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Surveying the ‘Sphere

A Study of Political Blogging in New Zealand

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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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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Introduction

Research Structure, Defining Political Blogs and the Need for Research

In the last five years, blogging on political topics has emerged from an obscure niche of the digital world toward ever higher levels of authorship, readership and participation. At the heart of this medium are the political bloggers themselves, who create this material through analysing and interpreting political information, and present it to the rest of public for consumption, entertainment and validation. Political blog readers interact with these bloggers by reading, interpreting and commenting on this information. Some of these readers will go one step further than passive involvement in blogging by commenting on the material produced, therefore joining the discussion and generating further content through their interactions. The political blogosphere is therefore potentially creating a massively participatory vehicle for involvement in politics, and providing a forum for a diverse multitude of voices, opinions and theories, focussed upon the political issues of the day.

New Zealand has not been isolated from these trends – in fact, in the interconnected, internet-enabled mass public that we live in, New Zealanders are very much part of this multitude. Evidence of this is found in the explosion of locally focussed and authored political blog websites where these amateur commentators apply their minds, time and effort to their own personal chronicle of political life in New Zealand. Correspondingly, there has also been the growth of a local mass of blog readers, who engage with the material of these bloggers for the purposes of information, entertainment or analysis.

As undeniable as the inexorable rise of blogging has been, it is however a new and largely unknown medium. The impact of the blogosphere is already beginning to be felt, in terms of the number of readers these sites attract, the credit that these sites are beginning to receive from traditional media and political elites, and also by virtue of the stories and scandals that bloggers are bringing to the attention of the public. Speculative assessments abound as to whether and how these levels of readership and ever increasing 'achievements' of political blogging may be having an impact on democracies such as New Zealand. However, only a small amount of empirical data exists - either in a specifically New Zealand sense, or in an international context, to test the validity of these concepts. Simply put, very little is known about who these bloggers and readers are; why they are participating in this medium; and what impact they feel they are having both within the confines of the medium and on our society, media and democracy at large.

It is to these questions and issues that this research is devoted – to understanding and quantifying the New Zealand experience of political blogging, and to providing a core of quantitative and qualitative data regarding who New Zealand political bloggers and blog readers. This data may then be used to test the applicability of these various theories, as well as to provide a 'face' to the participants in New Zealand political blogosphere.

Research Structure

This study is divided into three main chapters. Chapter One will outline the methodology used to conduct two surveys of the participants of the New Zealand political blogosphere. This chapter will also consider a number of academic perspectives that will be used to inform a model of democratic deliberation, develop an analytical framework and provide a set of criteria and through which the results of this study will be evaluated. Other studies

into the political blogosphere will also be reviewed in this chapter to provide a further basis for comparing the outputs of this study.

Chapters Two and Three will present summarise and analyse the information received from these two surveys conducted between June and July of 2008 according to the methodology outlined in Chapter One. 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.

In the concluding chapter of this study, the outcomes of these surveys will be reviewed in the context of the analytical framework established in Chapter One. This will allow conclusions to be drawn as to how applicable the model of democratic deliberation developed is to the political blogosphere, as well as provide an insight into how applicable the other research is to the New Zealand context.

Defining Blogs

It is firstly necessary to define what is meant when we discuss 'blogs' and 'blogging'. The term blog itself is a shortened form of the original term for the medium – weblog; which was originally coined by Jorn Barger on his personal website,¹ this term is a portmanteau of two words that are otherwise easily understood: 'web' meaning the internet, which is the location of this content; and 'log', as in a record of events.² As blogs themselves are

¹ Rebecca Blood, *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog* (Cambridge MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002), 3; David D. Perlmutter, *Blog Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 62; Unfortunately neither Robot Wisdom (www.robotwisdom.com) nor the Internet Archive (www.archive.org) include the specific content which gave birth to the term.

² Jill W. Rettberg, *Bloggging*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 17-18

designed as online journals of thoughts, opinions and observations, it appears that such connotations are very appropriate. Thanks to Peter Merholz, the original “weblog” terminology soon came to be replaced: “For What It’s Worth I’ve decided to pronounce the word ‘weblog’ as wee’-blog. Or ‘blog’ for short.”³ And thus the term was born.

The original form of these blog websites is much the same as it is now. The most important characteristic is that it is a webpage which is likely to contain the following features:

- a) A series ‘postings’ of various lengths presented in reverse chronological order from which they were made available (that is, the most recent comes first);
- b) Hyperlinks within some or all of these postings that provide access to relevant or supporting external information, or to the initial source material;
- c) A ‘comment’ feature for readers’ opinions upon each of the postings;
- d) An archive of previous postings that are no longer available on the main screen of the blog;
- e) Additional hyperlinks around the main content, which provide access to other political blogs, news sources or other websites that are interesting or relevant to the author’s material.⁴

³ Peter Merholz, “For What It’s Worth”. peterme.com.
<http://web.archive.org/web/19991013021124/http://peterme.com/index.html> (accessed May 25, 2009).

⁴ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 61; Kathy Gill. “How can we measure the influence of the blogosphere?” *Kathy E. Gill, Department of Communication, University of Washington, Seattle*.
http://faculty.washington.edu/kegill/pub/gill_blogosphere_www2004.pdf (accessed September 26, 2008), 1.

These characteristics of a blog combine into a form that is easily recognisable, regardless of where the blog originates, or the topics upon which it covers. As described by Jill Rettberg, “their basic layout is similar, with the page divided into two or three columns, where the largest column is for the main content, the posts, and the narrower columns are kept for links to other blogs, information about the blog or blogger, links within the blog and ads.”⁵ While this is of course a generalisation, it is one that appears to hold true across the vast majority of the New Zealand political blogosphere encountered in the course of this study. An example of this layout used by a New Zealand political blog, *The Standard*,⁶ is shown in Figure A:

Figure A: Example of Blog Layout



⁵ Rettberg, *Blogging*, 18.

⁶ “The Standard,” <http://www.thestandard.org.nz> (accessed May 24, 2009).

Political blogs are designed to be easy to establish, use and maintain - a novice blogger is easily able to start blogging within a number of minutes, and little to no technical ability is required.⁷ Further, the most common tools for building and maintaining a blog are made available for free. Blogging is therefore a medium that has very low barriers to entry, which is likely to be an important factor in terms of how the use of the medium continues to grow as more people become aware that such websites exist.

The ability to comment upon blog postings is an important feature of a blog, as they allow readers of that blog the ability to contribute their thoughts on the original posting, and to engage both the author and other readers in discussing the topic at hand. However, this feature is not used by all bloggers, and even amongst those that do, it is not necessarily used to great effect.⁸

One New Zealand blog that often attracts a great deal of comments is David Farrar's *Kiwiblog*.⁹ An example of a typical comment thread on this blog is shown below in Figure B – in this case, this is one of the regularly posted 'General Discussion' threads, which are made available solely for reader initiated discussions:

⁷ Dan Burstein. "From Cave Painting to Wonkette: A Short History of Blogging." in *Blog! How the Newest Media Revolution is Changing Politics, Business, and Culture*, ed. David Kline & Dan Burstein (New York: CDS Books, 2005), xiv; Blood *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog*, 41.

⁸ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 49-50.

⁹ David Farrar, "General Debate 1 June 2009". *Kiwiblog*.
http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz/2009/06/general_debate_1_june_2009.html (accessed June 1, 2009).

Figure B: Example of a Comment Page



Interacting with the content in this manner is an important aspect of the way in which readers interact with the content made available by bloggers. Such features allow the readers to be involved in co-creating the content that is available through the blog, by expanding and critiquing the original points made, or by providing additional information that supports or detracts from the original posting. This means that the original content produced by the blogging author can often become only a small fraction of the total amount of commentary that is made available in that thread of the conversation. In the context of political blogs, such a feature allows readers to engage in lively discussions about the merits of different policy discussions, or consider the implications of a political scandal from a number of different perspectives, or debate with other blog readers the appropriate solution to different political issues. The ability for readers to post such

comments and have such discussions with the original author and other readers of the blog means that political blogs have the potential to serve as discursive forums for democratic debate and deliberation.

Defining Political Blogs

The first New Zealand political blog is believed to have emerged in 2002, when Gordon King launched *NZ Pundit* (unfortunately, now since defunct), where he started posting what has been described as “wonderful polemics challenging the conventional thinking and reporting...”¹⁰

As this study concerns the use of political blogs in New Zealand, this therefore raises the question of what a political blog is. A political blog is but a subset of this wider category of blogs – one that features the essential features listed above and utilises the layout illustrated by Figure A, but is devoted to the author’s thoughts, opinions and observations on political news, issues and analysis rather than upon other topics. In particular, this study has been conducted on the basis of a very broad definition of political blog. This definition is that a political blog is a blog website that features commentary, discussion and/or debate on New Zealand political issues, personalities or news. Note that this definition does not include any quantum as to what proportion of that blog is related to specifically to political content - indeed, observation shows that the majority of New Zealand political bloggers discuss a wider range of issues than those that are purely political. While such proportions are likely to be important, this study has been designed to achieve the maximum amount of

¹⁰ Gabriel Pollard, “Exclusive Interview with Prominent Blogger, David Farrar.” *WikiNews NZ: The Print Edition 10 May 2007*, <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fd/626may2007.pdf> (accessed May 13, 2009), 2.

participation from the New Zealand political blogging community in the two survey instruments, whilst also ensuring that information is collected about the extent and different methods these bloggers have for contributing to this community.

There are a number of ways in which the role of a political blogger can be defined, and a number of functions that they may be performing via their blog. Such definitions help provide a context for understanding how the content that they produce provide that may be of value to the wider discourse on New Zealand politics. In *Blog Wars*, David Perlmutter summarises these functions as:

1. Political blogs may produce ideas for campaigns, policies and positions for the benefit of politicians and political parties. He argues that political bloggers are motivated by a desire to make a meaningful impact in the causes to which they are committed and that they are not a herd of followers; instead feel that they can make a meaningful contribution if they are listened to by the political elites.¹¹ Jordan Carter, primary author of the *Just Left* blog, provides a good example of such a desire to assist the cause to which he is committed in his posting titled “Labour’s Future”,¹² where he considers how the Labour Party needs to adapt in the wake of their loss of the New Zealand general election of 2008.
2. “Bloggers can serve the public as informants, investigators, collators and compilers.”¹³ Essentially the bloggers concentrate and highlight pieces of potentially valuable and useful information to their readers, and therefore prevent stories from being lost in the massive amount of information available in today’s

¹¹ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 82.

¹² Jordan Carter, “Labour’s Future.” *Just Left*. http://jtc.blogs.com/just_left/2009/05/labours-future.html (accessed May 13, 2009).

¹³ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 110.

online world. They serve the function of searching out and bringing key information to others attention,¹⁴ whilst at the same time archiving and preserving this information for future reference.¹⁵ Examples of political bloggers performing this function in New Zealand are Russell Brown in his *Hard News* blog, in his critical posting “Rodney’s Folly”¹⁶ which provides readers of the history of right-wing perspectives on local government in Auckland City; whereas blogger Tim Selwyn highlights the risks that low official cash rates create in terms of encouraging investors to seek higher returns from finance companies with questionable records in his posting titled “Public issues for Hawkins, Petricevic & Co.”¹⁷ on the *Tumeke!* blog.

3. Bloggers can go and cover stories that other mainstream media may not have an interest in; or where they do have an interest, provide a different perspective from the professional voice of the media. By acting as “informants in the political marketplace”¹⁸ they provide unique content from local, specialised perspectives¹⁹ that would otherwise not be provided by traditional sources, therefore providing more data which their readers may use to inform themselves.²⁰ Peter Cresswell, author of the *Not PC* blog, provides an example of this function in his coverage of a

¹⁴ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 110.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁶ Russell Brown. “Rodney’s Folly.” Public Address: Hard News. <http://publicaddress.net/5957> (accessed June 9, 2009).

¹⁷ Tim Selwyn, “Public issues for Hawkins, Petricevic & Co.” *Tumeke!* <http://tumeke.blogspot.com/2009/06/public-issues-for-hawkins-petrecivic-co.html> (accessed June 10, 2009).

¹⁸ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 112.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

meet-the-candidates evening for a parliamentary by-election in his posting “Confession Time in Mt Albert”.²¹

4. Perlmutter likens a function that bloggers may perform to the Mercuries of early 17th century England. These were amateur newspapers produced by Englishmen on both sides of the English Civil War to articulate the position of their faction, and to garner support from the public for their cause. These were blog-like in that they represented the opinions of diverse factions; they were the direct creations of individuals or small groups that shared an alignment to a faction or cause; they required some expense, time and effort to publish and distribute; and they were scathing and unreserved in their tone and content.²² All of these are features shared by blogs and the blogosphere. He further argues that the free exchange of ideas is one of the bedrocks of democracy, and blogs are an example of a perfect marketplace through which these ideas can be created and exchanged, even if they are also like these Mercuries in that these exchanges may be intense and uncompromising in the manner through which the ideas are expressed: “In sum, many folk saw the basis of free society as the free exchange of ideas, but nobody promised that these disputations would be pretty or without rancour.”²³ Examples of such rancorous debate in the New Zealand blogosphere are the posting “We Love Phil Gaffe”, a critical piece on Labour Party Leader Phil Goff written by a blogger called “Fairfacts Media”²⁴ on the right-leaning *No Minister* blog;²⁵ and a

²¹ Peter Cresswell, “Confession Time in Mt Albert.” Not PC. <http://pc.blogspot.com/2009/06/confession-time-in-mt-albert.html> (accessed June 8, 2009).

²² Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 116.

²³ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 116.

²⁴ Note that throughout this study, where a blogger operates under a pseudonym and their identity is otherwise unknown, they will be referred to by this pseudonym.

similar critical piece from the left side of the New Zealand political blogosphere produced by a blogger called “all_your_base” on *The Standard* blog, which was critical of the Prime Minister and National Party Leader John Key.²⁶

5. Bloggers may act as revisers and extenders of the traditional mainstream media, in that they may extend the coverage of these outlets with further information, or revise their articles to make them more accurate or insightful. Further, bloggers may devote more attention to issues than the mainstream media, therefore providing more fulsome coverage of events and issues.²⁷ They may also act in a function similar to an investigative reporter, collecting information either through internet sources or via more traditional investigative methods and ‘muck-raking’, finding out information behind the story and exposing it via their blog.²⁸ Author “Idiot/Savant” from the *No Right Turn* blog provides an example of this function of editing and extending the content of the mainstream media in his posting “A nuisance”²⁹ where he extends on the material produced by the mainstream media in their coverage of a political scandal, offering his further opinion on the details of the story; whereas blogger Cameron Slater displays his talents at ‘muck-raking’ in his posting “What’s the big deal? says Anderton”³⁰ on his blog *Whale Oil Beef*

²⁵ Fairfacts Media, “We Love Phil Gaffe!” No Minister. <http://nominister.blogspot.com/2009/06/we-love-phil-gaffe.html> (accessed June 9, 2009).

²⁶ all_your_base, “Audrey Young: Goff right, Key wrong.” *The Standard*. <http://www.thestandard.org.nz/audrey-young-goff-right-key-wrong/> (accessed June 9, 2009).

²⁷ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 119.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁹ Idiot/Savant, “A nuisance.” *No Right Turn*. <http://norightturn.blogspot.com/2009/06/nuisance.html> (accessed June 5, 2009).

³⁰ Cameron Slater, “What’s the big deal? says Anderton.” *Whale Oil Beef Hooked*. www.whaleoil.co.nz/content/whats-the-big-deal-says-anderton (accessed June 9, 2009).

Hooked in which he attacks the Progressive Party and the supposed inconsistencies and hypocrisies of their leader, Jim Anderton.

6. Perlmutter contends that some bloggers are effectively operating as impromptu political analysts and critics. They are either non-traditional in their methods, or perhaps they are not “media fit” for presentation via the mainstream media. But nevertheless, many have a depth of knowledge and expertise in their given field that is valid as an expert opinion on matters of politics and policy.³¹ David Farrar provides an example of a New Zealand blogger performing this function with his analysis of the Green Party’s “alternative budget” policies in his posting “The Greens’ New Deal”³² on *Kiwiblog*.
7. “Bloggers can serve as watchdogs over the actions of government and big media – and each other... they can raise a hue and cry over questionable actions and utterances by government or big media or any powers that might otherwise seem immune to constructive criticism.”³³ Essentially, bloggers may be fulfilling the role of the ‘5th estate’ by keeping tabs on the performance and objectivity of the traditional 4th estate – the media.³⁴ They can also serve as a collective reviewer of Government politics and policy, through undertaking line by line analysis and fault checking of official documents and statements to ensure that they are true to the commitments that that public figures and politicians have made.³⁵ An example of a

³¹ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 125.

³² David Farrar, “The Greens’ New Deal.” *Kiwiblog*.
http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz/2009/05/the_greens_new_deal.html (accessed June 10, 2009).

³³ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 132.

³⁴ Peter Fitzjohn, and Rob Salmond, “The Battle of the Blog: A Phony War?” In *The Baubles of Office: The New Zealand General Election of 2005*, ed. Steven Levine and Nigel Roberts (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2007), 268.

³⁵ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 143.

posting on a New Zealand political blog that displays this function is provided by a blogger operating under the pseudonym “Eddie” on *The Standard* political blog, titled “Dispatches from the Mirror Universe: Herald vows to fight super-council”.³⁶

In this posting, Eddie points out the inconsistencies between how *The New Zealand Herald* has reported on one particular story compared to how the newspaper reported on another similar issue from a year before, and the different editorial stances that *The Herald* has taken on critiquing Government policies.

8. And finally, Perlmutter believes that bloggers may be playing an important role as political educators. The way they may sort and present of information and provide thinking about political issues means that they may be increasing the level of knowledge and understanding that their readers have about the issues at hand. An example of this function in action in a New Zealand context is David Farrar’s posting “Labour’s Filibuster”,³⁷ in which he explained to his readers on *Kiwiblog* what a filibuster was, and the pros and cons of how the Labour Party was using it to oppose the passage of Government legislation.

Whilst Perlmutter’s summation of the functions that may be performed by a political blogger is fairly comprehensive, it fails to identify two other functions that some New Zealand bloggers are clearly performing. The first of these is providing a satirical take on political events. One of the best examples of such satire in a New Zealand blog is the content produced by Danyl McLauchlan on his blog *The Dim Post*, such as his clearly

³⁶ Eddie, “Dispatches from the Mirror Universe: Herald vows to fight super-council.” *The Standard*. <http://www.thestandard.org.nz/dispatches-from-the-mirror-universe-herald-vows-to-fight-super-council> (accessed May 1, 2009).

³⁷ David Farrar, “Labour’s Filibuster.” *Kiwiblog*. http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz/2009/05/labours_filibuster.html (accessed May 18, 2009).

satirical posting titled “National Party Scandals”.³⁸ In this way, bloggers may then also be entertaining the New Zealand public, as well as providing valuable information on New Zealand politics. The second function that should be added to this list in a New Zealand context is how politicians are beginning to use the medium to connect directly with the public, and expand on their ideas and positions in a way that press releases and traditional media engagements do not allow. Russel Norman, Co-Leader of the Green Party, shows this function at work in his posting on “The Politics of Water”³⁹ on the Green Party’s *Frog Blog*, where he discusses his perspective on how water management policies need to change in order to better protect New Zealand waterways. It is now relatively common for New Zealand politicians to blog – for example, the Labour Party has established the Red Alert blog⁴⁰ for expressly this purpose, while ACT Party Leader Rodney Hide has been blogging for a number of years on the ACT Party website.⁴¹

What this list of functions (and examples thereof) show is that political bloggers are contributing to the debate on New Zealand political issues and events in a number of different ways. With such a diversity of content and opinions presented via political blogs, New Zealanders have available to them a rich and dynamic source of information, from which they may be gaining new insights, new concepts or new perspectives on New Zealand political life.

³⁸ Danyl McLauchlan, “National Party Scandals.” The Dim Post. <http://dimpost.wordpress.com/2009/06/04/national-party-scandals> (accessed June 5, 2009).

³⁹ Russel Norman, “The Politics of Water.” Frog Blog. <http://blog.greens.org.nz/2009/06/09/the-politics-of-water/> (accessed June 10, 2009).

⁴⁰ New Zealand Labour Party, “Red Alert”, <http://blog.labour.org.nz> (accessed May 28, 2009).

⁴¹ Kane Hopkins, “Blogs, political discussion and the 2005 New Zealand General Election.” (Doctoral Thesis, Massey University, 2008), 217.

The Need for Research

Despite only being in existence for little more than ten years as a medium, and barely being noticed outside a closed niche of direct participants in the last five years, there are indicators that the blogosphere is beginning to have an impact upon New Zealand politics. The first piece of evidence of this is that political bloggers are now reaching an ever larger audience, with some bloggers achieving readerships that compare favourably to established media channels. For example, the most popular blog in New Zealand is *Kiwiblog*, which is ranked by web-ranking company Alexa as being the 125th most popular website in New Zealand⁴² with an estimated online audience of approximately 9,000 unique visitors per day.⁴³ The rest of the top 10 blogs, as listed on the *Tumeke!* blog in their regularly updated statistics on the New Zealand blogosphere,⁴⁴ all attract regular daily visitors of between 700 and 1800 unique visitors per day.⁴⁵ While this may not seem to be high in terms of people reached, research into the blogosphere of other countries indicates that such sites tend to attract opinion leaders such as mainstream journalists, political leaders or analysts⁴⁶, or general citizens that have a tendency to be influential upon the communities that they live in, due to their level of education, their degree of political participation, or

⁴² Alexa, "Siteinfo: www.kiwiblog.co.nz." <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/www.kiwiblog.co.nz> (accessed June 1, 2009).

⁴³ Tim Selwyn, "NZ Blogosphere Rankings: March 2009." *Tumeke!: New Zealand Blogosphere* <http://nzblogosphere.blogspot.com/2009/04/nz-blogosphere-rankings-march-2009.html> (accessed June 28, 2009).

⁴⁴ The authors of the *Tumeke!: New Zealand Blogosphere* blog have developed their own formula for ranking the popularity of different blogs in New Zealand. This is by far the most comprehensive and consistent approach to measuring the popularity of different New Zealand political blogs encountered during this study.

⁴⁵ Tim Selwyn, "NZ Blogosphere Rankings: March 2009."

⁴⁶ Fitzjohn and Salmond, "The Battle of the Blog: A Phony War?", 253.

their general status.⁴⁷ These are all people who have potential to greatly impact the political discourse of New Zealand in that they shape the mainstream commentary available via mass media, produce policy and write laws, or convince their fellow citizens of the merits of different political arguments. This means that despite the relatively small size of the audience, at least compared to the mass media, that political bloggers may be having a disproportionate influence upon the political discourse due to the nature of the people that are participating.

Such observations have been made with regard to the New Zealand blogosphere, with Bill Ralston commenting in the New Zealand Herald that as opinion makers, bloggers “are newest and potentially the most powerful of them all”;⁴⁸ the National Business Review states that “any realistic ‘power list’ produced in this country would include either Farrar [author of *Kiwiblog*] or his fellow blogger and opinion leader Russell Brown [author of *Hard News*]”.⁴⁹ Even Helen Clark, whilst she was Prime Minister of New Zealand, lamented the impact that the political blogosphere was having upon political reporters in New Zealand when “she complained that political journalists were “rushing to judgment” in their blogs”.⁵⁰ With these observations in mind, it is no surprise that political bloggers

⁴⁷ Joseph Graf and Carol Darr, “Political Influentials Online in the 2004 Presidential Campaign.” Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet. <http://www.ipdi.org/UploadedFiles/political%20influentials.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2009), 12-15; Gavin O'Malley, “Study: Blog Readers An Elite Minority.” MediaPost News: Online Media Daily. http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=28115 (accessed March 19, 2009).

⁴⁸ Bill Ralston, “Bill Ralston: Public opinion on Key turns rabid.” *The Herald on Sunday*, 7 October 2007.

⁴⁹ Ben Thomas, and David Young, “Politicians Will Be Haunted By Their Past on Internet.” National Business Review. <http://www.nbr.co.nz/article/politicians-will-be-haunted-their-past-internet> (accessed March 21, 2009).

⁵⁰ Philip Matthews, “Bloggers Left and Right.” *The Press*, 18 February 2008.

are now being recognised as a potentially influencing factor in electoral contests held in New Zealand.⁵¹

The need for research is further underscored by considering the impact that political bloggers are beginning to have through their own efforts to lead media coverage through locating their own stories and scandals. A particular example that is credited as being a breakthrough moment for political blogging in the United States of America is the “Rather Memogate” incident,⁵² referring to Dan Rather on *60 Minutes II*, and memos that that programme showed in the lead up to the 2004 Presidential Election in the United States in order to substantiate criticism of United States President George W. Bush’s decades-old service record in the Alabama National Guard. Following the airing of this particular story, a number of bloggers and their readers thought that something was awry with the memos shown on the programme. This line of collective investigation cumulated in the now famous posting “The Sixty-First Minute” on the *Powerline* blog,⁵³ which finally “broke” the story regarding how the documents were faked, resulting in a number of dismissals of staff at 60 Minutes, as well as considerable embarrassment for the John Kerry campaign. This post also earned *Powerline* the “Blog of the Year” award from Time Magazine, who quoted one of the blog’s authors John Hinderaker: ““What this story shows, more than anything, is the power of the medium”, Hinderaker says. “The world is full of smart people who have information about every imaginable topic, and until the Internet came along, there wasn’t any practical way to put it together,” he tells TIME.”⁵⁴ A similar incident

⁵¹ Fitzjohn and Salmond, “The Battle of the Blog: A Phony War?”, 249.

⁵² Ibid., 253; Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 89-93.

⁵³ Scott Johnson, “The Sixty-First Minute.” *Powerline*.
<http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/2004/09/007699.php> (accessed March 22, 2009).

⁵⁴ Time, “Time Names Powerline 2004 Blog of the Year.” Time.
http://www.time.com/time/press_releases/article/0,8599,1009851,00.html (accessed March 23, 2009).

occurred recently in the UK, whereby a blogger operating under the pseudonym “Guido Fawkes” on the *Order Order* blog was credited with producing incriminating material that eventually led to the downfall of a senior member of the British Cabinet.⁵⁵

New Zealand bloggers have not yet located stories and scandals of the magnitude of the two examples provided above, though some have recently been credited with leading stories of political consequence. One of the more notable examples of this the postings made on blogs such as *Kiwiblog*⁵⁶ and *Whale Oil Beef Hooked*⁵⁷ encouraging Phil Twyford to stand down from selection as the Labour Party candidate in the 2009 Mount Albert By-Election. In his column in *The New Zealand Herald*, Matt McCarten credits the influence of these bloggers as being one of the factors in the eventual removal of Twyford as a candidate: “I salute the right-wing bloggers, who mischievously instigated a destabilising campaign against Labour by writing that National could win Mt Albert if Twyford was the Labour Party nominee.”⁵⁸ 59

⁵⁵ Reuters, “Britain's Brown Loses Minister in Funding Row .” *New Zealand Herald*. http://www.nzherald.co.nz/politics/news/article.cfm?c_id=280&objectid=10488765 (accessed May 25, 2009); Guido Fawkes, “How Guido Destroyed Hains Ambitions in 12 Months.” *Order Order*. <http://www.order-order.com/2008/01/how-guido-destroyed-hains-ambitions-in/> (accessed May 25, 2009).

⁵⁶ David Farrar, “Labour’s problem with Mt Albert.” *Kiwiblog*. http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz/2008/12/labours_problem_with_mt_albert.html (accessed June 10, 2009); David Farrar, “Labour in full panic mode over Mt Albert.” *Kiwiblog*. http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz/2009/04/labour_in_full_panic_mode_over_mt_albert.html (accessed June 10, 2009).

⁵⁷ Cameron Slater, “The Standard Outed Again.” *Whale Oil Beef Hooked*. <http://www.whaleoil.co.nz/content/standard-outed-again> (accessed June 10, 2009).

⁵⁸ Matt McCarten, “Blocking Twyford Nomination Exposes Labour Character Flaw .” *New Zealand Herald*. 3 May 2009. http://www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article.cfm?c_id=466&objectid=10570015&pnum=0. (accessed May 3, 2009); Matt McCarten, “Goff Falls in Challenge To Show Courage Under Bloggers' Fire .” *New Zealand Herald*. 26 April 2009. http://www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article.cfm?c_id=466&objectid=10568645 (accessed April 26, 2009).

Another example is the story broken by “Idiot/Savant” of the *No Right Turn* blog, who found that the parliamentary attendance record of the ACT Party members was lacking, including missing debates and voting on items such as The Budget. Idiot/Savant ‘broke’ this story on his blog⁶⁰ following his own personal research, and it was then picked up by media outlets such as The New Zealand Herald.⁶¹

All of these anecdotes and observations show how New Zealand political bloggers may be having an influence upon the political discourse in New Zealand, but they raise a number of interesting questions. Is there any merit in these extrapolations of overseas research, or does the New Zealand experience of political blogging differ in terms of who is participating in the medium? Are those that are participating in New Zealand political blogs as influential as these commentators think they are? And if so, who do they think that they are influencing with their material? And what is the impact of this influence upon New Zealand politics at large? Once again, these are all questions that this study will seek to answer.

A New Form of Participation?

This study takes place against a wider backdrop of a perceived crisis in political communication and participation.⁶² Traditional models indicate a marked decline in the

⁵⁹ David Farrar, author of *Kiwiblog*, however downplays the role he had in destabilising Twyford’s candidacy. See David Farrar, “Blogs & Mt Albert.” *Kiwiblog*. http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz/2009/04/blogs_mt_albert.html (accessed June 10, 2009).

⁶⁰ Idiot/Savant, “Where’s Rodney?” *No Right Turn*. <http://norightturn.blogspot.com/2006/05/wheres-rodney.html> (accessed May 26, 2009).

⁶¹ New Zealand Press Association, “Hide defends dance defection.” *New Zealand Herald*. http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10383618 (accessed May 29, 2009).

⁶² Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2002), 3.

level of political participation in the post-war period in most western democracies. Electoral turnout, party and union membership and issue awareness have all decreased to levels far lower than what they once were, while voter apathy and political disengagement has increased significantly. Extrapolation of these trends would indicate an emerging crisis – political participation is vital to successful democracy, but this data indicates that fewer and fewer people are participating in traditional participatory mechanisms.⁶³

However, such pessimism may be counteracted by examining how society may have adjusted to the changes in mediums, platforms and technologies to create new forms of political participation. People may no longer take to the streets in protest, write letters to the editor or coordinate leaflet drops to the same degree they once did, perhaps they are channelling their political engagement in new ways, or via new mediums. Perhaps political participation has not died at all – it has merely morphed into new forms, and utilises new means of expression, participation and discussion.⁶⁴

One of the new mediums for such political participation may well be political blogs. If so, who is participating in this new form of political interaction, and why are they doing so? Does this correspond with our traditional definitions of political participation, or does a new model need to be developed to encompass this new medium? If political blogging is one of the harbingers of a renaissance of political participation, then some obvious questions must be asked and answered, such as:

- Who is participating?
- Why are they participating?
- How are they participating?

⁶³ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix*, 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Again, this perspective underscores the need for specific, New Zealand based research to quantify the answers to these questions. This study will therefore seek to examine which New Zealanders are engaging with political blogging, and whether their involvement in the medium could constitute a renaissance of political involvement, and therefore a potential counter against the pessimism noted above.

Summary

It is clear that political blogs are serving a number of different functions that may be enhancing discourses on New Zealand politics, and that they may be also enhancing the deliberative aspects of New Zealand democracy. But these perspectives raise a number of different questions, which this study will seek to answer through the collection and analysis of the survey data provided by New Zealand political bloggers and their readers. This research will thus provide a uniquely New Zealand perspective on political blogs as an emerging medium for democratic deliberation and political discourse, as well as assist with understanding whether political bloggers are indeed the “newest and potentially the most powerful” of New Zealand political commentators.

Chapter One

Research Methodology, Model of Democratic Deliberation and Other Studies

The purpose of this first chapter is threefold. Firstly, it will outline the methodology used to conduct the two surveys that were specifically created for the purposes of this study, The New Zealand Political Bloggers Survey and The New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey. Secondly a model for considering how political blogs may be impacting upon democratic deliberation and political discourse will be established through the review of the theories of Jurgen Habermas and Cass Sunstein. This review will result in an analytical framework and a set of criteria through which the responses of these two surveys may be evaluated to determine how New Zealand political blogs are delivering to this model and these criteria. And thirdly, other comparable research into the nature of the political blogosphere will be reviewed to provide a basis for comparing the results of these surveys against the other research that has been performed into the nature of the political blogosphere.

Research Methodology

The centrepiece of this study is the gathering and analysis of primary source information via two survey instruments specially created for the purpose of understanding the New Zealand experience of political blogging. These surveys have been named The New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey (also referred to as "the bloggers' survey") and The New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey (also referred to as "the blog readers' survey"). The respondents to these surveys have provided a wide range of quantitative and

qualitative data upon which theories and conclusions proposed by other researchers can be tested and critiqued, and from which new theories and conclusions can be drawn. Through these surveys, this study aims to compile and analyse a stock of empirical data which future researchers may use to further develop an understanding of how political blogging is impacting upon democratic deliberation and political discourses in New Zealand, and around the world.

Participant Selection – Bloggers Survey

According to the definition of political blog adopted in the Introduction of this study, a potential participant in the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey was any blogger whose blog website features commentary, discussion and/or debate on New Zealand political issues, personalities or news.

Potential participants in the New Zealand Political Bloggers Survey were identified primarily by the existence of their work. Bloggers also use blog-rolls to link their blogs to others of a similar nature. This means that by knowing the web address of one political blogger, a reader or researcher can gain access to many other political blogs through referencing the blog-roll on that particular site. For example, *Kiwiblog* references over 150 other political blogs,⁶⁵ while *Whale Oil Beef Hooked* links to over 300, sorted into categories according to the author's classification of that blog's political alignment or topics discussed. These blog-rolls therefore provided a core list of potential survey participants'. Four prominent New Zealand political blogs were selected due to the breadth and depth of their political blog-rolls - *Kiwiblog*, *Whale Oil Beef Hooked*, *The Standard* and *Tumeke!*. Utilising these blog-rolls, a list of New Zealand political blogs was created

⁶⁵ David Farrar, "Blog Roll". *Kiwiblog*. <http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz/blogroll> (accessed 24 April 2008).

including references to 357 individual blogs that were in some manner focussed upon analysis, commentary and debate of New Zealand political news and issues.

Next, each of these 357 blogs was visited in order to locate any publicly available contact details for the author or authors of that blog, which provided the contact details for 188. These potential participants were then emailed an invitation to partake in The New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey. This invitation introduced the participant to the purpose of the research; provided information on the researcher; and of course provided them with the location of the survey instrument. These potential participants were also encouraged to pass on the details of this survey to other political bloggers that they were aware of.

This method of participant selection succeeded in securing a robust number of responses to the New Zealand Political Bloggers Survey, with 160 responses being attracted, and 110 of those completing the entire survey instrument. This level of participation was unexpected – the initial survey design envisaged participation from as few as 50 participants, and at the time such a level of participation was felt to be hopeful. Given that the *Tumeke! New Zealand Blogosphere* blog was tracking 187 active New Zealand political and news blogs as part of their New Zealand Blogosphere ranking project⁶⁶ (but subtracting that there may have been multiple responses from some blogs that are maintained by more than one author) it is probable that half to two-thirds of active New Zealand political bloggers have completed this survey. Achieving such a high level of responses naturally increases the validity and depth of the insights provided by this study, and therefore this higher level of participation was very welcome. Such a response rate is far greater than that achieved by other comparable studies, such as that undertaken by McKenna and Pole on political

⁶⁶ Tim Selwyn, "New Zealand Blogosphere Rankings: July 2008." *Tumeke! New Zealand Blogosphere*. <http://nzblogosphere.blogspot.com/2008/08/nz-blogosphere-rankings-july-2008.html> (accessed August 29 2008).

bloggers in the United States, in which they attracted participation from approximately 150 political bloggers out of the 4,000 that they initially identified.⁶⁷

Participant Selection – Blog Readers’ Survey

According to the definition of political blog adopted in the Introduction of this study, a potential participant in the New Zealand Political Blog Readers’ Survey was any person who visits a blog website that features commentary, discussion and/or debate on New Zealand political issues, personalities or news.

To therefore achieve participation from readers, it was essential to have the cooperation of political bloggers themselves, as it was via their sites that potential participants in the Readers’ survey would be found. Ideally, this would be in the form of bloggers placing a posting on their site encouraging their readers to follow the survey link, or alternatively contacting any reader databases that they may have and encouraging their participation. To secure this cooperation, a question was inserted into the bloggers’ survey asking if they would be prepared to encourage readers to participate in The New Zealand Political Blog Readers’ Survey. Of the 110 bloggers that fully completed the New Zealand Political Bloggers’ Survey, 72 agreed to promote the blog readers’ survey on their blogs. These 72 bloggers were then contacted via the email addresses that they provided asking them to place a message on their blog inviting readers to complete The New Zealand Political Blog Readers’ Survey.

This methodology of collecting survey responses was again ultimately very successful, resulting in 789 total participants, with 614 of those completing the entire survey. Once again, this was in excess of the initial estimate of 200 participants. Estimating to what

⁶⁷ Laura McKenna and Antionette Pole. “What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog.” *Public Choice*, 134 (2008), 99.

degree the blog reading audience of New Zealand has been sampled is difficult, as there is little data upon which to base assumptions as to what proportion of New Zealanders visit political blogs. The New Zealand Blogosphere Statistics compiled upon the *Tumeke!* blog do however produce estimates of how many people are visiting New Zealand political blogs according to their own particular methodology.⁶⁸ At the time that the blog readers' survey was conducted, the *Tumeke!* statistics showed that the blog with the highest visitor count was *Kiwiblog* with an estimated 7,000 visitors per day.⁶⁹ The rest of the top ten blogs had reader estimates that varied between approximately 2,000 and 500 daily visitors. If we assume that a political blog reader in New Zealand is highly likely to visit one of these top ten blogs, then the cumulative total of the daily visitor estimate for each of the top 10 should represent the total potential size of the New Zealand blog reading community. This cumulative total is 16,790 total potential daily visitors to political blogs,⁷⁰ which therefore means that 614 full survey participants represents a sample of 3.7% of the New Zealand blog reading community. This is a similar level of participation to that which Joseph Graf achieved in the Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet Study of American political blog readers, which received 723 total participants.⁷¹ However, it is far short of the rate of participation achieved by the BlogAds research, also into American political

⁶⁸ Tim Selwyn, "FAQ: how do we calculate blog traffic?" *Tumeke NZ Blogosphere*. <http://nzblogosphere.blogspot.com/2008/02/faq-how-do-we-calculate-blog-traffic.html> (accessed 14 May 2009).

⁶⁹ Tim Selwyn, "New Zealand Blogosphere Rankings: July 2008."

⁷⁰ Made up of *Kiwiblog* = c7,000; *Public Address* = c2,000; *The Standard* = c1,750; *Frog Blog* = c900; *Whale Oil Beef Hooked* = c1,020; *No Minister* = c990; *Not PC* = c980; *The Hive* = c900; *No Right Turn* = c760; *Tumeke* = c490.

⁷¹ Joseph Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership." Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet. <http://www.ipdi.org/UploadedFiles/Audience%20for%20Political%20Blogs.pdf> (accessed November 7, 2008), 4.

blog readers, which received approximately 36,000 participants⁷² - however, this is out of the estimated size of the American political blog audience, which has been estimated as being millions of people,⁷³ which means that in percentage terms, the response rate achieved by this study is likely to compare positively. Again, this high level of response adds strength and validity to the data collected and the insights provided.

Participant Information and Consent

Upon following the link provided in both of the survey invitations, participants were directed to the online Participant Information Sheet. This provided all participants with full information about the purpose, design and practicalities of this study. Participants were only able to complete the survey instruments if they first confirmed that they were over the age of 16, and also confirmed that they consented to the terms upon which the surveys would be conducted. Copies of the Participant Information Sheet used for both surveys are included in the Appendix with copies of the two surveys themselves.

Survey Construction

As this research involved the participation of bloggers and blog readers located across New Zealand, and that political blogging takes place entirely within the internet, it was logical that the two surveys be conducted via the internet as well. This solved three challenges present for this study:

1. The first challenge was to avoid any geographic limitation to participation in the survey. By placing the surveys on the internet, respondents would be equally able

⁷² BlogAds, "Political Blogs Reader Survey 2006." BlogAds.
http://www.blogads.com/survey/2006_political_blogs_reader_survey.html (accessed September 15, 2008).

⁷³ Joseph Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership", 3.

to participate regardless of where they lived in New Zealand. Participation was not limited in this research by conducting these surveys in this manner, as all participants must have access to the internet in some form in order to participate in political blogging. Further, using internet based survey software also was also likely to resonate well with potential participants – they are used to interacting and communicating via the internet, so arguably, participating in an online survey is a more natural method than other physical methodologies, and in this manner is more convenient for participants also.

2. Online survey tools allow a uniformity of survey delivery and sampling, ensuring that each participant has their responses collected in a uniform and readily analysed manner. When compared with other potential methods of conducting the survey, such as paper based questionnaires, the strength of flexible internet based survey tools is apparent through the removal of the need to enter, translate or otherwise transpose the data into a workable format for analysis. Given the large number of participants in this study, and therefore the large amount of time that such transposition would take, as well as the errors that could be inadvertently made in such a process, such uniformity and efficiency in preparing and analysing the information provided is valuable.
3. This methodology also allowed for anonymous participation in the research. The common use of pseudonyms by both New Zealand political bloggers and readers indicates that many potential participants may appreciate the ability to participate in these surveys in an anonymous manner. The use of an online survey tool meant that the participants never had to physically interact with a researcher to complete the survey instruments. While participants were able to reveal their identities via the

contact information that they provided, this disclosure was protected by the security measures enacted on the survey tools to ensure that this information would not be made available to the general public.

Conducting the two surveys via the internet meant that appropriate software would need to be developed or provided to build and deliver the questionnaires to the participants. One way of meeting this need was through utilising one of the number of commercially products available via the internet that are designed for this purpose. The alternative was the construction of an online survey facility specifically for this study. The latter of these two options was rejected, as self-construction provided no benefits to this research that could not be met by these commercially available packages. Further, this decision removed the need to spend a substantial amount of time and money to build a custom survey instrument. Given that these online survey tools are available at reasonable prices,⁷⁴ offer a comprehensive set of features that are consistent with best-practice in survey design and research methodology, and are inherently flexible and easy to use, the use of a commercially available survey product was chosen as the appropriate option for this study. Following an assessment of the feature set, pricing and flexibility of a number of different online survey solutions, SurveyMonkey⁷⁵ was selected as the online survey tool for conducting the New Zealand Political Bloggers and New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Surveys. SurveyMonkey offered a superior range of features compared to other tools available via the internet. Most importantly, these included a guarantee from SurveyMonkey that data would not be used for any purpose apart from that which the

⁷⁴ Estimated cost of using these services for this study is approximately US\$180.

⁷⁵ Surveymonkey.com. "The simple way to create surveys". <http://www.surveymonkey.com> (accessed March 21, 2008).

survey designer intended, committing to hold the data “in the strictest confidence”.⁷⁶ SurveyMonkey also offered optional Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption on all surveys and data, an option that this research made use of.⁷⁷ And finally, SurveyMonkey guaranteed that upon the conclusion of this study and the termination of the account created by the researcher that all data collected via the site will be destroyed.⁷⁸ These features are all vitally important to ensuring that participants in this research could complete the surveys with complete confidence that their responses would be confidential and preserve their anonymity, if important such considerations were important to them.

Methodological Limitations

The methodology deployed by this study has some limitations which need to be noted. Firstly, while the selection of participants of the New Zealand Political Bloggers’ Survey relied upon four of the more comprehensive blog rolls available in the New Zealand political blogosphere, it is a reasonable presumption that there would be some political blogs that had escaped the attention of all four of these prominent bloggers. This may have been because these missing blogs had lower levels of readership, specialised in particular niche political topics, or had only been in existence for a short period of time. Such factors are however inevitable given the nature of the medium and the ease upon which new bloggers can commence producing material. However, this risk was minimised at least in part through encouraging participants to pass on the invitation to undertake the survey to other political bloggers that they were aware of.

⁷⁶ Surveymonkey.com. “What does SurveyMonkey do with my collected data or emails?” <http://www.surveymonkey.com/HelpCenter/Answer.aspx?HelpID=107> (accessed March 25 2008).

⁷⁷ Surveymonkey.com. “What is SSL encryption and what level do you offer?” <http://www.surveymonkey.com/HelpCenter/Answer.aspx?HelpID=151> (accessed March 25, 2008).

⁷⁸ Surveymonkey.com, email message to author, 29 March 2008.

Further, not all bloggers listed contact details; or if they did list contact details, then sometimes these were not in a form that allowed survey information to be sent, particularly as this methodology of inviting survey participants was reliant upon the transmission of a hyperlink to provide participants with the location of the survey instrument. Some of the bloggers located via blog roll analysis do provide alternative forms of contact, such as phone numbers or geographic addresses. However, it seemed inappropriate to contact the participants over the phone due to the intrusion that such contact would have been upon them,⁷⁹ and due to the relative difficulty that it would have been to provide them with the hyperlink location of the survey instrument.

However, while these two limitations in the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey are noted, it is unlikely that either of these would have skewed the sample in any significant manner, if at all, particularly given the robust sample size that this method achieved.

With regard to the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey, equal participation in the survey could have been influenced by the time and date that any particular blogger placed the posting or sent the email encouraging readers to participate. The likelihood of a reader seeing the invitation placed on a blog is increased according to how "high" the invitation is placed at the time that the reader visits that blog – that is if the invitation was the first posting they see, then they are more likely to respond than if the posting is already back on an archived page due to the amount of time that had passed since the invitation was posted. Reader participation could also have been hampered by the unwillingness of some respondents to the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey to promote the Readers'

⁷⁹ It is arguable that these potential participants were inviting such intrusion by making a phone number publicly available on their blog. However, issues would still remain in terms of effectively administering the survey via the phone, so these participants were excluded from participation. This is of little consequence to the results of this survey, as the sample size is still robust enough to provide insights without the small proportion of potential participants that were excluded due to this decision.

Survey. These particular sampling risks were again controlled by encouraging participants to refer others to the survey instrument; and also by encouraging the bloggers who agreed to promote the survey to do so on multiple occasions.

A Model of Democratic Deliberation

To develop an analytical framework through which the results of the two surveys may be understood, two particular perspectives will be reviewed. These are the theories of Jurgen Habermas and Cass Sunstein, both of whom have considered the nature of democratic deliberation and how the quality of political discourse may benefit a democracy. As participation in political blogging is a manner through which more fulsome democratic deliberation may be achieved, these perspectives provide a model of democratic deliberation, an analytical framework and a set of criteria through which the outputs of this study may be interpreted.

Jurgen Habermas and the Theory of the Public Sphere

The first perspective to be considered in the context of this research is Jurgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere, which is considered to be an enduring and influential basis for considering the quality of public debate within a democracy.⁸⁰ As political blogs are a forum through which public debate is articulated in New Zealand, Habermas' theories are highly relevant to this study by providing a theoretical model for assessing the quality of the democratic deliberation that occurs on political blogs. Indeed, even the term 'the

⁸⁰ Hopkins, "Blogs, political discussion and the 2005 New Zealand General Election", 58.

blogosphere' is a clear reference to the linkage between the function of blogs and the concept of the public sphere.⁸¹

The public sphere "consists of the institutional space where political will formation takes place, via the unfettered flow of relevant information and ideas."⁸² Simply put, it is a space in which members of the public may meet to discuss matters of common interest, form common shared opinions, and therefore establish the basis for the articulation of the will of that public with regard to political and social issues.⁸³ Habermas originally developed this concept in his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*,⁸⁴ where he outlines his historical interpretation as to how the public sphere developed in Western Europe and most clearly evident between 1680 and 1730.⁸⁵ The period in which Habermas argues the public sphere originally developed was characterised by the loosening of traditional limitations upon public debate and thought, allowing the development of a new, bourgeois-centred medium for public discussion and debate amongst those who were sufficiently informed and able to participate.⁸⁶ This loosening of control occurred due to the culmination and confluence of three historical changes. The first of these was the gradual decline of the Christian Church as a moderating influence upon the opinions of the

⁸¹ Mark Tremayne, ed., "Preface" in *Blogging, Citizenship and the Future of Media*, (London; New York : Routledge, 2007), vii.

⁸² Peter. Dahlgren, "The Public Sphere and the Net: Structure, Space, and Communication" in *Mediated Politics: Communication and the Future of Democracy*, by W. Lance Bennett and Robert Entman (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 33.

⁸³ Hopkins, "Blogs, political discussion and the 2005 New Zealand General Election," 58.

⁸⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

⁸⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁶ Luke. Goode, *Jurgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere* (London; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), 9.

public, caused by the impact of the enlightenment and the growth of Protestantism.⁸⁷ Secondly, the change in political governance systems, from the feudal system that was reliant upon the centralised power of a monarch or aristocracy, to versions of the modern parliamentary system which featured democratic decision making and entrenched separation of powers.⁸⁸ The third factor was the most vital - the growth of the bourgeois class within these societies, fuelled by the gradual replacement of the feudal economic order with finance and trade based capitalism that allowed such a class to develop.⁸⁹ This loosening of control allowed a public sphere to develop and manifest itself through the use of public gathering spaces as discursive forums, such as the cafés and salons of Europe at this time. These were spaces where these members of the bourgeois public would meet to have these discussions on public and political issues that manifested the public sphere. It also allowed the development of equally important expressive mediums such as early newspapers through which the public could articulate, critically examine, and critique public issues, and therefore build a basis of consensus for public opinion. In the words of Thomas McCarthy: "In its clash with the arcane and bureaucratic practices of the absolutist state, the emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented before the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people".⁹⁰

The traditional feudal order of society and economy relied upon the projection of state power upon the public in a symbolic and representative form. In such a society, Habermas argues that there was no clear delineation between the state and the private lives of the

⁸⁷ Goode, *Jurgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere*, 5.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 14-15.

⁹⁰ Ibid., xi.

citizen. Through these changes, a demarcation was able to occur between the private realm were separated of households and individuals, and the new sphere of governance which Habermas called the *sphere of public authority*. The public sphere developed to mediate between the private realm and the sphere of public authority, providing a forum through which the will of the citizenry could be aggregated, discussed and articulated.⁹¹ Habermas contends that via this articulation, the citizens were exercising their role as a check upon the power of the state, as well as providing necessary input from the public about the appropriate direction for laws and regulation.⁹²

However, this conception of the public sphere was relatively short lived. The same capitalist forces that allowed the development of newspapers and cafés as forums for democratic discourse ultimately led to the development of commercialised mass media in the late 19th century and throughout the 20th, which lessened the actively participatory and critical role of the public and replaced it with a passive consumerist function: “Habermas observes with pessimism the trivialisation of public opinion, not least in the electronic media, the industrialisation of public opinion, the transformation of publics from discursive to consuming collectivities, and an array of other ills that many other critics have also often noted.”⁹³

In doing so, this commercialisation and industrialisation of the media allowed a minority of individuals within our societies to assume a privileged position over the political discourses of the public sphere,⁹⁴ and encouraged the use of public relations and public

⁹¹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 30.

⁹² Goode, *Jurgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere*, 9-13.

⁹³ Dahlgren, “The Public Sphere and the Net: Structure, Space, and Communication”, 34.

⁹⁴ Hopkins, “Blogs, political discussion and the 2005 New Zealand General Election,” 67.

“opinion management”⁹⁵ over real engagement between members of the public. These changes have manifested themselves in moving traditional media away from expressing the political opinions that were the output of the public sphere, and toward trivialising political news and focussing on entertainment over information.⁹⁶

Habermas also argues that the decay of the public sphere was further exacerbated by the creation and adoption of the welfare state. By involving the state in the care and wellbeing of otherwise private individuals and households, the post-war development of the modern welfare state once again blurred the distinction between the state and the private realm, through directly involving the state in the private lives of individual citizens and households.⁹⁷ This then undermined the role of the public sphere, as it changed the nature of public discourses through altering the focus of such discussions from rational-critical examination of the public interest, to competition for public resources and how those should be redistributed via the welfare state.⁹⁸ These factors have reduced the public sphere to it currently being but a mere shell of what it once was,⁹⁹ through displacing what was a culture *debating* public and encouraging the rise of a culture *consuming* public in its place.¹⁰⁰

As the above shows, Habermas’ theory is best understood as being a historical perspective on issues of deliberative democracy. This does not mean however that the theory of the

⁹⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 193.

⁹⁶ Dahlgren, “The Public Sphere and the Net: Structure, Space, and Communication” 34; Aaron Barlow, Aaron. *The Rise of the Blogosphere* (Westport: Praeger, 2007), 119.

⁹⁷ Goode, *Jurgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere*, 22-23.

⁹⁸ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 142.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁰⁰ Goode, *Jurgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere*, 18.

public sphere is now irrelevant to understanding our modern world. As Dahlgren summarises, “I take the view that it is meaningful to speak about a public sphere today, but by any standard of evaluation it is in a dismal state.”¹⁰¹

If the theory of the public sphere is to be applied to political blogging to understand how the blogosphere may be delivering to this model of democratic discourse, then the following criteria need to be met:

1. Disregard of status: “First, they preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from pre-supposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether”.¹⁰² Arguments within the public sphere should be judged on the basis of their merits, not on the basis of the status of the speaker. This means that all participants in a discussion should have the ability to propose, detract and interject as they saw fit, without deference to others of superior social rank or significance.
2. Domain of common concern: “...discussions within such a public presupposed the problematisation of areas that until then had not been questioned”.¹⁰³ This essentially means that the conversations taking place within the public sphere should be able to consider any question in which the participants are interested, without constraint being imposed by the traditional ordering forces of the state.
3. Inclusivity: “However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who – insofar as they were propertied and educated – as readers,

¹⁰¹ Dahlgren, “The Public Sphere and the Net: Structure, Space, and Communication”, 35.

¹⁰² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 36.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion”. Simply put, such discussions within the public sphere should be freely accessible and open to all members of the public that the issues being discussed concerned.¹⁰⁴

In order to further understand how political blogs may be delivering to these ideals, Sunstein argues that consideration should also be given to the *ideal speech situation*. A central tenet of the ideal speech situation is that:

Rational discourse is supposed to be public and inclusive, to grant equal communication rights for participants, to require sincerity and to diffuse any kind of force other than the forceless force of the better argument. This communicative structure is expected to create a deliberative space for the mobilisation of the best available contributions for the most relevant topics.¹⁰⁵

A simple summary of this particular theory is that for conversation participants to be behaving in a manner that is consistent with the ideal speech situation, they must meet three criteria. The first of these is that all participants must be motivated by a desire to find the truth out of their interaction. Secondly, they should not behave strategically, in withholding information or misleading the other participants to gain an unequal advantage in understanding. And thirdly, all participants should treat each other as if they are equals within the discursive forum.¹⁰⁶ These criteria also need to be considered when evaluating the role of political blogs in our society.

¹⁰⁴ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 36.

¹⁰⁵ Jurgen Habermas, “Between Facts and Norms: An Author’s Reflections.” *Denver University Law Review*, 76:4 (1999), 937-942.

¹⁰⁶ Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 2-4.

To therefore test whether the New Zealand political blogosphere is creating a forum for democratic deliberation that is in accordance with Habermas' theories, the following questions need to be answered by this study:

1. Are New Zealand political bloggers creating public discursive forums that are consistent with the criteria outlined by Habermas for the public sphere?
2. Is there any evidence that political blogs are open and inclusive environments, which are attracting participants that represent a valid cross section of New Zealand society?
3. Do these participants view political blogs as being superior to the traditional media in terms of presenting political news and information, and therefore better at articulating the output of the public sphere?
4. Is there any evidence that participants in the New Zealand political blogosphere are motivated by a desire to seek the truth through their discussions, not behaving strategically, and treating each other as equals in the discourses that are occurring?

Cass Sunstein and the Personalisation of Political Discussion

Cass Sunstein's theories, as best articulated in his book *Republic.com*,¹⁰⁷ are also relevant to the model of democratic deliberation that this study will apply to consider the impact of political blogging upon democratic deliberation. In *Republic.com*, Sunstein analyses the impact that increased diversification of news sources and personal customisation of information may be having upon democracies. As political blogs are an alternative source of political news and opinions for a growing number of New Zealanders, and as these blogs are very diverse and customised to the viewpoints of the authors or readers of that

¹⁰⁷ Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

blog, then the arguments and hypotheses expounded by Sunstein in this book are also relevant to this research.

In *Republic.com*, Sunstein's central argument is that democratic deliberation is a vital aspect of a correctly functioning democratic society.¹⁰⁸ In this regard, his work shares much in common with Habermas and his theories of the function and benefit of the public sphere in that deliberation, discussion and debate on public issues helps the public to better participate in democratic life through assisting with the understanding and articulation of viewpoints on public issues. Sunstein puts forth the concept of the *public forum*, which shares much in common with Habermas' concept of the *public sphere*, in that it is a publicly available space used "for the purposes of assembly, communicating thought between citizens, and discussing public questions".¹⁰⁹

Sunstein argues that citizens need to be exposed to a wide range of opinions, viewpoints and discussions in order for modern democracies to function properly. In this regard, he argues that "a well functioning system of free expression must meet two distinctive requirements."¹¹⁰

1. Exposure to alternative viewpoints: People must be exposed to viewpoints that they did not anticipate, and therefore did not have the opportunity to "filter" due to their preconceived notions of what is of interest or acceptable to them. Such exposure not only increase the level of understanding that the public has on issues that they would otherwise be uninterested in, but also prevents the growth of niche 'enclaves' of opinions, whereby extremist viewpoints may flourish.

¹⁰⁸ Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

2. Exposure to common experiences: People need to share common points of reference with others in their society, in order to promote homogeneity and a set of common values and beliefs. Such commonality is essential to the functions of a democracy such as New Zealand's, as it promotes a framework of commonly acceptable points of reference upon which Governments may successfully legislate, as required.

Sunstein believes that traditional broadcast media, such as broadsheet newspapers and television news, are unacknowledged in their role as the primary mechanisms for delivering these two requirements, and are therefore also one of the best expressions of the concept of the public forum that currently exists on a nationwide scale. He points out that one of the benefits of broadcast media is that it is designed to maximise the audience that it appeals to. To meet this aim, the mainstream media will carry a diverse range of content and information. Therefore, in consuming this content, the public is exposed to a wider range of material than that which they may otherwise self-select, if they were given the opportunity: "You might think that you have nothing to learn from someone whose view you abhor. But once you come across the editorial pages, you might well read what they have to say, and you might well benefit from the experience. Perhaps you will be persuaded on one point or another, or informed whether or not you are persuaded."¹¹¹

However Sunstein is concerned that the traditional broadcast media is slowly being supplanted by mediums that do not allow these the two aforementioned requirements to be met to the same degree. In terms of political news and information, political blogs are potentially one of these substitutes for a subset of the New Zealand population. Sunstein's concern is that as people modify their news consumption habits to take advantage of the

¹¹¹ Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 34-35.

ever greater levels of news customisation available via the internet; that is, as more people start to create their own personal news source, “The Daily Me”,¹¹² the less that people are exposed to alternative viewpoints that allow them to experience new ideas and perspectives on public issues. This also means that there are fewer common experiences that are shared between the democratic populace, which serves to reduce the heterogeneity of our society, therefore challenging our common frame of reference and making our society more splintered in its viewpoints. Such personalisation of the news is not simply science fiction. Instead such personalisation is already increasingly common and pervasive, and seen by some as representing the ultimate articulation of consumer choice in the post-industrial internet age.¹¹³ Here in New Zealand, we may customise our view of www.stuff.co.nz, one of New Zealand’s main news websites, to better present only the information that we are interested in; we may filter out information on www.3news.co.nz to see only the stories that conform with our existing interests, rather than watching the six o’clock news to find out more broadly what has happened during the day. And, if we are interested in political blogs, we are more than likely to find one within the hundreds that are available that will specialise to our particular ideological beliefs, values, or political opinions. In this sense, political blogging may indeed be one of the contributors to the potential decline of what Sunstein believes to be important aspects of our society.

In the updated version of this book, *Republic.com 2.0*, Sunstein addresses political blogging specifically.¹¹⁴ Firstly, he notes the arguments made by those who laud the role of

¹¹² Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 7

¹¹³ Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital*. (New York: Knopf, 1995), 165.

¹¹⁴ The original *Republic.com* was written in 2001. Blogging was still very much a niche activity at this stage, as discussed in Chapter One. The updated version of this book, *Republic.com 2.0* was written in 2007. This therefore allowed Sunstein the ability to update his work to accommodate the changes that had occurred in the intervening 6 years. For more of an explanation of these changes, see the Introduction of *Republic.com 2.0*.

blogs in sharing and exchanging information – that blogging creates a massive marketplace of competing ideas that facilitates access to a vaster range of opinions than would otherwise be made available via the mainstream media. Because the interactive nature of the medium allows for deliberation over arguments, and drives the use of facts and sound reasoning, Sunstein believes that democracy is enhanced by the uptake of blogs as a medium.¹¹⁵ He also believes that blogs are better at delivering these ideals than other mediums, in that they achieve a greater degree of inclusiveness, accessibility and equality to participants than other forms of commentary and analysis.¹¹⁶ In this regard there are more strong parallels between Sunstein’s description of the role and benefit of political blogs, and the criteria of the public sphere as proposed by Habermas, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Sunstein however also notes that there is a degree of variability in terms of how well different bloggers deliver to these aims, and that the best bloggers are likely to take into account contrary opinions and act as aggregators of information and alternative viewpoints. These better bloggers are marked by their ability to respect and respond to reasonable counter-arguments, and use these to synthesise new ways of thinking about issues that may be considered truly creative. Such consideration of alternative viewpoints may also be acting as a check against inaccuracy, and lead to greater quality and truth in the content that is produced.¹¹⁷

Sunstein however posits some concerns about how well the political blogosphere, taken in totality, delivers to these aims. He notes research that shows that there is a tendency for political bloggers to primarily reference only those other bloggers or sources that they find

¹¹⁵ Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 139.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

agreeable;¹¹⁸ as a reader scans the blog rolls of a politically left-leaning blog looking for further material and insights to read, they're likely to find a list that is predominantly constituted of other similarly left-minded blogs; like minds tends to predominantly link to other like minds. This closed linking does not create diversity, rather it encourages readers to delve ever deeper into similar viewpoints, which serve to reinforce and congratulate the interpretations taken by others of a similar mind. Sunstein is not alone in this observation, as the same observation of 'like links to like and the 'balkanisation' of the blogosphere has been raised by a number of different scholars.¹¹⁹ Further, Sunstein argues that when bloggers cite bloggers of another political persuasion, that it is usually only to critique the arguments being posed by 'the other side' and that only one quarter of bloggers actually cite their opponents in a manner that could be described as constructive deliberation and enquiry.¹²⁰ The impact that this closed loop linking creates is simple – the existing political opinions of the participants are entrenched, rather than challenged. As evidence of this conclusion, he recounts an experiment performed in Colorado Springs in 2005 which tested to what degree group polarisation occurs when the groups are constituted only of those of like minds. The conclusions of this experiment were quite clear – all groups ended with more extreme positions than that which they entered the discussion with.¹²¹ Simply put, Sunstein sees this as evidence that Habermas' conception of the ideal speech situation

¹¹⁸ Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0*, 145.

¹¹⁹ Lada Adamic, "The Social Hyperlink," in *The Hyperlinked Society: Questioning Connections in the Digital Age*, ed. Joseph Turow and Lokman Tsui (ed.) (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 234; Eszter Hargittai, Jason Gallo, and Sean Zehnder, "Mapping the Political Blogosphere: An Analysis of Large-Scale Online Political Discussions," (*Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Sheraton New York, New York City, NY. 27 May 2005*) http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p15026_index.html (accessed May 13, 2009), 14.

¹²⁰ Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0.*, 149.

¹²¹ Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0.*, 61-62; Cass Sunstein, *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45-46.

is unlikely to develop within a political blogosphere, as there is little in the way of meaningful discourse between these warring political factions of bloggers. Instead what develops is ever more extremist enclaves of entrenched political opinion, and intense criticism of any other alternative viewpoint. As Sunstein summarises: “Indeed some bloggers, and many readers of blogs, try to create echo chambers. Because of self-sorting, people are often reading like-minded points of view, in a way that can breed greater confidence, more uniformity within groups, and more extremism.”¹²²

Sunstein’s opinion on how well political blogs help to facilitate exposure to alternate viewpoints, and exposure to common experiences, is therefore best described as mixed. He is positive about how blogs increase the ability for more voices and viewpoints to be heard, and for the greater levels of participation and access they have than other mediums. In these regards, Sunstein is essentially arguing that political blogs have the potential to be good articulations of Habermas’ theory of the public sphere and the ideal speech situation. However, the predominance of like to like linking risks creating closed communities of bloggers and readers. In doing so, this may lead to the exclusion of alternative viewpoints and common experiences, which then risks creating niches of reinforced extremist opinions rather than forming forums for healthy discussion and debate: “I have not denied that we are better off with blogs than without them. But it is a big stretch to celebrate blogs as an incarnation of deliberative ideals.”¹²³

This perspective highlights the need to gain New Zealand specific data on our own political blogosphere, in order to substantiate whether New Zealand is better off with our political bloggers, and whether blogs should be celebrated as an incarnation of deliberative

¹²² Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0*, 145.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 146.

ideals. In particular, Sunstein's theories raise the following questions to be tested via this research:

1. Are New Zealand political bloggers creating a "marketplace of ideas", through using the medium of political blogs to discuss a wide range of topics from a variety of different viewpoints?
2. To what degree are political blogs supplanting traditional media sources in New Zealand, and therefore pulling society away from what are the traditional forums for diverse and homogenising experiences?
3. What level of desire do New Zealand bloggers and blog readers have to discuss alternate viewpoints? Do Sunstein's concerns regarding community reinforcement hold in the eyes of New Zealand participants themselves?

Other Studies

There are few pieces of research that have been devoted to a similar aim to this study of the New Zealand political blogosphere. This has been a challenge as there has been little to draw from in terms of comparative work from which to base the design and methodology of this study. Of course, there is an ever growing amount of literature available on the general topic of political blogging, and the impact that it may be having on democracy; indeed, much of this literature has been reviewed in the course of this study, as listed in the Bibliography. It is for this reason that this study has been designed to focus primarily upon the data that has been collected via the two surveys used. Some of the more pertinent pieces of research will be discussed in this section of the chapter.

In a New Zealand context, one of the few substantive studies on the nature of political blogging thus far is the work of Fitzjohn and Salmond. Their research was conducted specifically upon the impact that political bloggers had upon New Zealand general election of 2005.¹²⁴ They argue that there are three primary means through which political bloggers could have influenced the course of the election:

1. By influencing the opinions of uninformed and uncommitted voters;
2. By influencing the media, through bringing stories to the attention of mainstream reporters and shaping the way that these stories are presented;
3. Or by encouraging otherwise partisan readers to become more involved, active and participatory in convincing others in their community to particular points of view.¹²⁵

Of these, the first was rejected by Fitzjohn and Salmond. They argue that political blogs are adept at attracting only the political elites, and those people that are already committed in a partisan sense to a particular political party.¹²⁶ The medium does not appear to attract the ordinary, non-committed “swing voter”, which means that blogs are unlikely to be directly influencing the outcome of an election through influencing how these undecided voters think about particular issues or by encouraging them to vote for a particular party.¹²⁷

In terms of the second impact, they argue that:

Bloggers were ready and willing to provide free information to journalists, were able to spark some minor stories... and could contribute to marginal changes in

¹²⁴ Fitzjohn and Salmond, “The Battle of the Blog: A Phony War?”, 249.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 259.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 253.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 259.

the way the media covered some stories. But New Zealand political blogs were not able to force the mainstream media to cover stories they would otherwise have ignored, nor could they alter the general tone of campaign coverage. The influence of blogs over the campaign media agenda was neither major nor miniscule; blogs mattered, but at the margins.”¹²⁸

In terms of the third point, they note that bloggers have the potential to energise an already partisan audience and turn them into more potent advocates for their particular cause. This in turn may mean that political blogging is having an indirect impact upon the outcome of New Zealand elections, through encouraging greater political participation and promotion from the readers that they attract.¹²⁹

Comparative Research on Political Bloggers

There are some studies from the United States that have sought to quantify the nature of the political blogosphere in a manner that is comparative to this study. The value in reviewing these is that firstly, these studies provide a basis of comparison for the results of this study into the New Zealand political blogosphere, through which conclusions may be drawn as to how the nature of our blogosphere is similar to, or differs from, that of the United States. Once those similarities or differences are understood, this then allows realisation of the second benefit; an understanding of how applicable United States-based research into the political blogosphere may be to the New Zealand context.

The first area of information available regards the demographics of political bloggers. It is treated as a common assumption that political bloggers are predominantly white males,

¹²⁸ Fitzjohn and Salmond, “The Battle of the Blog: A Phony War?”, 263.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 264.

who are highly educated and with high personal incomes.¹³⁰ But what data exists to substantiate these claims? Only one study was identified that offered a comparative source of data upon political bloggers themselves. This was research undertaken by Laura McKenna and Antoinette Pole, as reported in their article “*What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog*”.¹³¹ The core of their research is a survey of political bloggers that is very similar, if far shorter, than the one undertaken for this study.

Their findings show that the demography of American political bloggers is fairly homogeneous. They confirm Perlmutter’s assertion that political bloggers are predominantly white (80% of respondents), male (75%) and well-educated (approximately 40% with an undergraduate degree, 33% with a Masters degree, and 11% with a doctoral, law or medical degree).¹³² The majority of the respondents in McKenna and Pole’s research indicated that they were aged between 26 and 41 years old.

McKenna and Pole’s research sought to understand to what purpose political bloggers are committing themselves to via their blogging. In order to understand this, the researchers provided a question in their survey that sought insight into what information these bloggers were bringing to their readers’ attention.

¹³⁰ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 28.

¹³¹ McKenna and Pole, “What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog.”

¹³² *Ibid.*, 101.

Table 1A: “What Do Bloggers Do” – Responses on What Information American Political Bloggers Provide

Activity	Number of cases	Percentage of sample
An article in a newspaper	128	91
A political post on another blog	122	87
The positions or activities of a candidate, political party, or interest group	123	87
An upcoming vote in congress, state legislature, city council or the UN	109	77
The release of data or statistics not published in a newspaper (e.g., The Brookings Institute, US Census Bureau)	81	57
An upcoming rally, protest or march	73	52

Source: Political Blog Survey 2005

Note: $N = 141$ political bloggers

McKenna and Pole interpret these results as indicating that there is a strong desire amongst political bloggers to inform their readers of information that would otherwise not be made available via the mainstream media. However, the respondent bloggers do not consider themselves to be substitutes for the role of the traditional media, even though some of them noted that they have the ability to provide on-the-spot coverage if they are in the right place, at the right time.¹³³ There is nevertheless a desire to play the role of media watchdog, in terms of checking the accuracy and correcting the errors of traditional media sources.¹³⁴ They also note that there is a wide divergence in terms of what type of issues and information these bloggers are specialising in within the otherwise broad field of politics, but that approximately 80% of respondents indicate that they cover issues regarding the *media and politics*, or *economics and politics*, or *campaigns and elections*.¹³⁵ They also questioned whether bloggers see it as their role to inform readers about political events that they could be participating in, and encouraging them to engage in these

¹³³ McKenna and Pole, “What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog.”, 102.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 105, 106

¹³⁵ McKenna and Pole, “What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog”, 102.

activities. They found evidence that the majority of American political bloggers are actively encouraging their readers to participate in a range of political processes and activities.¹³⁶

Finally, McKenna and Pole considered how behaviours change according to the different levels of traffic that political bloggers receive. The conclusions in this regard were that the larger an audience that a blog received, the more content that that blog devoted to time-intensive activities such as fact-checking the media. However, they also hypothesise that conversely, the production of such content is one of the primary reasons that the bloggers that undertake such work have higher visitor numbers.¹³⁷

Comparative Research on Political Blog Readers

In terms of the demography of political blog readers, a different set of sources is available. Firstly the data collected by Graf for the Institute for Politics, Democracy, and the Internet (IPDI)¹³⁸ on the readers of American political blogs shows that in terms of the age of political blog readers, the largest subset tended to be those aged 35-54 making up 41% of the political blog reading audience. Surprisingly, those aged less than 34 years old made up only 21% of the respondents to this study. These readers also tended to be predominantly male, making up 75% of those that responded to the survey. Joseph Graf, the author of the IPDI research, notes that this deviates from the norm of other, non-political blogs, which usually attract an audience that is approximately 40% female. The IPDI research also shows that political blog readers are highly likely to be well educated, with 75% of

¹³⁶ McKenna and Pole, "What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog", 106.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹³⁸ Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership."

respondents having at least a college degree, and 30% of these having a post-graduate qualification.¹³⁹

These results correspond with the research done by the firm BlogAds upon the makeup of the blog reading community of the United States¹⁴⁰. BlogAds also found that the blog reading population was skewed towards those aged over 30, with less than 15% of respondents to this survey being aged in their 20s or younger. The BlogAds research also showed a similar male dominance in the readership, with only 28% of respondents being female; and also again confirmed that these blog readers tended to be well educated, with nearly 78% having at least a college degree, and 39% of these respondents having a post-graduate qualification.¹⁴¹

A number of other interesting insights are provided within the IPDI data. Firstly political blog readers have a tendency to be more extreme in their political views in comparison to the general blog reading population of America, in that they are more likely to indicate that they have a strong preference for the more extreme ends of the political spectrum, particularly on the political left.¹⁴² The study also notes that political blog readers tend to have a lower opinion than general blog readers of nearly every media type apart from daily newspapers,¹⁴³ and that they are more likely to be actively participatory across a range of everyday political activities.¹⁴⁴ The respondents also noted their motivations for visiting political blogs, with over 90% of these participants voting that their interest in politics in

¹³⁹ Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership", 4.

¹⁴⁰ BlogAds, "Political Blogs Reader Survey 2006."

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁴² Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership," 5.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

general was a driver, as well as that they appreciated how blogs provided them with different content or perspectives than was otherwise available via the mainstream media.¹⁴⁵

The BlogAds survey collected a further set of data which also provides potentially valuable comparisons against the New Zealand data that was collected through this study. Firstly, they also identify a tendency in political blog readers to be predominantly left-leaning on the political spectrum,¹⁴⁶ as well as a tendency to be participatory in terms of readily available political activities.¹⁴⁷ They also collect some very interesting data in terms of how blog readers perceive the usefulness of different media sources of information, which clearly shows a high preference towards political blogs.¹⁴⁸

BlogAds also found that over 95% of readers were consulting more than one political blog, and that just over 50% of the blog readers that participated in their survey had placed comments.¹⁴⁹ This survey also confirmed the results of the IPDI survey, in that it also showed that the availability of different content and perspectives on political issues are the predominant causes of readers wishing to visit political blogs. The majority of respondents to BlogAds survey also further believed that blogs are able to provide news faster, and with more honesty.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership," 8.

¹⁴⁶ BlogAds, "Political Blogs Reader Survey 2006." 3.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology used to conduct The New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey, and the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey. The results of these surveys will be summarised and analysed in Chapters Two and Three respectively. This chapter has also proposed a model for evaluating how political blogging is delivering to the ideals of democratic deliberation. And finally, this chapter has reviewed a number of other studies that offer data.

Chapter Two

Results of the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey

This chapter is devoted to presenting and interpreting the information collected through the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey. This analysis is divided into five sections:

- 1. Demographics of New Zealand Political Bloggers:** This section of responses analyses the demographic makeup of the survey participants, to provide an insight into 'who' these New Zealand political bloggers are.
- 2. Motivations and Characteristics of New Zealand Political Bloggers:** The questions in this section focus upon why these respondents became political bloggers; how many blogs they run; what particular themes, issues or theories their blog specialises in; whether their blogs explicitly support or critique particular New Zealand Political Parties; and whether they use pseudonyms to mask their identity from their readers and other bloggers.
- 3. Time and Financial Commitment to Political Blogging:** This section of questions concerns how much effort and expense these respondents incur in order to maintain the content of their blogs; and the nature and source of any funding that they are provided to meet the costs (if any) of their blogging. These questions seek to understand and quantify what degree of constraint exists on effective participation in the New Zealand political blogosphere – do the theories of easy and equal access hold, or do de facto barriers to participation exist that may prevent more fulsome participation in this medium.

4. **Reader Participation and Engagement:** These questions ask the respondents to quantify how many readers they have, and how they promote their blogs to attract further readers; whether they allow participation in their blog by allowing comments from readers, and if so, what limitations and controls these respondents use to moderate this participation.
5. **Role as a Blogger, and Impact of Blogging:** This final set of questions asks these respondents to describe their role as influencers of public opinion and debate on political issues, and asks their opinions on whether, how and to what degree they feel they are having an influence upon New Zealand Political discourses.

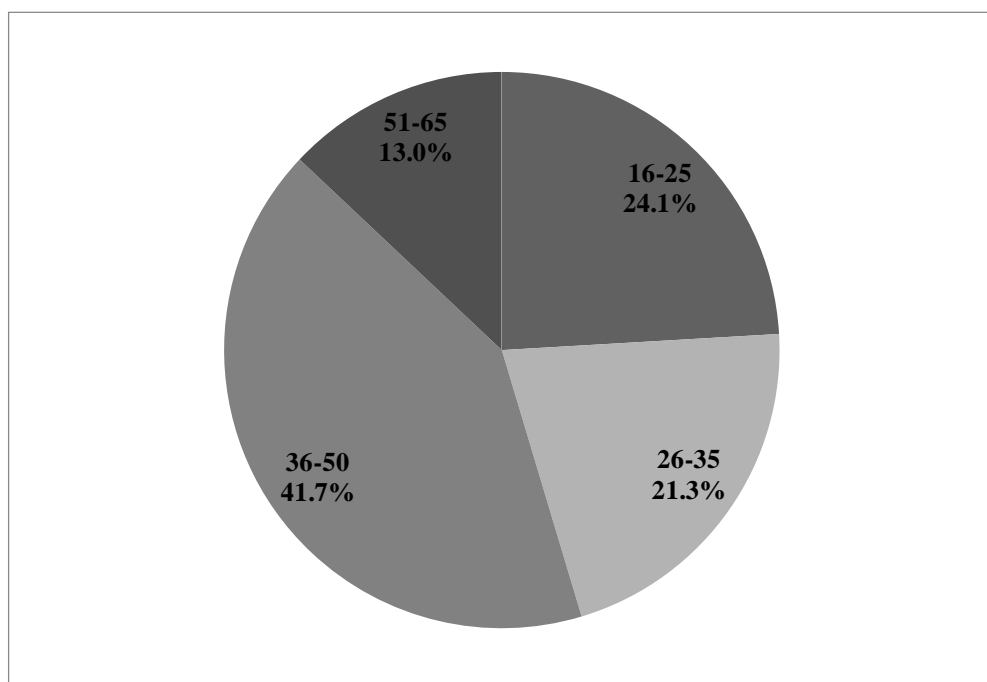
Section One: Demography of New Zealand Political Bloggers

The collection and analysis of demographic information provides a valuable context upon which to base further conclusions and analysis. Understanding whether and how the sampled population of New Zealand Political Bloggers is similar to, and differs from, the standard New Zealand demography provides a useful basis for commencing this research. Note however that these were actually the last questions asked in the survey, but are presented first as they logically frame the rest of the results.

Age

Question 33 asked bloggers to provide their current age. 108 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2A.

Figure 2A: Age of Political Bloggers



The results of this question provide a rather surprising insight into the age distribution of the sampled blogging population, in that the largest group of respondents falls into the 36-50 age bracket. This surprise is based upon the theories of John Palfrey and Urs Gasser,

described in their book *Born Digital – Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*.¹⁵¹ In this book, the authors contend that those born since 1980 are naturally more comfortable with and more inclined to use online technologies such as blogs.¹⁵² This contrasts with older people, who Palfrey and Gasser argue have poorly adapted to the potential of such technologies.¹⁵³ If Palfrey and Gasser's theory is correct, then it seems logical to expect the age of these respondents to be skewed towards the lower age brackets of 16-25 or 26-35. To see such a high proportion of survey participants in the 36-50 age bracket (and to a lesser extent, the 50-65 age bracket); or "Digital Settlers" as Palfrey and Gasser term them, due to their hesitance and unfamiliarity with new internet technologies,¹⁵⁴ suggests that their theory cannot fully explain the reasons why people in this age bracket are the largest users of political blogs within New Zealand.

However those aged over 36 are more likely to be politically participatory;¹⁵⁵ and if consideration is given to the functions that political bloggers commonly perform, as discussed in the Introduction, it is conceivable that older political bloggers may have a more fulsome perspective than younger bloggers, in that they have seen many campaigns, policies, issues and personalities go by, and can draw upon this life experience to provide better commentary and debate on the issues of today. This experience may then be providing these 36-50 year olds with a greater degree of confidence in the material that they are producing and broadcasting to the public.

¹⁵¹ John Palfrey, and Urs Gasser. *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

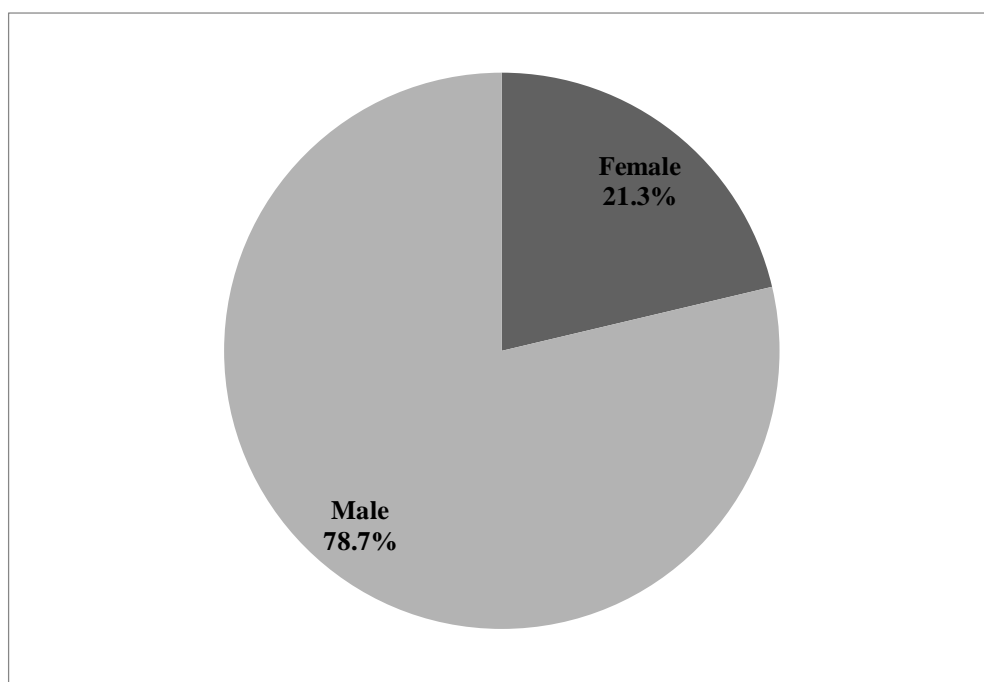
¹⁵⁵ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix*, 89-90.

These two theories fall short however when compared against the results for those aged 50-65, and 65+. These people have even more experience to draw upon and insights to provide – therefore, why do they not have the confidence to use this new medium. It is likely that these age brackets are where Palfrey and Gasser’s theories do hold with regard to political blogging, in that those aged 50+ are more likely to be “Digital Immigrants”¹⁵⁶ and the use of internet technologies such as blogs is simply foreign to them.

Gender

Question 34 asked respondents whether they are male or female. 108 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2B.

Figure 2B: Gender of Political Bloggers



These results clearly show that male political bloggers far outweigh female, by a factor of over three-to-one. This strongly suggests that there is a systematic reason that females are either self-excluding themselves, or are denied access to participation.

¹⁵⁶ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix*, 4.

While this result corresponds with the other studies reviewed in Chapter One, it is still unusual to see such a low rate of participation. Research performed by The Pew Internet and American Life Project shows that the rate of female authorship of blogs in America is not too distant from male usage, with 8% of female Americans creating blogs compared to 11% of males.¹⁵⁷ If such a result about general blog usage also carries across to New Zealand¹⁵⁸ then this would indicate that the underrepresentation of females is an issue particular only to the political blogosphere. One potential answer, and it is at risk of being sexist, is that women become disillusioned with the medium when they are unable to break into the top echelons of political blogging,¹⁵⁹ as a review of the top ten list of New Zealand political bloggers certainly shows a male dominance.¹⁶⁰ This explanation is partially illuminated by one of the responses provided to Question 3 in this survey, which asked those that had been previously active as a political blogger why they stopped. The explanation provided by the respondent was that they had become “worn down by the dominance of white male voices in political blogosphere”.

This raises a question as to whether the blog reading population similarly skewed towards predominantly male participation. If this is the case, then it may just be that an aspect of political blogging in New Zealand is that it the majority of conversations in the medium may be characterised by ‘blokes talking to blokes’. The answer to this will be found in Chapter Three. However, regardless of this result, there is clearly the need for more

¹⁵⁷ Deborah, Fallows, “How Women and Men Use the Internet.” *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. 28 December 2005. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2005/How-Women-and-Men-Use-the-Internet.aspx> (accessed June 13, 2009).

¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately, this is a question that is beyond the scope of this study to answer.

¹⁵⁹ Steven Levy, “Blogging Beyond the Men's Club.” *Newsweek*. 21 March 2005. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/49166> (accessed May 21, 2009).

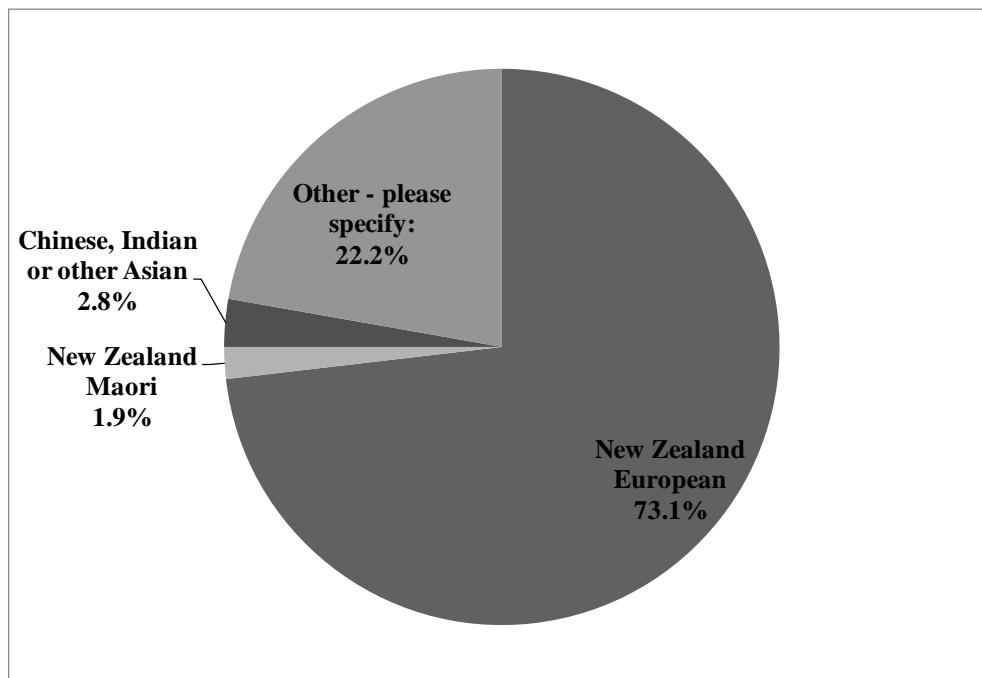
¹⁶⁰ Selwyn, “NZ Blogosphere Rankings: March 2009.”

research to understand exactly why females are alienated from participating in the political blogosphere as authors.

Ethnicity

Question 35 was designed to understand the ethnic makeup of the New Zealand political blogging community. 108 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2C.

Figure 2C: Ethnicity of Political Bloggers



Interestingly, these results clearly show that political blog authors are predominantly New Zealand Europeans, with 73.1% of respondents identifying with this ethnic descriptor compared with census data showing that New Zealand Europeans make up 59.1% of the population.¹⁶¹ Less than 5% of total respondents are New Zealand Maori, Chinese, Indian, or other Asian, and no respondents identified as being Samoan, Cook Island Maori,

¹⁶¹Statistics New Zealand. "Tables: QuickStats About Culture and Identity."
<http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/F1A5AEF5-198F-4F42-8B86-51419FBA82E3/26468/2006CensusQSCI.xls> (accessed May 21, 2009).

Tongan, or other Pacific Island – all of which indicate that levels of participation within these ethnic groupings is far lower than would be expected if distributed according to the census data.^{162 163}

These results show a low level of Maori participation in political blogging, with only 1.9% of respondents within the sample identifying with this ethnic descriptor, despite Maori making up 14% of the general New Zealand population.¹⁶⁴ In this regard these results conform to the results of the McKenna and Pole study, which found that non-white ethnic groupings were equally excluded from the political blogging community of the United States.¹⁶⁵

Personal Income

Question 36 asked the responding bloggers what their total personal income was in the last 12 months, before tax. 105 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2D.

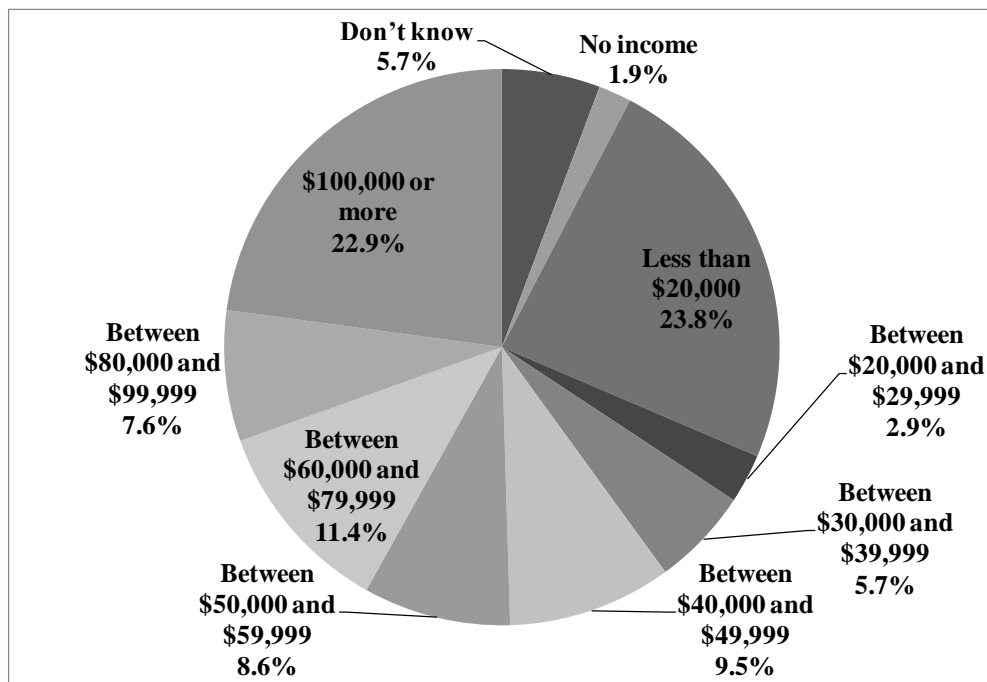
¹⁶² Statistics New Zealand. “Tables: QuickStats About Culture and Identity.”

¹⁶³ Maori = 14%; Chinese, Indian or other Asian = 8.8%; Samoan, Cook Island Maori, Tongan, or other Pacific Island = 6.6%. 24 respondents selected the “Other – please specify” category. 11 of these responses were New Zealander or other ethnic descriptors of those that reside within New Zealand – i.e. Kiwi, Pakeha. Four other respondents identified as British or English. Three respondents objected to providing an answer to this question. The balance of the 24 consisted of other non-New Zealand originating ethnicities.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ McKenna and Pole, “What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog”, 101.

Figure 2D: Personal Income of Political Bloggers



The responses received to this question portray a highly skewed distribution of income when compared to the statistical data collected as part of the Census. 22.9% of bloggers that responded to this survey reported personal incomes of \$100,000 or greater in the last year, compared with the census results, which show only 4% of the general population having incomes of this level.¹⁶⁶ The data is similarly skewed at the lower end of this range as well, though not to quite the same degree; 23.8% of survey respondents indicated that their personal income was less than \$20,000, with another 1.9% of these responding that they had no income at all. This compares with 33.7% of the general population having incomes of less than \$20,000, and 4.59% having no income.¹⁶⁷¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Statistics New Zealand. "Tables: QuickStats About Incomes." <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/39CDE100-B0BD-47FF-A9EB-575E2CDE88E4/35767/2006CensusQSAIncomes2.xls> (accessed May 22, 2009).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Consideration must be given to the different time periods in which the Census (2006) and this study (2008) were undertaken. It is likely that two years of income growth would have led to higher average incomes being reported in this survey compared to those found via the Census. That said, the observations made in this section are still valid.

Examination of these responses when cross tabulated against the responses to Question 38 which concerned the current employment status of respondents, as displayed in Table 2A, provides a partial explanation for the higher than expected level of respondents with incomes of less than \$20,000. This analysis shows that the predominant reason for these lower incomes is because these respondents were engaged in full-time study, which accounts for 50% of the no income responses,¹⁶⁹ and 60% of the responses from those who reported income of under \$20,000.

Table 2A: Cross Tabulation of Lower Income Political Bloggers and Employment Status

	No income	Income Less than \$20,000
Working full-time for pay or other income (32 hours or more a week)	0.0%	12.0%
	0	3
Working part-time for pay or other income (less than 32 hours a week)	0.0%	8.0%
	0	2
Unemployed, looking for work	0.0%	12.0%
	0	3
Retired	0.0%	0.0%
	0	0
Temporarily or permanently disabled, unable to work	0.0%	8.0%
	0	2
In full time study at a School, Polytechnic, University or other educational institution	50.0%	60.0%
	1	15
Unpaid work, either within or outside of the home	50.0%	0.0%
	1	0
TOTAL RESPONSES	100.0%	100.0%
	2	25

Taken in totality, these responses indicate that the income levels of New Zealand political bloggers are markedly higher than those reported by the general population. The median weekly income in New Zealand for June 2008, the same time as this survey, was \$537 per

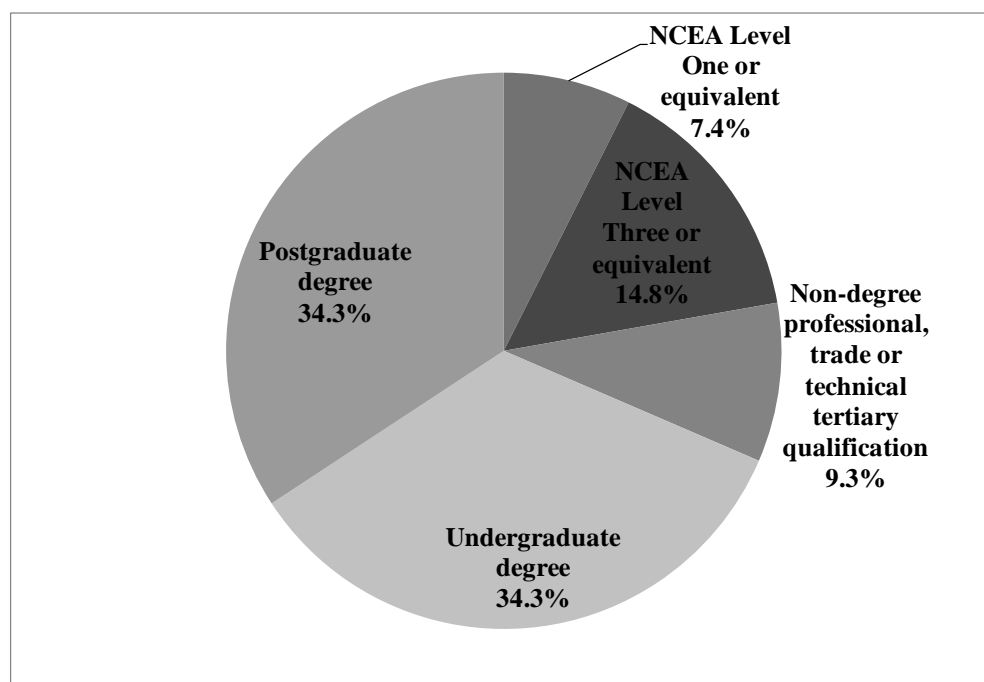
¹⁶⁹ As there are only a small number of responses in this category, these results need to be interpreted with caution.

week or \$27,924 per annum.¹⁷⁰ This compares with the cumulative total of 65.7% of New Zealand political bloggers who responded indicating incomes greater than \$30,000 in the last 12 months. This observation, combined with the higher than average percentage of respondents that reported incomes of over \$100,000, and lower than average percentage of respondents that reported incomes of less than \$20,000, strongly indicates that New Zealand political bloggers are more likely to be wealthier than other New Zealanders.

Formal Education

In Question 37, respondents were asked what their highest level of formal education is. 108 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2E.

Figure 2E: Highest Level of Formal Qualification of Political Bloggers



Again, these responses differ markedly from that of the general New Zealand population. Of primary interest in these results is that 77.9% of respondents have attained a post-

¹⁷⁰ Statistics New Zealand. "New Zealand Income Survey: June 2008 Quarter." <http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/hot-off-the-press/nz-income-survey/nz-income-survey-jun08qtr-hotp-revised.htm> (accessed May 21, 2008).

secondary school level qualification.¹⁷¹ Also worthy of note is that no responses were received for any level of education below School Certificate/NCEA Level One. Statistics New Zealand Census 2006 data shows that such results are again considerably different to the overall demographics of New Zealand, where only 2.4% of the general population has a postgraduate qualification, and 10% have an undergraduate qualification.¹⁷² This again suggests that there is something about the nature of political blogging that either encourages highly educated people to participate, or that the intellectual weight of participation effectively bars those with lesser academic credentials from participating to the same degree. This result is also likely to have an impact upon the nature and appeal of the material published by these political bloggers – are they capable of translating their thoughts and opinions into a manner that those without their educational credentials are likely to understand as fulsomely as others with similar credentials, or does this instead encourage the interpretation that political blogs are the preserve of the intellectual elite of New Zealand society, to the detriment of fuller participation by the average New Zealander? These results show that political blogging is predominantly undertaken by those that are highly educated, and thus the medium is a preserve of New Zealand's intellectual elite.

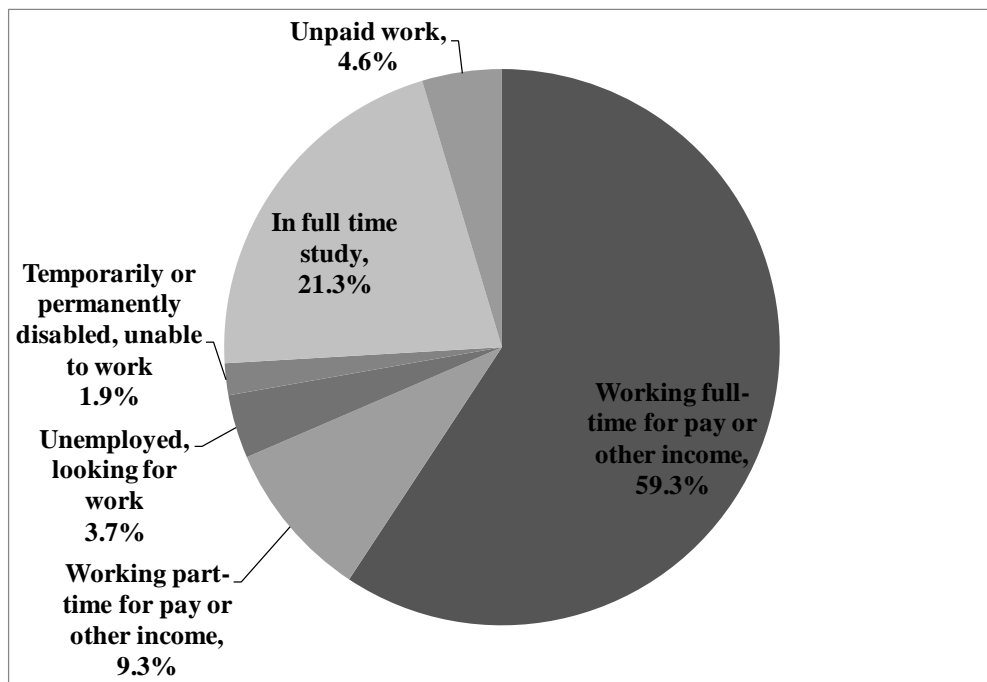
Occupation

Question 38 asked respondents what their employment status was at the time of the survey. 108 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2F.

¹⁷¹ 9.3% Non-degree professional, trade or technical tertiary qualification; 34.3% Undergraduate degree; 34.3% Postgraduate degree.

¹⁷² Statistics New Zealand. "Tables: QuickStats About Education and Training." <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/A2B94E09-4821-4557-9D99-8CCE8C28F2E7/37468/QuickStatsAboutEducation1.xls> (accessed May 22, 2009).

Figure 2F: Current Employment Status of Political Bloggers

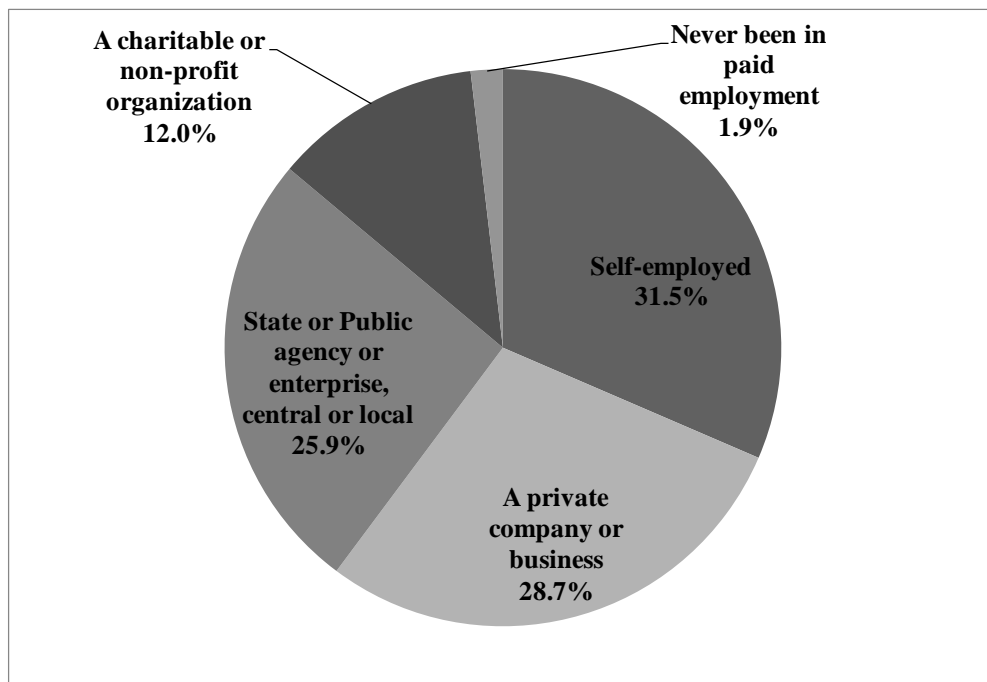


These results in of themselves are not necessarily distinctive, though their collection provides opportunity for cross-tabulation against the other responses to derive deeper insights from this data.

Employer

Question 39 asked respondents what type of organisation they currently work for. 108 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2G.

Figure 2G: Type of Employer of Political Bloggers



Again, these responses are valuable primarily for the cross-tabulation that they allow. However, one particular aspect of these results should be highlighted, in that a high proportion of respondents employed by a state or public organisation. At 25.9% of total responses received this is a proportion that is almost as large as those employed within the private sector (28.7%). This result highlights a potentially interesting conflict for these individuals – political blogging is characterised by the author’s tendency to provide partisan commentary and analysis on political issues, whereas as employees of state or public organisations, these individuals are usually committed to performing their duties in a politically non-partisan manner. These results therefore highlight an interesting duality for these individuals, between their constrained ability to fully comment and participate in the political issues that dominate their professional lives due to their obligations towards impartiality, versus their online personal lives whereby they are potentially anything but impartial and non-partisan.

Note should also be made of the high proportion of respondents that are self-employed, which at 31.5% of respondents is the largest category of responses.

Other Political Involvement

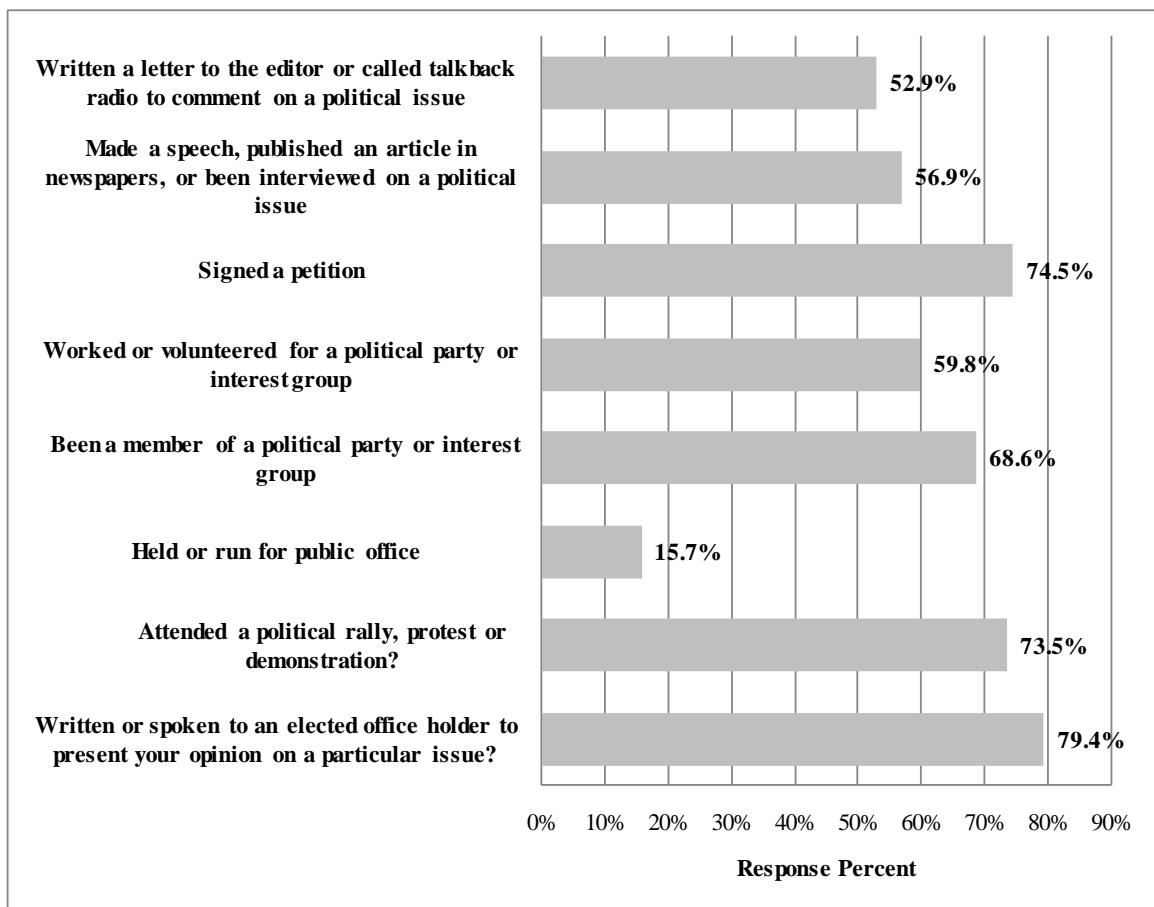
Question 40 was designed to test how active New Zealand political bloggers are in a more traditional sense of political participation, and therefore ascertain whether political blogging is attracting new, previously politically inactive participants to the New Zealand political life; or whether the same people who are already active via standard forms of political engagement have simply migrated to the new medium. This question was also designed to test the theory that political bloggers are influential citizens; that is those whose opinions are likely to strongly persuade their friends, acquaintances and associates to share their point of view. This theory, first conceived by Elmo Roper to assist with the management of the public image of large businesses, states that those “...who were more politically and socially active [do] appear to be the thought leaders on public affairs”.¹⁷³ Roper designed a questionnaire that asked what political and social activities people had been involved in – those that had undertaken three or more activities qualified as being influential¹⁷⁴

In accordance with Roper’s design, respondents to the bloggers’ survey were provided with a list of eight political and social activities, and asked to indicate which ones they had been involved in in the last year. 102 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2H.

¹⁷³ Ed Keller, and Jon Berry. *The Influentials*. (New York NY: Free Press, 2003), 18-19.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

Figure 2H: Other Political Involvement of Political Bloggers



What can be concluded from these results is that the respondents are highly active in a political sense. This then strongly suggests that for the majority of respondents, their political blogging is an extension of pre-existing predilection towards political involvement, much like what has already been noted by Pippa Norris with regard to online democratic functions.¹⁷⁵ On the basis of this evidence, it appears that political blogging is not operating as an attractor for otherwise non-participatory individuals. Also of particular note is that these results indicate a high propensity for bloggers to engage in activities that indicate a political or ideological affiliation.¹⁷⁶ Membership of a political party, volunteering for a political party or interest group, and running for public office are all

¹⁷⁵ Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2001), 238

¹⁷⁶ Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership". 7.

activities that require a degree of personal affinity for the cause, ideology or philosophy of the party or interest group to which that activity is connected. As this survey has identified that it is relatively likely that New Zealand political bloggers will have such an affinity¹⁷⁷ it is likely to mean that the material posted by these bloggers would be consistent with their partisan positions.

Without a control group of non-bloggers to compare these results with, it is difficult to definitively state that these results confirm a high level of participation. Nevertheless, the results do mimic the outcome of a study into politically influential online Americans by Joseph Graf and Carol Darr.¹⁷⁸ The results of their survey showed that politically influential online Americans engaged in a similar set of activities to a far greater degree than other Americans. Given that firstly the results of the New Zealand survey conducted for this research shows even higher levels of participation amongst New Zealand political bloggers, and secondly that New Zealand's overall levels of political participation is likely to have declined to a similar degree to that of the United States,¹⁷⁹ it is a reasonable assumption that these results indicate that New Zealand political bloggers are far more likely to be involved in these traditionally participatory activities than the ordinary New Zealander.

These results also provide the data necessary to confirm that New Zealand political bloggers to have a high tendency towards being classed as influential according to Roper's

¹⁷⁷ Working or Volunteering = 59.8% of respondents; Membership = 68.6%; Running or Holding Office = 15.7%.

¹⁷⁸ Graf and Darr, "Political Influentials Online in the 2004 Presidential Campaign."

¹⁷⁹ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

hypothesis, as shown in Table 2B by the 75.9% of respondents that selected three or more of the above response categories.¹⁸⁰

Table 2B: Influential and Non-Influential Political Bloggers

Number of Activities	Percentage of	Percentage of
8 - Influential	11.1%	75.9%
7 - Influential	14.8%	
6 - Influential	13.9%	
5 - Influential	13.9%	
4 - Influential	10.2%	
3 - Influential	12.0%	
2 - Non-Influential	13.9%	24.1%
1 - Non-Influential	4.6%	
0 - Non-Influential	5.6%	
TOTAL RESPONSES	100.0%	100.0%

There is also an interesting age-based dimension to these results, as displayed in Table 2C:

¹⁸⁰ Note that this question received a lesser number of responses than the question immediately prior, which received 108 responses. The difference between these two response rates, 6 respondents, is therefore assumed for the purposes of this analysis to be those that did not answer this question because they had not undertaken any of the activities listed in the last 12 months.

Table 2C: Percentage of Political Bloggers that Engaged in Participatory Activities by Age

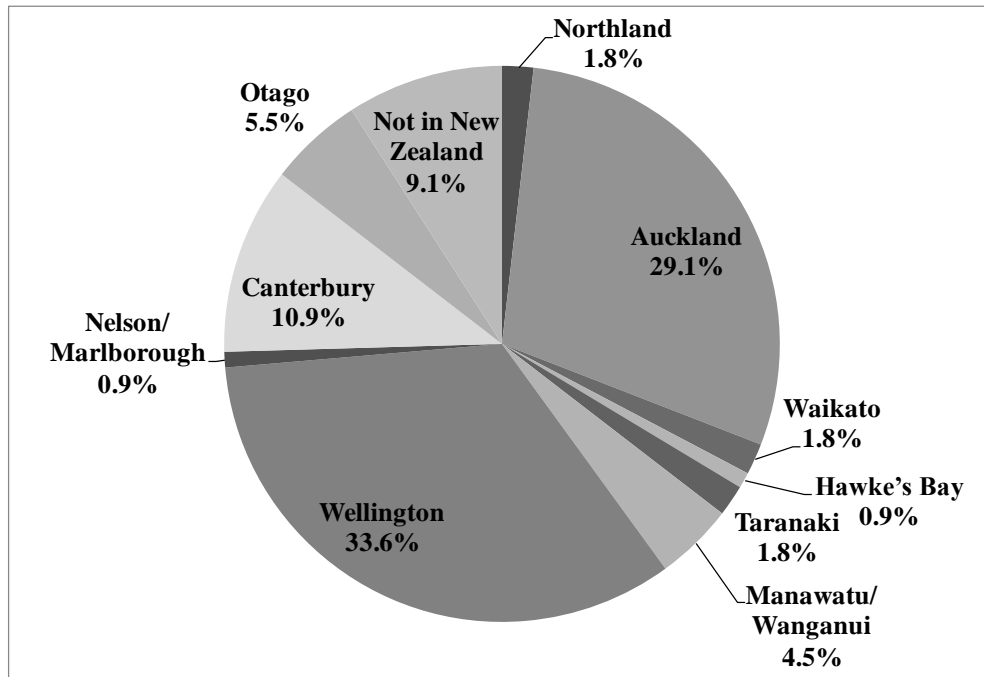
Age of Respondent	16-25	26-35	36-50	51-65	65+
Written or spoken to an elected office holder to present your opinion on a particular issue?	76.0%	68.2%	85.0%	92.3%	0.0%
Attended a political rally, protest or demonstration?	84.0%	72.7%	70.0%	61.5%	0.0%
Held or run for public office	16.0%	18.2%	10.0%	30.8%	0.0%
Been a member of a political party or interest group	92.0%	59.1%	62.5%	61.5%	0.0%
Worked or volunteered for a political party or interest group	72.0%	63.6%	55.0%	46.2%	0.0%
Signed a petition	80.0%	63.6%	75.0%	76.9%	0.0%
Made a speech, published an article in newspapers, or been interviewed on a political issue	60.0%	63.6%	55.0%	53.8%	0.0%
Written a letter to the editor or called talkback radio to comment on a political issue	72.0%	40.9%	47.5%	61.5%	0.0%
AVERAGE ACROSS ACTIVITIES FOR AGE BRACKET	69.0%	56.2%	57.5%	60.6%	0.0%

This table clearly shows that those political bloggers aged 16-25 are the most likely to be participatory in a general sense. These results contrast with the findings of Question 33, which showed that those aged 16-25 were less likely to participate in political blogging than those in the 36-50 age bracket. However, Table 2C shows that those young people that do participate in political blogging are more likely to be politically active than other age groups.

Region of Residence

Question 41 asked respondents which region of New Zealand they live in, in order to understand the population distribution of those active in the medium. 110 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2I.

Figure 2I: Region of Residence of Political Bloggers



These results show that over 60% of respondents resided in either Auckland (29.1%) or Wellington (33.6%). The region of New Zealand that scored third was Canterbury (10.9%), fourth was Not in New Zealand (9.1%),¹⁸¹ and fifth Otago (5.5%). All other regions attracted less than 5% total responses, and four categories (Bay of Plenty, East Cape, West Coast and Southland), received no responses from the responses within the sample.

¹⁸¹ Note that there is no reason why a non-New Zealand resident could not operate a blog “that features commentary, discussion and/or debate on New Zealand political issues, personalities or news”, as is the definition used by this research. It is wholly conceivable that the a significant proportion of the respondents in this category are expatriate New Zealanders, who are currently living and working overseas, and who maintain their interest in New Zealand politics through participating in political blogging. It is however notable that there are more foreign respondents blogging on New Zealand politics than there are in many regions of New Zealand.

These results show that political blogging is predominantly an urban activity – 73.6% of respondents to this survey reside within the three major urban regions of New Zealand, Auckland, Wellington, or Canterbury. This is not necessarily surprising, as it roughly corresponds to the overall urbanisation of the general New Zealand population. However, the percentage of respondents that live within the Wellington region does not correspond with the general population distribution of New Zealand. That more political bloggers reside within the Wellington region than the Auckland region, despite the fact that the latter has approximately three times the total population of the former,¹⁸² shows that there is an unusually high proportion of political bloggers within that area. Given that the Wellington region is the hub of the majority of New Zealand political activity as it is the base of Parliament, this is perhaps simply a reflection of the higher likelihood that Wellington residents have of being directly involved in political life, and their blogging is simply an extension of that.

¹⁸² Statistics New Zealand. “Subnational Population Estimates: At 30 June 2008”. <http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/hot-off-the-press/subnational-population-estimates/subnational-population-estimates-jun08-hotp.htm?page=para004Master> (accessed May 30, 2009).

Section Two: Motivations and Characteristics of New Zealand Political Bloggers

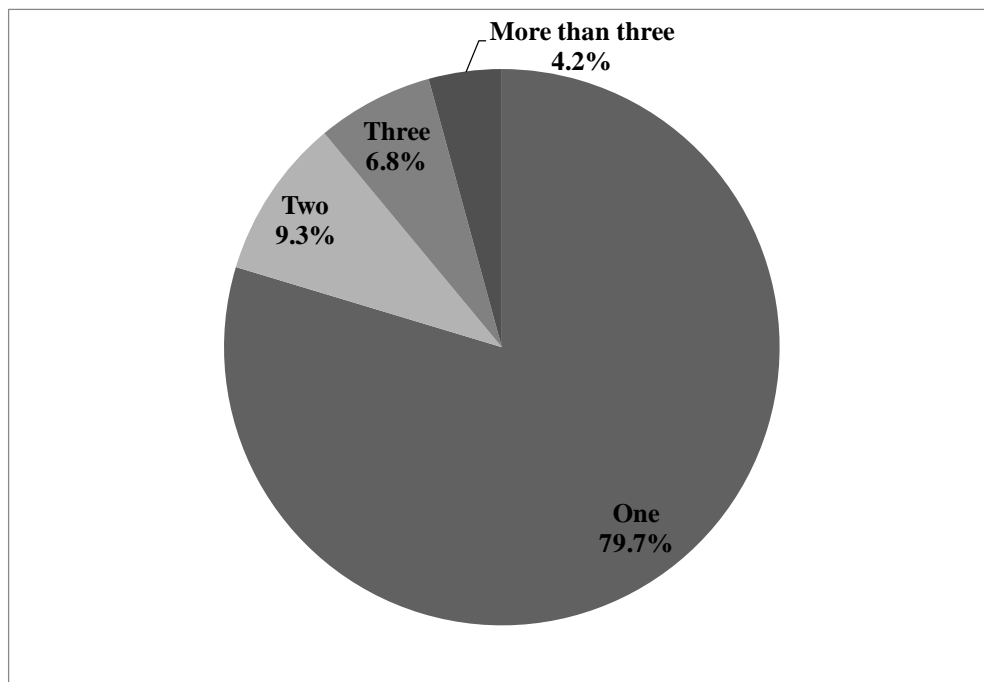
The purpose of this section of questions is to understand why these respondents joined the New Zealand political blogosphere, and what messages they are choosing to communicate via the medium. Important themes such as the content and bias of their material will be examined in this section; as well as whether or not they use pseudonyms, and what impact the use of such identity masks may be having upon the medium.

The first three questions of this section of the survey were the first presented to participants, and were primarily concerned with qualifying participation in the survey. Question One asked respondents to confirm that they were indeed aged 16 years or older, to comply with the ethical limitations of the survey methodology. Question Two asked whether the participant was either currently or had previously been active as an author of a political blog. And Question Three was a follow up for those that indicated previous but not current blog authorship, to understand the reasons for stopping authoring material.

Extent of Blog Authorship

Question Four of the survey asked respondents how many different blogs they write for. 118 responses were received to this question and they are summarised in Figure 2J.

Figure 2J: Number of Blogs Authored by Political Bloggers



Firstly, these results show that the majority of bloggers maintain a singular online identity for their political opinions and commentary – this is not surprising in of itself. What is more interesting is the number of authors that provide content to multiple blogs, with over 20% of responders indicating that they do. Observation of the New Zealand political blogosphere suggests two primary reasons for operating multiple blogs. Firstly, a significant proportion of political blogs operate with groups of authors providing content, so it is not uncommon for authors to be present on a number of different blogs, as they maintain their responsibilities to their group effort as well as a separate one for their own distinct opinions. Secondly, some bloggers also like to keep discussions on markedly different topics distinct via different blog sites. Given that there is no real barrier to maintaining multiple blog sites, due to the ease through which they may be established and maintained, and that a blog is likely to be more coherent if is focussed upon a singular topic as opposed to multiple, it is logical that some bloggers maintain more than one blog so as to split their content in such a manner.

Reasons for Starting to Blog

Question Five asked respondents to comment upon why they originally started blogging. This question seeks to understand what factors have motivated bloggers to start generating this content and placing it online. 114 respondents provided answers to this question in a free text format. The responses received to this question were quite diverse; however, some common themes are recognisable.

Firstly, given the nature of the medium, it is unsurprising that the most significant reason expressed in these comments related to a desire to provide commentary, express opinion, or otherwise engage in the political issues of the day. Responses of this nature were received from 49 of the survey participants. However, other respondents noted some further interesting rationales for joining the blogosphere. 18 of the respondents answered that they were motivated to join the blogosphere in order to highlight issues that they thought were otherwise underrepresented in the New Zealand political discourse. An example of a comment that expressed this sentiment is “My concern about the Electoral Finance Bill, and the effect that it was likely to have on freedom of speech and the expression of political opinion.”¹⁸³

Other respondents answered that their participation in the blogosphere was triggered by the perceived lack of balance or quality commentary from the mainstream media. This sentiment was expressed by 15 of the respondents, for example: “Personal interest of mine; Mainstream media don't always cover all the stories or give a detailed analysis or commentary on events/situations.”

¹⁸³ The free text comments that are quoted in this study have had clear spelling errors corrected. However, any general grammatical or logical errors in these comments have been left in the form in which they were received.

One other particularly interesting subset of these responses concerned respondents who joined the New Zealand political blogosphere due to the lack of balance that they saw developing in the medium. These respondents stated that they joined the blogosphere to address the absence of political voices for their particular affiliation, or to counter the perceived higher levels of popularity of “opponent” blogs, or to provide a rational voice against the partisan activity that they saw elsewhere in the blogosphere. Reasons such as this were provided by 14 of the respondents, an example of which is “To raise awareness about and counteract the pre-eminence of Right Wing blogs - particularly the National Party's sub rosa blog, Kiwiblog.”¹⁸⁴

It is useful at this point to return to the answers provided to Question Three, which was a follow up question presented only to those respondents that indicated in Question Two that they were previously a political blogger, but since have ceased. This question asked them to expand upon their reasons for stopping, and is a useful counterpoint to the discussion above. Nine of the ten respondents that indicated that they had previously been active answered this question. Two key themes are identified in these responses to Question Three – firstly, that time limitations became an issue for five of the nine; whereas two of the nine indicated that their blogging came to conflict with their employment status.

Proportion of Content Related to Politics

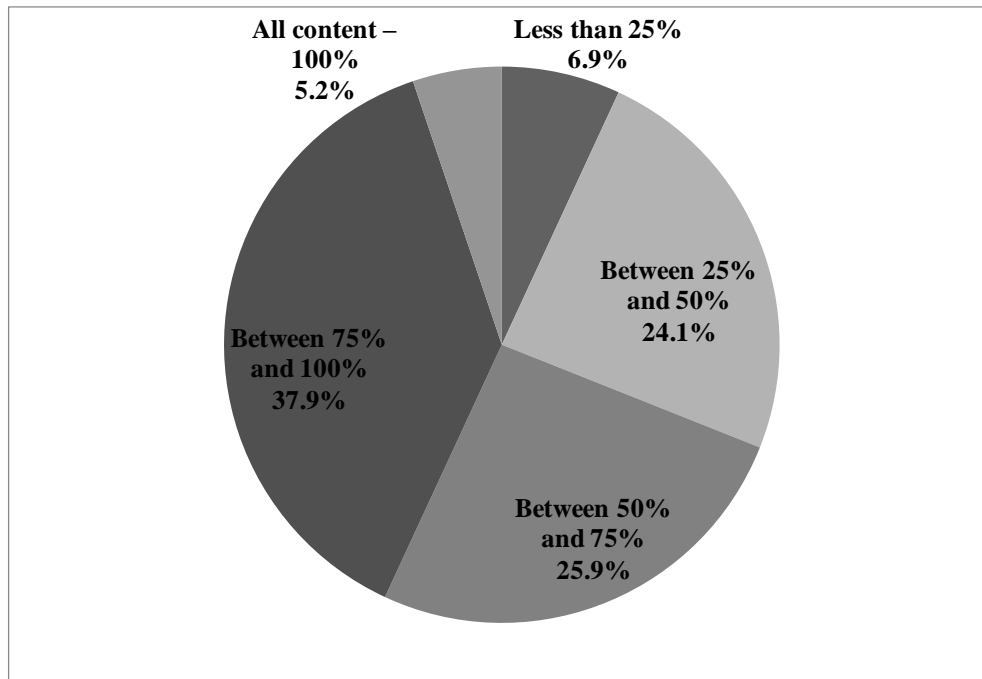
Question Six concerned what proportion of the content of the respondents’ blogs was related to politics. This question is important, as the definition of political blog that has been used for this research,¹⁸⁵ is deliberately designed to be a broad and all encompassing

¹⁸⁴ Another illustrative response received from a survey participant is: “To attempt to balance other partisan blogs with some reflections which include views from the wider political spectrum.”

¹⁸⁵ That is a blog that features commentary, discussion and/or debate on New Zealand political issues, personalities or news.

one. This question is therefore designed to understand what proportion of the content that these respondents prepare is related to this definition. 116 respondents answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 2K.

Figure 2K: Proportion of Political Bloggers Blog Content Related to Politics



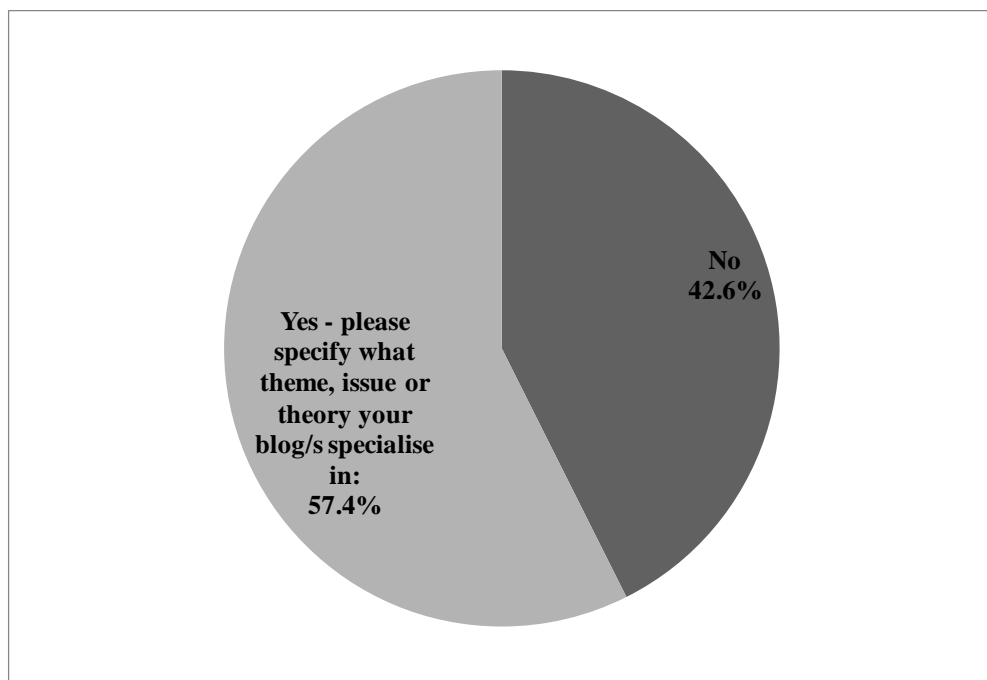
These results confirm that the majority of political bloggers focus the majority of their blogs upon political issues, with 69% of respondents answers confirming that over 50% of the content that they have prepared is on such a topic. This raises the question as to whether the other 31% of these respondents may be considered political bloggers – the simple answer, according to the definition used by this research, is yes; however, they evidently focus on other topics as well. Nevertheless, their readers are exposed, at least in part, to that proportion of their content that is indeed related to political discussion. If anything, these bloggers that have less than 50% of their material devoted to politics may be a challenge to Sunstein’s concerns, as explained in Chapter One - the readers of these political blogs that contain a proportion of content that is less than 50% may be exposed to alternative thoughts and ideas or common homogenous experiences that they did not

anticipate.¹⁸⁶ In this regard, these bloggers may indeed be having a more powerful impact than those bloggers who are solely or majority focussed on political discussion in terms of resolving to Sunstein's concerns with the medium.

Specialisation

To further supplement the responses to Question Six, Question Seven asked authors to confirm whether the material that they produce is specialised upon a particular theme or issue within the otherwise broad field of political discussion. Respondents were given a "Yes" or "No" option, with an invitation to expand upon their response via a free text field to further elucidate as to what particular topic their blog was focussed upon. 115 respondents answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 2L.

Figure 2L: Specialisation of Blog Content



¹⁸⁶Sunstein, *Republic.com*, .8. Indeed, the same could be said about any proportion less than 100%, though to a lesser degree.

Of note is that the majority of bloggers somehow focus their material, rather than keep a broad discussion of New Zealand politics. Once again, the 66 free text responses provide further insight into the responses to this question, in that they show a broad range of interests that are being expressed by New Zealand political bloggers. These range from economic policy analysis, to constitutional and philosophical issues, to green issues, communism and anarchism. However, there are two particular niche topics that are brought up more than others – libertarianism, which is mentioned by eight of the 66 respondents; and feminism, gender theories or other gender related topics, also mentioned by eight of the respondents.

Support and Criticism of Political Parties

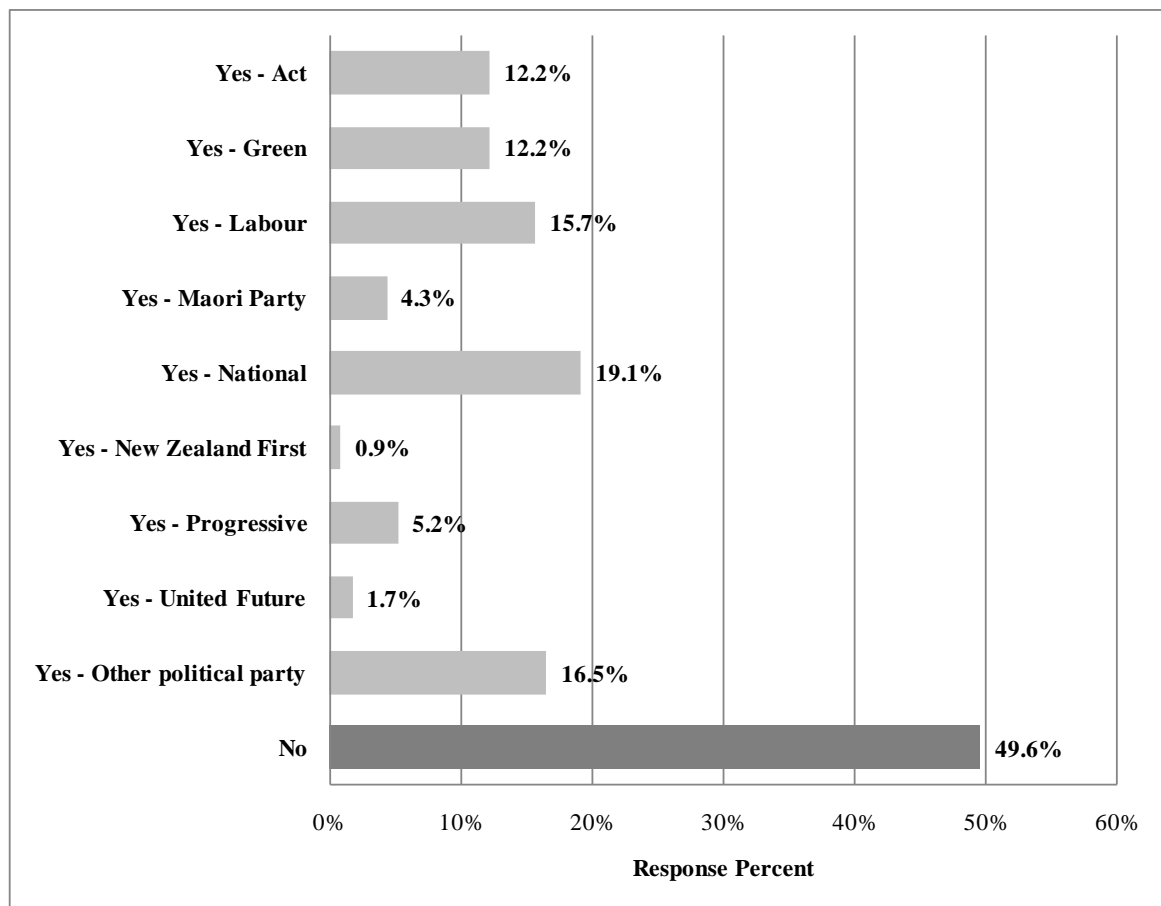
The next two questions in the New Zealand Political Bloggers Survey, Questions Eight and Nine, asked bloggers to confirm whether they explicitly support or critique particular political parties within their blog. Observation of New Zealand political blogs show that a significant proportion of them appear to have a clear ideological direction, a tendency to support parties that match that ideology and to attack those parties that undertake different policies. As discussed in Chapter One, the study undertaken by Graf found that political blog readers were more likely to gravitate towards the extreme ends of the political spectrum with regard to their preferences.¹⁸⁷ Questions Eight and Nine will test whether the same tendency towards extremism in the political spectrum is observed with regard to New Zealand political bloggers. Further, the responses to these questions will also provide some insight as to whether there is evidence of extremist enclaves developing, as per Sunstein's theories, in that it tests the degree to which extremist affiliation is common.

¹⁸⁷ Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership", 5.

With both questions, respondents were provided with a list of political parties that had members in Parliament at the time of this survey,¹⁸⁸ plus a free text option through which respondents could name other parties. Respondents were able to select as many responses as were applicable to their blog. Note the use of the word *explicitly* in the wording of the questions; these questions are designed to capture those expressions of support that are clear for readers to see.

Question Eight received 115 responses and the results are summarised in Figure 2M.

Figure 2M: Support for Political Parties from Political Bloggers



¹⁸⁸ The New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey was conducted in June-July 2008, in the final year of the 48th Parliament of New Zealand and less than six months prior to the 2008 General Election. During this Parliament, the Labour and Progressive Parties governed at the head of a minority coalition Government, with New Zealand First and United Future providing support on confidence and supply. The ACT and National parties formed the formal opposition. The Green Party and the Maori Party also held seats in Parliament during this term.

What is notable about the responses to this question is that nearly half of them (49.6% of respondents) indicate that these bloggers do not use their blogs to support any particular political party or party policy, and are therefore intended to be neutral. Other notable features of these results is that some of the “minor” parties, particularly ACT¹⁸⁹ and the Green Parties¹⁹⁰, achieve a far higher level of explicit support within the New Zealand political blogosphere than would seem appropriate given their support within the electorate. Unsurprisingly, the Labour¹⁹¹ and National¹⁹² Parties attract the highest level of support within the New Zealand political blogosphere.

Also interesting from these results is the use of the “Other” free-text response category, which attracted 16.5% of respondents. 47% of the respondents that selected this “Other” category confirmed that they use their blogs to explicitly support the Libertarianz Party, which provides them with 7.8% of respondents.¹⁹³ This means that this minor party, which has never been successful in winning a seat in Parliament, and which attracted only 0.05% of the vote in the 2008 New Zealand General Election¹⁹⁴ attracts more explicit support within the New Zealand political blogosphere than some parties actually represented in Parliament at that time; such as the Maori Party,¹⁹⁵ New Zealand First Party,¹⁹⁶ Progressive

¹⁸⁹ 12.2% of respondents, 24.2% of “Yes” responses.

¹⁹⁰ 12.2% of respondents, 24.2% of “Yes” responses.

¹⁹¹ 15.7% of respondents, 31.2% of “Yes” responses.

¹⁹² 19.1% of respondents, 37.9% of “Yes” responses.

¹⁹³ Or 15.5% of “Yes” responses.

¹⁹⁴ Elections New Zealand. “Official Count Results - Overall Status.” *2008 General Election - Official Result*. http://www.electionresults.govt.nz/electionresults_2008/partystatus.html (accessed May 23, 2009).

¹⁹⁵ 4.3% of respondents, 8.5% of “Yes” responses.

¹⁹⁶ 0.9% of respondents, 1.8% of “Yes” responses.

Party,¹⁹⁷ and United Future Party.¹⁹⁸ Other minor parties referred to in the “Other” category of respondents were Alliance, Citizens & Ratepayers,¹⁹⁹ the Communist Party, DAFT, the Kiwi Party, the Republican Party, Residents Action Movement, and the Workers’ Party.

It is also interesting to note how these scores deviate from the public polling data taken by Colmar Brunton around the time that this survey was conducted. Figure 2N compares the percentage of “Yes” responses for each of the parties listed as a proportion of the total “Yes” responses²⁰⁰ against the results of the Colmar Brunton survey conducted in July 2008:²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ 5.2% of respondents, 10.3% of “Yes” responses.

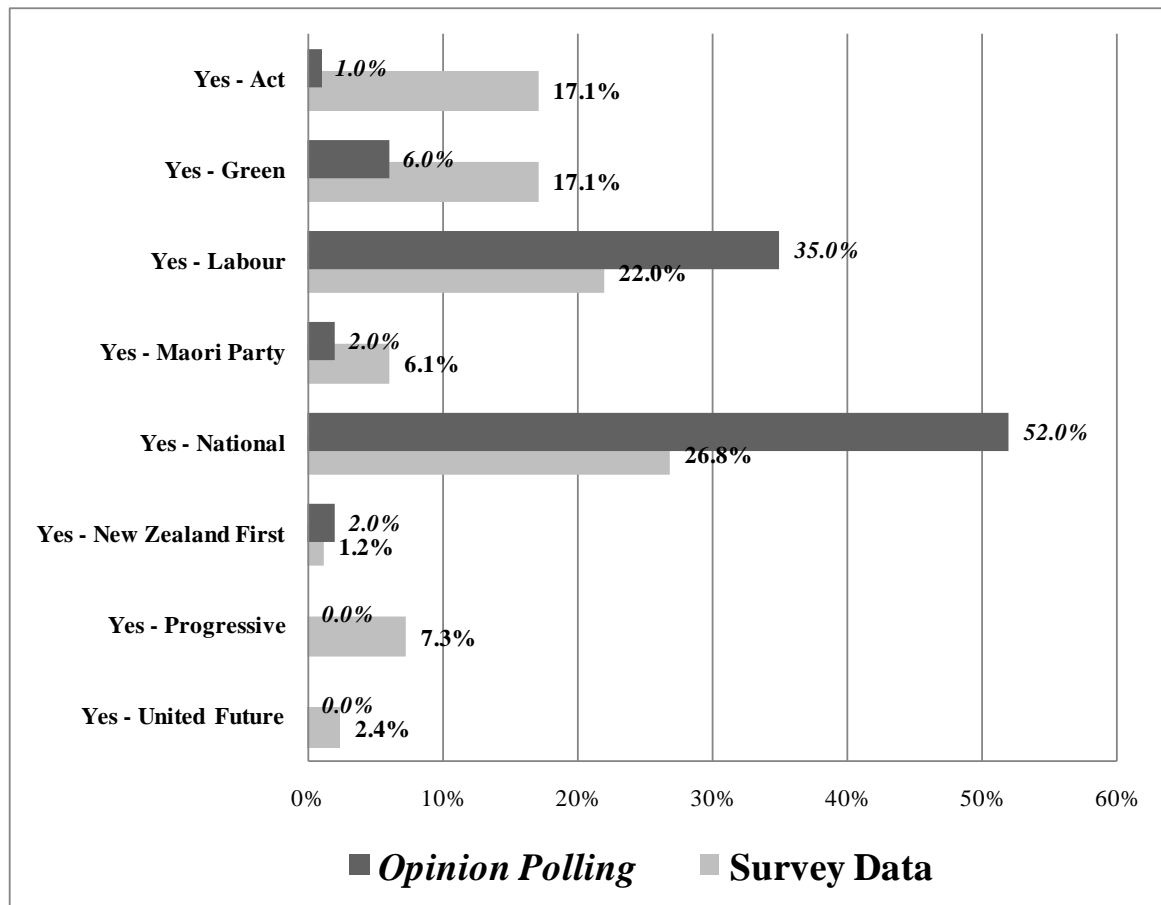
¹⁹⁸ 1.7% of respondents, 3.4% of “Yes” responses.

¹⁹⁹ Citizens and Ratepayers is a political group active in Local Authority elections in the Auckland region.

²⁰⁰ Note that this is therefore a different manner of displaying the response data, hence the different percentages reported in this Figure compared to Figure 2M.

²⁰¹ Colmar Brunton. *2008 Poll Results*. <http://www.colmarbrunton.co.nz/index.php?pageLoad=44> (accessed May 22, 2009).

Figure 2N: Comparison between Opinion Polling and Political Bloggers' Survey Responses



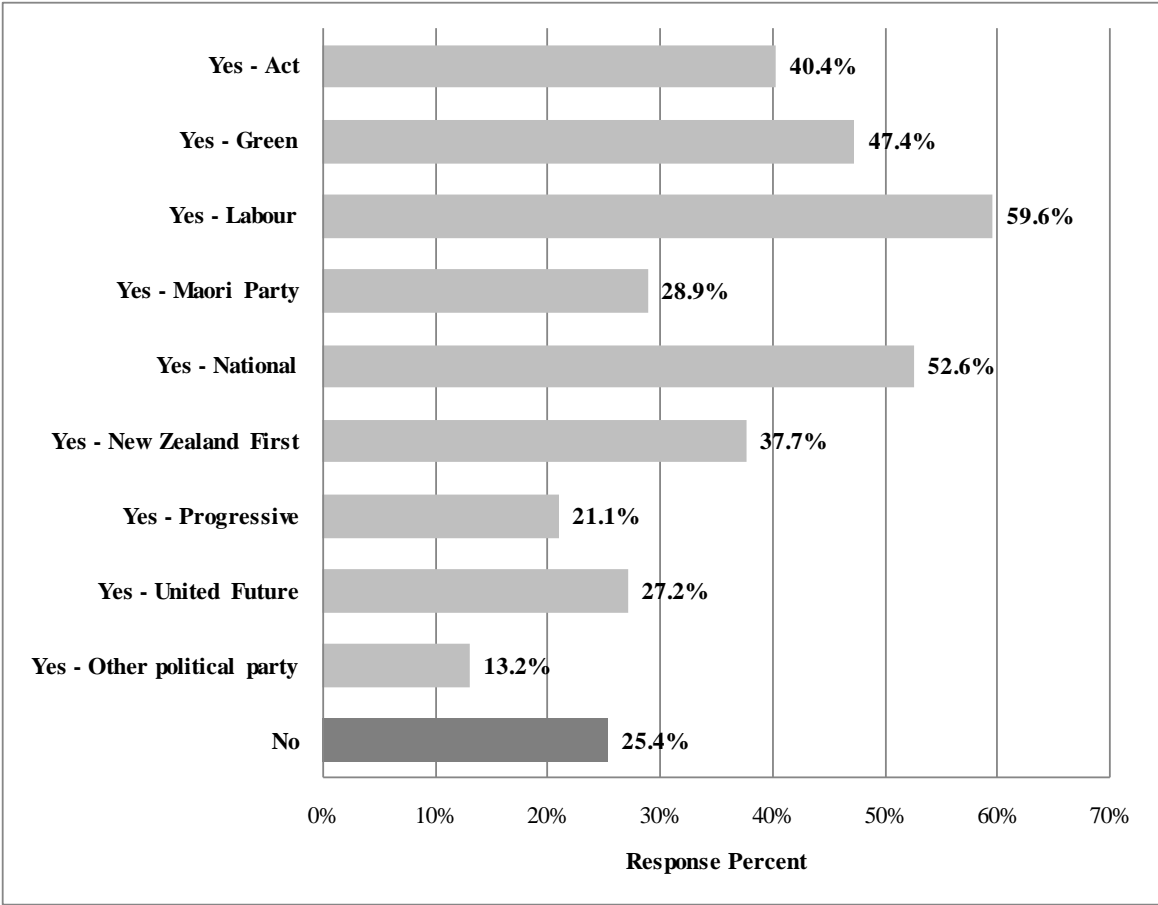
Firstly, a caveat in interpreting this comparison – the polling and this survey were conducted on fundamentally different bases. Colmar Brunton’s respondents are only able to name their one preference, whereas respondents to this survey were able to name multiple preferences. This means that this comparison should not be seen as anything more than an indicator of how support for these parties differs between New Zealand political bloggers and the New Zealand public at large.

Nevertheless, the support levels reported in the survey are substantially different from those that would be expected based upon polling data. The Figure clearly shows that the Act (in particular), Green, Maori, Progressive and United Future parties all receive substantially *more* support from New Zealand bloggers than they do from the general New

Zealand electorate; and that the National, Labour and New Zealand First parties receive substantially *less* support from these respondents than from the electorate.

Question Nine of the survey asked the opposite question – that is, which political parties or party policies have the respondents critiqued via their blogs. 114 responses were received to this question, and these are summarised in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Critique of Political Parties from Political Bloggers



What is immediately noticeable about these responses, when compared to the results for Question Eight, is the significantly lower number of respondents that selected “No” as a response. 25.4% of respondents selected “No” to this question, compared with 49.6% of respondents in Question Eight. This comparison leads to the conclusion that New Zealand Political Bloggers are, on average, more likely to use their blogs to critique political parties

or policies rather than support them, and that essentially blogs are used more as an attack medium than as a publicity medium within New Zealand. This conclusion is further encouraged when the “Yes” responses are analysed as all of these that are related to specific parties are significantly higher than that which was reported in the earlier question.

Naturally, the highest level of criticism is reserved for the two major parties, with the Labour Party being selected by 59.6% of respondents, or 79.8% of these respondents that did not select a “No” category; and the National Party being selected by 52.6% of respondents, or 70.5% of those respondents that did not select the “No” category. However, while the two major parties can expect to attract the highest levels of criticism, due to their higher profiles and therefore the higher levels of support and criticism, these results seem extraordinary in terms of the sheer amount of criticism that these parties attract from the blogosphere.²⁰²

The minor political parties also attracted exceptionally high numbers of responses that indicate that they have been criticised via blogs – ACT was selected by 40.4% of respondents;²⁰³ The Greens selected by 47.4% of respondents;²⁰⁴ The Maori Party selected by 28.9% of respondents;²⁰⁵ New Zealand First selected by 37.7% of respondents;²⁰⁶

²⁰² Timing of the survey may be one of the causes of this higher level of criticism, as this survey was conducted less than six months out from a General Election, when public polling indicated a poor result for the current Labour-led Government. There may have therefore been a concerted effort from those who did not support Labour to encourage the trend by adding criticism on Labour to their blogs; and perhaps conversely, for Labour supporters to increase the amount that they attacked National, in an attempt to try and sway the opinions of the blog reading public.

²⁰³ 54.2% of “Yes” responses.

²⁰⁴ 63.5% of “Yes” responses.

²⁰⁵ 38.7% of “Yes” responses.

²⁰⁶ 50.5% of “Yes” responses.

Progressive selected by 21.1% of respondents;²⁰⁷ United Future selected by 27.2% of respondents.²⁰⁸ A potential explanation of the higher levels of criticism than support for these parties is the very fact that they are niche political movements, which all appeal to only 5-10% of the electorate. This naturally means that these parties *do not* appeal to 90-95% of the electorate who are outside the niches that these parties are targeting. Alternatively, the earlier question already observed that some of these minor parties have far higher levels of support within the political blogosphere than they do from the general electorate. Perhaps then this larger level of support is encouraging an equally vociferous backlash from those who oppose the policies of these minor political parties. Regardless of which of these explanations is correct, it is clear that these smaller parties face a significant degree of criticism from New Zealand political bloggers – and certainly, more foes than friends within the medium.

Interestingly, analysis of the cross-tabulations shows that 18 of the 114 respondents that answered the question selected all named political parties as those that they critique. In this sense, they appear to consider themselves non-partisan as they critique all parties equally. Of that 18, ten of these respondents did not indicate that they have ever supported any political party in their response to Question Eight. This suggests that these respondents are in fact behaving in a non-partisan manner through rejecting and critiquing all political parties via their blogs. Some of these respondents indicated an “anarchist” tendency in their free-text responses, in that they feel that all political parties are illegitimate or unnecessary, which may be part of the explanation of this result. Another four of the 18 entered a party into the “Yes – Other” category of responses, which was either the

²⁰⁷ 28.2% of “Yes” responses.

²⁰⁸ 36.4% of “Yes” responses.

Communist Party (one respondent) or the Libertarianz (three respondents). These four respondents evidently support parties that are on the extremes of their respective ideological positions, in that the Communists are likely to reject any and all mainstream parties as being not “left” enough, and the Libertarianz doing the same on the right.

Regardless, it is clear from the results of these two questions that praise is far less common in the New Zealand political blogosphere than criticism. This strongly suggests that those that participate in political blogging in New Zealand are the more passionate advocates of their particular political causes, and that they will attack all other parties and policies that do not fit with their ideological position. The New Zealand political blogosphere is evidently no place for the faint of heart.

Use of Pseudonyms

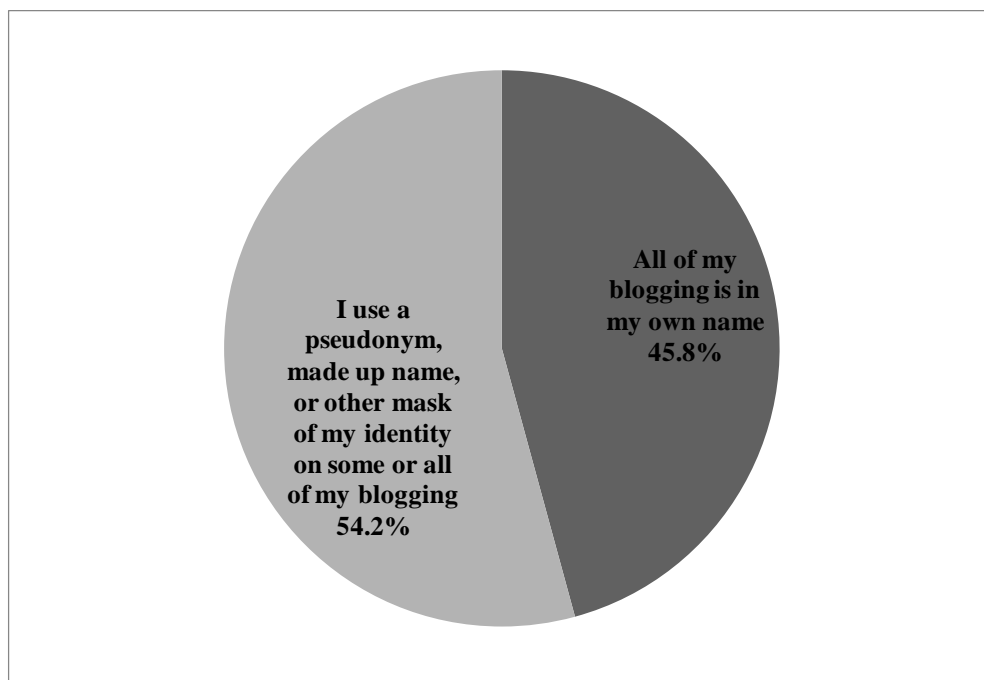
The next set of questions of The New Zealand Political Bloggers Survey concerned the use of pseudonyms. Observation of New Zealand political blogs shows that it is quite common for authors to pen their material under false names. There are a number of possible reasons as to why authors may wish to keep their name hidden. Firstly, they may simply not wish to be associated with the political positions that they take. This may be for a variety of reasons, such as protecting themselves from claims of a conflict of interest or bias, due to the sensitive nature of their employment or relationship with Government; because they realise that the opinions that they are expressing are extreme, and do not wish themselves, or their families and friends, to be pilloried or ostracised for having such an uncommon viewpoint; or because they feel that it gives them more freedom to express themselves in a manner that they feel is useful to the reader. In this regard, the use of pseudonyms may assist in ensuring that the conversations within the New Zealand political blogosphere are

freer and franker than they may otherwise be; and that some participants are protected from the adverse consequences of their participation through having their identity protected.

However, it is also possible that the use of pseudonyms can lead to more dramatic, rash and combative content being posted, and therefore can degrade the quality of conversations by removing the personal consequences of poor behaviour. If this is the case, then the use of pseudonyms is counterproductive to the quality of democratic discourse in the New Zealand political blogosphere.

First and foremost however, it is necessary gain data about just how common the use of pseudonyms is. This was the purpose of Question 10. 118 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2P.

Figure 2P: Use of Pseudonyms by Political Bloggers



The results of this question confirm that it is indeed more common for New Zealand bloggers to mask their identity with regard to their online activities than not, though the results are finely balanced. The next logical question is *why* these bloggers do this, to

confirm whether the hypothesis above is correct – this was the purpose of Question 11. Bloggers were given a free text field to respond to this question, which attracted 61 out of the 64 people that confirmed that they blogged under a pseudonym.

Analysis of the responses provided show that the responses to this question can be broadly classified as falling within four categories of reasons, of which a single respondent may fall into multiple categories. These broad categories of responses that justify the use of a pseudonym for these bloggers are:

1. Work: the blogger's feels that their employment prospects or business interests may be damaged by association with their blogging. Such concerns were the most commonly reported by respondents to this survey, with 29 out of the 60 respondents voicing work concerns in some manner. A sample comment that illustrates this category is: "As the owner of a business which receives some funding from a government department, I need to keep separation between the views of my blog and the operation of my business."

A particular subset of this category are those who use a pseudonym due to not only their concerns about their employment prospects, but also because their position may require them to be neutral and without conflict of interest. Seven of the 29 responses in this category can be further typified in this manner, for example: "The only reason I don't use my real name is that I am about to begin work as a public servant, and do not want to compromise my career opportunities or be perceived as producing biased work."

Indeed, when these responses are cross-tabulated against to Question 39, we can see that there is indeed a degree of variation in these responses, depending upon the

type of organisation that these respondents work for. Table 2D illustrates this comparison.

Table 2D: Use of Pseudonyms Compared with Type of Organisation Political Bloggers Employed By

Type of organisation employed by, or most recently employed by	Self-employed	A private company or business	State or Public agency or enterprise, central or local	A charitable or non-profit organization	Never been in paid employment
All of my blogging is in my own name	38.2%	58.1%	46.4%	23.1%	100.0%
I use a pseudonym, made up name, or other mask of my identity on some or all of my blogging	61.8%	41.9%	53.6%	76.9%	0.0%

This table shows that while indeed the majority of respondents that work for state or public agencies are indeed using pseudonyms, that such behaviour is more common for those that are self-employed or working for charitable or non-profit organisations.

2. Privacy: General concerns about their personal privacy, or that of their family, and the desire not to have their blogging associated with themselves for this reason. This was the second most common category of responses, with 27 of the 60 respondents reporting such concerns via this question. One example of privacy related responses is: "I'd rather the rest of my life wasn't associated with my blogging... I'm not really prepared to be a public figure of any kind - I'm most interested in being part of a community (of bloggers)."

3. Distrust: These respondents indicated that they do not trust some of the readers of their blog not to pursue them in real life as a result of their comments; or that they were concerned about how the Government may respond if they were personally associated with their comments. In many ways, these responses are similar to those that indicated a desire for privacy – however, they have been separated out, as these respondents all indicated some degree of distrust, fear or other concern regarding what would occur if they did not maintain a degree of privacy, as opposed to those above who have indicated a desire to keep their identity private without such distrust. 15 of the 60 respondents provided answers that fall into this category. An example of such a comment is: “Personal safety. One of my co-bloggers posts under his name and has since been the target of smear campaigns, hate mail and threats of violence. It seems some people have issues with others expressing their own opinions.”²⁰⁹
4. Branding: These bloggers utilise a pseudonym because it allows them to build or maintain a brand around their blogging, which they use to increase the profile of their online persona and to attract and maintain readers. 12 of the 60 respondents provided responses that fall into this category. Examples of responses that regard branding are: “Because, like newspaper editorials, the blog takes on a personality of its own that becomes somehow distinct from the author.”²¹⁰

The final question in this section concerns whether these pseudonym using bloggers would change their behaviour if they had to blog under their real name. Once again, respondents

²⁰⁹ Another illustrative example is: “Because left-wing commenters and bloggers have shown themselves to be utterly without principles and will attack the messenger rather than the message, going so far as to hack blogs, attempt to have them shut down and mount DOS attacks against them.”

²¹⁰ Another illustrative example is: “Branding: I've used my alias online since ~1993 and it is an established ‘brand.’”

were provided with an open-ended free text field to respond to this question, which resulted in 60 responses. While the responses to this question are interesting, they are not directly related to the purpose of this study and therefore a discussion of these results has been excluded from this summary for the purposes of brevity.

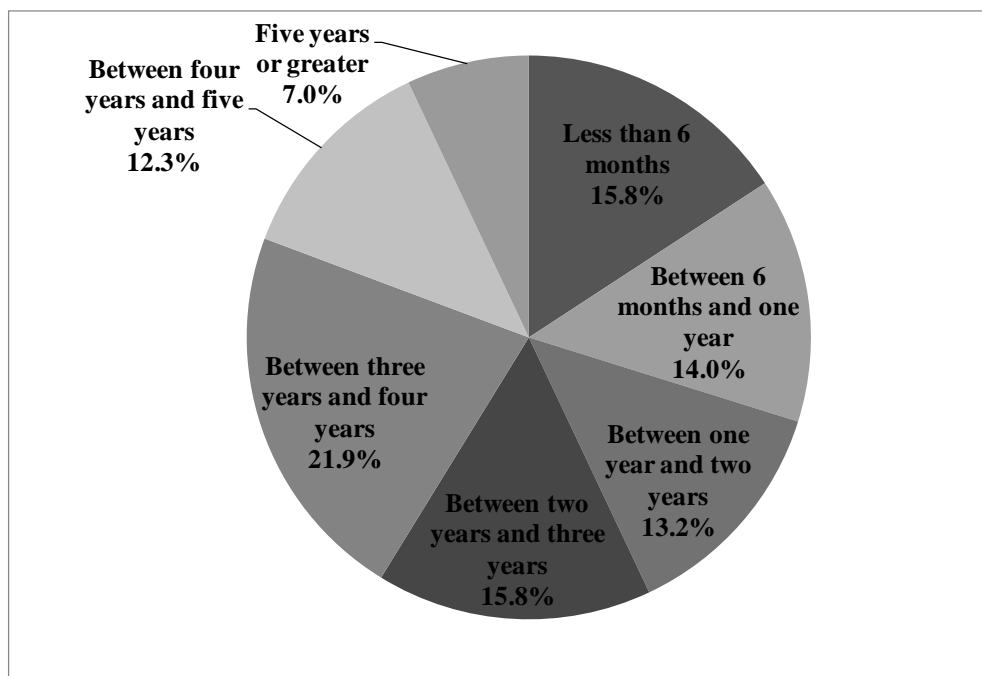
Section Three: Time and Financial Commitment to Political Blogging

This section of the summary of the responses to the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey concerns how much time and financial resources New Zealand political bloggers expend upon their blogs. These questions are useful to understanding the New Zealand political blogosphere because they essentially operate as constraints upon participation from others, and therefore limit to what degree political blogs may be delivering to the model of democratic deliberation established in Chapter One.

Length of Time Blogging

Question 13 of the survey asked respondents how long they had been active as a political blogger. 114 responses were received to this question and they are summarised in Figure 2Q.

Figure 2Q: Length of Time Active as a Political Blogger



What is interesting about these responses is that they indicate that indeed the vast majority of uptake in the medium has happened in the five years prior to June/July 2008, when this

survey was conducted. 93% of the respondents have joined the medium in this timeframe. Beyond that however, these results indicate a relatively steady rate of growth in uptake of the medium rather than any standout period of growth. However, 12 months prior to the survey nearly 30% of respondents had commenced blogging. As Fitzjohn and Salmond note however, blogs do have a tendency to appear and disappear overnight.²¹¹ In this regard, it is conceivable that some of these respondents that have recently commenced activity will quickly drop out of participation as quickly as they began, either through a lack of time to commit to the medium, or due to lack of readership.²¹²

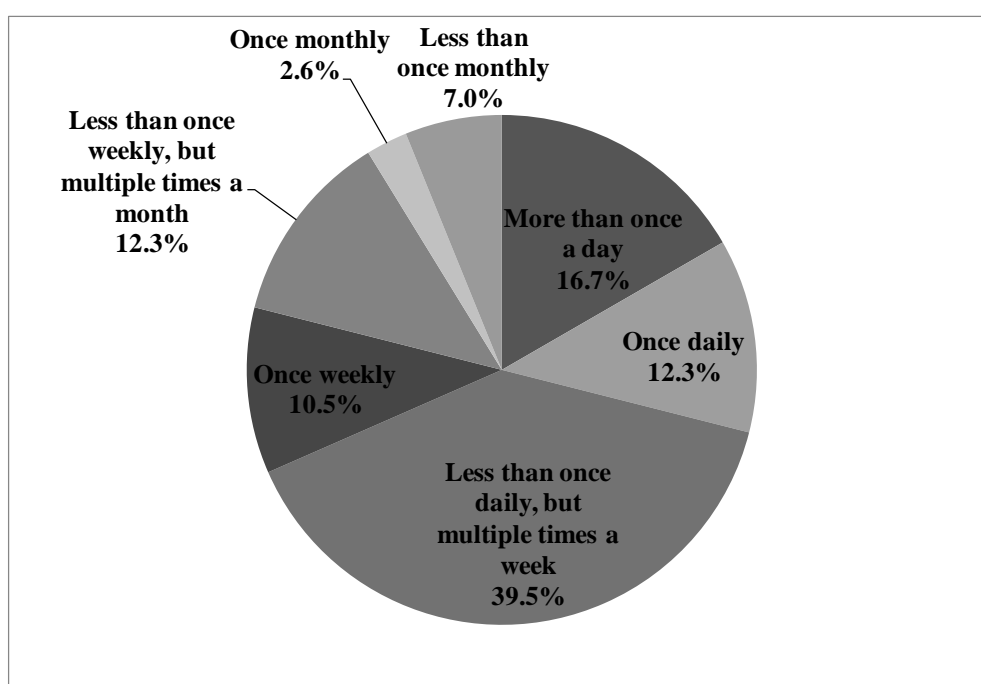
Frequency of Posting

There are two useful dimensions upon which the amount of time that these bloggers devote can be measured. The first measure is how frequently these bloggers update their sites to provide new content for readers, which was the purpose of Question 14. 114 respondents answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 2R.

²¹¹ Fitzjohn and Salmond, “The Battle of the Blog: A Phony War?”, 251-252.

²¹² These were both reasons cited by those respondents who had previously been active as political bloggers but had since ceased blogging, as identified through the responses to Question Three.

Figure 2R: Frequency of Blog Posting



These results clearly show that the majority of respondents update the content on their blog at least once a week, with 79% of respondents selecting one of the four categories within this timeline. Of that, the majority post less than once daily, but multiple times per week, with 39.5% of respondents selecting this category. A significant proportion of these update their blogs more than once per day, with 16.7% of respondents indicating that they update at this frequency.

There also appears to be a relationship between the frequency of updates and the number of readers that these bloggers attract, as provided in the responses to Question 20. This comparison is displayed in Table 2E.

Table 2E: Comparison between the Frequency of Posting and Number of Readers

Frequency of Blog Updates		More than once a day	Once daily	Less than once daily, but multiple times a week	Once weekly	Less than once weekly, but multiple times a month	Once monthly	Less than once monthly – please specify:
Number of Readers	Do not know	11.1%	21.4%	25.0%	16.7%	53.8%	66.7%	28.6%
	None	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Less than 100	5.6%	7.1%	4.5%	16.7%	7.7%	33.3%	0.0%
	Between 100 and 500	5.6%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	15.4%	0.0%	28.6%
	Between 500 and 1,000	5.6%	14.3%	4.5%	8.3%	15.4%	0.0%	14.3%
	Between 1,000 and 5,000	5.6%	35.7%	31.8%	33.3%	7.7%	0.0%	14.3%
	Between 5,000 and 10,000	22.2%	7.1%	6.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Between 10,000 and 20,000	11.1%	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Between 20,000 and 50,000	27.8%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	50,000 or more	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.6%

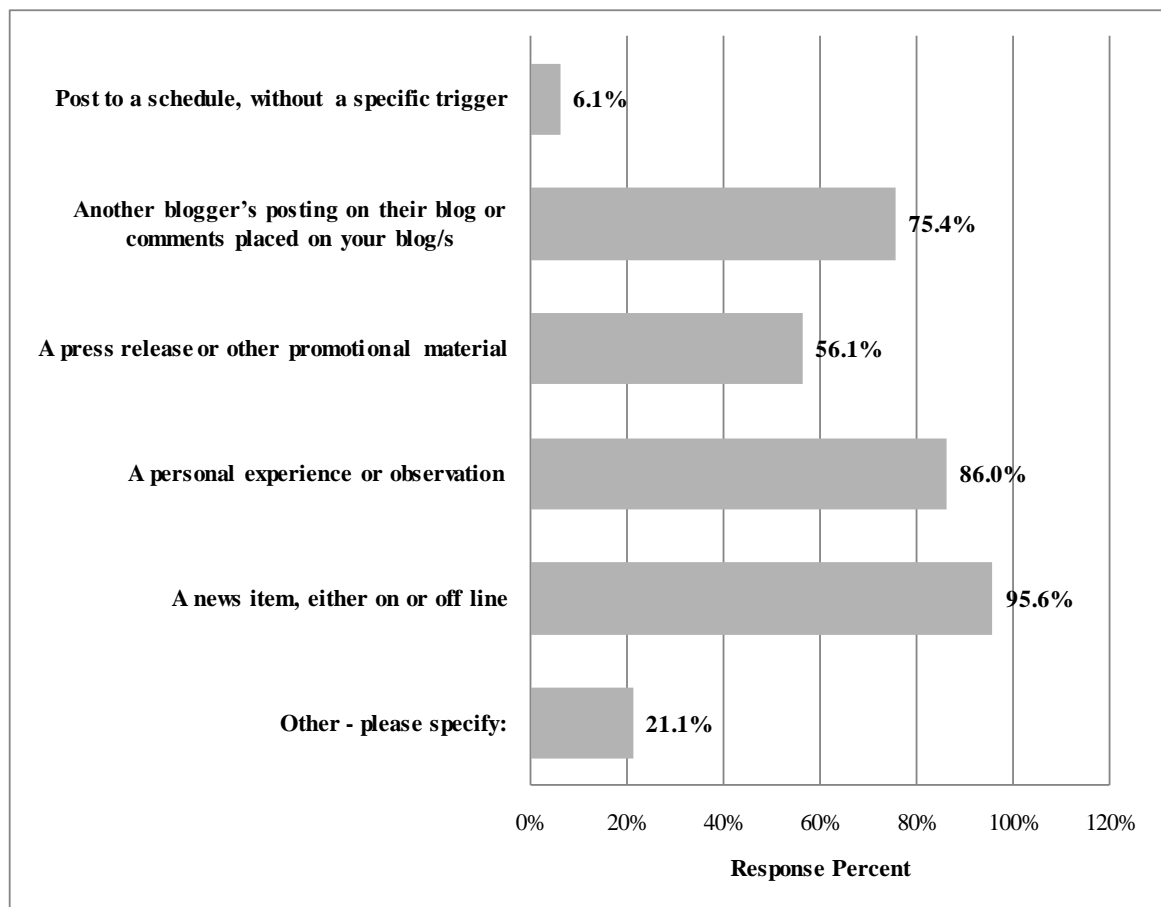
This data certainly shows that the higher readership levels are in part linked to the frequency upon which the author updates their material, as only those bloggers that update at least multiple times per week seem to achieve reader levels of over 5,000.²¹³ This correlation suggests that one of the key causes of higher readership is providing regular and up to date content for those readers to engage with – a logical observation that many bloggers have expressed anecdotally but usefully confirmed by the results of this survey.

Posting Triggers

Question 15 concerned what prompts the respondents to post new content on their blog. 114 respondents answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 2S.

²¹³ Apart from one response, where the respondent indicated that they receive 420,000 unique visitors per month, despite updating less than once a month. This response is due to the nature of this particular site which includes a number of functions, of which a blog is but one component. Therefore, it is unlikely that all of these unique visitors are attracted to the blog content of this site alone.

Figure 2S: Prompts for Posting New Content



As the results clearly show, “a news item, either on or off line” is the most significant trigger for new content. This means that these bloggers must spend a significant period of time reading and analysing the content of the news in order to make comments upon the substance of the story – another time investment that a political blogger must make in order to be successful.

The second most significant trigger for the bloggers that responded to this survey instrument was “a personal experience or observation.” This category was designed to quantify to what degree personal experience and interactions play a part in generating content for political blogs. Little more can be said about this without further insight – but it is at least possible that given that the nature of their blogging is political, that so will these personal experiences that they blog about be of a political nature. The responses to

Question 40 showed that New Zealand political bloggers tend to be highly involved in political activities and highly influential in their communities. It is therefore possible that this high level of personal activity in these traditional activities is encouraging their blogging.

The third most commonly selected prompt for these respondents was that which the blogosphere itself generates, through “another blogger’s posting on their blog, or comments placed on your blog.” This confirms that the New Zealand political blogosphere is highly referential and self-reinforcing – in that other bloggers activity essentially triggers responses that are designed to support or refute the arguments made by others.²¹⁴

Time Commitment per Week

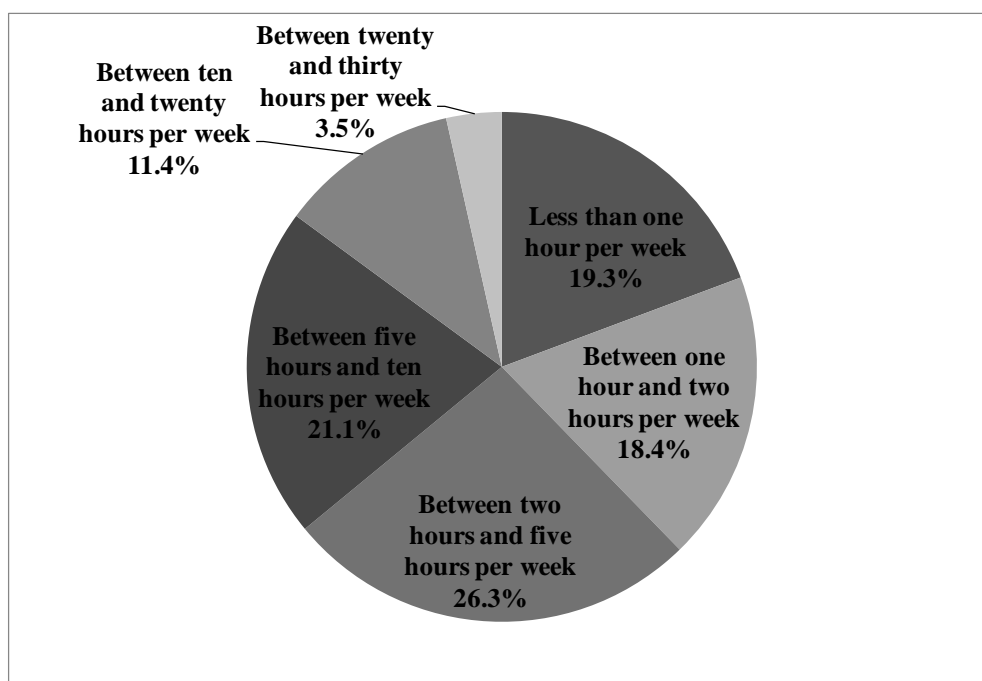
Question 16 of the survey asked respondents to quantify the amount of time that they spent on their blogs per week. 114 respondents answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 2T.

²¹⁴ Respondents were also given the ability to enter free text comments via the use of an “other” field provided with this question. These responses vary greatly, and are difficult to sort into coherent categories of additional triggers. Some of the comments that demonstrate the most commonly expressed sentiments via this free text field are:

“If it makes me angry, or makes me laugh and want to know more, or it's important but people might not recognise its significance - then I will probably post on it. Before I leave the house for the day I will post something to the blog. I am conscious that I ought to post at least one item per day.”

And: “Journal articles. Emailed queries. Deciding to look at something on a whim. Topic monitoring.”

Figure 2T: Amount of Time Spent Blogging



The results to this question essentially confirm that there is little time barrier to participation in political blogging. Evidently, no political bloggers treat their blogging as a full-time occupation in New Zealand.

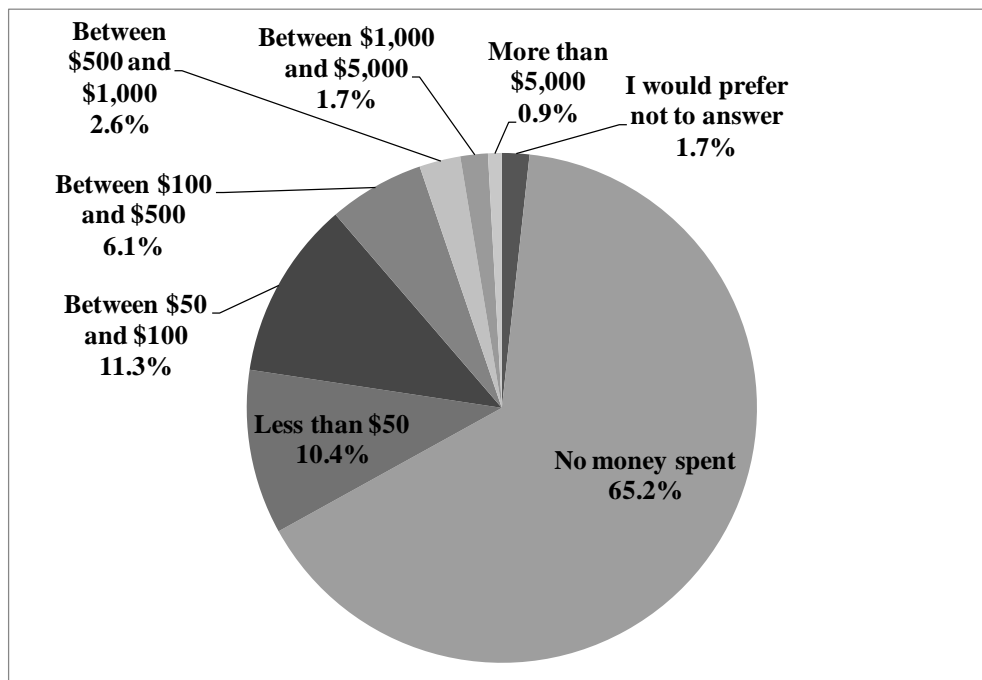
Financial Commitment

Question 17 was designed to understand what level of financial investment political blogging requires. The hypothesis is that the tools to undertake blogging are freely available and accessible; and that therefore, the common blogger should have no need to invest in specific resources to enter the blogosphere. Nevertheless, this study recognises that some of the larger and more popular political blogs invest in their own hosting, unique web addresses, and other infrastructure in order to allow them more control over the look, feel and content of their blog. Examples of this are *Kiwiblog*,²¹⁵ the group of blogs on

²¹⁵ David Farrar “Kiwiblog” <http://www.kiwiblog.co.nz> (accessed 20 June 2009).

Public Address,²¹⁶ *The Standard* ²¹⁷ and *Whale Oil Beef Hooked*.²¹⁸. Therefore, this question is designed to quantify what proportion of the participants in New Zealand political blogging are able to do so without financial cost; and what degree of cost these bloggers are incurring. 115 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2U.

Figure 2U: Amount of Money Spent on Political Blogging



These results show that there is little in the way of financial barriers to participating in the New Zealand political blogosphere.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ “Public Address.” <http://publicaddress.net/> (accessed May 25,2009).

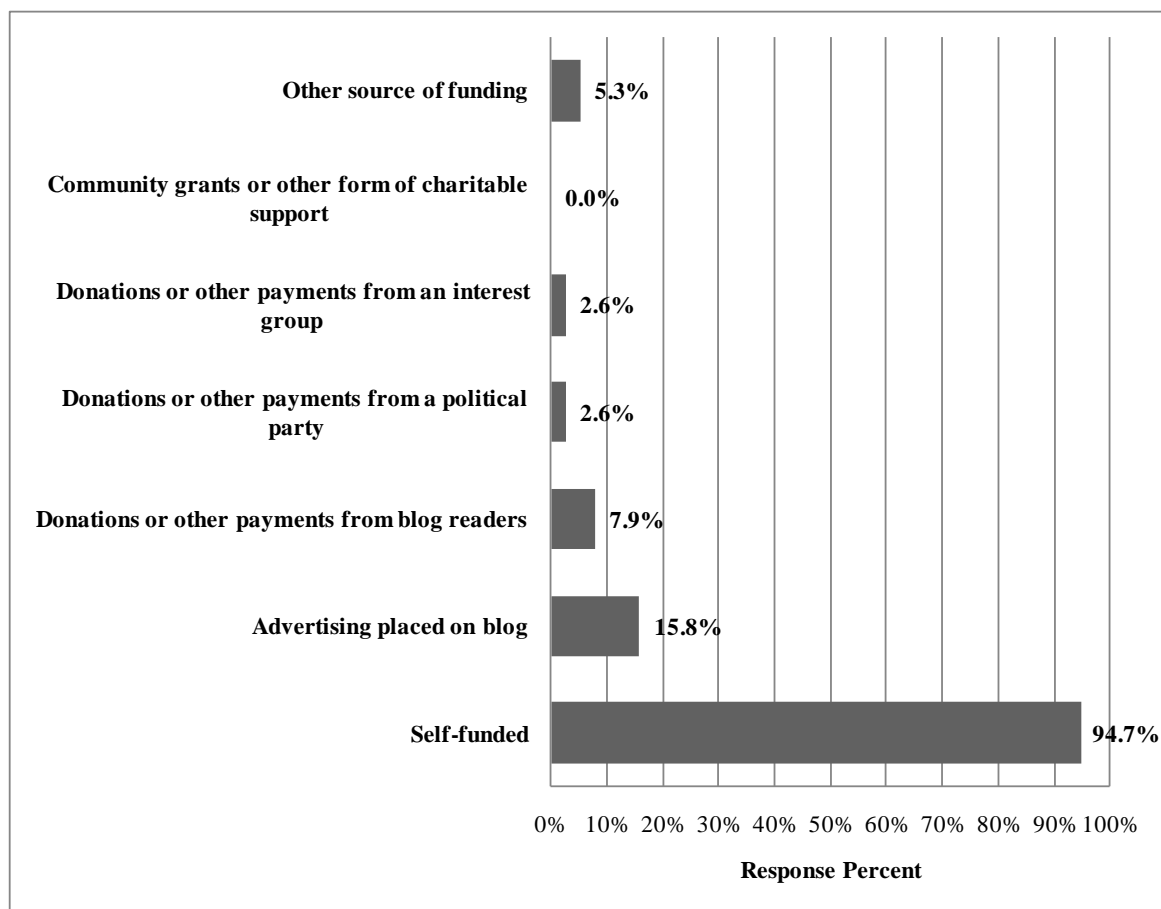
²¹⁷ “The Standard.”

²¹⁸ “Whale Oil Beef Hooked.” <http://whaleoil.blogspot.com/> (accessed May 25, 2009).

²¹⁹ The results also however confirm that there is a small minority of bloggers that have invested very significant amounts in their blogs, with 8.7% of respondents paying between \$100 and \$1,000 on their blogs over the last 12 months; and 2.6% of respondents paying over \$1,000 in the last 12 months. One of these responses appears again to be a special case, whereby the respondent indicated that they had spent approximately \$500,000 on their blogs in the last 12 months. It appears that this respondent is taking into account the total spend across a set of web-properties that they maintain and provide as functionality for

Of course, any discussion about funding also must consider the source of the money. As bloggers arguably have influence over their readers, then it is important to look at the sources of this funding to understand whether any undue influence is being exerted on the editorial control of the blog, which may otherwise skew the blogger's interpretation of different news and events. This was the purpose of Question 18. 38 of the respondents answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 2V.²²⁰

Figure 2V: Sources of Funding for Political Bloggers



other users, as well as facilitating their own blogging effort. Rather than excluding this from the sample, it has been included but highlighted as an outlier.

²²⁰ A low response rate to this question compared against the other questions is logical given the results of the earlier question, whereby 65.2% of respondents indicated that they have no need for any funding, and this question was only displayed to those that answered that they had incurred some degree of cost in Question 17.

Importantly, this shows that the vast majority of those respondents that answered this question have self-funded their blogs, with 94.7% of respondents to this question confirming that the money required for their blog was their own.²²¹ As a follow up, Question 19 asked these respondents whether any conditions were placed on the funding that they received from external sources.²²² Only one respondent indicated that the funding they received was conditional, and those conditions were not such that would influence the content that they produce on their blog.²²³

²²¹ More interesting however was the small proportion of respondents that reveal other sources, including one respondent that confirmed that funding was made available from a political party.

²²² This question is designed to understand whether there is an external influence that is “corrupting” the material available via blogs, in an unwarranted fashion. It is quite one thing to have a blogger portraying their own opinion – but wholly another to have that opinion directly swayed by the funders of that blog.

²²³ The specific response given by this single respondent was “Some donations were to help a possible legal suit by an aggrieved target of my criticisms.”

Section Four: Reader Participation and Engagement

The next section of this summary of responses asked the responding political bloggers a series of questions that seek to quantify how they manage their relationships with the readers of their blogs. These questions concern whether these bloggers track the number of readers that they have; how they attract these readers; whether they allow readers to participate in their blogging by allowing for comments on blog postings; and if comments are allowed, what controls are placed upon such comments.

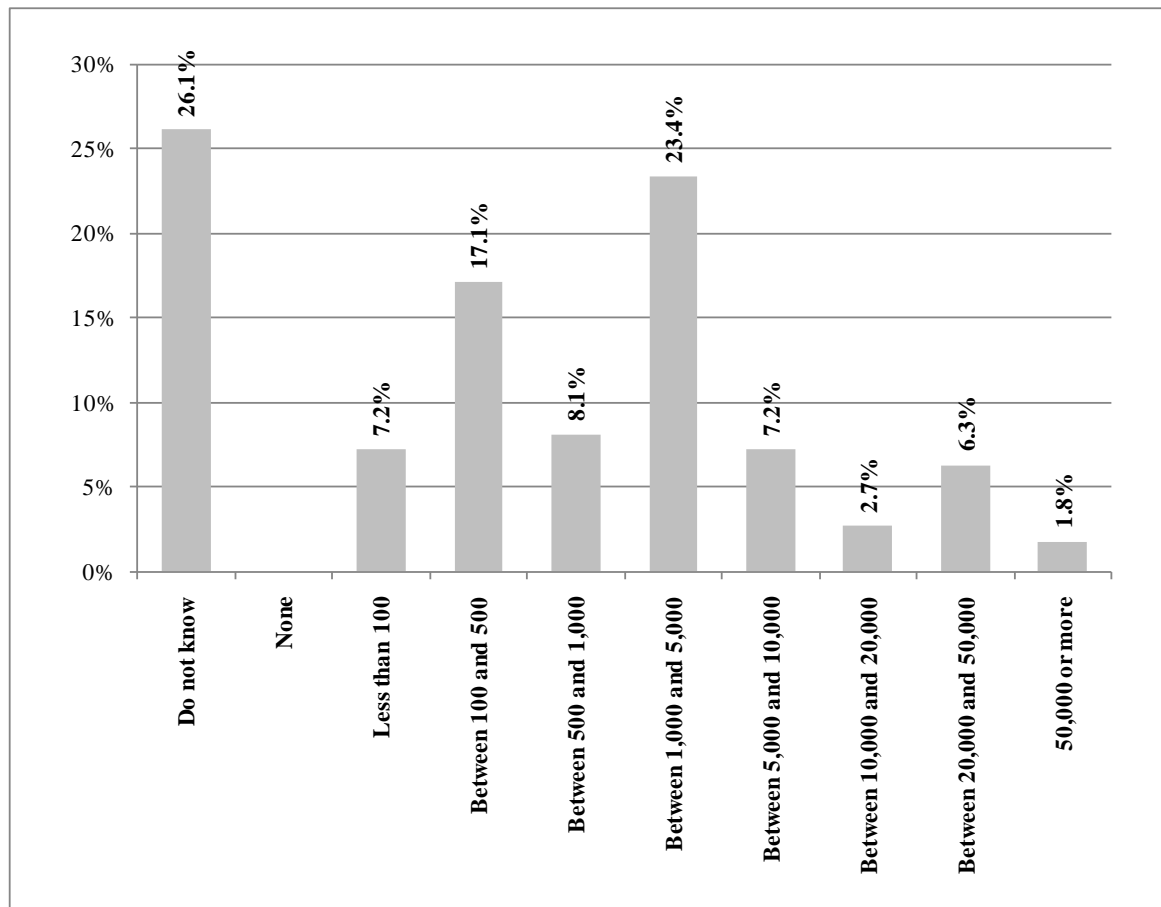
Number of Readers

Question 20 asked respondents to quantify the number of readers their blogs attract.²²⁴ The data provided through this question is primarily useful for performing cross-tabulations. 111 responses were received to this question and they are summarised in Figure 2W.

²²⁴ The question specifically asked respondents to account for the number of readers of their blogs in terms of Unique Visitors. ‘Unique visitors’ is a commonly used term in the internet industry for a statistic describing a unit of traffic to a website, counting each visitor only once in the time frame of the report. The question is designed to ensure that any responses provided are on a similar basis. Other measures of site visitation, such as simple tracking of the total number of site visits which does not accommodate multiple visits from the same user, are likely to produce completely different visitor count numbers.

However, asking for unique visitors also requires a degree of functionality and understanding of web statistics that may not be available to some of the bloggers that responded. In hindsight, this question was not well designed, as the ‘unique visitors’ terminology is not well understood, and it is possible that some of the bloggers who responded to this question would not have visibility of such a statistic for their site, as indicated by the high proportion of “Don’t Know” responses received. Such responses could also be because the blogger concerned genuinely doesn’t know what their readership is, and potentially does not care either. Nevertheless, these results confirm that the majority of political bloggers in New Zealand are not receiving much in the way of traffic, which the Tumeke! New Zealand Blogosphere Statistics also show. However, this data shows that there is a core of bloggers that are reaching relatively significant audience sizes of 5,000 or more: 18% of these responses fall into this category.

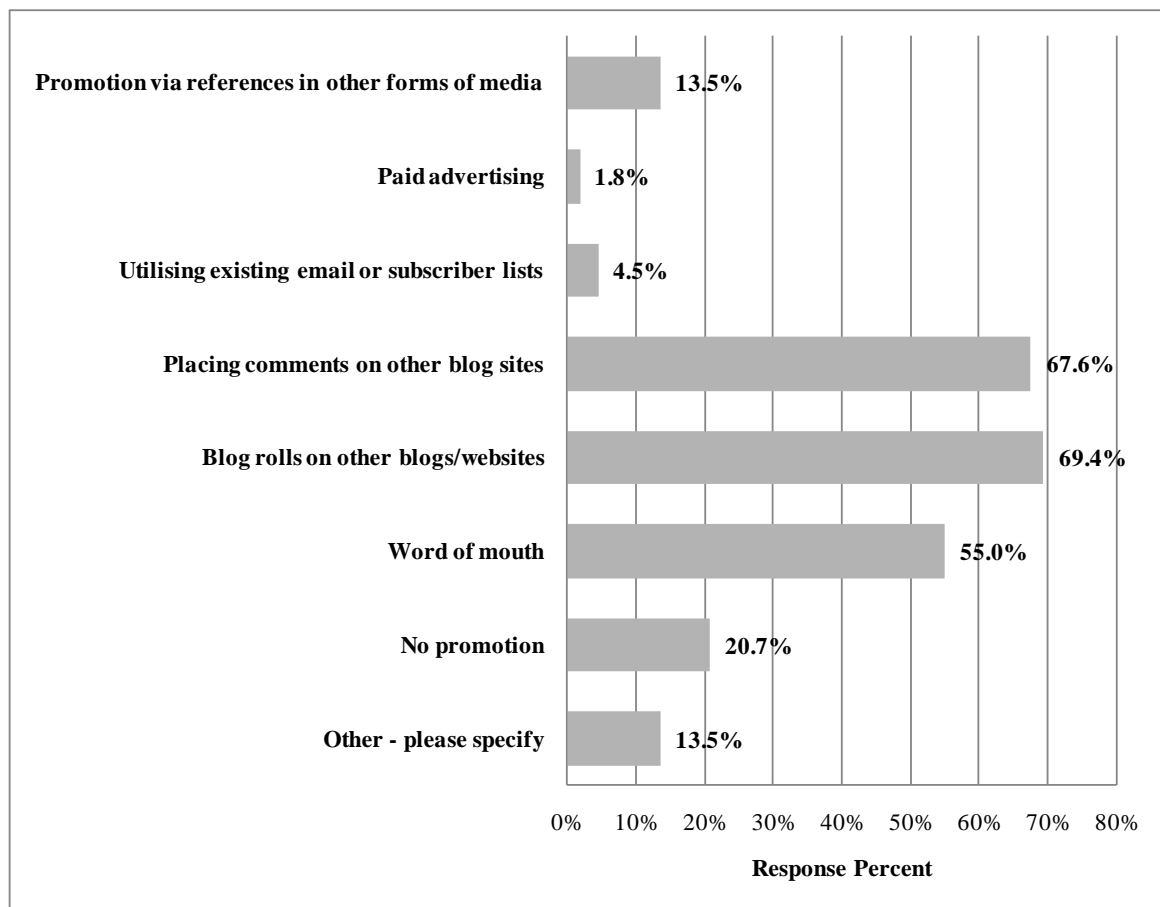
Figure 2W: Number of Readers



Methods of Promotion

Question 21 asked respondents to indicate how they go about promoting their site to potential visitors. 111 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2X.

Figure 2X: Methods Used to Promote Blog



The high number of respondents that use blog rolls to promote their blogs underscores how important the blogosphere is in of itself as the most important promotional tool for these respondents.²²⁵ Closely behind and also closely related are those bloggers that promote their site through commenting on the posts of others. Again, these respondents are utilising one of the common features of the blogosphere to increase the profile of their blogs.²²⁶ The

²²⁵ 'Blog rolls' are lists of other blogs that authors keep on the side of their sites, referring their readers to other authors that they are aware of.

²²⁶ This is usually achieved through bloggers commenting on another site and including the web address of their own blog as part of their comment. The value in this form of referral is that readers get a feel for the tone of the commenter's blog before they visit the site.

other notable aspect of these responses is that the vast majority of participating political bloggers do not use any promotional mediums that require payment, such as advertising.²²⁷

Note also that the majority of the other response categories are referring to a closed microcosm of people that are likely already to be interested in political blogs, meaning that such promotion may risk the “like links to like” factors discussed in Chapter One.²²⁸ This means that it is likely that the audience that such promotional efforts attract is only going to drive a larger share of the audience that is already reading political blogs. Therefore, while this may increase that individual blogger’s reading statistics such promotion is unlikely to drive new audiences to the medium.^{229 230} The conclusion that can be drawn from these results is that promotion within the New Zealand Political Blogosphere is predominantly self-contained within the blogosphere itself, and is unlikely to drive public interest in political blogging as a source of information.

Comments

Question 22 of the survey asked respondents whether they allow the readers of their blogs to place comments on the postings. Establishing to what degree commenting is used within

²²⁷ Arguably, this reticence to use these arguably more effective forms of promotion is likely to be one of the factors that limit the growth of political blog audiences. This is also likely to be a reflection of the fact that the majority of blogging is on a not-for-profit basis, as shown by the responses to Question 17 and 18. It is only logical that a blogger would be reluctant to purchase paid advertising services, when increased visitor traffic is unlikely to generate any additional income for that blogger.

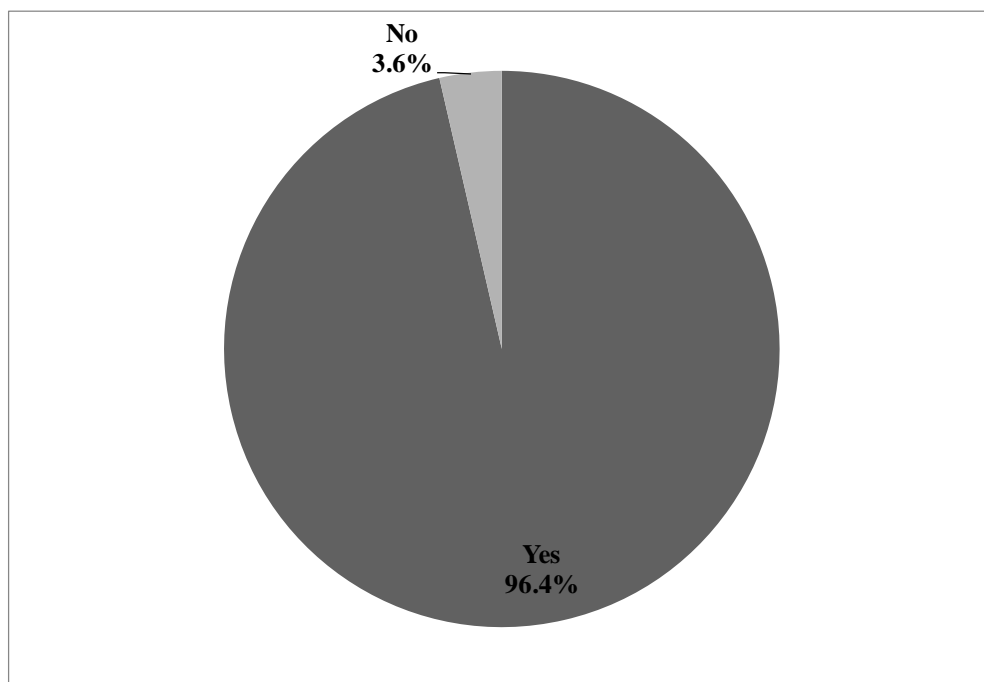
²²⁸ Adamic, “The Social Hyperlink,”234; Hargittai, Gallo and Zehnder, “Mapping the Political Blogosphere: An Analysis of Large-Scale Online Political Discussions,”14.

²²⁹ Norris, *Digital Divide*, 238.

²³⁰ Promotional activities that would drive new audiences are potentially “word of mouth” promotion, as used by 55% of respondents, though this depends on the social circles of these bloggers, and is unlikely to be a method of significantly increasing readership; and promotion via “references in other media”, which is used by only 4.5% of respondents –again, not surprising, as the degree to which this promotion strategy works is wholly dependent upon these media organizations showing interest in and picking up upon a blogger’s content.

the New Zealand political blogosphere is important because this is directly related understanding how political bloggers may be in creating forums for democratic deliberation, and therefore understanding how political bloggers may be delivering against the model established in Chapter One. 111 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 2Y.

Figure 2Y: Use of Comments



These results confirm that 96.4% of bloggers allow their readers to comment upon their posting.²³¹ Of more interest are the 65 free text responses that were also provided, which gave respondents the opportunity to explain why they allow comments to be posted.

By far the most common type of free text explanation expressed by those that allow comments on their blogs was that they do so because they believe in encouraging discussion, in having an open and lively debate with their readers, and in having their ideas tested and challenged to improve both the readers' and the bloggers' understanding of the

²³¹ As such commenting is a standard feature of all major blogging software packages, this is not surprising.

issues. 49 of the 65 responses can be classified in this manner. An example of this sentiment is: “I believe in freedom of expression and constructive dialogue. I am not afraid to argue points with people, and if I get something wrong, I do not mind having this pointed out.”²³²

Other responses indicated a similar sentiment to the desire to build traffic, but in a sense deepened this concept by expressing a desire to build a blogging community. These bloggers want more than just more participants and more viewpoints; these bloggers want to encourage and empower people to take an active role in blogging, and therefore improving the quality and diversity of the content produced. Four of the respondents made comments of this nature, for example: “... A commentless blog is a mouthpiece for one person's views - and that's OK, a matter for personal choice - but the community that develops around an active discussion is an important part of the sort of blog I want to run. It also leads to breaking new stories, ideas for posts, even education.”^{233 234}

On the contrary side of this question, only two of the respondents that do not allow comments on their blogs provided explanations as to why not. One of these comments was: “I had comments for a while. But in the end, I did not want to run a sewer, and I was

²³² Another particularly illustrative response is: “Comments are the lifeblood of a political blog. I view the posting process as merely a facilitation of a wider discussion. It's actually the comments that drive the content of the blog.”

²³³ Another example is: “Part of our blog's mission is to promote discussion and blogging amongst women, so comments are an integral part of this, of building a sense of community.” Note that this comment is particularly interesting given the responses to Question 34 and the wider conclusions about the lack of female participation in the New Zealand political blogosphere.

²³⁴ Other respondents had unique but valuable perspectives as to why they allow comments on their blogs, which highlights their perceptions of the value of the medium. One particular example of this is included below, whereby this respondent explains why they see such comments as a key positive differentiator between blogs and other media types: “... the interactive nature of blogs is part of what separates them from other media.”

unwilling to spend the effort or deal with the recriminations from policing them, so I simply removed the facility.”

The conclusion that can be drawn from these responses is that the vast majority of New Zealand political bloggers allow some sort of commenting function because they believe it enhances the quality of the material produced on the blog, and because the dialogue, debate and discussion that such comments creates produces more lively, interesting and valuable content for readers.

Comment Policies and Subscription

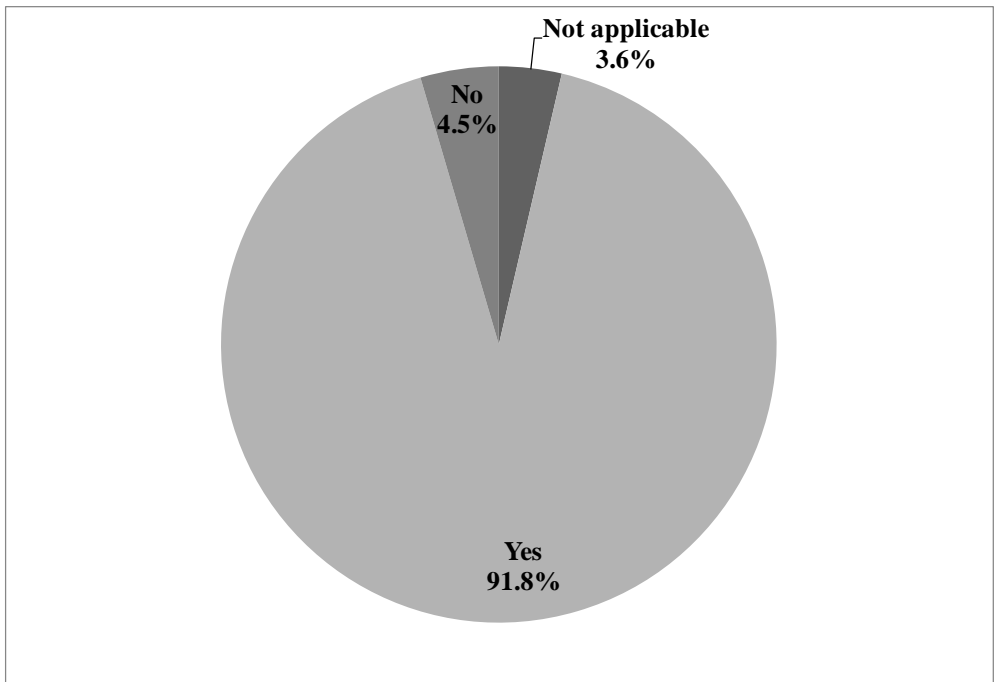
Questions 23 and 25 concerned whether and how the respondents exert controls over the comments upon their blog posts through the use of comment policies or enforced subscription of those readers that wish to place comments. Only 26.6% of respondents used subscription to control the behaviour of those that wish to comment on their blogs; whereas a far higher proportion, 54.5%, used comment policies in order to maintain order and reasonable behaviours.

Responding to Comments

Question 24 related to how these bloggers engage with the reading audience that they attract. The purpose of this question is quite simple –the ability for readers to freely place comments on a blog and engage both the author and other readers in discussions is a key aspect of how political blogs may be delivering to the model of democratic deliberation established in Chapter One. It would also seem logical that bloggers would want to engage with the thoughts of the readers, understand the discussion points, and use this information to synthesise new theories for later debate in a manner that again may encourage public sphere-style interaction between authors and readers.

110 respondents answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 2Z.

Figure 2Z: Responses to Comments



At a high level, these results confirm that the vast majority of New Zealand political bloggers engage with the comments posted by their readers.

Respondents were provided the opportunity to explain their reasons for engaging with their readers in this manner through the free text field that accompanied this Question. 74 free text responses were provided by the survey participants, and these responses can be classified as falling into two broad categories:

1. First are those bloggers who say they respond because they value the commentary of their readers, and engage with this commentary for the purposes of challenging, debating, discussing or otherwise improving the understanding of a particular issue. These bloggers are those who appear to be using these comment fields in line with the hypothesis above – i.e. they are utilising the core strength of the medium to draw in readers and make comments almost as vital as the original posting itself. 44

of the 72 free-text comments received to this question from those who answered “Yes” can be characterised in this manner.²³⁵

2. The second category is those that have indicated a desire only to respond to comments for the purposes of defending the original posting. These bloggers appear to see comments as a by-product of their otherwise one-way blogging experience; akin to a newspaper columnist, who may receive correspondence relating to their content, but who are unlikely to engage because they fundamentally believe that their original posting was inherently correct. 17 of the 72 of the comments provided by those respondents who answered “Yes” appear to fall into this category.²³⁶

These free text comments finally allow the full confirmation of the stated hypothesis – i.e. that the majority of New Zealand political bloggers embrace unique abilities of their chosen medium by using the comment function of their blogs to engage with their readers, to challenge ideas, and to discuss the issues at hand. They are therefore illustrating behaviours that are consistent with the model of democratic deliberation established in Chapter One. Nevertheless, such engagement is not a universal phenomenon, as there is a substantial number, approximately one third of bloggers, who would prefer not to substantively engage with their readers, and instead appear to use their blogs as a vehicle for one-way communication between themselves and readers - that is, they are mimicking the traditional media functions in this regard by clearly delineating between themselves as authors who provide content, and readers who absorb it.

²³⁵ For example: “I usually try to respond, even if it is just to thank someone for their comment. Partly this is about promoting a sense of community, but mostly for me it is a basic part of my drive to blog - to get feedback about my ideas and writing and then engage in discussion about it. I have even had my mind changed once or twice by discussions in comments.”

²³⁶ For example: “To correct comments or assertions made, to defend a position.”

Section Five: Role as a Blogger, and Impact of Blogging

These three questions concern asking the participant political bloggers to discuss how they describe their role as a blogger, and what impact they feel blogging has on political discourse of New Zealand; both now, and how they see that evolving in the future. Gauging these perceptions is useful because it allows for further insight into the motivations as to why these bloggers are engaged in authoring this content, and also gives a unique perspective on how the medium is evolving.

The Role of Political Bloggers

Question 26 asked respondents to describe their role as a political blogger, in terms of influencing public opinions, debate and discussion on political issues. Respondents were provided only a free text field through which to answer this question, and 107 responses were received.

The responses to this question were mixed, and difficult to classify in terms of any meaningful groupings of responses. Nearly half of the respondents, 52 of the 107, expressed an opinion that they thought they were having only a small or marginal degree of influence, without stating what form this influence may be taking. However, two broad classifications are possible of some of the comments. Firstly, 22 of the 107 respondents believed that they were influential in terms of highlighting issues and perspectives that may not have otherwise been noticed or covered, and bringing these to the attention of their readers, the media or the decision makers in Government. For example:

I wouldn't call my blog high-profile, or widely read, but occasionally a post makes an impact - for instance, I posted in February about Trevor Mallard's car having signage that did not comply with the Electoral Finance Act, and this led to an

official complaint by an anti-EFA activist. I also created the "Winston Peters Recession Effect" - where I proved that whenever Winston Peters was a Minister, New Zealand is in recession - as a tongue-in-cheek reaction to a quarter of negative growth three years ago, and this was picked up by larger blogs, and eventually was an article in the Herald on Sunday.²³⁷

The second manner in which these comments may be typified is those that believe that their role is to facilitate debate or to express their opinion on political issues. In this sense, these respondents are not necessarily highlighting how they may be influencing the public in reality, only that they are providing a forum for such discussions should members of the public wish to engage with these topics and discussions. 20 of the comments provided may be summarised in this fashion, for example: "I think I play a role as part of a tight-knit blogging community, developing ideas and discourse and perhaps occasionally enlightening/inspiring thought in others who stumble upon my blog by accident."²³⁸

The Influence of Political Bloggers

The next two questions asked the respondent political bloggers to assess the level of influence that they feel they are having upon political commentary, debate or discussion. Question 27 asked these participants to comment on the current level of influence that they feel they have; whereas Question 28 concerned their opinions on what level of influence

²³⁷ Other examples of this sentiment are: "Had significant influence on media perceptions and handling of 'ethnic' stories, due to period of intensive buy-in from senior editors at the NZ Herald. Also provided a rallying point for the broader 'ethnic' sector in media and the civil service, through which to push a specific diversity agenda." And: "We try to look deeper than most mainstream political analysis, to inform people and to challenge media to do a better job, while providing them with tools to do so."

²³⁸ Another illustrative example of such a comment is: "I want to put my view out there and let others agree or otherwise. I certainly want to stimulate debate and also show that the MSM view of the world is not unipolar..."

blogs may have in the future. 111 people answered both questions, and the results are summarised in Figures 2AA & 2BB.

Figure 2AA: Bloggers Assessment of the Current Impact of the Political Blogosphere

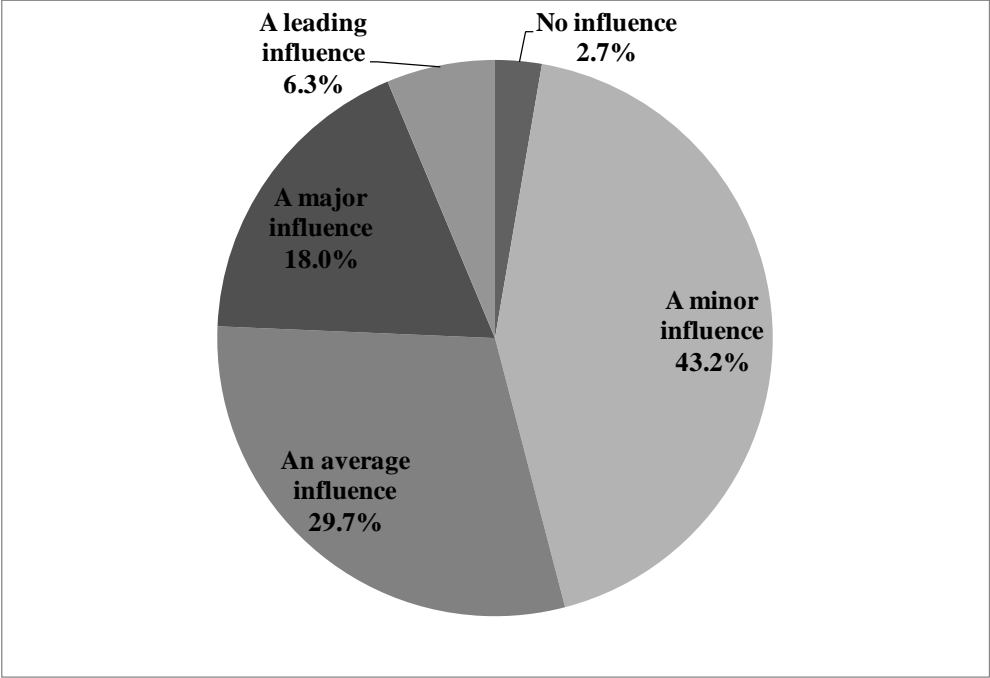
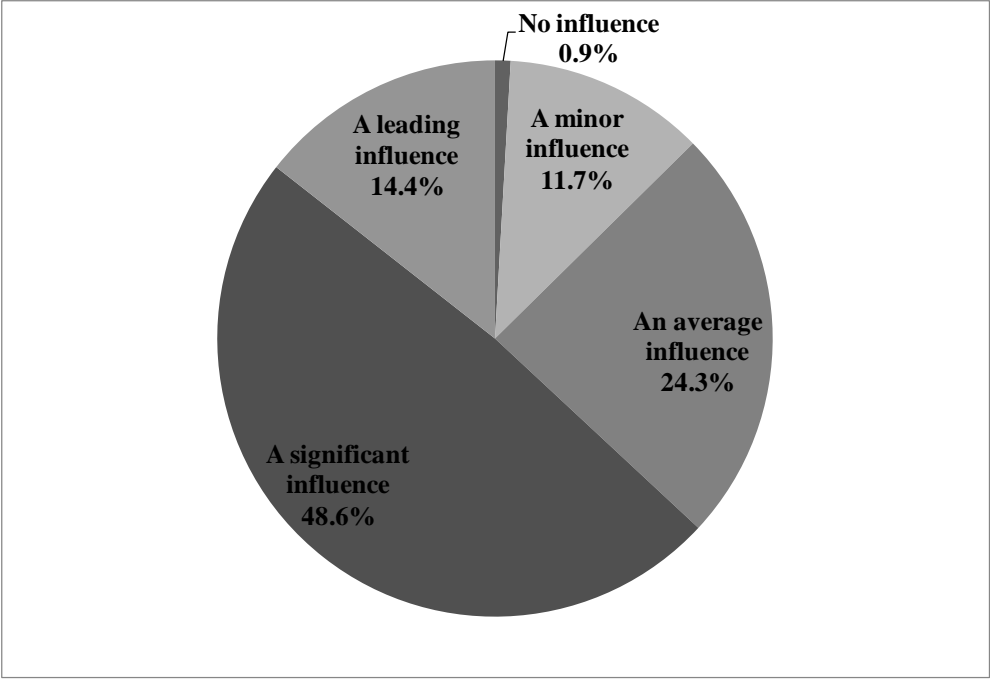


Figure 2BB: Bloggers Assessment of the Future Impact of the Political Blogosphere



The results of these questions are quite clear – the bloggers that participate in this survey clearly believe that the influence that they are currently having upon New Zealand politics is in the range of minor to average; whereas they see this level of influence increasing substantially in the future. The average opinion of these bloggers therefore appears to be that their chosen medium is still in its nascent phases of development, and will turn a corner in terms of influence at some point in the future. More insight into this conclusion can once again be derived from the free text commentary that accompanied this question. 86 respondents provided a further explanation for their response to Question 27 via this method; and 76 respondents to Question 28.

Comments Regarding the Current Impact of Political Blogs

In terms of the responses to Question 27, analysis of the free text comments provided shows:

1. That these bloggers feel that the party most significantly impacted by political blogging in New Zealand is the traditional media, as mentioned by 54 of the 86 respondents. An example of such a comment is:

In terms of how the blogosphere affects the mainstream media - which is its most important impact - is that it makes the mass media political reporters more colloquial in their descriptions, more mocking and more aggressive in their approach to stories. Secondly they can use blogs as sources for raw material. Thirdly, by the media companies pushing the internet it has meant

that mass media political reporters are now blogging themselves which has perhaps elevated blogging by having them on the same platform/genre.²³⁹

2. That blogs are currently influencing the Government, political parties, or other opinion leaders on policy issues, was mentioned by 20 of the 86 respondents. To illustrate this category, an example of such a comment is:

Blogs provide ideas to people who may not have the time to dig into every issue. If you are looking for diverse views on a topic to aid in composing relevant perspectives, using Google to search blogs is a powerful way to "net out" the main perspectives on many issues. Bloggers may have already done the research so that a policy researcher in government or elsewhere can build on that work in the course of doing their own...²⁴⁰

3. That some respondents noted that any impact is only upon the small clique of readers that are already within the blogging community, or those readers that are inclined and interested in involvement in political discussion. These respondents appear to think that the same people who are inclined towards traditional modes of political participation have and will continue to migrate to blogs, whereby they can have in depth and possibly partisan discussions with each other. An example of such a comment is:

²³⁹ Another example is: "Over the last four years blogs have clearly influenced the media pitch on leading stories. The blogosphere is able to react much more quickly in getting a story out there outside the print & TV news deadlines."

²⁴⁰ Another example is: "It's not yet major, but I do think that parties are actively taking the blogosphere into account. Unfortunately, done uncritically, it may mean that they get a distorted picture of the reality of public opinion. Blog commenters, in particular, aren't a representative sample of the population!"

The blog appeals to a minority of vocal and interested people. It does not directly influence the average voter. However, it appears some blogs (not mine) that are widely read do become a source of news and commentary themselves. I believe that those who read blogs usually read blogs that are compatible with their own political view rather than turning to blogs for answers.²⁴¹

4. That relatively few of the respondents feel that political blogging has a direct impact upon the general public. This sentiment was expressed by only nine of the 86 respondents to this question, for example: “It allows the full political view to be shown to the public - rather than short sound bites that do not give even 10% of the picture.”²⁴²

Taken in totality, the average opinion of these respondents is quite clear – they do not feel that they are currently having a significant direct influence on public opinions. However, they do believe that their work is being picked up and used by the opinion and thought leaders that are then able to directly influence public opinion, such as the media and those in the political sphere. This means that these bloggers are confident that they are having some degree of indirect influence on the general public via these intermediaries by instead primarily influencing the elites – the politicians and political analysis, the media and the influencers; those that then have the ability to more directly influence the public.

²⁴¹ Another example is: “I think that most people tend to read blogs they agree with or really disagree with. There is a lot of preaching to the converted going on. The readership levels are high, but I'm not convinced the influence levels are. I also note that, if you look at the political compass results on NoRightTurn, bloggers tend to be quite extreme in their views and so attract readers who like that.”

²⁴² Another example is: “...the value in opinion forming and/or changing is for the people who are undecided and not politically polarized who acquire their information from a number of sources. Possibly about 0.02% of the population. However the blogs are a good source of maintaining information. Other media operate on a sound bite basis and turnover information...”

Comments Regarding the Future Impact of Political Blogs

The second set of free text responses; that is those that are provided by respondents to explain what influence they believe political blogs will have in the future; are best analysed in terms of how the respondent scored that influence. All of the answers provided by respondents that believe that blogs will have “a leading influence” on political commentary, debate or discussion in New Zealand in the future show that these bloggers believe that political blogs will play an ever larger role in either replacing or strongly complementing the role of traditional mainstream media. One example of such a comment is: “Because fewer people are joining political parties and technology is becoming more prominent, blogs will eventually be the primary mode of communication about politics.”²⁴³

These respondents argue that there is a generational shift occurring in terms of how the public wish to view political discourses that will serve to continually erode the role of the traditional mainstream media as the sole commentator and analyst of political news and information. They see a future whereby political blogs have either fully supplanted, or feature strongly beside, mainstream media in terms of providing information to the public on New Zealand politics. The primary drivers of this change, according to these respondents, will be an increasing public desire for more participation in the reporting of and analysis of political news, and a greater desire for them to express their opinions on the issues at hand. There appears to be a strong element of belief in a growing trend towards a participatory model of democracy, where the public is directly involved in commenting on political affairs and therefore supplanting the role of traditional mass media through direct

²⁴³ Another example is: “I believe that blogs will become the central source of information for a large percentage of the population in the future. As the internet’s place in our nation become firmly imprinted the utility of regularly updated blogs will become better known.”

participation, a opinion typified by this respondent: “It can only increase as it is a great expression of participatory democracy.”

Similar sentiments are expressed by those who selected the next category down in the response matrix; that is, those answered that they believe political blogs will be “a significant influence” in the future. Again, this is due to these bloggers’ perception that the mainstream media will be increasingly unable to compete with the always available nature of political blogging, and the sheer multitude of opinions, viewpoints and outlets for expression that the medium offers. An example of this sentiment is:

They can be very influential in informing the public beyond what the traditional (main stream) media picks up on. They are also much more accessible to a wider, newer audience. They seem to be the new incarnation of the Fourth Estate, if/when main stream media is compromised beyond trustworthiness and their classical role in politics as the Fourth Estate.²⁴⁴

Some respondents highlighted the opportunity for a symbiotic relationship to develop between the traditional media and bloggers:

The Internet is slowly taking over political commentary from newspapers, as newspapers can't compete with highly-educated amateurs willing to work for free.

Bloggers also have the advantage of not being bound by editors and deadlines.

²⁴⁴ Other examples are: “... bloggers such as Farrar [author of *Kiwiblog*] will become more influential because not only will their content be absorbed into normal media, they will become the “go-to” people to interview. Think of them as the next generation of Chris Trotters and Colin James.”

And: “The way the MSM works is changing. I think readership is being lost to blogging because the standard of mainstream journalism is being forced down as newsrooms are “rationalised”. There currently seems to be even less investigative writing than ever before. I also wonder if people are interested in the often more colourful writing on blogs and its partisan quality - papers in New Zealand are less obviously slanted towards a particular position on the political spectrum and this is where blogs excel. They're also a way for people to participate in public debate on issues.”

However, newspapers will continue to be the dominant source of the hard news on which bloggers depend. You need money, connections and training to produce good quality hard news.

Other respondents note that the world won't necessarily change markedly – there will still be professional “reporters” or “commentators” on political events; merely that they will use blogs as their medium of choice rather than newspapers, television or radio: ““Stars” are already emerging. People like Russell Brown and David Farrar and Frogblog are read and noted. Blogging is - at this point - about influencing the influencers...the opinion leaders.”²⁴⁵

Those respondents that felt that blogs will only be “an average influence” on New Zealand politics in the future echo similar sentiments to those above, though evidently with less fervour due to the ranking. However, a fair number of the respondents believe that the biggest limitation upon a larger influence of political bloggers the lack of demand within the general public for such a medium. They appear to believe that there is an audience that is underserved in terms of political discourse, and it is to this audience that blogging appeals – but this audience is small:

As more people seek information, debate and commentary from the net, the influence will grow, particularly among opinion makers. However, the broad mass of the population is influenced politically from mainstream media and does not go

²⁴⁵ Another example is: “Blogs will continue to be used and relied upon by political journalists, politicians, academics, etc to obtain information about politics in NZ. They will increasingly play an important role in covering politics and elections - possibly doing the job better than the mainstream media.”

out seeking political news - this is something most political bloggers don't quite get, most people don't want politics every day.²⁴⁶

Other participants in this category note their perceptions of the lack of professionalism, balance and integrity as being the biggest limitations upon having a larger influence, for example: “Intelligent, informed and readable blogging takes a fair amount of discipline to such an extent that the best bloggers are likely to be those that do this sort of thing for money. One can blog without being intelligent, informed or readable but the influence is likely to be diminished.”²⁴⁷

Finally, there are those respondents that believed that political blogs would have only a minor influence in the future. These participants express the opposite sentiment to those that believe blogs will be a significant or major influence in New Zealand – that is, they believe that political blogs will not achieve significant levels of participation, and will remain a niche option for those with a high level of political interest. An example of this sentiment is: “Most blogs are read only by other bloggers, and people who enjoy politics, which I think is only a small proportion of the population. Most people really don't care much about politics except for voting every three years.”

How can the responses to these questions best be summarised? Clearly, the majority of participants believe that political blogging in New Zealand is not currently a large influence on political debate and commentary. The most positive participants tended to note the impact that blogging is having on mainstream media, in terms of shaping political

²⁴⁶ Another example is: “As with most net-based things, there is a tendency to overhype their impact, while blogs are read by a small group of those 'in-the-know' they are yet to have the mainstream everyday-person impact a newspaper or TV news has.”

²⁴⁷ A further example is: “I'm always going to be a little sceptical of blogs and blogging when it comes to influencing debate as there is no accountability and it's quite difficult to ensure a blogger's credentials.”

news prior to its emergence via traditional media channels, or ‘showing up’ traditional media through doing a better job of political reporting. Others have noted the impact that blogs are having on the elites within New Zealand society, particularly in the political arena, in providing them with another source of information upon which to base policies and proposals. On the other hand, participants noted that blogging is having only a marginal impact upon public opinions directly, and that the medium is dominated by a niche of people that are already high participants in the political process.

It is also clear that the majority of participants believe that the influence of blogging will increase. Those that articulate this position most strongly believe so because they see traditional media as being increasingly unable to compete with political blogging in terms of speed, accuracy, integrity and appeal to readers. Other, less strident, participants note that a symbiotic relationship is likely to develop as blogs supplant some, but not all, of the functions of traditional mass media; and that while the leaders of the blogging world may become the leading commentators of tomorrow, this will simply duplicate the model that currently exists into a different medium. These more positive sentiments are tempered by the smaller number of participants that believe blogging will remain in a niche of participation, and will never reach higher levels of influence due to low levels of direct public participation and a lack of professionalism, standards and balance.

Blogs as an Alternative or Complement to Traditional Media

The final substantive question in the New Zealand Political Bloggers’ Survey asked participants whether they see political blogs as an alternative or a complement to traditional forms of political commentary that exist via the mainstream media. Participants were provided with a free-text comment field through which to answer this question, and 109 bloggers did so.

Over half of these responses (58 of the 109) were provided by respondents who felt that the medium was complementary to traditional media sources. A number of themes were recognised highlighted by an analysis of the responses that they provided. Firstly, that the blogosphere is in an essentially symbiotic relationship with traditional media outlets whereby these outlets provide the news content that the bloggers may then use as the basis of their analysis and commentary, which blogs will continue to excel at. An example of this sentiment is: “I think blogs are a complement to other media. I would assume that most bloggers don't have the resources to research news stories, but can offer commentaries which might enhance readers' understandings of current events.”

Secondly, other respondents that saw a complementary future for blogs and traditional media emphasised the community and audience involvement characteristics of the blogosphere as its main attraction and point of difference:

Blogs will never fully replace newspapers or television, as they're designed to work differently. Television is a passive medium, and blogs require at least some interaction to view the whole post. Newspapers likewise can be carried around with you and accessed outside of the home or office, even on the train or bus, so they have a distinct advantage there. That said, I do see online news sites either dying off or converting themselves into a more blog-like format in the future. Static self-serve online news isn't a long-term solution on the internet.

A far smaller proportion of respondents saw the blogosphere developing as an alternative to traditional media, with only 11 of the 109 responses providing this sentiment. The majority of these appear to be focussing on their personal experience of news consumption, rather than on wider trends. Many of these respondents argue that blogs are far better at

providing insightful commentary on events, rather than just the factual reporting that major news outlets offer:

Yes - they're an alternative. They're more opinionated, freer to be able to run a particular line or idea, they can take a strong position on the political spectrum and seem to generate public participation and commenting communities in a way that online news doesn't. I notice that online news sites are fairly limited in what topics and discussion they can allow and encourage - most probably because of the need to attract the greatest readership - and it's often more highly moderated.

And finally, 16 of the respondents believed that blogs would be both a complement and alternative to traditional news sources. These respondents appear to see the potential of the medium, but are still waiting to see just how it continues to develop:

Both. Just as politicians and the MSM need each other, blogs and traditional political commentary have a symbiotic relationship. This will develop in future, as political blogs take more of role in creating the news instead of opining on it. David Farrar's Electoral Commission letter regarding the EPMU third party status is a case in point. Political blogs act as a moderate alternative to MSM commentary at present, but this is also changing. As user-generated content gains sophistication, blogs will compete directly with the MSM on many fronts. Satire in particular will give editorial cartoonists and opinion writers a run for their money.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to summarise the key findings of the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey. Unique insights have been derived from their responses into the demography of New Zealand political bloggers and their methods and motivations for being active in the New Zealand political blogosphere. Information has also been provided about how these bloggers interact and engage with their readers, and how they feel they are influencing political discourses in New Zealand.

Chapter Three

Results of the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey

Analysis of the responses provided to the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey is divided into the following sections:

- **Demography of New Zealand Political Blog Readers:** As with the demographic section of the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey discussed in Chapter Two, this section of results seeks to provide insights into the makeup of the audience of political blogs in New Zealand, and therefore to understand who is participating in the medium.
- **Participation in Political Blogging:** This section of questions concern how much time these readers spend consuming the information provided by political blogs; why they are attracted to reading information on political blogs, and which particular blogs they tend to frequent; and also looks to understand what proportion of New Zealand blog readers go beyond passive consumption of blog material through participating in the discussion via comments.
- **Comparisons against Other Forms of Media:** The questions in this section asked the respondents to compare political blogs against the other, more traditional forms of media in terms of relative accuracy, trustworthiness, entertainment value, usefulness, quality of analysis and breadth and depth of analysis. The final question in this section asked respondents whether they feel that political blogs are viable alternatives to these traditional media types.

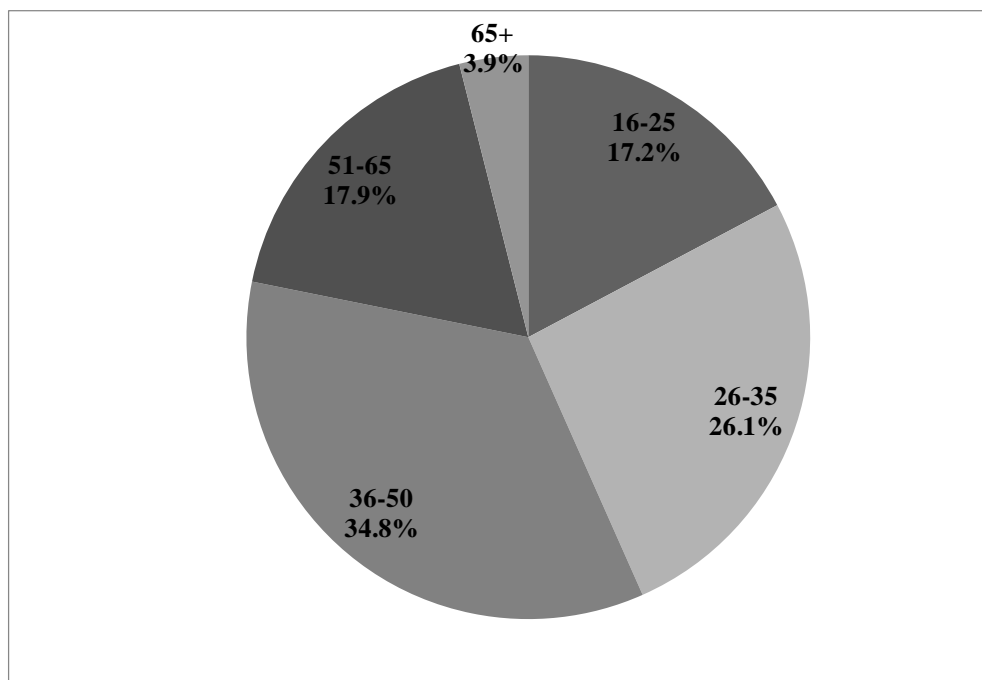
Section One: Demography of New Zealand Political Blog Readers

Once again, the purpose of this section is to collect and analyse the demography of the audience for New Zealand political blogs. This will allow for comparison against the general population of New Zealand, as well as against the results of the other similar studies discussed in Chapter One. Note that these demographic questions are numbered 18-25 in that they were the last to be asked in the course of the survey.

Age

Question 18 invited respondents to provide their current age. 609 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3A.

Figure 3A: Age of Political Blog Readers



The results of this question showed a similar set of results to those supplied via the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey, discussed in Chapter Two. As with those results, the largest group of respondents in the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey are those aged between 36 and 50 – again, an intriguing result considering the *Born Digital*

argument also outlined in Chapter Two.²⁴⁸ More intriguing than this single result however is that the majority, 56.6% of participants in this survey, were aged 36 and older (36-50 years old = 34.8%, 51-65 years old = 17.9%, 65+ years old = 3.9%). When considered in tandem with the responses given to the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey, as illustrated in Figure 2A, the *Born Digital* hypothesis of explaining participation is again challenged. Not only are New Zealand political bloggers older than anticipated; but their readers are older still – the expected lower levels of participation due to unfamiliarity with web-based technology, as explained by the *Digital Natives* hypothesis, is absent.

When considered in comparison to the general news consumption habits of those aged 36 and over, it is reasonable to assume that the *Digital Natives* hypothesis was misplaced with regard to blog readers. Reading material placed on a blog is little different to reading material placed on standard news websites – stories are posted and sorted via hyperlinks; chronologically presented; and made available via a computer terminal. This is markedly different from bloggers themselves, who require some degree of technological familiarity in order to utilise even the simplified tool set that modern blogging software requires. It is therefore reasonable to expect that the reader demographics of political blogs would correspond to the reader demographics of sites such as Fairfax New Zealand's news website, www.stuff.co.nz²⁴⁹ – and indeed they do, in that over half of the users of this website are aged over 40.²⁵⁰ This comparison strongly suggests that there is no real technological impediment to consuming news via the internet; and that therefore the

²⁴⁸ Palfrey and Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*, 1.

²⁴⁹ "Stuff.co.nz" <http://www.stuff.co.nz/> (accessed May 17, 2009).

²⁵⁰ Stuff.co.nz. "Spoilt for Choice - Site Demographics, Stuff.co.nz." *Stuff*. April 2009. http://file.stuff.co.nz/stuff/advertise-online/media_kit.pdf (accessed May 17, 2009).

Digital Natives hypothesis, which anticipated a skewing of political blog reader participation towards those aged less than 35, is incorrect.

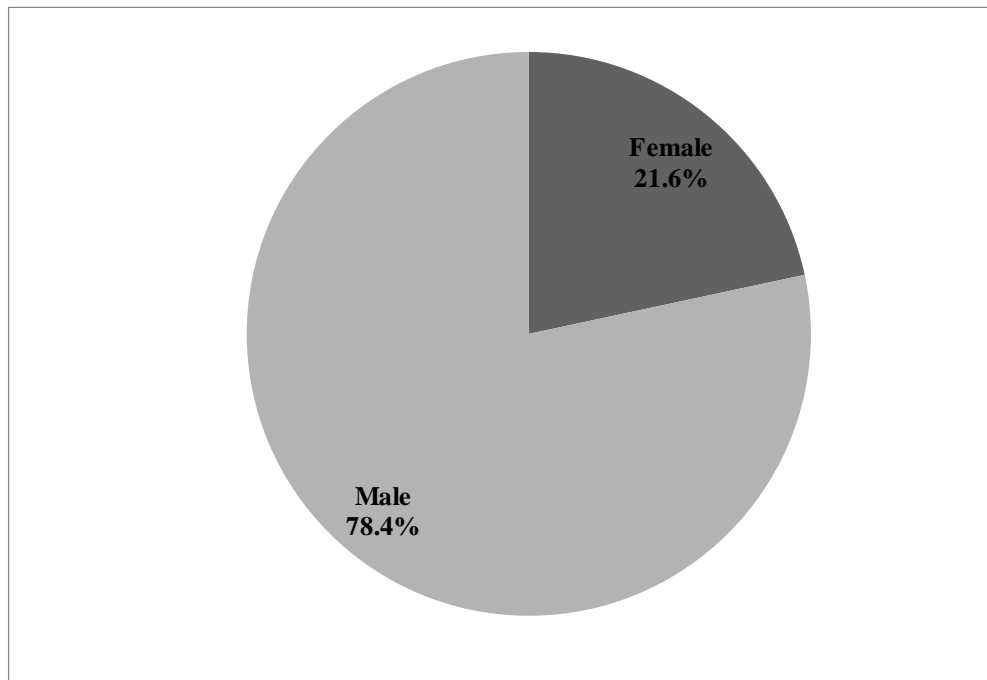
While this hypothesis is rejected, this does not provide an explanation as to why the age of respondents is slanted towards older participants. Without a technological impediment to political participation, it is logical to believe that the participation in blogging would correspond to the higher levels of interest in political events, and involvement via traditional modes of participation, that is observed in those people aged in the 36 plus age brackets.²⁵¹ In this regard, the responses to this question are merely conforming to what would otherwise be expected – older people are more interested and engaged in political discussion; younger people less so.

Gender

With Question 18, blog readers were asked whether they were male or female. 610 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3B.

²⁵¹ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix*, 89-90.

Figure 3B: Gender of Political Blog Readers



These results are very similar to the results seen in the bloggers' survey, in that they also show that usage of the blogosphere is dominated by males over females. This confirms and extends the hypothesis stated in Chapter Two, in that women are not only underrepresented in terms of authoring the content of New Zealand political blogs, but even more so in consuming this content as well – indeed, the New Zealand blogosphere seems to be dominated by 'blokes talking to blokes.'

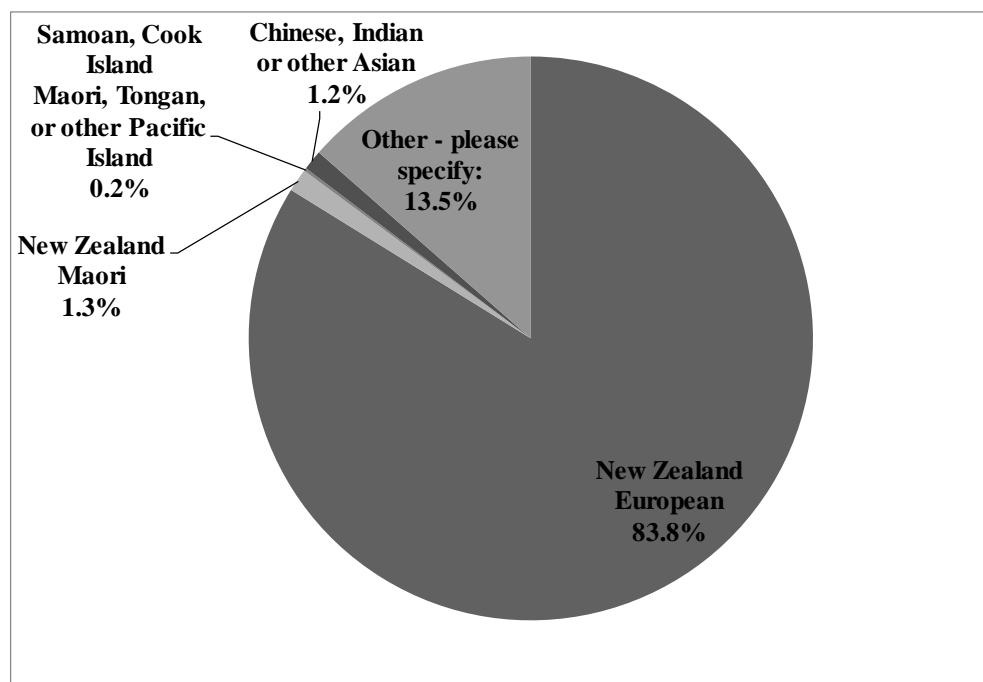
These results also strongly correspond with the results of Graf's survey into the audience for political blogs in the United States, which similarly showed that females tend to be outweighed three-to-one as readers of American political blogs.²⁵²

Ethnicity

²⁵² Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership," 4.

Question 19 was designed to understand the ethnic makeup of the political blog reading community of New Zealand. 606 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3C.

Figure 3C: Ethnicity of Political Blog Readers



Again, these results confirm the trends seen in the bloggers' survey, though with some important divergences. Again, blog readers predominantly respond as being New Zealand Europeans, but to an even higher degree than the levels shown in the bloggers' survey. Nearly 84% of readers identify as New Zealand Europeans, which is starkly different to the standard population mix of New Zealand.²⁵³ Of course, the higher percentage of respondents in this category logically means that there is a lower level in the other ethnic groupings, with again the responses showing distinctly lower levels of participation from

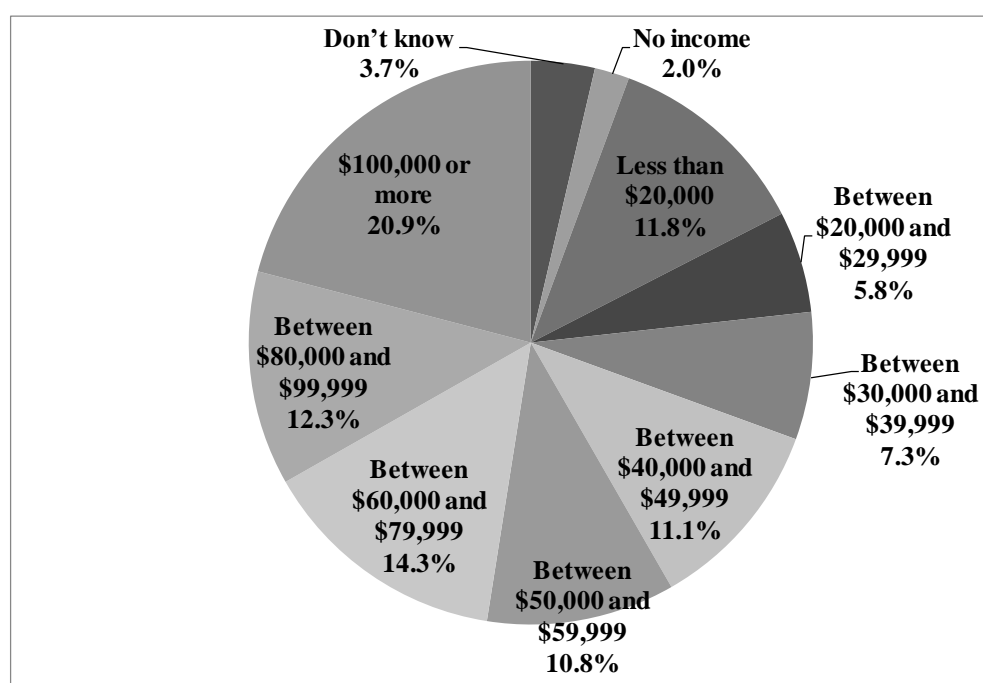
²⁵³ Statistics New Zealand. "Tables: QuickStats About Culture and Identity." <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/F1A5AEF5-198F-4F42-8B86-51419FBA82E3/26468/2006CensusQSCI.xls> (accessed May 21, 2009).

Maori, Pacific and Asian peoples but to an even greater degree than seen in the bloggers' survey – in this survey less than 3% of respondents are seen across these three ethnicities.

Personal Income

In Question 20 of the survey, blog readers were asked what their total personal income was in the last 12 months, before tax. 602 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3D.

Figure 3D: Personal Income of Political Blog Readers



Again these responses are similar to the responses to the bloggers' survey, in that there are a very high proportion of responses in the higher income brackets, and an income distribution that differs markedly from the New Zealand norm. If anything, these responses indicate that New Zealand political blog readers are likely to earn more than those that write political blogs, with only 23.3% of blog readers earning under \$30,000 per year, as opposed to 34.4% of the blogging respondents. This comparison is displayed in Table 3A.

Table 3A: Comparison of Blog Reader and Blogger Incomes

	Blog Readers	Bloggers
No Income	3.7%	5.7%
Don't Know	2.0%	1.9%
Less than \$20,000	11.8%	23.8%
Between \$20,000 and \$29,999	5.8%	2.9%
Between \$30,000 and \$39,999	7.3%	5.7%
Between \$40,000 and \$49,999	11.1%	9.5%
Between \$50,000 and \$59,999	10.8%	8.6%
Between \$60,000 and \$79,999	14.3%	11.4%
Between \$80,000 and \$99,999	12.3%	7.6%
\$100,000 or more	20.9%	22.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

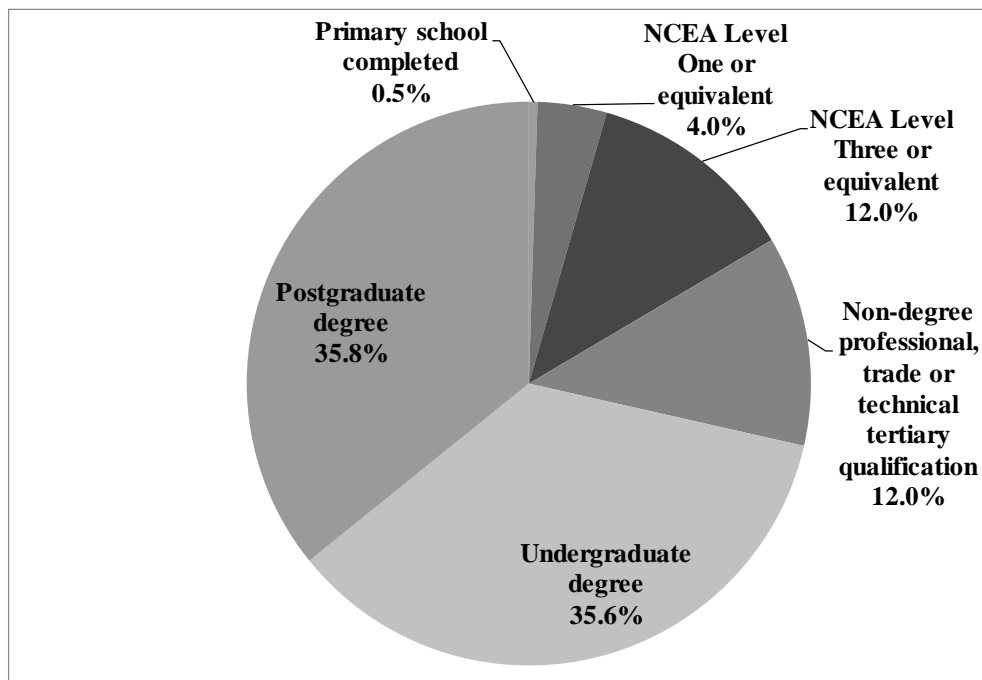
Once again, we see the high proportion of respondents that reported earnings of over \$100,000 in the 12 months prior to this survey being conducted, compared to the 4% of the general population that reported incomes of this level in the 2006 Census. This also means that at least 76.7% of blog readers are earning incomes that are over the annualised average weekly wage of all New Zealanders, which was assessed by Statistics New Zealand to be \$27,924 in June 2008.²⁵⁴

Formal Education

Question 21 asked participants to provide information regarding the highest level of formal qualification that the respondent had obtained at the time of the survey. 606 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3E.

²⁵⁴ Statistics New Zealand. "New Zealand Income Survey: June 2008 Quarter." <http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/hot-off-the-press/nz-income-survey/nz-income-survey-jun08qtr-hotp-revised.htm> (accessed May 21, 2008).

Figure 3E: Highest Level of Formal Qualification of Political Blog Readers



Yet again the responses strongly correspond to those seen in the bloggers' survey – very high levels of tertiary education are reported amongst readers;²⁵⁵ with a very low number of respondents answering that their highest qualification was of secondary school level or lower (less than 5% with a qualification less than University Bursary or its equivalents). The same comparisons performed in Chapter Two are again valid here – only 2.4% of the general New Zealand population have post-graduate qualification compared to 35.8% of political blog readers; and 35.6% of blog readers have undergraduate qualifications, compared to 10% of the general New Zealand population.²⁵⁶

This therefore confirms that not only are New Zealand blog authors predominantly highly educated, but so are their readers. Further conclusions are possible in that such a predominance of highly educated people within a community may be a factor in limiting

²⁵⁵ 83.4% across both post-graduate and undergraduate degrees and trade or technical qualifications.

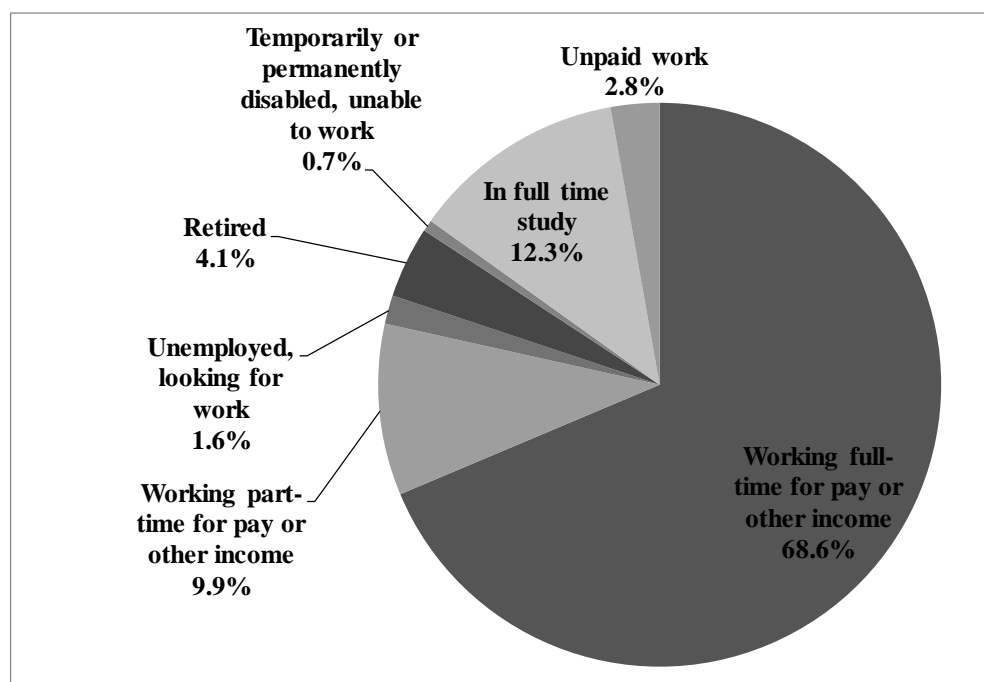
²⁵⁶ Statistics New Zealand. "Tables: QuickStats About Education and Training." <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/A2B94E09-4821-4557-9D99-8CCE8C28F2E7/37468/QuickStatsAboutEducation1.xls> (accessed May 22, 2009).

participation for those that do not have the same levels of education, as the material that is prepared and discussed may be too ‘intellectual’ for those with lesser levels of education. Whether those with lower levels of education have attempted to participate in blogging, but have found the material too inaccessible; or whether they have not ever engaged with blogging before due to either a lack of interest in the material, is unknown.

Occupation

Question 22 concerned what the current employment status was of the respondents at the time of the survey. 609 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3F.

Figure 3F: Current Employment Status of Political Blog Readers



These results in of themselves are not necessarily distinctive. However what is worthy of note is the proportion of respondents engaged in full-time study which at 12.3% of respondents is significantly less than that reported in Chapter Two with regard to New Zealand political bloggers, which was 21.3%. This may be explainable with reference to

two factors. 92% of those respondents to the blog readers survey that are engaged in full-time study fall into either the 16-25 year old age bracket (71%), or the 26-35 age bracket (21%). This compares to the 87% of the respondents to the bloggers' survey that are engaged in full-time tertiary study that fall into these age brackets (16-25 = 74%, 26-35 = 13%). This means that these two age groups explain the vast majority of any deviation in terms of these two populations. The first factor to therefore note is that the proportion of 16-25 year olds is significantly lower with regard to blog readers than it is to bloggers, with 17.2% of the former and 24.1% of the latter falling into these age brackets. This explains part of the deviation in the total proportion of those engaged in full-time study between the two populations. However, this is further exacerbated by the fact that a significantly lesser proportion of blog readers within these two age groups are engaged in tertiary study in comparison to bloggers within the same age ranges. This comparison is displayed in Table 3B.

Table 3B: Comparison of 16-35 Blog Readers' and Bloggers' Occupations

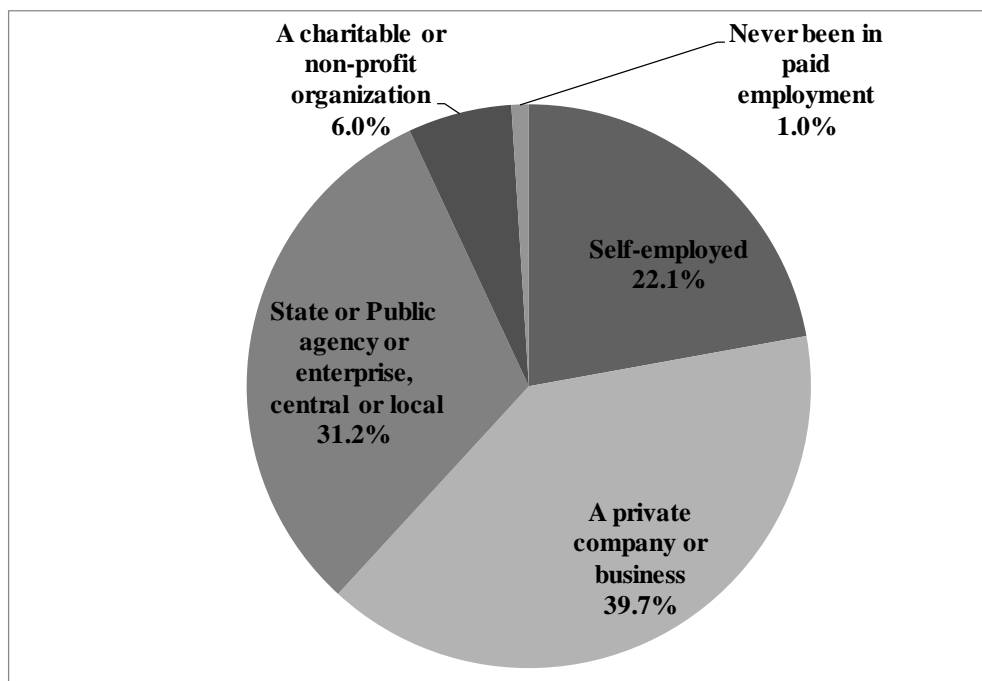
Current Occupation	16-25 Year Olds		26-35 Year Olds	
	Blog Readers	Bloggers	Blog Readers	Bloggers
Working full-time for pay or other income (32 hours or more a week)	38.1%	19.2%	79.2%	65.3%
	40	5	126	15
Working part-time for pay or other income (less than 32 hours a week)	9.5%	7.7%	6.3%	8.7%
	10	2	10	2
Unemployed, looking for work	1.9%	3.8%	1.3%	4.3%
	2	1	2	1
Retired	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%
	0	0	1	0
Temporarily or permanently disabled, unable to work	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%
	0	1	0	0
In full time study at a School, Polytechnic, University or other educational institution	50.5%	65.5%	10.1%	13.0%
	53	17	16	3
Unpaid work, either within or outside of the home	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	8.7%
	0	0	4	2
TOTAL RESPONSES	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	105	26	159	23

Here we can see that only 50.5% of the 16-25 year old blog readers are currently engaged in full-time study, compared to 65.5% of bloggers in the same age range. A similar lesser proportion is observable for those aged 26-35 between the two respondent groups.

Employer

With Question 23 of the survey, blog readers were asked what type of organisation they currently work for. 605 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3G.

Figure 3G: Type of Employer of Political Blog Readers



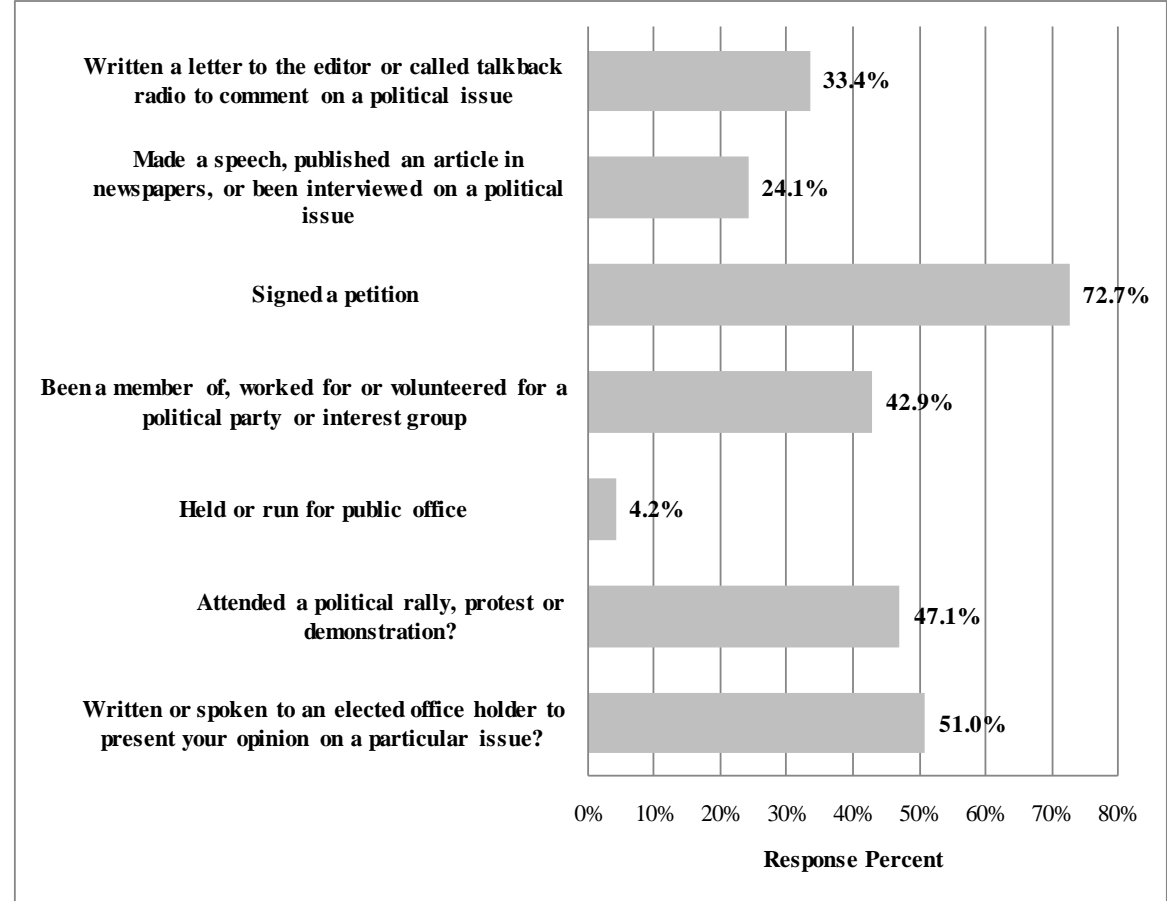
Again, the primary value in collecting this data is to allow for cross-tabulation against the responses to the other questions in this survey. However, these results are notable because just like those seen in Chapter Two, they indicate a high proportion of respondents that are employed by a state or public organisation. Unlike those bloggers employed by the public service, these readers are unlikely to face any impediments to their participation within the

New Zealand political blogosphere due to their employment within the public service, as they are not actively involved in creating content.

Other Political Involvement

Question 24 of the survey asked blog readers what other political activities they have been involved in. 473 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3H.

Figure 3H: Other Political Involvement of Political Blog Readers



These results also mimic those of the Political Bloggers’ Survey discussed in Chapter Two, in that they also universally indicate a high level of traditional political involvement and mobilisation amongst blog readers. All of the results are however lower than those recorded in the blog authors survey. This deviation in levels of participation may well be

explainable with reference to the roles that these different groups of respondents are demonstrating with regard to political blogging, in that political bloggers are displaying a heightened tendency towards more fulsome participation by creating and writing political blogs, whereas blog readers have not taken the step towards blog content production and instead are more passive consumers of the content.

This question was also included to test the same two hypotheses described in Chapter Two. These are firstly whether those that read political blogs are those that are otherwise politically active individuals; and secondly, whether the degree of their political involvement marks these respondents as likely to be influential citizens in accordance with the theories and experiment design of Elmo Roper.²⁵⁷²⁵⁸ Table 3C shows the outcome of this analysis.

Table 3C: Influential and Non-Influential Political Blog Readers

Number of Activities that the respondent had committed time to in the last 12 months, out of seven.	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of respondents Influential or Non-Influential
7 - Influential	1.0%	37.7%
6 - Influential	4.6%	
5 - Influential	8.1%	
4 - Influential	9.4%	
3 - Influential	14.5%	
2 - Non-Influential	18.3%	62.3%
1 - Non-Influential	22.1%	
0 - Non-Influential	21.8%	
TOTAL RESPONSES	100.0%	100.0%

²⁵⁷ Keller and Berry, *The Influentials*, 18-19.

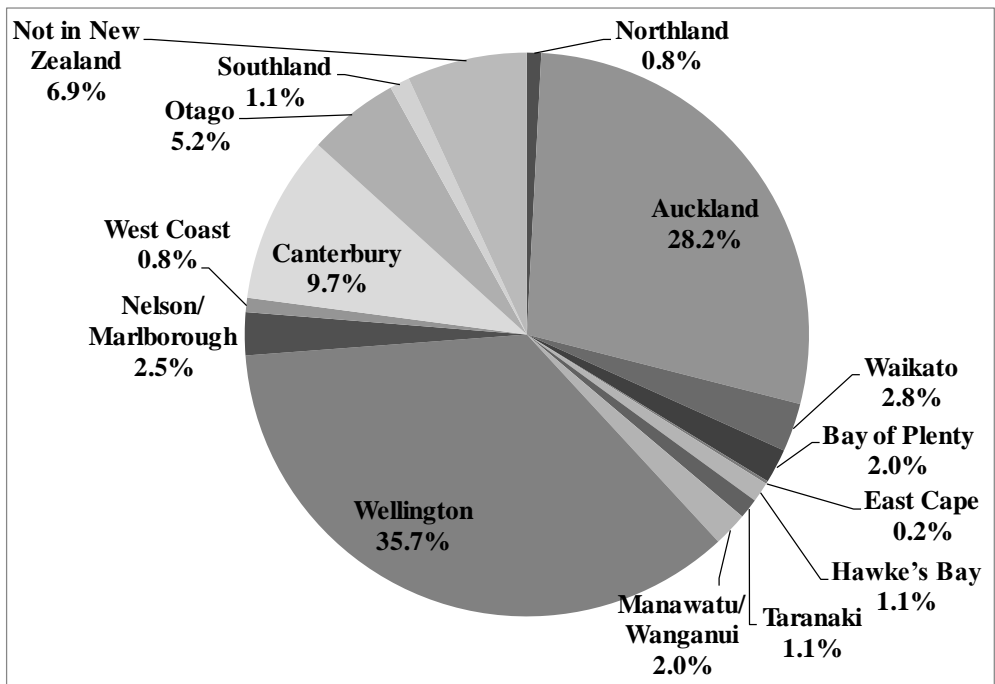
²⁵⁸ Note that this question received a lesser number of responses than the question immediately prior, which received 605 responses. The difference between these two response rates, 132 respondents, is therefore assumed for the purposes of this analysis to be those that did not answer this question because they had not undertaken any of the activities listed in the last 12 months.

This analysis shows that New Zealand political blog readers are far less likely to be influential, as defined by Roper’s hypothesis, than New Zealand political bloggers. Once again, when we consider the more passive way in which these readers are utilising political blogs (as compared to the active role of those authoring them), this is not necessarily surprising.

Region of Residence

The final question of the survey, and of this section of results, asked respondents which area of New Zealand they lived in. 611 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3I.

Figure 3I: Region of Residence of Political Blog Readers



In what again strongly parallels the results of the New Zealand Political Bloggers’ Survey, these results show that over 60% of respondents resided in either Auckland (28.2%) or Wellington (35.7%). Other significant regions of participation were Canterbury (9.7%) Not

in New Zealand (6.9%) and Otago (5.2%). All other regions were selected by less than 5% of survey participants.

These results suggest that political blog readership, just like authorship, is predominantly an urban activity, with the total cumulative percentage from Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury regions again equalling 73.6% - an uncanny result, given that it is precisely the same cumulative result as found in the bloggers' survey. This underscores the same conclusion regarding urbanisation of blog usage found in Chapter Two, as well as the bias towards higher levels of participation in the Wellington region – surprising in the sense that it is disproportionate to the Wellington population; unsurprising given that Wellington is the political hub of New Zealand.

Section Two: Participation in Political Blogging

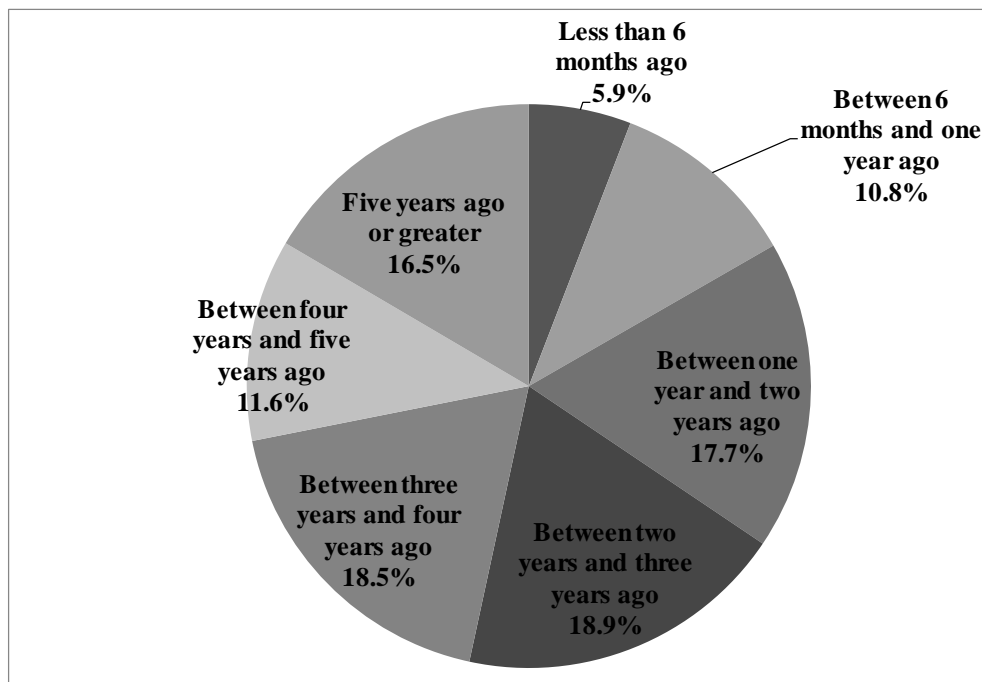
Readers were asked to describe how they use blogs via a series of questions designed to quantify the user experience of those that read New Zealand political blogs. These questions seek to understand this usage in terms of the amount of time that readers invest in consuming blog material; which blogs they read; how they interact with the material on those blogs; and, most significantly, why they are drawn to blogs as a medium. The purpose of these questions is to estimate the degree of impact that the political blogosphere is having, and where that impact is most clearly noted.

Question One of the survey is not relevant to analysis, as it purely concerned testing the validity of the potential respondent as a reader of New Zealand political blogs, and ensured that they had appropriately consented to participation in this research.

Length of Time Reading Political Blogs

Question Two of the survey invited respondents to answer when they started reading political blogs. 665 people answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 3J.

Figure 3J: Length of Time Active as a Political Blog Reader

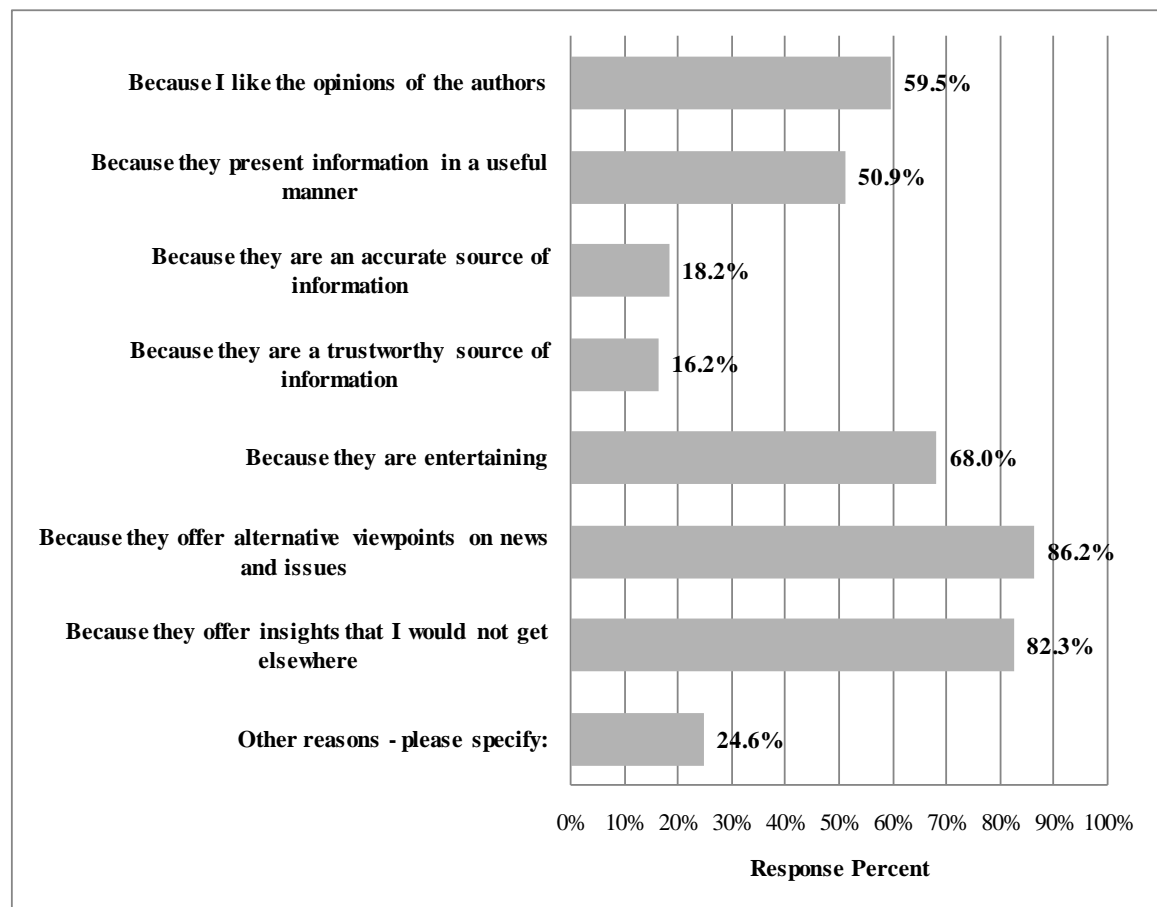


The responses to this question show a degree of entrenchment in the blog reading community, in that 83.3% of respondents have been visiting political blogs for over one year, and 46.65% of respondents for over three years; but also that usage of the medium appears to still be growing, in that a not insignificant number of respondents (16.7%) have started reading blogs within the six to twelve months prior to this survey being conducted. Of significant note is that 16.5% of readers claim to have been reading blogs for over five years.

Reasons for Reading

Question Three of the blog readers' survey asked respondents to classify why they started reading political blogs. This question was designed to give an insight as to why blog readers are attracted to blogs as a medium, as understanding the motivators of the current audience will potentially give insights into how the medium will continue to develop. 666 people answered this question, and the results are summarised in Figure 3K.

Figure 3K: Political Blog Readers' Reasons for Visiting Blogs



“Because they offer insights that I would not get elsewhere” attracted a high level of responses, with 82.3% selecting this category. This response category is designed to be a measure of perceptions of how unique the content of political blogs is – that is, how many of these readers believe that they would not be able to source those viewpoints from any other media source. The high level of responses that this response category attracted confirms that the vast majority of blog readers perceive the content that they find on New Zealand political blogs as being sufficiently unique that these readers believe that they would not find that content through any other medium. This result strongly suggests that for the majority of blog readers, political blogs are playing an important role in increasing the accessibility of information. This is a similar conclusion to that found by Graf with his study of American political blog readers, as referenced in Chapter One, which showed that

92% of those respondents visited political blogs because “they provide news that the mass media ignores.”²⁵⁹

This conclusion is further underscored by the responses received to the second response category. “Because they offer alternative viewpoints on news and issues” attracted the highest percentage of responses, with 86.2% of blog readers selecting this as a rationale for visiting political blogs. This question is designed to test to what degree readers’ value the role political blogs perform in increasing the visibility of these alternative viewpoints. According to these results and with reference to the discussion regarding unique content above, the conclusion certainly affirms the statement that the alternative *and* unique nature of content available via the New Zealand political blogosphere are highly valued and attractive to New Zealand political blog readers. Again, these results match the findings of Graf, which showed that 92% of American political blog readers visit blogs because “they give a different perspective on the news.”²⁶⁰

The third response category, “Because they are entertaining”, was designed to test another hypothesis. Blogs are, anecdotally at least, perceived as being “entertaining” sources of political commentary. Entertainment value may therefore play a strong role in attracting people to view the content. The responses to this category confirm that hypothesis is true for the majority of respondents to this survey instrument, in that 68% of respondents indicated that such entertainment value is indeed one of the reasons that they visit political blogs. This result does not strongly correspond to that of Graf’s, though the question asked

²⁵⁹ Graf, “The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership,” 8.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 12.

by him was slightly different: 84% of American political blog readers read them because “they are interesting or funny.”²⁶¹

The sixth response category was also selected by the majority of readers. “Because they present information in a useful manner” is designed to test the usability characteristics of New Zealand political blogs, and whether this is another aspect of the medium that attracts readers to the content. Blogs are designed with simple usability in mind, in that they predominantly feature only one column of content, with hyperlinks that sort, organise or connect readers to ancillary information. That 50.9% of respondents selected this response category confirms that the majority of readers value such usability features of blogs, and that this is another important factor that attract users to the medium.

The final category that was selected by the majority of users was “Because I like the opinions of the authors.” This response category was designed to test to what degree aspects of community, or common understanding attract blog readers, and the results are important in understanding how much blog usage is driven by the readers desire to find the right content for them. Note that “like” does not necessarily mean that readers agree with the author’s opinions, but agreement but is usually implied. Responses to this question test how the appeal of the author attracts an audience, with 59.5% of readers confirming that indeed such appeal does work for the majority of readers.

There were two response categories that were not validated by the majority of respondents. First of these was “Because they are a trustworthy source of information.” This response category attracted responses from only 16.2% of readers. The second category that was similarly scored was “Because they are an accurate source of information”, which was selected by 18.2% of readers.

²⁶¹ Graf, “The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership,” 8.

The set of responses provided to Question Three gives a very valuable insight into why readers are attracted to blogs as a source of political information. On one hand, the majority of respondents are attracted to blogs due to the core characteristics of the medium; that is the opinions, insights and unique perspectives of the authors; and the entertaining and accessible manner that these authors use to present their material. But on the other hand, these same readers do not attribute their use of political blogs to the level of trust that they have in the content produced by political bloggers, or to the accuracy of the information produced by bloggers.

Such responses beg for an explanation as to why the factors of demand for political blogging are balanced in such a manner. A possible explanation is that blog readers are attracted to these political blogs not as the sole source of trustworthy information – there are plenty of other locations through which an accurate or trustworthy picture can be constructed. Instead, these readers are attracted by the commentary and interpretation that a blogger can offer upon a news event, and that these are the truly unique characteristic that defines political blogs as a useful communications medium.

Respondents were also provided the opportunity to name other reasons why they visit political blogs via the free text field attached to this question, which solicited an additional 164 comments from respondents. Analysis of these responses provides two additional reasons for visiting political blogs mentioned by a substantial proportion of respondents. 48 respondents mentioned that they visit blogs because of their perceptions of the limitations, biases or lack of quality analysis and reporting available via the mainstream media. These respondents indicate that they go to blogs because they are the ‘best’ source of news available to them. An example of these comments that illustrates this sentiment is: “Because the mainstream media is not doing its job! Two of the political blogs I visit to get

news that is not covered (or only covered in sensationalist and/or partisan sound bites) by the mainstream media.”²⁶²

The second rationale for visiting blogs highlighted by these free text comments is that they allow better expression of opinions and opportunities for debate. These respondents appear to like the interactivity of political blogs, and appreciate the two-way nature of the communication in the medium, as opposed to the passive engagement offered by the traditional media. 40 of the respondents provided comments of this nature, of which the following is an example: “Because it is possible to debate issues with people who have opposing viewpoints. It tests the robustness and strength of my own ideas, and may help persuade casual readers. It also offers a chance to repudiate some of the more outrageous claims made on the blog or in the comments section, again for the benefit of casual readers.”²⁶³

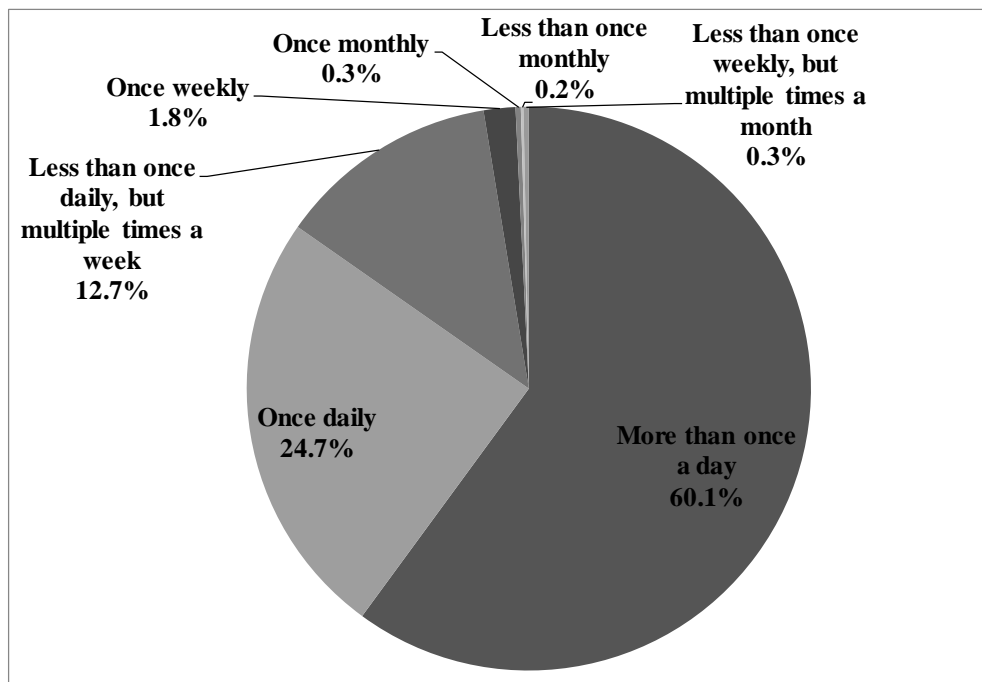
Time Commitment to Reading

Questions Four and Five of the survey focus upon quantifying the extent of blog readers’ demand for content by examining how often, and for how long, readers consume the material produced by political bloggers. Question Four received 661 responses, and they are summarised in Figure 3L.

²⁶² A further example is: “Mainstream media has a very narrow range of opinion, and the analysis is aimed at people who don’t know much about the given subject. Blogs can offer more depth because they can assume reader awareness of the issues.”

²⁶³ Another example is: “They are the modern agora - a forum for debate. They promote literary endeavour. I am interested in politics. They allow a contest of ideas that can get behind the standard sin. They are Socratic - truth emerges from critical discussion.”

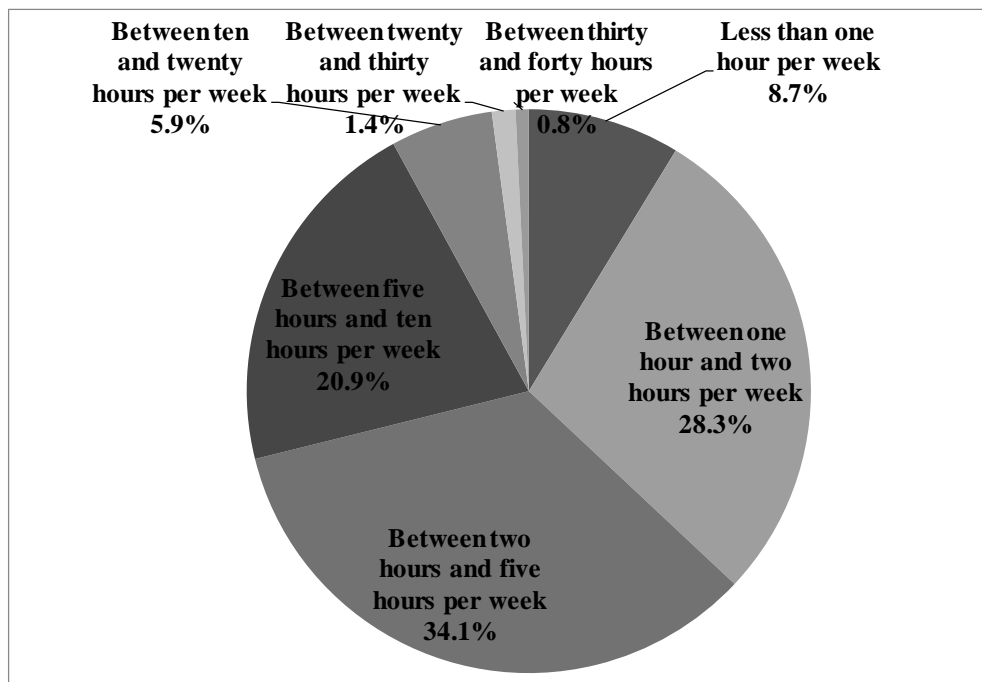
Figure 3L: Political Blog Readers' Reading Frequency



These results show that demand for content amongst those readers that responded is high, with nearly 85% of respondents visiting political blogs at least once a day, and more than 99% of respondents confirming that they visit blog sites at least once a week. Given these results, it appears that once a reader starts visiting blog sites, their use of these sites becomes entrenched and they use them to a heavy degree.

Question Five invited blog readers to provide an estimate of how much time they spend reading and commenting on political blogs; 665 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3M.

Figure 3M: Amount of Time Spent Per Week on Political Blogs by Political Blog Readers



Over 90% of bloggers spend over one hour a week reading blog sites, and over 83% of bloggers spend between one and ten hours per week on the sites.

Blogs Being Read

Question Six was designed to understand which blogs the respondents to this survey regularly visit. As far more comprehensive data is available in this regard through the New Zealand Blogosphere Statistics, collated on a monthly basis by Tim Selwyn on the Tumeke! Blog,²⁶⁴ these results have been discarded from this analysis.

Blog Commenting

The final question in this section, Question Seven of the survey, tested the interactive characteristics of blog readership, by asking whether the respondent has “ever placed a comment to a posting on a political blog.” As discussed in the Introduction, the comment

²⁶⁴ Tim Selwyn, *New Zealand Blogosphere Statistics*. <http://www.nzblogosphere.blogspot.com/> (accessed June 1, 2009).

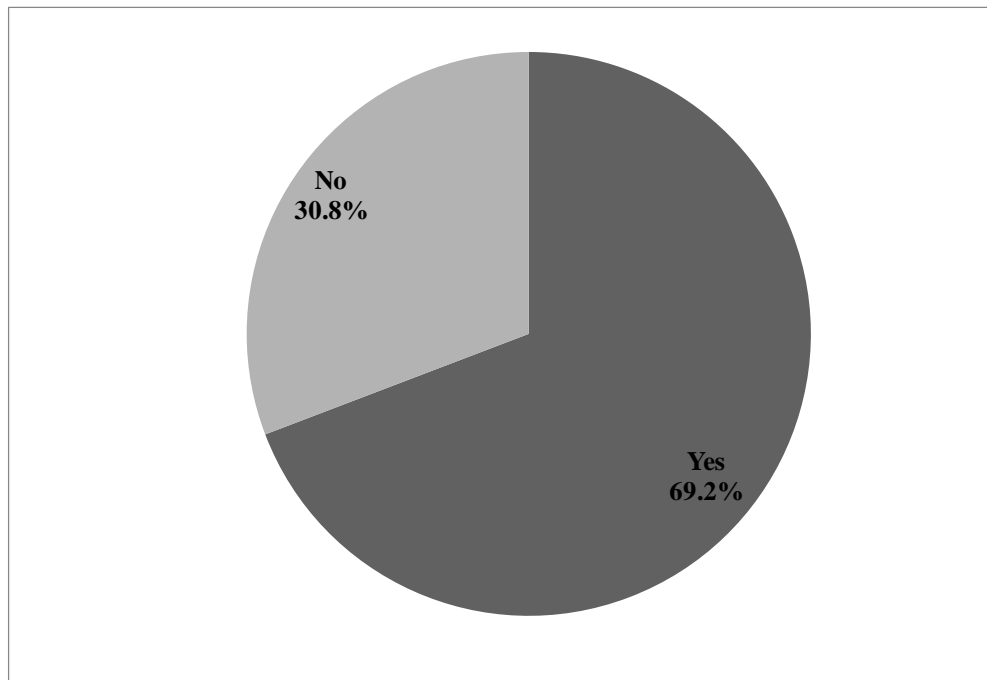
function of blogs is an important part of the function of the medium, as it easily and quickly allows two-way communication to take place between the author and the reader. This therefore may serve to deepen the involvement of the reader by engaging them in active participation, as opposed to the passive forms of participation that dominate traditional media sources.

More importantly however, the degree to which political blog readers engage in such discussions is an important aspect of testing how political blogs are fulfilling the requirements of the model of democratic deliberation established in Chapter One. Particularly, these results give an insight into how political blogs may be functioning as a new articulation of Habermas' public sphere. A crucial aspect of the theory of the public sphere is that members of the public meet to discuss matters of "common concern"²⁶⁵, which means that examining the degree to which political blog readers actually join the discussion in order to understand, debate and articulate their viewpoint, and therefore assist in the synthesis of a common public understanding of an issue is important to answering this particular question.

659 responses were received to this question, and they are summarised in Figure 3N.

²⁶⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 36.

Figure 3N: Commenting Political Blog Readers



Given that commenting is such an important feature of blogs, it is therefore not surprising that the survey results confirm that the majority of blog readers have placed a comment on a political blog posting, with 69.2% of respondents responding in this manner.

Respondents were also provided with the opportunity to explain why they place comments on blogs via an additional free text field, through which 391 further responses were received from those who answered “Yes” to this question. Analysis of these responses shows that the vast majority of these (306 or over 78%) of them, commented on blogs because they in some way wished to express an opinion on the topic presented by the blogger; to support the blogger’s comments; or because they wished to join the discussion on the issue. One of the more salient expressions in this regard is:

I place comments to provide feedback to the author and to share my thoughts with other readers of that blog. I may ask a question. I may thank them for a thoughtful post. I may share a similar experience, affirming theirs. I may take issue with some

fact or opinion that I feel does not address some aspect of the subject that I feel should be addressed.²⁶⁶

Some of the respondents however noted that they comment in order to provide or correct the information that the blogger or other readers have provided, either solely or in addition and in support of their opinions. Arguably, these commenting readers are performing a different function to the majority who posit only their opinions, in that they are at least attempting to drive conversations through improved understanding of the facts relevant to the issues being discussed. Approximately a quarter of the respondents made comments of this manner, such as: “To correct horrifyingly wrong statements of fact. And, occasionally, to throw in tangentially-related articles from other media.”²⁶⁷

What these free text comments also revealed, however, was that a number of the survey participants appear to show contempt for their fellow participants in the political blogosphere. 30 comments were classified in this manner following the analysis, an example of which is: “To try and irritate a right wing fool who felt that their narrow minded worldview was the only important one.”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Other illustrative examples are: “Like to have a say and this is one of the only ways. It is the new Letters to the Editor”

And “... something I was particularly frustrated or angered by; if I think of something funny; if a discussion is occurring in comments that I find interesting or worthy and want to participate in; if I think the writer needs words of support; if the writer requests opinions or responses.”

²⁶⁷ Further examples are: “Usually to express my approval of an opinion expressed in a blog entry, and sometime to refute other comments which I don't agree with and can provide evidence against”

And “Usually to provide referenced information that one or more posters is obviously unaware of” and “Because I happened to be well informed on the topic – ‘share the knowledge!’”

²⁶⁸ Another example is: “Usually to disagree with other comments - educating the many idiots who post on Blogs you might say!”

One of these comments in particular reflected on how the medium appears to have changed since more people started participating in the political blogosphere, and how that had alienated them from participating more fulsomely:

I like joining a discussion: adding some information that matches a point the blogger has made, or ties it to some similar thing that I know they're interested in. If I fail to understand why someone smart is saying something stupid I often want to ask why, as they often have some reason that isn't obvious. I also feel a strong desire to tell someone who's making false assertions without any data to back it up that they are wrong, and provide data or argument to that effect. When I started doing this I commented on David Farrar's blog and on Idiot/Savants about how collegial NZ political blogging community was. You can tell this was a few years ago, as the comment areas are really not nice at all now. I stopped commenting on Kiwiblog a few years ago, as it became a very unpleasant place to be. NoRightTurn has now banned comments to avoid a similar fate. Alas, I see no signs of serious discussion on political blogs now - the partisan morons are too busy shouting "4 legs good, 2 legs bad!" for anything else to be heard. As a result I rarely comment these days.

What can be concluded from this free text analysis is that many readers of blogs are driven to comment on blogs because they wish to express their opinion, in support or criticism, of the original content provided by the blogger. This is unsurprising, given that this is the very reason why bloggers tend to place such comment functions on their blogs, as shown by the responses to Question 22 of the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey (discussed in Chapter Two). A far smaller proportion of those political blog readers that place comments do so because they wish to increase the level of understanding on the issue

being discussed by providing or correcting pieces of information. And finally, these comments further show that there is a level of contempt amongst and vitriol between readers in the blogosphere, in terms of how they perceive other participants are engaging with the medium.

Section Three: Comparisons Against Other Forms of Media

The next section of this survey was designed to test how readers perceive blogs in comparison to other, traditional forms of media. These questions test whether, how and to what degree blog readers' views of these different sources of information differ with regard to perceptions of accuracy, trustworthiness, entertainment, usefulness, quality and breadth of political blogs; and finally, whether these readers see the blogs that they follow as viable alternatives to traditional news media.

These questions all utilised a five point rating scale for each of the different comparative criteria used. Five different media types were compared – political blogs, major news websites, daily newspapers, magazines and periodicals, radio news and current affairs, and television news and current affairs. In order to compare the average opinion of the political blog readers that responded, an average response score has been calculated for each of the media types.²⁶⁹

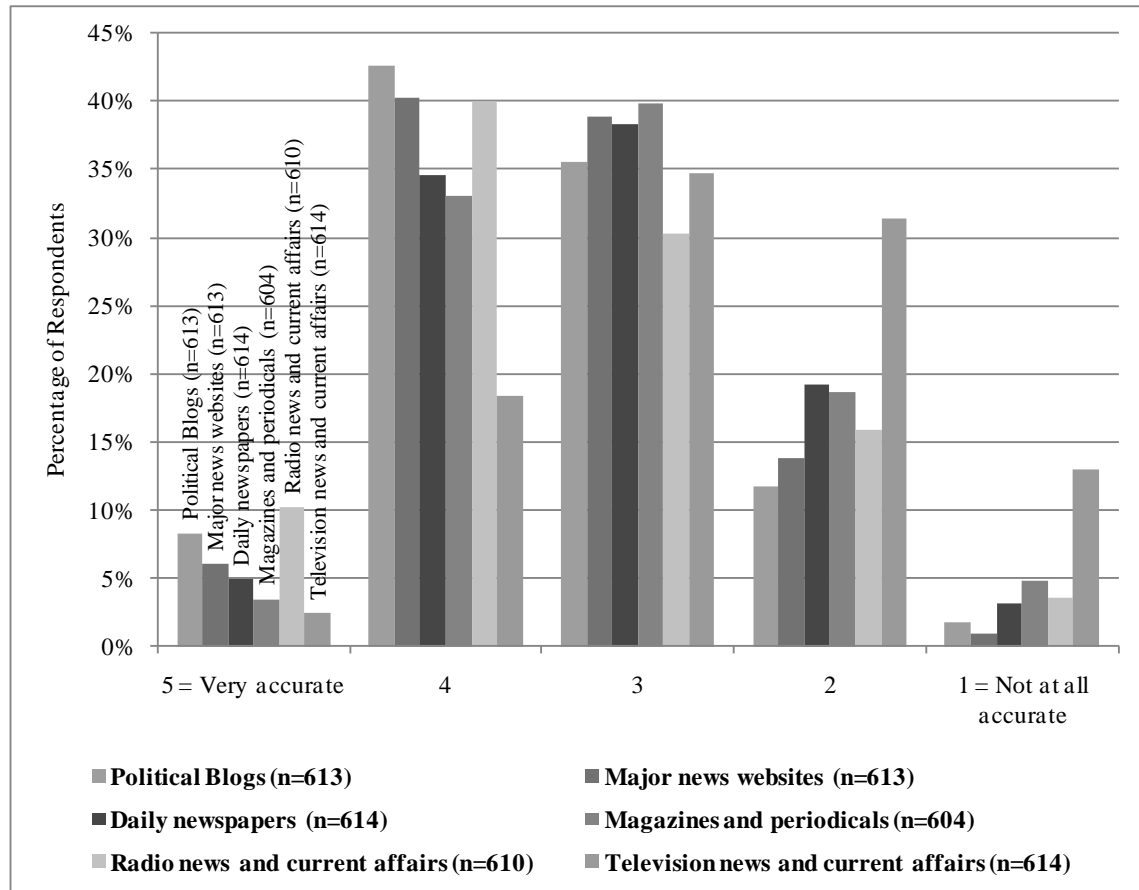
Perceptions of Accuracy

Question Eight asked respondents to compare how *accurate* they feel each of these media types are in reporting political news and information. Measuring perceptions of accuracy is important because it tests to what degree blog readers see political blogs as *authoritative* sources of news – i.e. sources that they can rely upon to present a correct summary of the

²⁶⁹ The methodology used to calculate the average response score was to multiply the number of respondents that gave a particular ranking by the numeric value of that ranking; then adding the resultant sums together and taking an average across all respondents. A hypothetical example to illustrate this methodology: If 50 of a total 100 respondents gave political blogs a 5, then the calculation would be $5 \times 50 = 250$. If the other 50 respondents gave political blogs a 1 on the 5 point ranking scale, then the next calculation is $1 \times 50 = 50$. Adding those two together provides a total of 300 ($250 + 50$), divided by the total number of responses (100) to give an average response score of $(300/100)$ 3 on the 5 point rating scale.

issue at hand. 617 respondents answered this question to some degree,²⁷⁰ and these responses are summarised in Figure 30.

Figure 30: Blog Readers' Perceptions of Accuracy of Media Types



Comparison of the average response scores shows that, on average, blog readers trust blogs to be more accurate than other forms of media. The comparative average ranking calculated for each of the media types, using the methodology discussed above, was 3.44 for political blogs; 3.37 for major news websites; 3.19 for daily newspapers; 3.12 for magazines and periodicals; 3.37 for radio news and current affairs; and finally 2.66 for television news and current affairs.

²⁷⁰ The specific number of respondents for each of the media types is included in Figure 30.

This result is surprising - very few political blogs, both in New Zealand and overseas, have developed their own sources of political news. This means that the majority of these sites are still playing the *intermediary* role of translating, re-presenting and analysing news from other sources. In this sense, as these blog sites are derivative of these other sources, then it is intriguing that readers, on average, see these blogs as more authoritative sources of news than those organisations and professional news sources that actually investigate and commission such news.

This suggests that readers perceive that accuracy is added through how these blog sites *modify* the content from these other sources. As discussed in the Introduction, one of the roles that political bloggers may take on is to challenge and analyse the news material sourced from other traditional media sources; and in doing so, add to the accuracy of that material in the eyes of the people that read it. This accuracy takes the form of added insights into news, such as around the history of a particular decision; the motivations of the newsmaker; or other such information that adds context to the issue for the reader. Further, as blogs and their authors are usually openly partisan in terms of the political parties that they explicitly support or critique (as demonstrated in Chapter Two), it is expected that at least some of the readers that they attract will be equally partisan. Therefore, these *perceptions* of accuracy are also likely to be a function of how that particular blogger translates the news item according to the partisan lens that they are committed to; i.e. accuracy through interpreting news as “anti-National” when you run a blog that often criticises the National Party.

Respondents were also provided with the opportunity to explain further their perceptions of the accuracy of political blogs. 274 free text responses were received in this fashion. One of the more common sentiments expressed by those who were most positive about the

medium was that the accuracy of political blogs is driven by the level of participation in the medium. An example of one of these comments is: “Although blogs may not always be accurate, the vigorous debate that goes on in comments helps the truth emerge, as does cross-linking to other blogs that approach issues from different angles.”²⁷¹

These comments are pertinent because they illustrate how these readers perceive that the large amount of participation across the blogosphere allows diverse voices to be heard; and that these diverse voices, taken in totality, allow a reader to derive a more accurate picture than that which is available via other media.

The additional comments provided by those who were most negative about political blogs are equally interesting in explaining these respondents’ perceptions of the accuracy of the medium. The most common theme expressed by these respondents was that bloggers are best at expressing opinions, rather than expressing facts: “They are emotional (which is why I read them) but clearly not based on fact, simply the opinion of the author.”²⁷²

A final observation on this question is that it is interesting to compare these responses against the responses to Question Three of the survey, where only 18.2% of blog readers indicated that they visit political blogs because they perceive them as being accurate sources of information; but yet the responses to this Question Eight show that these blog readers perceive political blogs to be more accurate than every other traditional news source.

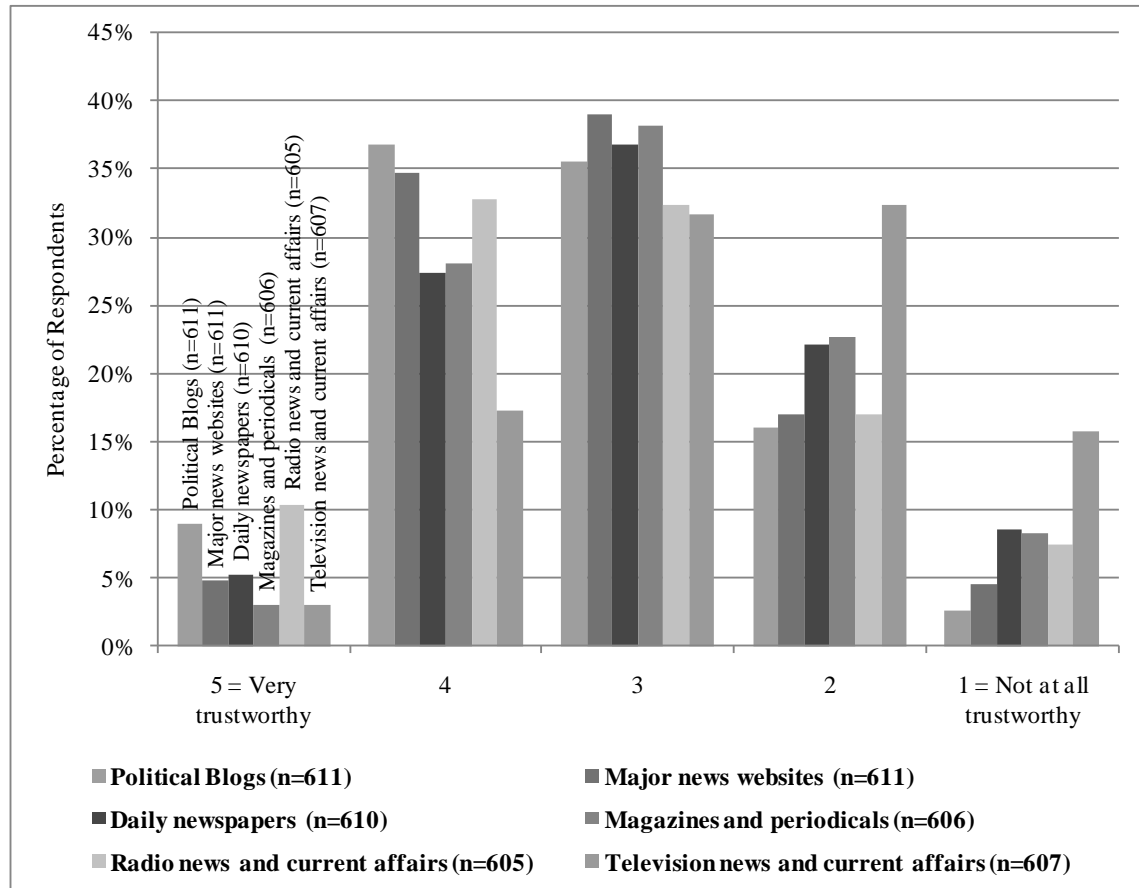
Perceptions of Trustworthiness

²⁷¹ A further example is: “By viewing a large number of blogs you can build accuracy of information. People will lie in a blog as much as any MP but the opposing views will sift them out. This does not happen in MSM because they fence sit rather than openly challenge the tripe they are fed.”

²⁷² Also: “By their nature they are biased. One (or more) person making a political comment with no editorial oversight by another.”

Blog readers' perception of relative trustworthiness of blogs in comparison to other media types was the subject of Question Nine. 614 respondents answered this question,²⁷³ and these responses are summarised in Figure 3P.

Figure 3P: Blog Readers' Perceptions of Trustworthiness of Media Types



Again, respondents on average perceive blogs to be more trustworthy than other traditional media types, with an average response score of 3.34. This compares with 3.18 for other news websites; 2.99 for daily newspapers; 2.94 for magazines and periodicals; 3.21 for radio news and current affairs; and 2.92 for television news and current affairs.

Respondents were again extended the opportunity to provide free text comments to further explain the answers they provided, which yielded 165 responses. The most common

²⁷³ The specific number of respondents for each of the media types is included in Figure 3P.

sentiment expressed by those most positive about the trustworthiness of political blogs is that they appreciate how transparent political bloggers are in their biases, as opposed to other media types. An example of such a comment is:

Trustworthiness, to me, correlates strongly with declared versus perceived bias, and tendency towards sensationalism over analysis and discussion. Political blogs get bonus points for the fact that I can identify the writer and trace their opinions more clearly over time. This is harder on mass media where articles are produced by an organization rather than individual.

The same sentiment was picked up by those who rated blogs negatively. Instead, these bloggers see the declared biases of political bloggers to mean that they are untrustworthy, because they are clearly inclined to support particular parties or ideologies over providing unbiased information: “Blogs aren't trustworthy because they're for the most part blatant propaganda.”²⁷⁴

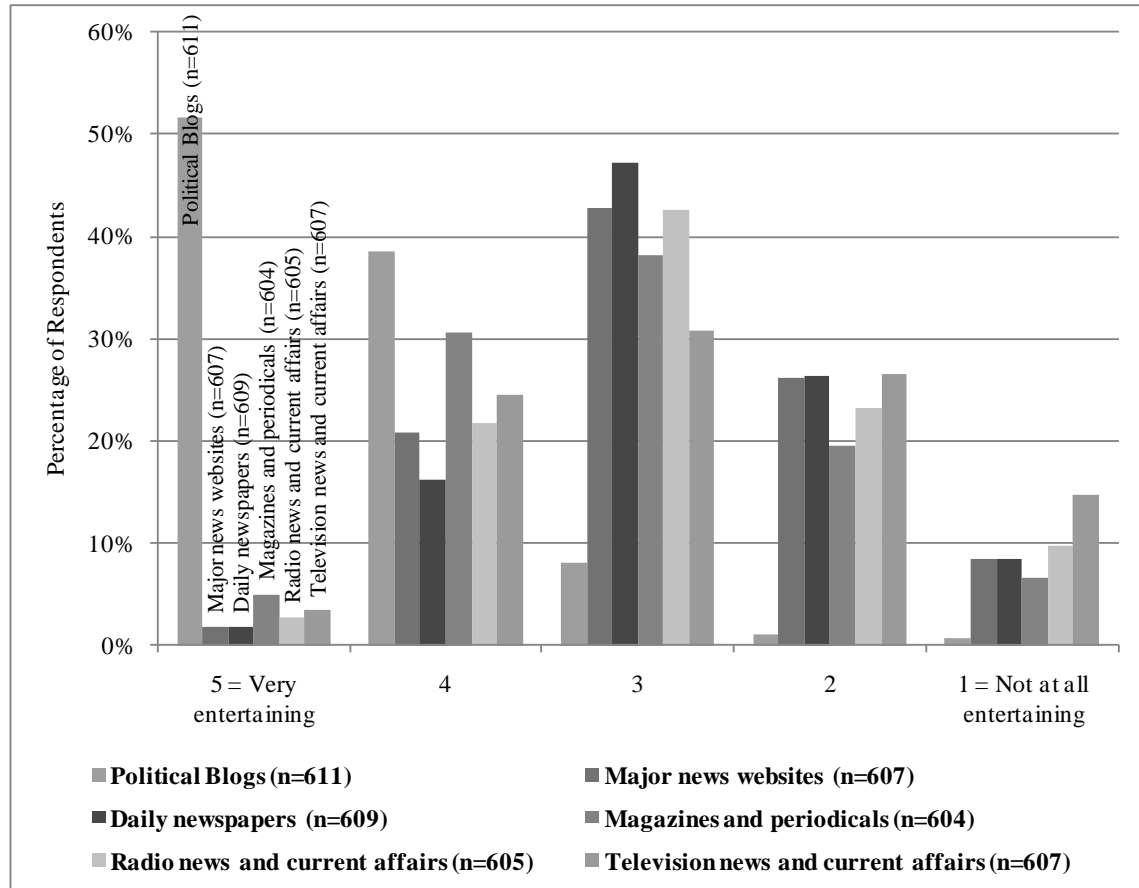
Again it is interesting to compare these results to those received from Question Three of the blog readers’ survey. In this earlier question, only 16.2% of respondents indicated that they visit political blogs because they perceive them to be a trustworthy source of information on political news and events. Yet, the results of this Question Nine show that these same respondents have a higher average perception of trust in political blogs than they do in any other media types. The conclusion that this allows is that these readers perceive political blogs to be the least bad medium in terms of trusting the content that they produce. If that is the case, then it appears that blog readers are exceptionally cynical with regard to their perceptions of the media.

²⁷⁴ Another example is: “I’d trust them more if I thought they had any intellectual integrity or commitment to truth.”

Perceptions of Entertainment Value

Question Ten asked respondents to comment on how entertaining each of the media types listed is. 614 respondents answered this question,²⁷⁵ and these responses are summarised in Figure 3Q.

Figure 3Q: Blog Readers' Perceptions of Entertainment Value in Media Types



Once again, these results confirm that political blogs outdo other media types in New Zealand for providing political news and information that also entertains these respondents – and on this measure, the gulf between political blogs and other media types is large. Political blogs achieved an average response score of 4.39, compared to 2.81 for major

²⁷⁵ The specific number of respondents for each of the media types is included in Figure 3Q.

news websites; 2.77 for daily newspapers; 3.08 for magazines and periodicals; 2.85 for radio news and current affairs; and 2.75 for television news and current affairs.

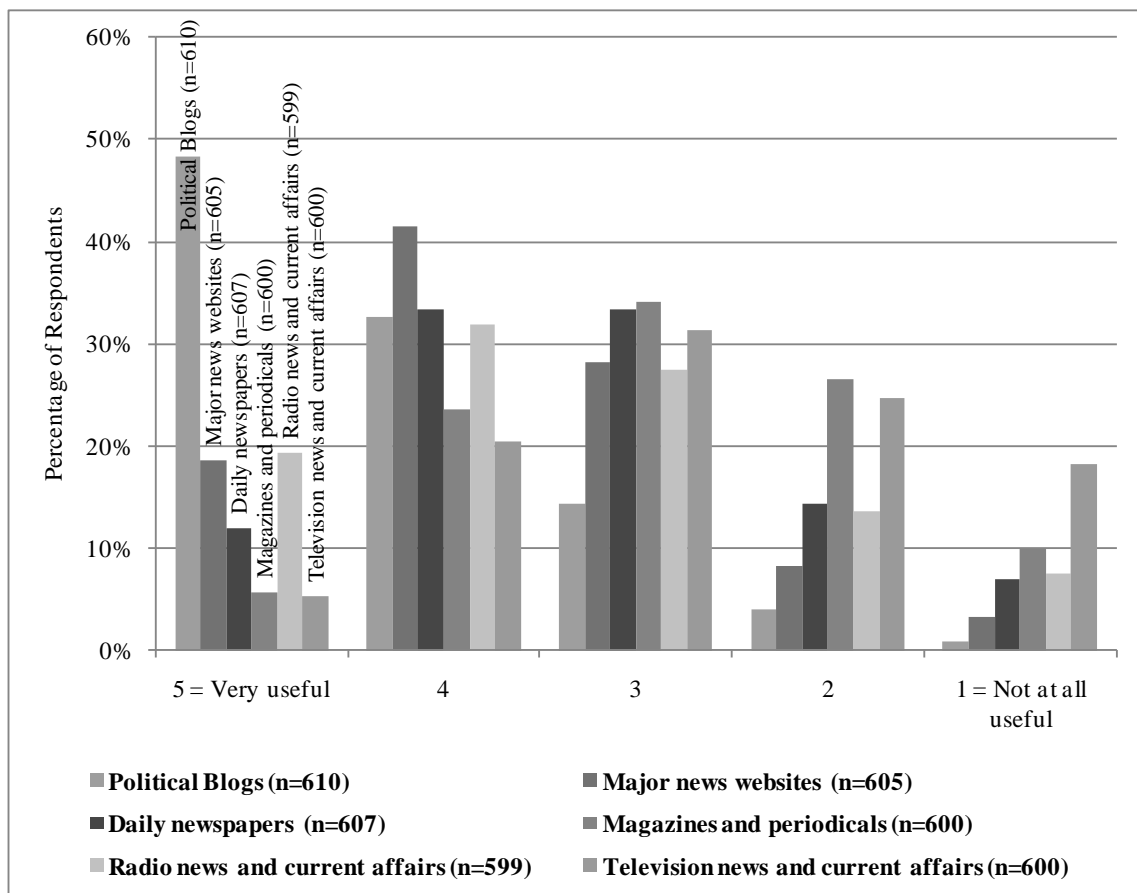
Perceptions of Usefulness

Question 11 asked respondents to rank each of the media types in terms of how *useful* they are in presenting political news and information. This question is designed to test to what degree the innate characteristics of political blogs as a medium provide for the ease of use and consumption of the material provided. As discussed in the Introduction, political blogs are, by their very nature, thought to be very easy to use. They have a solitary function, and simple ordering of information and interface that allows readers to find the information that they desire quickly and easily. This is in comparison to other media types, whereby the information that a reader desires is either hard to access due to the sheer amount of other information available via that medium (such as with major news websites, daily newspapers or magazines and periodicals; all of which are usually devoted to larger subject matters than just political news and events and are harder to navigate due to either their physical forms or their complex ordering of information); or due to the time limiting of content (such as with television and radio news and current affairs, where specific content is broadcast at a particular time, and usually only once).²⁷⁶ Question 11 is designed to test this usability hypothesis. 611 respondents answered this question,²⁷⁷ and the results are summarised in Figure 3R.

²⁷⁶ Though the internet has changed this also, through allowing these media types to develop web properties that serve as online repositories of this content and allow users to access this according to their own schedule. Such examples are TVNZ On Demand, TV3 On Demand, and Radio New Zealand. Of course, the advent of recording mechanisms for these media types also allows some degree of time-shifting of material, which has continued to be enhanced through the development and uptake of Personal Video Recorders such as MySky HDi, and TiVO.

²⁷⁷ The specific number of respondents for each of the media types is included in Figure 3R.

Figure 3R: Blog Readers' Perceptions of Usability of Media Types



These scores confirm the hypothesis that blog readers find blogs more useful than these other media types. Blogs scored 4.24 in average response terms on this measure, compared to 2.81 for major news websites; 2.77 for daily newspapers; 3.08 for magazines and periodicals; 2.85 for radio news and current affairs; 2.75 for television news and current affairs.

Analysis of the 103 free text comments provided in addition to the scoring above show that those most positive about the usefulness of political blogs scored the medium in this manner because political blogs better enable them to access the information and perspectives that they are interested in: “Blogs are easily accessible anytime (and unlike

magazines and broadcasts, they have search functions). Oddly enough, it's also relatively easy to find information on a whole range of issues, from drug laws to the EFA.”²⁷⁸

This indicates that these respondents value political blogs because they provide the reader the ability to delve into their particular points of interest to a greater degree than other media types. This sentiment echoes Sunstein’s hypothesis around customisation of news sources, in that it indicates that these readers of political blogs are using them to more deeply explore only those issues that are of interest to them, rather than experiencing the broad and homogenising content provided by the mainstream media.

Those that were most negative about the usability of political blogs instead focussed on the lack of quality reporting and content available via blogs, and the tendency towards biased analysis and discussion: “One hopes that second, third and subsequent waves of political blogs improve the quality of their political discourse because this current lot (with the notable exception of Public Address) are truly appalling in terms of their contribution to quality political discourse.”²⁷⁹

Perceptions of Quality of Analysis

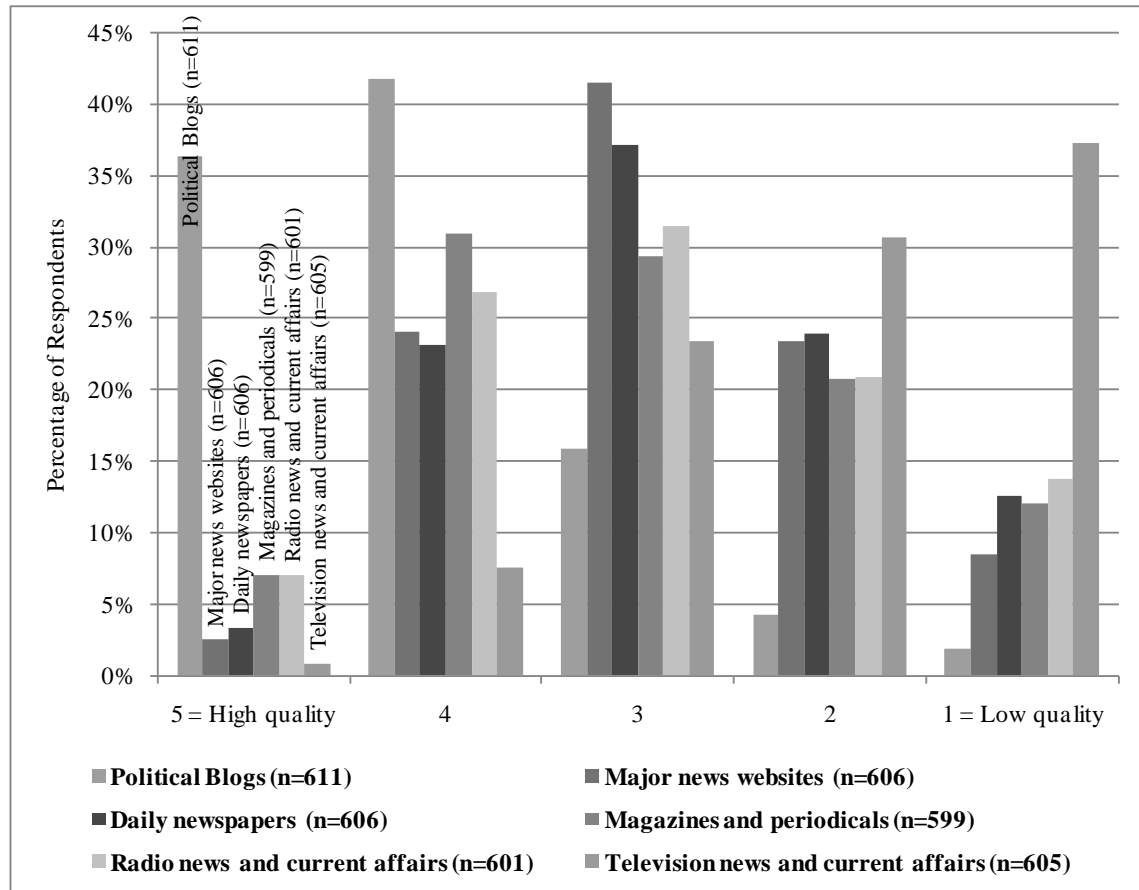
The degree to which readers perceive the quality of analysis available via these different mediums is tested by Question 12. This question is designed to measure the degree to which blog readers feel that the bloggers are providing quality insights upon political news

²⁷⁸ Another example is: “They can be very up to the minute and link to 'happening' issues, or background links, wider contexts. While a blog like PA might be slanted to liberal left, there's vigorous debate, willingness to concede misinformation or accommodate other views. Allows one to home in on issues that of interest and get plenty of information around them.”

²⁷⁹ Another example is: “Blogs don't report; they echo. Their usefulness is in drawing your attention to things you may not have noticed, not in breaking news. Most provide little analysis, simply partisan cheerleading and shitflinging.”

and information. 612 respondents answered this question,²⁸⁰ and the results are summarised in Figure 3S.

Figure 3S: Perceptions of Quality of Analysis in Media Types



Yet again, the average response scores show that blog readers believe that political blogs perform better than traditional media sources. An average response score of 4.07 was received for political blogs, compared with 2.89 for major news websites; 2.81 for daily newspapers; 2.99 for magazines and periodicals; 2.92 for radio news and current affairs; and 2.04 for television news and current affairs.

The majority of blog readers evidently feel that blog authors provide a higher quality of analysis than all of the traditional media sources that are otherwise alternatives for analysis

²⁸⁰ The specific number of respondents for each of the media types is included in Figure 3S.

of political news and information. The 122 free text responses provided by the survey participants provide further insights into this conclusion. Those most positive about the quality of analysis available on political blogs most commonly mentioned the freedom that bloggers have to devote more time and effort to explaining a story and its relevance. Illustrative of this sentiment is the following comment: “Much more useful than papers or other sources in putting developments into political, social and historic context, and in analysing what may lie behind the surface of a story. TV analysis is usually inaccurate, superficial and uninformed.”²⁸¹

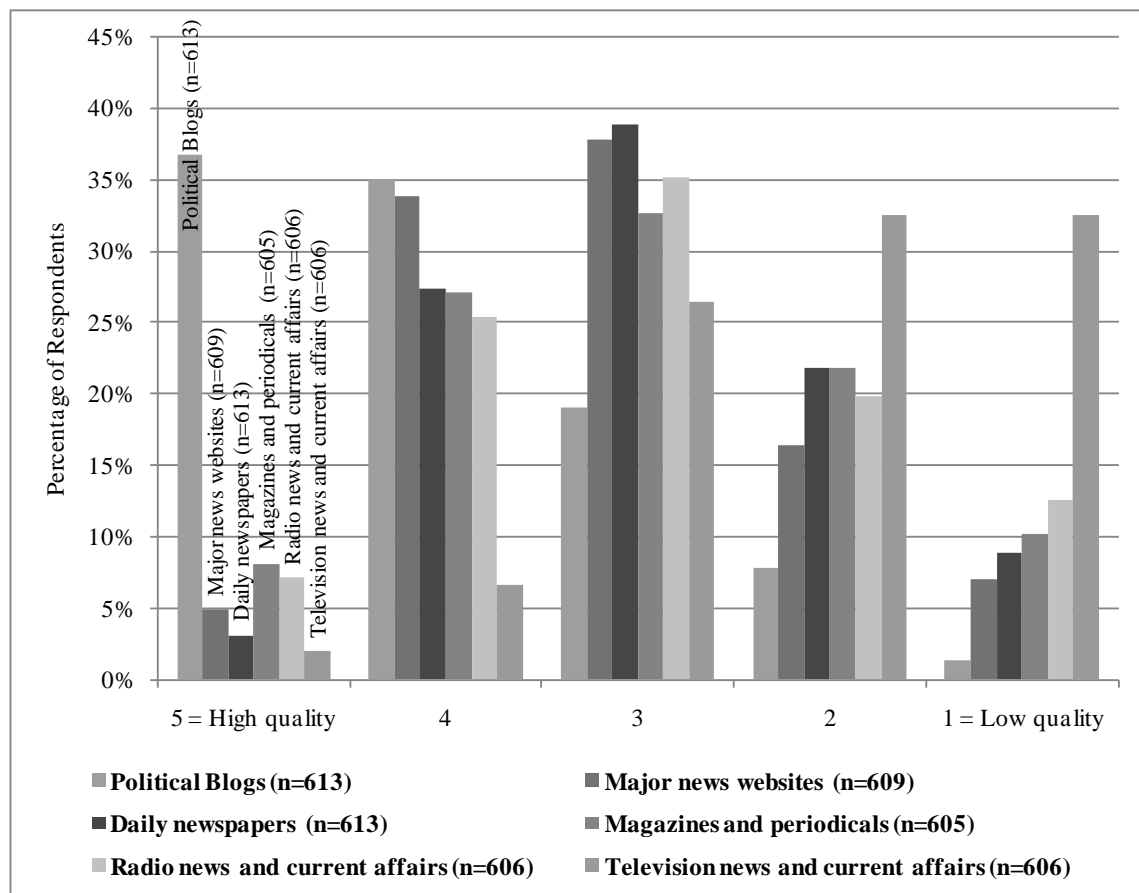
Perceptions of Breadth and Depth of Content

Question 13 was the final question in this comparative section of the survey. It asked respondents to measure the different media types according to the *breadth and depth of material* that they offer – that is, the degree to which these sources make available information on a variety of different topics relating to political news and information. The hypothesis being tested via this question is whether readers feel that blogs allow them to access more information and analysis than would otherwise be offered via the mainstream media. 614 respondents answered this question,²⁸² and the results are summarised in Figure 3T.

²⁸¹ A further example is: “Because there are fewer time pressures on blogs, both in terms of how long it takes them to get a piece published and how long that piece is itself, they have both more time and space to devote to analysis.”

²⁸² The specific number of respondents for each of the media types is included in Figure 3T.

Figure 3T: Perceptions of Breath and Depth of Material in Media Types



The responses to this question confirm yet again that political blogs are perceived by blog readers to be better providers of this characteristic than other media sources. Political blogs scored 3.98 on this measure, compared to 2.89 for major news websites; 2.81 for daily newspapers; 2.99 for magazines and periodicals; 2.92 for radio news and current affairs; and 2.04 for television news and current affairs.

74 free text responses were also received. These show that this positive sentiment towards the breadth and depth of discussion on political blogs is based on the ability that the collective political blogosphere has to provide a greater amount and diversity of content, due to the lack of traditional limitations:

The mainstream media seems very constrained, possibly by costs, possibly by available space/broadcast time, possibly by editorial/corporate dictate. In contrast, blogs can and do talk about damn near anything, and often in much more depth. There is much less constraint on issues, and there seems much more space to explore them.

In summary, the six questions above have asked respondents to provide their perceptions of how well political blogs compare with other media types. Across all measures, political blogs received more favourable results than traditional media sources, which means that these readers, on average, find political blogs more accurate; more trustworthy; more entertaining; more useful; of better quality; and with more breadth and depth of analysis than the mainstream media.

This outcome suggests a number of possible explanations. Firstly, a general tone of dissatisfaction with traditional mainstream media was detected throughout the comments provided to these questions. Many respondents seem to view mainstream media sources as beset with commercial agendas that diminishes the quality of political news in order to make it more easily understood by the general public – a sentiment most commonly expressed with regard to television news and current affairs, but equally evident across all the mainstream media sources examined. These alternatives to blogs are perceived as not investing sufficient resources to explore the political news and information that they are providing – i.e. that they only give a cursory summary of topics, and do not provide sufficient information or discussion about the issue at hand. In this sense, there is an elitist sentiment that seems to be expressed through these results. Political blogs are providing these readers with a forum through which they can indulge their interest in a topic to a degree that is unpalatable for the masses that otherwise rely on mainstream media sources,

and therefore political blogs are perceived by readers as being of better quality than those mainstream sources because they allow this analysis and discussion on political news to continue until the audience wishes it to stop, rather than until the newspaper article ends, or the television news broadcast is completed. In this sense, the responses to these questions can be explained by the self-selected nature of the survey participants. The results to Question Three, which concerned the respondents' motivations for using political blogs, confirmed that the vast majority seek out political blogs "because they offer insights that they would not get elsewhere" and "because they offer alternative viewpoints on news and issues." They are media consumers that are looking for "more" information than which is otherwise provided to them via traditional sources. It is therefore not surprising that readers score political blogs higher than other media types on measures of quality of analysis and breath and depth of analysis, as it is the perceived deficit in these areas that drives these people to view blogs.

Secondly, these results further confirm a general mistrust of mainstream media reporting of political news and issues, to which blogs are seen as being the least bad, rather than the best. Again, this conclusion must be interpreted in the context set by the responses to Question Three, whereby respondents indicated that the trustworthiness of blogs is, on average, not a strong attractor for these readers; yet, the responses to this set of questions show that readers trust blogs more than other media types. The key issue appears to be how open these different media sources are about their inherent biases, or at least what these readers perceive these biases as being. However, the comments attached to these responses reveal that many of these readers are attracted to the transparency of biases that are present within blogs, in that the author will often declare their biases quite openly. This is seen as quite different to traditional media sources, which present themselves as impartial, but who are perceived to have deep set biases that skew the way that they report upon information.

In this sense, it appears that while blogs are ranked as more trustworthy than these other media sources, this is very much a case of the least bad rather than the best.

Finally, these results need to be interpreted with regard to Sunstein's hypothesis,²⁸³ and the regard to which a political blog is fulfilling the function of a fully personalised source of news – The Daily Me. These readers may well be scoring political blogs so highly in these measures because they have found particular blog sites that reflect, affirm and entrench the political views that that reader already holds. These readers are unlikely to be able to find such specialisation to their tastes within the mainstream media, as these are designed for broader tastes, and attempt to stay away from partisan analysis of events. If however a blog reader equates quality content to that which is produced through a partisan lens, and with finding a particular political blog that provides analysis of political news in the manner that they like, or affirms their political belief – the blog equivalent of Sunstein's The Daily Me - then in that case it is not surprising that a mass-market media source fails to score as highly. The across-the-board higher scores could simply be attributed to these readers thinking that a specialised, openly partisan source of information is in every way preferable to one that is mass-market and non-biased.

Blogs as an Alternative to Mainstream Media

The final substantive question of this section of the survey, Question 14, asked respondents to comment, via a free text field, on whether they believe "That political blogs are a viable alternative to these other traditional media types, in terms of providing the public access to political news, commentary or debate." This question is prompted by the assertion, made by *Time* magazine, that blogs have become "a genuine alternative to mainstream news outlets, a shadow media empire that is rivalling networks and newspapers for power and

²⁸³ Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 7.

influence.”²⁸⁴ To what degree does this claim hold true in the eyes of those who actually use political blogs in New Zealand? 584 respondents answered this question, and a number of key themes can be derived from analysis of their responses.

Most respondents answered positively to this question (i.e. answered that blogs are a viable alternative), and those that did so highlighted the ability to more easily access a focussed summary of political discussion as being the primary reason for their response. Others indicated that the discussion and interactivity of the medium makes political blogs far more compelling than traditional news.

However, a number of caveats were also expressed by these respondents. One of the most common of these was that political blogs are a viable alternative for commentary and debate, but not for news. These respondents argue that political bloggers lack the resources, knowledge and abilities to source content themselves, but that they excel at analysing and discussing the news presented to them by the traditional media. Other respondents qualified their response in terms of positing that blogs may be an alternative, but only for those that are sufficiently intelligent or savvy to understand the arguments and counter arguments, and remain above the inherent biases of the medium. One particular comment expressed this sentiment well:

Political blogs' usefulness is limited in the extent to which it remains the domain of the wealthy and educated. The habits and skills needed to read political blogs, as well as the cost of a computer and a good internet connection, are still hardly universalised. In other words, they're great for those who have access to them already. Additionally readers need to be aware that blogs are inevitably constructed around a writer's bias. However, I believe

²⁸⁴ David Kline, “Toward a More Participatory Democracy,” in *Blog! How the Newest Media Revolution is Changing Politics, Business, and Culture*, ed. David Kline and Dan Burstein (New York NY: CDS Books, 2005), 5.

that they remain a viable alternative, chiefly because they exist outside the media hegemony and represent a wide range of opinions.

In summary, the majority of these respondents are positive about blogs being an alternative to the mainstream media as a source of political information, but this positive sentiment is predominantly expressed in cautionary terms. Political blogs thus appear to be perceived by readers as an alternative to traditional media sources of commentary and debate. Indeed, political blogs may have the potential to deliver these functions well. But the respondents caution against relying on these blogs for news or other factual insights on the basis that there is too much risk in relying on blogs as the sole source of political information. On this basis, the majority of respondents indicate that the traditional media still has an important role to play in terms of collecting and presenting neutral, unbiased source material, which the participants in the political blogosphere may then analyse, interpret and discuss. In this respect, these respondents are essentially saying the role of the traditional media is not being replaced by political blogging; rather, blogs are increasingly complementing the role of those media outlets by providing an additional forum for debate and commentary on political news, whilst leaving the news gathering functions of the media largely unchallenged.

Summary

The participants in the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey have provided a massive amount of responses and data regarding their experience as readers of political blogs in New Zealand. Once again, this has allowed conclusions to be drawn as to who these participants are, and how they are using this medium to inform themselves on political news and issues, and engage in discussions with other readers. Insight has also been provided into how these readers perceive political blogs in comparison to other established forms of media, and their opinions as to what degree political blogs may be considered a substitute for traditional media sources.

This survey has therefore delivered to the aims of this study, in terms of collecting a unique New Zealand perspective on the nature of political blog usage and engagement. The concluding chapter of this study will further analyse the results of this survey in the context of the criteria outlined in Chapter One.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to understand and quantify the New Zealand experience of political blogging. This data may then be used to test the applicability of various theories regarding the potential impact of the political blogosphere upon New Zealand political discourses, as well as to provide a face to the New Zealand political blogosphere.

In the Introduction, the need for research into the New Zealand experience of political blogging was highlighted due to the ever increasing levels of participation in the medium that have been observed. The Introduction also noted that political bloggers are increasingly being recognised as having the potential to markedly influence the discussion of political news and events in New Zealand, and to shape the opinions of either the public or of key political decision makers and commentators. However, these observations contrast with the near complete absence of any systematic review of exactly who is participating in the medium in New Zealand, as either writers of political blogs or as their readers, and what impact they feel they are having via their use of the medium. This absence of data raises the first question to which this study was devoted – who are these political bloggers, and who in New Zealand is reading their work?

Chapter One featured the review of two key perspectives that highlight some of the potential benefits or concerns regarding the development of a political blogosphere, and that were used to develop a model of democratic deliberation through which these responses may be evaluated. The first of these was Jurgen Habermas' theories of the public sphere and the ideal speech situation. These theories posit the existence of public discursive forums through which the public may meet to discuss issues that are of common

concern and interest according to a set of criteria. Through such discussions, the opinion of the public is able to be formed and articulated, which therefore allows the public to act as a check and balance against the power and actions of the state. The discussion of this theory highlighted a number of criteria that need to be met to determine whether political blogs may constitute a revival of this notion of the public sphere, and whether they are operating in accordance with the principles of the ideal speech situation. Determining whether and how these criteria were met gave rise to further questions:

- Do political blogs operate in a manner that disregards the status of the participants, so that all may participate in conversation within this discursive forum without limitation?
- Do political blogs operate as a domain of common concern, in that any matter that is of common interest to the participants is able to be discussed?
- Are political blogs inclusive of all potential participants, without forming closed cliques?
- Do the discussions within the New Zealand political blogosphere meet the criteria of the ‘ideal speech situation’, in that the participants are motivated to find truth, do not behave strategically, and treat each other as equals?

Secondly, Chapter One considered the theories of Sunstein. Sunstein is concerned that the ever increasing ability to customise news sources has the potential to damage our democracy. This damage could be being caused through limiting the number of unexpected alternative viewpoints that the public may encounter, which therefore means that the public is limiting their opportunity to be exposed to new ideas, concepts and perspectives that may challenge their viewpoints and stop the development of extremist enclaves of

entrenched opinions. This damage could also be caused by limiting the number of shared experiences that those in a society and a democracy need to have in order to retain sufficient homogeneity to allow the passage of acceptable laws and regulations. Specifically on the topic of political blogs, Sunstein notes that political bloggers risk creating extremist enclaves, where ever-more extremist opinions are reinforced and validated by closed niches of supportive readers, rather than encouraging discussion upon alternative viewpoints. This perspective therefore also raised a number of questions:

- Are New Zealand political blogs collectively operating as a large marketplace of ideas, increasing the public availability of perspectives and alternative discussions?
- To what degree are New Zealand political bloggers supplanting the role of the mainstream media, the traditional homogenising agent of society?
- Are New Zealand political bloggers encouraging the discussion of multiple viewpoints, or are they risking the creation of closed, extremist niches through focussing only on limited viewpoints and perspectives?

Chapter One also reviewed a number of other studies that sought insight into the makeup of the political blogging community of the United States. This review prompted a further question, which was to what degree does the New Zealand experience of political blogging correspond to these perspectives?

The New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey and the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey were specifically designed for the purposes of this study to provide answers to these questions. The purpose of this concluding section is therefore to reflect upon the information provided by these surveys, and discussed in Chapters Two and Three, in order to understand whether and how the questions listed above have been answered.

Who Are New Zealand Political Bloggers?

The responses to the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey provide a clear insight into the demographic makeup of the political blog authoring community of New Zealand. New Zealand political bloggers are likely to be:

- **Older:** Over half of the sampled population (54.7%) were aged over 36 years of age at the time of the survey. Age may be a virtue for a political blogger, in that it may allow a deeper insight into political issues that is built on a foundation of experience in understanding and interpreting political news and events, and sharing this experience with the readers who may not otherwise have the benefit of this deeper experience based insight.
- **Male:** over three quarters of the sampled population (78.7%) were male. This is a significant deviation from the natural demography of New Zealand, and indicates an inherent sexual bias that is limiting female participation in authoring political blogs. This is not to say that there is any explicit barrier to female participation; indeed, other studies have noted that females are almost as likely as males to be bloggers on other topics. This therefore suggests that there are some inherent characteristics of political blogging that encourages male over female participation and this creates an interesting opportunity for further research.
- **New Zealand European:** The sampled bloggers were predominantly New Zealand European, with very low, almost non-existent, rates of Maori participation. Again, this suggests that there is some characteristic of the medium that is preventing those of other, non-New Zealand European ethnicities from participating in accordance

with the size of their populations in New Zealand, and again creates an interesting opportunity for further research.

- **Wealthy:** Over half of the sampled population had incomes of over \$50,000 in the 12 months preceding the survey (50.5%), with nearly a quarter (22.9%) earning \$100,000 or more. This is not representative of the standard income distribution of New Zealand, given that Statistics New Zealand reports the annualised average weekly wage to be \$27,924 per year.
- **Well Educated:** 77.9% of respondents have some sort of post-secondary qualification, which again differs markedly from the standard New Zealand population. This again suggests that there is something about the nature of political blogging that either encourages highly educated people to participate, or that the intellectual weight of participation effectively bars those with lesser academic credentials from participating to the same degree.
- **Politically Active:** These results show a very high level of political participation, in everything from more passive activities such as petition signing, to those with the potential to indicate partisan leanings such as running for office, membership and volunteering. These are measures that are difficult to compare against the New Zealand population as a whole, as there is little data available to construct a meaningful analysis. Political bloggers are likely to be ‘influential’ individuals, in that they may have a disproportionately significant impact on the views and opinions of those around them.
- **Urban:** These results show that bloggers reside overwhelmingly in the main urban regions of New Zealand, but particularly in Wellington. Given that this survey has

highlighted that over a quarter of New Zealand political bloggers are in public sector employment, it is not necessarily surprising that Wellington is the home of a disproportionate amount of New Zealand political bloggers. Bloggers that live in the Wellington region are potentially far more likely to personally experience political events, due to their proximity to the Parliament and other Government processes. Given that the responses to the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey also showed that personal experiences were one of the predominant triggers of political blog posts, this means that where political bloggers choose to live may have an important bearing on the content that they produce.

These results confirm the hypothesis presented by Perlmutter,²⁸⁵ and they share a number of similarities with the outcomes of McKenna and Pole's research into the political bloggers of the United States - aside from one deviation, in that McKenna and Pole found that the majority of American political bloggers were aged 26-41.²⁸⁶ This high degree of similarity between the demographics of political bloggers in New Zealand and the United States means that research on the political blogosphere in the United States is more likely to be relevant and applicable to explaining the same observations in New Zealand. This therefore means that this study has indicated that future researchers may more readily apply information sourced from the United States regarding the political blogosphere to a New Zealand context, thus considerably increasing the amount of literature that may be applied to understanding the New Zealand political blogosphere.

Who Are New Zealand Political Blog Readers?

²⁸⁵ Perlmutter, *Blog Wars*, 28.

²⁸⁶ McKenna and Pole, "What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog.", 101.

As reviewed in Chapter Three, the responses to the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey provide a clear insight into the makeup of the audience for political blogs in New Zealand. Blog readers are likely to be:

- Older: Again, over half of the sampled population (56.6%) were aged over 36 years of age at the time of the survey. This indicates that not only were New Zealand political bloggers older than expected, but blog readers were older still. Blog readership conforms with the observed usage patterns by age of online newspapers, which is not surprising given the degree of similarity in using these two news sources,
- Male: Political blog readers are just as likely as bloggers to be male rather than female, with the same ratio of more than three male readers for each female reader. This result indicates that one of the characteristics of political blogging in New Zealand is that the conversations are predominantly 'blokes talking to blokes'.
- New Zealand European: The political blog reading audience of New Zealand is disproportionally skewed towards participation from New Zealand Europeans, to an even greater degree than the political blogging community itself. 83.8% of respondents to the survey identified themselves in this manner, whereas Maori, Pacific Island, and Asian ethnicities all registered at less than 1.5% of respondents.
- Wealthy: Political blog readers' incomes were higher again than those expressed by political bloggers, with relatively equal proportions of respondents earning over \$100,000 per year. Blog readers were also less likely to be on lower incomes than political bloggers, which is explainable with reference to the lower proportion of

16-25 year olds in the blog reading community, and that those respondents in the 16-25 and 26-35 are less likely to be engaged in full time study.

- **Well Educated:** Blog readers are highly likely to be well educated, with 83.4% of respondents having some sort of post-secondary qualification. This result is somewhat higher than that found with regard to New Zealand political bloggers. Given the strong tendency for highly educated people to be dominant on both the reading and writing side of political blogs, there is the potential that the nature of the content made available upon political blogs is denying those with lesser levels of education the ability to participate more fulsomely.
- **Politically Active:** These results showed that political blog readers may be politically participatory, but not to the same degree as political bloggers. Just over a third of the participants (37.9%) may be considered influential, indicating that political bloggers have a significantly lesser tendency to be highly involved in a traditional sense of political participation.
- **Urban:** Once again, blog readers tend to live in the major urban regions of New Zealand, with 73.6% of readers coming from Auckland, Wellington or Christchurch; particularly Wellington, where the highest number of survey participants hailed. This result is even more intriguing than the political bloggers result – arguably there is some benefit to a political blogger in being in a major urban centre, particularly Wellington, given that political news and activity is likely to be centred in urban areas, and therefore bloggers will be better able to understand and comment upon events. However, blog reading does not require the same degree of proximity to news sources – there is not the same factor of personal experience that was shown with regard to political bloggers. In the case of political

blog readers, if you are reading about an event, then the information you will be receiving is likely to be just as valuable to you if you are in Southland rather than Wellington.

Comparison of these demographic results against the other studies referenced in Chapter One once again shows a strong degree of symmetry between the political blog reading audience of the United States and New Zealand. Graf showed that American political blog readers are most likely to be 35-54,²⁸⁷ which approximates the most likely readers of New Zealand political blogs being those aged 36-50. What doesn't correspond is the low levels of participation from those aged 34 and under in Graf's research, which equated to 21% of the American blog readers, but the similar brackets in New Zealand equated to 43.3% of New Zealand blog readers. New Zealand political blog readers are just as likely to be male rather than female across the two studies, with both recording a similar ratio of approximately 3:1; and a similar tendency to be highly educated, if anything the New Zealand readers more so. Given that the results of the political blog readers' survey performed by BlogAds²⁸⁸ showed a similar demography to that found by Graf, the same parallels may be drawn between this New Zealand data and the BlogAds data. Once again, such similarities between these two surveys and the demographic insights offered by this research shows that New Zealand researchers may be more confident in applying material sourced from the United States to understanding New Zealand political blog reading.

²⁸⁷ Graf, "The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership", 4.

²⁸⁸ BlogAds, "Political Blogs Reader Survey 2006."

Substantiation of the Model of Democratic Deliberation

The next task of this concluding chapter is to substantiate what has been learned with regard to how the New Zealand political blogosphere fulfils Jurgen Habermas' theories of the public sphere and the ideal speech situation, as discussed in Chapter One.

Disregard of Status & Inclusivity

Two aspects of Habermas' theories may be considered in tandem, as the material supporting this discussion is the same for both. These are whether New Zealand political bloggers are creating forums that are free from regard to the status of the participants, and are inclusive of all potential participants that wish to join the conversation. With consideration of the reasons why political bloggers allow readers to comment upon their postings, as shown in the responses to Question 22 of the bloggers' survey, there is some evidence that New Zealand political bloggers are at least trying to create a forum that delivers to these two criteria. 49 of the 65 bloggers that answered the question as to why they allow comments expressed the opinion that they do so because they believe in encouraging discussion, in having an open and lively debate with their readers, and in having their ideas tested and challenged to improve both the readers' and the bloggers' understanding of the issues. A smaller proportion of these respondents expressed a desire to encourage and empower people to take an active role in political blogging, and therefore to improve the quality and diversity of the content produced. These respondents indicate that New Zealand political bloggers are open to the participation of anyone who wishes to come and engage with them upon the topics at hand, without concern as to who they are, what role they play, or whether they are of sufficient status to join the conversation. Essentially, these respondents have answered that they have an open door to anyone who wishes to come and join the conversation on their blogs, and in this regard they cannot be

considered to be operating with regard to the status of these potential participants or acting in a manner that could be described as exclusionary.

However, the demographic results of these surveys show a different picture in terms of how well these sentiments are actually being delivered to. That New Zealand political bloggers have created a forum that is clearly not inclusive of women to the same degree as men, or to non-New Zealand Europeans, or to those of lower incomes or education levels, indicates that the medium is not acting in an inclusive or non-status oriented fashion despite the desires of these bloggers. This is not to say that New Zealand political bloggers are deliberately excluding these groups from active participation – indeed, this study has not posited an explanation for some of these exclusionary factors. But the preponderance of rich, white highly educated and moneyed males indicates that the medium is far from inclusive of all New Zealanders. Further, those of lower status in our society, as measured by less wealth, being non-New Zealand European, or with lesser education are clearly less likely to participate in the New Zealand political blogosphere. There is some inherent factor of the New Zealand political blogosphere, and indeed in the American political blogosphere as well given the similarities in this respect, that is acting as an exclusionary and status oriented criteria for participation. In this regard, this criterion of Habermas' theory cannot be regarded as fulfilled.

Domain of Common Concern

To answer the second question raised by the review of Habermas' theory of the public sphere requires consideration of whether New Zealand political blogs are domains of common concern. Are participants able to discuss any manner that they wish to bring to the forum? Firstly, consideration should be given to the responses given to Question Five of the New Zealand Political Bloggers Survey, where they were asked their reasons for why

they started blogging. The most commonly cited reason, provided by 49 of the 114 respondents, was that they desire to provide commentary, express opinion, or otherwise engage in the political comments of the day. The second most significant reason for starting a blog was the perception that the media was not providing sufficient coverage of the issues that mattered to these bloggers, and therefore their blogging was a reaction to this perceived imbalance in reporting.

Reflecting on these responses, bloggers are essentially using the medium to ‘bring matters to the table’ of public discussion that therefore allows them to understand whether or not such a matter is of common concern amongst their readers. Question 22 of the bloggers’ survey showed that 96.4% of bloggers then also allow readers to place comments on their material, which means that the vast majority of New Zealand political bloggers are allowing readers to join the discussion and also voice whether they are interested in the matter at hand also; or alternatively, why they do not believe that such a discussion is valid. 69.2% of readers take advantage of this comment facility, as shown in the responses to Question Seven of the blog readers’ survey, and 78% of the comments provided indicated that readers place such comments for the reasons of wanting to express an opinion, support the blogger’s sentiment, or simply because they wished to join the discussion. These factors combine to make it likely that this criterion of Habermas’ theory of the public sphere is indeed being met by New Zealand political blogs.

Ideal Speech Situation

With regard to the characteristics required to determine whether the conversations within the New Zealand political blogosphere meet the requirements of Habermas’ ideal speech situation, consideration needs to be given to what evidence there is to support the notion that participants are motivated to find the truth in their engagements within the medium

and whether they behave strategically in terms of how they provide and discuss information. Again, we may draw upon the sentiments that bloggers express in terms of why they allow comments on their blogs, which is to allow other viewpoints to be expressed in a desire to improve the collective understanding of the topic at hand. Again, the following comment illustrates this desire to find the truth on a topic: “I believe in freedom of expression and constructive dialogue. I am not afraid to argue points with people, and if I get something wrong, I do not mind having this pointed out.”

This is supported by those readers who comment on blogs in order to increase the understanding of matters of fact, and to correct errors or misinformation of others. This was a sentiment expressed by approximately one quarter of the respondents that explained why they provide comments on blogs. Consideration should also be given to the results of Question Nine of the blog readers’ survey, where respondents ranked political blogs as on average the most trustworthy of the different media types available to them.

However, it certainly appears that the expression of opinion is more valuable to the majority of participants, both on the side of bloggers and readers. In this regard, no clear conclusion may be drawn as to whether those active in the New Zealand political blogosphere are motivated by a desire to understand the truth in a situation, or whether instead they merely wish to vocalise their perspective without the necessary synthesis of opinions. When the evidence provided through Questions Eight and Nine of the New Zealand Political Bloggers’ Survey is also considered, concerning whether bloggers explicitly support or critique particular political parties via their blogs, then it is clear that a considerable proportion of the conversations on political blogs are more motivated towards supporting or undermining different political causes rather than an objective discussion. With these factors in mind, there is no evidence to support the conclusion that participants

in the New Zealand political blogosphere are motivated by truth and do not behave strategically – instead, it appears they are motivated primarily by a desire for self-expression and support of their political allegiances.

As for evidence to support the notion that participants treat each other as equals with regard to the conversation, the same observations made with regard to inclusivity and disregard of status are valid. In this case, it appears that participants are indeed motivated toward equal treatment of all that wish to participate in the conversation – however, the inherent nature of the blogosphere is denying participation from so many people within New Zealand society that there is a pervasive degree of inequality of participants throughout the medium.

With only one of the three criteria of Habermas' public sphere supported by the results of this study, the conclusion must therefore be that either political blogs are failing to fulfil this function within New Zealand society, or that it is incorrect to apply this theory to understand how political blogs may be enhancing democratic deliberation. Further, as there is insufficient evidence to support the conclusion that participants are motivated by truth and behave in a non-strategic manner; plus the observed in-equality in the medium as judged by the demography of participants, the criteria for the ideal speech situation can also be judged as not met. The New Zealand political blogosphere cannot therefore be concluded to constitute a revival of the notion of the public sphere, just like the conversations within it cannot be judged as meeting the criteria of the ideal speech situation.

The next elements of the model of democratic deliberation established in Chapter One are those proposed by Cass Sunstein.

Marketplace of Ideas

The first aspect to be considered of Sunstein's theories and how they may apply to the New Zealand political blogosphere is whether or not New Zealand political blogs are collectively operating as a large marketplace of ideas, increasing the public availability of perspectives and alternative discussions. The most compelling piece of evidence in this regard is the answers provided by blog readers with regard to their reasons for visiting political blogs, which showed that 82.3% of respondents do so because they seek insights that they would not otherwise be able to access. Further, 86.2% of respondents visit political blogs because of the alternative viewpoints that they are able to receive via the medium. Also relevant to considering this question are the responses provided to Question 13 of the blog readers' survey, which showed that these readers perceive political blogs to be superior in terms of the breadth and depth of material and analysis that they offer on political issues. These results have to be considered as compelling evidence to support the notion that political blogs are fulfilling these readers' desires for the provision of a plethora of different non-mainstream viewpoints.

The answers to the topics that political bloggers cover within their blogs, as discussed with regard to Question Seven of the bloggers' survey is also relevant to considering this aspect of Sunstein's theory. This showed that 57.4% of bloggers are in some way specialising the information that they offer within the broad topic of New Zealand politics. As the analysis of the responses provided to this question shows, the topics covered in this regard ranged widely across a number of different niches, promoting the conclusion that political blogs are indeed providing an increased array of news and viewpoints than that which would

otherwise be provided by the mainstream media. Also relevant to this aspect of Sunstein's theories is the proportion of blogs that is devoted to political news and analysis, as explored via Question Six of the bloggers' survey. Given that the majority of bloggers consider a wider array of news and issues than that which is solely political, it is appropriate to conclude that political bloggers are also increasing the breadth and availability of other non-political ideas and concepts. With these pieces of evidence in mind, it appears appropriate to conclude that political blogs are indeed operating as a marketplace of ideas, and are increasing the availability of different sources of information.

Supplanting Mainstream Media

The next aspect of exploration of Sunstein's theories is to examine how bloggers are supplanting established media sources, which are considered by Sunstein to be one of the traditional homogenising factors within a society. Answers to this question are in part provided by the responses to Questions Eight to 13 of the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' survey, discussed in Chapter Three, which found that on average blog readers find political blogs to be more accurate, more trustworthy, far more entertaining, and far more useful than other media sources. These respondents also indicated that, on average, they see political blogs as better than traditional media in terms of the quality of analysis on political news and issues, and (as already discussed) in terms of the breadth and depth of coverage that they offer.

However, the most important question in this regard was Question 14 of the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey, which asked respondents whether they believe that political blogs are a viable alternative to these other traditional media types, in terms of providing the public access to political news, commentary or debate. While the majority of respondents indicated that they thought that political blogs could indeed be a viable

alternative to the mainstream media, a number of cautionary qualifications were also mentioned. The most commonly voiced concern was that political blogs are not capable of sourcing political news itself, but that they are excellent outlets for additional commentary and debate on that news. This indicates that the majority of respondents see a symbiotic relationship developing, between what would ideally be the unbiased and factual reporting of the mainstream media, and the analysis and discussion of these stories via political blogs. Given that mainstream news stories are one of the primary triggers for political blog content, as shown via the responses to Question 15 of the bloggers' survey, then it is clear that political bloggers are incorporating the mainstream media into their content, and that therefore their readers are still experiencing the homogenising factor of major news sources.

Extremist Enclaves

The final aspect of Sunstein's theories is to test whether or not New Zealand political blogs are operating as enclaves of extremist thought. Consideration of this aspect raises the question as to whether the participants in the New Zealand political blogosphere are indeed attempting to create closed communities of likeminded participants.

There is little to suggest that this is actually the case with regard to the data collected by this study. Political bloggers are clear in the biases that they hold toward particular political parties, as shown via the responses in Questions Eight and Nine of the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey, and there is evidence that there is a tendency within the blogosphere to extend disproportionate levels of support to niche political causes such as the Libertarianz. However, there is also evidence that despite this, the majority of New Zealand political bloggers are genuinely attempting to bring as many voices into the discussions on their blogs as possible, as discussed earlier in this concluding chapter. They

appear more to wish to extend the understanding of these niche viewpoints, rather than to close them down and nurture them within closed communities. Of course, they are often fervent believers in terms of the causes that they support, and can be acerbic and intensely critical of ideals that do not match their own. However, this can be expected when you take people that have a tendency towards being highly participatory, particularly when many of these participatory activities require solid partisan allegiances by the very nature of the activity. These points were demonstrated via the responses to Question 40 of the bloggers' survey, and to a lesser degree with Question 24 of the blog readers' survey.

Further, the responses to Question 29 of the bloggers' survey and Question 14 of the blog readers' survey show the majority of both the readers and writers of political blogs appear reluctant to see the medium as a replacement for the functions of the traditional media, recognising the symbiotic relationship between the two and the different purposes that they serve. If these sentiments are correct, then the mainstream media will still be available to fulfil the homogenising function that it provides for our society, whilst political blogs exist along side to provide an outlet for those that are interested in finding out more information and discussing the issues further.

The conclusion that is reached by this study with regard to Sunstein's theories is that political blogs are excellent at providing more information and viewpoints that would not otherwise be available. In creating such a dynamic marketplace of ideas, they are servicing democracy well by providing interested readers with a vast array of different perspectives on political news and issues. There is some evidence to suggest that such a selection of material is allowing people to participate in what are very clearly biased communities of blogging participants – but nevertheless, the results of these surveys show that the majority of people participating in the New Zealand political blogosphere are doing so out of a

desire more to increase understanding of different perspectives, rather than nurture closed extremist groupings. Political blogs may be extreme, but they are not closed to the participation of others of different views.

Limitations of the Study and Opportunities for Further Research

A massive amount of data was collected through the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey and the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey. This presented a challenge in terms of summarising all of the data collected within the space constraints of this study. More data was collected than was necessary to evaluate the applicability of the model of democratic deliberation; but this range of data was required to deliver to the other main purpose of this study, which was to provide a comprehensive assessment of as many aspects of political blogging in New Zealand as possible. This range of data will allow future researchers a base of insights upon which they may test other aspects of the New Zealand political blogosphere.

Another challenge arose through the design of the two surveys and the analysis of the responses provided. In hindsight, some of the questions should have been worded quite differently, and asked for different responses from the participants in order to better illuminate some of the aspects of the model of democratic deliberation. There also should have been fewer free-text comment fields – while these were useful in terms of allowing respondents an unconstrained ability to answer the questions, these questions also created a large amount of variability that was challenging to summarise accurately. While the major themes raised via these questions have been summarised, there are hundreds of other individual perspectives that have not been adequately presented.

There remains plenty of scope for other research into the New Zealand political blogosphere. One particular area that could be explored in light of this study is the under-representation in the medium of women, non-New Zealand Europeans and those with less-than tertiary levels of education. Another potential area of further research is to explore whether and how political blogging is having an impact upon the mainstream media and governments, from the perspective of those operating within these fields.

Summary

This study has achieved its aims of collecting and analysing a unique set of data that explains the New Zealand experience of political blogging. The high levels of participation in the survey instruments means that the insights that have been provided may be taken as very fair reflections of the attitudes and opinions of the New Zealanders that are engaging in this medium. The data provided has been tested against a model of democratic deliberation, which has provided further insight into how the medium is being used and the potential that it has to shape New Zealand political discourses.

It is still unknown as to whether the likes of Bill Ralston are correct when he describes political bloggers as the “newest and potentially the most powerful” political analysts and commentators. However, what is abundantly clear following this research is that New Zealand has a vibrant community of dedicated and passionate political bloggers who enjoy creating the massive plethora of news, perspectives and opinions that are available via this medium, just as there is an equally vibrant and passionate community of readers who engage with this material, share and discuss their perspectives, and who help generate further content through their participation.

Appendix A: The New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey

WELCOME & PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS

New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey

Welcome to the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey.

My name is Andrew Cushen, and this survey is being conducted as part of my research towards a Master of Arts in Political Studies at the University of Auckland.

The purpose of this research is to understand political blogging within a New Zealand context. An integral aspect of my study is to gain a direct insight into who New Zealand political bloggers are and why you do this - what motivates, interests, and appeals to you about political blogging? How much time and resources do you apply to this pursuit? What future do you see for political blogging? This survey is designed explore these questions, and therefore assist me in understanding to what degree you, as a political blogger, really have the potential to shape political debate, commentary and analysis.

Please take note of the following information and terms:

- Questions marked with an asterix (*) must be completed.
- This survey must only be completed by those aged 16 years or older.
- This survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.
- If you wish, you may complete the survey in multiple sessions, by continuing to use the link provided. The survey will record all of your responses up until the last completed page. However, browser cookies must be enabled for this to take place, and once the survey is completed, the link will no longer provide access to your responses.
- PLEASE COMPLETE YOUR RESPONSES BY THE 30TH OF JUNE 2008.
- All reasonable efforts have and will be taken to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of your responses.
- All responses are securely encrypted, and are accessible only by myself.
- Responses will remain on the Survey Monkey platform until the 30th of September 2008, thereafter all information will be removed and purged from the Survey Monkey platform.
- Responses will be retained by myself, in a password protected format on my personal computer, for a period of up to six years, thereafter all information will be removed and purged from my personal computer.
- Once a response is submitted at the end of the survey, it will be impossible for the collected information to be withdrawn.
- Presentation of the results of this survey will be in such a manner that will not allow your personal information to be identified.
- You are advised to print this page and retain it for your records.

If you have any questions, comments or feedback about this survey, or my research in general, you may contact:

Andrew Cushen - Student & Researcher: acus004@ec.auckland.ac.nz.

Dr Geoff Kemp - Supervisor: g.kemp@auckland.ac.nz

Associate Professor Raymond Miller - Head of Department, Political Studies: rk.miller@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 83711.

I greatly appreciate the time and effort that your participation requires. Thank you for considering this survey.

Kind regards,

Andrew Cushen

*** 1. I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION DESCRIBING THE AIMS AND CONTENT OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONNAIRE. I AM AGED 16 YEARS OR OLDER. I UNDERSTAND THAT, BY SUBMITTING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE ELECTRONICALLY I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH UNDER THE TERMS INDICATED IN THE INFORMATION SUPPLIED ABOVE.**

☐ YES - I AM AGED 16 YEARS OR OLDER AND I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON THE 9TH OF APRIL 2008 FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS FROM THE 9TH OF APRIL 2008 TO THE 9TH OF APRIL 2011, REFERENCE NUMBER 2008/089

Are you a Political Blogger?

*** 2. Do you currently maintain a blog that features commentary, discussion and/or debate on New Zealand political issues, personalities or news?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No - But I have done so previously
- ☐ No - I have never done so

Thanks

Thank you for your interest in the survey.

This survey is designed to collate information relating only to those who are active, or have been previously active, as a political blogger. Please EXIT this survey via the button located at the top right of this page.

Once again, thank you for your interest!

Andrew Cushen.

Despite not being a political blogger, I would appreciate your involvement in this project. If you regularly read political blogs, then please consider completing the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey instead. This is located here: [New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey](#).

Please Continue

Though you are no longer active as a political blogger, I would still appreciate your contribution to this survey.

Please complete the survey by answering the questions with reference to when you were last active as a political blogger.

3. Before you continue, would you please outline why you stopped authoring a political blog?

Section One

4. How many active political blogs do you currently maintain, either as a sole author or in conjunction with other primary authors?

An "active political blog" is one that you have posted content on in the last 3 months; and where a significant proportion of the content on that blog concerns the commentary, discussion and/or debate of New Zealand political issues, personalities or news.

- ☐ One
- ☐ Two
- ☐ Three
- ☐ More than three - please specify (numeric values):

5. What was your main reason/s for starting to blog on political topics?

6. In the last 12 months, what proportion of the content you author on your blog/s relates to analysis, commentary, debate or observation of New Zealand political issues?



- ☐ Less than 25%
- ☐ Between 25% and 50%
- ☐ Between 50% and 75%
- ☐ Between 75% and 100%
- ☐ All content - 100%

7. Does your blog/s focus on or specialise in any particular theme, issue or theory within the broader field of politics? If so, what?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes - please specify what theme, issue or theory your blog/s specialise in:



8. Referring to the blogs that you are author or co-author of, do any of them explicitly SUPPORT any particular political party or parties, or the policies of a particular political party or parties? Please select as many as apply.

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes - Act
- ☐ Yes - Green
- ☐ Yes - Labour
- ☐ Yes - Maori Party
- ☐ Yes - National
- ☐ Yes - New Zealand First
- ☐ Yes - Progressive
- ☐ Yes - United Future
- ☐ Yes - Other political party - please specify:

9. Referring to the blogs that you are author or co-author of, do any of them explicitly CRITIQUE any particular political party or parties, or the policies of a particular political party or parties? Please select as many as apply.

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes - Act
- ☐ Yes - Green
- ☐ Yes - Labour
- ☐ Yes - Maori Party
- ☐ Yes - National
- ☐ Yes - New Zealand First
- ☐ Yes - Progressive
- ☐ Yes - United Future
- ☐ Yes - Other political party - please specify:

*** 10. Do you author your blog/s under your own name, or under a pseudonym, made up name, or other mask of your identity?**

☐ All of my blogging is in my own name

☐ I use a pseudonym, made up name, or other mask of my identity on some or all of my blogging

Section One - Follow Up Questions

11. Why do you use a pseudonym, made up name, or other mask of your identity?

12. If you were unable to author your blog/s under a pseudonym, made up name or other mask of your identity, would you change the content of your blog/s? And if so, how would this content change?

Section Two

13. How long have you been blogging on political topics?

- ☐ Less than 6 months
- ☐ Between 6 months and one year
- ☐ Between one year and two years
- ☐ Between two years and three years
- ☐ Between three years and four years
- ☐ Between four years and five years
- ☐ Five years or greater – please specify (to the nearest year - numeric values):

14. On average, how often do you post content to your blog/s?

- ☐ More than once a day
- ☐ Once daily
- ☐ Less than once daily, but multiple times a week
- ☐ Once weekly
- ☐ Less than once weekly, but multiple times a month
- ☐ Once monthly
- ☐ Less than once monthly – please specify:

15. What inspires or prompts you to post new content to your blog/s? Please select as many as apply.

- ☐ A news item, either on or off line
- ☐ A personal experience or observation
- ☐ A press release or other promotional material
- ☐ Another blogger's posting on their blog or comments placed on your blog/s
- ☐ Post to a schedule, without a specific trigger
- ☐ Other - please specify:

16. On average, how many hours per week do you spend authoring content on your political blog/s?

- ☐ Less than one hour per week
- ☐ Between one hour and two hours per week
- ☐ Between two hours and five hours per week
- ☐ Between five hours and ten hours per week
- ☐ Between ten and twenty hours per week
- ☐ Between twenty and thirty hours per week
- ☐ Between thirty and forty hours per week
- ☐ Forty or more hours per week – please specify (numeric values):

*** 17. In the last 12 months, how much have you spent on hosting, maintaining, promoting and/or obtaining content for your blog/s?**

- ☐ I would prefer not to answer
- ☐ No money spent
- ☐ Less than \$50
- ☐ Between \$50 and \$100
- ☐ Between \$100 and \$500
- ☐ Between \$500 and \$1,000
- ☐ Between \$1,000 and \$5,000
- ☐ More than \$5,000 – please specify (numeric values):

Section Two - Follow Up Questions

18. What was the source of the money you have spent on your blog/s, as answered on the previous page? Please select as many as apply.

- ☐ Self-funded
- ☐ Advertising placed on blog
- ☐ Donations or other payments from blog readers
- ☐ Donations or other payments from a political party
- ☐ Donations or other payments from a politically motivated interest group
- ☐ Community grants or other form of charitable support
- ☐ Other source of funding - please specify

19. Was this funding conditional upon you accepting any terms and/or conditions upon how you would author your blogs, the content of your blogging or the editorial line of your blog/s?

- ☐ N/A - Self funded
- ☐ No conditions upon accepting funding
- ☐ Conditions placed upon accepting funding

If funding was conditional, please outline what these conditions were, and what impact these conditions have had on how you author your blog, the content you post, or the editorial line of your blog:

Section Three

20. In an average month, how many UNIQUE VISITORS read content on your blog? If you have more than one blog, please answer with reference to that blog which receives the most visitors.

- ☐ Do not know
- ☐ None
- ☐ Less than 100
- ☐ Between 100 and 500
- ☐ Between 500 and 1,000
- ☐ Between 1,000 and 5,000
- ☐ Between 5,000 and 10,000
- ☐ Between 10,000 and 20,000
- ☐ Between 20,000 and 50,000
- ☐ 50,000 or more – please specify (numeric values):

21. How do you promote or otherwise encourage readers to visit your blog/s? Please select as many as apply.

- ☐ No promotion
- ☐ Word of mouth
- ☐ Blog rolls on other blogs/websites
- ☐ Placing comments on other blog sites
- ☐ Gaining access to or otherwise utilising existing email or subscriber lists
- ☐ Paid advertising
- ☐ Promotion via references in other forms of media – newspapers, news websites, radio, television
- ☐ Other – please specify

22. Do you allow comments to be placed on your blog posts by readers of your blog/s?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain your answer to this question - why do you, or why do you not, allow comments to be posted?

23. Do readers have to login/subscribe or otherwise provide contact details prior to placing comments on your blog/s?

- ☐ Not applicable - no comments allowed
☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain your answer to this question - why do you, or why do you not, require readers to login or subscribe prior to placing comments?

24. Do you ever respond to the comments made on your blog postings?

- ☐ Not applicable - comments not allowed
☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain your answer to this question - why do you respond, or not respond, to comments placed on your blog postings?

25. Do you have and enforce a comment policy on any of your blogs, or otherwise censor or alter the comments that are posted on your blog/s?

- ☐ Not applicable - no comments allowed
☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain your answer to this question - why do you, or why do you not, have and enforce a comment policy?

Section Four

26. How would you describe your role as a political blogger, in terms of influencing public opinion, debate and/or discussion on political issues?

27. What level of influence do you believe political blogs have on political commentary, debate or discussion in New Zealand CURRENTLY?

- ☐ No influence
- ☐ A minor influence
- ☐ An average influence
- ☐ A major influence
- ☐ A leading influence

Please explain your answer to this question:

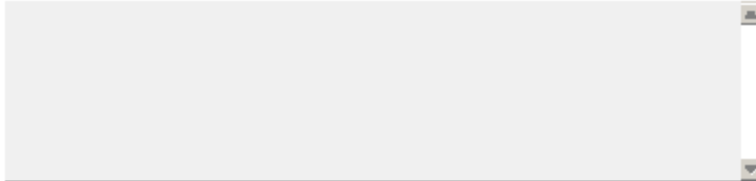
28. What level of influence do you believe political blogs may have on political commentary, debate or discussion in New Zealand in the FUTURE?

- ☐ No influence
- ☐ A minor influence
- ☐ An average influence
- ☐ A significant influence
- ☐ A leading influence

Please explain your answer to this question:

29. Do you see political blogs as an alternative or complement to traditional forms of political commentary – i.e. newspapers, online news sites, radio and/or television?

Why do you think this?



Section Five - Further Participation

30. If required, would you be prepared to participate in a follow up interview to explore your answers more thoroughly?

☐ No

☐ Yes - please advise the best way to contact you to arrange this (email address or phone number):

31. I am also conducting a survey of blog readers. I propose to reach blog readers via political blogs such as yours.

Would you be prepared to promote or otherwise encourage your readers to participate in this survey?

☐ No

☐ Yes - please advise the best way to contact you to arrange this (email address or phone number):

32. If you also spend time reading other political blogs, then I encourage you to please consider [clicking here to take the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey](#). Thank you!

Section Six - Demographics

33. How old are you currently?

- ☐ 16-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-50
- ☐ 51-65
- ☐ 65+

34. Are you male or female?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

35. What ethnic group do you primarily belong to?

- ☐ New Zealand European
- ☐ New Zealand Maori
- ☐ Samoan, Cook Island Maori, Tongan, or other Pacific Island
- ☐ Chinese, Indian or other Asian
- ☐ Other - please specify:

36. In the last 12 months, what was your total personal income, before tax?

- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ No income
- ☐ Less than \$20,000
- ☐ Between \$20,000 and \$29,999
- ☐ Between \$30,000 and \$39,999
- ☐ Between \$40,000 and \$49,999
- ☐ Between \$50,000 and \$59,999
- ☐ Between \$60,000 and \$79,999
- ☐ Between \$80,000 and \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 or more

37. What is the highest level of formal qualification that you have attained?

- ☐ Incomplete primary education or no education
- ☐ Primary school completed
- ☐ Secondary education to School Certificate or National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level One
- ☐ University Entrance, Bursary, Higher School or Higher Leaving Certificate, or National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level Three
- ☐ Non-degree professional, trade or technical tertiary qualification
- ☐ Undergraduate degree
- ☐ Postgraduate degree

38. Which one of the following best describes your current occupation?

- ☐ Working full-time for pay or other income (32 hours or more a week)
- ☐ Working part-time for pay or other income (less than 32 hours a week)
- ☐ Unemployed, looking for work
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Temporarily or permanently disabled, unable to work
- ☐ In full time study at a School, Polytechnic, University or other educational institution
- ☐ Unpaid work, either within or outside of the home

39. Which one of the following best describes the type of organisation that you currently work for; OR, if not currently in paid employment, the type of organisation that you last worked for?

- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ A private company or business
- ☐ State or Public agency or enterprise, central or local
- ☐ A charitable or non-profit organization
- ☐ Never been in paid employment

40. Which of the following activities have you also committed time to in the last 12 months? Please select as many as apply.

- ☐ Written or spoken to an elected office holder to present your opinion on a particular issue?
- ☐ Attended a political rally, protest or demonstration?
- ☐ Held or run for public office
- ☐ Been a member of a political party or interest group
- ☐ Worked or volunteered for a political party or interest group
- ☐ Signed a petition
- ☐ Made a speech, published an article in newspapers, or been interviewed on a political issue
- ☐ Written a letter to the editor or called talkback radio to comment on a political issue

41. Which region do you usually reside in?

- ☐ Northland
- ☐ Auckland
- ☐ Waikato
- ☐ Bay of Plenty
- ☐ East Cape
- ☐ Hawke's Bay
- ☐ Taranaki
- ☐ Manawatu/Wanganui
- ☐ Wellington
- ☐ Nelson/Marlborough
- ☐ West Coast
- ☐ Canterbury
- ☐ Otago
- ☐ Southland
- ☐ Not in New Zealand

Appendix B: The New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey

WELCOME & PARTICIPANT INFORMATION	
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL STUDIES FACULTY OF ARTS	
<h1>New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey</h1>	

Welcome to the New Zealand Political Blog Readers' Survey.

My name is Andrew Cushen, and this survey is being conducted as part of my research towards a Master of Arts in Political Studies at the University of Auckland.

The purpose of this research is to understand political blogging within a New Zealand context. An integral aspect of my study is to gain a direct insight into who New Zealand political blog readers are and why you read political blogs - what motivates, interests, and appeals to you about political blogging? How much time and resources do you apply to this pursuit? What future do you see for political blogging? This survey is designed to capture your thoughts on these questions, and therefore help me to establish how political blogs help you form opinions, engage in debate, and stay informed on political issues.

Please take note of the following information and terms:

- Questions marked with an asterix (*) must be completed.
- This survey must only be completed by those aged 16 years or older.
- This survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.
- If you wish, you may complete the survey in multiple sessions, by continuing to use the link provided. The survey will record all of your responses up until the last completed page. However, browser cookies must be enabled for this to take place, and once the survey is completed, the link will no longer provide access to your responses.
- PLEASE COMPLETE YOUR RESPONSES BY THE 4TH OF JULY 2008.
- All reasonable efforts have and will be taken to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of your responses.
- All responses are securely encrypted, and are accessible only by myself.
- Responses will remain on the Survey Monkey platform until the 30th of September 2008, thereafter all information will be removed and purged from the Survey Monkey platform.
- Responses will be retained by myself, in a password protected format on my personal computer, for a period of up to six years, thereafter all information will be removed and purged from my personal computer.
- Once a response is submitted at the end of the survey, it will be impossible for the collected information to be withdrawn.
- Presentation of the results of this survey will be in such a manner that will not allow your personal information to be identified.
- You are advised to print this page and retain it for your records.

If you have any questions, comments or feedback about this survey, or my research in general, you may contact:

Andrew Cushen - Student & Researcher: acus004@ec.auckland.ac.nz.

Dr Geoff Kemp - Supervisor: g.kemp@auckland.ac.nz

Associate Professor Raymond Miller - Head of Department, Political Studies: rk.miller@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142.
Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 83711.

I greatly appreciate the time and effort that your participation requires. Thank you for considering this survey.

Kind regards,

Andrew Cushen

*** 1. I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION DESCRIBING THE AIMS AND CONTENT OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONNAIRE. I AM AGED 16 YEARS OR OLDER. I UNDERSTAND THAT, BY SUBMITTING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE ELECTRONICALLY I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH UNDER THE TERMS INDICATED IN THE INFORMATION SUPPLIED ABOVE.**

☐ YES - I AM AGED 16 YEARS OR OLDER AND I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON THE 9TH OF APRIL 2008 FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS FROM THE 9TH OF APRIL 2008 TO THE 9TH OF APRIL 2011, REFERENCE NUMBER 2008/089.

Section One

2. When did you start visiting political blogs?

- ☐ Less than 6 months ago
- ☐ Between 6 months and one year ago
- ☐ Between one year and two years ago
- ☐ Between two years and three years ago
- ☐ Between three years and four years ago
- ☐ Between four years and five years ago
- ☐ Five years ago or greater

3. Why do you visit political blogs? Please select as many as apply.

- ☐ Because they present information in a useful manner
- ☐ Because they are an accurate source of information
- ☐ Because they offer alternative viewpoints on news and issues
- ☐ Because I like the opinions of the authors
- ☐ Because they are a trustworthy source of information
- ☐ Because they offer insights that I would not get elsewhere
- ☐ Because they are entertaining
- ☐ Other reasons - please specify:

4. On average, how often do you go online to read and/or comment on political blogs?

- ☐ More than once a day
- ☐ Once daily
- ☐ Less than once daily, but multiple times a week
- ☐ Once weekly
- ☐ Less than once weekly, but multiple times a month
- ☐ Once monthly
- ☐ Less than once monthly - please specify:

5. On average, how many hours per week do you spend reading and commenting on political blog/s?

- ☐ Less than one hour per week
- ☐ Between one hour and two hours per week
- ☐ Between two hours and five hours per week
- ☐ Between five hours and ten hours per week
- ☐ Between ten and twenty hours per week
- ☐ Between twenty and thirty hours per week
- ☐ Between thirty and forty hours per week

6. What are the names and URLs (web addresses) of the political blogs that you most regularly visit?

Blog One Name	<input type="text"/>
Blog One URL	<input type="text"/>
Blog Two Name	<input type="text"/>
Blog Two URL	<input type="text"/>
Blog Three Name	<input type="text"/>
Blog Three URL	<input type="text"/>
Blog Four Name	<input type="text"/>
Blog Four URL	<input type="text"/>
Blog Five Name	<input type="text"/>
Blog Five URL	<input type="text"/>

7. Have you ever placed a comment to a posting on a political blog?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If your answer was yes, why did you/why do you place comments?

Section Two

In this section, I would like you to rank blogs against other media types.

This is to gain an insight into how you, as a blog reader, regard blogs as a credible source of political news, analysis and debate compared to these other traditional media types.

Each question focuses on a different criteria. Please rank each of the media types listed according to how well they deliver to your expectations for that criteria.

8. Please rank each of the media types listed below according to how ACCURATE you feel they are in reporting political news and information.

	5 = Very accurate	4	3	2	1 = Not at all accurate
Political Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Major news websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Daily newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines & periodicals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you wish to make about the accuracy of political blogs:

9. Please rank each of the media types listed below according to how TRUSTWORTHY you feel they are in reporting political news and information.

	5 = Very trustworthy	4	3	2	1 = Not at all trustworthy
Political Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Major news websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Daily newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines & periodicals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you wish to make about the trustworthiness of political blogs:

10. Please rank each of the media types listed below according to how ENTERTAINING you feel they are in reporting political news and information.

	5 = Very entertaining	4	3	2	1 = Not at all entertaining
Political Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Major news websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Daily newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines & periodicals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you wish to make about the entertainment value of political blogs:

11. Please rank each of the media types listed below according to how USEFUL you feel they are in reporting political news and information.

	5 = Very useful	4	3	2	1 = Not at all useful
Political Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Major news websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Daily newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines & periodicals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you wish to make about the usefulness of political blogs:

12. Please rank each of the media types listed below according to your perception of the QUALITY OF ANALYSIS they offer on political news and information.

	5 = High quality	4	3	2	1 = Low quality
Political Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Major news websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Daily newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines & periodicals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you wish to make about the quality of analysis displayed on political blogs:

13. Please rank each of the media types listed below according to your perception of the BREADTH AND DEPTH OF MATERIAL they offer on political news and information.

	5 = High quality	4	3	2	1 = Low quality
Political Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Major news websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Daily newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines & periodicals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television news and current affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you wish to make about the breath and depth of material displayed on political blogs:

14. Do you believe that political blogs are a viable alternative to these other traditional media types, in terms of providing the public access to political news, commentary or debate?

Section Three - Further Participation

15. If required, would you be prepared to participate in a follow up interview to explore your answers more thoroughly?

☐ No

☐ Yes - please advise the best way to contact you to arrange this (email address or phone number):

16. If you are also an author of a political blog, then I encourage you to please consider [clicking here to take the New Zealand Political Bloggers' Survey](#). Thank you!

Section Four - Demographics

17. How old are you currently?

- ☐ 16-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-50
- ☐ 51-65
- ☐ 65+

18. Are you male or female?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

19. What ethnic group do you primarily belong to?

- ☐ New Zealand European
- ☐ New Zealand Maori
- ☐ Samoan, Cook Island Maori, Tongan, or other Pacific Island
- ☐ Chinese, Indian or other Asian
- ☐ Other - please specify:

20. In the last 12 months, what was your total personal income, before tax?

- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ No income
- ☐ Less than \$20,000
- ☐ Between \$20,000 and \$29,999
- ☐ Between \$30,000 and \$39,999
- ☐ Between \$40,000 and \$49,999
- ☐ Between \$50,000 and \$59,999
- ☐ Between \$60,000 and \$79,999
- ☐ Between \$80,000 and \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 or more

21. What is the highest level of formal qualification that you have attained?

- ☐ Incomplete primary education or no education
- ☐ Primary school completed
- ☐ Secondary education to School Certificate or National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level One
- ☐ University Entrance, Bursary, Higher School or Higher Leaving Certificate, or National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level Three
- ☐ Non-degree professional, trade or technical tertiary qualification
- ☐ Undergraduate degree
- ☐ Postgraduate degree

22. Which one of the following best describes your current occupation?

- ☐ Working full-time for pay or other income (32 hours or more a week)
- ☐ Working part-time for pay or other income (less than 32 hours a week)
- ☐ Unemployed, looking for work
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Temporarily or permanently disabled, unable to work
- ☐ In full time study at a School, Polytechnic, University or other educational institution
- ☐ Unpaid work, either within or outside of the home

23. Which one of the following best describes the type of organisation that you currently work for; OR, if not currently in paid employment, the type of organisation that you last worked for?

- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ A private company or business
- ☐ State or Public agency or enterprise, central or local
- ☐ A charitable or non-profit organization
- ☐ Never been in paid employment

24. Which of the following activities have you also committed time to in the last 12 months? Please select as many as apply

- ☐ Written or spoken to an elected office holder to present your opinion on a particular issue?
- ☐ Attended a political rally, protest or demonstration?
- ☐ Held or run for public office
- ☐ Been a member of, worked for or volunteered for a political party or interest group
- ☐ Signed a petition
- ☐ Made a speech, published an article in newspapers, or been interviewed on a political issue
- ☐ Written a letter to the editor or called talkback radio to comment on a political issue

25. Which region do you usually reside in?

- ☐ Northland
- ☐ Auckland
- ☐ Waikato
- ☐ Bay of Plenty
- ☐ East Cape
- ☐ Hawke's Bay
- ☐ Taranaki
- ☐ Manawatu/Wanganui
- ☐ Wellington
- ☐ Nelson/Marlborough
- ☐ West Coast
- ☐ Canterbury
- ☐ Otago
- ☐ Southland
- ☐ Not in New Zealand

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