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Surveying the ‘Sphere

A Study of Political Blogging in New Zealand

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Abstract

This thesis examines the nature of the New Zealand political blogosphere in order to determine who is participating in political blogging in New Zealand, and whether their participation fulfils the requirements of a model of democratic deliberation.

Two surveys were specifically created for the purposes of this study. The first of these is the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey, which received responses from 160 New Zealand political bloggers. The second is the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey, to which 789 readers of New Zealand political blogs responded.

The responses to these surveys provide a massive amount of data regarding the nature of the New Zealand political blogosphere, and the motivations and opinions of the political bloggers and blog readers that participate in it. Analysis of these responses shows that the demographic make up of the New Zealand political blogging community largely conforms to what has been observed by other researchers.

The responses to these surveys are also used to test how applicable a model of democratic deliberation, based on the theories of Jurgen Habermas and Cass Sunstein, is to the New Zealand political blogosphere. Application of this model shows that the New Zealand political blogosphere does not meet the criteria established by Habermas and Sunstein.

This thesis provides a uniquely New Zealand perspective on political blogging, which may then be used by other researchers to test the applicability of different theories and perspectives, and therefore improve the level of understanding of this medium in a New Zealand context.

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