Understanding and Comparing e-Campaigning Utilisation in the 2008 New Zealand General Election

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Abstract
Varying and incommensurable e-Campaigning utilisation frameworks are available in scholarly literature, leading to substantial problems around the comparability, reliability, and robustness of e-Campaigning research across political parties, candidates, elections and electoral systems. This paper proposes a uniform, campaign-focused and technology-enabled conceptual framework for a more systematic and comparative understanding of the breadth and depth of e-Campaigning utilisation. The framework is applied to empirically describe, analyse and compare the extent of e-Campaigning utilisation by the two major political parties involved in the 2008 New Zealand General Election, namely the National Party and the Labour Party.

1. Introduction
e-Campaigning is an emerging global phenomenon that can be defined as political parties’ or candidates’ utilisation of ICTs, predominantly the Internet and its related applications, during an election period for vote maximisation [1, 2, 3]. Currently, e-Campaigning research mainly focuses on exploring and understanding e-Campaigning utilisation within a particular election or even by a specific political party or candidate [4]. Building on these e-Campaigning studies, some scholars also try to compare e-Campaigning utilisation across different countries [e.g. 5]. As e-Campaigning has become increasingly complex and sophisticated, scholars have accordingly devised conceptual frameworks to understand and describe the extent of e-Campaigning utilisation within the particular election under study [e.g. 1, 2, 6]. Typically, these frameworks have been developed through a practice-based approach that translates observed practices in a social phenomenon into contemporary theory [4]. More specifically, scholars first extract content elements from e-Campaigning websites; these elements then are subsumed to various categories referred to as e-Campaigning practices, such as information dissemination [1, 7, 8], interaction [1, 2, 8] or targeting [8, 9]. Furthermore, some scholars attempt to describe and compare the extent of e-Campaigning utilisation by the number of paragraphs or links on e-Campaigning websites [10].

Consequently, varying and incommensurable e-Campaigning utilisation frameworks exist in scholarly literature, leading to substantial problems regarding the comparability of existing e-Campaigning studies, as well as limitations to the reliability and robustness of comparative e-Campaigning research. For example, due to the use of inconsistent frameworks across e-Campaigning studies, Ward et al.’s (2008) comparison of e-Campaigning utilisation in 12 countries arrives at highly generalised conclusions [5]. Considering the status quo of e-Campaigning research, a more robust, uniform framework is strongly needed in order to provide for more systematic and comparative understanding of the extent to which e-Campaigning is utilised. The extent of e-Campaigning utilisation involves two dimensions: 1) the coverage of e-Campaigning practices (the breadth of e-Campaigning); and 2) the e-content elements associated with a particular practice observable in e-Campaigning (the depth of e-Campaigning practices). The question then is how an alternative conceptual framework can be constructed so that new light can be shed on these two dimensions of e-Campaigning.

Consequently, in this paper, the following research questions are addressed: 1) How could the extent of e-Campaigning utilisation be conceptualised in a more systematic and uniform way? and 2) How could this conceptualisation be applied to empirically describe, analyse and compare the extent of e-Campaigning utilisation across political parties, candidates, or electoral systems? The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: firstly, in Section 2, the conceptualisation of e-Campaigning utilisation proposed in this study is introduced and further discussed. In Section 3, the research methodological approach is described. Subsequently, in Section 4, the empirical research findings of two comparative case-studies from the 2008 General Election in New Zealand are presented.
Zealand are presented and analysed using the proposed framework. And finally, some concluding remarks are presented in Section 5.

2. Conceptualising e-Campaigning utilisation

Since the publication of the first campaign brochures online, e-Campaigning has become increasingly professionalised, sophisticated and complex [5, 11]. Acknowledging developments in technology in combination with the uniqueness of each election campaign, many scholars have tried to capture this rapidly changing e-Campaigning landscape by devising their own practice-based conceptual framework to explore, describe and understand the particular e-Campaigning phenomenon they were facing at the time [4]. However, this practice-based approach towards e-Campaigning research has created four major problems with existing e-Campaigning frameworks: firstly, many conceptual frameworks are restrictedly focused on a single website used for e-Campaigning activities [1, 2, 7, 8]; secondly, existing frameworks usually do not explore or clarify the relationship between observed e-Campaigning practices and election campaigning objectives [e.g. 1, 2, 6, 12]; thirdly, there is a large variation in observed e-Campaigning practices across e-Campaigning studies, ranging from only one e-Campaigning practice utilised in e-Campaigning [e.g. 13, 14] to a wide array of e-Campaigning practices [e.g. 2, 7, 8]; and fourthly, several frameworks demonstrate technological deterministic characteristics by classifying e-Campaigning practices in accordance with the latest technologies or applications, such as RSS feeds, interactive opinion polls, podcasts, and, more recently, Facebook pages [e.g. 12, 15], leading to divergent research outcomes over time. The resulting lack of a consistent campaign-focused and technology-enabled conceptual framework for e-Campaigning research raises substantial issues with regard to the comparability of the extent to which e-Campaigning is utilised between political parties or candidates, over time and across electoral systems.

Given the issues associated with existing frameworks, we developed a conceptual framework that explicitly relates technology-enabled e-Campaigning practices to wider campaign objectives and activities in election campaigning [16]. This conceptual framework consists of two interrelated components: e-Campaigning practices and their associated e-content elements. Both e-Campaigning practices and e-content elements are derived from an academic literature review of e-Campaigning across election systems, countries, and time. The developed framework includes the following five campaign practices: information dissemination [1, 6, 7]; voter interaction and engagement [2, 8]; support mobilisation [1, 6, 17]; targeting campaigns [8, 9]; and resource generation [7, 18, 19]. Each of these campaign practices will be further discussed below.

We would like to emphasize that the developed framework is not necessarily a finalized, static conceptual framework for describing, analysing, and understanding the extent of e-Campaigning utilisation. Over time, we may see new campaign practices emerging as a result of the innovative use of technologies for election campaigning by political parties or candidates. Consequently, in the future, research will be needed to test the empirical adequacy and accuracy of the current framework and, with that, to explore the need for framework modification and/or extension.

Information dissemination. This is considered the most long-standing practice of election campaigning for two different reasons. Firstly, election campaigns ultimately aim to influence voters in their decision-making process and, with that, try to achieve maximisation of votes. Campaign information plays a critical role in this decision-making process [20]. Empirical research findings confirm this view, demonstrating that voting behaviour is strongly affected by people’s awareness and knowledge of political parties or candidates, based on available campaign information [21]. Furthermore, research findings show that swing voters are most responsive to campaign information: clearly, these are the voters whom campaign teams endeavour to woo in an election campaign [22].

Secondly, people’s active political involvement is crucial to election campaigning [5]. However, research findings demonstrate that voters’ political involvement has declined in many countries [5]. Thus, campaign teams usually try to generate people’s interest to be involved in election campaigning. Scholars point out that campaign information serves as an important stimulus for political involvement [5].

Generally, information dissemination involves a one-way, top-down approach – from campaign teams to voters [20]. This important characteristic distinguishes information dissemination from another campaign practice, namely voter interaction and engagement. Overall, although the practice of information dissemination is more or less standardised due to its long existence, technological advancement enables campaign teams to innovate the dissemination of campaign information. For instance, many campaign teams utilise Internet multimedia technology to disseminate information in text, images, sound and/or
The e-Campaigning practice of information dissemination can be operationalised in a number of e-content elements. E-content elements commonly associated with information dissemination are summarised in Figure 1 below [1, 2, 4, 6, 8].

**Voter interaction and engagement.** Also referred to as voter involvement [23], this e-Campaigning practice focuses on 1) interaction with voters for receiving campaign feedback; and 2) engagement with voters for building trust and relationships. Feedback from voters is critical for campaign teams to evaluate the impact of an election campaign. This offers an opportunity for the campaign team to take necessary actions for enhancing or rectifying campaign practices in a timely manner [20]. Furthermore, voters and especially swing voters are more likely to cast their votes to the political party or candidate whom they trust [27]. Often, trust is developed as a result of continuous efforts by a political party or candidate to interact and engage with voters [24].

Offline interaction and engagement can be categorised in two forms: synchronous, real time interaction, such as face-to-face communication, and asynchronous, delayed interaction, such as postal mail [25]. Both synchronous and asynchronous forms of voter interaction and engagement can be simulated online. The e-content elements related to this e-Campaigning practice are summarised in Figure 1 below [2, 7, 8, 12, 15].

**Support mobilisation.** This e-Campaigning practice acknowledges the ultimate dependence of political parties and candidates on support from voters [4]. Voter support can take many forms, such as organising and participating in campaign events (e.g. political rallies), and, most importantly, casting vote to the political party or candidate on election day. Consequently, campaign teams have a critical task to identify potential supporters and translate potential support into tangible support actions [4].

According to scholars and practitioners, support mobilisation has become an ever-increasing challenge [19]. Voters not only have taken a back-seat, but also spend less time to participate in events supporting their party or candidate [17]. Another challenge is political disengagement of voters below the age of 30. Although these young voters represent a vastly growing voting population, they account for the largest group of voters who are least interested in conventional politics, and are the least likely to vote on election day [19]. With more and more people, and particularly youth, using the Internet, it is anticipated that e-Campaigning may offer a solution to these support mobilisation challenges [19].

The e-Campaigning practice of support mobilisation can be operationalised in a number of e-content elements which are presented in Figure 1 below [1, 8, 17].

**Targeting campaigns.** The e-Campaigning practice of targeting campaigns covers two distinct forms. Firstly, political parties or candidates can target their political rivals, and more specifically, their particular views or policies, in the same election. Here, the assumption is that, in order to sway voters’ opinions, a political party or candidate can try to persuade and convert voters through “painting the public perception of the political party or candidate in a more favourable light” by launching attacks on their political opponents [20].

Secondly, acknowledging that segments of the voter population have specific needs and demands, targeting campaigns can be aimed at specific voter strata. In contrast to information dissemination through mass communication aimed at a single, more or less homogeneous audience of voters, the practice of targeted campaigns uses tailored campaign information aimed at the unique characteristics of a particular voter stratum, such as youth or senior citizens. Hence, effective campaigns not only depend on increasing dissemination of campaign-related information, but also on disseminating the right information to the right people [7, 10].

E-content elements related to this e-Campaigning practice are listed in Figure 1 [9, 23].

**Resource generation.** Election campaigning usually is strongly dependent upon scarce resources [26]. Ever since television has become the predominant technological platform for election campaigning, it has taken the largest share of the campaign team’s financial resources [20]. In addition to televised campaign advertising, campaign teams need to finance other electioneering activities, such as direct mailing, in-person engagement with voters, telephone and door-to-door canvassing [20]. Furthermore, human resources are in high demand to plan, organise and conduct different campaign activities. Given this dependency on instant resources for campaigning activities, it is essential for campaign teams to aim for accessing different types of resources, such as through the recruitment of party members or volunteers, and different forms of fundraising. Resource generation is not directly associated with influencing the voter’s decision making process; however, it affects the overall sustainability and continuity of election campaigning. The e-Campaigning practice of resource generation can be operationalised in a number of e-
content elements which are listed in Figure 1 below [7, 8, 17].

**Summary.** The proposed conceptual framework of e-Campaigning utilisation is presented in Figure 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>e-Campaigning practice</th>
<th>E-content elements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information dissemination</strong></td>
<td>Political party’s or candidate's information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Candidate biography</td>
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<td>Press releases</td>
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<td>Policy statements</td>
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<td>Campaign news</td>
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<td>Campaign events</td>
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<td>Speeches</td>
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<td>Contact information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Information about the political party's or candidate's other online presences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Campaign blogs without visitor comments allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voter interaction and engagement</strong></td>
<td>Instant chat/messaging</td>
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<td>Instant opinion polls</td>
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<td>Instant surveys</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Applications for interacting with the political party’s or candidate's policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interactive calendar of campaign events</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means to contact the political party or candidate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion forums</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Campaign blogs with visitor comments allowed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means to provide feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support mobilisation</strong></td>
<td>Means for voters to invite their peers to participate in campaign events</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means to inform voters of electoral information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means for voters to receive campaign information and updates</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means for voters to connect with supporter groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means for voters to download campaign materials</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means for voters to forward campaign materials to others</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Targeting campaigns</strong></td>
<td>Content targeting political opponents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content targeting political opponents' policies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content targeting specific voter strata</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resource generation</strong></td>
<td>Means to make donations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Merchandise shop</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means to become a party member</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Means to become a volunteer</td>
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**Figure 1.** e-Campaigning utilisation framework

3. **Research methodology**

In order to gain a more systematic and comparative understanding of the breadth and depth of e-Campaigning utilisation across parties, candidates, elections or electoral systems, a qualitative research approach was adopted to enable a contextual, rich description of the social phenomenon under study, using the proposed conceptual framework [27]. A multiple-case study research strategy has been used to explore, describe and explain the extent of e-Campaigning utilisation across political parties involved in the 2008 General Election in New Zealand [28]. The unit of analysis is the organisation of a political party’s e-Campaigning utilisation, which usually is the responsibility of the campaign team. The research methods used in this study are an academic literature review of existing e-Campaigning studies; website analysis, with data being collected on a daily basis from the day that the election was officially announced, i.e. 12 September, 2008, until Election Day on 8 November, 2008; and semi-structured interviews with all campaign team staff members and political representatives involved in the e-Campaigning strategy and implementation. The proposed conceptual framework was subsequently used to 1) classify raw empirical data collected from each political party under study; 2) describe and analyse the breadth and depth of e-Campaigning utilisation in each case study; and 3) compare the research findings across the multiple cases.

The empirical case studies presented in this paper are part of a larger multiple-case study of e-Campaigning utilisation across parties, candidates, elections and electoral systems in New Zealand [29]. For the purpose of this paper, we present the empirical data of two case studies explored in this larger research activity, namely the National Party (referred to as National hereafter) and the Labour Party (referred to as Labour hereafter) as the two largest political parties in New Zealand at the time. Supporting arguments for the selection of these two case studies can be found in scholarly literature pointing at the fact that many general elections turn out to be a competition between the two largest political parties, as only these parties have a realistic chance to win the election [18].

With a centre-right party ideology and led by party leader John Key, National was the largest opposition party before the 2008 New Zealand General Election. Having been an opposition party since 1999, National sought to become the governing party after the election. Figure 2 depicts the home page of National’s 2008 e-Campaigning website. The second case study in this paper, Labour, has a centre-left party ideology and was led by the incumbent Prime Minister Helen Clark.
Labour sought a fourth consecutive term in government in the 2008 Election. The home page of Labour’s 2008 e-Campaigning website is presented in Figure 3. The research findings for each case study are presented in Section 4 below.

### 4. Research findings

#### 4.1. National’s e-Campaigning utilisation

**Information dissemination.** National’s e-Campaign offered a wide array of comprehensive information on the party, party candidates and particularly the party leader John Key. For instance, National’s official campaign website contained information put under sections with an intuitive name and structure, allowing website visitors to easily retrieve the required information. An embedded search engine further enhanced the ease of information discovery through the website. Furthermore, the website had a large repository of policies, ranging from Art and Culture to Defence and Security. Filed under its related portfolio, each policy statement had been released by the party candidate responsible for that particular portfolio. In doing so, website visitors could get further insight into the party’s intended ministerial delegation.

Overall, media releases disseminated via the website were policy-oriented. They were either related to the policies championed by the party, or attacking the policies of the party’s main opponent, the Labour Party. Media releases were filed under their particular portfolio, similar to the party’s policies.

Other campaign information disseminated through the official campaign website included an archive of speeches by different party candidates; contact information for the party leader and candidates; links to other online information resources about the party and its leader, such as facebook and YouTube, and a list of blogs from party leader John Key, the so-called “Key Notes”. These blogs were text-based, and permission for posting comments by visitors was disabled.

National made extensive use of Internet multimedia technology for information dissemination. Most notably, National’s official campaign website contained a large amount of images depicting the party leader and the campaign trail. Moreover, a separate website called “National TV” or “NTV” had been set up where visitors could access a wide variety of video clips, ranging from clips showing debates in Parliament with involvement of National party members, to clips about particular campaign events, such as party leader John Key visiting schools or talking to workers.

**Voter interaction and engagement.** National’s campaign team acknowledged the importance of providing opportunities for voter interaction through its e-Campaigning activities, especially to reach out to younger voters. Consequently, National’s official campaign website included several options for visitors to interact or engage with the party. For instance, visitors could email the party leader, party candidates and the party office via a clickable link; they were encouraged to submit general feedback to the party by clicking an email link; and they were offered an interactive campaign events calendar, which not only highlighted major campaign events in a given month, but also allowed visitors to filter campaign events based on their personal criteria, such as date or region.

A key policy change campaigned by National was about income tax reduction, which was opposed to the Labour Party’s position on income tax policy. Visitors of National’s official campaign website could explore...
the impact of National’s proposed income tax reduction on their personal circumstances via a so-called “Tax Calculator”.

As noted, National’s official campaign website provided links to other online resources about the party and the party leader, such as a Facebook page and YouTube videos. Although visitors were offered to leave comments on either site, there was little evidence that party representatives responded to these comments.

**Support mobilisation.** This e-Campaigning practice was evident in National’s e-Campaign in several respects. For instance, visitors of National’s official campaign website were encouraged to click on a link to receive campaign newsletters from the party or the party leader on an almost daily basis. Moreover, they were encouraged to also forward these campaign newsletters to others. The party decidedly excluded a link for National supporters to invite others to participate in the party’s campaigning events, due to the party’s concern about being perceived as distributing spam.

In their 2008 General Election campaign, National took a new approach towards downloadable campaign materials via their official campaign website. Website visitors could download the party’s campaign theme song “Choose A Brighter Future” against a small fee.

National particularly acknowledged that the ultimate support it needed was that supporters would register as voters and, on election day, would cast their votes to the party. For this reason, National’s official campaign website included a link to the Electoral Enrollment Centre where people could register themselves as voters. Furthermore, the website offered a drop-down box listing the party’s various constituencies across the country as well as contact information for the party’s local offices.

**Targeting campaigns.** National’s e-Campaign made use of both forms of campaign targeting aimed at specific voter strata as well as particular political rivals.

Firstly, special campaigning efforts were targeted at two particular segments of the National voter population, namely the so-called “Superblues” (voters who are 60 years old or above) and the “Internats” (voters who are overseas). Separate websites were created for each voter segment, which could be accessed via a link on National’s official campaign website. Registration for these online communities was free of charge. Each website contained specific information and resources for that particular voter segment.

For example, the Superblues website focused primarily on issues of particular importance to senior citizens, such as crime and health care. This website also included a series of newsletters from the party leader targeted at senior citizens. Furthermore, visitors of the Superblues website were provided with an electronic card which they could forward to others.

The Internats website focused on support mobilisation, such as online voter registration; providing information about casting votes while overseas; inviting other Internats; and finding and socialising with other Internats in the same geographical area. The website also provided a link to “Kiwiblog”, a blog authored by a National supporter to keep overseas voters up-to-date regarding the 2008 General Election and New Zealand politics in general. Aimed at the growing population of Asian voters in New Zealand, some content on the website, such as the party’s background and their key policies, could also be accessed in Chinese.

National’s campaign targeting at opponents was quite subtle. Occasionally, it emerged in the party leader’s blog, media or policy releases. Usually, the targeted opponent was the Labour Party and especially its main policies on the economy and taxation.

**Resource generation.** This practice involved making online donations, becoming a party member, and becoming a volunteer. All activities could be done by completing an online form; an online donation could also be done via credit card. Donors could choose the amount they wished to donate up to NZ$1,000, which is in compliance with the New Zealand Electoral Finance Act. National’s official campaign website featured a video clip in which the party leader expressed his gratitude to donors and mentioned the significance of each donation for achieving the ultimate goal of National becoming the governing party of New Zealand, and John Key the new Prime Minister.

**Summary.** Figure 4 provides a detailed overview of the breadth and depth of National’s e-Campaigning utilisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>e-Campaigning practice</th>
<th>E-content elements</th>
<th>Availability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information dissemination</td>
<td>Political party or candidate's information</td>
<td>●</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Candidate biography</td>
<td>●</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Press releases</td>
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<td>Policy statements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Campaign news</td>
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<td>Campaign events</td>
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<td>Speeches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contact information</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information about the political party's or candidate's other online presences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Campaign blogs without visitor</td>
<td>●</td>
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</table>
4.2. Labour’s e-Campaigning utilisation

Information dissemination. Labour’s campaign staff considered disseminating campaign-specific information to voters as highly critical. Staff indicated that, nowadays, the majority of voters are not particularly obsessed with election campaigning. When voters do show interest, they are often selective and primarily focus on information, particularly on policies proposed by the party, that are of concern to them. In general, Labour’s e-Campaign included most of the e-content elements for information dissemination. For instance, the Labour Party’s official campaign website provided information organised around themes. Particular emphasis was put on information about the party’s policies, information on the campaign trail, and speeches by the party leader and party candidates. Policy statements were organised under their particular portfolio (e.g. Agriculture, Climate Change, Economy). The coverage of policy statements was broad and each statement was presented comprehensively. Provided in text format, each speech included a synopsis and the release date. A similar information management structure could be found in the party’s news release section.

Information about Labour’s campaign trail was primarily centred on the party leader, incumbent Prime Minister Helen Clark. The party had created a dedicated website entitled ‘The Campaign Trail’ which included Clark’s web blog called “Helen’s diary”. Here, Clark shared with voters her thoughts on various political topics. The blog was a static, one-way form of communication; that is, visitors were not allowed to post comments.

Labour’s official campaign website also provided information about the party’s candidates standing in the 2008 General Election, including information on the background of each candidate, constituency, and contact information. Moreover, website visitors were offered a link to Labour’s presence on Facebook. Furthermore, the party also used Internet multimedia technology for information dissemination. Notably, the party had created a web page called “Labour TV Archive”. It contained various video clips ranging from Labour’s televised campaign advertisements to interviews with Helen Clark.

Background information about the Labour Party and the principles that the party stands for, were absent from the party’s official campaign website, as the campaign team did not consider such information to be campaign-specific.

Voter interaction and engagement. Voter interaction and engagement in Labour’s e-Campaign mainly focused on the party’s policies. For instance, the party provided an online calculator for voters to explore the impact of the party’s policies regarding personal tax, superannuation (“KiwiSaver”), and subsidies for families, on their personal circumstances. Moreover, the Labour Party utilised Web 2.0 tools to
allow visitors to engage with Labour’s policies. More specifically, all party policies were tagged with keywords, such as productivity, at-risk young people, finding work, and responding to the international downturn. When a policy was frequently viewed, the size of its tags increased accordingly. The party encouraged visitors to interact via email with the party’s main office, the party leader and the party candidates. Alternatively, visitors could leave their comments on the party’s Facebook page or on YouTube. However, the party rarely responded to visitors’ comments.

Support mobilisation. Labour’s campaign staff indicated that support mobilisation was not the main focus of the party’s e-Campaign. Using the conceptual framework, this perception was confirmed in our analysis. The e-Campaigning practice of support mobilisation was confined to allowing voters to receiving newsletters, and voter registration. Labour’s official campaign website did not mention any campaign events; instead, it suggested that, if voters were interested in being involved in the party’s campaign events, they could use the phone number or email address provided on the website to contact their own local party office for further information.

Targeting campaigns. Labour’s e-Campaigning activities did not include campaign targeting at any particular voter segment. However, campaign targeting at its largest political rival, National and especially National’s party leader John Key, was significant. For instance, on its official campaign website, Labour published a series of televised campaign advertisements directly aimed at the inexperience and credibility of John Key. For instance, one advertisement portrayed a mother from a working family expressing her doubts about Key’s credibility and ability to lead the country in the looming economic crisis. Another example was a string of advertisements referred to as “John Key Doubletalk”, pointing out Key’s ‘u-turns’ on different policies. Also, Labour’s official campaign website featured direct comparisons between Labour’s and National’s position on policies that were considered by the Labour Party’s campaign team as “deeply concerning mainstream New Zealanders”.

Moreover, in order to openly cast doubts about the credibility of the National Party leader, Labour had created a dedicated web page called “Key Facts”, where Key’s changing stance on a variety of policy issues, such as civil unions, the war in Iraq, or climate change, could be compared and contrasted. Labour substantiated their arguments by providing video clips with evidence of Key’s changing position on a number of policies, and by publishing supporting articles from New Zealand political journalists. The party also provided an email link for visitors to forward these video clips to others.

Campaign targeting at National could also be observed in Clark’s web blog, such as through the use of suggestive words to negatively portray National and party leader John Key (e.g. calling National’s policies “sinister”). Labour not only made no secret of its campaign targeting at National, but also justified this practice by publishing the following statement on the Key Facts web page: “encourage you [the voters] to use this information to judge for yourself whether John Key has the values and ability needed to lead New Zealand”.

Resource generation. Labour focused on two different elements of resource generation: namely, campaign donations and recruiting volunteers. In order to make a donation, visitors could complete an online form to make a monetary donation of up to NZ $1,000 paid by credit card. Labour’s official campaign website also provided advice on making donations via other channels, such as regular mail, telephone or online banking. Visitors were invited to sign up as volunteers and provide support with different campaign activities, such as disseminating pamphlets, data entry, or hosting a meeting for a Labour candidate.

Summary. Figure 5 provides a detailed overview of the breadth and depth of Labour’s e-Campaigning utilisation.
Interactive calendar of campaign events
Means to contact the political party or candidate
Online discussion forums
Campaign blogs with visitor comments allowed
Means to provide feedback

Means for voters to invite their peers to participate in campaign events
Means to inform voters of electoral information
Means for voters to receive campaign information and updates
Means for voters to connect with supporter groups
Means for voters to download campaign materials
Means for voters to forward campaign materials to others

Contents targeting political opponents
Contents targeting political opponents' policies
Contents targeting specific voter strata

Means to make donations
Online merchandise shop
Means to become a party member
Means to become a volunteer

Support mobilisation
Targeting campaigns
Resource generation

Figure 5. Summary of Labour’s e-Campaigning utilisation

4.3. Cross-case analysis

A comparison of the two case studies points at similarities and differences between National and Labour’s e-Campaigning utilisation. For instance, both parties covered all five e-Campaigning practices in their respective e-Campaigns. In both cases, information dissemination was the most significant e-Campaigning practice. Both parties also used similar technologies and applications to enable these e-Campaigning practices, demonstrating that a single website perspective on e-Campaigning utilisation is insufficient. Also, neither party made extensive use of available opportunities for voter interaction: for example, despite the fact that both parties allowed visitors to provide comments on campaign-related information and other resources, neither party responded to these comments.

A stark contrast between the two case studies emerges when the depth of both parties’ e-Campaigning utilisation is compared. More specifically, besides information dissemination, National’s e-Campaign particularly focused at support mobilisation, targeting campaigns and resource generation, while Labour’s e-Campaign concentrated on targeting campaigns. This reveals a vastly different strategic focus in the utilisation of e-Campaigning between the two political parties, which has implications for the outcomes and impact of e-Campaigning utilisation.

It is worth noting however that our comparative analysis is not indicative of the quality or performance of e-Campaigning utilisation, as the actual effects of e-Campaigning utilisation are outside the scope of the proposed framework and this particular study.

5. Conclusions

The empirical findings demonstrate that e-Campaigning utilisation has evolved into a wide range of e-Campaigning practices and associated e-content elements, with different e-Campaigning utilisations. The developed conceptual framework for e-Campaigning research helps us to observe and analyse how these e-Campaigning utilisations are shaped by wider election campaign practices, instead of by technologies. Our empirical research has shown that this framework provides a more systematic, consistent, and robust foundation for understanding, analysing and comparing the extent of e-Campaigning utilisation. As such, the significance of this framework extends to understanding and comparing the breadth and depth of e-Campaigning utilisation across political parties, candidates, elections or electoral systems. Further research will be needed to test the empirical adequacy and accuracy of the developed conceptual framework in comparing e-Campaigning case studies across countries with varying electoral systems, and to allow for modifications or extensions to the framework as a result of further evolving e-Campaigning utilisations, so that the framework maintains its empirical relevance.
References


