

Online Activity and Electoral Outcomes

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Abstract

Online activity has been shown to affect many different aspects of society including consumer perceptions of services and products. Little is known however about the effect of online activity on voting outcomes. We examine the impact of online activity on electoral outcomes, using a large phone survey of voters in the 2010 Australian federal election. We find that online activity affects voting outcomes and also whether or not a voter thinks about changing their vote. Some forms of online activity are associated with vote change while others relate to thoughts about vote change. We also find that online activity relates to the more-distant state-wide Senate vote differently from localised constituencies in the House of Representatives. Finally we establish that recalling online activity is strongly and positively correlated to vote change, establishing that findings from online activity research related to more generic services and/or products generalise across into the political domain. Given the ever-increasing level of online activity in the political sphere developing a more nuanced understanding of its effects has the potential to influence the underpinning democratic foundations of society.

Keywords: Social Media, Internet, Voting intentions, Voting outcomes

Introduction

Online activities involving social media and the entire Web 2.0 phenomenon have been the subject of much research, with extant literature finding that social media and related web based tools influence consumer behaviors and attitudes (Patino et al., 2012), contribute strongly to building or stigmatizing even the strongest global brands (Laroche et al., 2013, Lobschat et al., 2012), and create new products (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). Logically, online activity effects will extend beyond the traditionally researched consumer domain into other areas where behaviors, attitudes and product branding have the potential to be impacted by online activity. One obvious parallel domain is that of politics. The ‘marketing’ of political parties involves many similar aspects to the marketing of consumer products, in that there is a desire to change individual behaviors and attitudes, and to build branding in order to increase consumer allegiance. In essence, political campaigns are about building market share, in the same way as product marketing is. Given this similarity, it seems highly plausible that online activity would have the ability to impact not only voter attitudes but also their behavior in the form of election outcomes and voting patterns.

Existing research exploring online activity in the political sphere, beyond protest (Van De Donk, 2004), concentrate primarily on two main questions. Firstly, exploring individuals’ response to materials created and promoted by political parties (Papagiannidis et al., 2012, Karlsen, 2010), and secondly, looking at how different political parties use online activity techniques to build brand and establish a convincing online narrative in a largely one-way communication with voters (Baxter and Marcella, 2012). Nevertheless, online activity in elections is increasing (Macnamara, 2011, Sancar, 2013, Gibson and Cantijoch, 2011). What

is missing so far is an analysis of the outcomes achieved by online activity despite much interest in social influence generally (Beck et al, 2002). At the electorate-level macro analysis, there is interesting research from a diverse range of countries including the United States (Williams and Gulati, 2008), Germany (Tumasjan et al., 2011), and New Zealand (Cameron et al., 2013). There is limited existing research exploring whether and how online activity influences voting outcomes at the individual voter level, an important level to understand because this is how parties and candidates strive to influence outcomes; this paper addresses this issue by posing the research question:

Does online activity affect voting outcomes?

The structure of the remainder of the paper is as follows: the following section describes the theoretical basis of the work and presents the propositions. The methods employed and results obtained are then presented. In the final section of the paper these results are discussed, along with the conclusions reached and their related implications.

Theory and propositions

There is evidence as to the impact of online activity on sales and branding of products and services. Online activity, as a subset of electronic media falls into the traditional categories: “paid (e.g., advertising), owned (e.g., website), and earned (e.g., publicity)” (Stephen and Galak, 2012). Social *earned* media, where positive mentions occur in electronic sites, such as blogs and Facebook, is found to positively impact value through increased sales (Stephen and Galak, 2012, Onishi and Manchanda, 2012). Further, online activity “appears to play an important role in driving traditional earned media activity” (Stephen and Galak, 2012) creating a reinforcing cycle. Firms also heavily use electronic *paid* and *owned* media, such as websites and Google, to prosecute their cause. This practice dates back to the early days of the web (e.g., Hoffman and Novak (1997)). Therefore the use of internet and online activity is well established in commerce.

The world-wide-web has been used by political parties to disseminate information and messages to voters for many years (Papagiannidis et al., 2012) in a way that parallels its use in commerce. Initially, candidates and parties that had web-sites to convey information to voters gained a competitive advantage (D'alessio, 1997). Once the web enjoyed a level of broad community acceptance, the parties began to use it as a central way to convey information to voters (Farnsworth and Owen, 2004) including the use of YouTube (Chen, 2008). Later, it was found that more nuanced use of the internet has become to broadly take hold (Papagiannidis et al., 2012).

The effects of mass media framing the political discussion is known to influence voter intentions in ways that underscore each voter's value orientation (Schemer et al., 2012). However, it is also clear that two-way communication with voters happens and affects voter intention (Miller and Wlezien, 1993). Therefore it is likely that online activity, with its potential for richer two-way communication will play a central role in influencing voters additional to information web-sites and traditional media outlets.

The use of online activity in the United States of America reached a pinnacle in the Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012, where communications technologies were very broadly used to activate complex networks of campaign teams to mobilize voters (Sides, 2012). Social media forums underpinned the exemplary use of information and communications technology of the Obama campaigns (Carmichael, 2013). This was backed up by sophisticated analytics (Sides, 2012) so that teams could deliver messages targeting potential voters with personalised content.

The 2010 congressional election was studied for the impact of online activity in mobilizing voters and in the self-expression to one's social group of the fact that they voted. Specifically, a randomized control trial reported the positive role of direct social media communication in

urging people to vote (Bond et al., 2012) and used actual voting to triangulate (ibid). The influence was small (0.025%), but when taken over an entire electorate, such as that in the USA, the outcome could be profound when considering close results such as those of the 2000 USA Presidential election (ibid). Critically, the self-expression to a voter's social group had a more profound effect than simply receiving information about polling places (ibid).

The study included very simple messages and the effect of this on actual voting. The effect of richer communications on voters is more mixed. Specifically, there is evidence that more complex social communication can be a 'two edged sword' in that voters may be demotivated by social messages as well as being motivated (Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt, 2010). Nevertheless, there is evidence that social bonds and influences are more likely to impact than broad messages delivered using mass marketing techniques (Beck et al., 2002).

Conversations with others have been found to impact on voter intentions. For example, in the 1992 British general election, a study found that voters changed their intentions after having a face-to-face conversation with another person with strong convictions about a political party (Pattie and Johnston, 1999).

To our knowledge there are no studies into how the use of information and communications technologies, specifically social media, on-line advertising or political websites affects individual voter voting; i.e. whether voters changed their vote because of their online activities. This is partly because in countries where voting is voluntary online activities focus on improving voter turnout and mobilization as the most important issues. Australia is one of only a few mature democracies which enforces compulsory voting turnout making it an ideal context in which to study the impact of media on voter outcomes. This is because researching voting behavior in this context is possible because of a stable and very high voter turnout. Specifically, in the election used for this study, the Senate turnout in the state selected was 94.07% of enrolled voters, slightly higher than the national senate turnout for the same election (93.83%) (Australian Electoral Commission, 2011).

In summary, mass media has long been known to influence voter intentions (Schemer et al., 2012). Further, specific two-way communication with voters has also long been known to affect voter intention (Miller and Wlezien, 1993) sometimes positively and sometimes negatively (Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt, 2010). Personal interaction is very expensive and so parties will seek to use efficient ways to communicate with voters, such as social media. Nevertheless, in person social interaction is influential. However, is online activity similarly influential at the individual voter level? We expect this to be. This study addresses these gaps in the existing research by exploring the general proposition that:

Proposition 1: Online activity affects voting outcomes

Much of the interest in examining the role of social bonds in politics concerns generating higher voter turnout. For example, there is evidence that the smaller the community and therefore the stronger the social bonds, the more likely members of the community are to participate in elections (Harkins and Latane, 1998). Beyond garnering a higher turnout, this is particularly important because political parties historically have used social groups to convince voters. In the pre-internet era, social groups were pivotal in encouraging voters to identify with the politics of one party or another. Specifically, Miller and Wlezien (1993) examined the influence of voter perceptions of groups on their change in party affiliation. The paper proposed a "reference group theory of partisan evaluations" (ibid) that explains change in party and electoral coalitions. According to this theory, social groups are perceived by the voter to be connected, with varying degrees of intensity, to different political parties. A specific individual's evaluation of those groups influences their orientations toward the political parties and candidates and therefore whether they would likely change their vote to a competing party.

Conceptually, social influence extends to how connected a voter is to a candidate (Arzheimer and Evans, 2012). Clearly, online activity has potential to both influence voters based on the voter's own social engagement. Further, one would expect that response to online activity is likely to change when the social distance between the voter and the candidate increases. In Australia, candidates for the House of Representatives are local with members based on (mostly) tight geographic areas. In contrast, the Senate is a state-wide electorate with candidates unlikely to be local to the voter. This means that socially, the voter is closer to their local candidates (for the House of Representatives) whereas the voter is more distant from their state-level Senate candidates. Therefore, one would expect that online activity is likely to affect voter outcomes in the Senate, because in this electorate voters would seek information about candidates on-line thus seeking to bridge the remoteness they would feel, when compared with the much more local House of Representatives, because voters are more likely to already understand their local members and challengers, resulting in this second proposition:

Proposition 2. That online activity affects House of Representatives and Senate voting outcomes differently

Method

The data used in this research was obtained via a phone survey collected in the two weeks immediately following the August 2010 Australian Federal Election. The data was collected and verified by a market research company contracted to an Australian political party. This political party generously granted permission for the authors to analyze and publish from their data in the interests of increased electoral transparency. The market research company contacted randomly selected potential subjects from a publicly available Australia wide list of phone numbers and asked them participate in the survey. The identity of the political party gathering the data was not disclosed. Survey responses were anonymised prior to obtaining the dataset and cannot be identified by the researchers. Respondents received no payment or other form of incentive for contributing to the survey. The complete data set contained 1588 sets of observations. Preliminary data examination revealed that there were 165 cases where the subjects vote outcome was missing so these cases were deleted, leaving 1423 responses. When calculating the dependent variables (as described in section 3.1) an additional 288 cases were removed as it could not be determined whether their vote had changed from the previous election. These cases included situations where the subject was not eligible to vote in the prior election, did not recall how they voted in the prior election or where they voted for 'other' or 'independent' in both elections. A further 89 cases were removed as they had indicated "not sure" in response to questions asking whether they had thought about voting for another political party. This left a total of 1046 responses which were used in all analyses.

Demographic and descriptive data shows that the age of respondents was evenly spread across these age categories (as shown in table 1), gender was evenly distributed (52% female, 48% male) and 73% of respondents lived in a metropolitan area. All respondents had voted in the federal election; 88.8% of them at a polling booth and 11.2% by postal ballot. The voting patterns reported by survey respondents align well with the actual recorded first preference votes received by political parties standing candidates for election, as shown in tables 2 and 3. This helps establish that the sample selected is relatively unbiased in terms of political leanings, given that the reported voting patterns in the sample are similar to those of the entire voting population.

Age	Frequency	Percent
18 to 24	105	10.0
25 to 34	166	15.9
35 to 44	197	18.8
45 to 54	194	18.5
55 to 64	171	16.3
65 or older	213	20.4
Total	1046	100.0

Table 1. Age distribution of respondents

House of Reps	Response Frequency	Response Percent	Actual vote
Labor	434	41.5	37.99
Liberal/National	405	38.7	30.46
Greens	146	14.0	11.76
Family First	22	2.1	2.25
Sex Party	12	1.1	.09
Other	27	2.5	17.45
Total	1046	100.0	100.0

Table 2. Surveyed voting patterns and actual voting patterns – House of Representatives

Senate	Response Frequency	Response Percent	Actual vote
Labor	401	38.5	35.13
Liberal/National	396	37.7	30.34
Greens	177	16.9	13.11
Family First	31	3.0	2.10
Sex Party	18	1.7	2.04
Other	23	2.2	17.28
Total	1046	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Surveyed voting patterns and actual voting patterns – Senate

Dependent variable definition and operationalisation.

The analysis conducted uses two dependent variables; Vote Change (whether the subject's vote had changed since the previous federal election) and Thought Change (whether the subject thought about changing their vote). These variables represent two important and different potential voter outcomes related to online activity. Thinking about change is generally seen as a precursor to actual change; however there is limited evidence to suggest that this will automatically hold in the political context under examination. It may well be that while some forms of online activity provoke action (Vote Change) others provoke thoughts about action (Thought Change). Exploring both these outcomes provides a rich insight into the effect of online activity. These two dependent variables were recorded for the vote in each of the two houses of parliament creating four dependent variables: Vote Change

– House of Representatives, Vote change – Senate, Thought Change – House of Representatives, Thought Change – Senate.

Thought Change was self rated by subjects using a coding of 1-‘Yes’, 2=“no” and 3= “not sure” in response to a question as to whether they had thought about voting for another political party. “Not sure” responses were removed prior to analysis, as described previously. Vote Change was calculated by comparing the 2010 vote with data collected about their vote in the prior federal election in 2007. If a different party was selected in 2010 than 2007 the response was coded 1 = “Yes”, if the same party was voted for it was coded 0 = “No”. If change could not be determined responses were coded 3 = “Can’t tell”. “Can’t tell” responses were removed prior to analysis, as described previously.

For the House of Representatives, 23% of votes changed, 61% did not change and the remaining 16% could not be determined. For the Senate 26% of votes changed, 55% did not change and 19% could not be determined. These results align with evidence suggesting that around 23% of voters change their vote in any given federal election (Watson and Browne 2008). Additionally, the higher incidence of vote change for the Senate makes sense in light of evidence that Senate house voting patterns exhibit more variability than those in the House of Representatives (Watson and Browne 2008).

Independent variables definition and operationalisation.

The independent variables as a group comprehensively explore the forms of media the respondents recalled interacting with during the 2010 federal election campaign. These 26 variables (listed in table 4) represent a diverse range of online activities. All independent variables in the survey instrument are dichotomously coded as 0 = “No” 1 = “Yes”. Examples of these various forms of online activity are contained in Appendix 1.

Data analysis

To explore propositions 1 and 2 the authors conducted a series of Chi Squared independence tests. This non-parametric statistical technique was selected as all data are categorical, ruling out the more commonly encountered ANOVA or regression techniques which assume normally distributed data. In addition high multicollinearity between the independent variables means that regression coefficients will potentially be unreliable.

Chi-square tests compare groups of subjects, asking for example “Is the proportion of subjects who considered changing their vote the same for subjects who recall seeing TV advertising as for those who did not”? A 2x2 chi-square test was conducted for each of the 26 independent variables against all four dependent variables. Results are documented in table 4 and discussed in the following sections.

Results

The results of the Chi squared tests conducted are shown in table 4 below, which reports significant ($p < .05$) Chi-squared values and their associated Phi-correlation values. A significant chi-squared statistic identifies a situation where subjects who recalled exposure to the form of media were significantly more likely to have either thought about changing their vote, or did change their vote. The phi-coefficient, which is equivalent to an r^2 , measures effect size by indicating the strength of the association between the variables¹. The table is

¹ The Phi correlation has a theoretical range of -1 to +1 and is conventionally interpreted as:

- 1.0 to -0.7 strong negative association. ***

divided in panels grouping similar forms of media. 29 of the 104 Chi-Squared tests conducted returned a significant result; statistically significant results for at least one of the four dependent variables were achieved for 13 of the 26 variables explored. The Phi-correlations indicate that every significant result also returned a positive relationship between recalling online activity and considering changing or actually changing their vote. These results indicate broad support for Proposition 1 by showing positive associations between online activities and voting outcomes.

% recall	Activity	Thought Change HOR Chi Phi	Thought change Senate Chi Phi	Vote Change HOR Chi Phi	Vote Change Senate Chi Phi
Visiting Websites					
16	Mainstream news website	.001 *** .9 ***	.005 ** .9 ***	.021 ** .7 ***	.013 ** .8 ***
12	Political party website	.07 * .6 **	.037 ** .7 **	.043 ** .7 **	.003 ** .9 ***
12	Australian Electoral Commission website	.002 ** .9 ***	.007 ** .8 ***	.004 ** .9 ***	.001 *** .9 ***
4	Local Members website	.016 ** .8 ***			.037 ** .7 **
4	Federal parliament website				
3	Local Candidates website				.038 ** .7 **
2	Candidate website outside electorate			.003 ** .9 ***	.004 ** .9 ***
2	Non-Government Organization website	.003 ** .9 ***	.005 ** .9 ***		
Seeing online political advertising					
5	Online advertisements			.050 * .3 *	.022 ** .7 **
4	Website advertisements	.042 ** .7 **			.011 ** .8 ***
2	YouTube advertisements				
3	Facebook advertisements				
1	Twitter advertisements				
Visiting a Blog					
3	Visited Political blog				

- -0.7 to -0.3 weak negative association. **
- -0.3 to +0.3 little or no association. *
- +0.3 to +0.7 weak positive association. **
- +0.7 to +1.0 strong positive association. ***

% recall	Activity	Thought Change HOR Chi Phi	Thought change Senate Chi Phi	Vote Change HOR Chi Phi	Vote Change Senate Chi Phi
Signing an online petition					
3	Signed an Online petition				
Using YouTube					
5	Watched political YouTube content				.029 ** .7 **
1	Shared YouTube political content				
Using Facebook					
6	Shared Facebook content		.023 ** .7 **		.034 ** .7 **
3	Followed politician/party on Facebook				
1	Received a reply on Facebook				
Using Twitter					
1	Followed on Twitter				
1	Received a reply on Twitter		.044 ** .6 **		
1	Re-tweeted a tweet	.039 ** .7 **		.039 ** .7 **	
Using Email					
4	Shared political email				
3	Received an email				
2	Subscribed to a political email list				
Number of Significant Results Obtained		7	6	6	10

Table 4. Testing Propositions 1 & 2 – Significant Chi-square values & associated Phi-correlations

Discussion

This study improves current understanding of the effects of online activity by exploring whether online activity was positively associated with voters changing and/or considering changing their vote. Voting outcomes were examined for both the Senate and House of Representatives vote in the 2010 Australian federal election. This discussion section traverses four perspectives; looking firstly at whether online activity is associated with vote outcome, then moving on to consider how online activity interacts with social distance issues to create different outcomes for the different houses of parliament. The association between online activity and actual change (as opposed to thoughts about change) is considered next; finally the power of recall in relation to online activity is discussed.

Online activity and voters

In line with proposition 1 the results show that many of the forms of online activity examined were significantly associated with voters' intentions and outcomes. The results presented in table 4 illustrate the potential for online activity to impact voters, with recall of 13 out of the 26 online activities significantly positively associated with changes in voting outcomes.

Different activities within some forms of media were associated with different effects. Looking firstly at websites, with the exception of the federal parliamentary website visiting, every other website was significant associated with voter outcomes. The non-significant results related to the parliamentary website most likely relates to the non-partisan content therein.

Political advertising proved to be far more powerful when explored in a generic platform context such as 'online' or 'website' rather than specific advertising media such as YouTube, Twitter or Facebook. This may relate to the low recall levels for social media advertisements, or the lack of maturity of these specific advertising channels at the time of the data collection (2010). We anticipate that advertising via specific online channels would have a stronger effect if the research was replicated in a current election campaign however this remains an empirical and unresolved question.

Positive actions seem to be more indicative of potential vote change than passive consumption of content. For example, sharing Facebook content was positively associated with thinking about or actually changing vote in the Senate. The action of re-tweeting on Twitter was positively associated with actual or contemplated vote change in the House of Representatives. Passive activities such as seeing a Facebook advertisement, following a politician or party on Facebook or Twitter, or receiving a reply to a Facebook post created no significant effect at all.

These results possibly relate to the fact that deciding to share content requires some level of 'buy in' to that content. Given the social nature of online activity it is unlikely that content sharing would occur unless some impact had been experienced by the Facebook or Twitter user. Facebook was more influential in the Senate. This may mean voters are using this media in ways to reduce the social distance between their fellow voters and the candidates and parties at that whole-of-state electorate. In contrast, Twitter was more influential in the local House of Representatives elections. This may be because very specific and more local interaction is possible where the social distance between the voters and candidate is much lower than the Senate. Therefore really connecting with fellow voters using Twitter is easier because it is local. We tend to share things socially that matter to us personally. While the current data does not permit it, a more detailed exploration of change provoking content sharing may yield additional insights into the effects of actively sharing content as opposed to passively consuming content.

In addition to the results reported above respondents were asked about their perceptions of the influence of internet use on their vote. The relationship between recalling online activity and the perception of the influence the internet was explored using regression analysis; an extract of the results is contained in table 5. The results provide evidence that online activity is positively related to perceptions of the internet influencing voting choices. In particular, those respondents who recalled visiting mainstream news, political party or the *Australian Electoral Commission* (AEC) websites strongly perceived internet use as influencing their vote, while moderate effects were identified for a number of other online activities. This shows that in addition to a positive association between online activity and vote change there are also significant positive relationships between online activities and the perception of their influence on vote outcomes. In addition, those online activities significantly associated with

perceptions of internet influence are broadly in-line with the online activities previously identified as being positively associated with vote outcomes.

Dependent Variable = Internet influence	Std Beta	t	Sig
Mainstream news website	.422	15.007	.000***
Political party website	.222	6.922	.000***
Australian Electoral Commission website	.170	5.811	.000***
Local Members website	.025	.857	.392
Federal parliament website	.096	3.274	.001**
Local Candidates website	-.017	-.559	.577
Candidate website outside electorate	.028	.981	.327
Non-Government Organization website	.052	2.054	.040**
Online advertisements	-.057	-2.038	.042**
Website advertisements	-.061	-2.055	.040**
YouTube advertisements	-.004	-.130	.896
Facebook advertisements	-.019	-.620	.535
Twitter advertisements	-.065	-2.168	.030**
Visited Political blog	-.061	-2.198	.028**
Signed an Online petition	-.025	-.922	.357
Watched political YouTube content	-.010	-.309	.757
Shared YouTube political content	.000	-.007	.995
Shared Facebook content	.086	2.687	.007**
Followed politician/party on Facebook	.033	.982	.327
Received a reply on Facebook	-.034	-1.105	.270
Followed on Twitter	-.053	-1.453	.146
Received a reply on Twitter	-.017	-.568	.570
Retweeted a political tweet	-.009	-.253	.800
Shared political email	.076	2.734	.006**
Received an email	.042	1.389	.165
Subscribed to a political email list	-.062	-2.025	.043**
Adjusted R ² .396			

Table 5. Additional regression analysis proposition 1 – perceived influence of internet.

Social distance and online activity

Proposition 2 suggests that there is a distinction between the different houses of parliament in terms of the effect of online activity. Voting outcomes in the Senate are typically thought of as being easier to move (i.e. they are “less sticky”) than those in the House of Representatives. As discussed previously this difference is thought to be related to the social distance experienced between voter and Senate candidates. Social distance is higher for Senate candidates who campaign across much larger electorates than the smaller and localized House of Representative electorates.

The results in table 4 indicate that many of the forms of online activity tested returned positive associations with actual votes. The analysis in table 6 indicates how the associated online activities identified varied between the two houses of parliament. More forms of online activity were positively associated with vote change in the Senate than the House of Representatives. This illustrates the potential for online activity to impact vote change by means of reducing social distance and provides support for proposition 2, that online activity affects House of Representatives and Senate votes differently.

Online activities positively associated with Vote Change in the:	
House Of Representatives	Senate
Visited mainstream news website	Visited mainstream news website
Visited political party website	Visited political party website
Visited Aust. Electoral Comm. website	Visited Aust. Electoral Comm. website
	Visited local members website
	Visited local candidates website
Visited candidate website outside electorate	Visited candidate website outside electorate
Saw online advertising	Saw online advertising
	Saw website advertising
	Watched political YouTube content
	Shared Facebook content
Retweeted a political tweet	

Table 6 Significantly associated online activities; House of Representatives vs Senate vote changes

Actual change vs. considering change

The question of which outcome online activity provokes is an interesting one. Considering change is generally accepted as a precursor to actual change, in line with gap theories espousing that the starting point for change is the act of unlocking or unfreezing thinking (Lewin, 1947). Online activity conceivably has a valuable role to play in loosening up voters' intentions as a first step towards vote change. As shown in table 7 many of the online activities explored motivated voters to consider changing their vote and/or actual vote change however not all of the activities associated with getting voters thinking about changing their vote were also associated with actual vote change. As online activity matures its effects may become more potent, for example the Sensis Yellow Social Media Report 2014 found 69% of Australians now use social media, 95% and 19% of whom use Facebook and Twitter, respectively (Sensis, 2014). With an Australian federal election due in 2013 it would be interesting to compare result for online activity impacts in 2013 with those from 2010 reported in this study. Such a comparison would provide a longitudinal insight into the influence of varying online activities as they mature and user communities enlarge.

Online activities positively associated with:	
Thoughts about vote change	Actual vote change
Mainstream news website	Mainstream news website
Political party website	Political party website
Aust. Electoral Commission website	Australian Electoral Commission website
Local Members website	Local Members website
	Local candidate website
	Candidate website outside electorate
Non Gov't Organization Website	
	Online advertising
Website advertising	Website advertising
	Watching political YouTube content

Sharing Facebook content	Sharing Facebook content
Receiving a reply on Twitter	
Retweeting a political tweet	Retweeting a political tweet

Table 7 Significant associated online activity; considering changing vs. changing vote.

Online activity recall

One of the axioms of marketing is that a brand message must be remembered by consumers in order to provoke changes in consumer behavior. If that truism holds in the political context we would anticipate that those online activities with higher recall levels would be more significantly associated with vote change. As shown in Table 4 those online activities with high recall levels were likely to be associated with vote change. Interestingly some forms of online activity with quite low recall values were also associated with vote change, suggesting that even low levels of recall can potentially provide political leverage. From a robustness perspective, these results indicate that finding no significant results for some of the low recall media is not necessarily a reflection on the power of the analysis, given that online activities with recall levels as low as 1% were significantly associated with vote change.

Table 4 contains details of the proportion of subjects who recalled varying forms of online activity. The media with the highest recall level overall (16%) was mainstream news websites (figure 1 of appendix 1 contains an example), followed by political party websites (figure 2 of appendix 1) and the AEC website (figure 3 appendix 1), both with 12% recall. There is quite a break before the next best recalled media at 6% (sharing Facebook content). Considering these three high recall forms of media in isolation shows they produced powerful results. Exposure to the websites for mainstream news, a political party, or the Australian electoral commission was strongly associated with actual vote change and thoughts about changing vote for both houses of parliament.

The results obtained in relation to the AEC website are also quite interesting. As per the example shown in figure 3 of appendix 1, this government website contains no policy content instead it explains voting procedures and allows citizens to check and amend their enrolment status. This is perhaps indicating a reverse causality to the postulated influence exerted by other online activities. It is likely that subjects who visited the AEC website had already decided to change their vote and wanted to make sure that they voted correctly and their vote would count.

Conclusion.

The research explored two broad propositions related to the relationship between online activity and voting outcomes. We found strong support for the general proposition that online activities can affect voting outcomes, with many, but not all forms of online activity positively associated with vote change or thoughts about vote change. We also found strong support for the second proposition that online activity performs a different role when social distance comes into play, finding that different online activities were associated with the House of Representatives and Senate voting outcomes. We show how some forms of online activity are associated with actual vote change, and others with thoughts about change. In particular, active activities such as sharing content are shown to have more associations with vote change than purely passive activities such as viewing web-pages. As online activities in the political sphere increase, developing a more nuanced understanding of its effects has the potential to have an effect on the underlying democratic foundations on which society rests.

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Appendix 1 – Example websites

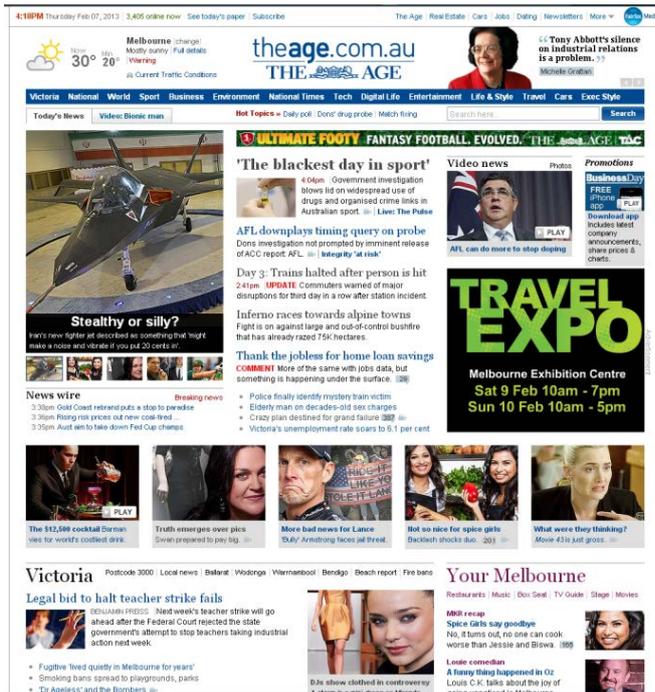


Figure 1 – Example mainstream news website



Figure 2 – Example political party website

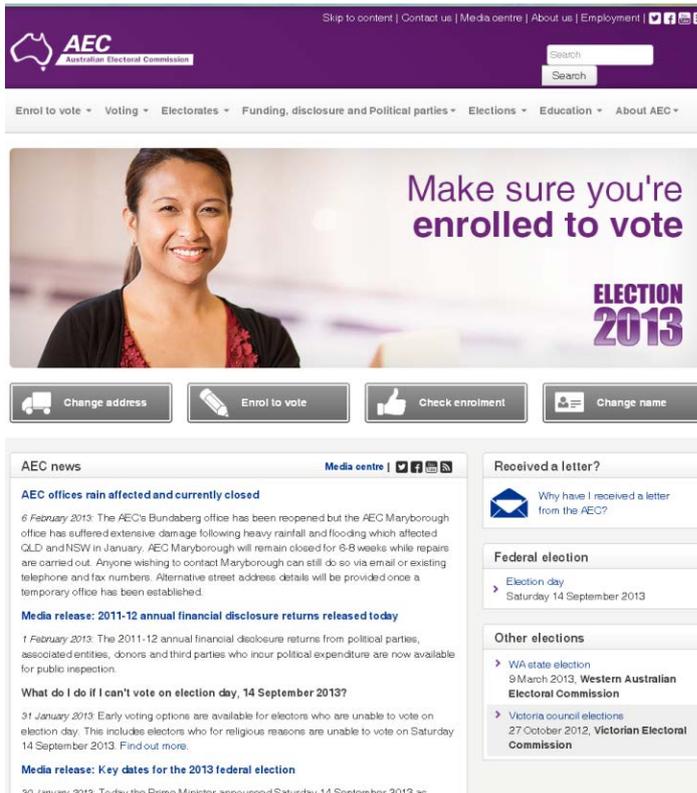


Figure 3 – Australian Electoral Commission Website



Figure 4 – Example Local Member website

En Passant with John Passant

Home John Passant Feedback Rules

Revolutionary reflections on this world of ours



Home
John Passant
Feedback
Rules

February 2013
M T W T F S S
1 2 3
4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11 12 13 14 15 16 17
18 19 20 21 22 23 24
25 26 27 28
« Jan

Tags
Archives
February 2013
January 2013
December 2012
November 2012
October 2012
September 2012
August 2012
July 2012
June 2012
May 2012
April 2012
March 2012
February 2012
January 2012
December 2011
November 2011

Superannuation for the rich?

Posted by John, February 6th, 2013 - under [Age pension](#), [Pensioners](#), [Superannuation](#), [Tax](#), [Tax expenditures](#), [Tax the rich](#).
Comments: none

There has been a bit of talk that the Gillard government may reduce the superannuation concessions going to the rich. One rumour doing the rounds is that all those with a super balance greater than \$800,000 would lose the over 60s tax exemption on their retirement income.

The Australian Institute has produced figures which show that the top 5% of income earners currently receive \$10 billion of the \$30 billion in tax benefits given by the concessional tax treatment of superannuation. **They say:**

'When in government the Coalition turned superannuation into a rort for the rich. The forward estimates show super tax concessions will be worth \$45 billion in 2015-16. 37 per cent of that goes to the top five per cent of taxpayers' said David Richardson, senior fellow at The Australia Institute.

'Someone on \$250,000 receives a tax concession worth \$6,750 on their contributions alone. That compares with low income earners who get a rebate of up to \$500 which the Coalition wants to scrap' said Mr Richardson.

'If the Coalition wants to find savings they should be looking at the subsidies going to the top end of town—not assistance for the 3.5 million low income earners who are likely to struggle in their retirement' said Mr Richardson.

So what is going on?

Let me explain tax expenditure theory to help readers understand what I am talking about. I'll use a simple self-indulgent example. Let's assume there are 100 people in our economy, Utopia. There are three tax rates - 30% on all income up to and including \$100 per day and 60% for all income above that up to \$200 a day. After that the rate is 90%. Everyone in Utopia earns \$100 a day,

Site search

Miniposts
Tax the rich
I am speaking at Marxism 2013 on taxing the rich. I will be talking on Sunday 31 March at 11.30. The Conference is the biggest left wing event of the year, over Easter at Melbourne University. Others speakers among the 70 or more include John Pilger, Gary Foley, Billy X Jennings, Brian Jones, Bob Carnegie, Jeff Sparrow, Antony Loewenstein, Toufic Haddad, and speakers from parties from Indonesia, The Philippines, Pakistan, New Zealand, the US and many many more...Check out the link [here](#). (0)

The 99 Passant
I am about half through compiling the first volume of my most read (readers' view) or most interesting (my view) articles from this blog. Keep an eye out

Figure 5 – Example political blog