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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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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.

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Glossary

App(s)	Abbreviated term for application. May refer to software installed on a smart phone, computer, or website.
Crowd Source	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.
Favourite	A means to show appreciation of a tweet. Late 2015 saw favourites change to likes.
Followers	Users who have subscribed to receive Tweets posted by the followed account.
Following	The number/size of followers an account has.
Handle	A unique user name used as an identifier on Twitter, the inclusion of which enables a tweet to be addressed to specific users.
Hashtag	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.
Like	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.
Meta Data	The additional data collected about individual tweets including favourite and retweet counts, Twitter client used, and new/reply/retweet status.
New Tweets	Tweets posted by an account that are not a reply to another users, or a retweet of another user.
Original Tweets	New Tweets plus Replies, but excluding Retweets
Reach	The number people who see an individual tweet.
Retweet	A way for a user to forward to their followers a tweet by another user, akin to a share on Facebook.
Selfies	A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.

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