
The Role of Digital Communication Within Activist Political Parties

Abstract

The objective of this research project was to identify the perceived role of the Internet in achieving the communication objectives of the Australian Greens, an activist political party. A survey of party members was conducted, prioritising potential online communication activities. The survey found that while there was support for use of the Internet, it was primarily as a tool for increasing organisational effectiveness rather than as a public relations medium. More support was found for using the medium to engage in political activities than activist activities, suggesting that the organisation may be transitioning from a radical activist movement toward being a mainstream political party – a move anticipated by the behaviour of similar groups in Europe. Cluster analysis was used to identify a number of key groupings within the membership that provided a rationale for divergence within the findings, and suggested ways in which the organisation will need to integrate the views of numerous stakeholders to maximise the potential of the digital medium. It is hoped that this study will provide grounding for further research devising normative models for Internet use within activist political parties.

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Introduction

In April of this year, the NSW election saw a four percent swing to the Australian Greens, who secured eight percent of the total vote (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2003). Following the last federal election and several key by-elections, this was confirmation that the Greens have replaced the Democrats (who polled less than one percent) as Australia's primary minor party. Unlike the Democrats, the Greens have grown out of the protest movement. Many of their representatives and a significant proportion of their membership are social activists. This pattern of emerging 'activist political parties' is emerging around the world, in response to homogeneity of major parties (Cooke 2002; Friedman 2000).

Research has suggested that minor or fringe parties such as these will be able to make use of the Internet as a cost effective communication vehicle. Research has also pointed to the Internet as a powerful tool for social activism.

This project investigates how activist parties such as the Australian Greens will hybridise their activist and political agendas; and explores what role the Internet will play in communicating those agendas.

The political sphere has been one of the most fertile areas for predictions of dramatic social change brought about by arrival of the Internet.

Analysts have proposed a rebirth of civic engagement, the collapse of the party political system, and the emergence of direct representation (Levin 2002; Norris 2003). While such sweeping changes have failed to emerge, many political parties have begun to make strategic use of the Internet, particularly during electoral campaigns (Gibson, Ward and Lusoli 2003).

The Internet has also had significant impact for social movements. From environmental campaigners to Mexican freedom fighters, many activist groups have used the medium either as an organizational tool, or a venue for action (Meikle 2002; McCaughey and Ayers 2003).

Over the past ten years, the Internet has also been one of the factors facilitating the integration of economies that has underpinned 'globalisation' (Friedman 2000, pp. 61-73). As a consequence of globalisation, the majority of Western countries have experienced political 'shrinkage', seeing major political parties align more and more closely with one another on a broad range of policy issues (Friedman 2000, pp. 104-109). This has left an ideological vacuum, which minor and fringe parties struggle to fill.

Many of these parties have grown from activist roots as 'social movements', and are undergoing a transition as they attempt to take on the structure and functions of political party (Rootes 2002). A global

example of this has been the rise of the Greens as a political force in a number of countries, including Germany, Britain, New Zealand, as well as Australia.

Given the dichotomy between the Greens as a social movement and as a political party, this research project takes a first tentative step in exploring the communication objectives of such a hybrid organization.

For activist political parties like the Australian Greens, the role of the Internet is still unclear. While various analysts have predicted that the medium can play an important part in achieving communication objectives for fringe and minor parties, little research has suggested how the political and activist agendas of such organisations can be integrated and deployed online to realise this potential.

This project charts the integration and prioritisation of these agendas and the intended role of the digital medium within the Australian Greens, as an example of an activist political party.

Effectiveness of the Internet as a Communication Medium

The goal of communication management professionals within organisations such as the Greens is to make the most effective use of a range of available media – including the Internet. Measuring and

delivering effective mediated communication is a complex process, made more so by the multifaceted nature of digital media.

In outlining the normative role of communication within an organisation, Grunig considers two key areas; assisting in the achievement of organisational objectives, and contributing to organisational effectiveness (1992, pp. 2,3). The outcomes achieved by a given communication program may include 'awareness, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and behaviour of those affected by the program' (Dozier and Ehling 2002, p. 160). Using the Internet effectively requires organisations to determine their desired outcomes, and the optimal role for the medium in achieving these.

Communication managers must identify these objectives, prioritise them across available media, and deploy activities within these media to contribute to these objectives. Having done so, they must then assess the effectiveness of their communication by measuring performance on metrics that are based on the objectives identified.

Within a membership-based organisation such as a political party or social movement, the identification and prioritisation of objectives may be problematic due to the participatory nature of the organisation. In these instances, communication managers must often strive to acknowledge the

diversity of opinions between various stakeholder groups that make up the organisation.

It is important in addition to working towards communication objectives for communication managers to realise the role that communication programs can play in contributing to organisational effectiveness, as Grunig suggested. The Internet is a particularly powerful example of a medium that can be deployed to great effect internally as well as externally. When used as an internal communication medium, it can strengthen an organisation by facilitating information sharing and relationship building between internal stakeholders. (Wellman et al. 1996)

It is outside the scope of this project to operationalise effectiveness or performance metrics for various online strategies and tactics. This research will focus on the perceived importance of these strategies and tactics within the organisation. Further research may then investigate whether these strategies and tactics can be implemented effectively, and whether they indeed contribute toward the achievement of the objectives of the organisation.

Research Questions

In exploring the perceived role for the Internet within the Australian Greens, four research questions have been identified. These will be

addressed in this paper to provide an understanding of the value that stakeholders within the organisation place on the medium, and the ways in which they believe it should be employed.

RQ1 : How important is the Internet (ie. websites and email) as a communication channel, in the perception of the Greens?

RQ2 : What organisational objectives do the Greens seek to achieve through use of this channel?

RQ3 : What communication activities do the Greens seek to deploy in achieving these objectives (both within the organisational website and external to it)?

RQ4 : Does prioritisation of the medium, objectives, and activities vary between different stakeholder groups within the organisation?

Literature Review

One of the reasons for the paucity of research in this area is that the topic lies at the intersection of numerous more comprehensively studied areas. The various fields of study that inform this project are shown in Figure 1, which situates this research within those fields.

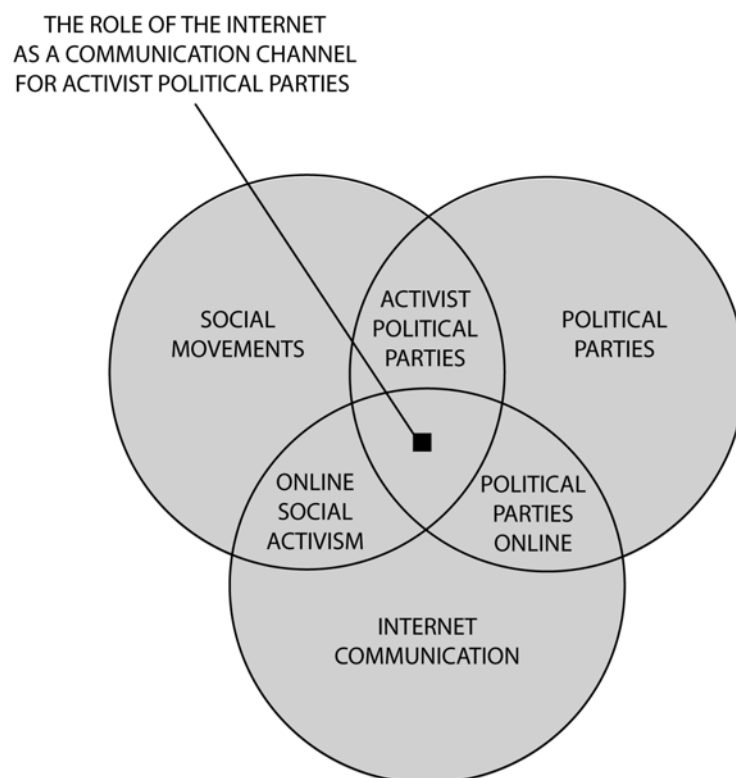


Figure 1. Fields of Related Study

Internet Communication

With each significant technological development in communication comes social change (McLuhan 1964). Reviewing how the field of mass communication was effected by the introduction of television, it is sobering to realise how little communication research has been done on digital technology, leaving the communication field 'lag[ging] woefully behind much of the internet community' (Holtz 1998, p. 3). Considerably before the advent of digital media, Grunig (1976, cited in Johnson 1997, p. 217) warned that 'when organisations become constrained by their technology and knowledge, they also fail to recognize problems and become closed'.

The array of digital media generally grouped under the broad heading of 'internet communication' are essentially a fractured set of channels, constantly developing and expanding due to technological change. This definition encompasses not only web sites and email, but also other tools such as discussion forums, online messaging, file exchange, and short message service (SMS).

Much has been written in management literature on the impact that digital technologies have had on the internal and external communications of organisations. Levine at al. (2000, p. xix) suggest that 'the connectedness of the Web is transforming what's inside and outside

[organisations] – your market and your employees’. Newland and White (2000, p. 31) agree that this digital channel is ‘becoming a significant communications tool for businesses and organisations’. Numerous scholars have even identified specific attributes of the technology, such as Kent and Taylor (1998, p. 323) who propose that ‘the Internet may be one of the only ways to reach traditionally isolated publics.’

Almost all studies of this impact are accompanied by the observation that opportunities are not being fully realised. Holtz suggests that even organisations at the forefront of change ‘barely scratch the surface of the Net’s potential’ (1999, n.p.). Kent and Taylor (1998, p. 322) criticise the lack of both corporate and academic activity, while Levine et al. (2000) repeatedly attack companies for their short-sightedness in leveraging this technology to develop relationships with their publics.

When such studies are written from a communication management perspective, blame for this myopia is laid at the feet of communication scholars and practitioners. Holtz scathingly comments that it ‘would be charitable to characterize the use of the Internet for public relations as in its infancy’ (1998, p. 3) and that ‘far too much of the official organizational material that finds its way onto the World Wide Web and other online networks is produced by non-communicators who happen to have a flair for developing Web sites’ (1999, n.p.).

One of the challenges in understanding and deploying digital media arises from the complexity of the technology itself. Horrocks suggests that 'given the amorphous and chameleon nature of [digital] media, there may be a case for jettisoning the term "media" altogether when considering the "matrix" that includes the Web and the Internet' (2000, p. 55).

Because of the manifold nature of the space, it cannot be applied as consistently across organisations as can other simpler communication channels.

Understanding the way in which the Internet can facilitate communication within an organisation requires a deeper appreciation of the nature of the organisation itself. For this reason, reviewing the nature and function of both political parties and social activist groups is a necessary step in identifying the role of the Internet within the Australian Greens.

Activist Political Parties and the Rise of the Greens

In charting the emergence of the Greens as a political force, Bob Brown, the leader of the Australian Greens draws parallels with the rise of Labor and Social Democrat parties in the late nineteenth century (Brown and Singer 1996, p. 63). Brown believes that in this instance, it is the Greens that are filling a 'vacuum in the politics of social justice and equal

opportunity' (p. 64). Ironically, in doing so, they seek to replace a Labor Party that Brown feels has 'lost its aspirations' (p. 64).

As a global political force drawing on a broad base of environmental and social justice movements, the Greens established their first representative seat in the Swiss parliament in 1979. Seats in German and Finnish parliaments followed in 1983, and by the end of the 1980s Green parties had representation in almost every European country. (Brown and Singer 1996, pp. 65-66)

In reviewing this history, Rootes (2002, p. 78) describes the motivation for the movement as a combination of post-materialist and fundamentally materialist concerns for the environment. Importantly, he identifies that two conditions must be met in order for this type of movement to establish political power – a level of environmental awareness, and the political competition promoted by a proportional representation model.

In Australia, the Green movement grew from the Tasmanian environmental lobby, which had been active in protests over Lake Pedder and the Franklin. Following the example of the Australian Democrats, the Greens sought to establish a political presence through the proportional representation structure in the state senates. Early success in Tasmania

was followed by a considerable hiatus through the 1980s, until the election of Andrea Sharam in Victoria and Ian Cohen in NSW.

Having been led politically by Bob Brown, an established environmental activist, the Greens had now added 'community activist' (Brown and Singer 1996, p. 88) Sharam, and veteran activist Cohen, who upon election 'was immediately in action helping organise protests in Polynesia' (p. 88). From their origin as a party, political representatives of the Greens have been drawn directly from the activist roots of the movement.

While this was also true of the German Greens initially, many commentators have seen the normalisation of their agenda as evidence that entry into political process will 'inevitably involve compromises and ... constrain their ability to act as critics' (Rootes 2002, p. 80). The German Greens movement, now in a governing coalition with the social democratic party have effectively alienated the protest movement from which they originated (p. 81). Rootes contends that 'the Greens have outlived the particular social movement constituencies out of which they grew ... [they are] no longer (if ever they were) the "party of all the social movements".' (p. 82)

While Rootes feels that this has provided a positive model for coalition formation, he proposes that to stem the erosion of support that they have

experienced since their rise to power, the German Greens must reassert their 'special competence with respect to the environment' (Rootes 2002, p. 82).

The challenging transition from social movement to political party is further addressed by Cooke (2002), in his examination of both the German Greens and the Brazilian Workers' Party. These 'movement parties', as he terms them, have faced similar issues in their development, though they have addressed them in different ways. Cooke contends that movement parties arise in periods of mass activism, and struggle to shift to electoral participation as these activist movements peak (p. 27). He sees the key attributes of this type of party being a greater striving toward 'internal democracy in order to encourage grassroots mobilization', complemented by a focus on 'social-movement organizing, activism and educational work' (p. 27). This is in contrast to Rootes (2002), who feels that Green parties must jettison this activist component in order to function as effective political bodies.

Cooke's narrative sees the Greens as hampered by the decline in activism and mass protest, forcing them to adopt a more reformist agenda (Cooke 2002, p. 29). He even suggests that the resources required to participate in the political process have limited the Greens' ability to advocate and

mobilise social activism, and that this has been partly responsible for its decline (p. 31).

Reviewing the Australian Greens purpose statements (The Australian Greens 2003), it is unclear as to what degree their activist agenda has been marginalised as part of their entry into the political process. Their goals include providing the Green political movement with 'a national identity and organisational coherence'; and a continuing 'process of education'. This education is broadly defined to range from public relations activities to 'pro-active exchange of information', suggesting that while not explicitly discussed, an activist agenda is not out proscribed within the current structure.

In her comprehensive review of the history and status of the Australian Greens, Lohrey (2002) constructs a compelling case suggesting that the rise of the Greens over the past decade, and their replacement of the Democrats as Australia's principle 'minor party' is not an aberration, and will continue.

As a result of analysing the support base for the Greens, Lohrey argues that the party is a legitimate ongoing political force. If this is indeed the case, it remains to be seen how they face the challenge of reconciling their activist past with their political future. They must determine whether

the two can coexist, or whether they must abandon their more radical agenda to establish ongoing political relevance.

Political Parties Online

An excellent chronicle of the hype surrounding 'online politics' is provided by Levin (2003). He catalogues the utopian predictions of the last decade, from 'direct democracy' and 'the rise of a more informed and active populace' to revitalisation of the 'politically disaffected' and even 'the end of the two party system' (pp. 80-81).

The beginnings of such predictions can be seen as early as McLuhan, who suggested that 'electronic technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement' (McLuhan and Fiore 1967, p. 8). He predicted that a 'new form of "politics" is emerging... Participation via television in Freedom Marches, in war, revolution, pollution, and other events is changing everything.' (p. 22) The commentary in the early nineties from futurists such as Rheingold (1994) and Negroponte (1995) was eerily similar.

Yet despite all the discussion, the political landscape has remained remarkably unaffected by the arrival of the Internet. So much so that some researchers have declared 'politics as usual' (Margolis and Resnick 2000, cited in Norris 2003, p. 23). Levin suggests that 'rather than bring

massive change, information technology is likely to further recent trends in political life' (2003, p. 84). He explains this by reframing the challenge of encouraging civic engagement not as an informational problem, but a motivational one. The Internet provides us access to a broad range of new political opportunities and information, but does not alter existing forces such as apathy and powerful special interests.

While no major changes have occurred, over the past ten years existing political parties have begun to use the Internet. Tentatively at first, and not always with strategic direction, but this is beginning to change. A number of researchers have focussed on the maturation of web sites development by these political parties. For a number of years, Gibson and Ward in particular have examined the nature of party websites (Ward and Gibson 2001; Gibson, Ward and Lusoli 2003) and proposed a methodological framework to study their function and effectiveness (Gibson and Ward 2000; Gibson and Ward 2002). In recent years, they have also broadened their focus to online member involvement through party websites (Ward, Lusoli and Gibson 2003).

Other researchers also have examined the various ways in which different parties use the Internet (Römelle 2003), and the degree to which the Internet facilitates the goals of minor and fringe parties (Margolis, Resnick and Wolfe 1999; Norris 2003).

Research in the area has primarily concerned itself with the nature, function and role of party websites – occasionally touching on the role of email as a channel for communication with members. Further, the majority of study has been concentrated in the United States, specifically examining the websites of senatorial and presidential campaigns.

The literature identifies a wide range of functions that parties can engage in using the Internet – both at a strategic and a tactical level. In an early paper, Gibson and Ward list the potential online goals of a political party as information provision, campaigning, resource generation, networking and organisational strengthening, and promoting participation (2000, p. 305). These (and other) strategic goals have then been operationalised into tactical functions ranging from providing party structure information and links to other sites (Ward, Lusoli and Gibson 2003, p. 36) to online membership renewal and online election of party officials (p. 37).

As mentioned above, a recurring theme in many analyses has been the potential of the Internet as a tool for fringe and minor parties. This has been attributed to a range of qualities of the medium, including its 'wide reach, high volume, and relatively low cost, along with its lack of external editors' (Gibson and Ward 2000, p. 302). This last point is seen as key, distinguishing the Internet from other media because 'there is no central

authority regulating, allocating and limiting political websites' (Norris 2003, p. 26).

In his comments on 'maverick political parties' (Meikle 2002, p. 29), Meikle also suggests a powerful role for the Internet in minor parties. Criticising major parties for producing fundraising-focused websites that lacked any real interactivity (pp. 42-47), he suggests that One Nation has been one of the only political parties in Australia to capitalise on the potential of the Internet as a public relations vehicle, an organisational tool, and a venue for policy discussion (pp. 51-57).

Unfortunately, few commentators address in any depth the way in which minor and fringe parties generate visits to their websites once they have been constructed. Levin (2002) highlights this problem, reminding us that the Internet 'will not diminish the need to reach voters who do not wish to be reached. Communicating with such voters is expensive, and the proliferation of sources of information will make this task not less expensive, but more so' (p. 85). This critique is supported by recent work that proposes the 'normalization' of the medium, whereby the established offline political landscape is being reconstructed online.

In this environment of 'business as usual', minor and fringe parties are still faced with a daunting challenge. Indeed, they may succeed in

developing highly functional sites, with extensive links (Gibson and Ward 2002, p. 104), but they must still find ways to engage the broader public with their agenda. This challenge is not unique to minor parties. It is one faced consistently by social movements – groups who do not have the resources to access mainstream media and must find alternate means for expression and engagement.

Online Social Activism

Tarrow (1998) provides a simple definition for social movements, describing them as ‘collective challenges, based on common purposes and solid solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities’ (p. 4). Heath suggests that the success of an activist group ‘depends in a large part on their ability to access and use power resources such as the number of followers, favourable media coverage, public support, money, and political champions’ (1997, cited in Coombs 1998, p. 291). Proponents of online activism believe that with these goals can be greatly facilitated through use of the digital medium.

Since the early nineties, writers such as Rheingold (1994) have seen the decentralised nature of the Internet as a key indicator of its role in facilitating social change. Similarly to minor political parties, social movements which cannot access mainstream media channels can still develop a website and use it to convey their message.

Comprehensive accounts of the online activity of a broad range of social movements are provided by Meikle (2002) and by McCaughey and Ayers (2003). Meikle describes the role that the Internet played in social actions ranging from the Seattle WTO protests (pp. 7-8) to the 'McLibel' court case (pp. 75-81). McCaughey and Ayers have compiled a collection of similar case studies, as well as providing a number of theoretical perspectives on online activism.

Discussion in social movement literature regarding the Internet can be divided into two streams. The first sees the Internet as a tool for social movements, facilitating their organisational processes. The other stream frames the Internet as a venue for social action.

A proponent of the first approach is Diani (2000), who views the Internet as a communication channel facilitating exchange between members of a groups, strengthening the group identity as well as directly facilitating the organisation of offline activism. In a similar way, Taylor, Kent and White (2001) reviewed a wide range of activist sites to examine the way that social movements were building relationships online – generally to facilitate offline activity. As an interesting counterpoint to research focussing on liberal democratic and radical leftist movements, Chroust (2000) demonstrated the universality of Internet usage by observing the

tactics used by the Taliban (primarily for internal communication) and a number of neo-nazi groups (for organisation, mobilisation and propaganda).

The vision of the more fundamental online activists in the second stream was summed up by Critical Art Ensemble in their treatise 'Electronic Civil Disobedience':

Street activism has become an anachronism now that there is no longer any geographical or physical center of economic or political power. ... The strategy and tactics of ECD [electronic civil disobedience] should not be a mystery to any activists. ... Blocking information conduits is analogous to blocking physical locations; however, electronic blockage can cause financial stress that physical blockage cannot, and it can be used beyond the local level. (Critical Art Ensemble 1995, pp. 3, 7)

This group and others analyse the potential of the Internet as a venue for social action. In his treatise on culture jamming, Lasn (2000) coined the term 'cyberjamming', suggesting that 'the Internet is one of the most potent meme-replicating mediums ever invented' (p. 132). Lasn proposed tactics including online petitions, virtual sit-ins and building 'gripe sites' as techniques being employed by social activists in the digital space.

A range of fringe groups such as Critical Art Ensemble and Electronic Disturbance Theatre have developed a specialisation in this area, reinventing the social movement model in a cell based structure, and deploying 'new tactics and strategies of civil disobedience' online (Critical Art Ensemble 1994, p. 142). It is important to note, however, that more mainstream movements have also used the Internet as a protest venue. A number of large global movements organisations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International have deployed online petitions, online membership, and so on. Smaller, single-issue groups may also find the Internet ideal for group formation, media access and mobilisation, as Coombs (1998) suggests, in his examination of the medium as a tool for addressing corporate social irresponsibility.

Online social activism is a broad term used to encapsulate a range of strategies and tactics, the common factor being that they advance the causes of a social movement through digital means. Whether it be through direct action against the websites of hegemonic groups, through generating mainstream media coverage, or simply through online organisational management, there are a multitude of ways in which the power of the Internet can be leveraged by activist organisations.

Method

A survey methodology was used to identify attitudes toward the medium, and opinions regarding a wide range of potential objectives and activities. As the Australian Greens is an organisation made up of geographically dispersed members, many of whom have a minimal time commitment to the organisation, a self-completion survey was determined to be most appropriate. Such a survey could be distributed to a large number of potential participants, to be completed and returned at their leisure.

The cooperation of the organisation was requested through one of the members responsible for communication activity. Generous access to the membership and existing approaches to Internet communication was provided. In exchange, a commitment was made to deliver research data, results and analysis back to the organisation to provide a framework for future improvement of Internet communication activities.

Participants

The survey aimed to collect data from a diverse range of Greens supporters. As a member organisation, it was important to identify and assess the views of various types of stakeholders – ranging from supportive non-members through to paid employees and members engaged in policy development and public relations. While the scope of the project did not allow sufficient rigour to ensure proportional

representation, the aim was to acknowledge the diversity of opinions within the organisation.

Instrument

A short survey was developed to capture data. The full text of the survey items is provided in Appendix C. An initial set of fifteen questions categorised the nature of each participant's relationship with the organisation (eg. "I am active in my local Greens group"). Following this, participants were asked to rate the importance of fifteen communication media with reference to the Greens. A five point Likert scale was used to measure perceived importance of media, following Gibson and Ward (2002).

The remainder of the survey required participants to prioritise a comprehensive range of goals and activities that the Greens could pursue online. These items were compiled drawing on literature both from online politics (Gibson and Ward 2000; Norris 2003; Romelle 2003; Ward and Gibson 2000; Ward, Lusoli and Gibson 2003) and online activism (Coombs 1998; Critical Art Ensemble 1995; Lasn 2000; Meikle 2002; NetAction 2002; Taylor, Kent and White 2001). A full list of items identified within these sources is provided in Appendix A. Overlapping items were then integrated, and each was classified as a communication

goal or activity. All items were reworded as succinct assertion statements for the purposes of the survey.

Attitudes to a range of seventeen possible communication goals were measured using an agreement scale (again following Gibson and Ward 2002). A similar scale was then used to assess attitude to forty-eight possible activities the Greens could engage in online. For clarity, these activities were divided into those that would be achieved through the Greens website (thirty items) and those that could be external to the website (eighteen items). Within these sections, item order was randomised.

At the conclusion of the survey, participants were invited to provide any additional comments they had on the topic. Further, they were given the opportunity to provide contact details and permission for a follow-up interview.

Procedure

At the request of the organisation, the survey was deployed online. A series of web pages were constructed to capture participant responses and to ensure that the survey was completed correctly. A link was also provided to a 'printable' version that participants could complete offline and submit by mail, if they preferred.

The online survey dialogue clearly communicated the nature and purpose of the survey, and provided contact details for any enquiries. Logos were used to indicate the project's association with the University of Technology, Sydney, and with the Australian Greens. The web address of the survey was placed on the homepage of the Greens 'members' site, accompanied by a short introductory paragraph, provided in Appendix G. Email coordinators within the Greens in each state were also provided this information for inclusion in regular email newsletters to supporters. Finally, contacts within the organisation also forwarded the details directly to various key stakeholders to ensure a cross-section of views.

The online survey was active for four weeks, from May 4 through June 1, 2003. Responses entered during this time were collected in data files that could then be imported directly into *Microsoft Excel 2000* and *SPSS 7.5 for Windows* for analysis.

Clearly, the use of a digital channel to distribute the survey in this way necessarily skewed the data by restricting participation to those supporters who are comfortable with Internet use. While, for this reason, the analysis does not provide a balanced view of the perceived importance of the Internet across the organisation as a whole, it ensures that contributors have at least a basic understanding of the medium.

Further, the preference by the organisation to manage the process in this way suggests that in large part, email is the default mechanism for much of the communication within the Greens. This was later supported by numerous participant comments to this effect.

Coding and Analysis

Data was coded numerically in order to analyse results using statistical tools. Table 1 shows the coding schemes for the three question types.

"Participant Classification" Items	
No	0
Yes	1

"Importance" Ratings	
Most Important	1
Very Important	2
Quite Important	3
Somewhat Important	4
Of No Importance	5

"Agreement" Ratings	
Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Not Sure	3
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

Table 1. Coding Regime

Coded data was imported into *SPSS 7.5 for Windows*, where a K-Means Cluster Analysis was performed. The output of the cluster analysis is provided in Appendix E. The resulting clusters were then used to categorise participants into five groups as described below. The cluster

groupings were added to the collected data, which was then imported into *Microsoft Excel 2000*, where descriptive statistical analysis and charting were performed.

Interviews

Following preliminary analysis, several areas of interest were identified for further examination by qualitative means. For each of these areas, a given set of responses was defined as characteristic of the issue. Using this template, one or more participants who had provided contact details were identified as typifying the response set from which the question had arisen. A total of ten participants were then emailed one or more open-ended questions to give further contextual data addressing the outstanding questions. The follow up questions are compiled in Appendix F.

This feedback was combined with comments entered at the conclusion of the survey process, and common themes were isolated. Quotes representative of these themes were then selected for inclusion in the discussion, to give context to the quantitative data.

Results

During the four weeks, 63 participants completed the survey. All responses were via the online survey, no responses were received by printed hard copy. Of the participants, 45 provided contact details and permission for a follow-up interview. Comments were also provided by 25 of the participants.

Responses to the first fifteen items were used to categorise respondents according to their relationship to the organisation. The breakdown of responses for the entire sample is shown in Figure 2.

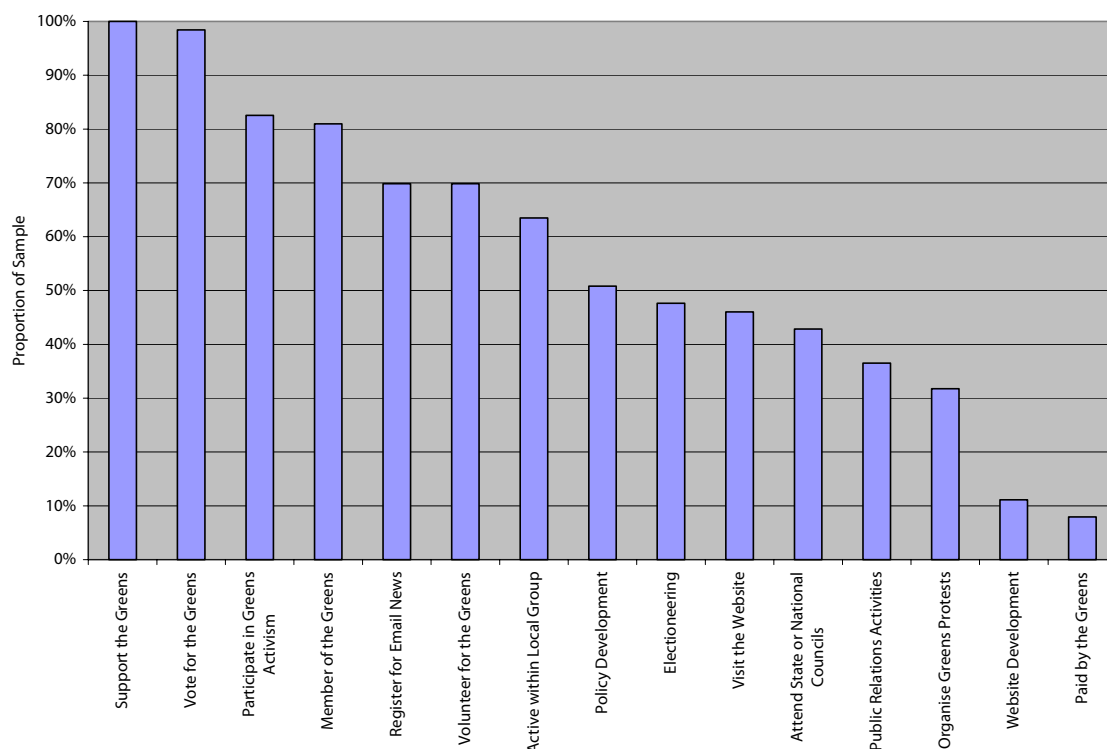


Figure 2. Affiliation with Greens

As anticipated, all participants supported the Greens almost all voted for the Greens (0.98). Most were paid members (0.82), had been involved in activism organised by the Greens (0.82), had volunteered at some time (0.71), and had signed up to receive email communication from the organisation (0.71). The majority also felt that they were active within their local Greens group (0.65).

Approximately half the sample visited the website regularly (0.47), had been involved in policy development (0.52) or election campaigns (0.48), and attended state or national party councils (0.44). There was also considerable response from members who had played a role in public relations for the organisation (0.37) or in organising protests and activism (0.32). A small number of respondents were paid by the Greens (0.07), and a similar number played a role in the development or management of the website and email activities of the organisation (0.11).

Classifying Participants

In order to identify important groupings within the participants, a cluster analysis was performed on this data. Responses were grouped into five clusters using a K-Means cluster analysis. Clustering was based on the fifteen classification variables shown in Figure 2. Figure 3 shows the proportional sizes of each cluster, and the description assigned to each group. Full details of the cluster analysis are provided in Appendix E.

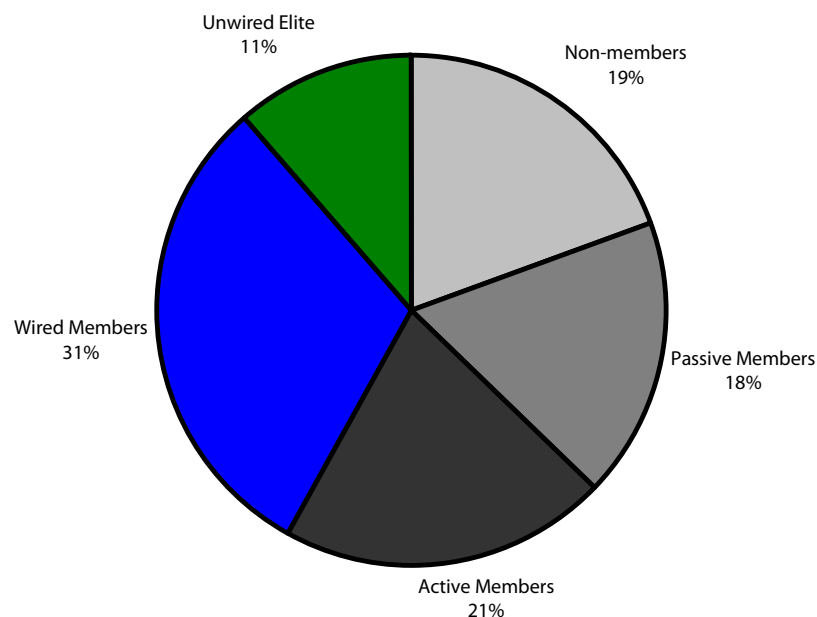


Figure 3. Proportional Sizes of Clusters

Grouped into five clusters, the participants can be categorised on the basis of likelihood for each item. In describing the core attributes of each cluster, they have been given the titles 'Non-members' (12 participants are part of this cluster), 'Wired Members' (19 participants), 'Passive Members' (11 participants), 'Active Members' (13 participants), and 'Unwired Elite' (7 participants).

The location of each cluster on each of the fifteen classification items is shown in Figure 4, allowing characterisation of each group. The descriptions below provide an overview of the collective nature of each cluster grouping.

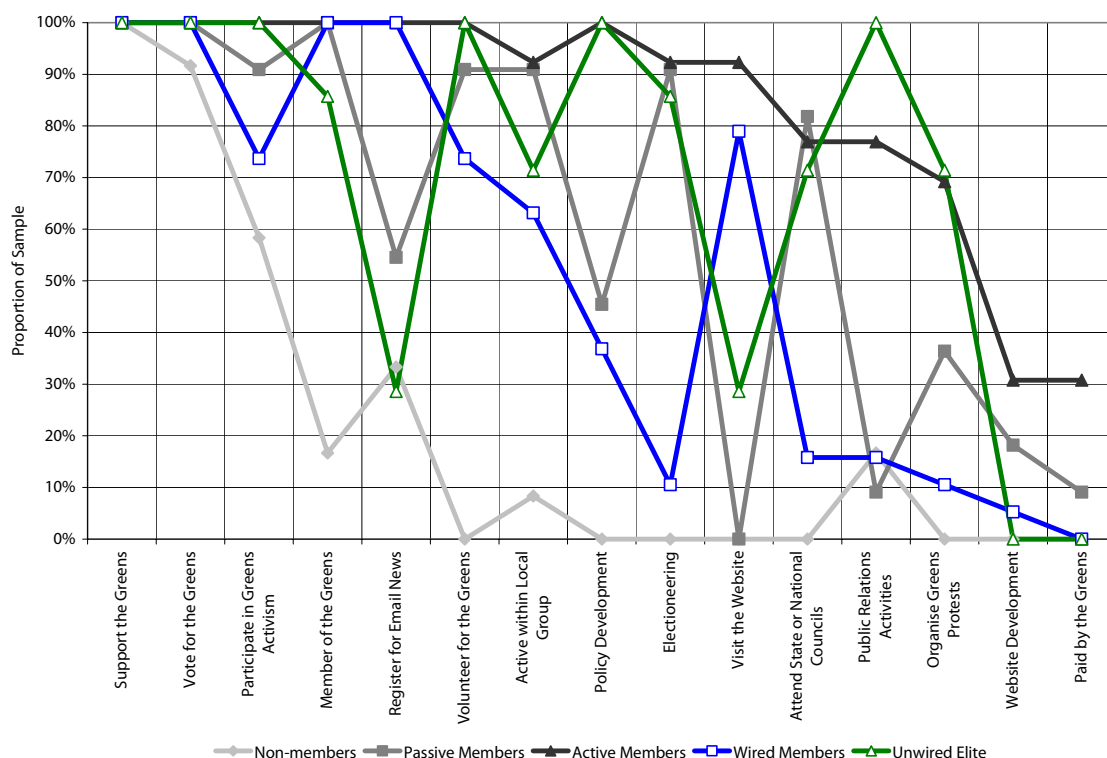


Figure 4. Affiliation with the Greens by Cluster

Non-members

While supporting and voting for the Greens, this group is very unlikely to be members of the party (0.17). They do not volunteer, participate in policy development, or assist with electioneering. They do not attend state and national councils, and most are not active within their local group (0.08). While they may attend protests, they will not organise them. They do not visit the website regularly, nor are they likely to receive email newsletters from the Greens (0.33).

Passive Members

This group is composed of members who are likely to be volunteers (0.91), and active within their local group (0.91). While some are involved in policy (0.46), almost all assist during elections (0.91). Many have also attended councils (0.82). None visit the Greens website regularly, while approximately half receive regular newsletters (0.55).

Active Members

The participants falling into this group are members who are involved in a wide range of Greens activity. This includes protesting (1.00), providing volunteer services (1.00), being active locally (0.92), working on policy (1.00), electioneering (0.92), attending councils (0.77), managing public relations activities (0.77) and organising activism (0.70). Further, they receive newsletters by email (1.00), and many visit the website regularly (0.92).

Wired Members

While the participants in this group play a less active role in the party, they are receive email newsletters (1.00) and much more likely to visit the site regularly (0.79) than passive members. Despite this digital activity, they are unlikely to be involved in electioneering (0.11), or attend councils (0.16).

Unwired Elite

This smaller group of participants share many of the characteristics of the proactive members. While somewhat less active locally (0.71), they are deeply involved in policy (1.00), electioneering (0.86), and public relations activity (1.00). This level of involvement suggests that these are key members of the party, active in a range of important capacities. The other important feature of this group is that few receive email newsletters (0.29) or visit the website (0.29).

Measures of Attitude

Responses to attitude questions were coded numerically, allowing mean attitudes to be calculated across the sample as a whole, and within cluster groupings. Only descriptive statistical analysis was performed, as the limited sample size and large number of variables measured prohibited effective use of inferential statistical tools.

On media items, a higher score indicates a higher mean level of perceived importance for the given media channel. Priority ranges from no importance (coded as 1) through to primary importance (coded as 5).

On all other items, a higher score indicated a higher mean level of agreement. Agreement shown ranges from strong disagreement (coded as 1) through to strong agreement (coded as 5).

Media

Results for prioritisation of media across the whole sample is shown below in Figure 5. Broadcast news media (television, newspapers and radio) was rated more important than one-to-one communication (direct mail and telephone contact). Politically, both local meetings and parliamentary debate were rated highly, while state and national councils were seen as less important. Email and the Greens website fell toward the middle of the range of media.

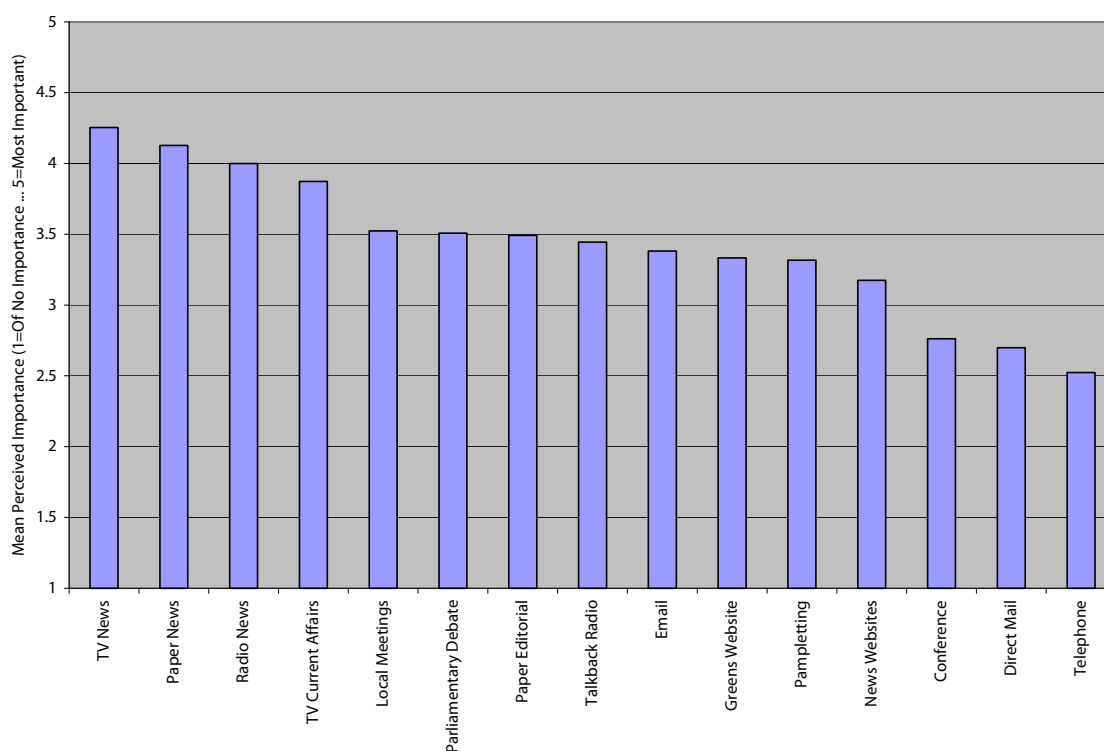


Figure 5. Importance of Media Channels

In comparing these results to the findings of Gibson and Ward (2002), a number of important differences can be seen. This comparison is shown

in Figure 6. Gibson and Ward found that higher importance was placed on digital and one-to-one communication, while broadcast media were seen as less important.

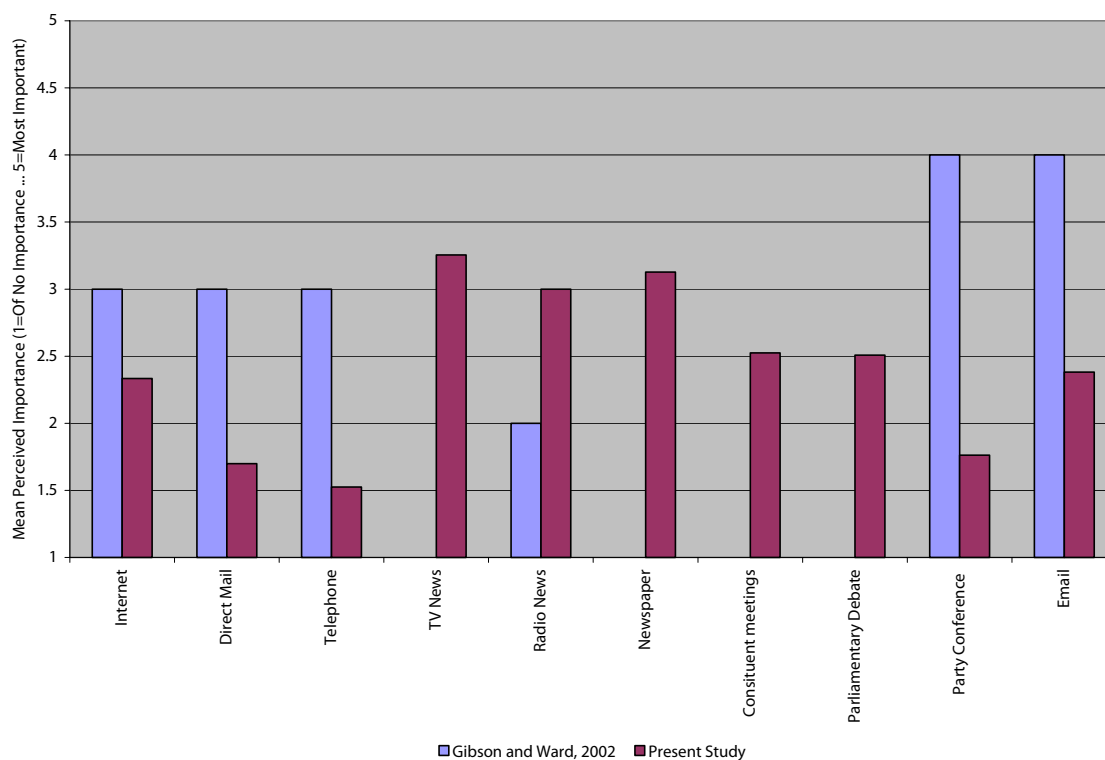


Figure 6. Importance of Media Channels compared to Gibson and Ward

Figure 7 shows the importance of media by cluster groupings. While there is some consistency across groups, there is considerable divergence in a number of the areas. Most obviously, the low rating of direct mail and telephone is due to the Non-members (and the Wired Members to a lesser degree), with other groups rating these one-to-one media much higher.

Additionally, the Unwired Elite saw both the political channels and the website as less important than other participants, but rated email highly. Passive Members felt that local meetings were an important channel.

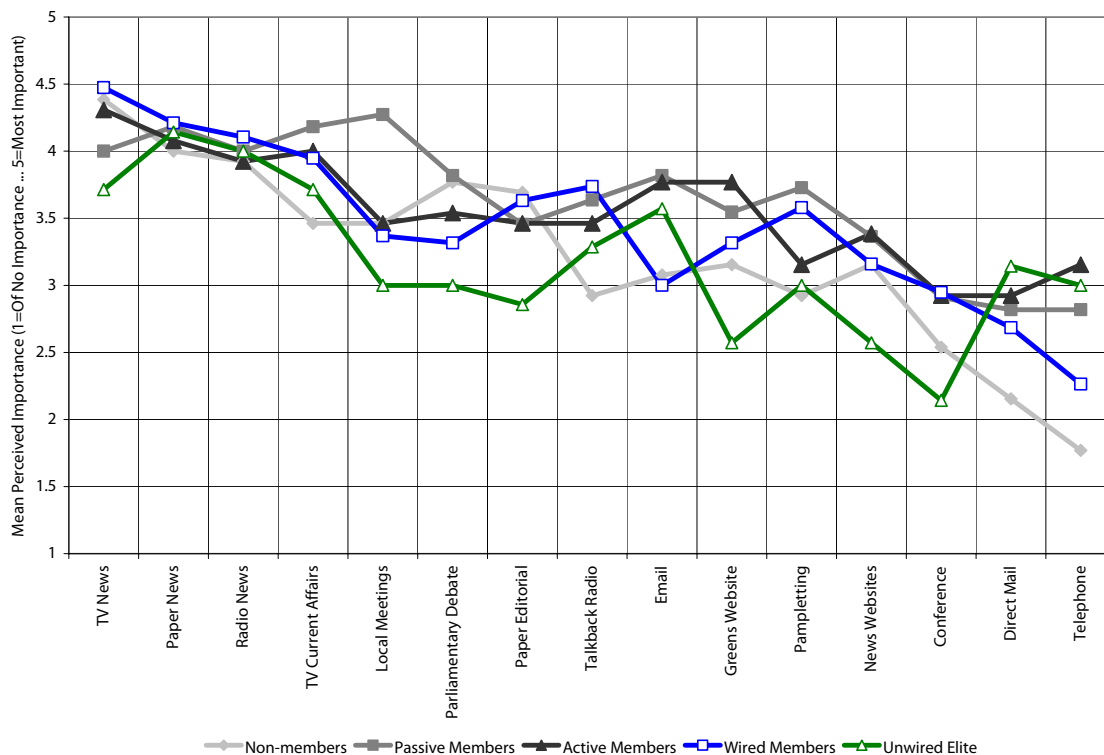


Figure 7. Importance of Media Channel by Cluster

Goals

Analysis of the relative importance of a range of potential goals for the Greens online is shown in Figure 8. All goals were consistently rated highly, with little variation between mean scores. Broadly, internal organisational goals such as information distribution, facilitation of organisation, and mobilisation of members were seen as slightly more relevant than tactical goals such as lobbying, campaigning and raising money. Protesting fell between these two extremes.

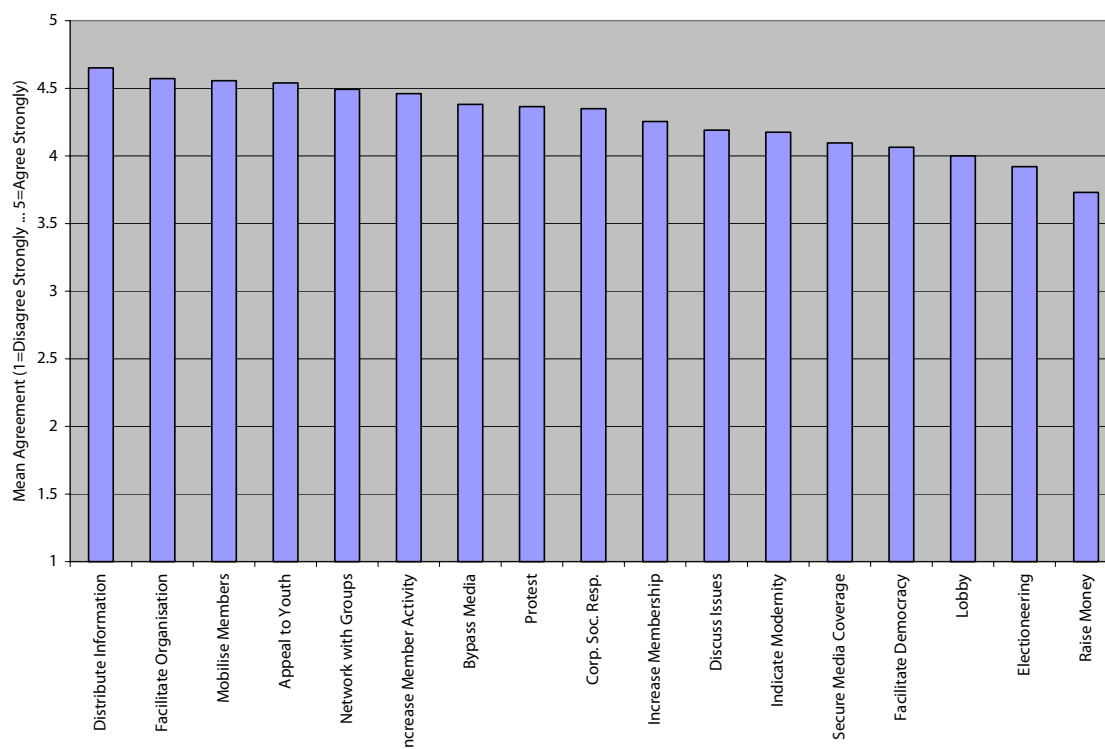


Figure 8. Endorsement of Goals

In comparing these results to the findings of Gibson and Ward (2002), dramatic differences are apparent. This comparison is shown in Figure 9. Contrary to this study, Gibson and Ward found that while information provision and member recruitment were important, other goals were rated much lower. In particular, while Gibson and Ward found no desire to use the Internet to appear modern, or to generate feedback, these were rated as important goals in the present study.

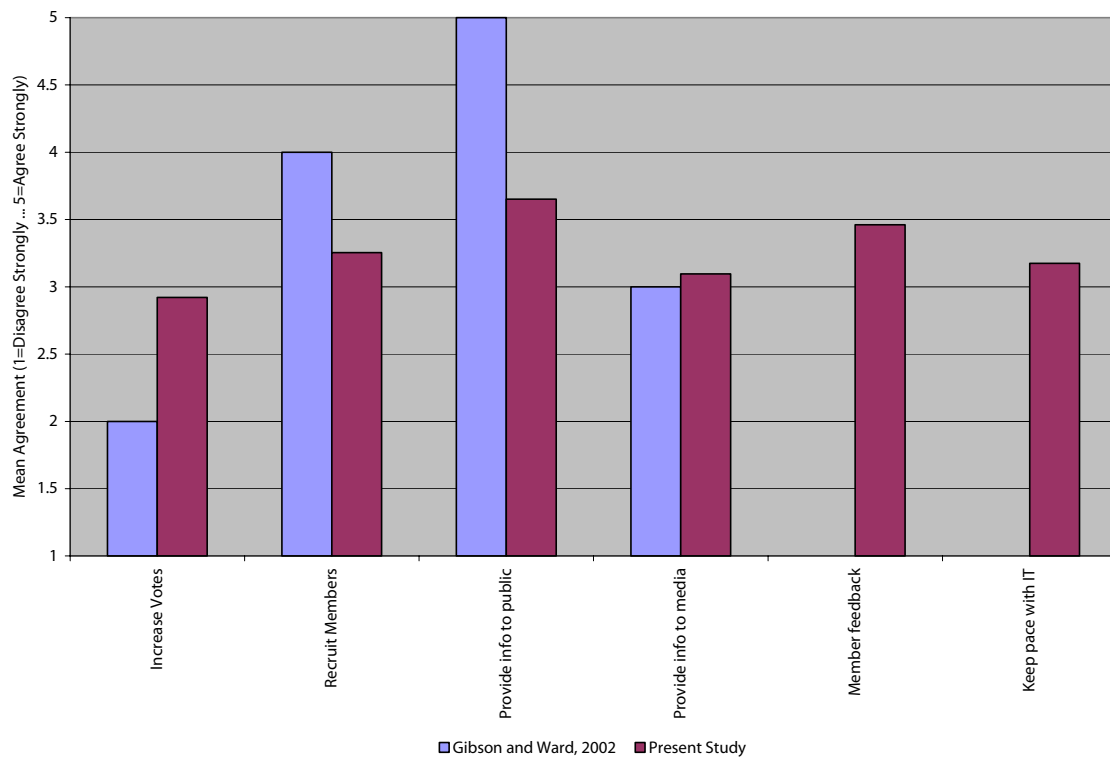


Figure 9. Endorsement of Goals compared to Gibson and Ward

Figure 10 shows these goals broken down by cluster groupings. While there is again a high degree of agreement, a number of differences can be seen. Generally, Active Members and Wired Members rated goals more highly in general, while the Unwired Elite felt that the Internet was a less viable tool in pursuing these goals (though they still showed considerable support for particular objectives. Specifically, the Unwired Elite disagreed somewhat with the important role of the Internet in facilitating organisation, bypassing traditional media, and playing a role in the lobbying process.

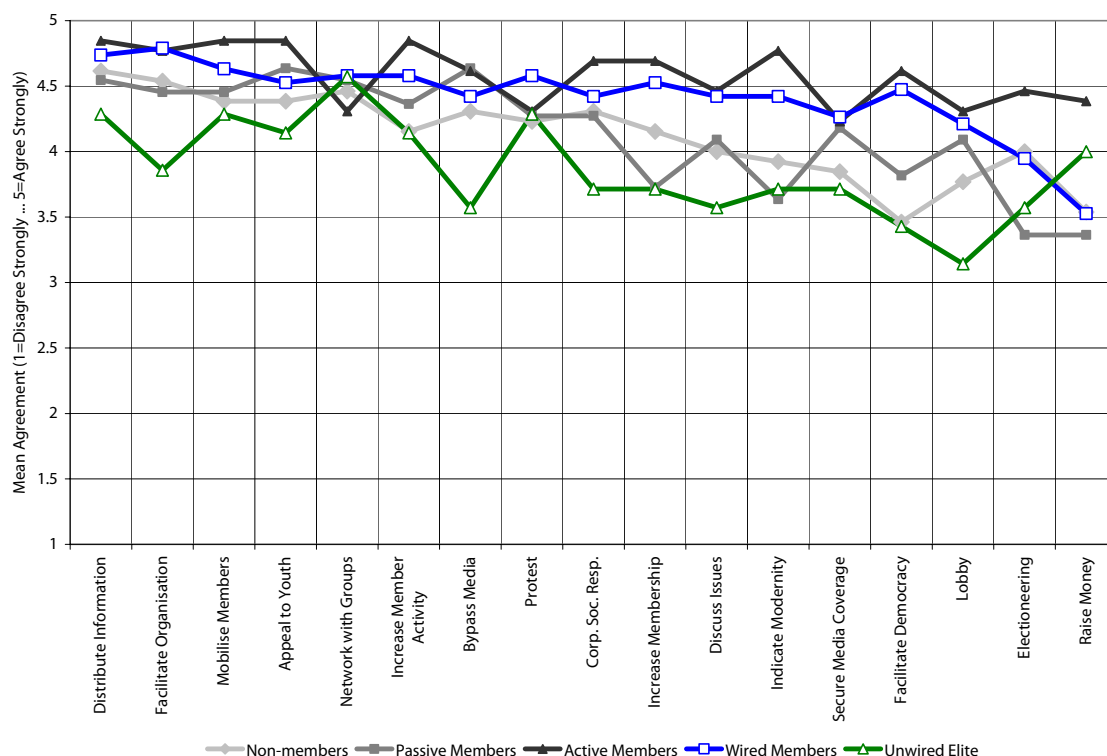


Figure 10. Endorsement of Goals by Cluster

Website Action

Figure 11 shows the degree to which participants felt that the Greens should implement various activities as part of the organisation’s website. Overall, the most highly rated items were informational content (policies, contact details, event schedules, campaign information, party structure). Low rated items included those perceived as less serious (games and screensavers), those perceived as overtly commercial (endorsed services and merchandise) and a range of items aimed at facilitating the democratic process (chat rooms, opinion polls, and voting on various issues).

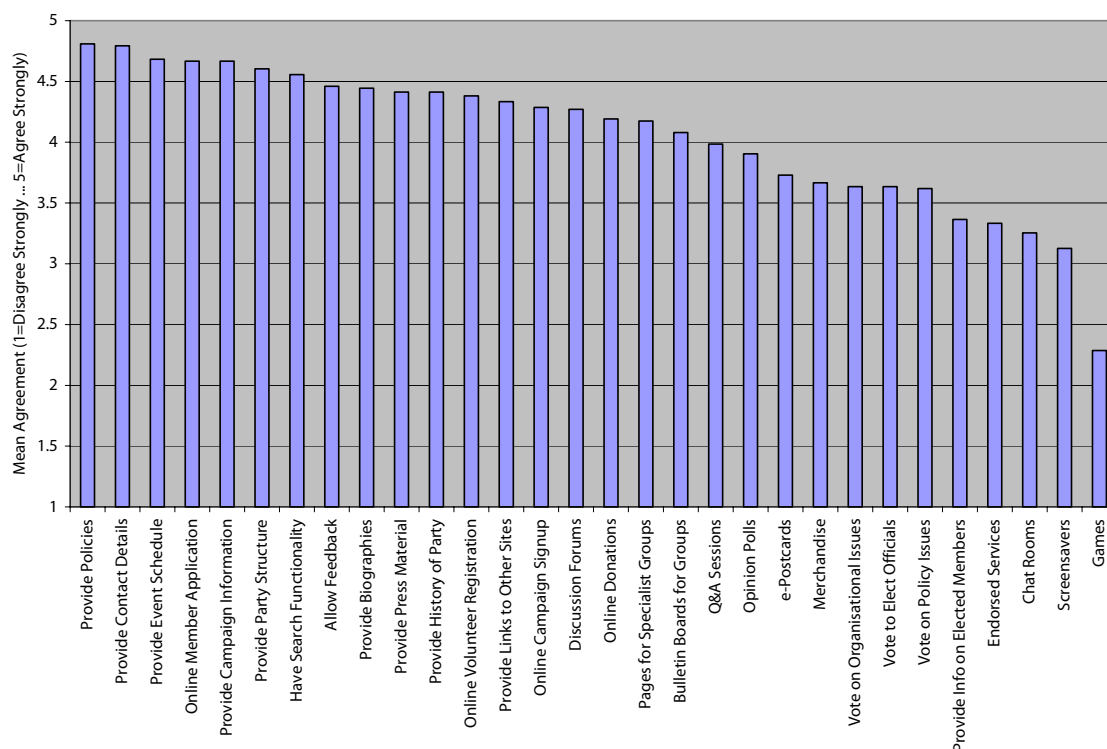


Figure 11. Endorsement of Website Activities

Analysing the data by cluster groupings, some variability between groups can be seen – as shown in Figure 12. The Non-members saw less importance in information and membership functionality on the site. Conversely, they were more in favour of endorsed services. The Unwired Elite fell well below the group mean on a range of the activities related to participation (discussion boards, opinion polls and chat rooms) and democratic process (voting on organisational issues, policies and officials).

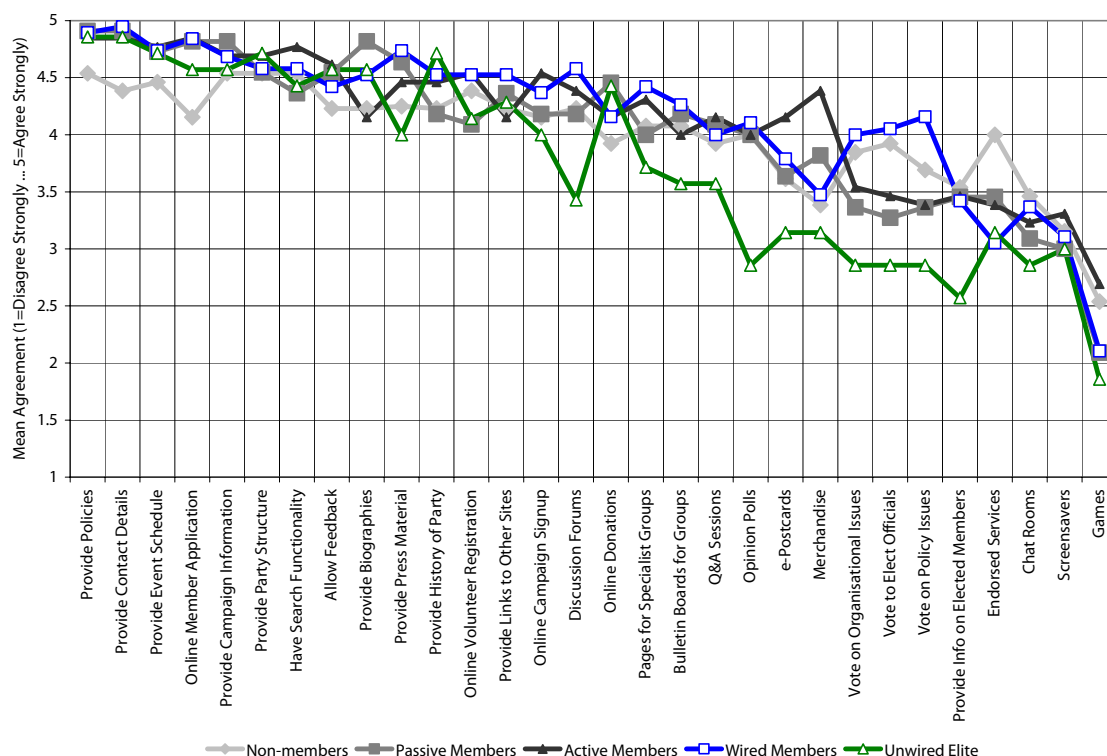


Figure 12. Endorsement of Website Activities by Cluster

External Action

Figure 13 shows the mean ratings for a range of tactics that the Greens could consider deploying externally to the website. Compared to previous sections, there was considerable variability between items, as shown.

Most highly rated was a regular email newsletter. This was followed by a number of awareness raising and agenda setting activism tactics – emails to editors, emails to stakeholders on various issues, online petitions and virtual ribbons to display support for Greens causes. While these less controversial tactics were rated relatively highly, more radical activist tactics were rated less positively – these included gripe sites, virtual rallies, virtual sit-ins, and blockades. Potentially illegal tactics (defacing

websites and hacking generally) were rated very negatively, indicating strong disagreement with the Greens pursuing these as options.

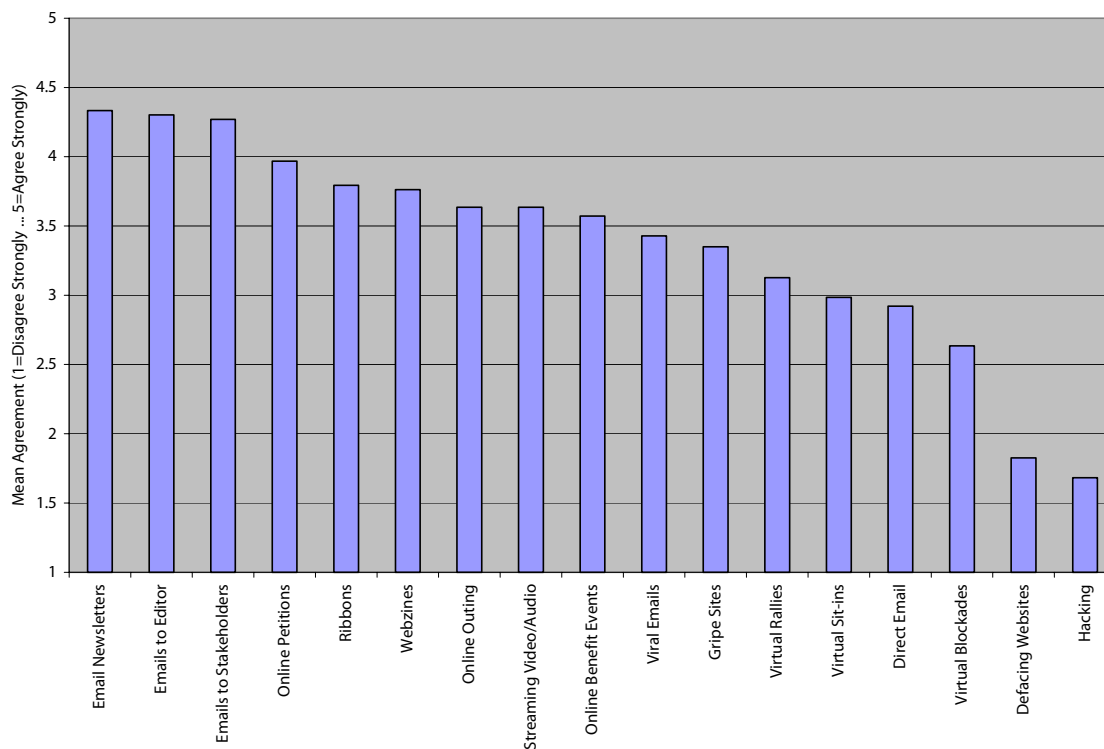


Figure 13. Endorsement of External Activities

These ratings can be seen analysed by cluster groupings in Figure 14. Again, there is general agreement, particularly in the more favoured items. The most apparent divergence is the raised rating by Active Members of legal and quasi-legal online activism (blockades, sit-ins, rallies and outing), and the strong rejection of illegal tactics by Passive Members and Wired Members. Also of note is the Unwired Elite's disapproval of rallies, gripe sites, online benefits and webzines.

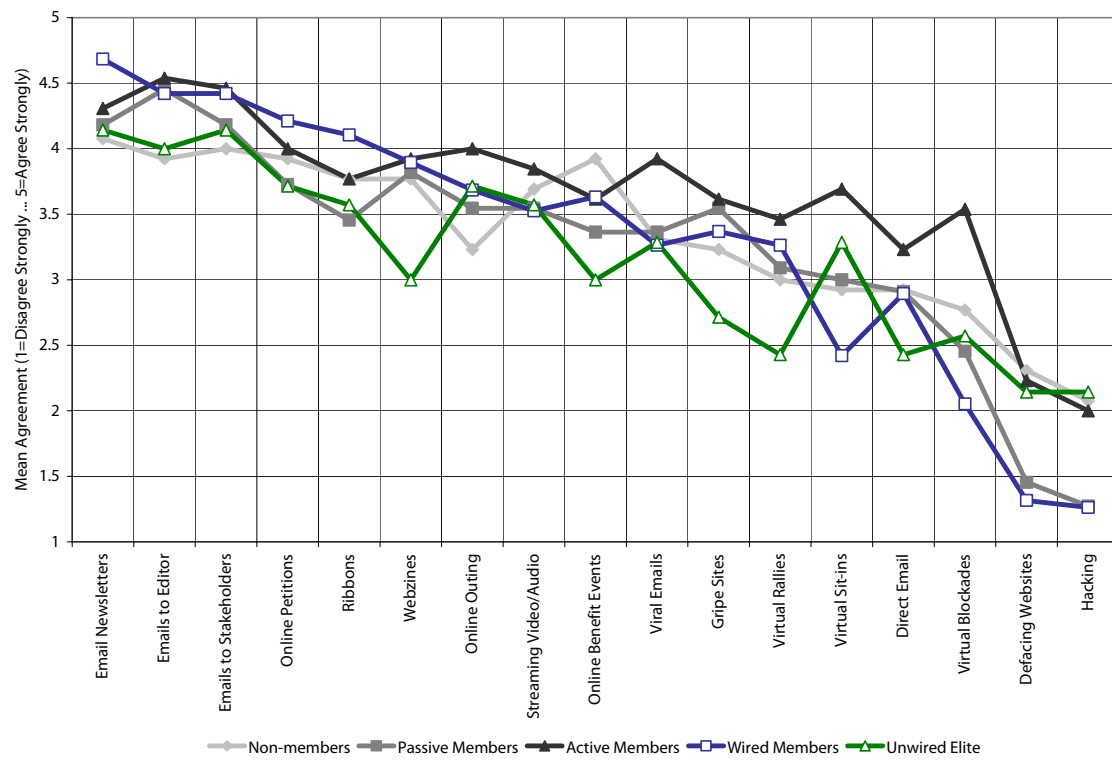


Figure 14. Endorsement of External Activities by Cluster

Discussion

Perceived Importance of the Medium

RQ1 : How important is the Internet (website and email) as a communication channel, in the perception of the Greens?

In sharp contrast to Gibson and Ward (2002), findings pointed to a preference for traditional broadcast channels as important media tools for the Greens. Television, newspapers and radio were given higher priority than either digital or direct communication channels. This suggests high awareness of the role that mainstream media plays in the political process, regardless of the challenges that the Greens face in securing positive coverage in these media.

When interpreting the relatively low priority given to the Greens website, it is important that this is a priority in the context of the website as a 'medium'. This is the first of several areas that point to a perceived role of the Internet as 'tool' rather than 'medium' within the organisation. The request by members of the organisation that the survey itself be conducted online suggests the importance of the Internet for certain communication tasks.

This conclusion is borne out by the comparatively high priority placed on email in comparison to the website. Participants saw the importance of the digital space as an internal rather than external communication

channel. This is a particularly important role given the nature of the organisation;

“In a state like Queensland we have several geographically dispersed population areas. Communication within the QLD Greens as a whole is therefore by email.” (Participant)

Email is also seen as an environmentally friendly approach to communication – an important consideration for the Greens. Several participants commented on the resulting reduction in paper brought about by electronic communication, both in terms of one-to-one communication, and in printing paper-based magazines that are mailed to members. Whether email significantly reduces environmental impact of an organisation is a matter for debate, but the perception that it does is another factor driving email use within the Greens.

While there is support for email use, a number of concerns were voiced by participants. Importantly, as an inclusive organisation, the Greens strive to ensure that information is accessible to all members and supporters, including those that do not have Internet access. Not wishing to “disenfranchise those without computers or who don’t log on” (Participant), alternative channels must be provided, reducing the cost efficiencies of using electronic communication. This balancing act was

explained by one participant who pointed to the “need to be careful not to widen the digital divide as we exploit new technology” (Participant).

As with email, geographic dispersion was also a factor in the high priority given to local party meetings over state and national councils. The local branch “represents members directly” and in this way is the locus of ‘grass roots’ democracy (Participant).

Another interesting finding was the skew of Non-members toward rating direct communication channels (direct mail and telephone) as less important. Not being members, these participants would primarily be experiencing connection with the Greens through mainstream media channels, and are not aware of the key role that direct communication plays within the membership base. For this reason, such a dichotomy is unsurprising, and would be expected in any organisation that uses direct means as a membership communication channel, but not as a recruitment tool.

Prioritising Online Goals

RQ2 : What goals do the Greens seek to achieve through use of this channel?

As touched on above, the Greens see the digital medium primarily as an internal tool rather than a broadcast channel. This bias is reflected in the

skew toward using the Internet to achieve internal, organisational goals. Survey responses saw the medium as a way to improve the effectiveness of the organisation. This was summed up by one participant;

“The majority of Greens members appear to have some access to the Internet and computer technology. This enables the Greens to use this cost-effective timely functionality to manage members and keep them informed. Once informed the group tends to work more productively together because information is available and manageable.” (Participant)

It is not clear how much of this bias is due to an informed preference, rather than a familiarity with the Internet as an internal tool and a lack of awareness of its potential for tactical media use. Even those who had played a role in electioneering did not see a key role for the Internet in gaining votes for the Greens.

Broadly speaking, those participants with a higher degree of familiarity with the medium rated the role of the Internet higher across all goals – suggesting that familiarity and use result in a greater awareness of potential and a preference for the medium. For this reason, the role of the Internet in tactical external activities may not be explored until a greater portion of the decision makers within the core of the party have more familiarity with the Internet being used in this way by other groups.

A division was also apparent in items relating to two-way communication within the party. The Unwired Elite group saw the Internet primarily as a one-way channel for the distribution of information, while Wired Members believed it could play a role in facilitating feedback and decision-making. From the present study it is not clear whether this one-way bias is Internet specific, though several responses indicated that key members of the organisation did feel participation was important, they simply felt that the Internet was not an appropriate channel;

“I still see [the Internet] as a form of publishing rather than an entity.”

(Participant)

“In regard to formal decision making, I don’t trust the Internet both in terms of others getting access to confidential information, or people hoping to contribute necessarily being considered/counting.” (Participant)

While it could be argued that these responses indicate a combination of ignorance and fear of the medium, other responses appeared both more informed and more considered;

“There are many advantages to [voting] electronically, but unfortunately it has not yet been proven and could be considered bleeding edge... [it is]

a great concept and works technically, but requires a sound process to support it, amongst other things that are harder to achieve [access, consistency, security, cost, regional issues] ... hence it may be dangerous to try and enforce formal decision making through an electronic channel.”
(Participant)

It is also important to note that several respondents downplayed the importance of ‘electronic voting’ because the Greens primarily operate on a consensus basis. While there is no impediment to implementing consensus based decision-making processes online, the results may be skewed against voting for this reason.

The broader support for achieving goals online in comparison to Gibson and Ward (2002) appears to be due to a more diverse sample.

Presumably, the respondent in the Gibson and Ward survey was focussed on public relations, and saw the role of the medium purely in terms of information dissemination. This study shows that when analysing the role of the medium in terms of the organisation as a whole, it is important to account for a wider range of goals as perceived by a broad cross-section of stakeholders.

Prioritising Online Activities

RQ3 : What activities (both within the website and external to it) do the Greens seek to deploy in achieving these goals?

The preference for using the Internet as an organisational communication tool rather than a tactical medium was carried through in the perceived viability of activities. Participants saw the primary role of the website as information distribution – firstly to existing membership, secondly to the media to gain coverage, and thirdly to the public at large.

Interestingly, most saw this information flow as one way, rating information dissemination as more important than feedback or discussion. This supports the conclusions Gibson and Ward reached, emphasising a preference for ‘downward’ communication over ‘upward’ or ‘lateral’ channels within party websites (2000).

In keeping with the focus on organisational communication, activities that were more populist or ‘gimmicky’ such as games and screensavers were seen as not appropriate. Again this may be partly due to a lack of familiarity with possibilities – given the success that mainstream political parties have had using similar tactics, such as the ALP’s ‘Political Big Brother’ site developed during the federal election (Chen 2001).

In comparing Non-members, Passive Members, and Active Members, there is a clear trend that members with more involvement see a role for the Internet in extending that involvement through greater information provision and functionality. In this way, many participants are looking to

the Internet to mirror and extend their existing relationship with the Greens – more passive members and non-members expect an information dissemination channel similar to television and newspapers where they currently hear about the Greens, while more active members want the Internet to be one of the channels through which they can interact with the organisation.

Again, the Unwired Elite group downplayed the importance of online interactivity, positioning the website primarily as a way of disseminating information. Strategically, in this way, they are meeting the demands of the passive members and non-members, who form by far the majority of the Greens (and most political parties) – and hence the majority of the voting power that the Greens represent.

Of all activities external to the website, email newsletters were the most popular. From previous discussion, there appear to be three distinct drivers for this: firstly, as there are existing newsletters, this is a familiar activity, and hence easy for participants to appreciate; secondly, the newsletter format fits well with the primary role of the medium being dissemination of information from the 'core' of the party; and thirdly, the widespread use of email as a one-to-one communication tool for the Greens makes newsletters a natural extension.

In rating various forms of protest online, there was a clear delineation between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of protest. From comments by participants, this line extended beyond the Internet, and would be equally applicable to offline protest. The exact location of the division varied between participants, but the considerations in making the distinction were similar. Two interrelated factors appear to be driving these attitudes – an understanding of the mechanics of mainstream media, and a raised awareness of the behaviour expected of a legitimate political party.

Several participants put forward adverse media coverage as the selection criteria for unacceptable forms of protest. Various members stressed the need to avoid "behaviour that could be portrayed in the media as gratuitously anti-social" (Participant), resulting in "unfriendly media headlines" (Participant). In this context, radical protest such as hacking, defacing sites, and even virtual blockades were seen as too antisocial, and hence open to critical media coverage.

While there are arguments that social movements need to be cognisant of the way their actions will be portrayed in the media, these very rigid criteria suggest that the Greens are positioning themselves not as a social movement, but as a political party. As such, the freedom to act radically is dramatically curbed. This suggestion is supported by various comments

from participants who feel that “as a political party [the Greens] should not protest on the web against companies.” (Participant) One participant made the distinction very clear suggesting that “as a party that is trying to become acceptable to the mainstream [the Greens should] put away childish things... we need to divorce ourselves from the antics that Green Peace get up to. I am a member of Green Peace and am in favour of all their actions. But The Greens need to act with more decorum.”

(Participant)

This is particularly interesting in light of the Greens’ history as a movement of radical activists. By acknowledging the requirements of becoming a ‘mainstream’ political party in search of wider electoral appeal, the organisation is straying from its core identity in a similar fashion to European Greens parties.

While many participants saw certain forms of protest as counter-productive due to adverse media coverage, there was general support for more conservative, passive protest actions (such as petitions, sit-ins and so on). In contrast to this general trend, The Unwired Elite group carried their concerns with interactive functionality into this area as well. This group was in favour of organised protest, but appeared uncomfortable with empowering members to be active, feeling that “control is still required of what is said in our name” (Participant).

While there was agreement amongst most participants that the Greens should not engage in radical activism, a number of participants indicated that the ideals of an activist-based movement may still exist. Several suggested that “the Greens should support and even suggest [defacing web pages], but organising or taking responsibility for such actions is not advisable” (Participant). Obviously, an organisation cannot actively support or condone activities without a degree of connection, pointing to a tension between a belief that such activism is appropriate and desirable, and a realisation that the party cannot pursue it.

Wired Members and the Unwired Elite

RQ4 : Does prioritisation of the medium, goals, and activities vary between different groups within the organisation?

The results and discussion to this point suggest that there are numerous differences between the responses of various groups within the organisation. Variability within the sample was most obvious along two dimensions: involvement with the party, and degree of Internet use. Figure 15 shows where the five cluster groupings used to categorise participants would be situated on two such axes.

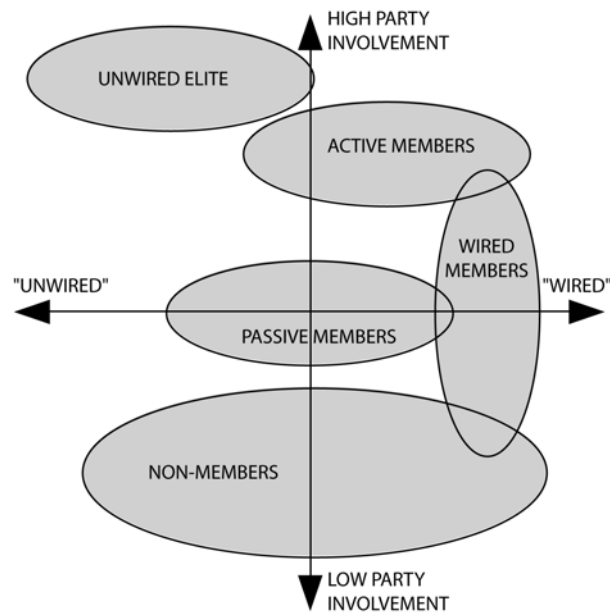


Figure 15. Involvement and Wired Dimensions

Generally speaking, involvement with the party results in higher interaction with the organisation, and an expectation that the Internet should play a role in this interaction. Hence, more involved participants see a greater overall role for the medium.

Similarly, participants with more digital expertise are more aware of the medium's potential applications, and expect more online interaction with any organisation of which they are a part. This again results in a corresponding increase in the role of the medium as the level of digital expertise increases.

While this survey did not cover the organisation comprehensively, it seems likely that the vast majority of those who associate themselves with the organisation are low involvement non-members. This is supported by the fact that the total membership of the Greens accounts for only a small fraction of the votes the party received in the last election.

Anticipated Hurdles

In discussing the role of the Internet within the organisation, numerous participants mentioned challenges that had to be overcome in order for the medium to be further integrated into various communication processes. As mentioned above, one of these was the awareness of the partial penetration of the medium. While the 'lack of penetration' problem has been reduced dramatically over the past few years, it is still an issue of concern, particularly for an organisation such as the Greens that positions itself as an inclusive party, while Internet usage remains skewed toward higher socio-economic levels.

Another set of concerns were technical, questioning the security and robustness of Internet solutions. While partly resulting from a lack of familiarity with the medium, these concerns may be valid, and will perhaps limit the specific tasks for which the Internet is used in the short term.

The most serious immediate impediment to more widespread use of the medium, however, appears to be technical skills and resources within the organisation. Participants suggested that “there is great interest in using the Internet to better advantage, but few available skills to do it”, meaning that care was needed allocating priorities, given the “meagre resources and reliance on donated time” (Participants).

This paucity of resources also influenced the response of participants who felt it important to prioritise possible activities given a limited capacity to implement them. One participant felt that the Greens may be “wasting time setting up and maintaining things like chat rooms, as they are unproven and not core” (Participant).

Conclusion

As anticipated, this study found that the Australian Greens do see an important role for the Internet within the party. While the nature of this role is complex, and perceived differently by different groups, certain areas of commonality can be found.

There is general acceptance of the Internet as a key organisational and communication tool to improve the effectiveness of the organisation.

While personal general use of email is a primary component of this, there are numerous other aspects such as email newsletters, and use of the website as an information source and repository.

One concern raised when using the Internet in this way is the danger of ignoring the 'digital divide' and assuming that all members and publics will have online computer access and proficiency. Particularly given the inclusive, 'grass roots' nature of the party, it is important that use of the Internet does not become elitist. One response to this concern is that parallel offline channels must be maintained in all instances, which can significantly reduce any improvement in organisational effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, those deeply involved in the party do acknowledge the need to utilise the channel, and also indicated support for more complex tasks online. Several noted the role that the Internet

can play in facilitating party meetings of dispersed members, and in managing discussion and production of policy initiatives.

There was considerably less enthusiasm shown for deployment of the Internet as an external communication medium. Most members and supporters see television and other broadcast media as considerably more pivotal to successful communication than digital media.

Despite this general reluctance, many do still feel that the Internet can assist modestly in achieving a range of public communication objectives. Primarily this is through providing information to potential members and the press.

There is also modest support for using the Internet as a channel for activism. The most popular forms of collective action were those using the Internet as a communication channel – email petitions, writing emails to editors and so on. There was less support for using the Internet as a protest venue in staging actions such as site blockades and virtual sit-ins.

Interestingly, there was strong rejection of radical illegal activism. Despite the organisation's history of radical collective action, there was a firm belief that it was not in the interest of the Greens to stage any actions that were antisocial or illegal due to possible negative coverage in

the media. This was an definite indicator of the move from social movement to political party that was evident in many of the comments analysed.

In moving away from its social activist origins, the party needs to be aware that it may be endangering its 'grass roots' supporter base. By striving to appear mainstream, serious and acceptable the party aims to gain a greater share of less radical voters. While there is a clear reasoning behind this strategy, it is one that has cost European Greens dearly by reducing their appeal to their core constituency. This also opens the field for a more convincingly radical party to emerge in the vacancy left as the Greens move toward the middle. Given the current climate, a strong 'anti-corporate, anti-globalisation' movement could conceivably move into the political arena and split the radical vote that the Greens have so effectively acquired during the demise of the Democrats.

Regardless of the approach that the Greens take in reconciling their political ambitions with their activist heritage, there is an acceptance of a growing role for the Internet in the resulting structure. Within the party, two groups are key in anticipating the nature this growth.

First are the Wired Members – an increasing portion of the members (and perhaps supportive non-members) for whom the Internet is their primary

channel of interaction with the party. The existence of this group places two demands on the delivery of digital content – breadth and depth. In terms of breadth, Wired Members will grow as a group, meaning that the party will need to be able to manage relationships with a broad cross-section of its membership through email and web content.

Simultaneously, as some of these members become more active, there will be increasing expectation for the delivery of deeper functionality online. It will be this group that drives the use of interactive, two-way communication channels using the Internet. To continue to appeal to this growing audience, the party will need to facilitate this style of membership.

The second pivotal group are the Unwired Elite. At the core of the party, responsible for electioneering, strategy, public relations and policy development, these key individuals appear unable or unwilling to embrace the digital medium to the degree to which many of the members would like. Initially it may appear that this group is composed of luddites who feel that the Internet is fundamentally useless, or simply a technology that they are not familiar with. Closer examination reveals that many of these members are both aware of the power of the Internet, and actively use it in a number of ways, particularly as an internal communication channel. In these instances, concerns stem from informed

doubt regarding the current viability of widespread adoption of the Internet as a primary tool for party interaction.

Of specific interest is public relations, an area where the Unwired Elites may not be fully versed in the uses of the digital medium. Responses from this group indicate a high level of caution and suspicion when employing the Internet to communicate externally. This is not a problem specific to the Greens – as discussed earlier, ignorance of and apathy toward the Internet is endemic of the public relations industry. The issue is that given the challenge that the party faces with obtaining positive coverage in mainstream broadcast media, the digital medium could provide an excellent alternative for many tasks.

In conclusion, there are several ways that the Australian Greens wish to use the Internet, and perhaps several more that will arise as the core of the membership becomes more aware of the possibilities. A significant issue to be addressed is the prioritisation of the group's limited resources in deploying solutions to make use of the medium. It could be argued that these changes will occur over time, and that even the present limited available skills and funds will drive the use of the medium in the areas where the members see most benefit. However, political parties have a vested interest in making such changes earlier rather than later, to capitalise on the benefits in this fiercely competitive environment.

In looking ahead, there is much further study to be done in this field. This paper has identified areas where an activist political party perceives the Internet can be most effectively used. It still remains to be determined whether the digital medium is actually a viable option for achieving these objectives. Should the potential be demonstrated, there is then a need to identify best practice models for deploying solutions that meet these goals.

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Appendices

Appendix A : Sources of Survey Items

Tables 2 and 3 catalogue the goals and functions identified by previous research for online activities by political parties and social movements respectively.

Source	Topic	List
Norris, 2003	Aims of political parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform • Persuade • Mobilize support
Römmele, 2003	Political party communication functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinion formation • Interest mediation • Party organisation
Römmele, 2003	Political party goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote maximization • Office maximization • Representation of members • Policy/ideology advocacy
Gibson & Ward, 2000	Political party goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote maximization and electoral campaigning • Pursuit of executive office • Policy advocacy • Pursuing internal democracy
Gibson & Ward, 2000	Online functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information provision • Campaigning • Resource generation • Networking and organizational strengthening • Promoting participation
Ward & Gibson, 2000	Directions for communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downward • Upward • Lateral • Interactive
Ward & Gibson, 2001	Functions of party websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information provision • Networking • Targeting and narrow-casting • Mobilisation and participation • Bypassing the traditional media
Ward, Lusoli & Gibson, 2003	Goals re. membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More members • More diverse membership • Increased activism • Interactivity
Ward, Lusoli & Gibson, 2003	Website contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy info • Current event info • Party structure info • Online campaign info • Newsletter

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback • Links to sites • Membership application/renewal • Endorsed commercial services
Ward, Lusoli & Gibson, 2003	Desired member activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter • Contact party • Vote on organisational/policy issues • Vote to elect officials • Membership renewal • Join specific campaigns • Discuss issues • Meet other members
Ward, Lusoli & Gibson, 2003	Reasons for online presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information provision (to public and media) • Campaigning (direct email, fund raising) • Targeting the youth audience • Symbolic significance (modernity) • Virtual infrastructure/efficiency gains • Soliciting voter/member feedback and participation
Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2003	Website features for information provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party history • Organisational structure • Program/policies • Media/press room • Biographies • Calendar of events • FAQ • Specialist group pages • Leader focus • External/internal links
Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2003	Website features to increase participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Download a screen saver • Search engines • Games • Online shopping • Email contacts • Opinion polls • E-postcards • Donate/Volunteer • Chat rooms • Q&A session

Table 2. Goals and functions – Online Political Parties

Source	Topic	List
Lasn, 2000	Techniques for cyberjamming, pp. 132-133	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyberpetitions • Virtual protests • Virtual sit-ins • Gripe sites
Meikle, 2002	Strategies for effecting social change, p.24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking • Publicising • Educating • Organising • Mobilising
Meikle, 2002	Digital analogues to existing repertoire, p. 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email writing campaigns • Email petitions • Independent web-zines • Independent web radio and TV • Virtual sit-ins • Virtual blockades • Virtual sabotage and monkey-wrenching • Outing • Virtual ribbons/badges etc. • Virtual graffiti • Online benefits • Virtual hunger strike
NetAction, 2002		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email press release distribution • Online press relations • Email/website newsletters • Virtual town hall rallies • Chat room house parties • Web sign-up sheets (tabling) • Pass along emails • Online lobbying • Email to editors • Web petitions • Special interest newsgroups
Taylor, Kent & White, 2001	Role of internet for activist public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve activist public • Extend reach • Coordinate efforts with like-minded groups
Taylor, Kent & White, 2001	Building relationships with activist publics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage activist public • Encourage feedback • Meet informational needs of activist public
Coombs, 1998	Issues management tasks of activist organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobby to change public policy • Agitate management to alter organisational policies
Coombs, 1998	Process of online issues management for activist organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish violation of social responsibility • Raise stakeholder awareness • Encourage stakeholder action
Critical Art Ensemble, 1995		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic blockage

Table 3. Goals and functions – Online Social Activism

Appendix B : Structure of the Greens

Figure 16 shows the structure of the Australian Greens at a national level (The Australian Greens 2003).

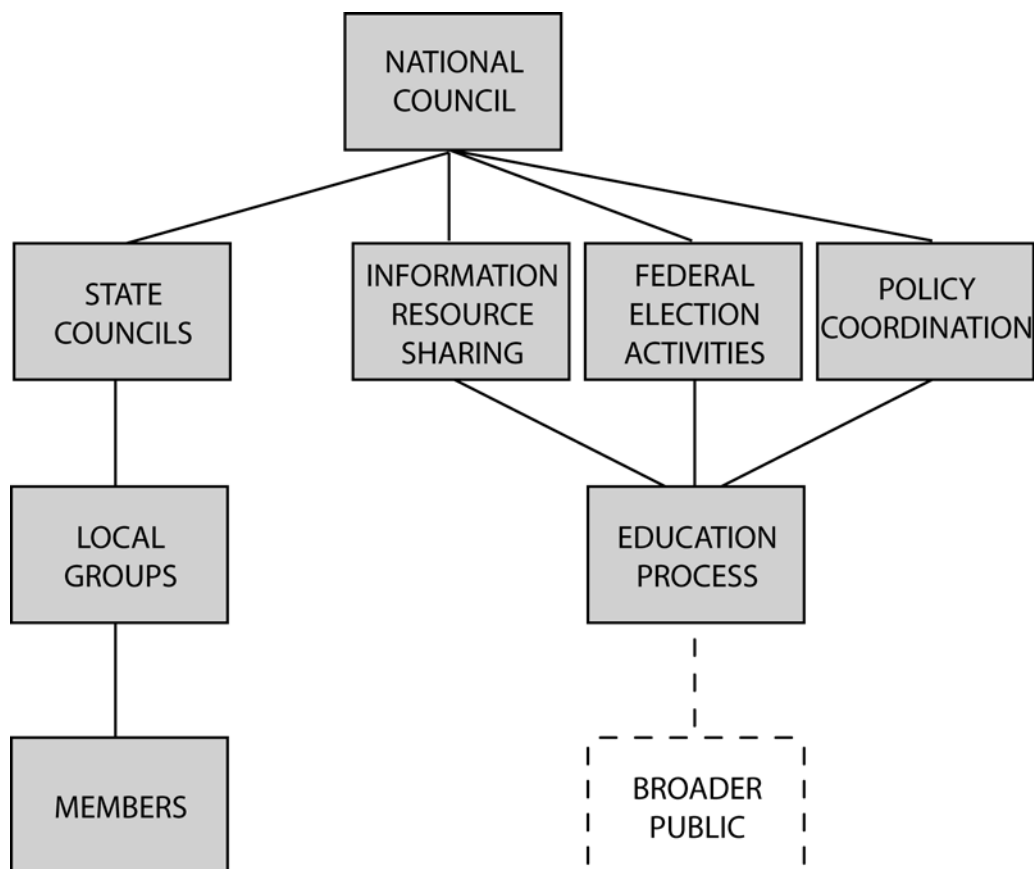


Figure 16. Formal Decision Making Framework

Appendix C : The Survey Instrument

Dear Greens Supporter,

I am currently researching the role that the Internet (websites, email and so on) should play within the Australian Greens. This project is part of my coursework as a Masters student at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). The survey is will also provide suggestions to improve the Green's current use the Internet as a communication tool.

It would greatly assist if you could take a few minutes to complete the survey below. All information provided will be anonymous, and results will be presented as statistical summaries of the data.

Should you have any questions about the survey or my research project, please do not hesitate to contact me at brett@digitalstrategist.com or on 0414 455 530.

Thank you,
Brett Rolfe.

Question 1.

Please tick any of the following statements that describe your involvement with the Australian Greens. You may tick as many or as few as are relevant.

Items were left blank or rated

✓ Yes

- I support the Greens
- I vote Green
- I visit the Australians Green website regularly
- I have signed up online to receive Greens material
- I am a member of the Greens
- I am active in my local Greens group
- I have attended a state or national council
- I have been involved in public relations or marketing for the Greens
- I have been involved in federal election activities
- I have been involved in policy development for the Greens
- I have been participated in Greens protests and activism
- I have organised Greens protests or activism
- I have been involved in the development or management of the Australian Greens website or email newsletter
- I volunteer for the Greens
- I am paid by the Greens

Question 2.

Please rate the importance of each medium for allowing the Greens to communicate with the public.

Items were rated

- ✓ Most Important
 - ✓ Very Important
 - ✓ Quite Important
 - ✓ Somewhat Important
 - ✓ Of No Importance
-
- Television news
 - Television current affairs
 - Newspaper news
 - Newspaper editorial
 - Radio news
 - The Australian Greens website
 - News websites
 - Email
 - Parliamentary debate
 - Talkback radio
 - Important Of No Importance
 - Local meetings
 - Pamphleting and leafleting
 - Annual conference
 - Telephone
 - Direct Mail

Question 3.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Items were rated

- ✓ Agree Strongly
- ✓ Agree
- ✓ Not Sure
- ✓ Disagree
- ✓ Disagree Strongly
- ✓ This should not be a goal for the Greens

I think that the Internet should be an important way for the Australian Greens to...

- mobilize support.
- ensure that the organisation is run democratically.
- get new members.
- coordinate with like-minded groups (eg. international environmental lobby groups).
- campaign for votes during elections.
- distribute information.
- organise activities.
- discuss issues and form policy.
- identify irresponsible corporate behaviour and raise awareness.
- facilitate and/or stage protest actions.
- show that it is a modern organisation.
- raise money.
- generate media coverage.
- reach young people.
- encourage members to be more active.
- lobby government and industry bodies.
- reach people by bypassing traditional media that may not choose to cover important issues.

Question 4.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Items were rated

- ✓ Agree Strongly
- ✓ Agree
- ✓ Not Sure
- ✓ Disagree
- ✓ Disagree Strongly

I think that the Australian Greens website should...

- allow people to register as volunteers.
- have newsgroups for special interest groups within the organisation.
- allow people to search the site.
- have online games to play.
- have things to buy (eg. Greens merchandise).
- have information on upcoming events.
- have online membership application and renewal.
- have e-postcards to send.
- explain the structure of the organisation.
- include bios of key Green spokespeople.

-
- include contact details for the organisation.
 - have links to endorsed online commercial services (eg. environmentally friendly products).
 - allow people to donate money.
 - provide information for the media (eg. press releases).
 - provide links to other related websites.
 - provide campaign information.
 - have screensavers to download.
 - have chat rooms.
 - include the Greens' policies.
 - include a history of the Greens.
 - include polls of people's opinion on issues.
 - facilitate discussion of issues.
 - have pages for specialist groups within the Greens.
 - allow members to vote on organisational issues.
 - allow people to give feedback.
 - stage question and answer sessions (eg. with Greens senators).
 - allow people to register to join campaigns.
 - focus on the elected members.
 - allow members to vote when electing officials.
 - allow members to vote on policy issues.

Question 5.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Items were rated

- ✓ Agree Strongly
- ✓ Agree
- ✓ Not Sure
- ✓ Disagree
- ✓ Disagree Strongly

As well as having a website, I think that the Australian Greens should...

- create 'gripe sites' about corporations or government bodies.
- send a regular email newsletter.
- encourage members to write emails (eg. lobbying government and industry leaders).
- stage virtual rallies in chat rooms (ie. 'town hall' style meeting in public chat areas).
- have a policy on information and technology issues.
- modify or deface the websites of corporations or government bodies.
- produce virtual ribbons and badges (ie. icons that individuals and companies can put on their websites to show their support on issues).

-
- create emails to be passed on from person to person (ie. forwardable emails).
 - stage virtual 'sit-ins' on issues (ie. populate chat rooms or discussion forums of companies or government bodies).
 - 'out' people online, revealing information related to issues (eg. publishing lists of public figures financially supporting certain corporations).
 - create online petitions.
 - damage websites of corporations or government bodies.
 - stage online benefit events to raise money and/or awareness.
 - encourage members to write email 'letters to the editor'.
 - broadcast online streaming content (ie. create a type of Greens online radio or TV channel).
 - send 'direct email' to potential voters, similar to letterbox drops/direct mail.
 - encourage members to produce independent webzines and newsletters (ie. to create sites or emails about issues they feel are important).
 - stage virtual blockades (ie. collectively access the websites of corporations or government bodies, creating a demand that stalls their site).

COMMENTS

I welcome any comments you may have about the survey, or about the role you feel the Internet should have within the Australian Greens.

[Space for comments was provided]

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEWS - OPTIONAL

Following analysis of the survey data, I would like to contact a number of participants for short follow-up interviews. These can be conducted by phone or email (whichever you prefer), around the end of May. If you would consider taking part in a short interview at your convenience, please fill in the following section.

I consent to be contacted for a short interview by phone* or email*. I understand that this interview will be transcribed, and that contributions may be included in the results verbatim, but will remain anonymous.

[Space for Contact Name and Contact Details was provided]

* Check boxes beside 'phone' and 'email' allowed participants to select a preferred means of contact.

Appendix D : Thoughts on Dissemination and Publication

There are two parts to the intended dissemination of this research. The first is to channel findings back into the Greens organisation to facilitate further improvement of their use of the Internet. This will be done in three ways – providing the final paper to key members of the party, developing a summarised version (up to 2,000 words) highlighting the major conclusions for wider distribution, and producing a list of prioritised activities based on the responses.

The second component of intended dissemination would be to seek publication of the article. Given the political focus of the research, the following journals would be considered;

Australian Journal of Political Science

(<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/carfax/10361146.html>)

Published by the Taylor and Francis Group, through Carfax Publishing in Australia. The journal is published three times each year, as the official journal of the Australasian Political Studies Association. The journal accepts manuscripts of 5,000-7,000 words. This would necessitate considerable editing – all material on social movement theory would be removed, and the results and discussion would be simplified dramatically. This could be achieved by concentrating purely on goals to be achieved, and not reporting results on activities.

Political Communication

(<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/tf/10584609.html>)

Published by the Taylor and Francis Group, and based in the USA. This is a quarterly journal publishing “cutting-edge research at the intersection of politics and communication”. The journal accepts manuscripts up to 9,000 words, which would be easily achieved by removing appendices and trimming the introduction and discussion slightly.

Party Politics

(<http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journals/details/j0010.html>)

An international journal published by Sage Publications. This is a bi-monthly journal that “provides a forum for the analysis of political parties”. The journal accepts manuscripts up to 8,000 words, which would necessitate the removal of much of the material on social movements – more clearly focussing the article on the Greens as a political party.

Appendix E : Cluster Analysis

The output from the cluster analysis using *SPSS 7.5 for Windows* is shown below. This was produced using a K-Means Cluster Analysis, for 5 clusters, across all 15 of the classifying variables. The analysis was produced in 6 iterations. Cluster classification and distance from nearest cluster were also produced for each participant.

Initial Cluster Centers

	Cluster				
	1	2	3	4	5
A_ACT	.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
A_ACV	.00	1.00	.00	.00	1.00
A_COU	.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	.00
A_DEV	.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00
A_ELE	.00	.00	1.00	1.00	.00
A_EML	1.00	1.00	.00	.00	1.00
A_MEM	.00	1.00	1.00	.00	1.00
A_ORG	.00	1.00	.00	1.00	.00
A_PAJ	.00	1.00	1.00	.00	.00
A_POL	.00	1.00	.00	1.00	.00
A_PR	.00	1.00	.00	1.00	.00
A_SUP	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
A_VOL	.00	1.00	.00	1.00	1.00
A_VOT	.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
A_WEB	.00	1.00	.00	1.00	1.00

Iteration History

Iteration	Change in Cluster Centers				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	1.264	1.405	1.436	1.217	.795
2	.110	.149	.515	.000	.241
3	.120	.000	.208	.000	.132
4	.115	8.571E-02	.101	.000	7.173E-02
5	.000	8.000E-02	.000	.268	8.740E-02
6	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

a Convergence achieved due to no or small distance change. The maximum distance by which any center has changed is .000. The current iteration is 6. The minimum distance between initial centers is 2.449.

Final Cluster Centers

	Cluster				
	1	2	3	4	5
A_ACT	.62	1.00	.91	1.00	.74
A_ACV	.08	.92	.91	.71	.63
A_COU	.00	.77	.82	.71	.16
A_DEV	.00	.31	.18	.00	.05
A_ELE	.00	.92	.91	.86	.11
A_EML	.31	1.00	.55	.29	1.00
A_MEM	.15	1.00	1.00	.86	1.00
A_ORG	.00	.69	.36	.71	.11
A_PAI	.00	.31	.09	.00	.00
A_POL	.00	1.00	.45	1.00	.37
A_PR	.15	.77	.09	1.00	.16
A_SUP	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
A_VOL	.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
A_WEB	.00	.92	.00	.29	.79

Distances between Final Cluster Centers

Cluster	1	2	3	4	5
1		2.722	2.065	2.368	1.696
2	2.722		1.417	1.109	1.600
3	2.065	1.417		1.235	1.467
4	2.368	1.109	1.235		1.813
5	1.696	1.600	1.467	1.813	

Number of Cases in each Cluster

Cluster	1	13.000
	2	13.000
	3	11.000
	4	7.000
	5	19.000
Valid		63.000
Missing		.000

Appendix F : Follow-up Questions

The following questions were asked of selected participants by email following initial analysis of the results.

- While you feel that there is a significant role for the Internet to play within the Greens, this does not seem to include 'participatory' aspects such as online discussion forums, voting for office holders, voting on policy, chat rooms or bulletin boards. Can you explain why you do not see the usefulness of these types of activities to encourage online participation of the wider membership in the process of the Greens?
- Along with the majority of respondents you rated providing online games on the site very poorly. Can you explain why you do not believe games are appropriate for the Greens site? Do you feel there is any role for entertainment content on the site?
- You indicated that you felt the Internet could play a role in ensuring the democratic operation of the party. How do you see this occurring?
- Given this, what leads you to feel that the Internet is not a particularly viable venue for voting on policy issues or electing office holders?
- You indicate that websites (both the Greens and external news sites) have no significant role to play as communication media for

the Greens. Given the significant penetration of the Internet, what factors lead you to this conclusion?

- Your responses indicate that you see a significant role for the Internet within the Greens, but that this does not extend to protest actions such as online blockades and defacing sites. Can you please explain why you do not feel these are appropriate, given the Greens' history as a non-violent protest movement?
- Why do you feel that online blockades and sit ins are viable tactics for the Greens, but defacing website is not? Particularly with reference to the Greens' history of illegal non-violent protest actions.
- You have indicated that you feel local meetings are a much more important communication channel than the state and national councils. Why do you believe this is the case?

Appendix G : Introductory Paragraph

Where the survey was promoted through the Greens website, or in email newsletters, the following introduction provided an overview of the purpose of the project. By clicking on the link provided, participants were taken to the first page of the online survey.

SURVEY : THE GREENS ONLINE

With the majority of Australians using the Internet regularly, it has become an key part of the communication strategy for many political parties. What role do you think the Internet should play within the Australian Greens? We invite you to complete this short survey to voice your opinion on this important issue.

[a hyperlink to the survey was then provided]