Anti apathy approaches in representative democracies: e-governance and web 2.0 – facilitating citizen involvement?

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Abstract: Apathetic citizens disenchanted with conventional channels of participation in democratic processes are a predicament for mature representative democracies, as it reflects in the depleting voter turnouts in elections and participation in community associations. Recognising the reverberations of this apathy on governance, economies ostensibly search for anti apathy approaches. Recently E-governance using the pervasive power of the internet/Web 2.0, during the election has been instrumental for democratic engagement. We considered Australia and France, applying a historiographical view exploring the pre-election scenarios, attempting to evaluate the use of the Internet/Web 2.0 as valid benchmarking anti-apathy approaches of e-governance, to facilitate citizen participation.

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1 Introduction

A major topic that confronts governments in mature representative democracies is the apathy of the average citizen to engage in the democratic process. To counter this apathy, e-governance approaches have been deployed by many economies. Such approaches include the use of e-voting; and the use of the internet and Web 2.0 during elections. Prominent work that guides the principles of progressive democracies (Norris, 2003) avows that the election process in representative democracies is vital for its very existence. Based on such insights, many democratic governments have initiated the process of re-engaging indifferent citizens in the elections, also leveraging the pervasive power of the internet. In some democracies there is a visible deluge of open forums on the internet created by citizens to re-energise freedom of speech, a right which has been neglected for some time, to reengage themselves in democratic procedures. However, it has to be noted that these open forums seem to disregard that the opinions could be relevant, honest or ethical. Moreover, this style of citizen activity on the internet seems to peak during the elections. We focus on two economies and the respective elections: the French Presidential Elections 2007; and Australian Federal Elections of 2007. This research is restricted to the activities leading up to the elections and do not intend to analyse the consequences or political directions.

While both economies are representative democracies and the elections did reflect a difference in the utilisation of Web 2.0 in e-governance. In France, there was an overwhelming voter turnout (Headstar, 2007) of 85%, after apathy in elections for years leading to the nationalist candidate winning in the last run after a low/divided vote among other candidates. This turnout has been largely attributed to the campaigns using Web 2.0 (Carvajal, 2007). All the main candidates for the presidential election had constructed 'Islands' on Second Life, which allowed citizens to engage in debates, attend political rallies and take part in protests, in the safety of the multidimensional world (Moore, 2007, p.1). A sardonic site known as Disco Sarko featured presidential candidate Sarkozy on a dance floor – capable of handling few dance moves; while another candidate, Segolene Royal took a more inclusive approach by inviting citizens to help create her campaign graphics and videos, harnessing their support (Canning, 2007, pp.1, 2). It seemed that politicians in France were discovering what businesses had already recognised, i.e., if they built virtual headquarters in Cyberspace, it is likely that real people will participate (Moore, 2007, p.2).

E-voting was deployed by France, although voters expressed concerns regarding the use of e-voting machines by filing a suit to prevent their use prior to elections in April 2007. Pre-elections, in April 2007, saw a suit being filed to prevent the use of electronic voting machines in the elections, as they did not meet the legal requirements set out by the French Constitutional Council (Sayer, 2007). Several political parties demanded the withdrawal of e-voting machines for the second round of the presidential

election (Sailhan, 2007), as the first round of pilot tests in 82 localities ended in long queues, equipment shutdowns and dropouts in many electorates (EDRI, 2007). The elder generation of voters in particular, were discontented as they expected the e-voting systems to keep their vote anonymous (Sailhan, 2007) and the tests proved the contrary. Furthermore, post elections saw protests from young left wing demonstrators who were sceptical of the economic and social reforms promised by the right wing president – Sarkozy (Bon, 2007). Of particular significance was the passionate demonstrations held by students who protested against Sarkozy's envisaged plans to make higher education more focused on vocational courses, empowering universities to hire and fire staff and providing more scope to expel under-performing students.

In Australia, the pre-election process seems to progress unbridled on the YouTube, with all political parties and candidates broadcasting videos, almost maligning the other parties and candidates (Australia Votes, 2007). The Liberal party portrays the existing Prime Minister and its leader, John Howard, in a series of videos touting the interests of Australia in terms of stability, and continued growth. The approach to campaigning, bringing forth the alleged weaknesses of the Labor Party and its strongest candidate, is rather perceptible, particularly the direct attacks on the opposition candidate, Kevin Rudd and in the portrayal of Labor as a trade Unionist threat. Conversely, the Labor Party, ostensibly displays understated videos that bring forth shortcomings of the ruling Liberal Party, along with a new vision for Australia, promise of high speed broadband, new taxation structures and family oriented policies. Without doubt, the number and frequency of the videos seem to be balanced in number and timing between the two major political parties. The smaller parties and their respective candidates are however not far behind.

Citizen participation in this process is also evident (YouTube, 2007b). Videos branded "*What is on your mind*" to bring up issues that are foremost to citizens and "*Welcome to Australia Votes*" which promotes the participation of citizens via posting messages, interactions, or joining discussions, reflect the leveraging of this medium for citizen participation. The French political campaigners nevertheless seem to have been more open to new technologies and creative with their uses (Headstar, 2007), as the Second Life campaigning seems non-existent in Australia.

Set in this context, this paper takes a retrospective view focusing on pre-election anti-apathy approaches in the two economies that are seeking to improve citizen participation. Have these approaches leveraging the internet and Web 2.0 facilitated citizen participation? Are the approaches equitable or are they widening the digital divide? We explore these broad questions through the *historiographical* lens, by presenting the use of Web 2.0 and the internet based approaches orchestrated efficiently, perhaps setting a new standard as anti-apathy tools in these democracies.

This paper is structured as follows. This section has established our research motivations. The next section provides the research framework with justifications. Section 3 with its varied subsections provides changing perspectives of democracy, relevant taxonomies and briefly synopsising tools that are being leveraged to facilitate anti apathy approaches. Section 4 and 5 focuses on exploring relevant events in both elections examined through the framework of philosophies and techniques synopsised in Section 3. In the last section, we provide broad perspectives on the validity of these anti apathy approaches, opening the pathway for further research. In particular, we highlight the need for research post elections to validate the apathy approaches.

2   Research framework: the historiographical lens

Historical research is an assessment of rudiments from history (Berg, 2004) which strategically attempts to collect information from the past, reconstruct them and interlace them into a meaningful set of explanations that can perhaps be applied to future situations. Sarnecky (1990) noted a growing interest in this method, which can be credited to the shift away from traditional focus on objective positivism, towards a broader stance that is supportive of the knowledge obtainable by this method.

According to Salkind (1996) the justification for historiography is intensely routed in the perspicacity that advances made in knowledge, policies, science or technologies cannot be fully appreciated, evaluated or leveraged without understanding the conditions within which these developments have occurred. Furthermore, it is constructed on the credence that the knowledge of the past provides sufficient information to be used in the present, in order to determine the future.

Varied reasons for deploying the method is collated by Berg (2004) which include: uncovering the unknown; answering questions; seeking implications or relationship of events from the past and their connections with the present; assessing past activities and accomplishments of individuals, agencies or institutions; help our understanding of human culture; etc. According to him, historical analysis can augment appreciation and understanding of contemporary issues in the realms of business, socio-politics and technologies. Among these, several reasons motivated the application of this method for our research. We attempt to trace the changing connotations of democracy in the context of mature representative democracies. Subsequently, we sought to draw meaning from anti apathy approaches used, during the elections, specifically leveraging the internet and Web 2.0 – Blogs, YouTube and Second Life. Historiography, we maintain, has assisted us in perhaps making a preliminary evaluation of the impact of the anti apathy approaches, in their particular circumstances and the key learning therefore, may be used for making forecasts.

However, early proponents of this method (Marshall and Rossman, 1999) cautioned on the possible influence of recent thought processes, when considering the information of the past, in the circumstances in which they occurred. While eliciting key learning therefore, the researchers had to understand both literal and latent meanings of sources within their historical time frames, as connotations change over time. The key learning from this research, being situated in modern times, may be applied for present and used as a predictor for near future. Nonetheless, the validity of the key learning as a predictor may change over a period of time and this will need to be taken into account as a limitation in future studies.

The sources of data used by historiographers include primary and secondary sources: Primary sources include oral or written testimony of eyewitnesses including original artefacts, documents, items related to the direct outcome of an event or an experience (Salkind, 1996). Secondary sources are narrated or written testimonies of people not present at the time of a given event including documents created by others that relate to the specifics of the research being undertaken such as oral histories of individuals, journal papers, news stories, encyclopaedias and so forth (Leedy, 1999). The currency of this research demanded both sources: first hand experiences of individuals, papers based on experiences of individuals (in blogs YouTube) in the process of elections and news stories (papers). We have also attempted to draw perspectives from journal papers, surveys and other sources for setting the context.

3   Historical evolution to cyber democracies via e-governance

3.1   Changing connotations of democracies and citizen participation

Prominent philosophies of Dahrendorf (2004, p.1) emphasised the role of demos in democracies. According to his definition,

> "Democracy is an ensemble of institutions aimed at giving legitimacy to the exercise of political power by providing a coherent response to three questions: (1) How can we achieve change in our society without violence?; (2) How can we, through a system of checks and balances, control those who are in power in a way that gives us assurance that they will not abuse it?; and (3) How can the people – all the citizens – have a voice in the exercise of power?"

Dahrendorf highlighted that it is the voice of the people which creates institutions that control governments, making them flexible enough to change without violence, which reflects that "… people are the sovereign that gives legitimacy to the institutions of democracy".

While democracies remain a popular form of governance that can either foster a cohesive political structure by engaging citizens or destabilise transient societies by dissolving accord and fuelling differences (Hay, 2005), the concept of democracy has been evolving by a myriad of influences (King, 2006) such as ideologies, politics, religion and lately rapid technological evolutions. As a seminal allusion in modern democratic governance (Norris, 2003) emphasised the focus of representative democracies must be on free/fair elections. Reapinc (2006) concurs that the main process of representative democracies entail electing representatives in a free and fair electoral system, to make policies on their behalf and ensure continued management. Fraunholz and Unnithan (2007) maintained that, theoretically, the election process allowed citizens to exercise informed choices while casting a vote in the elections i.e., they are able to choose from alternative people to represent them in democratic governance. Underlying principles of representative democracy is that governance is kept accountable as an opportunity is provided to the citizens to have their preferences weighted equally in their choice of leaders, through elections. However, the term democracy itself is no longer synonymous with a collective understanding of the citizen objectives, due to apathetic nature of the population. King (2006, p.18) anticipates that e-governance can reinvigorate involvement in the public sphere.

Norris (2003, p.4) emphasises the role of e-governance in strengthening democracies, particularly highlighting the role of e-voting in representative democracies. King (2006, p.22) acquiesce that e-governance is often expressed through the use of technologies to provide new avenues for voting. When e-governance initiatives (including e-voting) were being piloted in early 2001, the Commonwealth Centre of e-governance, Australia (CCE, 2001) expressed that its role is to provide citizens with choices. They purport that e-governance is not only about providing citizens with the ability to choose how they wish to interact with governments but also regarding the choices governments make about technologies to be deployed in supporting citizen choices.

Democracies today are transforming themselves into *e-democracies* use technology based approaches to strengthen and improve democratic processes. Good governance is often visualised as the engagement of citizens in public policy-making via e-Forums, e-Consultations, e-Referenda, e-Voting and other forms of e-Participation (Gupta, 2006).

The use of internet is emphasised for typical enhancements such as making processes more accessible, extending citizen participation in public policy making so that the broader influence will result in smarter policies, increasing accountability and political legitimacy. In the transition to so touted Cyberdemocracies, E-governance assumes a superior role in engaging citizens.

While etymological roots imply that any democracy relies on citizen participation, most traditional representative democracies tend to limit the participation to voting, which no doubt is a crucial process, leaving the actual governance entirely to the views of political candidates. Advocates of participatory democracy (Kramer, 1972) a process which emphasises the broader participation of constituents in the governance operations, endeavour to create opportunities for all members in a political group to make equal and meaningful contributions to decision making. Technology tools that enable community narratives and result in accrual of knowledge are therefore important forces in leading this empowerment. Gaynor contend,

> "many 'cyberutopians' believe that new technologies can eliminate the institutional form of democracy with which so people are dissatisfied. The Internet, they say, will allow for a true participatory democracy in which citizens can govern themselves without the interference of bureaucrats and legislators." (Gaynor, 1996a, p.1)

In contrast to mass media, electronic networks facilitate interaction of people; on the information they are presented. Citizens can have real time conversations, in virtual spaces with their political representatives about legislation or voice opinions to others on a democratic process – such as elections.

> "The ritualistic capability for expression increases the participatory nature of democracy in cyberspace … individuals play a more direct role in their own governance, through the power of citizen-to-citizen (lateral) communications which benefit both themselves and their communities." (Gaynor, 1996b, p.1)

Glimpses of anti apathy approaches for enabling participatory democracy in France is exhibited (Löffler, 2004) by the City of Issy-les-Moulineaux, a free standing town in the southern suburbs of Paris. It has been a pioneer in e-governance and citizen engagement which also translates to an international level, for example, the Mayor Andre Santini chairs the Global Cities Dialogue, a new international network of cities to promote information societies. An interview with the Assistant Mayor, Nathalie Pitrou, in 2002 (Löffler, 2004) revealed the active use of ICTs in engaging students, professionals, artists and public in general. It also provided insights into averting the issue of having the same participants (not all the public), by appointing four representatives per district from within the district population; training of people in stages and through a participative budget which allows district councillors to corroborate the possible outcomes of implementing budget proposals.

In his *Short History of Future*, emphasising the potential of historiography, Attali (2007) the French futurist purports *hyperdemocracy*, a concept that develops on common good, based on collective intelligence. According to him, historically democracies have evolved from the collective communities, towards a mercantile order of market democracies, based on individual freedom and free markets. The cultural demand for individual freedom and mobility has been satisfied by mass production of services that enhance the power and pleasure of that free individual in the form of itinerant objects which may be anything from PCs to mobile phones, iPods, YouTube and

MySpace. He posits, wherever a creative class masters a key innovation, a nucleus of the mercantile order is formed and in these times, the nucleus has moved from steam engines, on to information revolution. And if globalisation and markets were allowed to grow in a controlled environment, it would enable hyperdemocracies where every person will benefit from the numerous possibilities offered by technologies of future, to enjoy the benefits of commercial creativity on a fair and equitable basis.

Conversely, the current philosophy of *third way* seeks to adapt progressive values to the new challenges of the information age (DLC, 1998) rests on three principles as follows:

> "Government must promote equal opportunities in representative democracies; it should have the ethic of mutual responsibility that equally rejects the politics of entitlement and the politics of social abandonment and bring forth a new approach that empowers citizens to act for themselves. The approach emphasises technological innovation, competitive enterprise and education rather than laissez faire or top down redistribution. While honouring social values, it resists attempts to impose them on others and favours enabling governance, expanding choices for citizens and encouraging civic institutions to play a larger role." (DLC, 1998)

The current approach of *third way* and the futuristic perspective of *hyperdemocracies*, both are advocates of using technologies in citizen empowerment.

The influence of the aforesaid philosophies was reflected on the French election candidates and their political parties. Therefore, we have presented them as a precursor to our speculative discussions later. Furthermore, we found it relevant to examine the evolution of tools that has made internet, the real hero of French elections (World e-Democracy Forum, 2007) and is seemingly reflecting on the passionate campaigning in Australian elections.

3.2 The predicaments of modern democracies

Modern democracies are limited by safety nets that seemingly assure economic security and social stability (King, 2006, p.17) reflecting the market concept that increasingly visualises citizens as consumers. As citizens retreat from civic involvement, the role of individual citizens eclipse into a passive acceptance of survival through apathy, as referred to by Henry Kariel (King, 2006, p.17). Representative democracies are based on the fundamental principle of popular sovereignty by the people representatives. Essentially elected representatives are provided enough authority to exercise their initiative in changing circumstances, to take decisions that are in the best interest of the people.

> "In established democracies many believe that the growth of e-governance can serve to modernize and deepen democracy where the public has become more disenchanted with the traditional channels of participation in representative democracy, exemplified by falling levels of voting turnout, party membership, and community associations." (Norris, 2003, p.7)

A worldwide survey conducted in developed nations (MORI, 2005) revealed the gradual decline in the number of voters over the years. As a result, in some occasions, decisions by representatives may be against the wish of some social groups. For example, Canadian citizens have almost abandoned their responsibilities, becoming complacent, but yet

complain when a decision is made against their wishes by their elected representatives (Wiebe, 2006). This appears to be a growing dilemma in democratic governance.

The efficient use of the internet can improve the quality of information available to a citizen to make an informed judgement in electing the correct representative. The number of political websites, including mass media, interest groups, parties, unmediated information etc can prove to be information sources on performance of government, record of candidates and legislative debates (Corrado, 2000). The use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) could enable efficient electoral administration, facilitating vote counting and dissemination of results. The potential of e-voting is in reducing costs and strengthening electoral turnout due to the convenience. Therefore, to strengthen representative democracies, a variety of e-voting facilities could be introduced (Norris, 2003, p.4).

The key communication medium of internet in e-governance calls for a closer examination in this context. Although the proliferation of the internet is high in developed nations, Chen and Wellman (2004) observe that the digital divide remains substantial and continues to widen. Demographically, the percentages of internet users are those who are already technology savvy. Therefore,

> "people and social groups … on the wrong side of the digital divide may be increasingly excluded from knowledge-based societies and economies." (Chen and Wellman, 2004, p.1)

In their survey, internet users were classified using socio-economic status, gender, life stage and region, in eight developed democracies and the findings are quoted as under (Chen and Wellman, 2004, p.42).

- Internet users are more likely to be high earners and better educated than non -users. In general, the lower the internet penetrations rate in a country, the more elite the online population.

- Men are more likely than women both to access and to use the internet. With the exception of the USA, the share of female internet users is lower than their share in the general population in each of the countries surveyed.

- Internet penetration rate among younger people is substantially higher than that among older people. Students who can get online via school connections make up a big share of internet users in developing countries.

- Geographic location also affects access to and use of the internet, with more affluent regions having higher internet penetration rates than poorer ones (Chen and Wellman, 2004, p.42).

To counter the effects of apathy, many developed democracies such as Australia, Austria, Canada and USA have pioneered electronic voting (Ace, 2006), as part of e-governance techniques and for enabling citizen participation. The US Census Bureau reported that 64% of USA. Citizens age 18 and over voted in the 2004 presidential election. It is interesting to note that the youngest group 18–24 year old, had the lowest voting rate of 47%while those aged 45 and older held 70% of the turnout. The turnout rate for citizens with a bachelor's degree or higher was greater at 80%, than the rate of people with a high school diploma at 56%. With 79% citizens older than 65 had the highest registration rate (US Census, 2005).

In the growing context of apathetic citizens, Wiebe (2006) reproves the use of ICTs. He *observes* that western societies and technological gadgets have made it easier for citizens to become apathetic. In the Canadian context, where people put in more gas in their car tanks because it is easier than walking or buy 60GB MP3 players so as to hold all music in one place – thereby avoid changing CDs – municipalities in Canada envisage online voting as an anti apathy approach, to bring the polling station to the home of the voter. Wiebe questions the validity of this approach where people are bored and perhaps becoming lazier. He cautions that apathy is facilitated by ICTs as the internet had to discover interesting tools to keep up with easily bored minds and voting as a crucial element in democracies has lost its meaning. Specifically, the candidates/parties who entertain more on the internet will end up with more votes – but are they the correct candidates for leading the democracies? Another interesting point to examine is the Australian context. As Australia is one of the few countries in the world with mandatory voting, does the internet impact the vote. In comparison, there is evidence that the internet has an impact on voter turnout, but does it also impact the actual vote.

3.3 A taxonomy of enabling technologies

In developed democracies, *E-voting* without doubt, is considered a crucial process. In the USA, Diebold AccuVote-TS and its later version the AccuVote-TSx together were widely deployed e-voting platforms in the midterm elections held in 2006 (Feldman et al., 2006) in 357 counties, covering almost 10% of the registered voters. Post elections there were uprising nationwide, regarding irregularities, e-voting frauds and vulnerabilities. For example, there were allegations of *vote flipping* i.e., votes intended for one candidate being recorded for another. Another was security vulnerabilities found on the machines. Specifically, the access panel door on a Diebold AccuVote-TS voting machine – the door that protects the memory card that stores the votes, which was the main barrier to the injection of the virus – could be opened with a standard key widely available on the internet (Feldman et al., 2006). In a latest study (Bishop, 2007) the security of three electronic voting systems were reviewed. Three red teams were to try and compromise the accuracy, security and integrity of the voting systems without making assumptions about compensation controls or procedural mitigation vendors may have adopted. The results suggest that all three systems (which are being used currently) could be compromised.

Nevertheless, e-voting seems to have been successful in developed democracies such as Australia, which piloted the system in some states in Timson (2006). While the skepticism remains on the vulnerability and security risks, worldwide, nations seem to pioneer and legalise e-voting as an anti-apathy instrument. It has to be noted that the predecessor of French Presidential Elections are the US presidential elections where concerns were raised regarding various aspects of the voting process: was e-voting accessible to every entitled citizen; were votes cast correctly counted and whether these irregularities decisively affected the final selection of the president. Amidst these controversies was the use of the internet and Blogs (Rice, 2005).

Blogs have become an established way of citizen participation during elections. Williams and Jacobs (2004) explained these as the shortened version of Web Logs – a form of micropublishing. Blogging as a concept began with publishing online diaries. From then, building on the power and capacity to engage people in collaborative

activities, debates and sharing knowledge and due to the ease of use from any internet connection point, they have become an established web based communication tool. Many Blog clusters have formed links according to common interests. Among these, political Blogs seem to be the fastest growing in the past few years. The term *Blogosphere* is often used to denote the collection of Blogs, as they exist in communities. In the 2004 presidential campaign in the USA, the leading candidate in the blogging revolution was Howard Dean, who, through a network of websites and blogs**,** created a dedicated internet. He had specifically created a blog targeting younger voters. It is reported that the readership of his blog went up from 3000 to 30,000, per day, after the introduction of the blog targeting young voters (Rice, 2005). It is interesting to note that while other candidates distanced themselves from unofficial campaign blogs, Dean had embraced through numerous links. Another candidate, John Kerry, had taken on more interactive approaches.

Second Life "is a 3-D virtual world entirely built and owned by its residents" (Second Life, 2007). Since 2003 when it opened Second Life has grown explosively and today is inhabited by a total of 8,280,808 Residents from around the globe (Second Life, 2007). It is an internet based virtual interactive forum, which can provide residents (or participants) with an avatar (or appearance) according to their wish to interact with others. Communities or individuals can buy space, or *Islands*, to build their own environment. Essentially Islands in Second Life were bought by political campaigners or for huge projects. In the French presidential elections, all candidates had their own projects on second life.

YouTube is a company founded in February 2005 (YouTube, 2007a) which has become the world leader in online video provision, and the leading platform to watch and share videos globally through the web. It allows easy upload and sharing of video clips on www.YouTube.com and across the internet through linked websites, mobile devices such as the iPhone, blogs, and e-mail. The highlights of this venture are that it enables presentation of first hand accounts of current events and sharing of quirky/unusual video clips. It empowers people to become broadcasters, involving them in events. In November 2006, YouTube was purchased by Google Inc. and has since developed numerous partnership deals with content providers such as the BBC, Universal Music Group, Sony Music Group, Warner Music Group, NBA, etc. (YouTube, 2007a).

## 4   The French experience

4.1   *broadband penetration as an infrastructure for e-governance*

The vital infrastructure for e-governance is the diffusion of the internet and ICTs into societies. In 2002, the internet penetration in France was still at a stage where it had not reached out to the majority of citizens. As a result, most people had neglected its use (OECD, 2004). In addition, the traditional press had scorned the use of the internet and dismissed it as a valid approach to empowering citizens (World e-Democracy Forum, 2007).

In January 2005, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2005; ITU, 2007) released new statistics on global broadband penetration per 100 inhabitants, as illustrated in Figure 1. Many economies moved up in their ranking from 2004 and France was among those economies which had moved up fast in the ranking. This is also reflected in

the use of the 2007 elections where citizens, the Press and political campaigners have all leveraged the effective use of internet and its tools.

Figure 1   Global broadband penetration – January 2005

Broadband penetration by technology, top 20 economies worldwide, 1 January 2005
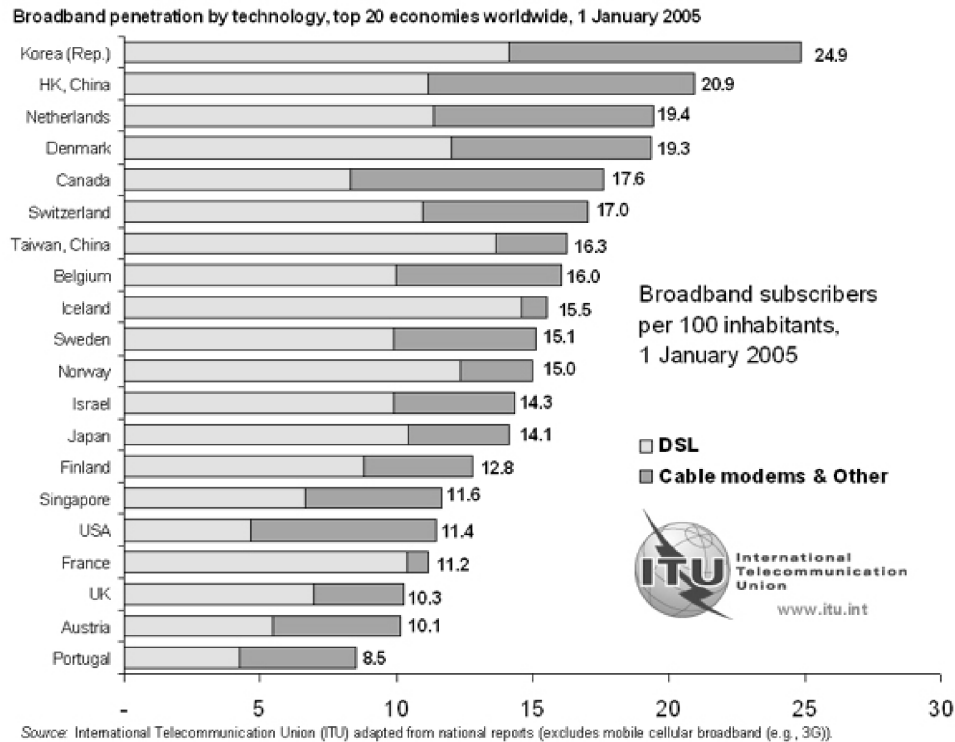
4.2 *E-voting*

E-voting was legalised in France in 2004 (IDABC, 2007). Up to 1.5 million of the 43 million eligible voters, for the first time, used the e-voting to elect their new president. It has been a controversial issue during the elections with the petition against e-voting with doubts over machine error, human error and malicious hacker attacks. In the first round of e-voting pilots conducted in 82 localities, endless queues, equipment shutdowns and dropouts resulted in political parties condemning e-voting a catastrophe (Sailhan, 2007). Two points of criticism were the loss of control by citizens with the risk of untraceable fraud and humiliation of a great number of electors as 5–10% were not comfortable with the systems. The e-voting machines were also deemed as discriminatory to the sight impaired and 25% of the electors ran the risk of mistaking their candidate or not finalising their votes (EDRI, 2007).

Sayer (2007) reported that campaigners filed a suit to prevent the use of e-voting machines. French elections are conducted via a secret ballot. Traditionally, electors enter a polling booth and place a slip of paper printed with the name of their chosen candidate in an unmarked envelope. The next step is clear: they then place the envelope in a transparent ballot box. This allows observers to ensure that the ballot box was empty at the start of the election, and for voters to ensure that the ballot has been received.

However, electronic voting machines do not allow lay observers to ensure that the ballot box was empty at the start of the election, and for voters to ensure that the ballot has been received (Sayer, 2007). Nevertheless, amidst scepticism and pre-election protests, e-voting did succeed.

In February 2007, the UMP party made a history by setting a new world record for total internet based voters on a single day (UMP, 2007). On 3rd January, a total of 31,800 members voted in UMP's primary candidate to select its presidential candidate for the 2007 French Presidential election. This was regarded as a pioneer due to varied reasons. After World War II, it was the first time that a political party in France had reached such high number of members and high levels of participation from an internal election. Further, this was the first time in the world that an internet based vote gathered such high number of voters. Out of a total 338,558 UMP members, a total 233,779 voted, representing 69.1% of the party memberships and out of this voting, 98.1% selected the Nicolas Sarkozy as the presidential candidate.

The UMP press release reported the process (UMP, 2007) as follows. The election was organised by Election-Europe, the leading global internet elections company and overseen by Mr. Yves-Henri PUAUX, Justice Bailiff, a court appointed official. More than 750 polling stations were equipped with internet enabled touch screen kiosks. Each day, thousands of ballots were registered among the 107 electronic ballot boxes corresponding to the different county federations and stored on servers hosted in a secured and controlled environment. Each member received at home a voter card with their confidential PIN and password. Several reminders to vote were sent by SMS, e-mails or phone. An external and independent hot line centre was available every day to deliver lost PINs to the members, once that member had been authenticated as a UMP member (UMP, 2007).

The supervision of the elections was performed by the Electoral Commission with the support of the centralised administration tools provided by the Election-Europe voting system. It took less than 20 min to decrypt and tally all of the 233,779 ballots stored in the 107 ballot boxes, without any issue or electoral fraud complaint; this allowed the Commission to announce the official results immediately after the closing of the voting period, live in front of 100,000 UMP members gathered for their Primary Convention. Since its inception in 2002, UMP had regularly used e voting to run their elections. The high mobilisation of members is regarded as the success of the inclusive approach launched by Sarkozy (UMP, 2007).

4.3 Web 2.0: The champion?

World e-Democracy Forum (2007) reported that never before the internet has been so active in a European election campaign. According to them

> "Online videos, reactive Blogs, participative debates, satirical or idolized
> websites, virtual world and viral rumours, Internet became the stage of a new
> kind of presidential campaign." (World e-Democracy Forum, 2007)

The 2007 elections seem to be an antithesis of the 2002 version when majority of the French citizens ignored the internet (World e-Democracy Forum, 2007). *So what caused this transformation*? Compared to 2002, many French citizens are well connected via broadband to the internet (see previous section). Most citizens are online *savoir-faire*, able to gain access to sufficient information via the internet, synthesise,

and react to it – whether it is to challenge it or empathise with it. While citizens who are interested as such in political participation could obtain information and forge their own opinion without assistance, there have also been significant attempts by candidates of the elections, to reach out to apathetic citizens via net campaigns.

Conversely, until this election campaign, the internet and Blogs were often derelict, or treated with derision by traditional media such as the television, radio or newspapers. However, during 2007 elections, the Press apparently had begun reading the Blogs for relaying better analysed information. Indubitably, the internet became part of the media landscape in the elections. *Why did this transpire*? Purportedly, the internet provided greater transparency and a means to access to all information. Citizens interested in political life could get information and forge their own opinion without any assistance. The exceptional feature in the 2007 elections was the explosion of websites created by common citizens, often from the communication sector. One significant example is the iPOL which proposed a weekly video report on the campaigns (iPOL, 2007) and for apathetic citizens, there were engaging official websites and interactive forums created on *Second Life* by campaigners.

4.4 The blogosphere

The use of Blogs has been significant, for the first time in a European election campaign – the only precedent being the 2004 US presidential elections. The country had the largest number of recorded Blogs in history, perhaps ascribed to the cultural inclination of French citizens to debates. It is interesting to note that most of the Blogs have been held by teenagers, who were not expected to have an impact on political processes. *It is questionable then as to how much these teenagers have been able to influence their elders?*

Parallel to these developments was the emergence of *influential Bloggers*, who sometimes became spokespersons of internet citizens, impelled by traditional media (World e-Democracy Forum, 2007). They were seen moving from television shows, into radio stations, explaining to French people what web users were thinking. Conversely, traditional journalists began writing on Blogs. Some significant examples are Chistophe Barbier and Jean-Michel Apathie whose writings are acclaimed in France to reveal the political backstage. Famous television journalists such as Karl Zéro and John Paul Lepers, envisioned the Web as an ideal, yet alternative path for journalism (Magniant, 2007). Famous writers such as Alexandre Jardin animated a website entitled "How can we do", where candidate proposals were published and French citizens were asked to imagine how they would apply them (Moore, 2007). Equally, opponents launched a website dedicated to debates known as Debat2007. Gurus of political communication namely Jacques Séguéla and Thierry Saussez, together held a weekly video chronicle online to share their analyses with web users (World e-Democracy Forum, 2007). Perhaps, it is not incorrect to suggest that the French internet had transformed into a true political repository. However, was this due to the interest of the French people for this campaign or did Internet pay a catalytic role?.

In March 2007, a Médiamétrie report indicated that more than five millions web users had consulted websites and Blogs related to the election campaign as compared to the 1.5 million in October 2006 (World e-Democracy Forum, 2006). The amount of information on the campaign (including text, videos and sound) was so voluminous that it would have taken hours to consult them every day. According to World e-Democracy

Forum (2006), it is the limit of the internet aligned with the force of television, which was able to gather more than 20 millions French for the *great debate* between the two main presidential candidates. There were suggestions during the campaign to control the internet – through similar councils as the Audiovisual Superior Council – CSA.

> "This was triggered by attempts by some citizens to mask themselves, barded with false addresses and remain anonymous, so as to enable them through invectives, fallacious reasons and deliberated polluted wires during discussions under cover. These people are often known as Trolls who affect the quality of debate."

However, Tim O'Reilly's proposal of a code of good control on Blogosphere remains polemic (O'Reilly, 2005).

The observable fact of the net-campaign was *Daily Motion,* a French version of 'YouTube' (Dailymotion, 2007). Videos published on Dailymotion discomfited Ségolène Royal with respect to teachers, leading to the journalist, Alain Duhamel being deposed for having taken position for a candidate. However, the journalist denounced a form of permanent monitoring that the web could create by decreeing himself the victim of the Net. The videos on the internet played a significant role in edifying the truth: when a former socialist minister, Jack Lang, announced to have been acclaimed by many people in a Festival, hundreds of web users contradicted him. A green Party's leader, Noël Mamère, proudly announced to have come to an interview on his bicycle. Few hours later, a video on Daily Motion showed him getting out of his car.

The experience of the US elections demonstrated that a successful online campaign depends on the implication of most citizens. This was visible during the campaign of the socialist primary elections, with the proliferation of websites supporting the official website known as *Desires for the future*. It was apparent in the power exhibited by the site of the Sarkozy supporters who had laid down an objective of 500,000 French registered in all France (Supporters NS, 2007). Conversely, Ségolène Royal, had *a new way of militating online* with 500,000 e-militants, a *marketing 2.0* and the densest network of political Blogs. Furthermore, for the mobilisation of François Bayrou's partisans, the third candidate of this campaign, the weight of the centrist party's Blogs was more critical, as the candidate expected to become a *French Howard Dean* as indicated by the website (Bayrou, 2007). He was successful in obtaining more than 18% of the votes to the first round of the campaigns.

Perhaps, this is the birth of the new type of citizens, who have become the activists of the Web, who are more involved in the governance. To forge an opinion, these citizens take a voluntary step to seek information and to confront his opinion with others. According to Rosnay (2007) in his book, the *La Revolte du Pronetariat*, the citizens are inventing a new democracy, based on the *media of the masses*, as opposite to the *mass media*. Among other exceptional facts of the campaign was the commitment expressed by all candidates to implement an e-petition system, a debate launched by the World e-Democracy Forum in 2005 and relayed since by the French website NetPolitique (2007), which shows a crucial step towards e-participation. Another important debate of the campaign concerned the voting machines used for the first time in a presidential election by 1.5 million voters. Although far from the hyperdemocracy purported by Attali (2007), France no doubt, sees to be at the wake of an inescapable movement, comparable to French revolution on the internet.

4.5 Second Life and YouTube

France is a country that historically has banned political television advertising (Carvajal, 2007). Therefore, the zealous political battles went to explode on user-generated sites such as Dailymotion and YouTube. The presidential candidates and their respective parties seem to have successfully orchestrated the internet for their campaigns, despite the warning set by the US elections precedent that official websites are often consulted only by mutants and sympathisers, while the true campaign is run somewhere else (Moore, 2007). Political campaigners have spent money and creativity on their websites. We now examine these more closely. The confrontation in Second Life, which is a parallel online universe where players cloak their alter egos into cartoon like bodies, demonstrated the rising impact of the newest cyber venue for politicians trying to promote real-world campaigns. All the four major candidates in the presidential elections had opened virtual headquarters in Second Life, which is an interactive forum that allows inhabitants, known as avatars, to engage in debates, attend political rallies and take part in protests (Moore, 2007) The political battles began in January when protesters attacked the headquarters of extremist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, in the popular 3D fantasy word site.

Nicolas Sarkozy, the presidential candidate of UMP, is estimated to have spent one million Euros on the election campaign. However, there were cynical allegations that the official website presented itself more as a web based television than a forum for debates (Carvajal, 2007). *On the web, the Sarkozy campaign created a satirical site Disco Sarko taking the mick out of their own candidate for courting the youth vote* (Carvajal, 2007). People were able to put him on a dance floor and give him a range of moves with various backing tunes. It was unusual as e-campaigns are usually aimed at opponents. In an effort to create a viral buzz among youth and sign them up to their own The difference in this campaign was that satirical e-campaigns which are usually aimed at opponents *Sarkonautes* e-mail lists, the Sarkozy campaign utilized their own candidate, instead of targeting the opponent. A 5 min video known as the human bomb has perhaps contributed to an unlikely backstage role in the election victory of Sarkozy (Sarkozy Human Bomb, 2007). In this video,

> "Sarkozy was demonized in the sprawling and chaotic blogosphere … it drew more than 450,000 viewers, seemingly attracted by an old chapter from Sarkozy's life: brash suburban mayor personally negotiates with the human bomb, a deranged man who seized kindergarten students as hostages in 1993."

The use of the pensive sound track music from the Gladiator, 'Honour Him', sent out the subtle message effectively during the last ten days of the presidential campaign. The video presented:

> "an emotional view of Sarkozy, who was otherwise attacked by rival videos such as La France d'apres, which imagined a bleak new France under Sarkozy with riot police, burning cars and suburbs engulfed in violence." (Carvajal, 2007)

While the campaigners in the party worried about the video demonising their candidate, they were also optimistic that it will have an enormous viral effect among the citizens.

Ségolène Royal, the presidential candidate from the Socialist Party, is estimated to have spent approximately 2 million Euros (10% of its campaign budget) towards her internet strategy. There was a feature on her site inviting people to help create campaign

graphics and videos – a way to harness the creativity of her support base, much as Cadbury's has invited people to send in video clips with their own homemade ads for Creme egg (Moore, 2007). There were others such as the Jose Bove game where citizens had to destroy GM maize and mad cows in honour of the campaigner against McDonalds and globalisation (Carvajal, 2007).

5   Australian experience

5.1   *Broadband penetration as an infrastructure for e-governance*

The key findings of the joint report of The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), on the 26th June 2007, titled *Communications Infrastructure and Services Availability in Australia 2006–2007*, include the following (ACMA, 2007)

> "Broadband services are provided by 19 Internet Service Providers (ISPs) via DSLAM deployments in exchanges across Australia. This number has not changed since 30th of June 2006;

> Growth of broadband services is reflected in the availability of ADSL services, with an additional 323 exchanges enabled between 30 June 2006 and 31 January 2007; growth and availability of ADSL2+ services, with 412 exchanges providing ADSL2+ services (as compared to 309 at 30 June 2006);

> As compared to the 1.09 million subscribers at the end of September 2006, Internet connections with download speeds of 1.5Mbit/s or higher increased to 1.56 million as of end March 2007;

> With all four mobile carriers upgrading their 3G networks to the High Speed Downlink Packet Access (HSDPA) protocol increased mobile data rates became available; and

> Drawing some 369 providers into the voice market is the increased interest in provision of voice services using Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP), a service enabled by broadband." (ACMA, 2007)

According to Davidson (2007) Australia has a high-cost, second-rate telecommunications network due to the non acceptance of governing parties that the network is a monopoly which must be regulated in the public interest. Perhaps, Davidson (2007) offers the best analysis on the broadband situation, with a historic perspective, as follows:

> "Australia's two-part tariff (low-cost to connect and above-cost charges for phone calls) provided a lucrative opening for arbitrage that could be sold to the electorate as competition. In 1990, plans were made to issue a second telecommunications licence. In return for a subsidised entry price into the network, which had an upfront value of about USD 2 billion, Optus paid USD 800 million for its licence. Since then, the cost of telecommunications has fallen, driven also by technological evolution, guarantee by the price cap. However, prices have risen relative to the rest of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries because they have not been as zealous in the pursuit of competition."

Furthermore, he comments on the attitude of political parties in Australia.

> "The biggest barrier to the roll-out of a high-quality, low-cost broadband network in Australia is the failure of the major political parties to recognise that the network is a natural monopoly and the regulatory framework has to reflect and facilitate this. But even at this late stage, when it is clear that the necessary precondition for a roll-out of fibre optic cable is the removal of the regulatory roadblocks, neither the Coalition nor Labor have come up with a sensible policy." (Davidson, 2007)

The available internet bandwidth in Australia ranks it as 25th in the world (ALP, 2007a). Particularly, the education sector and business sector are struggling with the sluggish infrastructure. The election campaign of Australian Labor Party promises the creation of a national network that is 40 times faster and with better services and thus:

> "cutting down the telephone bills for small business; enhancing business services such as teleconferencing, video conferencing and virtual private networks; enhancing capacity for services like e-education and e-health; and providing high definition, multi-channel and inter-active TV services." (ALP, 2007b)

Figure 2 represents Australia's broadband market, with penetration rates compared to other OECD countries, as of December 2004, and with subscribers in Australia (in '000s), over time, obtained from ABS and ACCC sources.

Figure 2   Australian broadband as of end December 2004
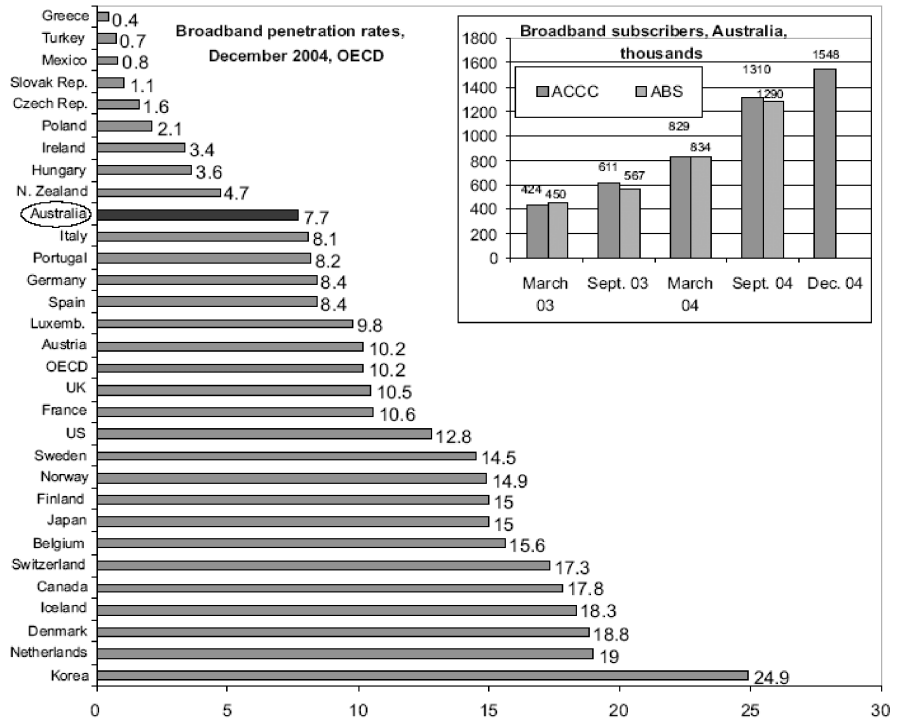
According to the shadow communications minister, Senator Stephen Conroy's written statement (Davidson, 2007):

> "Labor will hold an open and transparent process to construct our fibre to the node network (FTTN). Telstra starts in a strong position, as it owns the existing network. The Optus G9 consortium, having already lodged an access undertaking with the ACCC, is also in a strong position. Labor will be inviting tenders to submit suggested necessary regulatory reforms that they believe are required to deliver the project. As a part of the process Labor would consider extending the access regime that applies to the exchanges to the nodes."

As Davidson (2007) illustrates, this written statement indicates shallow thought process as the Labor policy has drawn from the $4.7 billion subsidy figure from a Telstra document submitted to the ASX on 7 September, 2005.The document suggested that the offer to build the network for $8.7 billion is conditional on rudimentary changes to the Trade Practices Act that provide Telstra's competitors access to the network at below cost. In other words, Telstra is indicating that there is no deal, unless it is able to get a full commercial return on its proposed investment in broadband. Furthermore, the Telstra document clearly indicates the AUD 4.7 billion government capital requirement for the proposal, that excludes operating expenditure associated with upgrade and customer revenue contributions.

In his written questions to Senator Conroy, Davidson (2007) pointed out that Telstra's own AUD 8.7 billion estimate for the fibre to the node network would require using the existing infrastructure of ducts, fibre optic cables and copper tails i.e., this amount is the is the incremental cost of upgrading the existing network. This infrastructure was built out of retained earnings from generations of telephone subscribers for a cost of around AUD 20 billion and has since been sold to Telstra's 1.5 million shareholders. Questions arise as to whether Telstra's competitors should be able to access existing infrastructure to run their fibre optic for free, in case they won the right to build the broadband network, and if so, how much should be paid. The infrastructure is no longer public property, due to privatisation. Therefore, rolling out a parallel network would cost AUD 20–30 billion, and involve endless litigation delaying completion of the project for years. Hence, Davidson (2007) comments:

> "Surely Labor isn't serious about a competitor being licensed to build the broadband network? Any other course except to allow Telstra to build it would dwarf all the previous telecommunications stupidities."

As Fibre to the node bypasses the exchanges where Telstra's competitors have their modems, they would have to put their modems on each node at the end of the street,which would be physically (and economically) impossible. Therefore, if Australia wants a high quality, economical broadband service, network competition has no future. As Davidson (2007) contend:

> "There is no option except a regulated Telstra monopoly unless some group of financial engineers with influence within Rudd Labor is concocting a 'structural separation', sold in the name of 'releasing value'. That value would certainly accrue to the promoters, but it would be at the expense of Telstra's shareholders or telephone users."

5.2 E-voting

As mentioned above voting in Australian elections is mandatory. Therefore, apathy is reflected in the nature of passive voting by citizens. Another example typical to Australia is that there is a significant percentage of population who is uninvolved due to being residents in another country or recently returned. There are also passive voters in rural areas of Australia who are either indifferent or uninvolved due to the digital divide in the country. Broadband remains an issue in many rural areas. Another significant proportion are vision impaired and disabled people, who rely on others for voting purposes. The responsibility of equitable inclusion and participation of citizens therefore rests with the institution itself. We expand on these points in the following paragraphs.

E-voting was pioneered in Australian 2001 federal elections and subsequently, in October 2004 parliamentary elections (Elecvote, 2006). The voting system used standard personal computers as voting terminals, where voters use a barcode to authenticate their votes. A secure local area network links voting terminals to a server, at each of the polling stations. It has to be noted that no votes are taken or transmitted over the internet or any other public network. In 2001, the voting system was used in the pre-poll centres, which usually open before the election day, in a limited number of places. Traditional paper ballots were used in places with no e-voting facility. Conversely, voters had the choice of e-votes and paper votes – in the centres were e-voting was available (Elecvote, 2006).

In October 2001, electronic vote counting, which retains paper ballots but electronically counts them, was pioneered (Elecvote, 2006). This process was then repeated in October 2004 elections. Voter preferences shown on paper ballots were data-entered by two independent operators, electronically checked for errors and manually corrected if required. This data is then combined with the results of the e-voting. Subsequently, a computer program distributed preferences under the ACT's Hare-Clark electoral system. The software for the e-voting and counting system was built using Linux open source software. It was specifically chosen to ensure transparency, so that "*it could be made available to scrutineers, candidates and other participants in the electoral process*" (Elecvote, 2006).

The Electoral Commission (Glenn et al., 2002) contend that the use of electronic voting and electronic vote counting was a success in the 2001 elections; and a valuable improvement on democratic processes in Australia. Their report highlights that a total of 16,559 electronic votes were recorded at four pre-poll voting centres and at eight polling places on polling day. According to them,

> "the electronic voting system eliminated the need for manual counting of electronic votes, thereby reducing the possibility of counting error and speeding up the transmission of results; it was reliable and secure; effectively eliminated unintentional voter errors; reduced the number of informal votes; allowed blind and vision-impaired people to vote entirely without assistance and in secret through the use of headphones and recorded voice instructions; and provided on-screen voting instructions in 12 different languages." (Glenn et al., 2002, p.3)

Glenn et al., also extols the benefits of the electronic counting system:

> "It effectively eliminated errors such as incorrectly sorting or counting ballot papers; increased the accuracy of the election count; reduced the time needed to accurately count the votes/ announce the election result; and increased the amount of information available about errors made on paper ballots by electors … While the system experienced some problems, such as difficult to use barcode readers and minor delays in displaying results on and after election night, it was well received by voters." (Glenn at al., 2002, pp.3, 4)

There were concerns raised about the accuracy of the electronic count. However, the Electoral Commission was of the view that these were unfounded as the built-in checks in the data entry system meant that the system was close to 100% accurate. This view was confirmed by post election checks (Glenn at al., 2002, pp.3, 4).

Subsequent to the 2001 election several enhancements were made to the electronic voting and counting system (Glenn et al., 2005) including changes to automate the set-up for the election so that all election details could be loaded into the system software by CD-ROM without the need for programmer intervention. The format of the barcodes was also altered to allow them to be more easily used and read. *In 2004 a total of 28,169 electronic votes were recorded at 4 pre-poll voting centers and at 8 polling places on polling day* (Glenn et al., 2005, pp.2, 3).

> "This number of electronic votes represents a 70% increase on the 16,559 electronic votes cast at the 2001 election. The proportion of electronic votes in relation to all votes counted increased from 8.3% in 2001 to 13.4% in 2004. At each electronic polling place the number of voting machines was increased from 10 in 2001 to at least 15 in 2004 to ensure that those wishing to use computers to vote could do so with minimal queues." (Glenn et al., 2005, p.4)

For the first time in 2004 (Glenn et al., 2005) purpose built voting tablets were trailed, indicating the possibility of a highly portable and robust substitute to the PC model of voting machines. Enhancements to the electronic voting and counting system ensured robust security and ease of use for electors.

> "The electronic voting system once again proved successful in eliminating the need for manual counting thereby removing probability of counting errors and speeding up transmission of results. It was reliable and secure, significantly reduced the number of unintentional voter errors and contributed to an overall drop in the proportion of informal voters at the election while it maintained the function for blind and vision-impaired people to vote without assistance; and provided on-screen voting instructions in 12 different languages." (Glenn et al., 2005, pp.3, 4)

As in 2001, at the 2004 election the electronic counting system had significant benefits (Glenn et al., 2005). Paper ballots were data entered by two independent operators. These were checked for errors and corrected manually, if required. Similar to the last time, the data was then combined with the e-voting result and under the Hare Clark electoral system, a computer program was used to distribute preferences. The electoral counting system proved to be accurate and reliable although there was public demand for a paper audit trial. The electoral commission maintained that it ensured system transparency and reliability via the use of open source software, the independent audit of the software code, and the security built into the system, including its physical security (Glenn et al., 2005, p.4)

In Australia, the right to privacy in voting is taken for granted by citizens in the elections. However, until now, it has not been really applicable to the 300,000 blind citizens, who had to rely on another person to mark their ballot paper (Macy, 2007). In an effort to be equitable, in the forthcoming elections, the Australian Electoral Commission is setting up 29 electronic voting booths that will allow visually impaired people to vote independently for the first time. In the new electronic voting booths, machines are computers with special voice-prompted software and a telephone keypad. Instructions are heard through headphones; the vote is registered and printed as a bar code, which is put into an envelope by electoral officers. According to Macy (2007) there would be many other people with disabilities, people who have, say, gross motor disability and are not able to hold or manipulate a pen or a pencil, to whom this process would apply, rather than only vision impaired citizens.

5.3   The blogosphere

On 13th of September 2007, Google announced the launch of the official Blog site which enabled Australian voters to have a close look at the parties, candidates and election issues – at one Google location.

> "These services, spanning Search, Maps, News, video, Earth, Trends, and iGoogle, enable voters to organise, find and share Australian election information more easily than ever before in any elections." (Sonego and Shilkin, 2007)

Google created a Picasa Web Album to showcase all the elements, offering the world's first tools developed in the Australian office, in the hope that the citizens will find them useful, fun and moreover with a view that "… democracy on the web works – and the web can work for democracy" (Sonego and Shilkin, 2007).

The OZ (2007) Politics Blog features a day by day report with key issues, comments, graphs indicating the voter preferences – how it moves, and even amusing video clips with major party candidates such as Rapping Rudd and Hip Hop Howard launching the election campaign. As the elections draw closer, there are more serious analytical views on polling methodologies (Jackman, 2007) to comments in lighter vein that "our fear campaign is based on the fact", may become the most memorable line of the elections.

An academic blog by Jackman (2007) from Stanford indicates betting summaries where analysis tracks prices offered by three agencies: *Centrebet, Portlandbet, Sportingbet. ALP is favoured to win in 74 of 150 seats (# seats with average ALP win prob > 0.5); with an expected Seat Count: 77.13 out of 150 seats as of October 28th, 2007*. In addition Jackman (2007) points to Roy Morgan research website often having interesting remarks on methodologies. For example, take the case of telephone polls having inherent biases. Specifically, the sample (by design) only includes those who have telephones (approximately 1% bias toward L-NP). Moreover, the sample achieved has a much lower response rate than face-to-face interviews (approximately twice as many people refuse to answer as refuse face-to-face). The 'bias' caused by this rate is less 'tangible' and 'predictable'. Historically, Roy Morgan Research has evidence that supporters of the party that is 'out of favour' tend to be over represented among those who 'refuse' to be interviewed. However, a compelling event or news story can generate a desire for people to 'have their say' – so create its own bias.

Furthermore, blogs are also in place by influential columnists such as Andrew Bolt (AB Blog, 2007) who began his column in Herald Sun in 1998, after working as a foreign correspondent. Bolt also writes for Brisbane's Sunday Mail, and is a regular commentator on Channel 9's Today show, ABC TV's Insiders, Channel 10's Nine AM, Melbourne's 3AW, Adelaide's ABC, Perth's 6PR and Brisbane's 4BC. The key point to be noted here is that the influence is leveraged through all forms of media participation, ensuring that television media also reaches analytical bloggers.

In Australia, the use of 'The Worm' a trend line that feeds from a televised debate, which centres on main party candidates, has been a permanent feature (BBC News, 2007). In the debate, two main candidates (ruling and opposition) are put up for a debate. If the audience reaction is positive, it turns white and climbs up the screen. If the audience reaction is negative it turns red and burrows down. The interesting fact regarding the worm this time is that votes have perhaps not listened to the candidates or their full say, but have rather voted based on key words such as 'George Bush', 'Iraq War', 'Climate Change', 'Interest rates', etc. For example, the mention of the existing Prime Minister suggesting that we will align with George Bush policies of War has driven the worm down. The Andrew Bolt Blog (AB Blog, 2007) reports that the Worm was biased. The Channel Nine worm charted the changing opinions of 90 undecided voters for the November elections (BBC News, 2007). Critics accused John Howard of coercing the host, the National Press Club, to ban the use of the 'worm'. However, he has denied involvement in a decision to ban a graphic that tracks audience opinion during a live TV election debate. According to the worm, Mr. Rudd was the overall winner of the debate (BBC News, 2007).

The live worm feed which was cut; with Channel Nine and Ray Martin (host of the show) being unhappy has made its way into people's blogs. A cynical blog reported "*So the Liberal Party thinks that it has the right to censor what Australian voters think*" (FC, 2007). An apparent outcome of the Worm is that the existing prime minister and his party seem to be losing ground. However, opinion in Australia is divided on whether the worm really has any impact on voters (BBC News, 2007).

Blogocracy, a blog by Tim Dunlop, includes commentary and discussion, values and culture (Dunlop, 2007). The blog features the Australian Electoral Commission's final figures on 'who is enrolled to vote' as of 29th October. The Commissioner Ian Campbell said that 13,645,073 people were on the electoral roll, an increase of 623,843 from the 2004 election. However, the proportion of 18–24 year old young voters has not increased since 2004, remaining at 80%, compared to the 95% for the rest of the adult population.

> "Despite an advertising campaign to get them involved about 340,000 ages from 18–24 seem to say nothing. That's a bad result for young voters, and while some of the blame can be slated to the government's new laws that allowed the electoral rolls to be closed earlier than usual, they probably don't explain the entire shortfall. Still, it is more than passing strange that any government would seek to make it harder for people to enrol by closing registration early. Especially when they have committed themselves to a ridiculously long campaign."

The number of blogs seems to have increased as the campaigns grow near (News, 2007). More importantly, the comments being posted at these sites seem to involve citizens much more in an analysis and intellectually stimulating discussion leading up to the elections/mobilising voter participation. In a country where a significant number of

citizens live overseas for work, these sites do seem to re-engage citizens and counter apathy in a positive manner.

However, Walsh (2007) a business coach and social evangelist, criticises the use of Web 2.0 in the elections and the use of blogs in Australian elections. According to him

> "... there is the blogified but essentially propaganda-focused KevinO7 site, named for Opposition Labor Party Leader and Prime Ministerial contender Kevin Rudd and set up by the Labor Party."

Furthermore, he questions:

> "So is this to be a Web 2.0 election? Well, you'd reckon, wouldn't you, that the Aussie pollies would by now have picked up on what their American counterparts have figured out, that it's a smart idea to have a blog? At least for the duration of the campaign, if not on an ongoing basis (let's be practical, don't want too much transparency, do we?)."

And finally, he comments that

> "… although there may be many, or at least several, blogs being maintained by Federal politicians, then it seems they are keeping well below the Google and Technorati radar. Nor are any blogs showing up on the excellent set of Australian election tools set up by Google."

However, the participation on blogs are rising as the election draws near.

5.4 *YouTube*

The main highlight of the Australian elections are the videos that are featured on YouTube (GoogleAustralia, 2007). The Liberal Party of Australia, the Australian Labor Party, The Nationals, The Greens, Australian Democrats and Family First have been active with videos on YouTube. Furthermore, Google's Australia Votes Channel features all other candidates.

The Liberal Party of Australia, which is also running the current coalition government, features the prime ministerial candidate mainly in 23 videos, as on 29th October– four weeks to the Election Day (LPA, 2007). A few clips feature the interests of Australia such as emphasising on high growth, stability of the economy etc, but more videos driving down its major competition, the Australian Labor Party with its candidate, Kevin Rudd. For example, the highest number of videos featured Labor policy machinery breaking down, naming the party as trade unionist, and the fact that his contemporary cannot manage money. There is almost maligning of the competitor.

Conversely, the Australian Labor Party (ALP, 2007b) features 51 videos, showing more ardent use of the channel, focusing on issues that confront Australia such as: having a holistic vision for growth in Australia, high speed broadband penetration matching world standards and so forth. Of particular importance are videos that are aimed at stimulating citizens, which also seem to be the favourite such as "What does being an Australian mean to you?" and instilling responsibility "Excuses don't cut it, enrol to vote now". Although voting is mandatory, there are citizens who avoid the polls by finding excuses such as travel or pay fines rather than vote. The official numbers are not known for this percentage of voters, but in a small population, even a small percentage of these voters could potentially tip the votes.

The Nationals (2007) has portrayed a very nationalistic take with ten videos, while the Australian Greens (2007) feature 25 with focus on people's forum addressing a Green Australia, against Uranium exports and rising oil prices. The Australian Democrats (2007) features 28 videos with focus on indigenous issues, bringing in balance; while the Family First (2007) as the name suggests campaigns on support for families through 20 videos. There are many election videos similarly on the Australia Votes (2007) channel on Google, mainly mobilising people participation through titles such as "what is on your mind". This video urges citizens to speak their mind, what they would like to hear and discuss about in this elections. There are also promoted videos that are featured on this site, reflecting commercialisation and perhaps aiming at young voters.

It has to be noted that all of these sites that feature videos also have subscribers and facilitate their discussion on each video. Overall the Australian YouTube election scenario seem to offer a controlled or rather balanced approach, featuring all political parties, integrating television and internet media – through cross references, and thus enabling citizen participation. However, notably, and perhaps attributed to the lack of high speed broadband connections, the campaigning using Second Life is absent from Australian scenario.

The YouTube video on "You call that a Worm – this is a Worm" (Worm, 2007), features John Howard as the 'Prime Manipulator' and Kevin Rudd as the "leader of the inspiration". However, the comments of voters seem to think that such videos are rather lame. It is evident that Australian voters do not take too kindly to maligning and perhaps, the young voters as they remain uninvolved (see last section) tend to ignore the whole campaign as a stale joke. Perhaps in an attempt to further involve people are reflected by Sydney Morning Herald site. As the formal election debate (featuring the worm) is over, the Sydney Morning Herald has offered another channel to enable participation (SMH, 2007). Voters have a change to pose questions such as:

> "What are the issues that are important to you and your families? Are you worried about climate change, or are workplace issues more important to you? Do you want to ask something about our involvement in Iraq?"

These questions will be posed to politicians in a moderated session, where they will field questions submitted via the new YouTube Channel. The questions will be selected by a panel of Fairfax journalists and then put to the invited politicians at a live event to be webcast on smh.com.au. In addition, there is a feature that enables 'whacking a pollie' – with the election game and watching the Rappin Rudd vs. Hip Hop Howard video. Will it get the voters, especially the young voters involved more? The result is yet to be seen.

5.5   Participation: an overview

We found it necessary to take a closer view at the existing voter opinion, especially on the blogs and YouTube sites, to understand the participation of potential voters in Australia. The reason is that voting being mandatory can enable 'passive votes' reflected by the absence of young voter participation as the elections draw near (Dunlop, 2007). It becomes even more critical therefore, to analyse people participation and to see how much of the opinions are exhibited and moreover, are they relevant, ethical and honest.

Some comments from the major participation video "What is on your mind" excerpts are provided for this purpose as follows (What is on your Mind, 2007):

- Why did none of the people in the street bring up global warming? The biggest world-wide political issue of the day? Or about government corruption, seeing as how both the coalition and Labor are being supported by Gunns, which is why they're both approving the pulp mill in Tasmania.

- LMFAO, you want Australians to vote Howard, to waste more money on war and weapons. The government has already spent billions on outdated technology.

- The ALP has released its tax policy and to it's credit much needed help being a tax rebate for working families with children at school but does it have any help for pensioners or other people not paying tax with children at school?

- Keven Rudd seems so much more genuine and sincere in the long term future of this country and its future generation than the tricky and sly Libs, donot give "never never ever" Little Johnny Howard another chance of stuffing. This country up, vote for Kevin Rudd and the ALP.

- Most of the videos are based on either making fun of the party leaders or on the media attention drawn topics like climate change. Please think about the other issues like Defence. Australia's Defence force is growing and maturing due to the support by the Howard government which is very important … no not just for 'war' think of all the other thing our soldiers do … e.g., assistance during or after natural disaster. Think Australian vote what is working for Australia … vote Howard please.

- I value what Howard and his government have done during their term, and yes saying sorry now is better then not at all, at least he can admit that. I strongly believe to turn our back on our country now by voting Rudd is in itself unaustralian.

- If you're not pre-puberty I think you aught to be worried about your inability to express a logical and informed opinion.

- Hows Kevin going to know what to do in government if he can not copy the Libs anymore?

- How about who is going to stop the government getting so monumentally large? They have got our credit card, and are not afraid to use it!

- I want to know about drug legalisation and drug licensing

- I vote for the green girl! Me too, the Green Google girl is awesome.

It is evident that the voter opinion can be honest, but perhaps not ethical nor relevant. For example, if the Green Google Girl looks awesome, there are voters willing to vote for this candidate. However, it is yet to be seen if these will in turn become real votes – as Australian voter opinions had the history of not having any impact on the real elections. Therefore, we maintain that there is certainly rising participation and perhaps invovlement in real issues, enabled by YouTube.

The Prime Minister John Howard's video (JH, 2007) on YouTube features the following comments:

- Sorry John, with all due respect your plan for broadband is not enough. If you really understood the internet and the Web 2.0 revolution, you would understand that we need much more capacity 10mps or much more to cope with impending trends.
  You also need to do more to encourage the IT industry in Australia. I.e., innovation, entrepreneurship e.g., Ireland.

- Howard seems interested in using You Tube to get his message across to the electorate. However, he should also seek to use the internet to engage in two way communication so that we the voters, can get our message heard.

- You're only using YouTube because you're playing catchup to Labor.

- Yeah, right it's not a desperate attempt to seem 'in-touch' by a man stuck in 1950s white Australia. Howard is a lying, racist, war-mongering, greedy old man.

- When all the votes are counted the 2007 election will be recorded as the closest since federation. Your vote counts so be informed, ask questions and chase answers.
  All the best Australia.

- You don't have my vote. Workchoices and Iraq were and are bad decisions.
  The only reason you won is because of lame Labor leaders. Kevin Rudd is finally a good one! Vote4 Kevin in 07 (And call the election … stop wasting time).

- Everyone keeps saying that the economy is great but all I see is the $10,000 a year I've lost in wages due to CA's over the past ten years. A strong economy may be great to those who have money but now without money you can't get decent education or medical anymore.

- Oh Johnnie … YOUR THE BEST!! I'll be voting for you and your liberal team … ive heard enough from the Labor party, young Labor, and the unions alike … lies upon lies upon lies … the most worrying thing tho, is that people are actually believing them.

- Howard's a turd; Costello is a douche. And to the Liberal stooge below me, Howard's the inventor of **following the opinion poll** … **Enough is enough**.

Conversely, we glimpsed at the major opposition candidate Kevin Rudd, features in the video (KR, 2007) and excerpted following comments.

- Geat work Kevin. Keep it up! Remember not to let Howard's tactics get to you. Voters want to hear about policy and I believe you have a great plan. Here is hoping you get in. Hope to be drinking to you on election night!!

- Hi Kevin, I want to know what will the Labor government do for the gay community? We just want the same rights as the others. We know that Labor doesn't support Gay marriage. That is fine for me but at least give us the same rights as the heterosexual couples. Most of these already outlined in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report about "Discrimination against People in Same-Sex Relationships: Financial and Work-Related Entitlements and Benefits".

- Who stands in front of a window when filming themselves? It's like taking a photo 101. Anyway … I want to see the end of the Howard Government, so the ALP will get my preferences, but the Greens will get my vote – The Greens are the only party to have short term targets for green-house gas emissions, the only party who'll protect a worker's right to strike, and the only party who'll leave uranium in the ground.

- Surely it's the bandwidth between the ears that counts, what is done with the bandwidth, not the bandwidth per se, otherwise it might as well be fibre to the nose.

  You got any bright ideas how to extract value from that 4.7 billion dollars worth of bandwidth?

  Not wishing to appear rude, but bandwidth bandwidth bandwidth, blah blah blah, how's it gonna deliver us from our services exports deficit? You're a better man than he is Gunga Din.

- I agree that there is far too much emphasis there on that internet stuff. You need to undo more of terrible policies the liberals have added. You need to scrap VSU if you want the support of university students and watch exactly is labours stance on gay rights/marriage?

- We also need to expand the mobile network coverage and bring down the unneccesarily high charges on mobile data. NextG at full power can achieve 6 Mb/s – plenty fast enough just not affordable. Fast internet is only good for pirating music, playing games, and downloading porn. Then again it might not be SUCH a bad idea …

- Fast broadband would be great but lets face it, it not a major issue affecting the country. We'll get better broadband sooner or later regardless of who is PM. History tells us that Labor can't manage an economy or country. They talk about doing it to help 'working families' but at the end of the day, cause more damage to working families than good. Last time Labor were in govt – high unemployment, high inflation, 18% interest rates.

- It is all well and good wanting to get rid of work choices – it isn't for everyone – however why aren't you admitting publicly that you do not intend to get rid of it until around 2011/2012. This would mean we would have to vote you in twice for it to be removed. The same kind of situation keeps arising with all of your policies. State hospitals etc. Everything has a caveat whereby it won't happen until you're elected AND you've been in power for at least 1 term.

- God damn, worst lighting ever, whoever did the lighting needs to be fired or something, makes the video look terrible, open window in the background good lord. Anyways … that aside ill still probably vote for Rudd …

No doubt, there are honest opinions which may account for participation, perhaps not relevant or not ethical. Nevertheless, it is evident that voter participation in Australia is increasing. However, it is still too early to say if the anti apathy approaches will indeed result in better participation or turnover in the election outcome. We maintain that only a post election analysis would reveal further results.

6   Summary and outlook

It appears that French political campaigners were exceptionally advanced in the use of new technologies, and more creative, than their Australian counterparts. Headstar (2007) commented on the big turnouts at the presidential election, which in itself signals widespread engagement with and interest in political engagement.

> "France generally seems gripped by political debate, a live grappling between ideas of the right and left of the sort that has not happened here since New Labor intentionally blurred the boundaries between the main parties. This means both sides have had to pull out all the campaigning stops to try to secure an advantage … Or perhaps it is something cultural: as they showed with the Pompidou Centre in Paris, opened in the 1970s, some 30-odd years before our own Tate Modern, the French are always quick to embrace the avant garde into the mainstream." (Headstar, 2007)

Even at the time the backstage presidential campaigns were being written, US campaign strategists had travelled to France to witness new political rituals (Carvajal, 2007). Michael Murphy, the advisor to the Californian Governor, pronounced the techniques *one click ahead.* According to the co-founder of Netpolitique.net, a leading French online political communication site and Blog, both presidential candidates were uploading and testing videos generated from pure propaganda to footage of public speeches (Magniant, 2007). Videometre, a French website that tracks audiences, estimated more than 1500 new political videos posted in the critical stages of the presidential campaign, i.e., after 22nd April 2007 (Carvajal, 2007). According to Magniant

> "I think the Internet won this campaign … they clearly bet on the farm on videos and this was very much like the Dailymotion elections for us. They just flooded those sites day in and day out … What is interesting now is how they will continue to use these techniques to govern … they understand now that public opinion is now online." (Magniant, 2007)

In 2002, so extreme views claim that 50% of voters in France voted for probably corrupt and right candidates, not considered suitable in democratic governments (Thbz, 2002). The internet was then more or less unused territory; perhaps voter apathy was at its peak. By contrast, with the pervasiveness of the internet, leveraged by candidates, political parties and media – France has been able to stimulate a significant portion of voters – who were until then uninvolved. Did this stimulation involve those voters who tipped the balance to the right? Was Sarkozy and UMP activating those marginal voters required for their victory? Perhaps, it is relevant then to look at the typical profile of internet users in mature democracies.

As pointed out by Chen and Wellman (2004) the average internet user is affluent, with a higher income level, higher educated, male and young population. Students with free internet access, especially in higher education (universities) seem to use the internet more frequently. If we take the penetration of Broadband internet in France, which is high and the current left oriented education system, which enables free access to students – who are a large internet user group – it seems that the eligible voters who were activated by the Second Life and Blog based campaigns were mainly youth. Perhaps, Sarkozy did succeed in tipping the balance to the right number of voters required for his victory. However, as Button (2007) reported, he did not achieve the right wing tidal wave, because the UMP advance was perhaps checked by voter discontent with a planned value added tax to finance payroll tax cuts for business, along with tax

cuts for the wealthy. Nevertheless, Sarkozy had won over a significant number of left tipped voters, increasingly, the young working male population, who worked the 35 hour working week in France, by promising tax breaks (Euroactiv, 2007).

The question remains in the researcher's minds: If voters ware aware of the political direction their vote would take and critically assessed the policies behind the Blogs and Second Life interfaces? For example post the elections, when Sarokozy was elected, on 9th of May 2007, Reuters reported that the French police arrested more than 100 demonstrators and hundreds of students who went on strike at a Paris University (Bon, 2007). While the left wing protestors were mainly youth, who claimed Sarkozy being a Fascist, the significant event was the strike at the Paris University by students who staged the protest at Sarkozy's plans to reform France's higher education system and blocked access to an annex of the Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne University. Sarkozy had promised to make higher education reform a priority and wanted to introduce a law before the end of the summer, to hand universities power to hire and fire staff, set salaries and manage their assets. He had suggested that Universities should focus on more vocational courses, be encouraged to seek outside finances and given more scope to expel under-performing students. The student protesters were cautioning citizens that the envisaged program will run right over them (Bon, 2007). There was also some skepticism regarding discrimination of voters based on sight impairment and inability to finalise votes from older voters.

Did all this have an impact on the election results and perhaps, on society at large? We are at present not able to determine if the involvement of the internet has activated marginal voters in the middle classes that traditionally vote more conservatively or if the 'hip' nature of the campaign has motivated younger voters to vote or vote differently. Nor can we conclude that the youth in the satellite cities of Paris did not get involved in the campaign due to their lack of access to the internet. However, we can conclude that the involvement of Web 2.0 technologies has clearly increased the interest in the campaign and resulted in greater voter turnout at the ballot box (and e-voting systems). It was evident that France was ready for a change. Also internet penetration has increased significantly over recent years, especially with the older generation catching up. Therefore the question remains, how big was the impact of the internet, did it just to increase voter turnout or did it also favour a more conservative voter view.

Another interesting finding is that the active participation in the election process has not continued and has not translated into daily politics. While one could have been excused to think that France was moving towards a more direct democratic process during the election campaign, this is certainly not translated into daily politics.

In Australia, the lead up to the elections, especially, the integrated approach taken by television media, Google and YouTube – orchestrating them for the elections is apparent. There seem to be almost an equal content distribution among all parties that are contesting for the elections. However, the ALP is seemingly tipped towards issues that confront Australia and also enable better participation, when compared to the Liberal Party – which seems to attempt at keeping citizens 'listening' but not 'engaged' in the issues that concern them. The other major party that is seemingly involving citizens seem to be the Greens. The success of the anti apathy approaches and the mobilisation using internet and Web 2.0 is yet to be determined in the upcoming elections, as Australia gears up to vote – as this paper is being written. As compared to France, we are unable to make a judgement based on increasing voter turnout, as the voting is mandatory but it is

interesting to note that the internet is facilitating a more personality-based campaign and that it is facilitating ordinary people to get a wider audience.

The mobilisation and interest of voters is apparent. The current electoral system is seemingly engaging more citizens by making e-voting more equitable. Campaigning on the internet has stimulated both citizens in urban and rural areas as well as triggered the growth of broadband, which is becoming almost a necessity. The electoral system is seemingly enabling citizen participation, bringing in discussion through blogs, even if they are not resident in the country. However the level of interest and participation is nowhere near that of the campaign in France. Another interesting issue is that the internet itself has become part of the campaign as the two major parties fight over broadband and the appropriate platform.

Unfortunately we are not yet able to present an ex-post analysis. A post election scenario analysis will reveal the extent of involvement of citizens and the impact it has perhaps had on the Australian democracy. Also at this early stage in the campaign we can only speculate as to the reasons why Australian citizens appear not as actively involved in the campaign compared to their French counterparts. There could be many reasons, the relatively short election period, mandatory voting, cultural differences, economic stability, etc. Future research will reveal the demographic distribution of voters and if the internet played a role in persuading particular groups of voters. It is evident that the internet cannot guarantee political involvement but it provides scope to overcome apathy in develop democracies.

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