One does not simply tweet without consequence: A study of the electoral contest in Ashgrove.

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Abstract

Twitter is now a fixture of society, an online meeting place for people to air their grievances about human rights and civil liberty, discuss global warming, stalk celebrities and show off their cats. An unedited forum of comments that is a gold mine of free data for those who seek to monitor opinions on everything from mobile phone providers to voting preferences. It is now unusual for modern political candidates not to sustain a social media presence during their campaign in order to connect with their constituency. This study examines Twitter use by candidates in a single electorate—the seat of Ashgrove—during an election campaign in the Australian state of Queensland in March 2012. In particular, it looks at how Twitter user groups drive concept discussions around themes and concepts within the campaign, thereby exerting influence within the domain as part of the election process. Using a theory building approach, the data set made up of 35,000 tweets was analysed using text analytics software to reveal how Twitter can be used as a feedback mechanism for candidates, how user groups drive concept discussions on Twitter, the role of legacy media within this framework, and how the language of Twitter is a unique genre of communication.
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1.0 Introduction

@dnahinga – “Alone Together”

@Wodespain – “Communicative disease”

@Winooski – “Crouching Grammar, Hidden Manners”

@anglescott – “Twitter is the dime store in the marketplace of ideas”

@jaelmchenry – “A riddle wrapped in an enigma wrapped in typos wrapped in bacon.”

(Greenman, 2012) - readers were asked to describe Twitter in one tweet

US President Barack Obama had 35 million followers on Twitter as at 1 September 2013 (Twitter website data). The skill of his social media campaign team is credited with winning Obama his second term in the White House (Hall, 2013). While much about the role of Twitter in politics remains contested (Aragón, Kappler, Kaltenbrunner, Laniado, & Volkovich, 2013; Baxter & Marcella, 2010; Baxter, Marcella, & Varfis, 2011; Hong & Nadler, 2012; Larsson & Moe, 2012), Hall’s findings suggest that Twitter is a social media platform through which politicians can influence and engage voters. Given the relatively recent rise of this social media platform, the mechanisms of this influence and engagement are not yet well understood. This study examines Twitter use by candidates in a single electorate—the seat of Ashgrove—during an election campaign in the Australian state of Queensland in March 2012. Generally, it examines how Twitter user groups drive concept discussions, themes and concepts within the campaign, thereby exerting influence within the domain (or the ‘Twittersphere’), as part of the election campaign. In particular, the study searches for evidence of a ‘Twitter concept lifecycle’ by examining specific concept case examples from the data.

The seat of Ashgrove, with an enrolment of just over 30,000 voters, was critical to the election outcome. Prior to the election the seat was held by a member of the incumbent Australian Labor Party government (ALP), Kate Jones, who resigned her ministerial
portfolio to fight off her challenger, Campbell Newman, the former Lord Mayor of Brisbane and extra-parliamentary leader of the conservative Liberal National Party (LNP) opposition. Not only did the seat of Ashgrove change hands, but the Opposition won the state election in a landslide, with 62% of the two-party preferred vote, according to ABC election analyst Antony Green. Newman now holds Ashgrove with a margin of 5.7%. The contest in this electorate was dynamic, a high risk strategy for the aspirational Newman, and the final result represented a remarkable reversal of (historical) outcomes for this electorate. Tweeting was part of the campaign strategies of both candidates.

The research questions are:

1. Through what mechanisms did specific user categories drive ‘concept discussions’ on Twitter?
   a) What are the characteristics of the Twitter concept lifecycle within a contested campaign context?
   b) What are the characteristics of the Twitter language genre within a contested campaign context?

The rationale for posing these specific questions, and the methods chosen to illuminate them, are contained in Section 1.7 and Chapters Two and Three below.

1.1 Definitions

The definitions for key terms used in this thesis are outlined below. The original definitions have been sourced from the Oxford English Dictionary.

Influence [noun]: The capacity or faculty of producing effects by insensible or invisible means, without the employment of material force, or the exercise of formal authority; ascendancy of a person or social group; moral power over or with a person; ascendancy, sway, control, or authority, not formally or overtly expressed.

1 (Green, 2012)
For the purposes of this study, influence is characterised as the capacity of user groups to drive concept discussions on Twitter, and also the individual ability of some users to influence other users on Twitter. It will be measured by the qualitative analysis of tweets using a time series graph correlated with external events for context, and by using statistical scores applied to individual Twitter users for comparative purposes.

**Engage** [trans]: To attract and hold fast (attention, interest).
The capacity of a Twitter user to be engaged in a particular topic or with a particular user, to a point where influence can occur.

**Media personalities**
For the purposes of this study, ‘media personalities’ are defined as Queensland-based media professionals who have an extensive following both on Twitter and externally, based on personality and high levels of engagement with their audience.

1.2 The Queensland political landscape

Since 1915, politics in the Australian state of Queensland has been defined by three periods during which one political party dominated state politics for a decade or more. The ALP held government in Queensland from 1915 to 1957, barring a three-year interruption from 1929 to 1932. The conservative Country/National Party held government from 1957 to 1989, and for part of that period it was in coalition with the Liberal Party. The ALP was in power for most of the last 23 years until 2012, barring two years from 1996 to 1998. The period of most relevance to this thesis is the latter half of the ALP dominance in the Queensland Parliament from 1990 until 2012.

When National Party leader Rob Borbidge took over as Premier after the 1996 election, he led a minority government with a tenuous hold on power. It was during Borbidge’s time as Premier that fellow conservative (but Liberal Party member) Pauline Hanson first became prominent on Queensland’s political scene. However in 1997 Hanson was dis-endorsed as a Liberal Party candidate and founded the One Nation party; the election in 1998 was the first real test for the hard-line right-wing policies that Pauline Hanson brought to the floor (Brennan & Mitchell, 1999). The issue
of how to deal with One Nation split the Liberal-National coalition, becoming apparent when voting preference decisions were made public. Both parties eventually chose to preference One Nation above the ALP, resulting in an unexpectedly positive result for One Nation, which went on to outpoll both the Liberal and National parties and to win 11 seats (from 89) at the 1998 election (Brennan & Mitchell, 1999). The Liberal-National coalition lost votes in the process, dropping from 44 to 32 seats, while the ALP retained the original 44 seats. The new leader of the ALP Peter Beattie made a deal with new independent member Peter Wellington allowing him to take control of a majority government. The turnaround time for Labor to regain control of the parliament, less than three years, was a telling sign of the turmoil on the conservative side of Queensland politics. The One Nation party went from 11 sitting members to zero when the next election was held in 2001, following mass defections to rival parties or by members choosing to stand as independents, and nearly all of these defectors lost their seats. Despite bringing new candidates forward for the 2001 election, three of whom were successful, by 2004 only a single One Nation member remained in government until 2009. The 2001 election landslide cemented Peter Beattie’s hold on power, which he repeated in 2004 and again in 2006. In both elections the National-Liberal coalition was led by Lawrence Springborg.

In 2007 the now-established norm was challenged, the catalyst being Peter Beattie’s retirement and his succession by Anna Bligh, Queensland’s first female Premier. Lawrence Springborg returned to lead the National Party after a two-year hiatus and in a move that would shape future events in Queensland, began working on the National and Liberal party merger. The merger was completed in 2008 and Springborg became leader of the new Liberal National Party (LNP) in time for the 2009 election. The merger was significant as it was representative of a new understanding and agreement between two parties who understood that as individual parties they could not mount a meaningful challenge to the ALP government—but together their prospects were more promising.

The 2009 election was the first real challenge that the ALP had faced in the past 20 years in government. Anna Bligh was faced with a stronger, more cohesive opposition in the form of the LNP, and for the first time in 20 years the media touted the conservatives’ chances of winning power. In the end, Bligh was re-elected with a
comfortable margin, but the ALP majority had begun to shrink (from 59 to 51 seats or a -4.67 per cent swing). Following this defeat, Springborg resigned from the leadership and was succeeded by John-Paul Langbroek, who was a Liberal member before the merger. Langbroek led the LNP until March 2011, when in an irregular, daring and high-risk move he was replaced by the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman, who was not a member of Parliament. Newman, a member of the LNP, was elected as Lord Mayor of Brisbane in 2004, where he faced a majority of ALP members in the Brisbane City Council chambers. In 2008 he was re-elected and this time secured a LNP majority in the chamber. The unusual decision of the state opposition to appoint a leader from outside the government was controversial and attracted a lot of media attention, which is discussed further below.

For Newman to become Premier, the LNP would have to win a majority in state parliament and Newman himself would have to win a seat. When Newman announced that he would be running for the seat of Ashgrove, which was held by an ALP cabinet minister and had been a safe ALP seat for 23 years, an intense media spotlight was placed on the once quiet suburb.
1.3 Ashgrove

The seat of Ashgrove was created in 1960 and covers the Brisbane suburbs of The Gap, Gaythorne, Enoggera, Ashgrove and parts of Mitchelton and Alderley.

![Figure 1: Queensland electoral commission map of the seat of Ashgrove. March 2012. Source: Electoral Commission Queensland](image)

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census data provided the following figures, which have been tabulated below to form a snapshot of the demographics in Ashgrove (using the State Electoral District definitive area including the suburbs listed above) as compared to Queensland ((ABS), 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Ashgrove</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of persons</td>
<td>44,802 (49.7% male – 50.3% female)</td>
<td>49.6% male – 50.4% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of persons</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median total household income ($/weekly)</td>
<td>$1,868</td>
<td>$1,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household size</td>
<td>2.7 persons</td>
<td>2.6 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of persons born in Australia</td>
<td>77.9%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of persons living in a stand-alone house</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of persons unemployed</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of persons in the labour force employed full-time</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of couple families with children</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of persons who identify with Catholicism</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of persons with 'no religious affiliation'</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2: Demographical census data in Ashgrove compared to Queensland*

The ABS census data showed that in the category of ‘religious affiliation’, 33.1% of persons in Ashgrove identified with Catholicism (significantly larger than the overall Queensland figure of 23.8%), with the next most popular answer being ‘no religious affiliation’, which was stated by 25.5% of respondents. This significantly higher percentage of those identifying with the Catholic faith is interesting to note, as the ALP have strong historical connections to the Catholic Church, and Newman made no secret of his assessment of the importance of the Christian lobby groups during the 2012 election campaign (Owens & Fraser, 2012). As evidenced by the table above, Ashgrove is generally in line with the overall Queensland statistical profile, except for a noticeable slant towards well-educated couples with children who live in stand-alone houses. In addition, the average household income is significantly higher than the Queensland average, which fits the profile of an affluent area with the majority of people born in Australia and speaking English at home.
Traditionally Ashgrove was a Liberal seat, first won by Douglas Tooth in 1960. Upon his retirement in 1974, Tooth was replaced by John Greenwood. In the 1983 election Tom Veivers won Ashgrove for the ALP but held on for just one term, losing to Liberal Alan Sherlock in 1986. Again, Sherlock could only hold the seat for one term, losing the 1989 election to Labor member Jim Fouras who held Ashgrove until his retirement in 2006. The new ALP candidate Kate Jones was successfully elected, and after winning her second term in 2009 she was appointed to the cabinet as Minister for the Environment, Resource Management and Climate Change. In June 2011 when Newman announced his intention to contest the seat at the 2012 election, Jones resigned from the ministry to focus on her campaign. The willingness of the ALP to reshuffle cabinet was recognition of the serious threat posed by Newman and of the importance of the Ashgrove campaign. This strategic decision is important as it marks the first definitive move by the ALP in their Ashgrove campaign and provided the basis for their ‘grassroots’ approach, a key factor for the research questions for this thesis.

An issue of particular historical relevance to this thesis is that of the LNP leadership during the ALP period of dominance, as it provides context for the bold step by the LNP to appoint Newman as leader of the party without holding a seat. When the LNP was officially formed in 2008, it followed the longstanding Liberal-National coalition agreement that exists at the federal level but with some significant differences. In most parts of Australia the Liberal Party is the dominant of the two, as it has more members concentrated in urban areas, with the National Party (formerly the Country Party) operating almost exclusively from rural and regional areas. This is not the case in Queensland, where the urban-rural divide is somewhat blurred, with many National Party members based in urban areas. This is in part because of the state’s population distribution, with relatively fewer people living in the capital city and more people based in regional parts of Queensland (ABS, 2011). As mentioned earlier, Lawrence Springborg assumed the leadership of the newly-formed LNP in 2008 and led the unified party into the 2009 election. Although the LNP lost that election convincingly, they did manage an eight-seat swing and finished only one percentage point behind the ALP on the two-party preferred vote. However the LNP lost the election largely because they did not have support in Brisbane. As a former National Party member, it is likely that Lawrence Springborg’s leadership did not resonate with potential LNP voters based in the state capital and hence, following his post-election resignation,
former Liberal Party member Langbroek was appointed as leader.

When Newman rose to power in local government, he was noted for his direct manner and charismatic style of leadership, which resulted in a strong profile in Brisbane. This is in contrast to previous LNP leaders, Springborg and Langbroek, who were based outside the capital and were not generally viewed by the press as ‘celebrity politicians’. An example of how the print media perceived this phenomenon is below:

The person who is most likely to get elected in this celebrity age is the person people feel comfortable and familiar with. So politicians need to “become” celebrity brands, or tap the celebrity market however they can. The mainstream media have undoubtedly contributed to this trend towards celebrity over substance. (Lawson, 2008)

When the LNP decided to stake their 2012 election chances on Newman, they were choosing a popular Brisbane politician with a state-wide profile thanks to his personality and leadership approach. The ALP response to Newman’s appointment as leader of the LNP was to conduct a strategy based on personal attack in an attempt to cast doubt on his ability to lead and to take advantage of his particular personality quirks. By targeting Newman’s family, the ALP initiated a high level of public debate and media coverage. This culminated in a political catastrophe when the Crime and Misconduct Commission, to which the ALP had referred Newman and his family ‘dealings’, found two weeks out from the election that Newman had no case to answer. As a result, Premier Bligh was forced to admit that the smear campaign had no merit or factual basis. An example of how the media responded to the incident is below:

Labor is asking voters to consider Mr Newman’s integrity in the face of revelations that a large donor to the former Brisbane lord mayor’s campaigns had controversial towers approved soon afterwards. Mr Newman says voters are realising there’s nothing to the claims.

‘There was a sea change in the last three days, statewide, Ashgrove and other seats,’ he told reporters.

‘What’s happening now is the people of Queensland have looked at what the premier has been saying … the smear campaign.'
‘When they saw the premier go out and say she had no evidence, the castle walls came crashing down.

‘My sense of it is ... the Labor Party have really alienated people.’ (AAP, 2012)

This event was a significant point for both campaigns, and is reflected in the Twitter data and the extensive media coverage that the issue gained. The backlash against the ALP was severe (52 to 48 per cent in Ashgrove – 2PP), and the reaction by popular media was unforgiving, as per the following:

By going so hard against Newman, Labor cemented the perception among voters that Anna Bligh could not run on her own record, could not justify her breaches of faith with the voters on issues such as privatisation, could not argue that after governing for 20 of the past 22 years her party wasn't tired or out of ideas.

Labor cemented the perception that the best it could do after governing for so long was spread rumours, plant stories and make personal attacks on Newman and his family over their business dealings—even though on three occasions, the state’s corruption watchdog completely cleared Newman of any wrongdoing, further adding to the voter view that Labor was desperately playing the man because it could not credibly talk about itself. (Penberthy, 2012)

It became evident that public sentiment was overwhelmingly negative towards the Bligh ALP government and media speculation that the ALP would be defeated in a landslide result (Agius, 2012; Ludlow, 2011; Penberthy, 2012; Sweetman, 2011; Wardill, 2011) was indeed correct. Queensland underwent significant political change in March 2012, with a swing towards the ‘right’ wing of politics that was echoed in recent elections in New South Wales and Victoria and at a national level. The LNP had recognised the need to portray strong leadership and had made the critical decision to appoint Newman as party leader from outside the Parliament. By bringing in a politician who already enjoyed a positive profile in Queensland, the LNP had gained critical momentum in the election contest.
The fight for the seat of Ashgrove was the focus of substantial media attention. The controversy surrounding the placement of Newman as the LNP candidate and his appointment as Leader of the Liberal National Party while not holding a parliamentary seat resulted in increased media speculation and interest from the public. As a result, every step of the campaign for Ashgrove was recorded and commented on by the media. The candidates' local connections were highlighted in the campaign as both candidates tried to communicate their key messages at a grassroots level, using strategies such as images of local community members and events, using personal ‘friendly’ language, and inviting open discussions. This local focus is a key topic for this thesis and is investigated in the thesis analysis, as the effectiveness of this strategy is questioned. Newman does not reside in the Ashgrove electorate, but close to it. As such, his campaign also depended on his local connections and constant presence in the electorate to enhance his legitimacy with local residents, which was reflected by media coverage at the time:

Ms Jones, meanwhile, has barely set foot outside her Ashgrove electorate after resigning as environment minister to run a grass-roots campaign to slay the man the LNP would make king... The 32-year-old mother-of-one lives in Ashgrove, went to high school there and is a member and patron of everything from the local branch of Meals on Wheels, to sporting clubs, the historical society and Neighbourhood Watch. (Agius, 2012)
1.4 The election result

28,823 residents voted in the seat of Ashgrove on 24 March 2012. The summary of votes for each candidate is below (source: Electoral Commission Queensland).

As evidenced in the above table, Newman won the seat by attracting 51.81% of the primary vote and 55.5% of the two-party preferred vote, indicating a 12.6% swing to the LNP against the incumbent ALP member Jones (ABC News Election Summary online).

The overall election results were a swing towards the LNP that ended the ALP hold on government, reducing them to just seven seats in parliament. State-wide there was an 8.1% swing towards the LNP, with the resulting 78 seats providing an unprecedented majority. The summary of the overall election result is below:
Figure 4: The 2012 Queensland election results (Source: ABC News Election Summary online)
1.5 Twitter

Twitter is an online microblogging service created in 2006. The service allows users to post messages of up to 140 characters as part of an international discussion board.

Twitter use has grown rapidly in the political domain. United States President Barack Obama with 35 million followers, ranked third in the world in 2012 after Lady Gaga (33 million) and Justin Bieber (33 million) (Johnson, 2013). In Australian political life, as at August 14, 2011, Kevin Rudd had nearly 1 million followers; Prime Minister Julia Gillard
120,000 followers; Malcolm Turnbull 65,000 and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott 38,000 (Twitter website data). Former Queensland Premier Anna Bligh had some 20,000 followers (Twitter website data). The uptake of new technologies for the purposes of political campaigning is not new, as social media applications allow for direct (or seemingly direct) dialogue between the public and elected representatives.

1.6 Twitter functions

Twitter has various functions that enable it to operate as a free-to-use large-scale discussion space with instantaneous update capabilities that form part of a scrolling ‘news feed’. The main characteristics and functions are listed below and can be seen in Figure 6 and Figure 7 below:

- Tweets are publicly visible by default, but this can be restricted by users if they choose
- Messages sent over the service are referred to as ‘tweets’ and have a maximum length of 140 characters
- Twitter can be used via the Twitter website—on a computer or using external applications (for smart phones etc)
- Private messages (similar to SMS) can also be sent using the service
- Users can subscribe to other users’ tweets—referred to as ‘following’
- Followed users’ tweets appear in a chronological news feed on the original user’s main Twitter page
- Users can group concepts or topics using ‘hashtags’—words or phrases preceded by a ‘#’
- Hashtags can then be searched to enable a user to see tweets that include the particular concept
- Users can mention another user by utilising the ‘@’ symbol
- Users can repost a message from another user; this is symbolised by ‘RT’ that appears as a prefix on the reposted message
- Topics that are tagged at a great rate are categorised as ‘trending topics’ that appear on the Twitter user main page.
1.7 Research background

There are a number of compelling reasons for researching the political contest played out in Ashgrove. The contest attracted considerable public interest (Fraser & Barrett, 2011; Lutton, 2011; Wardill, 2011) and Twitter was one of the instruments used in the forum of public debate as both a tactical weapon and a yardstick of influence. The intense media focus and high level of public interest in the campaign reflected the strategic importance of the seat of Ashgrove, and the dynamics of the contest between the two high-profile politicians were scrutinised and commented upon throughout Queensland. Polling indicated that both parties had a chance to win at some stage during the campaign, which added a level of uncertainty and even desperation towards
the end of the campaign. In addition, the Ashgrove campaign had its own distinct dynamics that were different to the overall state-wide campaign, while also acting as the pivotal focus point for media outlets across the country.

The unique circumstances of the Ashgrove campaign provide an ideal situation for researching Twitter and microblogging behaviours. The volatile situation meant that Twitter was used more intensely than usual and as a result had more potential to make a bigger impact on the external outcome.

1.8 Data

A corpus of almost 35,000 tweets was collected between 29 June 2011 and 27 March 2012. These tweets encapsulate the microblogging component of the electoral contest between Campbell Newman and Kate Jones in the seat of Ashgrove in the Queensland state election on 24 March 2012. As previously mentioned, Twitter was used extensively by both candidates as a communication tool throughout the campaign period, yet both used remarkably different strategies to achieve their objectives. As part of this project, interviews were carried out with key digital strategy advisors from both the LNP and ALP campaign teams, who had intimate knowledge of the campaign objectives and the success of their respective Twitter strategies. The difference between the candidates’ strategies is the key element undergirding this thesis topic, as it was this factor which enhanced the richness of the dialogue throughout the campaign. The specifics of the data collection and coding process can be found in Chapter Four.

1.9 The use of Twitter in Ashgrove

Using the Twitter data set, qualitative analysis will be undertaken using a theory building approach. As outlined in the research questions earlier in this document, one of the important purposes of this thesis is to determine through what mechanisms user groups were able to drive concept discussions. Later in this thesis, the detailed findings from the data will be outlined. The intent of this section is to outline why this particular data set is worth researching.
Leafy Ashgrove is a sleepy stretch of suburbia at the epicentre of Australia’s most electric election campaign... As the main parties fight to the death over this patch of political mecca, every interest group—from farmers to miners, Aboriginal leaders and environmental activists—seems to have wheeled its barrow along Ashgrove Avenue. (Bita, 2012)

As outlined earlier, the circumstances that led up to the campaign were extraordinary, as Newman announced his intention to run for the seat of Ashgrove whilst also being appointed as the leader of the LNP without holding a seat in parliament. Newman was a popular politician during his time as Lord Mayor of Brisbane, as evidenced by his polling and election results. He had a state-wide profile and support from important senior figures within the LNP (Wardill, 2011). The LNP in Queensland were struggling to find a strong leader who resonated with the public and had the profile to drive them to an election win. The ALP’s popularity was lagging at the time that Newman was appointed leader, and they were experiencing significant negative media coverage for their privatisation plans despite receiving some positive polling after the Queensland flood disaster in January 2011 (Howe, 2011; Lion, 2011; Ludlow, 2011; Sweetman, 2011; Young, 2011).

Newman made it clear from the beginning of his campaign that social media was not his specialty, and he was open about his lack of detailed understanding of Twitter whilst acknowledging that it was a relevant campaign tool (Girdis, 2012). Interestingly, Newman also publically showed his contempt for politicians who tweet often, as evidenced by the following quote taken from Hansard, the official record of the Queensland Parliament:

We should look at the Twitter records of Andrew Fraser. Clearly, the ship was on remote control, because he spent all of his time on Twitter. He used to Twitter [sic] in the chamber. He used to Twitter at night. He used to Twitter probably in bed at home, but I am not going to go any further there (Campbell Newman, spoken in parliament on 5 June 2012 about the former treasurer and avid user of Twitter, Andrew Fraser).

However the Newman campaign team’s Twitter objective was clear and its strategy was uncompromising; the staffers responsible for social media were to do two things:
1. Monitor Twitter for the latest news and topical issues
2. Use Twitter as a broadcasting device for pre-approved media releases and campaign materials.

The staffers were instructed not to engage with other Twitter users, other than answering simple direct questions that were easy to answer, or generic acknowledgement of support from users. The rationalisation given for this approach (expanded upon later when specifically referred to in the interviews with the strategists) was that Twitter is uncontrollable, and was populated by users who were biased against Newman and his campaign. From the interviews, it is apparent that this assumption was made without statistical data; rather it was a view held by senior members of the campaign team based on personal experience. As a result of this approach, a lot of the conversations about Newman that occurred on Twitter can be viewed as missed opportunities by his campaign team to engage with users who may have been receptive to having their voting preferences influenced. However, even though this was the approach taken by the campaign team, there were clear instances where Newman supporters engaged in conversations and even came to his defence. Newman’s Twitter strategy was cautious, even neutral, potentially giving Twitter users greater influence over the direction and tone of discussions.

Jones’ campaign team made Twitter an instrumental part of their effort to win votes, particularly once she announced her resignation from the cabinet in order to focus solely on the campaign. In an interview one of her digital strategists stated that the overarching goal with Twitter usage was to make Jones ‘impossible to hate’, and this meant playing up her image as a local mother with a pleasant and likeable disposition, with the intention of highlighting the dichotomy between that image and Newman’s characteristically aggressive and direct approach. Jones was never able to reach the follower numbers that Newman amassed without actively seeking followers, but she did drive some important debates during the campaign using Twitter. Interestingly, throughout the campaign it quickly became evident that Jones was distancing herself from the ALP brand, moving away from the traditional red and blue colours, instead favouring pink merchandise with the ALP party logo missing from her campaign marketing materials.
What neither of the candidates’ digital strategy teams seemed to fully comprehend was the notion of a ‘Twitter issues lifecycle’ (a concept that will be explored more fully later in this thesis), as neither side managed to manipulate the cycle to any great effect. Jones struggled throughout the campaign to dominate the Twitter conversation in any meaningful way, as she was completely overshadowed by (not necessarily positive) attention paid to Newman. This was due in part to the unique circumstances around his challenge for the seat of Ashgrove, and also to his ability to elicit strong reactions from the public, whether positive or negative. What my Twitter data shows is that below the overarching conversation themes, including gay rights and the morality of smear campaigning, there are a multitude of micro-conversations occurring between politicians, media, voters, party members, interest groups and trolls that previously have never been able to interact on this scale.

1.10 Conclusion

To conclude, Chapter One has given an overview of the political landscape that provided the context for the Ashgrove study, a basic overview of Twitter and a summary of what this study offers in terms of potential for further research. In the coming chapters, an overview of relevant literature will be given, leading to a detailed explanation of the research design and methodology (including the theoretical framework) for the project. A detailed data analysis will be followed by a discussion of the significant findings and implications for further research in the field.
2.0 Social media and Twitter: The Literature

LinkedIn is for the people you know.
Facebook is for the people you used to know. Twitter is for people you want to know
Source unknown

Twitter, (launched 2006), is but one of a raft of social media applications which are part of what is known as ‘the social web’ (Gruber, 2008). Recent research has been done on social media and its influence on social connectedness in areas such as health networks (G. Kim, Jang, & Chiriboga, 2012), community networks (Stoll, Foot, & Edwards, 2012; M. Taylor, Wells, Howell, & Raphael, 2012), gaming networks and cyberpsychology (Bowman, Schultheiss, & Schumann, 2012), and user credibility (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2012).

The advent of such web-based tools has disrupted traditional, industrial-age media platforms such as printed newspapers and magazines, and free-to-air broadcasting. These platforms are frequently termed ‘legacy media’. This disruption has included disruption to one of the significant rationales of legacy media: their self-defined function as ‘The Fourth Estate’, keeping the citizenry informed and holding authorities to account (Schultz, 1998). One domain in which legacy media have historically played a significant role is politics and elections. The advent of new media throws up new possibilities for political campaigning, indeed for any type of social advocacy, and for both media scholars and communication practitioners, questions about the impact and efficacy of the upstart startups as well as their relationship to the legacy media coverage of political campaigns.

We are yet to witness a decisive social media moment in political campaigning. Legacy media has those moments such as the use of radio by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill in the thirties and forties, and the Nixon Kennedy television debates in 1960, although some have argued that Barack Obama’s use of social media in the 2012 US election gave him a decisive edge (Hall, 2013; Tsou et al., 2013). The recent advent of Twitter means that the corpus of scholarly research about it is less than five years old. Moreover, as will be clear from this chapter, there is as yet little scholarly consensus about the role and function of Twitter in the public sphere. So much is
contested; for example, does Twitter agenda-set or merely amplify?

This chapter examines the Twitter phenomenon, and the rise of social media metrics, including the measurement of sentiment. We then examine the use of Twitter in political communication, and the notions of ‘influence’ and ‘engagement’ in an electoral context.

2.1 Twitter and the metrics of microblogging

2.1.1 Twitter’s origins

The strong rise in the use of social media has resulted in a large volume of publicly available textual data that can be analysed by those interested in studying the conversation and interaction dynamics between users. Twitter is an online social media tool and a form of microblogging that was created in 2006 and is based upon an SMS-style format. It provides a microblogging service that enables users to send and receive ‘tweets’ of up to 140 characters in length. The service is popular across a variety of demographics, with over 200 million tweets generated each day (Anger & Kittl, 2011; Bae & Lee, 2012; Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010; Duggan & Brenner, 2013; Kontopoulos, Berberidis, Dergiades, & Bassiliades, 2013). The subscription dynamic of Twitter is commonly viewed as a collected graph (referred to colloquially as the ‘twittersphere’), where users are the nodes and the edges indicate subscriptions (or ‘followings’). As such, users’ central news feeds display tweets from other users they are following, while also allowing the user to search for specific keywords in order to locate recent tweets from other users that mention those keywords (Angus, Smith, & Wiles, 2012).

Twitter originated as a startup named ‘Odeo’, which was initially designed as a podcasting platform. Following the launch of Apple’s iTunes, the platform became largely redundant and the original developers Evan Williams, Biz Stone, Noah Glass and Jack Dorsey moved on to the first incarnation of the Twitter platform (Carlson, 2011; Johnson, 2013). The original idea was brought forward by Dorsey, who was interested in developing a product that displayed user ‘status’; what one person was
doing at any given time. Originally, the program was set up so that users would send an SMS to a single mobile number, which would then broadcast the ‘status’ or text to a specific group of friends (Carlson, 2011). This initial set up explains why Twitter posts are limited to 140 characters, as the SMS character limit at the time of production was 160 characters, and the developers wanted to leave enough space for the username within each tweet (Johnson, 2013). Glass is credited with coming up with the name ‘Twttr’ for the program (named to imitate ‘Flickr’ which was another popular social media platform at the time), which eventually became ‘Twitter’ because of the similarity of the ‘short bursts of inconsequential information’ with the concept of ‘chirps’ (Carlson, 2011; Johnson, 2013). In March 2006 the developers had a working Twitter prototype; by this time Odeo’s employees were using the program extensively, resulting in very high personal bills for the cost of the SMS services (Carlson, 2011). The Odeo investors did not support the initial Twitter concept and were bought out by Williams in September 2006 for an undisclosed amount so the company was owned by a single person. In 2011 Twitter was valued at $5 billion (USD).

Twitter started appearing in academic studies in 2008 as researchers began to realise the potential of the platform for revealing trends and connectivity in the digital age. Twitter has a variety of applications, ranging from emergency communications, health diagnostics, crisis communications, product promotion and measuring electoral behaviour (Cottle, 2011; Strongin, 2010). There is an emerging body of work focused on how Twitter can be used to collect qualitative data in areas including computer sciences (Allen, Löffler, Radke, Schnetter, & Seide, 2009; Goldberg, Hayvanovych, & Magdon-Ismail, 2010), conversation analysis (Boyd et al., 2010; Bradley, 2010), political science (Bruns, Burgess, Highfield, Kirchhoff, & Nicolai, 2011; Cottle, 2011; Grant, Moon, & Grant, 2010; Jungherr, Jürgens, & Schoen, 2011; Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welpe, 2010), marketing and branding (Greer & Ferguson, 2011), health care (Hawn, 2009; Strongin, 2010), and disaster response strategies (B. G. Smith, 2010).
2.1.2 Twitter uptake and usage

From Twitter’s beginnings as an SMS-style user service used only by Odeo’s employees, the growth trajectory from 2006 to 2013 has been exponentially high (Cain Miller, 2010; Carlson, 2011; Johnson, 2013). Between 2007 and 2010 the number of users went from 503,000 to 175 million, with 58 million users joining in 2009 (Cain Miller, 2010; Rao, 2010). The latest statistics from Twitter indicate that as at January 2013 460,000 new accounts are created every day, and that there are over 200 million current users. The company itself has grown from eight staff in 2008 to over 400 staff with plans for expansion (Cain Miller, 2010). Popular technology blog TechCrunch tracks Twitter statistics and notates important milestones for the company, including staff appointments, product launches, office locations and links to quantitative data analysis such as traffic analytics.

Figure 8: Twitter new user growth from 1/9/12 to 27/2/13 (USA only) – sourced from TechCrunch

Pew Internet & American Life Project is a project of the Pew Research Centre (PRC), a not-for profit self-described ‘fact tank’ that provides information on issues, attitudes and trends ‘shaping America and the world’³. The PRC undertakes an annual demographic study of social media users across the most popular platforms, using survey data sourced from across both landline and cellular telephone lines in the US. While the PRC methodology is simplistic, using a sample of around 2,000

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² http://www.crunchbase.com/company/twitter
³ http://pewinternet.org/About-Us.aspx
respondents, the data they collect does provide a useful broad insight into who is using social media. In 2012, the PRC report found that 15% of adult internet users were using Twitter regularly, which was a small rise from the 13% in 2011 (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). In 2013, it found that 16% of adult internet users are active on Twitter, with the service skewed favourably toward those in the 18-29 age group who live in urban areas (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Male users outnumber female users slightly, which is a reverse of the 2011 findings, and about one third of Twitter users have had some tertiary education (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). The full report from PRC is available online⁴.

⁴ http://pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2013/PIP_SocialMediaUsers.pdf
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>% of internet users who use Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All internet users (n=1,802)</strong></td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Men (n=846)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Women (n=956)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a White, Non-Hispanic (n=1,332)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Black, Non-Hispanic (n=178)</td>
<td>26d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Hispanic (n=154)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 18-29 (n=318)</td>
<td>27bcd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b 30-49 (n=532)</td>
<td>16cd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c 50-64 (n=551)</td>
<td>10df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d 65+ (n=368)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education attainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Less than high school/high school grad (n=549)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Some College (n=519)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c College + (n=721)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household income</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Less than $30,000/yr (n=409)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b $30,000-$49,999 (n=330)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c $50,000-$74,999 (n=283)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d $75,000+ (n=504)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urbanity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Urban (n=561)</td>
<td>26bcd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Suburban (n=905)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Rural (n=336)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November 14 – December 09, 2012. N=1,802 internet users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. Margin of error is +/- 2.6 percentage points for results based on internet users.

Note: Percentages marked with a superscript letter (e.g., a) indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter, among categories of each demographic characteristic (e.g. age).

*Figure 9: PRC Survey results from 2012*
2.1.3 Twitter usage in Australia and internationally

Twitter tracking website ‘Twitaholic’\(^5\) (not affiliated with the official twitter.com) uses robotic tweet scanners\(^6\) to track users several times each day, creating a fluid list of the top users based on follower statistics. As of 30 March 2013, the global top users based on amount of followers are as outlined in the following snapshot from Twitaholic:

![Twitaholic Twitter user ranking table based on follower numbers (30 March 2013)](image)

From Figure 10, it is evident that American popular culture identities, such as musicians and actors, are the most dominant in terms of sheer user numbers. The notable exception to this trend is the Twitter account of the US President Barack Obama, who is consistently in the top five of ‘most followed’ users on Twitter—and the number of followers continues to grow:

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Figure 11: Barack Obama’s growth trajectory of followers (Source: Twitter Counter)

In Australia as at 30 March 2013, the largest users of Twitter are listed below:

Figure 12: Twitaholic Twitter Australian user ranking table based on follower numbers (30 March 2013)
2.1.4 The rise of Twitter metrics

It was inevitable once Twitter was launched that there would be attempts to capitalise on the fact that users make personal data open and accessible to anybody with an internet connection. As such, various Twitter measurement tools have come on to the market, where users are encouraged to sign up and receive benefits in return for being available for market research.

In 2008, Klout\textsuperscript{7} was launched in San Francisco, California, as a method for determining individual user scores of influence on social media across a variety of platforms (predominantly Twitter), resulting in a numerical value between 1 and 100. Simply put, the Klout score is calculated using the size of the user’s social media network, correlated with the content created by the user and interaction with other users (Edwards, Spence, Gentile, Edwards, & Edwards, 2013). Essentially, the methodology that Klout uses is based on data points gained from Twitter consisting of more than 25 variables, including follower count, following count, retweets, list subscriptions, the Klout scores of users who interact with the account, and unique mentions (Anger & Kittl, 2011; Edwards et al., 2013). These scores can be combined with other social media platform data, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and Foursquare to reach an aggregate user score. The algorithm used to calculate the resulting Klout score is not published, and as such cannot be replicated by external organisations or researchers, however the definition of influence that Klout uses (‘the ability to drive people to action’) implies that being retweeted and other user replies are ranked highly within the process (Anger & Kittl, 2011). Users are then placed into a matrix and allocated one of 16 pre-defined classifications based on a combination of eight pre-defined attributes.

Klout was developed as a business model to encourage user participation, which then in turn allowed Klout to form partnerships with companies to offer incentives to users. This model is what Klout refers to as its ‘Perks’ campaign; companies offer free experiences or products to users who meet a set of criteria including Klout score, geographic location and proven interest in a specific topic area. The goal is to have

\textsuperscript{7} http://klout.com/home
influential users creating positive content about the brand or company that offered the free experience, communicating their thoughts to their followers and encouraging discussion. The exact number and details of partnering companies is not publicly available; according to the Klout website the service has over 400 million scored users and has delivered over 1 million Perks at the time of writing. As the algorithm is kept private to retain the intellectual property of the company, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive scientific argument as to the credibility of Klout’s methodology. Criticisms have been made about the process and questions raised about the accuracy of Klout’s ability to reflect true influence, as the process is quantitative and does not take into account the content of interactions. There also have been issues surrounding privacy and the protection of user data which is made available to Klout’s business partners. It is clear that Klout deploys user data and networks as currency to attract financial partnerships, and with this business motivation it is not possible to use it as a valid scientific method of measuring influence on social media. However, Klout does contribute to the overall quantum of knowledge about Twitter and influence and can be used as part of a comprehensive study into the measurement of influence within social media.

Other examples of Twitter measurement tools in the market are Twitter Grader, Twitalyzer, PeerIndex, and Tweetlevel. Twitter Grader operates in a similar fashion to Klout, allocating users an influence score from 1 to 100 via an unpublished algorithm that takes into account the number of followers, the Twitter Grader score of those followers, tweet frequency, follower/following ratio, and retweet and mention rates (Anger & Kittl, 2011). Similarly to Klout, these methods of calculating influence are quantitative and likely to use variations of a similar algorithm to calculate user influence scores. As the process is not able to be tested and replicated, it is impossible to make a reasonable judgement as to the scientific validity of the method. The method is kept private to protect the business model that companies use to generate income from selling user information to consumer-based companies.

8 http://tweet.grader.com/
9 http://twitalyzer.com/5/index.asp
10 http://www.peerindex.com/
11 http://tweetlevel.edelman.com/
2.1.5 Scholarly interest in Twitter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: Number of academic articles published containing the keyword ‘Twitter’ (Source: Scopus)

Asur and Huberman (2010) conducted a study about using Twitter to predict future events. They used quantitative Twitter data, as well as sentiment extraction to show how legitimate social media can be used as a forecasting device. This study is one of the first available that investigates the ability of Twitter to forecast future events. Although it uses primarily quantitative analysis, the study does use qualitative sentiment analysis as part of its methodology, similar to this thesis. The authors define social media as a form of collective wisdom in the form of online discourse that has the ability to set trends and agendas in topical areas including environment, politics, technology and entertainment (Asur & Huberman, 2010). The reasoning behind their choice of study is summarised below:

In the case of social media, the enormity and high variance of the information that propagates through large user communities presents an interesting opportunity for harnessing that data into a form that allows for specific predictions about particular outcomes, without having to institute market mechanisms. One can also build models to aggregate the opinions of the collective population and gain useful insights into their behavior, while predicting future trends. Moreover, gathering information on how people converse regarding particular products can be helpful when designing marketing and advertising campaigns. (Asur & Huberman, 2010)

The paper used a study based on predicting box office revenues for movies using
Twitter discussions. The example was chosen due to the high levels of discussion on Twitter about movies and the accessibility of the data. The study used text classifiers to separate positive and negative tweets to perform sentiment analysis (Asur & Huberman, 2010). The researchers used LingPipe, a linguistics analysis software package to process the data and identify sentiment within the text. On comparison with other movie success forecast methods, including the Hollywood Stock Exchange index and news-based predictions, the study was more successful at predicting movie revenue results (Asur & Huberman, 2010). The study also demonstrated how sentiment analysis improves the ability to use Twitter data to predict outcomes. Interestingly, the study concluded with the following comment, which is relevant to this thesis and the potential Twitter has to measure electoral outcomes:

While in this study we focused on the problem of predicting box office revenues of movies for the sake of having a clear metric of comparison with other methods, this method can be extended to a large panoply of topics, ranging from the future rating of products to agenda setting and election outcomes. At a deeper level, this work shows how social media expresses a collective wisdom which, when properly tapped, can yield an extremely powerful and accurate indicator of future outcomes. (Asur & Huberman, 2010)

Bollen, Mao, and Zeng (2011) studied the relationship between behavioural economics and collective decision making. The researchers investigated whether measurements of collective mood states derived from mass Twitter feeds correlated with the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) over time. The study performed a sentiment analysis of the text data using OpinionFinder and Google-Profile of Mood State (GPOMS). The mood time series results were then cross-referenced against control test cases that also reasonably affect the general public mood, in this case the 2008 US presidential elections and the Thanksgiving holiday in that same year (Bollen et al., 2011).

Our results indicate that the accuracy of DJIA predictions can be significantly improved by the inclusion of specific public mood dimensions but not others. We find an accuracy of 86.7% in predicting the daily up and down changes in the closing values of the DJIA and a reduction of the Mean Average Percentage Error (MAPE) by more than 6%. (Bollen et al., 2011)
The study notes the fact that the predictability of the stock market has been analysed and debated by many people and organisations. The researchers are attempting to discover how public mood influences the stock markets, and to do this they need access to reliable, scalable and early assessments of the public mood across an appropriate time scale (Bollen et al., 2011). The decision to use Twitter data is based upon these requirements. The study harvested tweets in the period between 28 February 2008 to 19 December 2008 but did not discriminate as to specific users or group tags (Bollen et al., 2011). This project is an excellent example of the diverse applications for which Twitter has been used in academic studies.

Wu, Hofman, Mason, and Watts (2011) conducted a study examining the production, flow and consumption of information on Twitter, with the aim of analysing the way in which different user categories interact with each other using Lasswell's maxim:

“who says what to whom in what channel with what effect...” (Wu et al., 2011)

Understanding how users interact on Twitter is the first step to providing useable qualitative findings to inform future studies and contribute to the greater professional understanding of social media within the communications and marketing field. Using the follower graph studied by Kwak, Lee, Park, and Moon (2010) comprising of 42 million Twitter users, Wu et al. presented a crawl of the publically-available graph seeded with all users on Twitter as observed by 31 July 2009 (Wu et al., 2011)\(^\text{12}\). In addition to the quantitative Twitter follower graph, the researchers also analysed a data set of 5 billion tweets harvested from 28 July 2009 to 8 March 2010 from the entire Twitter stream (Wu et al., 2011). From these, the researchers filtered to only include tweets that contained URLs, because of the ability to track unique URLs from origin through the retweet cascade, therefore reducing the additional data set from 5 billion to 260 million. To categorise users, the researchers referred to the Twitter Lists grouping mechanism\(^\text{13}\) in which users self-group themselves under a certain category (usually relating to a personal interest). Using these lists, the researchers sought to examine how the different user categories interact through the production, flow and consumption of information.

\(^{12}\) The data is free to download from [http://an.kaist.ac.kr/traces/WWW2010.html](http://an.kaist.ac.kr/traces/WWW2010.html)

The researchers found that content is being produced on Twitter by a widening pool of producers, setting it apart from the mass media production model. However the results did reveal that the attention is highly concentrated, with 0.05% of users generating almost 50% of posted URLs. Within this 0.05% ‘elite user group’ across all the user categories, the researchers found that the users within each category rarely shared information outside their own categories (Wu et al., 2011). Interestingly, the researchers found that the two-step information had considerable support within the study, with news from media outlets passing through the intermediate layer of an influential opinion leader before passing on to ordinary users (Wu et al., 2011). This finding is consistent with this project’s data case studies involving ‘media personalities’, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five. The restrictions of this study are based on two factors: the process of pulling down data from the entire Twitter stream, which deliver a large but unworkable sample in terms of proving interaction between users, and the limitation to tracking interactions by only using tweets containing URLs, thereby disregarding a substantial number of tweets that also contain data relevant to the study. While the findings are useful from the general perspective of understanding how information flows through Twitter, specific case studies are needed to test the findings and replicate the results.

2.1.6 Measuring sentiment on Twitter

A significant volume of marketing and consumer research has been undertaken to track what people say on Twitter, usually in order to track sentiment relating to a particular product or service. Measuring and evaluating sentiment on Twitter is inherently problematic for two reasons. The 140-character limitation, which is a defining feature of the platform, has forced users to adapt the ways in which they express themselves. This in turn has led to the development of what this researcher refers to as ‘Twitter speak’, a mode of communication identified by unique syntax populated by abbreviations, acronyms and micro-URLs. As a result, gaining meaningful results from traditional machine-learning software with the aim of measuring sentiment is problematic because the unconventional sentence structures and seed words are difficult for programs to recognise. Secondly, Twitter is widely
recognised as a platform populated with a high level of sarcasm and irony. While advanced second generation text analytics programs do have highly-developed thesaurus functions and the ability to edit and change the settings of the ‘stop list’, irony and sarcasm continue to be concepts that cannot be fully explored and appreciated. Advances in computer science and the development of new metrics in data mining and text visualisation software mean that it is likely that this issue could be resolved in the future. The following literature presents information about the ways in which some researchers are accounting for these problems and what methodologies are being used. There are further examples in the ‘forthcoming research’ section of this paper.

Davis and O'Flaherty (2012) conducted a study investigating and assessing the accuracy of automated sentiment coding with respect to Twitter. The study used a consumer marketing approach to evaluate the automated sentiment coding accuracy and misclassification error rates of six leading third-party companies across a broad range of comment types and forms (Davis & O'Flaherty, 2012). For this study, the researchers are particularly interested in how social media platforms have altered the process by which brand image is created and managed and how social media acts as a platform for consumer dialogue. The researchers note that the third-party companies offering sentiment analysis services are typically claiming an accuracy rate of 70 to 80%, however there is a significant lack of controlled research that reliably assesses the accuracy of these computer-conducted sentiment analysis processes (Davis & O'Flaherty, 2012). The two research questions for the study are as follows:

RQ1: How accurately do third-party companies code various types of brand-related comments via automated sentiment analysis?

RQ2: When automated sentiment coding is incorrect, what types of misclassifications are made? (Davis & O'Flaherty, 2012)

Ultimately the researchers state their goal is to identify differences between the automated sentiment coding techniques used by third-party companies, to better inform professional marketers about the best way to carry out sentiment analyses for social media data (Davis & O'Flaherty, 2012).

The researchers selected six leading companies that supply sentiment coding
services, three that charge for their services and three that supply the services for free. The data set, composed of 767 tweets, used in this study was manufactured by the researchers to have complete control over the test case, and to ensure a mix of positive, negative and neutral tweets for analysis (Davis & O'Flaherty, 2012). After applying the methodology to the test Twitter sample and testing all six service providers, the researchers found that, overall, automated sentiment coding has limited reliability and can only process very simple statements, i.e. xxx is good, xxx is bad (Davis & O'Flaherty, 2012). Tweets that do not contain the keywords built into the computer lexicon are ignored by the computer programs, a serious limitation. The lack of accuracy in applying sentiment coding is compounded by the amount and types of misclassification errors that the researchers found (Davis & O'Flaherty, 2012). Misclassification by the automated sentiment coding process is inherently linked to the use of Twitter language and its unique forms of expression. The researchers warn professional marketers against using the automated sentiment reports produced by the third-party companies due to the low reliability and propensity for misclassification and inaccuracy (Davis & O'Flaherty, 2012). The relevance of this study to this thesis is the heightened awareness of the difficulties around performing an accurate sentiment analysis of Twitter by computer programs that do not fully understand the complexities and unique language inherent to the platform.

Kontopoulos et al. (2013) conducted an ontology-based sentiment analysis of Twitter posts, recognising the difficulty and limitations of applying only text-based sentiment classifiers to Twitter content. The researchers addressed the constraints caused by the 140-character limitation; Twitter posts typically use language that is modified and do not necessarily use logical syntax. As a consequence, an original ontological approach was taken to achieve a more accurate and efficient sentiment analysis of Twitter content (Kontopoulos et al., 2013). Specifically, the Twitter posts were not allocated a sentiment score, but instead a sentiment grade for each concept within the post. The classic ‘opinion lexicon’ used by text analytics software to determine sentiment was dismissed by the researchers as inadequate due to the unique jargon-laden nature of Twitter language (Kontopoulos et al., 2013). The researchers created a domain ontology to conduct sentiment analysis on the tweet samples, taking into account the limitations around the traditional machine-learning approach that treats each tweet as a uniform statement, thus allocating a single sentiment score to the
tweet in a manner that does not allow for the intricacies and possible multiple sentiments contained in a tweet to be examined separately (Kontopoulos et al., 2013).

An additional limitation is that classifiers usually distinguish sentiment into classes (positive, negative and neutral), assigning a corresponding score to the post as a whole, regardless of the fact that many aspects of the same “notion” may be discussed in a single post. Consider, for example, the sample tweet Tex: “The screenplay was wonderful, although the acting was rather bad”. The machine-learning based approaches would return a single quantitative (sentiment score) or qualitative (positive, negative or neutral) result. In this paper, we propose the deployment of ontology-based techniques towards a more fine-grained sentiment analysis of Twitter posts. (Kontopoulos et al., 2013)

Using a consumer product-based scenario, the researchers used the approach of assigning sentiment grades for each individual concept. Ultimately the researchers reaffirmed the need for a custom-built sentiment classifier for Twitter in order for quality sentiment analysis to be undertaken. Relevant to this thesis, Kontopoulos et al. (2013) identified Twitter language as a genre of communication that exists outside of the general text analytics framework. While conclusive sentiment analysis was not shown as a result of the study, this confirmation of the Twitter language genre links directly to the research questions of this thesis and the aim of broadening the understanding of this genre to support further research in the sentiment analysis space.

Mostafa (2013) undertook a study aimed at measuring Twitter sentiment and particular consumer brands, with an emphasis on the implications for marketing. The study used a random sample of 3,516 tweets to identify consumer sentiment relating to popular mobile technology companies (Mostafa, 2013). The relevance to this thesis is the researcher’s use of a predefined lexicon, using 6,800 seed adjectives, to conduct the sentiment analysis. As with the Kontopoulos et al. (2013) study, Mostafa acknowledges the challenge of working with Twitter data due to its unique structure and variable syntax.

Knowledge obtained from social networks is extremely valuable because millions of opinions expressed about a certain topic are highly unlikely to be biased. (Mostafa, 2013)
Using data mining software Mostafa conducted sentiment analysis using the predefined lexicon to compare sentiment expressed by users towards 16 different consumer mobile technology company brands (Mostafa, 2013). Mostafa is aware of the opportunity that Twitter and other social media platforms offer to marketing managers in terms of accessing feedback on products and services, and that this resource is essentially untapped by companies (Mostafa, 2013). Although able to conduct a sentiment analysis on the random sample of tweets, Mostafa acknowledges that she is unable to draw a link between sentiments expressed and the causal event behind the sentiment, and is unable to say how companies can alter sentiment. The study remains useful to this project as another example of the importance of the development of data mining techniques in relation to Twitter, and further cements the importance of this area of research for the professional fields of marketing and communication. This thesis advances the current knowledge base by demonstrating how concept discussion can be driven on Twitter, and by whom it is driven, information that cannot be shown conclusively with random tweet samples.

2.1.7 Forthcoming research

One of the emerging concepts in the field of social media analysis is that of Web Opinion Mining (WOM), referring to a process of extracting, analysing and aggregating internet data directly related to opinions. A study has been conducted testing this process within a consumer marketing framework, with a particular emphasis on providing solutions to the quantity and access issues of conducting a full scale WOM (E. M. Taylor, Rodríguez O., Velásquez, Ghosh, & Banerjee, 2013). The study is focused on the data mining process itself across a range of platforms, but once completed could lead to a more detailed insight into the best ways to mine Twitter data and link it successfully to opinion-forming behaviours. The study used by the researchers as a practical example is Twitter, and the results will provide a way to represent how opinion is spread through the Twitter network and insight into influence between users.
2.1.8 Conclusion

The development of metrics that accommodate the distinctiveness of Twitter is ongoing, and it is probable that the deficiencies identified in recent studies will be overcome in the future. One area where social media sentiment metrics has attracted particular interest from both scholars and practitioners is the political domain, which is explored fully in Chapter Five as a means of testing the theory building models presented by this thesis.
3.0 Research design and method

This thesis uses a theory building methodology to investigate specific characteristics of Twitter as defined by the Research Questions outlined in Chapter One. The literature review contained in Chapter Two provided an overview of relevant literature pertaining to Twitter and concepts contained within the Research Questions. From the review of literature it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the theoretical frameworks which have already been applied to Twitter, the results which have been derived particularly in regard to the generation and sustainability of discussions on Twitter, and the mechanisms which make this possible. Taking into account the literature, it is possible to identify a knowledge gap about how and why concepts are generated and sustained on Twitter. Given the lack of existing sound theoretical frameworks that are able to conceptualise the entirety of Twitter's functions, a grounded theory approach has been taken to this thesis, supplemented by other communications and media-effects theories that are used to contextualise the analysis.

3.1 Theoretical framework

Grounded theory is the process of building theory directly from the data rather than using the traditional scientific method of theory testing, which involves the application of a theoretical framework to a data set (Kelle, 2005; Stebbins, 2001; Strauss, 1987). Grounded theory reverses the traditional scientific research model, where a hypothesis is formed and a theoretical framework is selected prior to the data collection process beginning, and analysis tests the veracity of the hypotheses (Kelle, 2005; Thomas & James, 2006). According to Glaser (1992) grounded theory gives researchers freedom to generate new concepts that explain different aspects of human behaviour.

Grounded theory is a systematic yet flexible methodology that is applicable to studies
that use qualitative data sets, but can also be applied to quantitative data (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Glaser, 1992). The process of grounded theory is as follows:

- The significant ideas within the data are coded and then grouped into concepts in order to facilitate the detailed data analysis.
- Within the concepts, categories are identified and by examining these and their relationship within the concept clusters, theories can be formulated (Charmaz, 2006; Kelle, 2005).

Charmaz (2006) refers to four separate coding methods within grounded theory: initial coding (often referred to as ‘open’ or ‘substantive’ coding, referring to the first level of coding that takes into account the entire data set), focused coding (often referred to as ‘selective’ coding, a process that delimits the coding process once the core variable is identified), axial coding, and theoretical coding (weaving the identified concepts into hypotheses, usually with the assistance of a theoretical framework). Leximancer is a software application built on the principles of grounded theory, as it mimics this process (moving from words, to concepts, to themes) when coding data by identifying overall concepts within text data and then working through to link the core concepts together via knowledge pathways (A. E. Smith & Humphreys, 2006).

Recent examples of other research areas where grounded theory has been used to develop sound theory include sport psychology (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012), aging sociology (Cheung & Kam, 2012), health sciences (Giske & Cone, 2012; Koruth, Nevison, & Schwannauer, 2012) and information technology (Adolph, Krutchen, & Hall, 2012). These areas of study develop rapidly as technology and research methods evolve and a grounded theory approach assists in the generation of strong theory. As referred to earlier, grounded theory uses a ‘bottom up’ approach to generating theory, differentiating it from the standard social science report structure.

Recognising the lack of existing sound theoretical frameworks relevant to Twitter, Arceneaux and Weiss (2010) conducted research using a grounded theory approach to examine press coverage of Twitter between 2006 and 2009 in order to compare the public response to Twitter to that of earlier communications technologies including the telegraph, radio, and the internet. Arceneaux and Weiss disputed the popular opinion
that Twitter was essentially a ‘website about nothing’ and argued that regardless of whether the technology was here to stay, a grounded theory approach was the most suitable way to analyse the platform (Arceneaux & Weiss, 2010).

By examining existing research about Twitter and the generation of concepts through influence, it is apparent that there is a gap in the research relating to qualitative analysis. The developers of the software programs used for this thesis recognise the need for further research to develop theoretical frameworks that can inform the future use and methodology of the programs (Angus, Rintel, & Wiles, 2013). The relationships between Twitter user groups and their role in the generation and sustainment of concepts and themes that influence Twitter discussion are currently unknown; filling this research gap will contribute to the understanding of Twitter in the academic and professional arenas. As such, grounded theory is best suited to this project to generate theory in an area where research is deficient.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection for this project is made up of two components. The primary component is the Twitter data set comprised of almost 35,000 tweets, which were collected over a period of nine months initially using manual harvesting, progressing to software-assisted harvesting (via Archivist14) as the volume of required data increased. The secondary method of data collection is in the form of structured interviews with important political campaign staff from both candidates’ campaign teams.

Over the period between 29 June 2011 and 27 March 2012, 34,918 tweets were harvested by using three general search terms. From 29 June 2011 to 19 January 2012 the tweets were collected manually. From 20 January 2012 to 27 March 2012, the online software tool Archivist was used, and as a result the quantity of tweets per day collected in this period is higher due to both the nature of the political campaign and the ability of Archivist to collect more tweets than is possible manually.

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The tweets were collected using the search terms ‘Campbell Newman’, ‘Katejonesmp’ and ‘#ashgrove’. ‘Kate Jones’ was not used as the name is generic and the majority of search results proved irrelevant to the election campaign context. ‘Campbell Newman’ was unique enough to require no further specification. The hashtag ‘ashgrove’ was searched to pick up tweets about the campaign that may not have mentioned either candidate directly by name.

The initial decisions regarding search terms were made very early on in the research process, at the very outset of embarking on the research that would eventually become the resulting thesis document. With four years since the research began, hindsight reveals that some of these decisions could have been made to ensure stronger consistency. Notwithstanding possible improved consistency with regard to search terms, the nature of the case study (one candidate building a local-only campaign, and the other building a state-wide campaign) meant that isolating the candidates into only local campaign content would present significant challenges. This limitation is recognised, and further research using other case studies will be able to inform this process in a productive way.

### 3.3 Data coding

Vickey, Martin Ginis, and Dabrowski (2013) recently conducted research into Twitter users using a fitness study examining popular mobile fitness applications (apps). The researchers produced a classification model for tweets that categorised and coded the information shared by users through the apps. Using the model created by Dann (2010) to classify and code the tweets, the researchers used a grounded theory approach focused on qualitative data mining and text classification methods (similar to this thesis). The Twitter content classification model produced by Dann (2010) was generated through a grounded theory approach analysing current Twitter research, resulting in six broad categories and 23 subcategories for researchers to use. Vickey et al. reviewed the substantive literature concerned with Twitter classification, finding that prior studies had limited classifications to broad categories of content (Dann, 2010; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007; Krishnamurthy, Gill, & Arlitt, 2008). The author collated the current and prior
categorisations, using the information to create the 23 subcategories to allow for more substantive analysis of users. The limitation of this classification model for Twitter is directly related to the project's data, which was the author’s own Twitter feed. The 23 subcategories were designed for, and tested on, the individual user account, thus limiting their ability to be applied to large multi-user studies such as this thesis.

During the data collection process for this thesis, a logbook was maintained to keep track of the overall perceptions of the researcher and to serve as a timeline of notable external events. Congruent with grounded theory coding practices, each Twitter user that appears in the data set has been categorised according to their relevant affiliations. The categories used were:

- MEDIA – users who openly identify themselves as journalists and media outlet user accounts
- CANDIDATE – used for candidates running in Ashgrove
- LNP and ALP – users who openly identify or are clearly party plant accounts
- VIRUS – users who post what appear to be legitimate tweets but are posting links to virus sites
- POLITICIAN – users who are professional politicians not including the Ashgrove candidates
- PARTY – party tweets not including LNP or ALP
- PARODY – user accounts that parody politicians
- INTEREST GROUP – user accounts that openly represent a group with an interest in the political outcome in Queensland
- PUBLIC – those who do not fit into any of the above categories.

By categorising the users it will be possible to tag the data so that the relationship within and between the different categories can be analysed. The researcher elected to define a unique categorisation system that reflects the political context and primary user groups, rather than using an existing Twitter user classification model. At the time of writing, none of the existing classification models were suitable for a data set of this size and complexity.
3.4 Text analytics

Information visualisation techniques produce graphics based upon information drawn from the relevant input media. Visual text analytics encompass both qualitative and quantitative methods of extracting meaning and significance from text, taking into account the complexity of written or spoken language and the ambiguities that it contains. Mooranian, Dillon, and Chang (2011) describe visual text analytics as:

...a sub-class of visual data mining or visual analytics and is defined as: visualisation of non-physical data of all types that has text visualisation as its key component. Visualisation is itself defined as: use of visual representations to aid in analysis of quantitative or qualitative information. (Mooranian et al., 2011)

The choice of text visualisation tool for different data sets must take into account the temporal and semantic qualities of the input text to determine the most effective way to produce meaningful results. Both temporal and semantic mapping software applications are useful in the analysis of Twitter data. The unstructured nature of Twitter text in comparison to traditional conversation mediums means that extracting meaning from the temporal development of the data will be complex, but will produce interesting and relevant results. Semantic mapping text visualisation is also useful in the analysis of Twitter data to identify the theme clusters and the interlinking concepts that exist within them.

This project will use both spatial and temporal visual text analytic techniques, Leximancer and Discursis, to draw meaning from the data set. The software programs are outlined in the following sections. This is the first time that Discursis has been used in the context of political campaigns within the Twitter medium.

3.4.1 Rationale

Angus et al. (2013) recently published a report into both Leximancer and Discursis explaining how both tools work, how researchers can use the tools, and how visual concepts can be applied to analytical research and decision making. This study
provides the rationale behind the choice of Leximancer and Discursis and explains how these tools can be applied to yield sound research results and their role as analytical tools. Both tools use statistics based on word frequency to generate unique visualisations, but the individual tools facilitate different analytical tasks that feed into each other (Angus et al., 2013). Leximancer can assist specifically with tasks including extracting the main topics and themes from within a data set, showing how these relate to each other, while also allowing the researcher to examine participants’ relationships with particular topics. To contrast this, Discursis can show how topics and themes develop in a temporal context, and can pinpoint critical points in time that the researcher may be interested in; when topic changes occur, when particular topics are introduced and so on (Angus et al., 2013). Angus et al. use an example with text drawn from a popular interview-based television show using the conversation data from one specific episode involving the host and one guest. Leximancer was used to visually represent the prominent concepts that were discussed during the episode, and the relationship between the interview participants and these concepts based on frequency of use (Angus et al., 2013).

3.4.2 Leximancer

Leximancer identifies emergent seed-words within text data and analyses their frequency and pattern of use to form concept blocks, which are then grouped into theme clusters. This is similar to the coding process that grounded theory uses to generate theory from data. Leximancer has been used previously in a range of studies that explore the variety of possible contextual applications including analysing interview data (Coombs, 2010; Verreynne, 2012), opinion polls and political speeches (Wilson, 2010), branding (Kattiyapornpong & Nel, 2009) and psychological research (Cretchley, Gallois, Chenery, & Smith, 2010).

In 2010, Leximancer was used to analyse the content of community engagement text in the format of frequently asked questions (Coombs, 2010) posed as part of a controversial shale gas drilling project in New York. In this instance, Leximancer was used to facilitate open public debate on a sensitive issue that has political implications. By identifying and separating not only the significant concepts within the text, the
knowledge pathways and theme linkages were able to provide new and unexpected levels of insight into the significant issues surrounding the project (Coombs, 2010). By visually examining how significant concepts appeared together, in relation to their proximity to other significant concepts, Coombs was able to draw meaning from the Leximancer plot to inform their findings.

Figure 17: Leximancer plot generated from the entire Twitter data set

Leximancer uses frequencies of word occurrence and co-occurrences to build a matrix from which concepts are identified. The program then groups words into a list of words (thesaurus) that are closely related within a particular concept (A. E. Smith & Humphreys, 2006). The links between these concepts are measured and used to determine the strength of the relationship between particular concepts; the higher the co-occurrence, the stronger the relationship. Leximancer can also compare the
the thesauruses of multiple concepts to build a semantic map that visually represents the relationships between concepts (Rooney et al., 2010). Visually (as seen in Fig 17), the nodes within the Leximancer plot represent individual concepts, with the size of each node providing a relative measure of how prominent that concept was within the data. The concept nodes are shown as grouped according to their similarity with lines connecting the concept nodes to those that are the most similar (Angus et al., 2013). The coloured circles within a plot represent concepts that have been grouped into themes. The closer two nodes appear, the stronger the inferred relationship between the two concepts. Using this measure of relationship strength, it is possible to use a data mining process to compile meaningful insights about why the link is important to the overall analysis.

As an example, Figure 17 is a Leximancer plot generated from the entire Twitter data set, giving an overall sense of concepts and themes that played a role during the campaign. To give meaning to the plot, it has been broken down below for further explanation.

![Figure 18: 'katejonesmp' theme circle](image)

Figure 18 provides insight into the theme ‘katejonesmp’, a Leximancer grouping of concepts that forms part of the overall plot. It is possible to observe the close proximity of the concept ‘local’ with the concept ‘katejonesmp’. This enables a researcher to infer a strong relationship between Jones the candidate and the concept of ‘local’, which was a significant concept throughout the campaign. It is then possible to draw wider conclusions based upon the relationship between the two concepts; for example, when compared to the interview data concerning Jones’ campaign strategy (Informant A, personal communication, July 12, 2012) in which the strategist confirms that the core party campaign strategy was to portray Jones as ‘local’. As such, the close proximity
of the concepts within the Leximancer plot, when compared to the proximity of the concept ‘campbell’ (as representative of Newman), would lead the researcher to assume that Jones was successful in her positioning as ‘local’ because of how often the concept appeared together within tweets to merit this result in Leximancer.

The data for this thesis was run in Leximancer to identify the themes and concepts relevant to the project as a whole. This enabled the overall concepts and themes to become evident before looking further into the data for examples to compare user groups and concept discussion over a time series.

3.4.3 Discursis

Discursis is second-generation text analysis software that uses a recurrence plotting technique to identify and represent trends within time series data (Angus et al., 2013; Angus et al., 2012). Angus et al. describe the main advantages of the software as being able to visualise concept usage patterns across a range of time scales at the same time, in comparison to other currently available visualisation techniques (Angus et al., 2012). Discursis can be used as a ‘forensic tool’ to mine for and analyse patterns of interaction within significant or interesting time periods where the conversation is populated by participants with convergent characteristics (Angus et al., 2012).

Discursis has a diversity of applications, one of which is the analysis of Twitter microblogging data. The software focuses on the temporal aspects of communication, and is an ideal tool for Twitter data analysis as dialogue between Twitter users is more complex than a typical two-way conversation. Twitter conversations have multiple participants potentially located anywhere in the world. The nature of Twitter is that of a platform where numerous topics are discussed between multiple, in this case thousands, of users who offer their thoughts in a 140-character written utterance that contributes to the overall multi-layered tapestry that is the resulting conversation.
The Discursis data will be presented in Chapter Four as a selection of time series graphs comparing user groups to present a clear image of the conversation patterns for particular concepts. When peaks appear in a time series, they indicate a high frequency of tweets linked to that particular concept, as observed in Fig 19. Peaks are correlated against external events to contextualise the relevant circumstances that may impact upon their height or their breadth. When user group peaks occur close together, it is possible to make a judgment about which user group is exerting influence over the other. When user group peaks appear alone, it provides an opportunity to gain insight into why some concept discussions are not sustained. The pattern of the peaks over the time series provides insight into the manner in which Twitter is used by the different user groups, and allows conclusions to be drawn about how the mechanisms of Twitter impact upon its use.

3.4 Limitations

The nature of Twitter and its users predisposes the genre to the use of sarcasm and irony, and neither Leximancer nor Discursis are able to identify these sentiments when analysing data. Political discourse in itself contains a higher level of these sentiments than other general topics of discussion due to the controversial and divisive nature of political debate. The 2012 Queensland election was particularly significant, as it
resulted in a defeat the scale of which was unprecedented in modern Australian politics. For the purposes of this study, the limitations of Leximancer and Discursis have not had an adverse impact, as sentiment analysis has not been conducted as part of the data analysis. The nature of Twitter conversations and Twitter language as a genre is an area that will need to be revisited by text analytics researchers in future years.

The typical Twitter user is technologically-savvy and cross-generational (Bucher, Fieseler, & Meckel, 2013), including early adopters of social media who have immersed themselves in the platform to air opinions on everything between meal choices to human rights. As such, it is important to note that this thesis’ data set may only represent individuals from a narrow demographic, rather than representing the wider voting public in Queensland.

Due to the eponymous anonymous nature of Twitter, it is not possible to verify the voting status of users. This has particular implications for attempting to draw results from the data that ‘predict’ the election outcome. As there is no way to confirm that users are eligible Ashgrove or even Queensland voters, it is difficult to draw conclusions that relate specifically to voter behaviour or trends.

The size of the entire data set was initially viewed as a limitation, as the software was only able to process a certain amount of data. At the beginning of the project it was not possible to load the entire data set into Discursis without causing the program to fail due to the sheer amount of text. Fortunately, in the period since the data analysis began on this project, both Leximancer and Discursis have increased their capacity to cope with larger and more complex data sets (Angus et al., 2013).

3.5 Conclusion

To conclude, Chapter Three has provided the methodology and research design framework for this study. A grounded theory approach will be used to analyse the data and draw conclusions in order to provide answers to the Research Questions. The case examples used in Chapter Four for data analysis are presented using Discursis-
generated time series plots that compare user groups’ engagement with a particular concept. The concepts were selected as part of a data mining process of the overall data set represented as a Leximancer concept map. The peaks in the time series plots will be analysed in order to draw conclusions in relation to the Research Questions and the characteristics of Twitter.
4.0 Data analysis

What do you think Jesus would twitter, ‘Let he who is without sin cast the first stone’
or ‘Has anyone seen Judas? He was here a minute ago.’

Chris Cornell

This chapter examines data collected from Twitter across the campaign, and looks in
detail at three different dimensions of the campaign, as represented by concepts
generated by the Leximancer plot of the entire corpus of tweets collected (n=38,000).

The data analysis will seek to show if it is possible to draw from the Twitter data not
just what the prevalent themes and concepts are, but how they interact over time and
how long concepts endure as significant points of discussion. Following on from the
existing ‘issues lifecycle’ that is used in corporate and political communications, the
data may be able to identify if such a thing can be observed on Twitter. By identifying
and measuring the ‘Twitter concept lifecycle’ a greater understanding of the potential
of the tool for further applications will be gained.

As we have seen from the previous chapter, mapping the full the corpus of data
provides us with a set of salient themes and concepts that play a role within the Twitter
discussion. This chapter looks at three specific examples which were central to the
dynamic of the campaign in Ashgrove. The three concepts are: ‘ashgrove’, ‘gay’ and
‘cmc’. These concepts do not represent specific hashtags; but they do aggregate
hashtags, which includes the hashtag ashgrove. The first concept examined is the
broader concept of ‘ashgrove’. Continuing with the analytical approach, the data
analysis will be performed on the three case examples graphed according to user
group engagement. To give an overall perspective of the data set and to rationalise
the choices of concepts examined in the case examples, the following graphics that
represent the entire data set have been included.
4.1 Leximancer data overview

Figure 20: Leximancer plot generated from the entire Twitter data set

Observations

The high number of visible concepts in this graphic gives the researcher an overall perspective of the campaign and the entirety of the data set. Before breaking down this visual into separate components, it is useful to examine the graphic as a whole and extract information about the shape of the campaign and the spread of information within the Twitter data.

The centrality of Newman as a theme, compared to Jones who is located on the periphery, reflects my initial perceptions of the data during the collection phase; Newman fought a Queensland-wide campaign against Jones’ local campaign. The
position of concepts such as ‘fought’, ‘local’ and ‘Ashgrove’ close to Jones reflects this approach, with Newman linked to critical campaign concepts such as ‘leader’, ‘change’, ‘forward’ and ‘future’.

- Stand-out issues-based concepts are civil unions and smear campaign
- Jones is associated with concepts such as ‘local’, ‘fought’, ‘home’ and ‘Ashgrove’
- Newman is associated with concepts such as ‘leader’, ‘Queensland’, ‘change’ and ‘future’
- The concept associations above reflect the researcher journal and interview data.

4.2 Example concepts rationale

Both ‘ashgrove’ and ‘cmc’ are among the top concepts generated by Leximancer as determined by frequency (see Fig 20). The concept of ‘gay’ appears within the (higher ranked by frequency of occurrence) theme of ‘civil’; however ‘civil’ was deemed too generic for the purposes of the case examples. The concept ‘ashgrove’ is descriptive of the physical setting of the campaign and is the name of the electorate. Both candidates’ strategies (Informant A, personal communication, July 12, 2012; Informant B, personal communication, July 21 2012) involved leveraging the concept in some way as a campaign tool. As a result, ‘ashgrove’ as a concept has higher resonance and more relevance to this specific campaign than generic concepts like win, election and so on.

4.3 Example ‘ashgrove’

The concept ‘ashgrove’ was chosen as an example as it played an important role in the social media campaign as well as in the Queensland-wide campaign context. Newman had to win Ashgrove to become premier, and Jones resigned from the cabinet to fight for the seat on a local level. The effort of both candidates to appear ‘local’ is reflected in the Twitter data.
Figure 21: Discursis data showing the concept ‘ashgrove’ as expressed over the time period of 1/1/13 to 27/3/13 on Twitter. User categories (ALP, LNP, MEDIA, PUBLIC) are graphed in different colours. The stars on the graph denote significant points in time when the concept experienced a high volume of tweets from a particular user group.

Figure 21 shows the temporal development of the concept ‘ashgrove’ within the data, broken down to show how significant user groups (ALP, LNP, MEDIA and PUBLIC) engaged with the concept in comparison with each other. This is a strong example of user group interaction focused on a content-heavy and significant campaign topic. The significant time points are broken down in the following series of observations and interpretations (see Figure 21). The concept ‘ashgrove’ appears within the ‘katejonesmp’ theme on the Leximancer map, indicating a stronger link to Jones than Newman. Other significant concepts that appear close to ‘ashgrove’ within the ‘katejonesmp’ theme included ‘local’, ‘electorate’, ‘keepkate’, ‘fought’ and ‘home’.

4.3.1 Significant timepoints

What follows is an analysis of three significant timepoints from the data:

- Timepoint one: 6 February 2012
- Timepoint two: 6 March 2012
- Timepoint three: 24 March 2012
4.3.1.1 Timepoint one: 6 February 2012

Observations:

The spike in usage by the LNP user group appears to be generated by the frequency of the ‘#kickoutkate’ hashtag used widely by the LNP user group during this period. The sharp rise and fall of the peak indicates a high concentration of Tweets over a short time compared with the number of tweets across this concept in general. The tweets at this timepoint are concentrated in the evening period, originating with a tweet by user @YLNPPresident (identified as the Young Liberal National Party President Rod Schneider) of the image seen in Figure 22. The image depicts the number of speeches made by Jones in parliament that mention the word ‘Ashgrove’ from 21 March 2009 to 21 September 2011. The methodology for calculating the data in this image is not known.

![Figure 22: Twitpic posted by @YLNPPresident (9:16pm, 6 February 2012)](image)

Figure 22 was posted in response to the erection of a billboard (see Figure 23) in Ashgrove, as referenced in the below tweet from media:

@korenhelbig
6 February 2012, New bright pink ALP billboard up on Musgrave Rd: “To Campbell Newman, Ashgrove is a stepping stone. To Kate
6:52pm  |  Jones, it's home." #qldvotes

*Figure 23: Image of Jones’ campaign billboard as referenced in the Twitter conversation*

The tweets below are a selection of tweets from the **LNP user group** following the posting of the image by @YLNPPresident at 9:16pm on 6 February via a URL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Tweet</th>
<th>Retweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@YLNPPresident</td>
<td>9:16pm on 6 February</td>
<td>Looks as though @katejonesmp isn't the local champion she makes herself out to be. #kickoutkate #qldpol #qldvotes <a href="http://t.co/YdcfaJV5">http://t.co/YdcfaJV5</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@d_bell01</td>
<td>6 February 2012, 9:15pm</td>
<td>@katejonesmp how many times did you mention Ashgrove before campbell Newman ran? 0. So much for a local hero #qldpol #kickoutkate (retweeted 7 times)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@danik8</td>
<td>6 February 2012, 9:25pm</td>
<td>The awkward moment when @katejonesmp doesn't make a single speech about Ashgrove in 2 years. Too little, too late Kate! #kickoutkate (retweeted 4 times)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@gvandersee</td>
<td>(6 February 2012, 10:11pm)</td>
<td>So @katejonesmp &quot;claims&quot; Ashgrove is her home but doesn't mention it in Parl speeches until Newman announces his run. Some local! #qldpol (retweeted 5 times)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@gvandersee</td>
<td>6 February 2012, 10:36pm</td>
<td>To clarify, @katejonesmp spoke on Ashgrove 0 times since 2009 election until Campbell turned up. (as shown in graph I linked to originally)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@NelsonSavanh</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows @katejonesmp didn’t care about Ashgrove until</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 February 2012, 10:40pm  CanDo @Campbell_Newman announced his candidacy! #KickOutKate #qldpol twitpic.com/8gg0nw (retweeted twice)

@Mattrj1989
6 February 2012, 10:41pm  That awkward moment when Kate jones remembers she has an electorate. No speeches for two years re Ashgrove #kickoutkate #qldpol @katejonesmp (retweeted 3 times)

Interpretation(s):

The peak in tweets represents a cohesive response by the LNP user group to Jones’ campaign team erecting the pink (as opposed to the traditional red used by the ALP) billboard (Figure 21) portraying herself as the true ‘local’ candidate. Interestingly, although the discussion is started by an executive of the LNP, the other LNP users respond across the board in a very short amount of time across the intense evening period. This mobilisation of sympathetic users tweeting support, both across the LNP and PUBLIC user groups indicates a high level of engagement from users. It is assumed that the YLNPPresident used the ‘#kickoutkate’ hashtag with the intention of fostering high levels of discussion, and the hashtag appears repeatedly throughout the evening by the LNP user group. It is difficult to evaluate if this mobilisation effect occurred as a result of a predetermined strategy, as the LNP campaign strategist was not authorised to elaborate on the coordinated use of negative hashtags (Informant A, personal communication, July 12, 2012).

It is interesting to note that in this case the MEDIA user group do not engage with the content to a high degree, and that the ALP user group do not appear to see the need to defend the accusations. The reason behind the MEDIA user group’s relatively low level of engagement on this topic indicates that the mainstream media do not believe that the public outside of Twitter are interested in this particular attempt from the LNP to engage in a Twitter-focused attack on Jones’ campaign. The peak in usage is a clear example of the LNP’s strategic response to the claim that Newman is not ‘local’, clearly refuting Jones’ core ‘local’ campaign concept with pre-prepared data and hashtags useable on Twitter. The decision by Jones not to align herself with the ALP brand, using pink as her campaign colours on the billboard and in other printed
collateral, is an effort to link herself solely to the ‘local’ concept and to disassociate from the ALP as a concept. This conclusion is supported by the ALP campaign strategist, who elaborated on the strategy to keep Jones’ campaign at the local level (Informant B, personal communication, July 21, 2012).

The erection of Jones’ campaign billboard was an attempt by the ALP and the campaign team to reinforce the framing of Jones as ‘local’, and the framing of Newman as ‘not local’. The image posted by @YLNPPresident (an official party account) is an attempt to shift that framing of Jones as ‘local’ by pointing out that this persona is undermined by the fact that her parliamentary speeches only focused on the local community after Newman’s announcement as candidate for Ashgrove. The use of framing on Twitter is a relatively new research area, and is notable in the distribution of news, particularly in relation to conflict (Wasike, 2013).

4.3.1.2 Timepoint two: 6 March 2012

Observations:
The highest peak in this concept study occurs at this point, with a strong spike in tweets from the ALP user group. On this date media announce ReachTEL poll results putting Jones ahead in Ashgrove on a two-party preferred basis for the first time since Newman announced his intention to run for the seat (ALP 50.7% - LNP 49.3%) (Walker & Barrett, 2012). This significant announcement spurs a strong response on Twitter across all the user groups, but particularly from the ALP user group. The ALP user group tweets are repeating the polling results, also opening the debate about what happens if the LNP win the election, but Newman loses in Ashgrove. The below tweets provide a snapshot of tweets from the relevant user groups during this timepoint.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@612brisbane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 March 2012, 7:15am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New @ReachTEL #Ashgrove poll. 1st pref LNP 45.4%, ALP 44.4%. 2PP (based on 2009) ALP 50.7%, LNP 49.3%. Forced choice ALP 51.5%, LNP 48.5%. (retweeted 31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Tweet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@mattwordsworth</td>
<td>6 March 2012, 7:17am</td>
<td>Latest Reachtel polls has Kate Jones winning Ashgrove 50.3 to 49.7 over Campbell Newman. #qldvotes (retweeted 17 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@brisbanebulldog</td>
<td>6 March 2012, 7:25am</td>
<td>#qldpol #qldvotes Surely now it's time for the @LNPQLD to answer the question of who would be premier WHEN @katejonesmp wins Ashgrove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@DanielCheverton</td>
<td>6 March 2012, 7:47am</td>
<td>Kate Jones leading Campbell Newman in Ashgrove! Shows that being a local matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@AntigoneSierra</td>
<td>6 March 2012, 7:46am</td>
<td>Conspiracy Theory; This was the LNP's plan all along, @Campbell_Newman is just a patsy and they're hoping he'll lose Ashgrove. #qldvotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@lachiesnow</td>
<td>6 March 2012, 7:25am</td>
<td>Kate Jones ahead in Ashgrove! Time for .@LNPQLD to dust off Plan C! Voters seeing through .@Campbell_Newman using Ashgrove as stepping stone <em>(retweeted 12 times)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@GloriaAbernathy</td>
<td>6 March 2012, 7:29am</td>
<td>Oooh, Kate Jones is ahead in Ashgrove! More important than ever for @Campbell_Newman to tell us what happens if he loses Ashgrove. #qldvotes <em>(retweeted 3 times)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretation(s)**

The high level of tweets by the ALP user group is an unsurprising response to the poll results, standing out as one of only a few positive spots in the campaign for Jones’ campaign team. It is worth noting that the polling methodology used by ReachTEL to determine 2PP percentages differs from those used by Newspoll and Galaxy, and was criticised by the ABC election analyst Antony Green. This particular timepoint and the response from the ALP user category again highlights the importance that the candidates placed on linking themselves to the Ashgrove concept to appear ‘local’

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16 [http://blogs.abc.net.au/antonygreen/2012/02/how-should-reachtels-ashgrove-polls-be-interpreted.html#more](http://blogs.abc.net.au/antonygreen/2012/02/how-should-reachtels-ashgrove-polls-be-interpreted.html#more)
(Informant B, personal communication, July 21, 2012). Unsurprisingly, the impact of poll results on elections is a widely-contested area in scholarly literature (Evans & Ivaldi, 2012; Gosselin & Pétry, 2009; Klofstad & Bishin, 2012; Pickup, Matthews, Jennings, Ford, & Fisher, 2011; Stein & Vonnahme, 2012; Traugott & Wlezien, 2009; Vonnahme & Miller, 2013). The trend in increased pre-poll votes means that earlier polls are more important in terms of impact (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Arguably, the retweeting of this information by ALP users is an attempt at agenda setting, given that the initiating tweet came in at 7:15am from the ABC.

4.3.1.3 Timepoint three: 24 March 2012 (election day)

Observations

The spike in tweets from the PUBLIC user group occurs on election day, with the tweets containing content relating to the election result. During the evening tweet levels are high, coinciding with the public announcement of the result. There is relatively high activity by all the user groups, but the PUBLIC user group spike is noticeably strong. The following tweets are a snapshot of the different user groups’ reactions to the election results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
<th>MEDIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@salad1982&lt;br&gt;24 March 2012, 9:54pm</td>
<td>@jezzaf95&lt;br&gt;Campbell Newman has won Ashgrove. ABC Election Computer predicts a swing of 13.6% to LNP. #qldvotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXM: Campbell Newman has won the Brisbane seat of Ashgrove as part of an overwhelming election victory. <a href="http://t.co/M6mRajfW">http://t.co/M6mRajfW</a></td>
<td>Campbell Newman emotional as he addresses the LNP faithful at Camp Campbell in Ashgrove <a href="http://t.co/Ft0TpplB">http://t.co/Ft0TpplB</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@eastofjanuary&lt;br&gt;24 March 2012, 9:42pm</td>
<td>@couriermail&lt;br&gt;Kate Jones says she will be voting for herself tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interpretation(s):

Election night is an understandable timepoint for a spike in tweets to occur, given the controversial and emotional nature of the campaign. The tweet level builds towards election day but remains relatively steady. It is interesting to note how high the PUBLIC user group spike is, compared with the LNP user group which might have been expected to be the highest given the dramatic election results. It is reasoned that the high PUBLIC user group engagement and lower levels from the party-focused user groups is due to the switch to the LNP and ALP party members focusing on external celebrations rather than commenting on Twitter. The importance of local content links remains strong throughout; with Jones highlighting the importance of being ‘local’ right up until election day and Newman’s election night celebration held locally. The fact that the PUBLIC user group is generating the highest number of tweets indicates that social media, in particular Twitter, has a cathartic function in the public space; a function that is not unrelated to suggestions that the use of Twitter is a form of narcissism (Kandias, Galbogini, Mitrou, & Gritzalis, 2013; McKinney, Kelly, & Duran, 2012; Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013).

4.4 Example ‘gay’

The concept ‘gay’ was chosen due to the emotive and controversial discussion that was generated within the Twitter data set. The concept is directly related to human sexuality and generates a diverse range of opinions from Twitter users. The prominence of the concept in the data reflects the current societal focus on homosexual activism, which is continuously leveraged by the media and governments.
Figure 24: Discursis data showing the concept ‘gay’ as expressed over the period of 1/1/12 to 27/3/12 on Twitter. User categories (ALP, LNP, MEDIA, PUBLIC) are graphed in different colours. The stars on the graph denote significant points in time when the concept experienced a high volume of tweets from a particular user group.

Figure 24 shows the temporal distribution of the concept ‘gay’ within the data set, broken down to compare the way in which significant user groups (ALP, LNP, MEDIA and PUBLIC) engaged with the concept. It is a strong example of user group interaction focused on a content-heavy and divisive topic. The significant time points are examined in detail in the following series of observations and interpretations (see Fig 24).

4.4.1 Significant timepoints

What follows is an analysis of four significant timepoints from the data:

- Timepoint one: 26 February 2012
- Timepoint two: 12 March 2012
- Timepoint three: 15 March 2012
- Timepoint four: 18 March 2012
4.4.1.1 Timepoint one: 26 February 2012

Observations

On 26 February 2013 a high level of content was generated from those within the ALP and PUBLIC user categories. It is the earliest instance of a high number of tweets relating to the concept ‘gay’ within the data set. Those within the LNP user category are silent during this period, and the MEDIA user category’s engagement level rises only slightly after the ALP and PUBLIC tweet levels start to recede.

On 26 February Newman announced at an Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) forum (held within the electorate) that if elected, he will repeal the incumbent government’s legislation allowing same sex couples to formalise their relationships via a civil union ceremony. The announcement acted as a catalyst generating the high number of tweets from the PUBLIC and ALP user categories, the majority of which condemned the decision and used it as a springboard to draw wider conclusions about Newman’s ethics and accountability. The following significant tweets (as determined by relative retweet frequency) illustrate this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Tweet</th>
<th>Retweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@LNPIInsider</td>
<td>On behalf of gays, their families and rational QLDers, fuck you Campbell Newman #qldvotes</td>
<td><strong>(retweeted 24 times)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 February 2013, 8:01pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@nocando</td>
<td>Things Campbell Newman hates: accountability, above board business dealings and gay people! #qldvotes</td>
<td><strong>(retweeted 5 times)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 February 2013, 7:53pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@karenstruthers</td>
<td>Campbell Newman confirms he is not “gay friendly” at ACL forum today saying he will repeal civil union laws #civilunions</td>
<td><strong>(retweeted 31 times)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 February 2013, 8:34pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examination of the Twitter data on this date reveals very little activity from those in the LNP user category, as is reflected in the above graph.
Interpretation(s)

The high level of tweets from the ALP and PUBLIC user groups on this date is representative of long-running tension between Newman and gay rights activists. The announcement at the ACL forum confirmed the belief that Newman would repeal the civil union legislation if elected, resulting in the spike. The noticeable silence from those in the LNP user category is an accurate reflection of the LNP campaign strategy outlined in the interview data, as users stayed quiet and did not engage with the conversation (Informant A, personal communication, July 12, 2012).

The first two significant tweets listed above were generated by users who played a significant role on Twitter during the campaign. Both are anonymous accounts that tweeted frequently to a relatively large number of followers. ‘@LNPInsider’ claimed to be just that, an employee of the LNP who was dissatisfied with the party’s policies and sought to give inside information via Twitter. It is not possible to confirm if the user was in fact an employee of the LNP, and the user was placed within the PUBLIC user category due to their ambiguous political alliances. It is possible that the user was in fact a disenfranchised LNP staff member, but it is also possible that the user was an ALP plant attempting to spread negative messaging about Newman from a source that could be seen by other Twitter users as trustworthy given their apparent place of employment. ‘@nocando’ is a firmly anti-Newman account that was very active during the campaign and was openly opposed to Newman specifically as an identified ALP supporter. As a result the user was placed in the ALP user category within the data set. Similar to the ‘@LNPInsider’ user, ‘@nocando’ concentrated their efforts on crafting tweets that resonated with their followers and consistently broadcast strong messages that were anti-Newman.

The key tweet made by user ‘@karenstruthers’ is of particular interest to this study, given the identity of the user. Karen Struthers was the ALP state member for Algester within the Queensland Parliament from 2001 until her defeat in the 2012 election that is the study for this thesis. During her tenure, Struthers served in a number of cabinet positions; at the time of the 2012 election she was Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. A vocal anti-Newman user on Twitter and openly homosexual, Struthers stood out in the 2012 election campaign due to her high volume
of tweets and aggressive tweeting style. Struthers suffered a swing of 18.4% against her in the 2012 election. In the context of this research, she is a significant example of an ALP politician who was able to influence other users with her tweet content, but was unable to translate this into actual votes on the day of the election.

The similarity between the level of the PUBLIC user category and the ALP user category spike indicates that both groups shared a similar sentiment when it came to the ‘gay’ concept and the related election issues. This interaction between user groups indicates that controversial (and emotional) social issues such as gay marriage generate high levels of discussion on Twitter, a finding that will be explored in detail later.

### 4.4.1.2 Timepoint two: 12 March 2012

**Observations**

On 12 March 2012 the PUBLIC and LNP user categories spike in regards to the concept ‘gay’, more than two weeks after the first spike. There is a relatively small amount of engagement by the ALP user group, and the MEDIA user group is not engaged at all. On 11 March 2012 Katter’s Australia Party (a right-wing minority party headed by conservative politician Bob Katter) released a television campaign advertisement (also uploaded to YouTube) that accused Newman of ‘hypocrisy’ in regards to gay marriage. The advertisement includes an image of two topless men embracing, with the voiceover announcing that Newman supports gay marriage and will cede to the Greens and other ‘minority groups’ wish to legalise gay marriage should he be elected. The video includes a clip of Newman speaking at a press conference and saying the words ‘I support gay marriage’, concluding with the phrase ‘Is a vote for Campbell Newman a vote for gay marriage?’
Fig 25: Screen capture of one of the scenes from the Katter Australia Party advertisement

The link to the YouTube version of the advertisement spreads quickly through Twitter on 12 March 2012 and the depiction of gay couples as the natural opposite of ‘family values’ is discussed at length by Twitter users. The heated character of the debate is driven by the extreme nature of the advertisement, as the PUBLIC user category express outrage over the depiction of gay people, and the LNP user group are quick to describe the advertisement as ‘homophobic’, with Newman commenting publically that he found the advertisement ‘offensive and homophobic’. The debate continues on Twitter as Katter’s gay half-brother comments publically that the advertisement ‘incites hatred’. The following significant tweets (as determined by relative retweet frequency and succinct concept expression) illustrate the reaction from the PUBLIC and LNP user groups, causing the peak in concept occurrence observed in the graph.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Tweet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@AxeCo2Tax</td>
<td>12 March 2012, 8:53pm</td>
<td>Does Bob Brown support Gay Marriage?? Does Campbell Newman Support Gay Marriage?? The AD is factual #QandA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@MC_Odd</td>
<td>12 March 2012, 4:32am</td>
<td>#BobKatter’s homophobic election ad targeting Campbell Newman over his support for gay marriage. Fuck Katter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@couriermail</td>
<td>12 March 2012, 7:48am</td>
<td>Gay brother: Katter ad incites hatred <a href="http://t.co/cnlikhub">Link</a> (retweeted 5 times)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretation(s)**

The high level of tweets marks a significant point in the campaign which impacted on
both social media conversations and traditional media commentary. The language adopted by users is heated, reflecting the emotive nature of the ‘gay’ concept. Katter’s Australia Party is highly conservative, and was (and still is) open about their stance on gay couples and the campaign for marital unions. Katter’s campaign team were aware of the emotionally charged debate around Newman’s plan to repeal civil unions, and his need to balance the conservative demands of the ACL and progressive LNP supporters to achieve the maximum amount of votes. The advertisement was an attempt to position Newman as a gay rights supporter, which is ironic given his opponents’ earlier attempts to position Newman as a homophobe. It is possible that Katter’s campaign team thought that the controversial advertisement would alienate Newman from the conservative right-wing vote, which would then swing to Katter’s Australia Party. However this strategy was misinformed, as the majority of the Twitter backlash was directed at Katter himself, both for the anti-gay views expressed and also for the use of the advertisement to ‘incite hatred’ against gay people in general.

4.4.1.3 Timepoint three: 15 March 2012

Observations

The tweet spike that occurs at this point, three days after the previous critical point, is generated by the ALP user category, with little to no buy-in from the MEDIA, LNP or PUBLIC user categories. Examination of Twitter activity during this time shows that most tweets were commenting on the public debate that occurred on 15 March 2012 between Newman and Premier Anna Bligh. A wide range of issues are covered on Twitter during and after the forum, however those associated with the ‘gay’ concept are few, and are invoked by ALP users—resulting in the spike. The seminal tweet below appears throughout the data on this day, and the spike is caused by retweets and mentions of the original.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>@nocando</th>
<th>Campbell Newman already said he doesn't consider gay people to be &quot;normal fair dinkum families&quot; #qldforum #qldvotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 March 2012, 7:59pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interpretation(s)

The spike in the data is led by the ALP user category that inflames the Twitter conversation with the above tweet. The tweet is constructed in such a way to tap into the emotive gay rights conversation at a time when there is a high volume of tweets being circulated due to the public debate. The tweet appears to be quoting something said by Newman during the debate, but is in fact a reframing of an original quote from Newman during the campaign that has been taken out of context in a way that appears homophobic. The user who originated the tweet ‘@nocando’ (as explained in an earlier timepoint interpretation) is an anti-Newman campaigner and also an identified ALP supporter. As such, it is possible to surmise that the particular tweet was part of an attempt to reinforce the ‘Newman is anti-gay’ message when there was a high level of general election conversation, particularly by the PUBLIC (read: most likely to be swinging voters) on Twitter. It is interesting to note that the tactic did not yield its intended result in this case, as there was no pick-up from the other user categories, including the PUBLIC user category. It is possible that the tweet did not gain traction because of the high traffic numbers within the election conversation on this evening, or it may signify a lag in interest given the amount of time already spent debating Newman’s views of gay people in the wake of the Katter advertisement—relating directly to the concept of a Twitter issues lifecycle.

4.4.1.4 Timepoint four: 18 March 2012

Observations

The Twitter conversation on 18 March 2012, three days after the previous critical timepoint, shows a sharp spike in usage by the LNP user group, and corresponding smaller spikes across the MEDIA, ALP and PUBLIC user categories. Several important campaign-related events with relevance to the ‘gay’ concept occur on this day, and the resulting discussion causes the conversation spikes. To maintain clarity, the two events are broken down as follows.
First event

Newman and Jones participated in a public debate within the electorate (commentary on Twitter used the ‘#ashgroveforum’ and ‘#ashgrove’ hashtags). Many issues were raised during the debate, and the range of election conversation on Twitter was correspondingly broad. The ‘gay’ concept on this day relates to an anti-Newman campaign flyer (not ALP branded) that was circulated in the electorate in the days leading up to the debate. The flyer, in the same vein as the Katter advertisement, was emotive and pictured a crying toddler and text claiming that Newman was promoting child abuse by supporting gay activists. During the debate, when Jones was questioned about the flyers, she stated that she was unaware of the flyer and its contents. Newman also announced, in response to a question, that he would not repeal gay and lesbian surrogacy laws if elected. Upon the forum’s completion, Newman refused to shake Jones’ hand; the microphone picked up (unconfirmed) his comment that he would not shake Jones’ hand until she apologised to Newman’s wife. (It is assumed that this comment relates to a separate concurrent campaign by the ALP that focused on Newman’s wife and her family). These occurrences, among others, were direct contributors to the Twitter conversation on that evening, some significant examples of which are included below. Following the forum, Centrebet changed Jones’ odds of winning the seat from $2.40 to $3.60.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
<th>MEDIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@TBrady1963 19 March 2012, 9:12am</td>
<td>@katejonesmp was UNAWARE what ALP leaflets in her electorate contained (Anti Newman Lies). Either Incompetent or Lying #Qldvotes #Ashgrove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@sueGCB 18 March 2012, 9:03pm</td>
<td>The @AlexGreenwich led gay marriage group call gay marriage supporter @Campbell_Newman a homophobe. Ummm...I'm confused. #qldvotes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second event

On the day following the forum, the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) cleared Newman of any misconduct and dismissed the corruption claims made against him by the ALP. While not related directly to the ‘gay’ concept, this significant event occurring so soon after the forum contributed to the LNP user category spike as the conversation continued to maintain a high frequency of tweets during this time.

Interpretation(s)

Similarly to the period surrounding Katter’s advertisement, the forum perpetuated the confusion about Newman and his stance on gay rights, specifically gay marriage. In terms of policy, his intentions are clear: Newman announced that he would repeal civil unions if elected to satisfy the ACL and its conservative supporters. Yet at the forum, he announced that he would not repeal the gay and lesbian surrogacy laws in an apparent attempt to execute a campaign strategy of presenting himself as a ‘premier for everyone’. These two policy announcements are not in alignment, but have clear strategy goals. Newman and his team responded strongly in objection to the style of Katter’s advertisement and the infamous Ashgrove child abuse flyer, decrying those tactics as disreputable and turning the accusation of homophobia on to the instigators.

During the campaign we see two different strategies at play in Newman’s corner; one of a conservative family man upholding the institution of marriage, and one of a progressive liberal who does not discriminate and is critical of those who do. He withstood attacks from two different directions, the ALP supporters on social media who on the basis of the civil unions repeal branded him a homophobe, and the conservative right wing (Katter and so on) who branded him a gay rights supporter who abuses children by allowing gay parents. This dichotomy is interesting to note (Newman is attacked for being both anti-gay and pro-gay on the basis of his comments at different times), and the two different methods of attack are interwoven throughout the Twitter discussion. This confusion about where Newman actually stands on gay rights (assuming it is somewhere in the middle) worked in his favour, as it was difficult for those outside the attack groups to discern a clear position. The manner in which Newman was targeted by the conservative side, linking gay parenting to child abuse,
backfired on the instigators as Twitter displayed the public reaction to such hate-inducing claims. Newman ended up attracting support from people who did not actually agree with his policy, but who disagreed with the attack methods. This finding will be discussed further in this paper in relation to other case studies.

The high LNP user group spike during this timepoint demonstrates a clear reaction to the confusion surrounding Newman’s stance on gay marriage as well as a move to capitalise on the fortuitous timing of the CMC findings by attacking Jones and the ALP government. The lesser spikes by other user groups indicates some resonance with the LNP messaging, and is a clear indication that the reaction to specific types of campaign methods, particularly negative ones, gains significant traction on Twitter.

4.4.2 Links to theory

The use of the concept ‘gay’ by Twitter users within this particular case example is an instance of Twitter reflecting news values, specifically conflict. This is a result of the framing of the previously mentioned national debate about homosexual rights and marriage, the attempt by interest groups to agenda-set on this issue, and the background of the traditional news value of conflict (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). As evidenced in the above data, the issue of civil unions is contentious, but needs to be contextualised with the national examples. The wider debate in Australia about gay marriage gives currency to the anachronism ‘all political is local’.

4.5 Example ‘cmc’

The concept ‘cmc’ was chosen due to its prominence in the Leximancer concept frequency measurements, and the rich discussion the concept generated on Twitter.
Figure 26: Discursis data showing the concept ‘cmc’ as expressed over the period of 1/1/12 to 27/3/12 on Twitter. User categories (ALP, LNP, MEDIA, PUBLIC) are graphed in different colours. The circle on the graph captures the significant points in time during which the concept experienced a high volume of tweets from a particular user group.

Figure 26 shows the temporal development of the concept ‘cmc’ within the data set, broken down to show how significant user groups (ALP, LNP, MEDIA and PUBLIC) engaged with the concept in comparison with each other. It is an example of user group interaction focused on a topic that played a significant role in the campaign. The significant timepoints are broken down in detail in the following series of observations and interpretations. The concept ‘cmc’ refers to the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC)

\[17\] which is the independent body appointed by the Queensland Government responsible for investigating claims of misconduct and criminal acts within public institutions. CMC as a concept played an integral role in the campaign; it was used as a central campaign strategy by the ALP to refer Newman and his wife’s family to the commission to enhance negative media coverage and speculation about corruption and secret business deals (The Fitzgerald Legacy: Reforming Public Life in Australia and Beyond, 2010). Ultimately this strategy backfired for the ALP, given the timing of the CMC’s ultimate declaration in the week before the election that no misconduct was found. Having built its campaign upon the CMC referrals, the ALP were left with limited options in the final week before the election with no time to instigate a positive campaign. Given the personal nature of the CMC referrals, there was no policy basis on which to attack the LNP in time for it to resonate with voters. The ALP campaign strategist was not authorised to comment on the CMC-focused

strategy (Informant B, personal communication, July 21, 2012).

4.5.1 Significant timepoint

What follows is an analysis of the Twitter conversation from 12-19 March 2012.

Observations

From 12-19 March 2012 there were large numbers of tweets from all user groups relating to the concept ‘cmc’. Within this timeframe two peaks occur, driven by the PUBLIC and LNP user categories. The MEDIA and ALP user categories experience smaller peaks within the timeframe. The following external events occurred during this timeframe:

- 13-14 March 2012 – Mainstream media reports that the CMC is investigating claims about developer donations to the City Hall redevelopment fund made while Newman was Lord Mayor.
- 14 March 2012 – During a media conference Bligh is asked directly if she has any evidence to back up her referral of Newman to the CMC and the related campaign advertising that the ALP is running. Bligh answers in the negative.
- 16 March 2012 – The CMC clears Newman of the ALP-referred claims around developer donations, misconduct of council staff and corruption, although it announces it will independently look into the City Hall redevelopment fund issue to ascertain if any misconduct took place. Bligh issues a statement in the late afternoon, including the below extract quoted in a media source:
  “This is an investigation into a developer who has made seven separate donations via seven different entities to Campbell Newman’s election fund when he was Lord Mayor shortly before an approval was given for a housing development...These are serious issues which raise legitimate questions.” (Jabour, 2012)
- 18 March 2012 – The CMC clears Newman of any wrongdoing and dismisses all claims against him (correlates with the highest peak in Twitter conversation).

The MEDIA user group do not lead in either peak; they are slow to pick up on the first
conversation peak, and are fully present in the second peak along with the PUBLIC and LNP user groups. The tweets below showcase some examples of the conversation over the period, selected either for retweet frequency or succinct summation characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LNP</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@ShaneG_4164</td>
<td>@WestsideNews Given the CMC cleared @Campbell_4_QLD of any wrongdoing. Why is @katejonesmp and @TheQldPremier still refusing to #saysorry? (retweeted 5 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March 2012, 11:41am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@KickKate</td>
<td>@jewelrainbow @the_qld_premier @katejonesmp this matter is now resolved by the CMC, just waiting for Anna to apologise. #qldvotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March 2012, 4:47pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@australian</td>
<td>Newman donations in CMC sights: QUEENSLAND'S CMC is assessing whether $72,000 in donations to Campbell Newman's ... <a href="http://t.co/7xX8PuVL">http://t.co/7xX8PuVL</a> (retweeted 7 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 March 2012, 11:10pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@seanparnell</td>
<td>Campbell Newman donations in CMC sights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 March 2012, 6:04am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@SpencerJolly</td>
<td>CMC not to investigate Campbell Newman puts big wind into LNP's campaign sails for run to the line #qldvotes #vote9 (retweeted 10 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 March 2012, 4:36pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@tag64geoff</td>
<td>@Rhodezy06 - @Campbell_Newman has been cleared twice by the CMC and yet AB continues to smear him. No wonder why Qld has had enough of ALP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March 2013, 7:15pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@N5PRE</td>
<td>I also don't care that Campbell Newman was cleared he's dodgy as hell my common sense is overruling the CMC's findings. #Auspol #Australia (retweeted 9 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March 2012, 6:06pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@ppaulkane</td>
<td>But @theqldpremier, the CMC has cleared @Campbell_Newman of all slurs you've tried to smear him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March 2012,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interpretation(s)

The important period for this study takes place over seven days, the week before the election. The sustained nature of the concept discussion is of interest, as it differs from other studies that have a more defined concept lifecycle of two to three days (Botan & Taylor, 2006; Vasquez & Taylor, 2000). The MEDIA user category initially only pick up the concept conversation once the PUBLIC and LNP user categories begin to discuss the outcomes of Bligh’s press conference. The significant difference in the peak levels when comparing the LNP and ALP user categories is of note given the disparity in content levels. Examination of the Twitter data leads to the assumption that the LNP are using the space to ‘call out’ the ALP on their negative campaign tactics and the CMC findings. Indeed, it is apparent that the ALP user group did not have a contingency strategy, either party-sanctioned or user driven, to respond should the CMC findings not go as planned. Further, the campaign strategy of using CMC referrals to drive media coverage resulted in a lot of conversation on Twitter. It was linked with the overall negative campaign strategy of the ALP that focused on personally attacking Newman rather than leaving any room for attacking LNP policy or developing a positive ALP campaign.

The effectiveness of using attack advertisements in a political campaign, including social media platforms, has been explored by researchers with mixed findings (De Boer, Sütfeld, & Groshek, 2012; Koch, 2008; Lariscy & Tinkham, 1999; Sonner, 1998). Using personal attacks (or ‘smear’ campaigning) is not a new political device, however the use of the strategy by the ALP in this election did attract a level of debate on Twitter, allowing access into monitoring feedback on smear campaigns in a way that has previously been unavailable to campaign officials and the media. It is also important to note that following the 2012 election, the CMC announced the introduction of penalties for referrals that were deemed as spurious or without evidence, in order to
discourage the use of the CMC referral system as a political campaign tactic. The overall debate about the use of a tax-payer funded organisation for political means has fed into other recent elections, and will have an impact on ongoing campaign planning in Queensland.

The CMC decision not to investigate Newman had a catastrophic effect on the ALP campaign, and triggered a spike in Twitter conversation. From interpretation of the data it is possible to conclude, as per the research questions, that in this particular study the LNP and PUBLIC user categories drove the Twitter conversation in response to external campaign events. The MEDIA category is influenced by the LNP and PUBLIC user categories, yet once the MEDIA activity drops off, so does the LNP and PUBLIC categories. These sharp rises and falls within the conversations, while they appear back to back within the one-week time frame, do mimic the two to three day concept lifecycle that is evident in the other case studies. The LNP is able to drive the high level of Twitter content, and take up by the PUBLIC and MEDIA user categories through capitalising on the controversial nature of the CMC debate and significant campaign-related repercussions (such as the discrediting of the majority of all the ALP campaign collateral).

The relatively lower levels of Twitter conversation generated by the ALP user category are interesting to examine, as their first peak is almost in line with the PUBLIC and LNP peak, but their activity drops off during the second (overall much higher) peak. It is possible that after the first wave of 'resistance' tweets, the ALP user group collectively having no response to the LNP and PUBLIC user group commentary dropped away to let the discussion die down, not dissimilar to the activity of the LNP user group in the 'gay' concept study.

4.6 Conclusion

To conclude the data analysis chapter, the three case example concepts ‘ashgrove’, ‘gay’ and ‘cmc’ have been consolidated into one graph to give a sense of the overall patterns of conversation within the Twitter data.
As evidenced in Figure 27, some concept peaks occur together due to external circumstances. The matching peaks circled in the graph are similar, and are indicative of the concepts ‘gay’ and ‘ashgrove’ peaking at the same time. This is due to the gay issues raised at the Ashgrove forum, which also coincided with the announcement of the ReachTEL poll results. Apart from these matching peaks, it is evident that peaks in usage occur on a concept-specific basis and are dictated largely by external events where Twitter conversation acts as a record of the resulting reactive conversation and commentary of users.

The following chapter will discuss the significant points raised by the three case examples, and will seek to answer the broader research questions posed by the overall study.
5.0 Twitter and political engagement: The Literature

The best way to engage honestly with the marketplace via Twitter is to never use the words "engage," "honestly," or "marketplace."

Jeffrey Zeldman

The following chapter will outline the relevant literature relating to the use of Twitter in political engagement. This provides a relevant historic context of previous studies concerning the relationship between political science and social media, and also presents an opportunity to engage with the literature using the initial findings from the preceding data analysis chapter.

5.1 Twitter usage in government and electoral contexts

The best known and most researched example of Twitter use is during the 2012 US presidential election, after which Barack Obama secured his second term in the White House (Hong & Nadler, 2012). Obama’s use of Twitter, along with that of his opponent Mitt Romney, is relevant to this thesis. Other Australian and international election campaigns examined by researchers include other studies of the 2012 Queensland state election (Bruns & Highfield, 2013), the 2010 Swedish elections (Larsson & Moe, 2012), the 2011 Nigerian presidential election (Fink, Bos, Perrone, Liu, & Kopecky, 2013), the 2013 Italian general election (Vaccari et al., 2013), the German national elections (Kaczmirek et al., 2013; Tumasjan et al., 2010), the Belgium national elections (Verdegem, D'heer, & Mechant, 2013), the French presidential elections (Hanna et al., 2013), the 2011 presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan (Turdubaeva, 2013), the 2012 South Korean presidential election (Park, 2013), and the 2010 UK general election (specifically Scotland) (Baxter & Marcella, 2010; Baxter et al., 2011).

Hong and Nadler (2012) conducted research into the impact of social media on the 2012 presidential election campaigns in the US by testing the association between ‘candidate salience’ and the individual candidates’ level of engagement within specific social media platforms. This study is one of the first examples of the use of empirical evidence to measure the impact of social media within an election study. The
researchers acknowledge the existing literature surrounding the use of ‘new media technologies’ and the change in attitudes about how new communication technologies can impact political campaigns and affect public opinion (Baum, 2005; Dellavigna & Kaplan, 2007; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2004, 2006; Gerber, Karlan, & Bergan, 2009; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Strömberg, 2004), particularly in the case of television advertising (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Brader, 2005; Kaid, 1997; Twitter and Society, 2013; Valentino, Hutchings, & Williams, 2004). It is reasonable to assume that Twitter may also be able to impact public opinion.

Hong and Nadler (2012) investigated two themes, candidate salience and candidate engagement, and then tested their association to determine impact. The first theme, candidate salience, was defined as “the extent to which candidates are discussed online by the public in an election campaign, and which we measure using the number of mentions a candidate garners on the social media site Twitter” (Hong & Nadler, 2012). Politicians in the US continue to favour Twitter in roles that traditional media would usually fill, such as making announcements and streaming news conferences, as this provides them with a direct link to the public, without the influence of ‘gate keepers’ who control traditional media outlets (Hong & Nadler, 2012).

This paper attempts to fill the gap in our current understanding of the use of social media by political candidates by undertaking a quantitative analysis of American politicians’ Twitter use and its impact on their levels of online salience (Hong & Nadler, 2012).

To measure ‘candidate salience’, the researchers conducted an empirical analysis using the number of Twitter ‘mentions’ about a particular candidate. This content is generated from a tweet by a politician, which is broadcast to his or her followers and then starts a discussion; the ‘mentions’ used by the researchers are re-tweets, replies or standard mentions by followers in reaction to the original tweet (Hong & Nadler, 2012). The researchers also included the number of ‘mentions’ of a candidate by traditional media outlets, including television, newspapers and radio. The candidates that the researchers used for the purpose of the study were seven politicians who were running in the presidential elections in 2012: Mitt Romney, Newt Gringrich, Jon Huntsman, Ron Paul, Rick Perry and Rick Santorum (Hong & Nadler, 2012). The
researchers collected data daily for 22 days between 26 December 2011 and 16 January 2012, resulting in a sample size of 132 (number of candidates x number of days observed). This window of data collecting, over the Christmas holiday period for a limited number of days, may have an impact on the reliability of the study’s findings.

Hong and Nadler (2012) found that the association between the number of tweets by a candidate and the number of resulting ‘mentions’ is not robust, however the association between traditional media mentions and Twitter mentions is significant and worth investigating further. Overall, the researchers found little evidence to suggest that the number of tweets by a politician impacts on the number of ‘mentions’ they receive, however they did find strong evidence positively linking the number of mentions by news media to the number of mentions on Twitter (Hong & Nadler, 2012). These findings have significant implications for this thesis, as they relate directly to the question of effective political Twitter strategies and the idea that influence may not necessarily be achieved through sheer number of tweets alone. However, the findings cannot be taken as conclusive, due in part to the small sample size, limited data collection period, and because Hong and Nadler did not make allowance for the content of tweets. In addition, their measure of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ sentiment was based on a quantitative measure that does not take into consideration the ironic nature of Twitter conversations. To simplify, generating a lot of ‘mentions’ does not necessarily equate with a positive result overall for a campaign. Further to this, the significant correlation between traditional media mentions and Twitter mentions may have occurred simply because media outlets and journalists commonly syndicate their stories across a wide variety of mediums, including their Twitter accounts, which would account for the statistical relationship. By integrating a Twitter concept lifecycle model into studies such as these, further insights will be generated at a deeper level.

Larsson and Moe (2012) used the study of the 2010 Swedish election to examine how microblogging (Twitter specifically) contributed to the practice of ‘e-democracy’, particularly if the service enables greater public participation, or if Twitter users are the same participants that are already engaged. Sweden is an established democracy with high levels of freedom of speech, internet usage, ICT engagement and consistently high election participation by the public which makes it ideal for this research (Larsson & Moe, 2012). The researchers collected 99,832 tweets using
harvesting software and aimed to present greater insight into the practice of civic microblogging and public participation (Larsson & Moe, 2012).

Political blogging is an established practice and has gained credibility as a part of the modern communications and news sphere (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2008; Larsson & Hrastinski, 2011) and it is not unusual for politicians (through their campaign teams) to host their own blog, especially during an election campaign (Gibson et al., 2008). Larsson and Moe note the evolution of the political use of Twitter, from the early stages as a broadcast and key message dissemination device, to the more casual conversational and collaborative approach now more commonly adopted (Larsson & Moe, 2012). Their methodology is not without precedent, however all previous examples have used a significantly different sampling approach, in that a snapshot of the entire Twittersphere was used rather than specific study data (Kwak et al., 2010).

This study provides an analysis of a specific subset of that same online sphere, focusing on one set of use, namely political communication. Delimiting the analysis in this way enables us to provide a more detailed account regarding Twitter user types in a specific case. The aim is to move beyond descriptive statistics and study interaction between users, shedding light not only on the volume and forms of use, but also on who these users are and how they relate (or not) to each other (Larsson & Moe, 2012).
Larsson and Moe used Twitter harvesting tool ‘TwapperKeeper’\(^{18}\) to download and store tweets in CSV format, which were then analysed using statistical software (SPSS\(^{19}\)) and through visualisation manipulation software (Gephi\(^{20}\)). With the election held on 19 September 2010, Larsson and Moe began harvesting tweets on 17 August 2010 and continued through until 22 September. The collection of tweets was delimited to those containing the hashtag #val2010 (Swedish for #election2010), which had emerged as the most commonly used hashtag by the public and by politicians in the lead up to the election (Larsson & Moe, 2012). The ten most active single user Twitter accounts are summarised in the below table; these users were the most active in creating their own content (as opposed to a high retweet level).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twitter ID</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Political affiliation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all_insane</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anonymous, political-satirical content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blogia</td>
<td>618</td>
<td></td>
<td>Political blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnnikaBeijbom</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>Fp (Liberals)</td>
<td>National Parliamentary candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemokrati</td>
<td>550</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anonymous, author under assumed name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pihlblad</td>
<td>544</td>
<td></td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>juditburda</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>M (Conservatives)</td>
<td>Local Parliamentary candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vpressfeldt</td>
<td>352</td>
<td></td>
<td>University student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MuzafferUnsal</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>M (Conservatives)</td>
<td>Part-time politician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mickep2</td>
<td>312</td>
<td></td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skogskant</td>
<td>312</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 14: Ten most active Twitter accounts (Larsson & Moe, 2012)*

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\(^{18}\) ‘TwapperKeeper’ has now merged with social media management company HootSuite, and is available as the rebranded ‘HootSuite Archives’ [http://hootsuite.com/](http://hootsuite.com/)


The following graph is a visualisation of the most active Twitter users and their connectivity:

![Graph of Twitter users and their network connectivity](image)

*Figure 15: Most active Twitter accounts and their network connectivity (Larsson & Moe, 2012)*

Overall, Larsson and Moe found that the temporal distribution of tweets showed a clear relationship between the mainstream media and Twitter, similar to Hong and Nadler (2012). As a result, they concluded that Twitter activity is largely dependent on external events, such as television broadcasts. However, this correlation may be due to media outlets and journalists syndicating their material across mediums, including Twitter accounts.

In purely quantitative terms, Twitter contributes to a broadening of public debate: it constitutes a novel arena for mediated public communication, and the sheer number of tweets – close to 100,000 in the present sample on the Swedish election – testifies to its use. The important question, though, is to what extent Twitter merely serves as another arena for already established societal actors, or rather facilitates a new distribution among public speakers, allowing new voices or perspectives to be heard (Larsson & Moe, 2012).
Larsson and Moe conclude that their study does not make any claim as to whether Twitter use had any impact on the outcome of the election, but extrapolate that any impact that did occur was minimal at best (Larsson & Moe, 2012). This conclusion is based on their finding that Twitter is still only actively used by a marginal number of people, and that therefore it is impossible to correlate Twitter with political success. The researchers highlight the need for further research in this area to determine if in fact Twitter does have any impact on voter mindsets (Larsson & Moe, 2012).

Aragón et al. (2013) used the 2011 Spanish national election to examine how political parties have adapted their communication methods to suit social media, specifically Twitter. As with the other literature examined in this chapter, the researchers again affirm Twitter’s role in modern political campaigning, recognising the opportunities it presents to gather feedback data and analyse public opinion:

Social media has played an increasingly important role in electoral campaigns in recent years. The new functionalities provided by these technologies range from their use as a platform for spreading propaganda (e.g., retweets) to opportunities for generating spaces of debate among politicians and/or citizens (e.g., replies) ...This design encourages message exchange and converts Twitter into a large space of debate (Aragón et al., 2013).

Recognising a general lack of understanding about how politicians use social media, Aragón et al. note that Twitter is used as a one-way information tool by political parties. The Spanish study examines a system made up of two dominant parties (progressive/conservative), also including three minor/new parties and two regionalist/national parties (Aragón et al., 2013). With relation to Spain as a study, the researchers note the regulation of access to traditional media by Spanish electoral law, wherein the degree of presence of political parties within the mass media is determined by the previous election results, and as such the dominant parties maintain the largest mass media presence (Aragón et al., 2013).

Aragón et al. tested four hypotheses:

1. The volume of activity and the emotional load of the messages over time reflect the involvement of different parties in the significant moments of the electoral campaign.
2. Interaction in the Spanish political Twittersphere is polarized and balkanized, leading to scarce communication between parties, and a highly clustered network structure.

3. Political parties and their leaders tend to use Twitter more as a one-way flow broadcast medium than as a space for engaging in conversations.

4. Minor and new parties, which have lower coverage in the traditional media, will show a higher propensity to exploit the potential of Twitter as a new unregulated space for promoting their messages (Aragón et al., 2013).

The Twitter data set used by Aragón et al. was collected between 4 and 24 November 2011, resulting in a total of 3,074,312 political tweets (380,164 distinct users). Aragón et al. used both pre-selected political hashtags and emerging hashtags during the time period to harvest the tweets, as well as official political party user accounts, media and pre-determined ‘activist’ user accounts, and any tweet that mentioned the official party accounts (Aragón et al., 2013). By using text analytics methods, specifically the Louvain method (Blondel, Guillaume, Lambiotte, & Lefebvre, 2008) the researchers were able to conduct a quantitative analysis of the tweets to reveal interactions between users (intraparty, retweet frequency, interactions patterns), with an added layer of sentiment analysis (Aragón et al., 2013). Examining ‘emotional load’ evolution, the study compared the parties in terms of emotional variation by using a lexicon (the Spanish version of ANEW), coded across three emotional dimensions: valence, arousal and dominance (Aragón et al., 2013). To conduct the sentiment analysis, the researchers analysed the valence of the tweets, including both positive valence (happiness, satisfaction and hope) and negative valence (sadness and disappointment). The term ‘emotional load’ is justified, as Aragón et al.’s results reflect levels of emotion without distinguishing between positive and negative emotions. The ability to measure which days during the campaign reflect a high emotional load is a useful finding and could be replicated in future electoral case studies.

Aragón et al. confirmed their four hypotheses, and beyond that, offer a qualitative method of analysing tweets in an electoral context. The criticism of this method is similar to the other attempts to measure sentiment on Twitter; the difficulty in reconciling a standard lexicon’s emotive words with Twitter’s own jargon-heavy unique language. Aragón et al. provide a basis for understanding how modern politicians and
political parties are still learning to use social media, and also provide a useful starting point for analysis of tweets in political campaigns. This project seeks to further the learnings from this study and provide results that political parties and strategists can replicate to increase the effectiveness of a campaign.

In addition to the literature explored above, there is a limited amount of research conducted into government agencies’ use of Twitter, specifically the Australian Government. Alam and Lucas (2011) conducted a study to examine Australian Government (including local, state and federal) agency tweets to better understand the communicative practices of these agencies and how they use Twitter.

Twitter use in government is creating entirely new online communities that defy traditional communication and reach. Many Government agencies use Twitter to communicate with the public and to learn their opinions on government issues and matters. (Alam & Lucas, 2011)

Alam and Lucas outlined two research questions:

1. What are the communicative practices or patterns of microblogging communications by (the Australian) government?

To address the questions Alam and Lucas selected six different government agencies across local, state and federal levels and collected tweets from each official agency account over a short timeframe (two weeks: 14-26 December 2011). The selection of the six government agencies was done randomly following convenience sampling via relatively high levels of social media usage by the agency (Alam & Lucas, 2011). Tweets from the official agency accounts were collected, as well as citizen tweets interacting with the agencies. 305 official agency tweets were collected and 414 citizen tweets who mentioned the official agency account(s) within their tweets (Alam & Lucas, 2011). Due to the small sample size, the researchers did not use tweet harvesting software, nor did they use text analytic software (including Leximancer specifically) to analyse the tweets. Alam and Lucas argue that the text analytic programs focus on word reoccurrence within a tweet, whereas government agency tweets typically contain URLs linking to another location where the full message being
communicated is held, therefore rendering the initial word content of the tweet less important from an analysis point of view (Alam & Lucas, 2011). Instead, Alam and Lucas used genre analysis to examine the communication patterns contained within the data set. The context-specific genres formulated by Alam and Lucas for the analysis of official agency tweets included News and Updates, External Information, Retweets, Respond to User, External Event Announcement, Asking a Question, and Job Vacancies. The context-specific genres formulated by the researchers for the analysis of the citizen tweets included Complaint, Positive Feedback, Promotion, Asking a Question, and Suggestion (Alam & Lucas, 2011).

Alam and Lucas’ findings were consistent with the four roles that Twitter plays in government as proposed by Wigand (2010):

- extending the reach of communication
- updating and sharing information
- building relationships
- collaborating with stakeholders.

The genre analysis undertaken by Alam and Lucas on the tweet data set concluded that the government agencies within the study were using Twitter primarily to disseminate and broadcast news and/or updates about either themselves, or an external agency (Alam & Lucas, 2011). The agencies did not use Twitter as a means of community consultation, despite the opportunity to use the tool for interaction with citizens to gain feedback and so on. This is of particular note given that the majority of citizens used Twitter to provide feedback to the agencies, providing a real opportunity for the agencies to engage with these users. Alam and Lucas have contributed to the growing understanding of how governments use Twitter, particularly from an agency perspective. The limitations of this study include the short data collection timeframe and the time of year that the data was collected, which impacts upon the representative nature of the data.

Bruns and Highfield (2013) conducted a significant study concurrently with this research also examining Twitter and the Queensland election, lending strong insight despite using an alternate methodology and different case study frame. The researchers examined patterns of activity limited to one general hashtag used
throughout the campaign “#qldvotes”, specifically tracking interactions between politicians and other users (Bruns & Highfield, 2013). Bruns and Highfield generated significant insights into political campaigning within social media, an area that is relevant to this research, despite its differing purpose. Bruns and Highfield present valuable context with regard to Australian politics and Twitter specifically, noting the growing adoption of social media by politicians and their campaign teams recognising the potential to engage with voters and raise the level of participation in public debate. The study examines the level of engagement and approach style of Queensland politicians, revealing significant differences in intentional strategy (Bruns & Highfield, 2013). Bruns and Highfield present useful insights into the strategies and social media behaviour of candidates, resulting in an important piece of research that helps to establish credibility in the field of research concerning Australian politics and social media.

5.2 Measuring influence and engagement on Twitter

The concept of influence has been studied extensively in the fields of sociology, communication, marketing and political science (Cha, Benevenuto, Haddadi, & Gummadi, 2010; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Influence between human beings is an integral part of social relations; studying patterns of influence is important for understanding social trends, communication and how people interact with each other. Influence in a social context within interpersonal relationships was defined by Kelman (1958) within three broad varieties: compliance, identification and internalisation (Kelman, 1958). For this project, the internalisation variety of influence will be used as the broad definition, as it refers to people accepting a belief or behaviour both publically (voting preferences) and privately (political beliefs). Measuring influence is complicated, as it is difficult to quantify (Cha et al., 2010). Twitter presents an opportunity to measure influence within a defined frame and enables researchers to track conversations and user interactions in a way that has previously been unavailable to researchers. Research into Twitter concept lifecycles relates directly to the attempted measurement of influence and engagement, as it provides a greater understanding of the mechanisms by which influence and engagement occur.
A study undertaken by Leavitt, Burchard, Fisher, and Gilbert (2009) is the first example of an attempt to track influence on Twitter. The researchers tracked 12 popular Twitter users over a 10-day period and grouped user influences into conversation-based and content-based (Cha et al., 2010; Leavitt et al., 2009). The results of the study indicate that news-based media outlets are more effective at spreading content within the information flow, while popular Twitter users succeed in making simple conversation (Leavitt et al., 2009). The limitations of that study include the extremely small sample size and the limited quantitative influence measurement methodology, which is expanded upon in Cha et al. (2010).

Cha et al. (2010) conducted a study that attempted to quantify and measure influence. They argue that:

Directed links in social media could represent anything from intimate friendships to common interests, or even a passion for breaking news or celebrity gossip. Such directed links determine the flow of information and hence indicate a user’s influence on others—a concept that is crucial in sociology and viral marketing. (Cha et al., 2010)

Cha et al. collected a large amount of Twitter data and presented an in-depth comparison of three different measures of influence, indegree, retweets and mentions. Similarly to this thesis, Cha et al. used spatial and temporal analysis methods. Overall the study provided several insights:

First, popular users who have high indegree are not necessarily influential in terms of spawning retweets or mentions. Second, most influential users can hold significant influence over a variety of topics. Third, influence is not gained spontaneously or accidentally, but through concerted effort such as limiting tweets to a single topic. (Cha et al., 2010)

Cha et al. conducted the study with the aim of reaching conclusions that would have significance in the field of viral product marketing. For their project, they analysed the Twitter network and its capacity as a news-spreading medium. To do this they examined the types and degrees of influence within this network. The measurements used in the paper were quantitative, based on the following categories:
1. Indegree influence, the number of followers of a user, directly indicates the size of the audience for that user.
2. Retweet influence, which we measure through the number of retweets containing one’s name, indicates the ability of that user to generate content with pass-along value.
3. Mention influence, which we measure through the number of mentions containing one’s name, indicates the ability of that user to engage others in a conversation. (Cha et al., 2010)

The significant differences between the Cha et al. (2010) study and this project are the sample selection techniques and the measurement methodology. The researchers used a sample drawn from the entirety of Twitter at a chosen time, a snapshot of 80 million users. This thesis, in contrast, is specifically examining influence and engagement in one particular event. The findings will therefore be more focused and directed than those drawn from the entire Twitter space.

Cha, Benevenuto, Haddadi, and Gummadi (2012) used Twitter data to compare the relative roles that different users play in information flow. They used a mix of major and minor international news headlines to investigate the roles played by mass media, ordinary users (referred to in the study as ‘grassroots’), and opinion leaders (referred to in the study as ‘evangelists’) in the flow of information (Cha et al., 2012). Cha et al. capped the study at 80 million unique users. From those 80 million, 54,981,152 accounts were classified as ‘currently in use’, only 8% of which had their accounts set to ‘private’ with restricted access (Cha et al., 2012). Those with restricted access were ignored by the researchers as accessing their profile information and tweet details was not possible. From the remaining users, the researchers collected 1,755,925,520 tweets. From these tweets Cha et al. analysed the connectivity between users and how effective Twitter is as a broadcasting system (Cha et al., 2012):

We have presented, to the best of our knowledge, the first extensive analysis of a near complete data set obtained from the microblogging service Twitter. Acquisition of such a rich data set enabled us to identify the relationship among distinct groups of users—mass media, evangelists, and grassroots—and the roles that they play in viral spreading of political and social news messages. (Cha et al., 2012)
Not surprisingly, the study found that mass media sources played a major role in information flow, reaching the most users in regards to major topics. In comparison, evangelists proved adept at spreading information about both minor and major topics, and reached audiences that otherwise would not have been engaged (Cha et al., 2012). Grassroots users were found to be relatively passive in the information flow context, but make up 98% of the overall Twitter network from the sample used (Cha et al., 2012). The results of this study provided an interesting insight into what and who contributes to the information flow on Twitter.

A study conducted by Bae and Lee (2012) likened the concepts of ‘popularity’ and ‘influence’ and conducted a sentiment analysis on Twitter users that follow popular users with the aim of distinguishing between positive and negative influence. Bae and Lee analysed tweets from a sample of 3,000,000 that mentioned or replied to a pre-determined set of 13 individual popular Twitter users. The ‘popular’ Twitter users were selected based on the criteria that they had more than 1,000,000 followers and were ranked in the top 50 of online social influence measurement devices including Klout, Twitalyzer and PeerIndex during May 2011 (Bae & Lee, 2012). Bae and Lee then harvested tweets over a period of 57 days by using Twitter search functions every 30 minutes to collect all tweets from the popular users, and all retweets and mentions of these original tweets. A lexicon-based sentiment analysis was undertaken using a LIWC dictionary to distinguish between positive (favourable) and negative (unfavourable) sentiment contained within the tweets. The researchers describe LIWC as follows:

The LIWC dictionary is composed of almost 4,500 words and word stems in 70 categories, including overall emotion and positive and negative feelings. The LIWC dictionary consists of four main categories (linguistic, psychological, personal concern, and spoken) to reflect emotional state, social relationships, thinking styles, individual differences, etc. In particular, the psychological category has subcategories such as affect, cognition, and biological processes. (Bae & Lee, 2012)

Through this process, the researchers calculated the positive-negative ratio of sentiment contained in each tweet by dividing the number of positive words by the
number of negative words. Tweets that have a ratio higher than 1 were classified as positive (Bae & Lee, 2012). Once these scores were identified, a correlation analysis was undertaken to measure the strength of dependence between the popular users and their followers. This enabled Bae and Lee to then determine which of the popular users had the highest level of positive influence on their followers, and those that had high levels of negative influence, relative to audience size (Bae & Lee, 2012). Overall Bae and Lee found that most of the popular Twitter users had high levels of correlation with their followers, so tweets with positive sentiment caused their followers to respond in a positive way. To calculate influence, Bae and Lee credited the work of Cha et al. (2010), but developed their own algorithm to measure what they refer to as ‘positive-negative influence’ (Bae & Lee, 2012):

![Figure 16: Bae and Lee (2012) influence algorithm](image)

Bae and Lee point out that the drawback of Cha et al. (2010) is that their three influence measures do not take into consideration positive and negative influence variations (Bae & Lee, 2012). By introducing the positive and negative comparisons, Bae and Lee have added more depth to the standard measure of influence used by Cha et al. (2010) and are able to provide greater insight into the relationship between popular Twitter users and their followers. The limitations include the short time period wherein the Twitter data was collected (two months) and the subsequent inability to present any trend findings or correlation with offline data in the ‘real world’ (Bae & Lee, 2012).

A study conducted by Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, and Watts (2011) used a large scale Twitter data analysis in an attempt to quantify influence between users in a meaningful way. Bakshy et al. investigated the influence levels of 1.6 million Twitter users by tracking 74 million diffusion events that occurred on Twitter within a two-month timeframe in 2009 (Bakshy et al., 2011). Ultimately the study elicited two useful findings:
1. Influential Twitter users have a relatively large number of followers and tweet at a steady frequency.

2. The inclusion of interesting URLs within tweets enhances the likelihood of retweets.

Bakshy et al. note that despite these findings, they are unable to draw a causal link for influence and therefore are unable to predict which particular tweet inclusions or users will exert influence in the future (Bakshy et al., 2011). As per previous studies examined in the sentiment analysis section of this chapter, the researchers reaffirm the importance of word-of-mouth diffusion by ‘influential’ users on Twitter in terms of effective marketing and strategic communications, particularly in consumer marketing. This finding, coupled with the ability of Twitter data to be mined effectively, forms the basis of the study chosen by Bakshy et al.

Unlike other user-declared networks (e.g. Facebook), Twitter is expressly devoted to disseminating information, in that users subscribe to broadcasts of other users; thus the network of “who listens to whom” can be reconstructed by crawling the corresponding “follower graph” (Bakshy et al., 2011).

The data set used by Bakshy et al. included a total of 87 million tweets collected from 13 September 2009 and 15 November 2009, all of which included URLs and were related to one of the distinct diffusion events identified by Bakshy et al. (Bakshy et al., 2011). A quantitative study was then carried out on the tweets, identifying the user from whom the URLs originated and then tracking their reoccurrence to show influence. Bakshy et al. offer a model to show how prospective marketing companies may try to identify influential Twitter users; however they note that the amount of observational data that marketing managers would need to collect and analyse would make the process prohibitive in a commercial setting. This project attempts to address this issue through the categorisation of users into groups, so that patterns can be examined.
6.0 Findings and discussion

Twitter provides us with a wonderful platform to discuss/confront societal problems. We trend Justin Bieber instead.

Lauren Leto

Theory building

The inductive grounded theory approach has been followed throughout the data analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis, culminating in the following theory models that are able to be replicated and tested by other researchers:

1. When a concept is generated by a single user group, its lifecycle lasts two to three days unless successful engagement with other user groups exists.
2. External engagement with other users groups can increase engagement on Twitter and extend the lifecycle of a concept.
3. Through its unique functions and mechanisms, Twitter has developed into a separate genre of communication.
4. Crafting an engaging tweet involves taking advantage of the unique syntax and the effective use of wit and profanity.

Research questions

Through what mechanisms did specific user categories drive ‘concept discussions’ on Twitter?

a) What are the characteristics of the Twitter concept lifecycle within a contested campaign context?

b) What are the characteristics of the Twitter language genre within a contested campaign context?

The strategic planning of political campaigns is a process that is constantly evolving in response to societal issues, advances in technology, and party priorities. The use of social media by politicians and political parties varies between countries and individuals, yet the trend of politicians using social media platforms, specifically Twitter,
is beyond doubt (Aragón et al., 2013; J. Kim & Yoo, 2013). The significant findings from this thesis, and its implications for practice, are relevant not only to political campaign strategists, but also to professionals working in any field that requires strategic communications planning. As a result of this study, it is possible to gain a greater understanding about Twitter and its role in campaigns, political or otherwise. Twitter enables campaign strategists to gain real time feedback on campaign tactics, which in turn can assist to inform ongoing strategy. The general public now has a platform to not only discuss their political preferences, but to give feedback on specific campaigns as they occur. This function is already being used by campaign strategists at a minor level, with plenty of room to expand.

This study has revealed how ‘concept discussions’ are generated and sustained on Twitter by specific user groups, knowledge that has value beyond the political context. Topics and concepts that gain attention on Twitter have specific characteristics, particularly in regard to the relationships between user groups. This study has also revealed the existence of a Twitter concept lifecycle, providing evidence that concepts conform to a time-specific model depending on the circumstances of their generation. Twitter has become its own legitimate and specific genre of communication, and the construction of a tweet has great significance when the goal is to resonate with and influence other users. Twitter’s function as a breaking-news device has impacted upon the role of legacy media within the social media platform, and more widely within society. Journalists and media outlets are not driving the conversations on Twitter; they are breaking the news but are not engaged with the resulting conversation. The exception to this is the prominence of media personalities on Twitter, who command an impressive audience share both externally and on the social media platform. Their high level of engagement with followers sets them apart from the mainstream journalists who also use Twitter. The findings from this study also contribute to the wider discussion about the quantification of ‘influence’ on Twitter, as represented by the ability to generate and sustain concept discussions—which can also be expressed as exerting ‘influence’ over other Twitter users (Anger & Kittl, 2011; Bakshy et al., 2011; Cha et al., 2010).

The findings have been generated as a result of the case examples presented in the previous chapter, contextualised from the relevant theories and literature, and from the
supporting data (interviews with campaign strategists, researcher’s data collection perceptions log, and other supporting data generated from Leximancer and Discursis). Each of these findings will be explored in more detail within this chapter, concluding with implications for practice, both for political campaign strategists and the communications profession more widely.

6.1 Capturing ‘real time’ campaign feedback

Obtaining feedback during a political campaign has previously been limited to devices controlled in the majority by legacy media (letters to the editor, talkback radio) and traditional telephone polling conducted by companies on behalf of the major news organisations. Twitter has provided users with the unique ability to provide real-time feedback on campaigns, recording not only the general public’s reaction to particular issues, but also providing a global platform for the public to comment about specific campaign tactics. This connectivity between the politically-engaged public has resulted in a wealth of information that political parties can use effectively to inform campaigns during their implementation and as part of the post-campaign evaluation process. Political party strategists have already begun monitoring Twitter as part of their regular campaign activities, however the data provided on Twitter specifically about negative campaign tactics is not being utilised to its full potential (Informant A, personal communication, July 12, 2012; Informant B, personal communication, July 21 2012). The digital strategists for the Ashgrove campaign maintain that Twitter is not yet representative of a wide enough user group to produce any useable data pertaining to feedback, informing strategy and so on. This criticism is taken on board as a possible limitation; however the significant findings from this study still retain their value for future campaigns.

The case examples in the previous chapter revealed several examples of the general public (PUBLIC user group category) reacting to specific campaign tactics. The ‘ashgrove’ case example emphasised the importance that both candidates placed on being perceived as ‘local’; as evidenced through their external behaviours (campaign billboard, collateral etc) and Twitter activity from both party-sanctioned accounts and the wider party member users. The focus on being perceived as ‘local’ is an attempt
by both candidates at framing themselves within a particular concept (Bryant & Thompson, 2002; Wasike, 2013). The concept discussion generated from the ‘ashgrove’ case example was largely driven by the two political parties, as they contested each other’s claims. The reaction from the general public was minimal, indicating that they were not as engaged in the ‘local’ concept as expected. The significant learning from this for future campaign planning is the diversification of campaign-branded concepts, rather than focusing too much attention on one concept that has only a narrow band of interest to the public.

Within the ‘gay’ case example, the clear instance of the public providing feedback on campaign strategy is centred on the advertisement released by Katter’s Australia Party (KAP) describing Newman as pro-gay. The controversial nature of this advertisement, clearly designed to shock and divide, is an example of the news value of conflict creating a response from the general public. The public’s reaction via Twitter to the advertisement was largely one of revulsion, not only due to the content of the clip, but to the idea that KAP judged it as an appropriate campaign tool. The end result of the advertisement favoured Newman, as it helped bring back supporters who had been alienated or discouraged by Newman’s stance on civil unions. Overall, the significant learning from this for future campaigns is that overreach from an opponent party’s campaign can enable candidates to recover a middle road on controversial issues as the negative focus from legacy media, Twitter, and the general public is redirected to the opponent.

The ‘cmc’ example provided the clearest evidence of the general public providing real-time feedback specifically in relation to campaign tactics. The ALP’s direct campaign strategy was a targeted smear campaign directed at Newman’s wife, sustained throughout the campaign until the CMC’s findings were announced the week before the election. There are historical examples and extensive existing literature on the pros and cons of negative campaigning and the use of attack advertisements, however this is the first time that the general public have been able to come together as a group to publicly criticise tactics that attack people rather than policy. From a bipartisan viewpoint, it is clear that the ALP strategy was flawed to begin with, but Twitter amplified the fallout through its function as a platform for open debate. The ALP strategy was an attempt at negative agenda setting, and its failure, along with the lack
of a contingency plan, is a significant learning for future campaigns.

Both the ‘gay’ and ‘cmc’ case examples indicate that political groups expressing outrage on Twitter about negative campaign tactics resonate with non-political user groups, such as the general public and the media. The resonance of these concepts is an example of ‘conflict’ as a news value, and this will be explored later in this chapter as it provides a clear insight into the ways in which political user groups can engage non-political user groups on Twitter (Galtung & Ruge, 1965).

6.2 Driving ‘concept discussion’ on Twitter

The ability to generate and sustain concept discussions on Twitter is of significant strategic importance for communication strategists across all industries, not just those who work on political campaigns. This study does not provide a definitive formula for achieving this, but contributes to the wider understanding of Twitter and provides a starting point for the planning and implementation of future campaigns. The significant findings from the examples conform to the Galtung and Ruge (1965) concept definition of conflict as a news value, as controversial and emotive topics have the greatest success in sustaining Twitter discussion. In all the case examples, controversial and emotive topics generated a relatively high number of tweets from all user groups depending on the situation. Political user groups struggled in general to gain traction with non-political user groups, which is the key to sustaining Twitter discussion. As a user group, the general public are less likely to generate concepts at a high frequency of tweets on their own; instead they are usually part of a peak led by one or both political party user groups. In this way they are responsive to the other user groups, but also relatively highly engaged, particularly regarding emotive issues. From the case studies it is evident that party user groups generate high usage of a particular concept in two ways:

- In response to an external political event, such as the erection of a billboard, or the airing of a political advertisement. In this case they use Twitter as a quick response mechanism to either refute or endorse the external event.
As part of a concerted Twitter-specific effort linked to the political campaign, evident in the usage of pre-prepared hashtags as either campaign enhancements or attacks on the opposition.

There is an emerging trend in the Twitter research space around the concept that ‘attention is currency’, referring to the relationship between content and consumption within the social media ‘economy’ (Rui & Whinston, 2012; Wu et al., 2011). From a political campaign point of view, the ability to attract and sustain the right kind of attention on Twitter has the capacity to translate into an impact on external behaviours, such as voting (Aragón et al., 2013; Larsson & Moe, 2012; Welpe, 2011). The digital campaign strategists working on behalf of Jones and Newman demonstrated similar approaches to the implementation of campaign concepts that were designed to attract attention and intended to sustain discussion (Informant A, personal communication, July 12, 2012; Informant B, personal communication, July 21 2012). As such, a basic understanding of the value of sustained concept discussion already exists within campaign teams; however there is a lack of knowledge about how to create concepts that resonate with other user groups.

In order to effectively drive concept discussions on Twitter, an understanding of the daily user patterns is required. The case examples consistently show the majority of activity occurring in the evening, the exception being when highly significant news is broken early in the morning (such as by ABC Radio). Even in these instances, the case examples clearly show a resurgence of discussion in the evening of the day that the news is broken. This pattern is an example of the ‘new primetime’, which refers to the media cycle changes that have taken place alongside the evolution of online and social media and the ‘24-hour news cycle’ (Cook, Sarma, Fabrikant, & Tomkins, 2012). The ‘new primetime’ concept impacts upon the legacy media, particularly in relation to the use of Twitter by journalists and media outlets, a relationship that will be explored further in this chapter.

What follows is the analysis of three significant findings that have been generated by the case examples and the additional data, all of which contribute to the overall learnings about driving concept discussions on Twitter; the Twitter concept lifecycle, Twitter language as a genre of communication, and the role of legacy media on Twitter.
6.2.1 Twitter concept lifecycle

Issues and crisis management literature consider an ‘issues lifecycle’ that provides a model for professional practitioners to plan for and effectively manage issues (Vasquez & Taylor, 2000). One of the significant learnings from this thesis is the existence of a ‘Twitter concept lifecycle’, which provides a starting point for practitioners who are working within the digital space. The existence of the Twitter concept lifecycle was evident across the three examples, which also provided significant insights into how to extend the lifecycle, or shorten it as needed.

All three examples (driven by a singular user group) demonstrate that the lifecycle of a concept is limited to two or three days. A concept is more likely to have a longer lifecycle if more user groups are engaged in the concept discussion; as evidenced by the political user groups’ attempts to drive concepts. They were successful at engaging their own users, but struggled to gain traction with the general public user category. To sustain a concept discussion, it is important to utilise measures of external influence (across collateral and community engagement strategies) to achieve engagement of more than one user group. In addition, the examples also suggest that non-engagement (as opposed to disengagement) is not necessarily a ‘bad’ Twitter campaign tactic depending on the concept that is being discussed. As the Twitter concept lifecycle is generally limited to a few days, non-engagement in a negative concept can be viewed as a legitimate strategy. In instances where all user groups are engaged in a concept and the concept lifecycle is sustained, the level of tweets is on average lower, indicating that effective strategies utilise a ‘less more often’ as opposed to the ‘lots on one occasion’ technique that seems to typify the party Twitter strategies. This may be because it is difficult to mobilise the part-users to sustain the concept mentions over a longer amount of time.

The LNP digital campaign strategist demonstrated an understanding of the Twitter lifecycle concept through the implementation of a strategy of blanked non-engagement; choosing to let both positive and negative concepts fade away rather than risk sustaining them or causing them to escalate or become negative through engagement (Informant A, personal communication, July 12, 2012). Understanding the characteristics of the Twitter concept lifecycle is essential to developing and
implementing an effective social media campaign strategy.

6.2.2 Twitter language as a genre of communication

The user mechanics of Twitter have altered how users communicate with each other, and has resulted in the development of a legitimate genre of communication that is platform exclusive (Boyd et al., 2010; Starbird & Stamberger, 2010). The syntax of an ideal tweet is constructed to convey a specific point through the use of clever and direct language, utilising the multi-function ability of Twitter to reinforce the user’s message (utilising images, brief video, URL links etc). The evidence from the case examples supports the concept that the construction of tweets is highly significant in relation to increasing resonance, translating to gaining traction with other user groups and denoting the execution of ‘influence’. The case examples display representative tweets as determined by their quantitative measure of influence (retweet frequency). By examining these significant tweets in parallel with the researcher perceptions from gathering the data, it is possible to conclude that influentially successful tweets have a particular structure. Offensive language is often used in these tweets, not gratuitously, but in a way that adds emphasis to the point made by the user.

The theory of genre refers to patterns of style that transcend the individual product, putting into place a definition for the construction of the particular text and how it is read by the audience (Lacey, 2000; Ryall, 1975). The basic scheme of a genre of writing is built upon a ‘repertoire of elements’ that takes into consideration the narrative, style, iconography and other symbols within the text (Lacey, 2000). To apply this theoretical approach to the language of Twitter, it is possible to see the particular patterns of style and the consistent use of a range of elements that qualifies the text as a legitimate genre of communication. Tweets that resonate, as qualified by retweet rate, and drive concept discussions within the case examples are constructed in a way that utilises humour and irony. Due to the character limitations on tweets, no words are wasted in the construction process. Strong tweets capitalise on an existing issue, usually by offering an acerbic observation that sums up a single point of view that is shared by a majority of users. This ability to paraphrase an entire viewpoint in one succinct, humorous, and usually ironic tweet gives the tweeter a level of influence
through the appreciation expressed by other users. As their own followers retweet and share the content, the original tweeter attracts more followers and their sphere of influence expands.

The significant learning from these findings has considerable relevance for those planning and implementing communication campaigns. It is important to note that the case examples upon which this learning is based are political in nature, and therefore it could be argued that the tweets lend themselves to irony and sarcasm at a higher level than, for example, a consumer-based communications campaign. Generally, the concept of the Twitter language as an entirely new and separate genre of communication is one that requires further research from a broader perspective. The learning retains its relevance for this study, and has significant implications for practice.

6.2.3 The role of legacy media on Twitter

The way that news is delivered has changed considerably in the last two to three years. Mobile devices, tablets, blogs and online media have changed how and when consumers access news (Bryant & Thompson, 2002; Cook et al., 2012). The role of legacy media in the digital news age is still emerging, as news outlets adapt their practices and staff to keep up with the 24-hour news cycle and balance the priorities of advertising, paid content and reader interactivity (Cook et al., 2012; New Technology, Organizational Change and Governance, 2013). From the case examples it is possible to contribute learnings to this wider area of research, particularly with regard to how the media use Twitter and their role in concept development and discussion.

It is evident from the case examples that the media users (journalists and media outlet accounts) are not driving the conversation and concept discussions. They play a significant role in generating concepts (for example breaking a news story), but do not engage in the resulting conversation. This is presumably due to the high demand placed on journalists to be constantly breaking news online, leaving them time poor when it comes to participating in concept discussions on Twitter. The media user group
is not apparent in the leading of concept usage, which is different to the assumptions that the researcher brought to this study. It is proposed that while media tweets may spark a high usage concept discussion, they are not active participants within the peak itself. Instead they generally seem to be ‘late to the party’ on most of the study concept peaks, in instances where the Twitter discussion itself has become a news story (Girdis, 2012).

The examples and supporting data supplied by Discursis identify the existence of a subcategory within the media user group, grouped for the purposes of this study under the title of ‘media personalities’. This refers to individuals who are media professionals, but (according to the individual influence scores calculated by Discursis) have a much higher level of influence than the mainstream journalists and media outlet accounts. These media personalities are typified by a local public profile, and an external audience outside of Twitter. On Twitter itself they have large followings and engage with their followers regularly with preference for subjective content. Examples of the media personalities relevant to this study include ABC Breakfast Radio host Spencer Howson (@SpencerHowson) and The Courier-Mail columnist Des Houghton (@DesHoughton). Both have a substantial following on Twitter, and a significant local profile.

The theory of ‘gatekeeping’ refers to a description of information control through a range of mechanisms, both public and private (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Keegan & Gergle, 2010; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The use of gatekeeping in a mass media sense is generally accepted by the public and refers to the active moderation of news stories and information, such as editorial decisions made by newspapers, talkback radio producers and so on. The theory of gatekeeping and the associated models have evolved as the definition of news has evolved and as the general public gained the ability to self-publish online (Roberts, 2005; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Gatekeeping as a theory is linked with agenda setting theory, as they both refer to intentional efforts to control the content of news and not just what, but how the public think about issues (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). These theories had a clear practical application in traditional legacy media, limited to print, radio and television. Social media has essentially removed the traditional notion of a gatekeeper, not only due to the ability of consumers to self-publish, but also as a result of the 24-hour news cycle and the
The examples show that legacy media outlets and journalists have been successful in establishing their role on Twitter, breaking news online and thus retaining their importance. This topic is an area for future research, as the relationship between Twitter and legacy media develops over time. The influence levels of the media personalities are a significant concept for consideration both for the development of political campaigns and general communication campaigns.

6.3 Implications for practice

The significant learnings from this study pertaining to Twitter's functions translate directly to the field of professional communication, including political campaign strategy. Social media platforms, including Twitter, are an essential part of communication strategies across all industries. For political campaign strategists, the application of learning is direct. The findings from this study, including the access to real-time campaign feedback, and the elements of driving concept discussion, can be directly applied to future campaigns. As the attention paid to digital strategy by political candidates and their parties continues to grow, it is expected that the resourcing for social media strategies will improve, and as a result more informed strategies will eventuate.

In a broader sense, the professional communications field, including marketing, public relations, corporate communications and digital strategy, is seeking to understand social media platforms at a higher level to maximise results. Currently there is a lack of understanding in the profession as to the best ways to evaluate and report on digital communication results, including measures of influence and impact to target stakeholder groups. In industries where articulating the value of communications is not as simple as evaluating sales or membership figures, a greater understanding of methods of qualitative evaluation of Twitter is essential for future campaigns. In particular, the Twitter concept lifecycle and the Twitter language genre as findings provide insight into how the platform can be used as part of issues and crisis management, as well as product promotion, branding and reputation management.
6.4 Directions for future research

Unlike other social media platforms, Twitter’s usage mechanism is stable and unlikely to change significantly in the coming years. This provides an opportunity for research into the platform to be conducted in such a way that a wider understanding can be reached about its role in society. The ability to quantify influence on social media is a growing area of research, and more analyses are needed to test the current methods and try new methods as they are developed. Studies have already begun on the predictive nature of Twitter, and whether the platform can be used in a meaningful way to forecast particular events. These broad research areas will provide greater insight into Twitter and how organisations and individuals can use the platform to achieve certain results.

The use of Twitter in political campaigns will undoubtedly grow in the coming years, both in Australia and internationally. As more politicians use the platform, and it becomes a bigger part of campaign strategy, more data will be available to study the impact of Twitter on election campaigns and voter behaviour. The theory of the Twitter concept lifecycle required further testing through the use of further case studies and a wider range of data samples. As more research is completed in this area, it will be possible to provide a theoretical model of the lifecycle for use in professional practice. Likewise, further research into the Twitter language genre will provide greater insight into the genre model, legitimising it as a unique communicative structure. The role of ‘gatekeeping’ theory in the age of digital news media merits further investigation, as legacy media outlets continue to define their use across multiple platforms.

6.5 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has summarised the significant findings from the project using a range of methods to produce concepts for discussion. The significant findings are a contribution to the wider conversation about Twitter and its role in society, specifically within political campaigns. Twitter enables political strategists to gain real-time feedback on campaign tactics, which in turn can assist to inform ongoing strategy. The general public now have a platform which allows them to not only discuss their
political preferences, but also to provide feedback on specific campaigns as they unfold. This chapter has discussed how ‘concept discussions’ are generated and sustained on Twitter by specific user groups and how topics and concepts that gain attention on Twitter have specific characteristics, particularly in regard to the relationships between user groups. The existence of a Twitter concept lifecycle, providing evidence that concepts conform to a time-specific model depending on the circumstances of their generation, also has been discussed.

The study has revealed that Twitter has become its own legitimate and specific genre of communication, and that the construction of a tweet has great significance when the goal is to resonate with and influence other users. The impact of Twitter upon the role of legacy media, and more widely within society in relation to ‘gatekeeping’ theory also has been explored. The findings from this study also contribute to the wider discussion about the quantification of ‘influence’ on Twitter, an area with great potential for future research.
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8.1 Interview transcripts

8.1.1 Informant A - 12 July 2012

As a social media strategist you deal with these platforms all the time, so what do you think is Twitter’s place in political campaigning in Australia?
We found it to be good as a news feed to get information out there, to get something going virally, but not a good place for back and forth discussions, we also found it to be incredibly nasty and at times, simply horrible at times during the campaign.

Do you think it’s seen as uncontrollable?
Twitter’s imposter policies and parody policies are so much better than Facebook’s, but at the same time, it’s so easy to set up a fake Twitter account. After a while you can see that people are not true representations of who they claim to be – it’s just too easy to have all these ‘loud voices’ that appear to be different people but it’s really just one person. They feel they can get away with saying anything that they want.

Do you think that negative outweighs the positive, which could be that the tool could be used to connect with voters of a certain age group who maybe wouldn’t come along to an open house or a public meeting? Do you see any benefit there at all?
There is some benefit, but the problem is that the good gets drowned out – our take on it was that we would get those people through Facebook – when you look at the take up statistics, Twitter is growing but there are a lot more people on Facebook. They are all on there, and the beauty of it is that they don’t have to come to your website, you can deliver news to them when you want to. With Twitter, they might see the odd thing but they have to find it in the midst of everything else. We think that outweighs the benefits – the ease. It’s very hard to respond to genuine questions on Twitter because it gets lost.

Do you think it will get better in the future? If you were working on another campaign?
We definitely would use Twitter, it definitely has its place – and one of the things that
was learnt by our side of politics, probably a bit too late, is to grab usernames ahead of time. The fact that fake Campbell Newman had such a huge following compared to the real thing, means that our side was late to step up to the plate there.

*Parodies in themselves are interesting, could you see it as a positive that the fake Campbell has such an extensive profile?*

It was definitely something we looked at – as much as he criticised us, people certainly knew about issues and were more familiar with the Can Do label because of that Twitter account.

*Did it help the political brand?*

It did – he also sort of lost the plot a bit at some points, but it was something that we looked at. There are a lot of conspiracy theories about that account – but we never attempted to shut him down at any point because he was technically following the rules of Twitter.

*In terms of opinion leaders who are on Twitter, who are not politicians or journalists, do you think that they really can have an influence over other Twitter users?*

Definitely. The obvious one in my mind, although he is technically a journalist, is Spencer Howson. The fact that he embraced the fake Can Do Campbell is one of the reasons that account is so popular. It’s an example of the growing ‘Twitterati’ and you could see throughout the campaign that it was the same few loud voices, who were not necessarily on fake accounts, that were leading the debate, running with issues etc. It was very rare to see a new player step up, it was the same circle. I don’t like to think that I have a lot of sway, but I do have a lot of followers personally, even though I barely ever tweet.

*Do you think you have influence over your own followers?*

Probably – I certainly know that if I said something from my personal account it would be noticed. I’m not saying that I could convince people to change their behaviours, but they definitely respond. They are watching and listening, which is funny because I don’t tweet much at all.

*So you do have some power in that medium?*
Yes, because of my job. People know who I am and what my role is.

*There are different ways of ‘measuring’ public opinion. Polling is a popular one that has some known flaws, betting odds are another which are sometimes cited as more accurate than polling. Would you ever consider using Twitter as a legitimate means of measuring public opinion?*

Not at this point. Not until they can find some way of tightening up the controls. Particularly if you look at it from a volume point of view – say we had something that we refer to as a ‘tsunami’, an important policy announcement, or a candidate or party member ‘stuffing up’, we would see a tsunami of hate coming our way on Twitter.

*I found that during my own Twitter research using the specific search terms, that while there was a lot of negativity there for Campbell, I also saw a lot of people coming to his defence.*

Yes that did happen, and I can tell you now categorically that we had absolutely no fake Twitter profiles for the campaign. I would hear that people thought it was me sitting there with 20 fake profiles open – but that wasn’t the case. I ran the official accounts and my own personal one – that was it. That’s not to say that supporters didn’t create accounts, but there was certainly no sanctioned effort to tell supporters to create fake accounts. We just didn’t think that was ethical, and at the same time, the attacks directed at us sometimes were personal threats and we just did not encourage or condone that behaviour from our supporters.

*So what would need to happen before you considered Twitter as a legitimate measurement device during a campaign?*

We need to look beyond just the quantity of tweets, to who is tweeting and if it’s just the same person the whole time. Which is what we used to find, say we found 800 tweets on a particular topic – but it’s the same group of people creating the mass of tweets – it’s not genuine voters. It’s a manufactured wave. You couldn’t engage with them. I know that ridiculous amounts of money are spent on polling – and the results we got from that were very accurate. So I don’t think anytime soon we will be replacing polling with monitoring a Twitter account. Essentially, I believe people who have moderate views can’t be bothered taking the action and picking up their phone and tweeting, and that is why all you see on Twitter is extreme views.
But a moderate person could be reading tweets but not tweeting themselves?
Yes, but us looking at Twitter won’t pick that up. There must be a lot of people who watch, but don’t Tweet, and we have no way of collecting that data.

So is one of the problems in your eyes that the ‘average voter’ is not engaging on Twitter so can’t be engaged by you?
Yes, we found during the campaign that those who were interested in talking about the campaign on Twitter were generally staffers, supporters, media etc - people who are already engaged in the campaign. It’s not the people who we do want to reach out to – the fear is that those people won’t engage on Twitter because it’s a like a club where if you say the wrong thing the alpha group will shout you down and will intimidate those people in a negative way. A lot of the alpha group are practiced debaters, which means that if you’re an average person who doesn’t agree with their views, they will smack you down and scare you away.

Politicians using Twitters – I’ve seen a whole range on the spectrum, those that don’t use it at all, to those that use it every day. There are a few who stand out on both sides as fully engaged with the medium, to the point where they don’t just talk politics, they have become a Twitter identity. Do you think we will see more politicians doing that in the future?
Yes – we are seeing more and more of them jumping on. Especially with the newbies coming in, who know they have to be on there. I’m even starting to see engagement from politicians who have been around a long time, who originally didn’t want to know about it and now are interested in getting on board. As a party, we have probably terrified a lot of them out of using Twitter – which we think is a good thing. It’s something that we definitely did during the campaign because of the risk factor – you make one mistake on Twitter, like we saw a little bit with some of the young party members, and that comes back to bite. Someone will screenshot your mistake and send it somewhere else, like the media, and Twitter makes that process very easy. It is so easy to be taken out of context on Twitter – when politicians are trying to jam their message into 140 characters it can sometimes come out wrong.

So you think Twitter is useful for getting messages out rather than actually having
conversations with users?
Yes. We try to respond to users, and we did during the campaign, but a lot of it was rumour killing ‘myth busting’ types of things, rather than actual useful back and forth engagement with someone because there’s only so much you can put into 140 characters on either side of the discussion. It’s very hard to distil a personal issue down into that one tweet.

If there was a way to accurately and reliably measure influence on Twitter, do you think campaigners would use it?
I think so – one of the hardest things for us is keeping records of messages and responses that are out there on social media to add in a level of accountability. The problem with Twitter is that it’s so hard to catch every message or even every mention of the candidate. You can keep an eye on the conversation, but recording it is very difficult to get an actual idea of what issues are resonating with the public. In terms of campaigning, Twitter won’t replace polling because in the end I think Twitter is too driven by certain groups at this point in time. The research that came out in the #qldpol study was that the top tweeter was a troll who was sending out many tweets a day and that skewed the conversation and the results.

Did your campaign team use a Twitter harvester tool to try to capture all the mentions?
No, we had no budget. We did it manually. It was just me and my job wasn’t just Twitter – I was also running the website, the Facebook page, the YouTube channel, all of the social media. I was helping people set up email accounts, so that limited how much time I could spend on monitoring Twitter. With no budget and no resources, I couldn’t just sit there and watch Twitter all day, because I had other jobs to do.

If there was a way to filter out all the political parties, the media, party plants etc, would you use data like that to target the remaining public?
Yes, that would have been useful. In the next campaign it won’t be just me working on it, there will probably be a team of people responsible for social media management. The capacity will be improved and we will have more budget. Finding software that is specifically built for Twitter analysis is difficult, there’s way to monitor your clicks etc, but that isn’t particularly useful.
Anything else to add?

Just again how surprised I was by the level of nastiness that came out on Twitter during the campaign – across the board. Our strategy was to stay above the nastiness from the other side and we achieved that. Ultimately I don’t think the campaign was won or lost on Twitter. We actually had huge uptake on YouTube, the number of views was fantastic but that was driven through direction from Facebook and Twitter.

8.1.2 Informant B – 21 July 2012

In your experience as a digital media strategist what is your opinion of Twitter in terms of political use?

I think it’s a good way of communicating with people at a less intimidating level - it is 140 characters so there’s not a lot of room for spin. It’s more intimate and one-on-one even though it’s a broadcast tool that gives people the ability to interact with a politician, which is a unique experience outside of the traditional mediums such as a town meeting or community cabinet session. In this day and age who could be bothered attending those things, when you’re at home, you have your computer and your phone and in 10 seconds you can get a message to a decision maker. I think it’s a great opportunity for both the public and those in political life to engage in a very simple and cost effective way.

Do you think politicians use it well? Do they engage in conversation enough?

No. Most of them are really boring. I don’t know how they manage to fit so much dullness in one short message but they are really good at that. And it’s stuff that people just glance over and move on, there are reasons that politicians get belittled or sent messages by disgruntled people on Twitter and it’s because what they’re saying isn’t interesting and they’re not giving people a reason to respond or engage with them. Others just tweet shortened versions of their press releases, which are dull by nature and designed for a totally different audience. The ones that use it well are the ones who are casual and personal, that limit the staff team use of it as much as possible – they do a lot of it themselves – and are just normal and use it as a way to have a normal conversation but obviously without the hangover tweets or the ‘what I had for breakfast’ tweets, although at times that sort of thing could be used as it’s more personal and relatable.
Do you think the way that politicians use Twitter can actually have an impact on polling and change people’s opinions?

I’m not sure, there’s been some studies from the US about Obama’s use of Twitter in 07 and how effective that was, I’m not entirely convinced of its impact here. I think purely because the audience we are dealing with is much smaller. There is a fair chunk of people who use Twitter in Australia, but the vast majority are still reading newspapers or online news, watching the news on television in terms of audience concentration. I think that if it’s used properly it does have the potential to change someone’s mind about an issue – Sally citizen from Ashgrove is upset about something, she thinks it’s a certain way, she raises it with a politician, who offers to fix the problem or puts her in touch with the relevant people, getting the ball rolling etc and suddenly Sally’s opinion of that politician is completely changed. To replicate that to a level where you can compare it with polling would be difficult and very time intensive, but also it’s kind of why politicians go into politics in the first place. I’m in two minds about it, I think politicians needs to be there because everyone else is, including their opposition, but also if they do it well they can have an impact. I don’t think it’s the be all and end all but it certainly needs to be part of a wider strategy.

When you’re campaigning, do you think watching Twitter is a good way to gauge public sentiment?

Absolutely. I think there are some arguments that Twitter tends to skew to the left, and Facebook tends to skew to the right, that seems to be the anecdotal suggestion. I’m not entirely sure, but the way I used to use Twitter in my role was to set up a couple of key word monitors around the person I worked for, key policy issues, election issues etc – not just to get an idea of what people were saying but also to respond when things were wrong or reach out when it was necessary. The number of people that are out there who think that Politician X is great, but don’t actually follow or interact with them on Twitter on a regular basis is quite high. I would reach out and try to get these people involved in the process and hopefully recruit them for support. It’s a good way to get a barometer of how people are feeling but you have to keep in mind it’s only a small sample overall.
There’s a study being done at QUT at the moment looking at the Bligh vs Newman battle by following the #qldpol hashtag. They are finding that it’s only 1 per cent of the population who are generating the tweets. Is that your experience?

Yes. I think that’s correct - there are a number of people who are talking about things every day and only a small number of those people are discussing politics. I think this is reflected in how engaged Australians are overall in politics, the majority of people don’t care too much unless there is something going on that affects them personally. And I think that’s the case with Twitter too – people complain if the garbage isn’t collected or if there are noisy roadworks at night. The people who are using Twitter regularly to talk about politics, particularly the ones using the #qldpol hashtag, are probably the engaged minority.

Do you think in the future Twitter will represent a wider cross-section of people, which will make it more useful for campaigners?

Possibly. I think it happens now in a number of ways, but in a less organised structure. There are people who have an opinion and will tweet it or put it on Facebook, but won’t contribute to the overall conversation. I think it can be intimidating for people to get involved on Twitter, as the people on there tend to be very well versed and passionate about their beliefs, and to be honest some of them are a little crazy. Normal people don’t want to subject themselves to criticism from these people and I can understand that.

Do you think that opinionated minority wields a lot of influence on Twitter?

There are some who I do think are very successful at influencing others, there are also some others who are very vocal and tweet frequently but I think their tweets have zero impact on others. They are generally the ones who don’t have any personal details on their profile – it’s not a person so much as it’s an identity. There is one user @Qlder who tweets all the time and has a lot of followers, and if you’re a political adviser looking at that and he’s completely against your side of politics you might be inclined to panic a bit. But once you drill down and look at the people who are engaging with him, retweeting him etc, there aren’t actually that many of them. So that user account is tweeting all day to what looks like a large audience, but really is not having any impact. The ones that are most successful are those that are more middle of the road, not abusive or abrasive, they are very passionate about their opinions, and may work
for a particular party but they are engaging because they are not crazy or too one sided.

*If there was a tool that could qualitatively measure influence on Twitter do you think political campaigners would use it?*

Absolutely. From a political sense, we’re kind of where the marketing/PR and blogging world were about five years ago – everyone thought that Twitter was a waste of time and didn’t really buy into it. People sit at home writing blogs about fashion and beauty and they are reaching hundreds of thousands of people and having more impact that an advertisement that 500,000 people see because it’s more personal and the trust is there with no agenda. You take their opinions on board. It’s a less formal way of having a conversation and so people take it on board without cynicism. And now they are being used as brand ambassadors by PR companies and products. So if there was a way to identify these opinion makers on Twitter or Facebook then politicians would be remiss not to take advantage of such a tool. That is going on now, it’s just hard to find them.

*When you are monitoring Twitter throughout a campaign for certain key words and concepts, how are you searching for those tweets?*

We use HootSuite to set up key words and it updates live. It’s easy to use and flattens Twitter out onto one screen.

*How do you see Twitter evolving in the future? Do you think the next campaign would have an entire digital media team?*

I would be surprised if there wasn’t. If you think back to the pre-Rudd era, it was done a little bit but was hard to measure. That was only 2007 and it was the first real use of social media in an Australian political campaign and it’s only grown since then. We were investing resources into video messages and 90-second news packages about what my boss was doing each day, Q&As where you submit a question and get a video response back. That was day to day, and then when the campaign ramped up we had a live map of where my boss was and what she was doing, who she was meeting etc and the whole goal behind that was to make her relatable and come across as passionate. It was easy and relatively affordable to do it and it would be great if there was a concerted push towards the digital space in a campaign sense because it would
be great to do. The ideas are simple to execute and you can reach a lot of people in one go and it helps politicians come across as digital savvy and modern. Some of our most successful messages in terms of reach and engagement across all our social media platforms were the casual ones about family birthday dinners and things like that – normal people stuff.

To talk about Ashgrove specifically – the candidates used Twitter very differently and clearly had different strategies for using it. Do you think the way Kate Jones used Twitter helped her result in the end?

Well she did lose. But I do think Twitter possibly helped. Until the very end her personal approval rating continued to climb – which said to us that people really liked her but in the end they weren’t going to vote for her, which was due to a number of issues. The comments we saw coming through on Twitter about Kate were around how busy she was, how involved she was in the community etc – I mean who was talking about Kate Jones before Campbell Newman came along? She was a junior minister. No-one was watching Ashgrove until Newman announced that he was running so it actually was a great opportunity for Kate to get out there and show what she doing. The goal of everything we do strategy-wise is to win, and in this case she didn’t – so the success of her Twitter campaign does have to be based on that. But you do need to consider her personal approval rating throughout the campaign and just the sentiment of the community (measured digitally) which were all positive.

How did you measure the sentiment of the community throughout the campaign?

Using a tool called Viral Heat, where you put in a person’s username and other details and it uses an algorithm that looks at tweets about the person and to the person and gives a percentage rating of positive, neutral and negatives. It measures share of audience, share of mentions etc. She consistently trended at about 60% positive which is above the industry benchmark of 40-50%. She was never going to be the kind of person that inspired overly-negative comments. She was hard to dislike.

So what went wrong?

I think in the end, Queensland wanted change, something new. And that tapped straight into the LNP’s campaign message which said the only way to achieve change was to vote for them. I don’t think Kate was ever going to win, but I think the fact that
people liked her and that her personal approval level was so high and grew throughout the campaign is still important and is a good lesson of what can be achieved with the help of Twitter. In comparison, Campbell’s positivity rating was typically below 50% during the campaign but on a local Ashgrove level you can’t really compare the two because his focus was state wide. At the end of the day, Kate was engaging on Twitter, she was visual, friendly, and most importantly she was hard to hate. She was a young mum and that was part of her campaign.

One of the key themes that came out from the data was civil unions; do you think that’s a symptom of the Twitter user demographic? The night it went through parliament was the highest level of social media traffic for my boss by far, and not just the small loud group on Twitter, but a huge group of people tweeting a lot. I’ve never seen anything like what happened that night. I think it is indicative of the electorate’s changing focus.

Lisa Newman campaign, do you think it achieved its aim? I wasn’t involved in that strategic discussion, I was only responsible for digital media. I’m not surprised that it was discussed, using that strategy at all was debatable. What better platform exists to discuss it rather than Twitter? Twitter amplifies these issues, before where you might be in the tea room at work with four people, now it’s a snowball effect. It’s pack mentality and the issue gets amplified. I’m not sure how much wider impact that has but it doesn’t matter, when negative things happened in the campaign the digital effects would make it last longer than it usually would.
8.2 Additional Leximancer visualisations

Figure 17: Leximancer plot generated from the entire Twitter data set with maximum concept visibility
Figure 18: Leximancer plot generated from the entire Twitter data set comparing candidates and related concepts