff are "mindful of all the time". The Bureau did not report any breaches of neutrality guidelines. From discussions with Public Service staff, it appears that the requirement for political neutrality is deeply embedded in the work culture and practices. Social media are just additional forums in which political neutrality has to be applied.

Key learnings

- The important message is that if you want to get into social media, **you will not be able to control it**.

- Social media engagement **needs management to contain workload**. For instance, the ABS did not respond to individual tweets or posts. They responded when they could see a trend emerging.

- ABS **let social media sites self-moderate**. "It was a bit random", but overall self-moderation worked, with no major crises or controversies occurring.

- **Monitor constantly** – real time, all the time.

- **Have a crisis plan** in case things go wrong.

- **Don't do social media just for the sake of it**.
- Humour isn't going to work for everyone. But **you do need to be interesting**. ABS tried to use social media to "shake things up", to "make data funny" and engaging.

- To compete in YouTube, you "**have to be groovy**".

- Social media was **one part of an integrated plan**. Social media won't work on their own.

- **ABS was one of few government organisations that specifically agreed that social media had changed the culture of the organisation**. The ABS is now committed organisation-wide to using Twitter to engage dynamically with citizens and stakeholders.

- While Facebook was "nice" and popular with census collectors, the Bureau felt it did not achieve primary objectives. Nevertheless, the researchers note that social media are spaces for citizens and should be structured and managed to meet the needs of stakeholders, not only the organisation.

Main opportunities

- To **reach young people** who are less engaged in traditional media.

- To **do real time research**.

- To **engage citizens in conversations and answer queries**.

Main challenges

- It is **very time intensive**.

- It is **hard to know how much social media engagement contributed to participation** in the census.

- You **must have enough content** to keep sites interesting and updated. "The main challenge is always having enough content".

The national census is a periodic event (every five years), so in this respect it is similar to elections. However, the census appears to be relatively uncontroversial. There are no 'hung' censuses! And the census is not conducted in a politically-charged atmosphere. So in this respect, it is quite different to the electoral work of electoral bodies. However, the experiences of the ABS are informative, mainly for how they reinforce patterns and trends evident in other case studies.

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NSW Department of Education and Communities

Background

The department's goal is to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the people of NSW through a responsive and innovative education and training system. While being a state department and not an electoral management body (EMB), the NSW DEC has earned a reputation for innovative and effective social media use (e.g. cited in Macnamara, 2011b – a report of a study of more than 200 organisations using social media).

The department has **seven staff in its communication team**.

Objectives

The department's key objectives in using social media are:

- **Listening**;
- **Engagement**;
- Customer service ;
- Brand and reputation building;
- Storytelling.

> The ultimate for us is helping parents support their kids at school ... that's our overall objective. Then we've got other objectives as part of the program and we are ensuring that even though we are a government agency, I think this is really important we've got to be practical.

> We speak like were real people. We actually connect with people not the bureaucracy, so no matter what the platform is it would be identified as Vicki or Tracey or Ben. You're talking to people I think that's really important.

The department **uses social media internally as externally**, including an internal Yammer and SocialText microblogging sites.

> We value our employees as much as we value our external community and we do quite rich engagement internally as well and the benefits – so obviously around the internal environment having collaboration and sharing or ideas to support the work that they are doing in the classrooms is really important.

Platforms

The department uses an extensive list of social media platforms to reach and engage with its stakeholders.

> The digital community is a Web site, is Facebook, is Twitter, is Pinterest, is mobile as well. So that's the community and having an integrated solution is important.

- **Web site** – https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/home/
  In addition to the above main department Web site, a specific Web site for parents and students called 'School A to Z' is hosted by the department at http://www.schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au/about/mobile-applications. The site carries a range of information from homework and study through to wellbeing and technology tips. The Web sites link to all the relevant social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest. Social bookmarking tools are also prominently displayed on the sites.

  English Second Language (ESL) is also catered for via use of a Google Translator.

- **Facebook Community Page** – https://www.facebook.com/schoolatoz
  The department has found Facebook extremely effective in reaching their stakeholders and have been using the social network since 2008, although old sites have been 'retired' and the new 'School A to Z' was developed in August 2011. The site contains useful information for parents such as 'How to get the most out of parent teacher interviews' at https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=431609273524825&set=a.143622402323515.2271 6.118142061538216&type=1&theater.

  The site has around 3,000 'likes', but its qualitative dimension is seen as most important. The "real story of the site is the engagement and its really **rich conversations with parents**. We also **resolve a lot of parent issues** on there as well", senior staff reported.

  The department's Facebook page has **not attracted any significant level of negative comment or controversy**.

- **YouTube** – http://www.youtube.com/schoolaaz

  The branded channel hosts 29 videos (as at May 2012) on topics ranging from cyberbullying to doing well in class. As at early May 2012, the channel had received 15,662 views.

- **Twitter** – http://twitter.com/#!/schoolatoz
  The 'Schools A to Z' Twitter site is very active with 3,897 followers.

  The department tracks peak periods of interest and engages in sites to meet demand. This has interesting implications for resourcing, particularly in light of the comment below.

  For us we know **Sunday nights are a very big time and our staff are really active on Sunday nights**.

  The communication team also uses Twitter as a professional development tool to stay up to date on the latest social media marketing information.

- **Pinterest** – http://pinterest.com/schoolatoz
  This content sharing site which operates as an electronic 'pinboard' to share photos, videos, article, etc, is used for the 'Schools A to Z' program. Items 'pinned' include recipes and these relate to the nutrition area on the site. Pinterest reportedly works well as many mums use Pinterest and are familiar with it. At this stage, use of Pinterest is experimental, but "looks positive".

- **Mobile App**
  The department have also produced a 'Schools A to Z' app for both iPhones and Androids – see – http://www.schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au/about/mobile-applications.

- **Yammer and SocialText**
  The department uses the internal microblogging tool Yammer in-house and has been using this successfully for some years. Recently, SocialText has been integrated into the in-house portal and offers extensive analytics (one of its advantages). Having two microblogging tools has however meant extra management for the communication team.

Planning and strategy

Considerable research was undertaken in designing and planning the department's social media strategy and engagement. Notable was the **Young Leaders program** in which teams of six young people worked with a mentor drawn from the department's executive team. One of the teams discussed social media and how they could be used to assist stakeholders.

As well as engage in discussions, the teams conducted surveys, looked at benchmarking and attitudes about social media within the organisation, and also did extensive '**social listening**' before developing the strategy and choosing relevant platforms.

Social media engagement is **undertaken in the department as part of an "integrated communication approach** – I don't just have a social media plan". However, the department does have a widely-acclaimed *Social Media Policy* and *Social Media Guidelines* (see following).

Each social media platforms used has a unique and clearly identified purpose.

There is considerable research involved in preparing content. The department's staff "look at what people are talking about and this feeds back into story development. For each story or idea the department looks at which is the most appropriate social media channel/s".

> It's just tailoring, tweaking, embedding and putting it together and **curating**, I think is the key.

In addition to its direct use of social media platforms, the department engages in active **blogger outreach** to relevant bloggers and blogger communities.

Its communication/engagement strategy particularly seeks to engage with:

- Teachers;
- Parents;
- Principals;
- Administrative staff; and
- Broader school communities (including parents, relatives, friends, etc).

The department **engages in the online platforms year round**.

Event-based or ongoing conversation

The department takes **an ongoing conversational approach** in all its social media communication and this approach is supported by senior departmental management.

Management – leadership and oversight

The leadership for social media engagement has been driven and championed through the department's communication team. Yammer was employed as early as 2008 by a different unit, but the communication unit was asked to formally take over community management in 2010.

Senior management were and are supportive of the approach. Particularly notable is that the Director-General had a communication background and was already a Twitter user and was actively engaging staff on Yammer before the department broadly adopted social media as part of its communication and community engagement strategy. This gave the department "a head start", according to the communication team.

Other executive team members who did not have communication backgrounds needed convincing that it was the right approach, but this was done through passionate advocacy by communication leaders, with the support of the Director-General.

Noteworthy in the NSW Department of Education and Communities is that **social media use has now been 'devolved' across the entire department**. Staff are provided with training and encouraged to actively engage in social media communication in relation to topics relevant to their area of expertise. A cross-functional team headed up by the Deputy Director-General meets quarterly to review social media use across the department. The team includes representatives from communication, IT, legal, safety and security, and stakeholder groups.

The seven-member **communication team includes social software developers and designers**, **providing a high level of expertise** within the team. The department has a highly proactive approach.

> People need to be multiskilled ... they need to be able to pick up an iPad, if there's an issue shoot it, edit it, get it out on YouTube, deal with the issue quickly.

> You've got to talk the IT talk now to be a communicator as well. You don't have to be an expert and able to do everything, but you need to understand it to make strategic decisions and those strategic decisions relate to social as well.

While multiskilling is advocated, **each member of the team is a channel specialist/leader** and shares knowledge with the rest of the team and then the rest of the organisation via training programs.
As weekends are busy times on social media platforms, the team (including the head of communication) all monitor and manage the platforms on weekends. The manager relies on "employee goodwill" and a noteworthy level of passion that exists in the department.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

The department has a formally adopted written *Social Media Policy* and *Social Media Guidelines* developed in 2011. The communication team strongly argues that such documents should not be "boring government documents". The guidelines are in **plain English** are were developed based on the Public Service Code of Conduct as a foundation document. The policy and guidelines have been produced in a range of formats including printed, PowerPoint and online videos (see https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/technology/communication/PD20110418.shtml).

The department also is an exemplar for practising being 'social' (i.e. engaging in collaboration, interaction, etc). Its *Social Media Policy* **in video form is a repurposed Victorian Department of Justice video** that has been cited as Best Practice by a number of authors and reports.

Furthermore, **in developing the documents the department engaged its internal community using Yammer** (which has 13,000 active users), inviting contributions to content and comment. The executive and senior management were then also invited to comment and give feedback. Two of the department's key stakeholder groups, the Australian Teachers Federation and the Public Service Association) were also consulted and involved.

> You've got to set up a policy and get your governance right. That way you've dealt with a lot of your executive's concerns ... when you introduce any new tools into a place people are always nervous.

Training and resourcing

Training employees was seen as a key part of ensuring governance, along with its *Social Media Policy* and *Social Media Guidelines*, and a range of specific guides for different employees.

The department conducts a **social media training course for schools** attended by principals, teachers, administration staff and parents.

Teachers were identified as needing training, particularly in Facebook to ensure privacy settings were enabled optimally. The department's social media training is accredited through the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) and that body encourages teachers to attend.

External providers have also been brought in to conduct courses and employees attend range of conferences discussing aspects of social media regularly.

> I think it's really important that we continue to learn because social is just not going to stay stagnant.

The department's approach is **highly decentralised with devolved responsibilities and empowerment, but its social media engagement is undertaken within a sound governance framework**, comprised of clear policies and guidelines for employees, training and monitoring (see next section).

Measurement and Monitoring

The department **actively measures** all its communication activities. It uses platform metrics such as Facebook Insights, looking not just at 'Likes' but more importantly at engagement metrics because these generate "customer insights" that are then reported back to the executive.
The department uses **Radian6**, an external specialist monitoring provider, to monitor social media mentions of relevant topics and conversations in conjunction with a range of free monitoring tools such as **Google Alerts**.

Influence is also examined using **Klout** (http://klout.com/home).

> It's about what's your baseline and also to know if you've actually achieved against your goals and objectives – and having measurable objectives to start with. We also look at **sentiment** it's really important to us ... **qualitative** things are really important for us.

Other indicators of success include a number of awards. The 'School A to Z' program won the 2011 **Ragan Employee Communications Award**, a **2012 IABC Gold Quill Award of Merit** , and was a **finalist in the recent 18th annual AIMIA Awards**. Also the program was recognised as an Official Honoree in the family/parenting category at the 16th annual Webby Awards (see http://www.webbyawards.com/webbys/current_honorees.php?media_id=96&category_id=24&season=16).

Key learnings

- **Research platforms** carefully to identify those that are appropriate.

   Don't just do it because you can ... we did a rigorous listening program before we got on there.

- **Governance is critical** – involving policies, guidelines, training and monitoring.

- **Don't reinvent the wheel –** there are lots of good social media documents to reuse and repurpose under Creative Commons licensing.

- **Listen to your audience** to understand what is important to them and post relevant content.

- **It's riskier if you are not in social.**

- **Prioritisation –** due to resourcing required for social media engagement, priorities will need to be established in relation to other communication activities.

- **Post shareable content –** ensure your content is shareable by others, not proprietary and 'locked down'. After putting effort into producing it, capitalise on it by "giving it wings".

- **Talk like a human** – not in bureaucratic language or officialise.

- **Build trust internally –** management needs to trust the people that are doing this.

- **Internal before external** – learn and practice using social media inside the organisation before going public. For example, use Yammer as an internal microblogging site. It provides a safer environment to learn and make mistakes.

- **Talk to other government agencies and share experiences and learnings**.

Main opportunities

- **Identify key influencers** and target and leverage those.

- **Storytelling is powerful** – real life experiences told by real people visiting your sites are highly credible and influential.

Main challenges

- **Resourcing –** staff are required to engage in social media.

Further findings and examples are presented in the following section which reports research into other government departments and agencies using social media.

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Australian Taxation Office

Objectives

The digital media department of the Australian Tax Office (ATO) is located in Brisbane, with a team of eight. ATO is the Government's principal revenue collection agency and is part of the

Treasurer's portfolio. Its role is to manage and shape tax, excise and superannuation systems for Australia's 10 million taxpayers.

The ATO has a staff of around 20,000 across the country. The communication team is based in Canberra but, because the digital media team was established to work with digital security located in Brisbane, it has remained there.

Platforms

- **Website** – http://www.ato.gov.au
- **Facebook** – www.facebook.com/atogovau (1,570 'likes' at 16 May)
- **Twitter** – www.twitter.com/ato_gov_au (8,755 followers at 16 May)
- **YouTube** – www.youtube.com/AusTaxOffice
- An internal **wiki**
- **Sharepoint**.

ATO is also currently undertaking research into using **LinkedIn** and **Google+** for staff recruitment.

Objectives

A major overall objective of ATO is to **increase usage of e-tax**, an online tool which appeals to competent internet-users, most of whom would use social media as well.

Organisational objectives for using social media are:

- To provide citizens with **additional means to access information and "be educated"**;
- To **increase the ATO's online presence**;
- To utilise technology to **meet the changing needs of the community**;
- To **improve customer/client service** ...;
- To promote the ATO **Web site as the single source of authority on tax**;
- To **increase engagement** and create dialogue and sharing of views;
- To provide ATO with a **more human identity**;
- To **enhance ATO's reputation**.

Each platform is used for different objectives. For example, YouTube is used to convey educational messages and information. Twitter is used for more direct, short and sharp messages. Facebook is considered best for sharing and commenting.

Planning and strategy

ATO's online engagement began in 2008 with a Facebook page promoting e-tax. A Twitter account was set up in 2010 and a Facebook page and a YouTube site were established in July 2011.

There was a **defined strategy to use social media**. With the introduction of each channel, a full recommendation paper was prepared for the high level Communication and Research Committee. Three to six month **trials** were conducted on each platform, followed by an evaluation and recommendations for future usage. Once approved, an external communication campaign is launched to promote sites to the public.

ATO studied the introduction of online systems by the **Canadian Revenue Authority** as well as online engagement by the **Inland Revenue Service (IRS)** in the USA. In Australia, the ATO has closely followed initiatives of the departments of Defence and Immigration and Citizenship. However, staff note:

We are taking baby steps, given the size of the organisation and its risk aversion. We have to be really careful about the reputational impact something so small might have on us. So we do follow a very risk-averse approach. But channels have grown, technology has changed and it's grown from the bottom up rather than the top down ...

There is no overarching integrated comms strategy. It's not integrated into a bigger picture. It's a channel that's used as part of the overall comms plan, but at the moment things don't all necessarily mesh together … We need to be working hand in hand so that we're seen as a valuable commodity by the media team ....

Management – leadership and oversight

Having support of the First Assistant Commissioner (Corporate Relations) is seen as vital in implementing social media initiatives. The FAC has been **willing to take a risk and a high level of pride and interest has been created** in projects because of his involvement, according to staff.

ATO has appointed a **Director of Digital Media** in Brisbane, who works closely with the communication team in Canberra. The Director of Digital Media has become a '**champion**' for social media, with the support of management.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

A **social media policy was being drafted** at the time of this study. When completed, it will be made available to staff via the ATO intranet and possibly publicly on the internet. It will cover official, professional and private use of social media.

Training and resourcing

There is **no official training of staff** in social media. However, the digital media team does regular presentations to 'business lines'.

Measurement and monitoring

Monitoring and measurement are key tasks of the digital media team. A daily report is produced internally. The digital media team uses **Web metrics**, but has no budget for research such as surveys among 'clients'. There is an **exit survey at the completion of e-tax** which provides some data about online engagement. But better monitoring is seen as a "key task" for the team "to get a better handle, because we know that one tool doesn't necessarily fit every purpose".

ATO is currently **considering contracting an external specialist** to combine social media data with more traditional media monitoring.

Key learnings

- Online engagement is **still new for many people**, but having the **support of the First Assistant Commissioner has been vital**. There are still those who fear risk.

- It is **essential to have risk mitigation strategies**. Initiatives are regularly "tweaked" to reduce fears and risk aversion. The digital team has had to be responsive to management's fears, "capture them" and address them.

- **Staff want policies to get clarity**. A number of broader government policies and regulations apply to social media usage, including the Code of Conduct and Privacy Policy. But specific guidelines are useful, even necessary.

- There is still **organisational learning required**. The digital team sees itself as "taking the organisation on a journey".

- "You have to **speed up traditional processes to meet the needs on digital channels**".

- **Each platform has a different purpose**. "YouTube is best at providing educational messages or getting information to people; Twitter provides short and sharp messages and Facebook is for engagement and asking questions".

- **'Lurking' was found to be more common than expected**. The ATO expected viewers of its YouTube videos to 'clickthrough' from the videos to the ATO's Web site, but this rarely occurs.

Main opportunities

- Digital media are being **deployed across the organisation** for online marketing, corporate relations and by the publishing branch (where digital media can reduce costs).

- The online component of the tax time strategy is pivotal. The ATO recognises the potential of social media to **reach its audiences**, particularly those who are completing their tax returns online, or who are potential e-tax users.

- The **Twitter site has become an additional channel for customer enquiries** and comments. Tweets are always monitored and responded to in a relatively short time. Sometimes tweets alert the ATO to a problem (e.g. uploading on e-tax for instance) before anyone else is notified.

  It's about setting expectations. The nature of the channel is that it's immediate, so we have a service standard under which we respond within 24 hours for simple enquiries, or 48 hours for more complex issues.

- **Partnering with other federal bodies** to help educate citizens on how to remain safe online – e.g. Stay Smart Online (http://www.staysmartonline.gov.au) and the Department of Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy.

- "Be **brave**."

Main challenges

- The **difficulty in measuring behavioural change**.

- **Maintaining interest in social engagement between major events**.

- **Managing privacy and confidentiality** which is essential for the ATO. Identities, bank details and tax file numbers cannot be revealed under any circumstances. ATO terms and conditions are very specific. High-level security settings are used in Facebook and key word tracking is used to eliminate profanity.

- **Remaining neutral** – not providing personal tax advice or favouring any company or individual.

- **Be very careful about linking to other organisations' videos because they attach advertisements** which can compromise a government site.

- Currently there is **no budget to drive traffic to social media sites** ('audience-making').

- There are some things to watch and there is a **need to monitor vigilantly**.

  Because we have a government-branded YouTube channel, there's no advertising. But when we put up an interview that Channel Ten did with George Negus and our Commissioner, we found that when you clicked through from our channel it brought up mass advertising. We took that down within 30 seconds.

Notwithstanding ATO's strict requirements for privacy and neutrality, the organisation has **not faced any major crises or public criticism arising from its social media engagement**.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

The department's **social media engagement is an integrated part of its overall communication** strategy, although **each social media platform has its own specific objectives**.

The department carried out a thorough '**listening program**' before implementing social media communication.

Platforms

The department currently uses:

- **Facebook**;
- **Twitter**;
- **LinkedIn**;
- **YouTube**;
- **Blogs**; and
- **Flickr**.

A YouTube presence was developed in 2008 the other social media platforms have been added over the past four years.

Its Facebook page has recently added a **Live-Chat facility** and once a month a different subject is featured and **subject experts are invited to participate**. This is considered important to ensure social media initiatives do not stagnate and remain relevant.

The department is considering using **Storify, a content curation tool**, in the near future (http://storify.com).

The department's 'No to People Smuggling' television channel is presented in **eight foreign languages**.

Planning and strategy

The Communication Branch in the department is headed by a very senior and experienced executive and believes it is trusted within the organisation. "So, when we approached the CEO, or the then Secretary, to engage in social media, we were in a good position to get clearance". There are plans to further "empower" staff in using social media, but this is described as "**a journey that we will go on slowly**" to ensure it is "strategic" and "coordinated".

Staff have learned on the job, by attending conferences and by staying on top of the social media literature, often via Twitter and "learning by osmosis". Digital specialists have not been brought in.

Monitoring and measurement

Monitoring has been **conducted internally** by employees using freely available tools. The department mainly relies on platform analytics to provide key metrics (i.e. Facebook Insights, etc)

Key learnings

- **Trust the people involved –** If you don't have that trust ... either because you just don't have the right person, or because you are not able to, then it's not going to work".

- **Social helps inform policy –** it's another channel for people to make a contribution to policy debate.

- **Social never sleeps** – "it's hugely demanding ... I'm never off it as a result, it's 24x7*".*

- **Social media can enhance customer service –** Immigration has been able to take work off their contact centres which operate at much higher cost.

- **Social helps de-bureaucratise** ... **and personalise and humanise the organisation**.

- **Dip your toe, don't dive in –** take a leaf out of others' learnings.

- **Engage, don't lecture –** it is about conversation not lecturing or broadcasting.

  You've got to be prepared, you've got to have a passion and you be almost got to be obsessive.

Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment

Background

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is responsible for the Victorian Government's efforts to sustainably manage water resources and catchments, climate change, bushfires, parks and other public land, forests, biodiversity and ecosystem conservation. The DSE has a workforce of 3,000 staff, located across the state.

Planning and strategy

In 2010 the DSE **recruited an online communication manager** when senior management recognised the need to set up an online engagement team. The manager's role was to be the department's advocate and also to be part of the Victorian government's newly established media working group which was developing the state's *Government 2.0 Action Plan*.

The department has an **active Yammer site for internal engagement**, in which one-third of staff are members (around 1,000). This site began "organically at a grassroots level" to meet the needs of a dispersed workforce and has grown during the past six months.

Online communication is **integrated into all communication strategies** as a legitimate communication channel and is included in all programs as they are developed.

Target audiences depend on the project. The department **segments audiences** into organisers (lobbyists/activists), landowners, and the "remainder".

Platforms

As well as its main Web site (http://www.dse.vic.gov.au), DSE has profiles on:

- **Facebook** – http://www.facebook.com/DSEFirefighter

- **Twitter** – http://twitter.com/#!/DSE_Vic
- **Flickr**, which is heavily populated with photos – http://www.flickr.com/photos/dsevictoria/
- **YouTube** for in-house produced videos – http://www.youtube.com/DSEVictoria.

All media releases have some audio-visual/multimedia element and contain links to relevant social media sites.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

A **social media policy has been developed** for staff in response to demand. External and internal policies, advocating five key principles, are now on the departmental intranet at http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/about-dse/customer-service-centre/social-media.

Training and resourcing

All staff received training when the department launched its Twitter, YouTube and Flickr accounts.

Monitoring and measurement

Monitoring is considered very important. The department tracks the volume of traffic on its Web site, Facebook "engagement" (e.g. 'likes') and monthly changes in 'Followers'. Also, the department is using some qualitative measurement, utilising **Buzz Numbers**, **Hootsuite** to track keywords in real time. As more sophisticated programs have been introduced, the department no longer relies on Google Alerts. **Daily reports are sent to management**, as part of an integrated communications issues report because media issues are reflected in online engagement.

A major success cited was the 2011 'swooping birds' annual spring campaign. In the past, this public education campaign had involved an expensive print media campaign, but this was discontinued in favour of social media. Followers and 'likers' were asked to contact the department with locations of swooping birds via email, Twitter or phone (an example of empowering citizens through **participation**). Locations were then posted on a map on the DSE Web site. Evaluation showed web traffic increased by 400 per cent during this period.

Key learnings

For the DSE, the challenges were **education** within the department and gaining **understanding** of social media.

> I imagine most people who in my space would say this, around education and understanding … People don't necessarily understand what it is and we've had to educate and we've still got a really long way to go about this being a communications channel.

Victorian Department of Health – Better Health Channel

Background

The focus of our research was the Better Health Channel (BHC) established by the department (http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) which has been operating for the past five years.

The original idea behind the BHC was to have users come to the site and involve them in conversations. The approach then changed to outreach (i.e. engaging people on social media

channels). Currently, the department is looking at maintaining its social channels, but also boosting the interactivity and tools on the BHC Web site.

> The way we did it is through experimentation, low risk self contained experiments that we were prepared to throw away if they failed, but learn a lot along the way and if it still has something of value in it.

Objectives

The purpose of the BHC is to provide information, education and facilitate and support health behaviour change. There is also a large emphasis on prevention addressing the lifestyle choices that lead to chronic diseases.

The BHC has a clear behavioural change objective expressed as "**social media for social change**".

An example of behaviour changing approaches was a recent **Healthy Summer Challenge** in which citizens were invited to use the tools on the site to make small changes to their diet and exercise. The site originally appealed primarily to women aged 35 plus, but younger demographics are now visiting the site and the department is keen to attract diverse audiences.

Persuasive digital environments are seen as critical to assisting behaviour change and staff are involved in accessing considerable research and academic scholarship in the area of behaviour change. Exchange of ideas and collaboration with this department could be useful to the AEC. '**Social peer pressure**' is being considered as a way of achieving behavioural change.

Also, the concept of the '**social contract**' is being explored, based on evidence that if people can be induced to make a written or public commitment to something (e.g. eating fruit and vegetables), then they will.

Planning and strategy

At the time of this study, the department was in the process of producing a draft digital engagement model which identifies citizens' behaviours and how to to engage them via digital media. The model is due to be finished within a few months and the department may be willing to share it with the AEC.

The department has a **detailed social media strategy** that is constantly updated and it has been based on thorough research about participants.

> We're using new research that the department has put together which is more social marketing research which combines Victorian population health data with Mosaic data which tells people about buying habits and perceptions and we've aggregated all that into profiles to help us understand people's health behaviours and attitudes.

The social media strategy targets Victorian health 'consumers' broadly. An 'Addition and Engagement' plan exists within the overall strategy which includes release of four seasonal additions to the BHC each year with **predefined communication objectives**.

Platforms

The department uses an extensive list of web 2.0 tools including:

- A **wiki**;
- A **blog** (internally);

- **Facebook**;
- **YouTube**;
- **Twitter**;
- **Google+**;
- **Ideascale** (a *crowdsourcing* tool); and
- Customised '**apps**'.

The department plans on using **Flickr** in the near future as it develops a range of new visual material.

Management – leadership and oversight

The department cited the *"***whole of Victorian government approach***"* as informative and important for getting management and staff involved (see *Government 2.0 Action Plan* – Victoria". Also, the department endorsed the view that senior management support is essential, stating that its **Secretary was a "champion" for social media**.

> She championed it and she wanted to be the champion for it. As soon as she did it, all from the executives down, everybody fell in love.

The social media platforms are managed and maintained by internal specialist digital staff and the BHC also has a staff writer who produces all content. A **Digital Manager** was appointed and this position is seen as critical to the success of social media engagement.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

The department has **a number of social media policies and guidelines** which are available on the departmental Web site.

Training and resources

The department has invested in a variety of training for staff from those in the digital team right through to the executive level. The training has all been held in-house.

Monitoring and measurement

The department uses the social media dashboard **Hootsuite**, as well as free monitoring tools such as **Google Analytics** and platform metrics such as **Facebook Insights**, as well as some measures of sentiment and engagement.

Key learnings

- **Senior sponsorship is critical**;

- Understand and **mitigate the risks**;

- Have **content that meet the needs and interests of users** (not just the organisation);

- **Do research** to understand what is currently working and not working.

It should be noted that this department is **using extensive research and developing a framework for digital engagement for behaviour change**. Given its behavioural change objectives, this may be a department which can offer useful insights for AEC.

Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet

Background

The impetus for the introduction of social media in the department was the 'whole of Government' approach taken in the Victorian Public Service (VPS), leading up to development of the *Government 2.0 Action Plan*. The aim of that plan is to promote and encourage adoption of social media throughout the VPS to engage communities and citizens, increase transparency and build capabilities.

Planning and strategy

A detailed social media strategy has been developed in the department aligned with its 'business' objectives (the use of neoliberal capitalist terminology in government is interesting). The strategy was internally focussed, predominantly aimed at the VPS, with a segmented audience – e.g. leadership of the VPS such as Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries of departments, middle management, staff, etc, and the strategy was signed off by all Secretaries.

To gain "buy-in", senior staff gave a number of presentations to executive teams within departments explaining the value and benefits of social media engagement and engaged in consultation.

Management – leadership and oversight

Impetus to support the initiative came from two directions. The first was the former Premier, John Brumby, who was an enthusiastic user and proponent of social media. The second key influence was the rapid growth in social media use by citizens.

Giving "bureaucratic imperatives" (e.g. the need to comply with Public Service regulations and address key issues such as privacy), the Secretary of the department was the 'in principle' project sponsor and supporter of the action plan. Again, this demonstrates **the importance of leadership from the top**. Staff noted that having the Secretary as project sponsor meant that there was a certain cachet associated with the project.

The department also appointed an **advisory group** to assist in the development of the strategy. This was comprised of VPS staff, as well as external advisers. The department felt that people outside the Public Service were good "provocateurs" who could challenge orthodoxies.

Based on "good principles of evidence based policy", the planning group produced a **55-page research report** that examined trends in usage of social and consumption patterns of social media to inform implementation.

The next element was strong engagement within the Victorian Public Service. This included a series of **focus groups** and management returned to those groups when a draft framework had been prepared for further consultation.

Risk management was a key element considered in planning. The department convened a 'round table' on social media with the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and also engaged a lawyer to develop a risk management tool kit.

Social media policy and/or guidelines

Capability building was also a key part of the process and this included a range of resources including **online risk management toolkits** and **social media policies** and **Code of Conduct**. The material is available on the www.egov.vic.gov.au Web site.

Training and resourcing

Ultimately, only a few staff were authorised to engage in social media on the department's behalf.

This placed a high workload and demands on those staff, due to the 24/7 nature of social media. The senior executive primarily responsible for social media policy and implementation said she regularly tweets or responds on social media platforms at night and on weekends. She said "this is just part of being involved in social media".

The department did hire some extra staff to resource its social media initiatives, including a Community Manager for Gov 2.0, but the team was "extremely lean".

Monitoring and measurement

The department **does not use an external monitoring agency or service** because, interestingly, it does not believe they are sophisticated enough.

> It's one thing to find out do people like my shoes and brand in terms of positive/negative sentiment. But to figure out what are people thinking about alcohol-fuelled violence in Victoria, the tools are not really sophisticated enough. CSIRO is working with the Department of Human Services federally to develop a product that's designed for public sector requirements, so ... I think that will be very interesting to watch.

Measurement has proved more difficult, and the department acknowledged that it is **measuring outputs but not *outcomes***.

As a general measure of effectives, the department cited that Victoria was the state with the most nominations in the 'Government 2.0 Awards' administered by the Federal Government.

Political neutrality and privacy

The department regards **political neutrality** as clearly required and governed by Public Service guidelines and the Code of Conduct.

> We don't make political comment in other mediums. Why would we do that in using social media?

In terms of privacy, government departments and agencies are **bound by the Privacy Act** and recently the Privacy Commissioner released some guideline in relation to use of social media and the Privacy Act. The Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet believe privacy is sufficiently codified.

Key learnings

- **Start with objectives** not platforms;

- **Persistence and resilience** is needed as change is hard;

- **Governance** is critical;

- **High-level leadership** is critical;

- "Success has many parents – failure is an orphan". **Engage stakeholder**s;

- Think big, **start small**, fail fast;

- **Re-use content** – leverage existing content via social media;

- Have an **authentic human voice**;

- Prepare for and manage the "**mid-level management crunch**" – sometimes there can be a disconnect at this level.

Australian Government information management Office (AGIMO)

The Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), a 'business group' within the Department of Finance and Deregulation, has been a key lead agency in developing Australian federal government Web 2.0 initiatives, including coordinating the *Government 2.0 Taskforce*. AGIMO (http://www.finance.gov.au/agimo/index.html) continues to play a coordinating and facilitating role. As well as providing services to citizens and government through australia.gov.au (the primary online entry point for government information and services), data.gov.au (the online repository of public sector information datasets) and govdex.gov.au (the secure online collaboration service for government), AGIMO publishes a blog distributing news and information about latest developments in Government 2.0 (http://agimo.govspace.gov.au/category/gov-2-0) and hosts govspace.gov.au, an online social media collaboration platform for government.

The office also maintains a directory of government online sites at http://govspace.gov.au/directory. The current list is reproduced here as further examples of interactive government Web sites, blogs, forums, etc.

- 2011 Census of Population and Housing – national Census;

- Aged Care Complaints Scheme News – a Web site for the latest news about reforms to the Aged Care Complaints Scheme;

- AgedCareConversations – conversations about aged care;

- AGIMO Blog – tips on effective and efficient use of ICT;

- Annual Report – Commissioner of Taxation Annual Report 2010–11;

- ASADA Anti-Doping Update – Australia's driving force for Pure Performance in sport;

- Australian Bureau of Statistics – emergency access to key statistics;

- Australian Heritage Week – Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Community;

- Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse – a Web site for sharing information and good practice solutions for the homelessness sector in Australia;

- Best Practice Regulation Updates;

- Cape York Residential Rehabilitation – getting lives back on track;

- Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) – Research Practice and Policy Information Exchange;

- Commonwealth Financial Accountability Review – discussion paper;

- Commonwealth Fraud Control Information Online

  Prevention and mitigation of fraud against the Commonwealth

- Cyber White Paper – connecting with confidence

- data.gov.au – Australian Government datasets

- Defence Ministers;

- Defence News and Media;

- Department of Health and Ageing Graduate Development Program – better health and active ageing for all Australians;

- Do Something Real – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health;

- eex.gov.au Energy Efficiency Exchange – the bottom line on energy efficiency. A joint initiative of Australian, State and Territory Governments;

- Election Commitment Costings – Federal Election 2010;

- Engage – a conversation about Australia's aid program;

- ePlan Working Group – working towards digital cadastral survey standards for Australia and New Zealand;

- Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws – blog by the Australian Law Reform Commission;

- Free Flow – The Murray Darling Basis Authority blog;

- govdex support – govdex;

- Government Domain Names – manage your government domain name;

- Graduate Development Program – Department of Infrastructure and Transport;

- Innovation Showcase – examples of innovation in the Australian public sector;

- Livelonger – the 'Get Active, Eat Good Tucker, Live Longer' campaign;

- Maritime Travellers Processing Committee – government and cruise ship industry working together;

- mashupaustralia.org – an initiative of the Government 2.0 Taskforce;

- Migration Blog – Department of Immigration and Citizenship;

- mypolice – Dutton Park Blog;

- National Coordinating Committee for Government Radiocommunications

- National HACC Conference 2011 – Tues 5 – Thurs 7 April 2011;

- National Licensing

- OAIC Blog – protecting information rights, advancing information policy;

- Parks Australia;

- Public Sector Innovation Toolkit – empowering change in the public sector;

- Queensland Police Service News;

- Resilient Communities – blog;

- Rural health - a life changing difference – a blog featuring first-hand accounts from doctors and health students about their life in rural Australia;
- Service Delivery in Government – information, trends and practices;
- Skills Australia Blog
- Standard Business Reporting – reducing the business-to-government reporting burden
- Standing Council on Energy and Resources
- Strategic Policy Toolkit – promoting strategic policy excellence;
- Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund
- Survey – australia.gov.au surveys;
- The Attorney-General's Department Graduate Program – 'Live Learn Lead';
- Web Guide– helping government agencies manage their online presence.

International e-democracy initiatives and learnings

Social media are being used extensively in many countries. This research study also examined a number of international case studies, some of which is summarised in this section. Some further recent international literature is also reported here.

United Kingdom (UK)

In 1950, 84 per cent of the UK electorate turned out to vote. But in 2010, only 65 per cent did so (Jameson & Chapleau, 2011). Among youth, in particular, up to 60 per cent do not vote, amounting to around four million young citizens in the UK (Bite the Ballot, 2011). A survey of first-time voters carried out for Radio 1, just before the last election, reported that 30 per cent did not believe their vote would count and 20 per cent felt they did not know enough about politics to make a decision.

Despite these concerning statistics, **more than half claimed they would vote if they could do so online or using text messaging**. From the 15.5 million votes cast during the last series of the *X Factor* in the UK, Jameson and Chapleau (2011) observe that it is clear young people like voting. It is just that they are often not voting in political elections which employ traditional voting methods.

Strategies for using social media to engage UK citizens, both for *e-government* information and service delivery and consultation (*e-democracy*) objectives, were informed and given momentum by the 2008 UK **Digital Dialogues report** (Miller & Williamson, 2008).

Since then, a large number of national and local government initiatives have been launched in the UK. Well-known examples include **FixMyStreet** (http://www.fixmystreet.com) launched by **MySociety**, a project of the registered charity, **UK Citizens for Online Democracy** (http://www.ukcod.org.uk/UK_Citizens_Online_Democracy). MySociety also runs a number of other popular UK citizen consultation and social media sites such as **TheyWorkForYou** (http://www.theyworkforyou.com) which allows citizens to track the voting, speeches, statements and house and debate attendance of MPs. See detailed information about FixMyStreet at http://www.mysociety.org/projects/fixmystreet.

2010 UK election

While most research into the 2010 UK election did not specifically examine methods of voter enrolment and information prior to the election, a study of the election campaign by Rachel Gibson and colleagues reported that UK parties and politicians primarily "operated on old-fashioned, top-down broadcasting principles", rather than through interactive dialogue methods (Gibson, Williamson & Ward, 2010, p. 3). They reported that "the internet has become an organisational necessity for election campaigning but ... it has not brought about that strategic change some have argued we should expect" (p. 2).

This echoes concerns of other scholars that governments, political parties, companies and organisations are embracing social media, but not adopting the practices of Web 2.0 social media engagement. Rather, they are applying 'old' mass media practices to new media.

As observed by Macnamara (2010a), the "21st media revolution" is about emergent communication *practices* as much or more than new technologies.

2012 London Mayoral election

The recent 2012 London Mayoral election saw extensive use of social media to engage citizens generally and young people in particular, with some interesting uses of social media. One such site is ***Bite the Ballot*** – the name itself reflective of the informal irreverent tone of social media and youth engagement. A visit to the Bite the Ballot site in May 2012 revealed the following invitation:

> Bite the Ballot, Spirit Of London Awards, UpRise and media partner Community Channel's London360 are giving you the opportunity to be part of the biggest **voting Registration Rally** for young people in the UK, in the run up to the London Mayoral Elections on May 3rd 2012. Many youth organisations as well as media partners will be present on the day. Full list of exhibitors and performances will be published later this week**!**

The invitation went on:

> ON THE SATURDAY 14TH APRIL 2010, THE MINISTRY OF SOUND IN LONDON WILL HOST A DAY OF INSPIRATION AND EDUTAINMENT WITH SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKERS, ARTISTS, DANCERS, COMEDIANS, CELEBRITIES AND MOST IMPORTANTLY YOUNG LONDERS (Bite the Ballot, 2011) [original emphasis].

Bite the Ballot describes itself as "a grassroots campaign created by young people to inspire others to speak up and be a part of the decisions that directly affect us" and calls on UK youth to:

> Join us, have your say, it's our future! We have now got a direct voice to the people that make the decisions … we can't change the laws but we can have our say and if we come together people will have to take notice! Do not wait for someone else to voice what you are thinking – shout it loud and clear for yourself, do not be counted as part of the masses – be counted as an individual, with individual opinions and most of all do not grumble silently about decisions that are made on your behalf – make the decisions for yourself: VOTE! (Bite the Ballot, 2011).

It is significant and relevant to the focus of this study that the Bite the Ballot campaign calls on young people to vote (traditional democratic participation), but also noteworthy that it uses a range of attractors such as music, comedy, dance, celebrities and unconventional messages, including its own name and theme.

The site also borrowed the 2008 Obama slogan 'Yes we can' in its campaign for its **YouthVoteLondon** campaign.

Figure 3. The 'Bite the Ballot' logo developed for the YouthVoteLondon campaign.

Another major campaign for the 2012 London Mayoral election was conducted by the official site, **London Elects** (www.londonelects.org.uk).

London Elects is part of the Greater London Authority (GLA), but is an independent body responsible for organising the Mayor of London and the London Assembly elections. This includes press, radio, TV and online campaigns to urge citizens to vote and tell them how to vote, designing and printing the ballot papers and counting votes. Information about the London Elects campaign is available at http://www.londonelects.org.uk/our-public-awareness-campaign.

Figure 4. The London Elects Facebook page during the 2012 London Mayoral election.
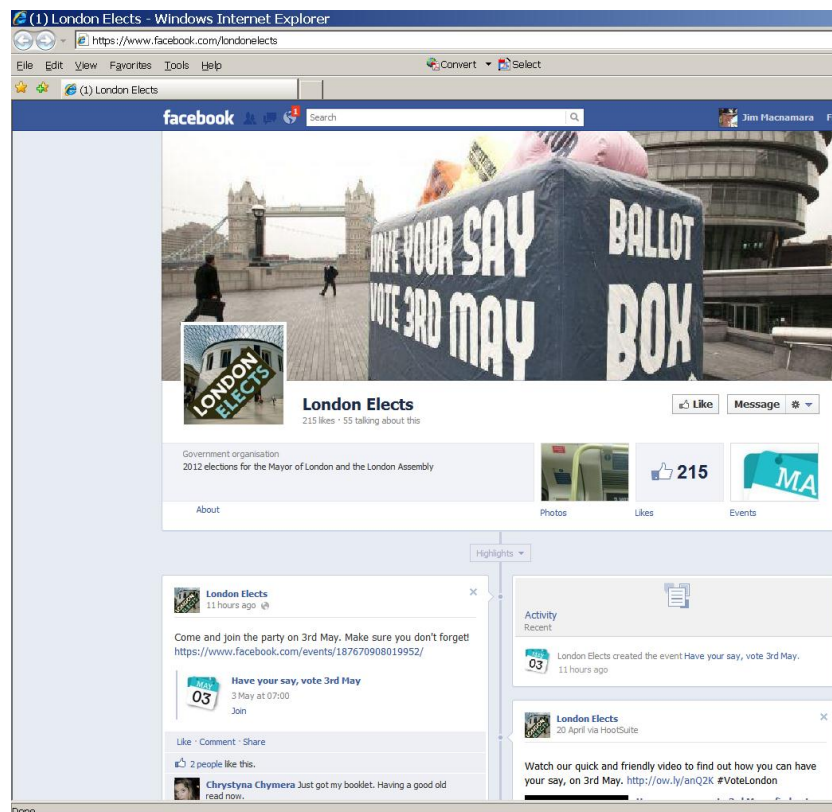
Independent studies of UK government online engagement

A study by London-headquartered digital publishing and training company, Econsultancy, based on interviews with directors of communication in 20 major government departments, reported that:

- **Information** is the area in which government departments have made most progress in terms of Web sites and use of social media;

- All departments have some form of **digital service delivery** (even if it is only providing data and information online);

- Departments are looking to digital engagement to provide **cost savings** compared with non-digital engagement options;

- "**Engagement** – departments are starting to move beyond broadcast into true multi-way collaboration with stakeholders, but it is very early in this process" (Econsultancy, 2010, p. 2).

These findings accord with a previous study by academics, Nigel Jackson and Darren Lilleker (2009) which concluded that "British political parties have sought to create a 'Web 1.5'" that combines elements of both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 (p. 232). However, there are recent signs that the UK government has moved beyond these early approaches to seek more open and fuller engagement online (see 'Social Media Guidance for Civil Servants' next).

Econsultancy (2010) added in its report that "engaging with stakeholders in their own spaces is in itself creating a whole new set of **learning opportunities** for civil servants" and pointed out that "departments are learning to work in an agile manner" (p. 2).

The Econsultancy report noted that "how to avoid **creating more work** through digital engagement" was one of the 'big questions in online engagement, echoing concerns about resourcing expressed by a number of participants in this study (p. 3).

Two other key findings of this study were:

- "**Digital engagement activities are often tolerated or ignored so long as they are under the radar**. In some cases as soon as there were any issues or adverse comments, departmental leadership often chose to restrict digital engagement significantly" (p. 13); and

- If the **leaders of a department 'get digital'**, then the organisation will be a more sophisticated user of digital channels" (p. 12).

These conclusions emphasise the importance of having senior management fully supportive and committed.

### *Social Media Guidance for Civil Servants*

On 17 May 2012, the UK national government released its *Guidance on the Use of Social Media for civil servants* as part of the UK Government IT Strategy. This document is worth close study, as it is based on considerable experience by UK government departments and agencies over the past decade. Among major recommendations, the guidelines advocate:

- **Communicate with citizens in places they already are** – this suggests using public social media platforms such as Facebook (which 50 per cent of Britains use), rather than expecting citizens to come to government-hosted sites;

- **Focus on the quality of interaction**, rather than simply numbers, by understanding who are using various platforms and addressing what they are concerned about;

- **Use social media to consult and engage** – not simply to transmit information;

- **Sometimes just listening is as valuable as engaging**;

- **Being present in the conversation** means engaging and a core part of any good conversation is **listening** (UK Cabinet Office, 2012).

It is interesting how listening is emphasised several times in the guidelines.

The guidelines propose a social media cycle as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The Engagement Cycle – Social Media (UK Cabinet Office, 2012).
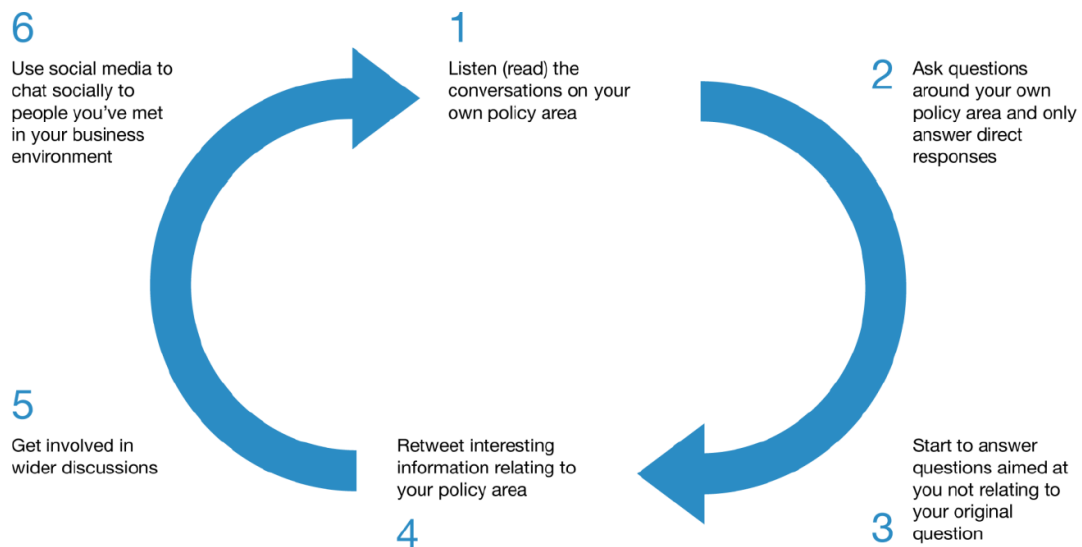
The UK social media guidelines also provide many examples and case studies, such as the **Get Ahead of the Games** Twitter account @GAOTG which had 23,356 followers, as at 18 May 2012. Overall, a feature of the UK government guidelines is that they are open and encouraging, urging civil servants to engage with citizens, build relations, listen and comment online – albeit always mindful of and in accordance with the *Civil Service Code*.

Other sites of interest

Other key online sites involved in the 2012 London Mayoral election identified by Professor Rachel Gibson were:

- www.bitetheballot.co.uk
- www.londonelects.org.uk
- www.aboutmyvote.co.uk
- www.ukpoliticalinfo/london-mayor-election-2012.htm
- www.citizensuk.org.

United States of America (USA)

A study by W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells and Deen Freelon (2011) from the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement at the University of Washington in the US of 90 online sites seeking to engage with youth found an overwhelming focus on *dutiful citizenship* and formal modes of participation. In a recently published report in *Journal of Communication*, Bennett, et al., reported:

- 76 per cent of civic learning opportunities related to imparting knowledge, expression, joining or acting (doing something to engage politically) took a dutiful citizen approach;

- "Opportunities to learn any form of expression are scarce in conventional community, interest and government organisations" which focus predominantly on "getting young people to engage with site-defined activities" [usually traditional modes of political participation];

- "Conventional civic organisations overwhelmingly regard young people as subjects to be heavily guided, or as 'citizens in training' who should be told what to do by authoritative figures" (Bennett, et al., 2011, p. 848).

The researchers further noted:

> ... conventional community and interest/activist organisations overwhelmingly reproduce their offline DC [dutiful citizen] models of citizenship and civic engagement in their online sites ... however, as many observers have noted, conventional civic organisations face shrinking memberships precisely because younger generations are not inclined to enter into formal membership relations (Bennett, et al., 2011, p. 850).

The sites which offered *actualising* learning opportunities – that is, took an *actualising citizen* approach which allowed users to become informed, express themselves and act in creative and self-directed ways that they chose – were online-only youth sites. These had "several notable qualities absent in sites produced by more conventional civic organisations", according to Bennett, et al.

Nevertheless, Bennett, et al. reported that government sites in the US, particularly those related to the Obama and Clinton campaign, offered more actualising civic engagement opportunities than many traditional community organisations and even some activist groups. "This was driven largely by Clinton and Obama affordances for sharing knowledge [peer to peer], blogging and forming personal support groups," the researchers commented (p. 849).

It is fair to say that campaign sites usually have more flexibility than those of government departments and agencies, with the former less bound by Public Service regulations and often managed by consultants and external agencies. So this progressive trend in US election campaign sites might not be generalisable to government organisations. US research shows that government-related online communication can engage young people, as well as citizens generally, through offering self-actualising forms of participation – i.e. allowing citizens to become involved in their own ways such as peer-to-peer learning and communication, user-generated content creation and sharing, and by allowing substantial flexibility in what can be said – rather than controlled top-down information transmission designed to promote traditional forms of political participation.

However, this will require government bodies such as the Australian Electoral Commission to be aware of and sensitive to changing conceptions of citizenship and political participation and adopt an actualising citizenship approach, rather than expecting young people and other politically disengaged citizens to act as dutiful citizens.

US Open Government Action Plan

Despite shifts in thinking about political participation and challenges to address, the US administration is pressing ahead with initiatives to further engage citizens in democratic processes. In September 2011, the US Government published **The Open Government Partnership: National Action Plan for the United States of America**. This is available online (see reference below). Informed by the *US Open Government Initiative* of the Obama Administration, the US National Action Plan (2011) lists as its first priority going forward to "promote public participation in government" (p. 3). Initiatives planned in the US Action Plan include launching the 'We the People' petition platform, as well as a range of open source initiatives to make information available and increase transparency.

As part of its Open Government Initiative, the White House issued a call in late 2011 for advice and input on tools to maximise public participation in policy making and political processes – see (http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/12/06/seeking-your-input-us-open-government-national-action-plan).

In the US, and increasingly internationally, there are a wide range of software tools for facilitating online communities and forums. For instance, specialist participation consultancy, Intellitics, developed and published a list of several hundred tools at http://participatedb.com/tools.

MIT Collaboratorium / Deliberatorium research

Ongoing experimental research in online communication within a 220-member user community conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), initially called The Collaboratorium (Klein, 2007) and renamed The Deliberatorium in 2008 (Iandoli, Klein & Zolla. 2009, p. 70), provides useful insights into the architecture that needs to be established to process large-scale citizens' participation and voice. In reporting on an online climate change forum conducted in what was then called The Collaboratorium, Klein et al. (2006) identified five key requirements for sense making in interactive online public consultation: (1) careful design of the rules of interaction; (2) 'seeding' of discussions with 'an initial corpus of policy options and pointers' to stimulate discussion; (3) a 'committed community of contributors and expert judges'; (4) voting systems which provide citizens with simple quick ways of contributing; and (5) tools for collating and assessing well-structured arguments.

Klein (2007) who has been extensively involved in the Collaboratorium/Deliberatorium project warns that large-scale interactions to date through online applications such as e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, blogs and wikis 'have been incoherent and dispersed, contributions vary widely in quality, and there has been no clear way to converge on well-supported decisions'. He cites problems in online discussion including a 'low signal to noise ratio', 'balkanisation' as users self-assemble into groups that share the same opinions, 'dysfunctional argumentation', and 'hidden consensus' that is lost in the volume of comments and viewpoints. Also, 'group interactions are all too easily hijacked by a narrow set of "hot" issues or loud voices', according to Klein and Iandoli (2008, p. 1).

In a 2009 paper, Iandoli, Klein and Zolla note that few attempts have been made to support large, diverse and geographically dispersed groups in systematically exploring and coming to decisions about complex and controversial issues (2009, p. 69). They say that, while large-scale online organisation using low-cost technologies has achieved outstanding results in knowledge creation, sharing and accumulation, 'current technologies such as forums, wikis and blogs … appear to be less supportive of knowledge organisation, use and consensus formation' (p. 70). In short, current online communication tools and approaches are effective in enabling speaking, but when issues are complex or generate widespread argument, Iandoli, Klein and Zolla say 'little progress has been made … in providing virtual communities with suitable tools and mechanisms for collective decision-making' which requires listening – although they did not specifically discuss listening.

Three types of 'argumentation' tools have been identified as important in the MIT Deliberatorium, based on de Moor's and Aakhus' (2006) argumentation support model – sharing, funnelling and argumentation tools. In a report of trials conducted by The Deliberatorium, Klein (2007) says that system design should include aids such as articles for users to read to become familiar with issues and for and against views before participating. Further, he says that design should provide 'argument maps' to group and link ideas and arguments on a topic. Third, he says online consultation systems should provide simple tools for users to search, add comments, rate, and vote on articles and ideas, as well as post new articles. Fourth, Klein says it is essential to provide immediate feedback to users such as simple 'thank you' acknowledgements of contributions.

This view is supported by experiences from the 2008 Obama election campaign in the US. Technology director of the Democratic National Committee, Ben Self, who was instrumental in the online campaign, says that less than 10 staff processed all online communication with citizens. One of the key strategies that made this possible was the use of 'placeholders' and pre-prepared responses that could be e-mailed or personalised with minimum customisation (Self, personal communication,16 February 16, 2009). Klein (2007) also says that creation and maintenance of a

logical 'argument mapping' structure requires editors with experience in argument map creation and harvesting of the best ideas from open discussion to add to argument maps.

Based on findings from the MIT Deliberatorium, the Obama campaign and other analysis, Macnamara (2010a, 2010b) summarised key 'architectural' requirements of online consultation and citizen engagement sites as listed below and as schematically presented in Figure 6:

- Background reading for those unfamiliar with topics to enable them to gain understanding in order to participate in an informed way;
- A moderation function to intervene in unacceptable communication such as racism, sexism or vilification;
- An acknowledgement function (ideally auto-generated) to respond to speakers promptly;
- A categorisation function to group information and comments into topics or headings so they are easy to find and follow;
- Editors' summaries to update late-comers to the conversation and condense and clarify large volumes of comment;
- Collection of comments in a database as a secure and searchable record;
- An interface with relevant policy advisers and decision-makers so that majority voices and consensus can lead to action and change.

Figure 6. Some key stages and processes in an 'architecture of listening' for large-scale public consultation and communication (Source: Macnamara, 2010a, 2010b).
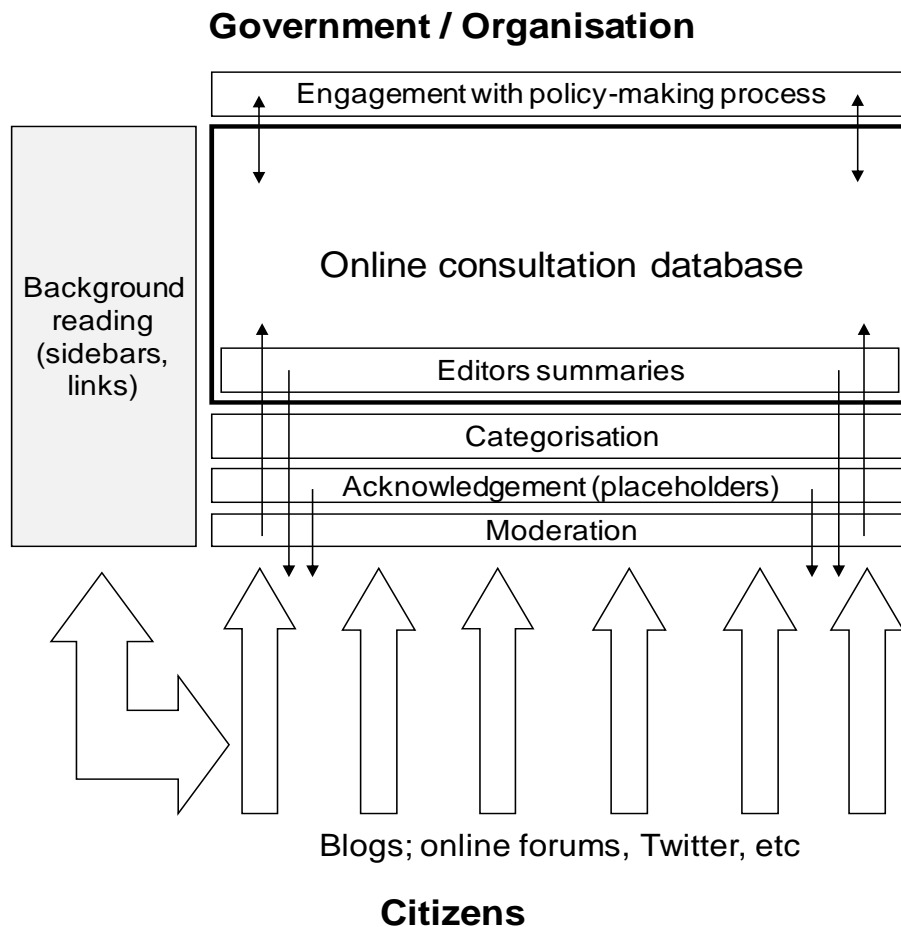
GovLoop

Recent initiatives and progress in citizen engagement through social media by government in the US are summarised in a recent report by the GovLoop Community, an online information sharing community which involves 55,000 members. While not specifically focussed on youth, ***The GovLoop Guide: The State of Communications***, published in April 2012, discusses 10 trends in government communication and lists key findings in relation to use of a range of social media sites (pp. 15–22). This is a further useful resource for accessing 'Best Practice' and learnings within government-citizen communication (GovLoop, 2012).

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Canada

Canada was considered a leader in both e-government and e-democracy during the 1990s and early 2000s, although it was ranked 11th in the United Nations (2008) survey for e-participation and 7th for e-government overall, suggesting its e-democracy focus has fallen behind online service delivery.

In 1994, the Canadian government released a *Blueprint for Renewing Government Services Using Information Technology* which began to be implemented in 1995. Canada was also innovative in launching community access program sites where Canadian citizens could develop computer skills as well as also a SchoolNet program.

A bilingual Canada Site opened in December 1995, now known simply as Government of Canada or *Gouvernement du Canada* (http://canada.gc.ca) providing a single portal to access national government information and services – fully five years before the US government portal and nine years before the UK government launched an equivalent.

Like other major democratic countries, Canada continues to push ahead with e-government and e-democracy initiatives. A February 2009 conference in Ottawa on 'Social media for government' featured case studies of engaging employees and citizens in online consultation by the City of Ottawa; the Treasury Board of Canada; the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada; the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board of Ontario; the Canadian International Development Agency and the Ministry of Government Services from the Ontario Public Service, as well as the US Department of Defense and US Department of State (Advanced Learning Institute, 2009).

The Canadian federal government published a ***Canada Action Plan on Open Government*** in 2012, based on extensive consultation, which outlines a range of commitments to open data, open information and open dialogue (Canada Federal Government, 2012). See Figure 7 for an overview of the contents and scope of this action plan. The plan includes developing a standard approach for government departments and agencies in social media to augment their engagement activities with citizens.

Overall, however, the Canadian government's action plan has a large focus on open data and service delivery. Citizen engagement is largely restricted to consultation in relation to policy-making. A number of commentators, such as Gartner analyst, Andrea Di Maio (2012), believe that Canada has slipped off the cutting edge of Government 2.0, particularly in relation to e-democracy.

A 2011 report for on ***Youth Electoral Engagement in Canada*** (Blais & Loewen, 2011) noted similar concerns to other democratic countries about declining voter turnouts and youth engagement in politics, and presented empirical evidence that "those who use the internet for this [political] information acquisition are more likely to vote" (p. 10). However, interestingly, the report did not discuss social media at all.

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Figure 7. Overview of the Canada Action Plan on Open Government released in 2012 (Canada Federal Government, 2012)).
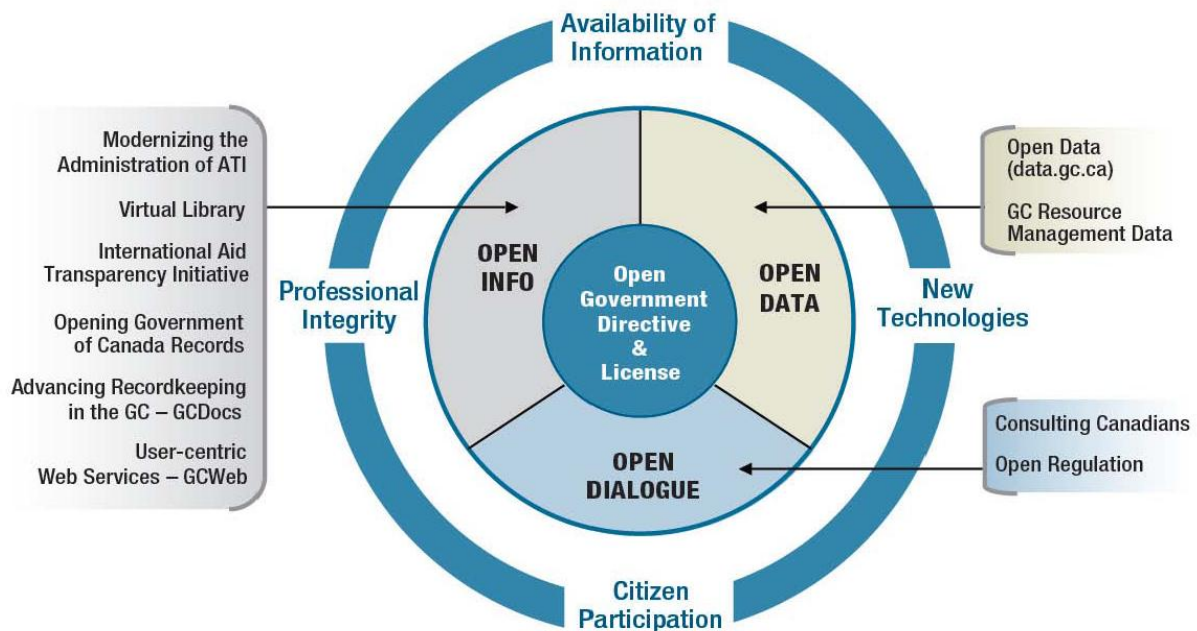
Elections Canada

The Elections Canada Web site (http://www.elections.ca/home.aspx) includes a Voter Information Service for citizens to find their electorate by entering their postal code, a search box to check their enrolment and maps, but overall it is largely a Web 1.0 site, with a traditional information distribution menu bar at the top. Social media icons and links are provided (such as Facebook, Twitter and Digg), but these are only for 'liking', 'following' and bookmarking the electoral organisation site. No blogs or links to an Elections Canada social media site are provided on the Home page.

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New Zealand

The principal case study relevant to the objectives the Australian Electoral Commission is Elections New Zealand which has been analysed as a major case study in this report.

Other recent noteworthy social media initiatives include the 'Making it easier' online project conducted by the Internal Revenue Department (IRD) in relation to taxation (see http://www.oag.govt.nz/2011/making-it-easy-to-comply/docs/ird-making-it-easy-to-comply.pdf).

Two key documents developed by the New Zealand government for adoption across the civil service, based on UK Cabinet Office of Information (COI) policies and standards, are:

- *Social Media in Government: High-level Guidance* "written to help organisations when they are trying to decide if they should use social media in a communication, community engagement, or a policy consultation context. It is intended to be useful to managers and leadership teams, but also provides basic principles, code of conduct issues, and templates that are important for practitioners of social media. Available to download from http://webstandards.govt.nz/guides/strategy-and-operations/social-media/high-level-guidance/;

- ***Social Media in Government: Hands-on Toolbox*** written to help practitioners who are setting up social media profiles and using the tools on a daily basis. It has been written for public servants with limited experience using social media, but also offers tools and tips that will be useful for those practitioners who have been using social media for some time. Available for download from http://webstandards.govt.nz/guides/strategy-and-operations/social-media/hands-on-toolbox/.

Other useful sites

Other key groups and organisations focussed on citizen consultation and engagement, including online engagement, from which useful information is available include:

- **National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation** (http://ncdd.org);
- **Deliberative Democracy Consortium** (http://www.deliberative-democracy.net); and
- **International Association for Public Participation** – Australasia site at http://www.iap2.org.au;
- **Participedia**, an open global knowledge community for researchers and practitioners in the field of democratic innovation and public engagement - http://participedia.net.

Methodology

The research was conducted during the period March – May 2012.

Research Questions (RQs)

The AEC Research Brief (Australian Electoral Commission, 2011a) required the collection of data in response to the following 10 research questions:

1. What is the extent of social media involvement with the organisation, and where did the impetus for this involvement come from?

2. Which groups of consumers/electors/taxpayers is the social media strategy targeting?

3. How has the organisation measured the effectiveness (including cost effectiveness) of its social media strategy? For example, is effectiveness measured in terms of numbers of people reached, or through surveys of awareness or increases in contacts through certain avenues or for certain demographics?

4. What were some of the key policy lessons that emerged from the experiences of the organisation, and what do they believe are some of the key "gotchas" for organisations considering a social media strategy?

5. How are issues of privacy and confidentiality addressed?

6. How are issues of political neutrality addressed (if at all)?

7. Is there a separate social media strategy or has the organisation incorporated the use of social media as part of their overall communication strategy?

8. How does the use of social media complement the use of other communication channels?

9. What has been the impact within the organisation (e.g., introducing social media policy, educating staff on the use of social media, who can use it, who can't etc)?

10. Has the organisation's communications section had to change or evolve to include social media (if at all), or is social media engagement treated separately to traditional communications strategies? (Australian Electoral Commission, 2011a, p. 6; 2011b, pp. 1–2)

Approach

Exploration of the research questions, which predominantly sought information on and insights into 'how' electoral management and other government bodies are engaging citizens through social media, their experiences in doing so, their perceptions of effectiveness, and any further insights that they could offer to inform AEC strategy, necessitated a *qualitative* approach conducted within the *interpretivist / constructivist* research paradigm.

As far as possible, the research was undertaken in a naturalistic setting, with interviews conducted in participants' workplaces and undertaken in an in-depth discussion format, rather than structured or semi-structured questioning.

The qualitative research approach involved two stages of research as follows:

1. **Literature review** of academic and relevant industry and professional research (e.g. by major consulting firms) in relation to social media use by organisations, particularly but not exclusively in relation to electoral engagement; and

2. **Qualitative case study analysis** of electoral management bodies (EMBs) and other government departments or agencies using social media to engage citizens.

Research methods

The literature review identified and examined a wide range of published data, including:

- **Academic journal articles** published in Australia and internationally (accessed through online scholarly databases such as EBSCO Host and JSTOR, as well as through subscription and the UTS library);
- Relevant **books** (particularly recent books);
- **Conference papers** at recent conferences on social media in government/the public sector, political communication, etc;
- Relevant **government reports** (e.g. Australian Federal 'Government 2.0' Taskforce report, Local Government and Community Engagement in Australia 2011 report, etc);
- Relevant **research reports of independent research institutes and centres** – e.g. Pew Research Centre, International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), Australian Digital Futures Institute, etc);
- Relevant **research reports by consulting firms** (e.g. Forrester, Gartner, KPMG, Deloittes, E-consultancy report on 'Digital Engagement in the Public Sector in the UK, etc).

Case studies were investigated through two research methods:

1. **Depth interviews** with senior personnel involved in decisions to use social media, as well as a number involved in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of social media communication. These were all conducted face-to-face by one of three interviewers involved in the project, using a pre-prepared question guide as well as open-ended discussion;

2. **Content analysis** of relevant documents such as policy papers (where available), plans, sample content, reports and evaluation data.

Sampling

The sample for case study analysis was selected in two stages:

1. A **purposive** sample based on prior knowledge within the AEC and among the researchers of government department and agencies using social media to engage citizens, particularly other electoral management bodies (e.g. State electoral commissions in Australia, Elections New Zealand and international electoral management bodies)[8];

2. **Snowball** sampling based on referrals from cases in the purposive sample (i.e. other departments and agencies that they know are using social media to engage citizens).

This yielded more than 20 government departments and agencies which were examined initially using desk research (e.g. online searching and review of reports). From this group, **12 cases were selected for interview and content analysis of key documents**.

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[8] The AEC maintains regular contact with State electoral commissions and the researchers are published authors in the field of social media for citizen engagement, affording validity to this sampling approach.

Data analysis

All interviews were digitally **recorded** and full **transcripts** were produced using a transcription service.

Text analysis was conducted on interview transcripts using two levels of **coding**, as discussed by Glaser (1978), Punch (1998, pp. 210-221) and other specialists in text and content analysis. An initial stage of *open* coding grouped comments into the following broad categories:

1. Platforms used (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blog, YouTube, etc)
2. Popularity (e.g. data on subscribers, views, downloads, etc)
3. Target audience/s
4. Person primarily responsible / champion
5. Management attitudes/support
6. Measurement and evaluation
7. Integrated with other communication
8. Key learnings – positive
9. Key learnings – negative
10. Privacy / confidentiality
11. Political neutrality (if considered, how was this maintained)
12. Strategy
13. Objectives
14. Integration (with other communication)
15. Impact on the organisation (including resources, structural and cultural changes, etc)
16. Advice for other government departments/agencies.

In a second stage of analysis, *axial* coding (also called *pattern* coding) was undertaken to identify specific findings within categories (e.g. platforms used, clear objectives or lack of clear objectives, positive or negative comments received, high or low level of participation, etc) and themes (e.g. regarded as a success or failure overall) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Punch, 1998, p. 205).

Text analysis of transcripts was conducted by the interviewer who conducted the interview. This was done to take advantage of the insight and familiarity with the content gained by the interviewer during the interview process (often taking up to 1.5 hours) and from reading documents such as plans, strategies and reports. In this way, the research sought to gain 'thick description', drawing on qualitative ethnographic techniques of observation and 'immersion', as well as text analysis.

To help ensure reliability, a selection of transcripts was **'blind' double coded** by a second researcher to identify consistency in interpretation. Inconsistent and individualistic interpretations were excluded from the report.

Informal content analysis of documents, including plans, strategies and evaluation reports, was conducted to identify answers to the research questions. For example:

- Evaluation reports provided potential response to RQs 1, 3 and 4;
- The existence of written plans or strategies provided potential responses to RQs 2, 4 and 7;
- Etc.

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APPENDIX A

The researchers

Professor Jim Macnamara PhD, MA, FAMI, CPM, FPRIA, FAMEC

Dr Jim Macnamara is Professor of Public Communication and Director of the Australian Centre for Public Communication at the University of Technology Sydney, as well Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UTS. He is a leading researcher and author in the fields of measurement and evaluation of communication programs and campaigns, the organisational, media and social impact of public relations, and social media. His recent books include *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* (Peter Lang, New York, 2010) and *Public Relations Theories, Practices, Critiques* (Pearson Australia, 2012).

Before joining UTS in 2007, Jim had a distinguished 30-year career working in professional communication practice spanning journalism, public relations, and media and communication research, including founding and heading the Asia Pacific office of CARMA International, one of the world's leading media research firms for more than a decade.

Jim holds a Bachelor of Arts (BA) majoring in journalism, media studies and literary studies, a Master of Arts (MA) by research in media studies, and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in media research.

Dr Phyllis Sakinofsky PhD

Dr Phyllis Sakinofsky is a lecturer at Macquarie University and a research associate of the Australian Centre for Public Communication at UTS. She has worked extensively with government departments and agencies in public communication roles for more than a decade and also with major public utilities including the Royal Hospital for Women.

From October 2007 until the 2011 NSW election, she was Senior Media Advisor for the Minister for State Planning and Community Services (and former Minister for Fair Trading, Youth, Women and Volunteering), Linda Burney MP. Prior to that, she was Media and Communications Officer for the NSW Department of Commerce.

Phyllis gained her Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in media and communication from Macquarie University in 2009. She also holds a Master of Arts in Communication Management from the University of Technology Sydney (2000) and a Marketing Management Diploma from Damelin Management College, Capetown (1986).

Jenni Beattie B. Applied Science (Mass Communication & Information Science)

Jenni Beattie is a widely experienced media researcher who founded and manages a specialist digital communication consultancy, Digital Democracy, as well as being a part-time lecturer and tutor in new media at the University of Technology Sydney.

Previously, she worked with a number of leading media publishing, monitoring, analysis and research companies including News Limited, advertising agency McCann Erickson, Media Monitors, CARMA International (Computer Aided Research & Media Analysis) and The Digital Edge. She also was Online Research Manager and Social Media Strategist for Network Public Relations from 2006–2008.

Jenni advises major corporations and organisations on social media strategies and has managed online communities for Kelloggs, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Kimberley-Clark, Paramount Pictures and Weight Watchers, as well as government clients such as North Sydney Council.

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Professor Rachel Gibson PhD
(International Consultant)

Rachel Gibson joined the Institute for Social Change at the University of Manchester in 2007 having held previous appointments as Professor of New Media Studies at the University of Leicester; Senior Research Fellow in the ACSPRI Centre for Social Research (ACSR) in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University; and Lecturer in politics at the University of Salford.

Of relevance to this project, Rachel has been a Principal Investigator on the Australian Election Study (AES) and the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) and on a series of Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Australian Research Council (ARC) funded projects dealing with the impact of the new media on politics.

She is an editor and co-author of number books, book chapters and journal articles including:

Oates, S., Owen, D., & Gibson, R. (2005) *The internet and politics: Citizens, voters and activists.* London: Routledge.

Gibson, R., Römmele, A., & Ward, S. (Eds.). (2004). *Electronic democracy: Political organisations, mobilisation and participation Online.* London: Routledge.

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UTS & Australian Centre for Public Communication

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) is one of Australia's leading universities. It is a member of the Australian Technology Network (ATN) and is highly rated and ranked among universities in Australia and internationally.

In 2011, UTS was **awarded the highest rating of five stars** for excellence in higher education in the QS™ World University rankings and was **ranked in the top 500 universities worldwide** in the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Rankings.

UTS also has been ranked **in the top 100 universities worldwide** in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* – e.g. 87th in 2005.

In the 2010 round of the **Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA)**, the Australian federal government benchmarked **80 per cent of UTS research at world standard or above world standard**.

Of particular relevance to this proposal, UTS is **a leader in research and teaching in media and communication** with long-standing and highly-respected teaching and research programs in journalism, media studies and public communication which includes public relations, advertising and organisational communication. UTS achieved a **4.0 (above world standard) in the Media and Communication Field of Research** (FOR code 2001) in 2010.

Australian Centre for Public Communication

The Australian Centre for Public Communication is a Centre within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences established in 2002 to facilitate research and debate about issues, ideas and developments in public communication, to assist in dissemination of research and knowledge about public communication and to promote ethical practice. The Centre is authorised to undertake commercial research projects as well as academic research. Also, Centres of the University play a key role in engagement with industry, the professions and the community.

The Centre has published a number of other research reports including:

- *E-electioneering: Use of New Media in the 2007 Australian Federal Election* – also reported in *Media International Australia* (Macnamara, 2008). Available at http://www.communication.uts.edu.au/centres/acpc/publications.html.

- *E-electioneering 2010: Use of Social Media in the 2010 Australian Federal Election* – also reported in *Media International Australia* and *Communication, Politics, Culture* (Macnamara 2011a, 2011b). Available at http://www.communication.uts.edu.au/centres/acpc/publications.html.

- *Social Media for Citizen Engagement: Report of Australian Federal Government Trials* (also reported in *Australian Journal of Political Science* (Macnamara, 2010a) and in the book *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* published by Peter Lang, New York (Macnamara, 2010b). Available at http://www.communication.uts.edu.au/centres/acpc/publications.html.

- *Social Media Strategy and Governance: Gaps, risks and opportunities* (extract accepted as a refereed paper for the 2012 International Communication Association conference, USA and under review by *International Journal of Strategic Communication*). Report available at http://www.communication.uts.edu.au/centres/acpc/publications.html.