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A Little Birdie Told Me: Twitter and the 2014 New Zealand General Election

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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New Zealand.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of Twitter by ten New Zealand political parties, their leaders, and their candidates during the campaign period immediately preceding the 2014 General Election. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the thesis not only demonstrates that Twitter was a platform used by all ten parties as part of their respective campaign strategies, but also argues that the ways in which Twitter was used was strongly influenced by each party’s organisational structure, resources, and, to a lesser extent, culture of professionalism among its field of candidates. This thesis is not concerned with measuring the effectiveness of Twitter in achieving the goals set for it by various political parties, aiming instead to explain the variance of Twitter use during one recent election campaign period.
Acknowledgements

There are a number of people, without whom, this thesis would not have been possible. First thanks must go to my supervisor, Dr Damien Rogers, for not just the extensive academic support he has given, but also the encouragement to keep going when the work to be done seemed insurmountable. Thanks must also go to Massey University Subject Librarian Ness Gibson for help with the finer details of how to reference uncommon documents. Outside of Massey I would like to thank Ashley Murchison for all the advice she has provided from the very early days of this project. In addition, I would like to thank Daniel Mann and Lamia Imam for the crucial feedback, and encouragement, they have provided throughout the project. There are, however, too many people to name who have provided proofreading and feedback on some, or all, of this thesis, for which I am ever grateful.
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## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>App(s)</td>
<td>Abbreviated term for application. May refer to software installed on a smart phone, computer, or website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowd Source</td>
<td>The practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people and especially from the online community rather than from traditional employees or suppliers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favourite</td>
<td>A means to show appreciation of a tweet. Late 2015 saw favourites change to likes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers</td>
<td>Users who have subscribed to receive Tweets posted by the followed account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following</td>
<td>The number/size of followers an account has.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handle</td>
<td>A unique user name used as an identifier on Twitter, the inclusion of which enables a tweet to be addressed to specific users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashtag</td>
<td>The collection of text starting with the # symbol used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. Created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like</td>
<td>A button associated with Facebook content, the clicking of which lets people know that a user enjoys certain content/comments without that user leaving a comment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta Data</td>
<td>The additional data collected about individual tweets including favourite and retweet counts, Twitter client used, and new/reply/retweet status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Tweets</td>
<td>Tweets posted by an account that are not a reply to another users, or a retweet of another user.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original Tweets</td>
<td>New Tweets plus Replies, but excluding Retweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach</td>
<td>The number people who see an individual tweet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweet</td>
<td>A way for a user to forward to their followers a tweet by another user, akin to a share on Facebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfies</td>
<td>A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Share
An action taken on Facebook to show one users’ content to the friends of another user.

Timeline
A chronological list of tweets from accounts selected to be followed by a given twitter user.

Total Tweets
The cumulative total of New Tweets, Replies and Retweets.

Twitter client
A tool used to interact with the platform, be it the web portal, the official mobile app, a third party app (mobile or not), or an app built to interface with a website.

Web 2.0
The tools that emphasise user-generated content, usability, and interoperability, as well as the websites that make use of those tools.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

API
Application Protocol Interface

FSA
Foreshore and Seabed Act

MP
Member of Parliament

NZES
New Zealand Election Study

TAGS 5
Twitter Archiving Google Spread Sheet V 5.0