

Social Media is the phenomenon whereby users share their experiences, reviews and opinions about products, goods, services, media, political campaigns, and many others online. It has been referred to as a “democratisation” of information (*Wikipedia, 2007*), where the traditional broadcast model has been superseded by a more conversational type model. Users are no longer passive consumers being fed information, but are now proactively engaging with the information that is available to them, in most cases, being content producers rather than merely content consumers. It is driven by one of the oldest forms of communication – word of mouth. People have been exchanging and sharing experiences and opinions with each other since we learnt how to interact, and advancement in new media technology have given rise to the significance of word of mouth communication online. Social media typically take the forms of: blogs, forums, message boards, wikis, email, instant messaging, chat, social networking platforms, and many others. Anywhere that a user can post a comment of a posted or featured item can be considered part of the social media system.

Organisations and companies are now jumping into the social media bandwagon. Many which are online-savvy are ranking social media as a critical component in their marketing communications, in communication with customers, in gaining brand awareness and in generating publicity. A survey conducted by Prospero Technologies, a social media solutions provider, shows that over 50% of marketers expect their social media budget to increase in the next year (*see figure 1*). While eMarketer, a notable research firm in marketing technologies, predict a spend of over \$1 billion dollars worldwide for social networking sites alone (*see figure 2*). EMarketer has also shown that social media sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Youtube and Wikipedia are ranked among the top 15 most visited sites online (as at March 2007, *see figure 3*). While metrics and reporting on the success of social media campaigns remain slightly unaccountable (they are still measured by traditional traffic, page views and user interaction duration statistics), what is clear is that it is a formidable component of the online / multimedia space,

with its influence over the market -and the general public, undeniably growing exponentially year on year.

This shifting transmission model of few-to-many to many-to-many raises a number of issues for individuals / organisations which hope to send out their messages online. Broadcasters no longer have sole control over their messages. Kim and Sawhney cites Steur's definition of "interactivity", defining it as "a media experience offered by technologies in which 'users can participate in modifying the form and content of the mediated environment in real time' "(Steur, 1995 cited by Kim & Sawhney, 2002 p.220). This is fully exhibited in social media where the technology is specifically designed for and encourages feedback and conversation. The interactivity that social media brings means that messages are now at the mercy of the public – a previously unaccounted for opinion source. The public are largely untrained in the complexities of the back-end systems which actualise media messages, they only care for the outgoing result. They have their own agendas to satisfy, which may or may not correlate with the intentions of the message's original maker. Audiences may also be untrained but are increasingly becoming highly media-literate, which means that it is more difficult to convince them to act on the intended outcome of a media message.

Another issue that arises is accurate measurement of audience consumption. Ien Ang highlights the problematic nature of measuring audience uptake of television consumption using the existing ratings system, that the "multiplication of consumer options has inevitably led to a fragmentation...which in turn has led to a perceived inadequacy of [measurement] figures" (Ang, 1996 p.57). One of the key selling points of the online medium however, unlike traditional broadcast technology, is that it is supposedly almost 100% measureable and accountable. A user flow can be tracked from the initial page view (termed Impression), to a resulting click, and to eventual outcome, a registration to the site, or a direct purchase (termed Acquisition) (*Interactive Advertising Bureau definitions*). What is lacking in

online measurement is the consistency with which these figures are validated. Impressions and clicks are an industry norm, but the exponential growth nature of social media is not as straightforward. There are no agreed-upon standards with which you can measure the effect of social media. Impressions and clicks are valid metrics, but it doesn't account for the "viral" factor of this phenomena. How do you measure the "hype" or "buzz" value of a positive review? How do you know which initial impression resulted in a send-to-friend viral forwarding? How do you attribute dollar values to all these actions, in an industry that is obsessed with return on investment figures? These are all questions which surround the new "conversation" and which contemporary marketers wrestle with and spin-doctor around daily.

So what does this mean for broadcasters hoping to send their messages online? How do you capture the online-savvy public's attention to direct them to a single cause? In this brave, new, paradigm shifting virtual environment, how can advertisers, organisations, companies, activists, bureaucrats and politicians get their message/s across? To answer these questions, I will use the timely event of the 2007 Australian Federal Election campaigns, focusing on the two major players – the Liberal and Labor parties. Never before have we seen such a vigorous implementation of online media to support an Australian federal election campaign than in 2007. We will focus particular attention on how the two candidates, Kevin Rudd and John Howard, have used social media, in an attempt to engage the 'chattering classes'. We will look at their online campaign collateral, their methodology and implementation, and of the perceived message that both campaigns carry. From these, we would be able to make projections of the eventual winner, (based solely on their use of social media), and whether this is accurately reflected on the outcome of the election. The most relevant literary theory which we can use to accompany this analysis is Marshall McLuhan's famous "the medium is the message". McLuhan declares that it is not the "content" that affects the environment in which it is released but the medium itself, that it is the "medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 20). We will look at how Rudd and Howard have both

harnessed the medium of (social media), and whether they were successful in presenting their inherent “message”.

Kevin Rudd stands at a distinct advantage (or disadvantage depending on how you look at it), in that he is the fresh-faced challenger to the incumbent Howard. He utilises this in his main campaign slogan, “Fresh Ideas”. Howard’s “Go For Growth” seems dull and unexciting in comparison. Rudd even demonstrates his “fresh thinking” immediately with his flagship site and campaign catch-call, “Kevin07”. The laconic, iconic, rhyming tagline is a direct appropriation of the language of new media. It can be seen in the abbreviated, phrase snippet lexica of text messaging, to the single-word, onomotopeiotic “buzz” language of contemporary media, (Google, YouTube, Facebook, TomKat, Web2.0). Howard has no equivalent comparison to show for. One of the critical learnings one should take from social media is that it involves a new set of communication avenues, with different rules of engagement from traditional marketing. It requires a different approach, where the essential value proposition is the “trust” factor that shared recommendations bring. It’s about the wider community speaking to one another in a grass-roots fashion precisely because the gloss and spin marketing school of yesterday is deemed manipulative and untrustworthy to them. There is a need for genuine engagement with the community for them to absorb a message (and hopefully pass it on). Speaking their language would be an intelligent start. With these considerations in mind, we can analyse further how each candidate has made use of the social media tools available to them; namely, their main website and how it serves as a focal point for their online campaign, and collateral within other social media sites, including MySpace, Facebook and Youtube.

The Liberal Party have kept the existing party URL, www.liberal.org.au to house their online campaign. This emphasises the party as a whole and doesn’t make particular note of John Howard as its main contender. Perhaps this is unnecessary, given Howard’s long term in office and wide recognition as the

face of the Liberal Party in Australia. He is synonymous with his party and as long standing Prime Minister of Australia, is well recognised and very popular amongst his supporters. The site included small buttons displaying that you are able to access campaign information through the video file sharing site Youtube, and that you are able to subscribe to campaign updates via an RSS feed. The site has kept its original layout, and made no distinct changes during the campaign period. It launched a scathing attack on its opponent, Kevin Rudd of Labor, by listing what it deemed, their negative points – inexperience, union influence, and ‘no policies’. The site uses a sinister, jarring red on red design to villainise Kevin Rudd, and chose to attack the other candidate rather than focus on its own offerings. (see figure 4):

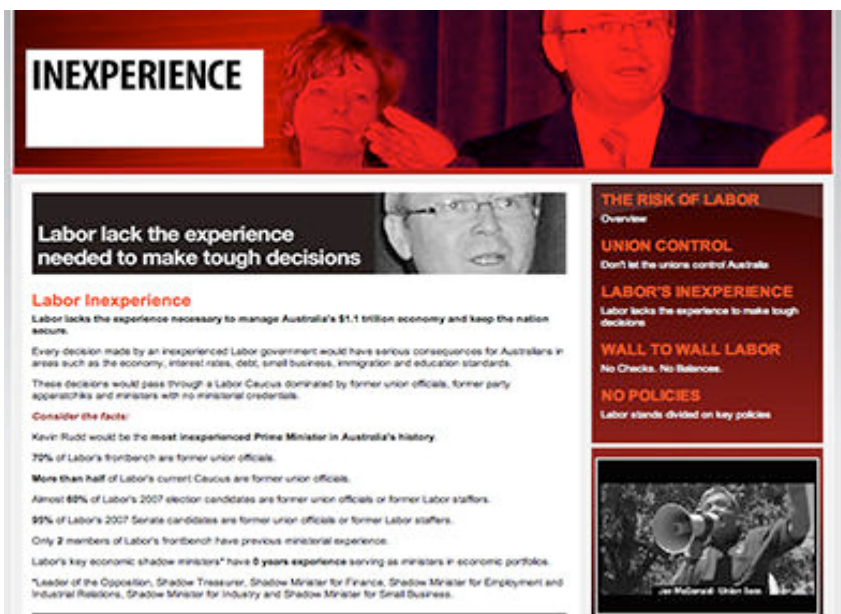


Figure 4: Screenshot of www.liberal.org.au during the election campaign, viewed November 2007

Kevin Rudd launched his campaign, with the aforementioned “Kevin07” tagline. He bought an exclusive domain to showcase this, www.kevin07.com.au . What this shows is a significant investment in the Federal Election campaign specifically for online purposes. The site is very useable and has a clean,

“fresh” design, with complementary colours used, which also retained the Labor Party colours, making clear affiliations with the party which he represents, and which is also good design technique for messaging consistency. The site also shows the significance of social media tools to his campaign, having an entire right hand side navigation devoted to interactive, participatory avenues with which voters can engage with – it includes the ability to donate, tell-a-friend functionality, online petition signup, a blog, and large links to his MySpace, Facebook and Youtube pages. Clearly, this highlights that social media is very much part of Rudd’s election campaign. (see figure 5)

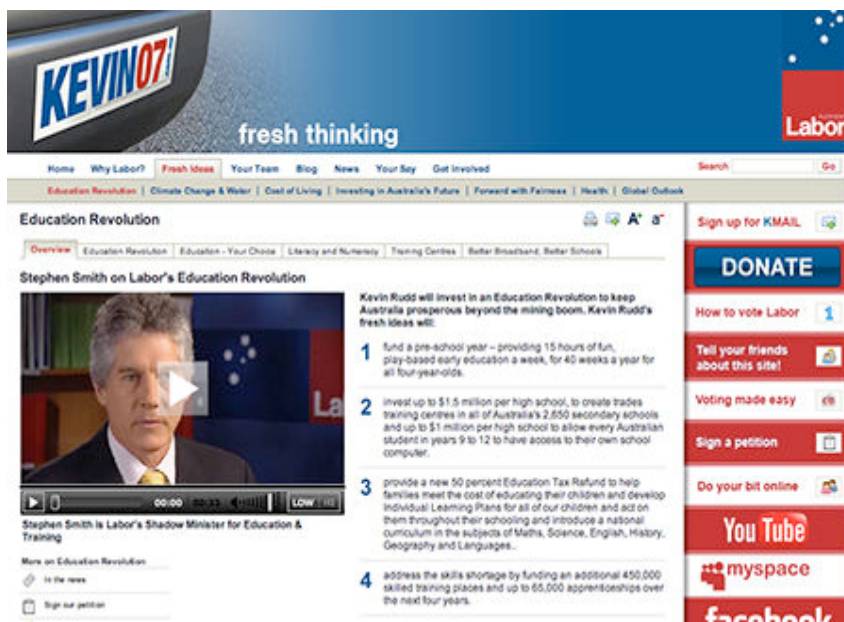


Figure 5: screenshot of www.kevin07.com.au during the election campaign, viewed November 2007

MySpace is a social networking site which allows for do-it-yourself templates for customisation of individual profiles. Kevin Rudd has used a custom template which is consistent with the main Kevin07 website. It makes good use of the page and has designed information in a visually appealing manner. He has even used the cross-promotional capabilities of 3rd party sites, advertising his own campaign banners in the profile page inventory (see figure 6). The page is, once again, useable and engaging. One

measure of its success can be determined by the amount of individual public profiles which has requested Kevin Rudd to be their “MySpace Friend” – over 20,000.



Figure 6: Kevin Rudd's MySpace page, viewed November 2007

John Howard has gone with the generic MySpace layout, which contain poor html coding and causes alignment issues on the page, with page elements displaying in unset locations when using different browsers and resolutions. He hasn't made full use of the promotional capabilities of the site, other random advertisements floating misplaced on the profile page (see figure 7). As a result, his MySpace Friend count is less than 10.



Figure 7: John Howard's MySpace page, viewed November 2007

In a similar vein, both candidates have also made use of Facebook profiles. Facebook doesn't allow for the same customisation as MySpace, and profiles largely retain the same format. Both candidates have devised a widget which displays a small area in an individual profile declaring that they are a "fan of" either candidate, downloaded when you add one of them as a Facebook friend. Given the relative similarity with which each Facebook profile is presented, it is notable then, that if we use the same 'who's got more friends popularity' metric as MySpace, Kevin Rudd once again overshadows Howard, with over 20,000 supporters to Howards less than 150.

As a final piece of social media, we'll address both candidates' YouTube videos, as per the below links.

Kevin Rudd: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYxnIHmLzOw&feature=related>

John Howard: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3lT2Jj1Y84>

Kevin Rudd opens by freezing a Liberal Party “scare” campaign. While it only lasts a second or two into the footage, it highlights that Mr. Rudd is aware of the various forms of media surrounding the campaign. It is symbolic that he freezes the opposing commercial, as it appears that he seems to be taking control of it. The sharp editing cuts between the commercial shot to his profile shot are nicely executed. His manner is relaxed, yet confident, in a background scenery of a brightly lit office, where he leans against a smart boardroom table. This approach once again shows that he is appropriating the language of the medium. Youtube is primarily used to exchange amateur video, from users which would be shooting them in their homes, on in a casual surrounding. Howard’s video is set against a backdrop of a well kept, office looking environment, the Australian flag framing either side of the shot. It denotes a position of power and authority, which, while being an understandable approach, doesn’t realise that Youtube videos are not the same as parliamentary addresses. The audience would not be press gallery journalists, and media professionals waiting for a debrief. They are regular Australian citizens, browsing from the comforts of their home computers or office desks. His speech is unengaging and makes a self-conscious declaration about his use of “the internet” and of its perceived value in his campaign. It does more to highlight his inexperience of the medium more than anything else.

From these analyses, it could be justifiably predicted that Kevin Rudd of the Labor Party has harnessed social media better than John Howard of the Liberals. Rudd has restructured his idea of marketing communications to better adapt it to the new playing field of social media. He has taken the time to learn its language, its usage and its breadth. He has engaged the community, his supporters and colleagues and clarified his position in his adaptation of this technology. He has used social media as it was designed to be used, that is, to be part of a conversation between himself and the community. The result, if we go by these points, would be that Labor will win the 2007 Federal Election.

It can be argued that social media is only being accessed by a certain type of demographic, not necessarily equally favourable of each candidate. Social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook is seen to have a 'younger' audience. This may be true of these two properties, but they are only a couple of examples of social media that's available. The Youtube audience for example, have an almost equal spread of market viewing share from 18-34s – 19%, 35-44s – 21%, 45-54s – 20%, to 55+ - 21% (see *figure 8*). Internet usage statistics reveal that "Government information and services" are ranked among the top 10 uses for people 35 years and up, with the ranking increasing the older the age group gets (see *figure 9*). Internet usage generally has always been skewed towards the AB demographic – that is, educated, well-off members of the populace, with a high socio-economic status, and perhaps with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. One would assume that this lends itself nicely to a support base for a conservative government. The argument therefore, that social media is a domain of the young, that it maintains a niche audience, is a false one. It is a mainstream medium, engaging a large and diverse cross-section of the community. Aside from the examples I've shown, there are many and varied blogs, message boards, user forums, and wikis which remain unaccounted for, the sheer quantity of them online making standard measurement very difficult.

McLuhan declares that the 'medium is the message', "The personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extensions of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan, 1964, p.19). The most successful players would be those that realise the nature of the medium itself, rather than focusing on the 'message' the medium purportedly would bring. The rise of the internet has begun a revolution of information. Through its proliferation, and most importantly, its accessibility, it is changing the way with which we converse with each other, and in this case, our elected leaders. Social media in particular, designed for a two-way conversation, for feedback and recommendation, for word-of-mouth communication, is further 'democratising' information. Political campaigns are now at the scrutiny of

the public. The democratic process seems to be exhibited, acted upon and facilitated by these new technologies. Future election candidates would do well to note this for their own campaigns. I optimistically share writer Stephen Noble's observation, which can be validated by McLuhan's theory and applied to the election campaign. The message of social media is this: we are in the throes of a social revolution, where democracy is becoming what its semantic origins declared it was, a "rule by the people". If the medium is indeed the message; then in time, (if it hasn't already) democracy will become a two-way conversation.

Bibliography

Ang, Ien: 1996, 'New Technologies, Audience Measurement, and the Tactics of Television Consumption' in her *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*, London, Routledge, 183-196

Bimber, Bruce and Davis, Richard: 2003, '*Campaigning Online, The Internet in U.S. Elections*' New York, Oxford

Hall Jameson, Kathleen and Kohrs Campbell, Karlyn: 2001, '*The Interplay of Influence, News, Advertising, Politics and the Mass Media*', U.S.A., Wadsworth

Kim, Pyungho, and Sawhney, Harmeet: 2002, 'A Machine-Like New Medium - Theoretical Examination of Interactive TV,' in *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol 24, 217-233

Marketwire, Prospero Technologies 2007: *Report on Prospero Survey Reveals 88 Percent of Businesses Expected to Increase Social Media Spending in 2008*, U.S.A

McLuhan, Marshall: 1964, 'The Medium is the Message,' reprinted in Kellner, Douglas and Durham, Meenakshi Gigi (eds) *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2001, 129-138

Noble, Stephen: 2007, 'The digital election is about what voters say to each other' *Digital Ministry article*, Sydney, viewed November 2007,
<http://www.digitalministry.com.au/component/option,com_myblog/Itemid,142/show,403/>

Roscoe, Jane: 2001, 'Big Brother Australia: Performing the 'Real' Twenty-four-seven,' in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol 4 (4), 473-488

Unknown, 2007: 'The Crowded World of Social Networks', *e-marketer newsletter*, viewed November 2007, http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?id=1004896&src=article1_newsltr

Unknown, 2006: 'Use of the Internet: Profile Breakdown', Roy Morgan Single Source Australia Oct 2005-Sept 2006, Sydney

Appendix

"How do you expect your social media spending to change next year?" (select one)	
Increase significantly	30%
Increase	58%
No change	10%
Decrease slightly	0%
Decrease significantly	0%
No response	2%

2007 Survey by Prospero Technologies

Figure 1: Marketwire /Prospero Technologies Survey, 2007

Worldwide Online Social Network Advertising Spending, 2006-2011 (millions)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
US	\$350	\$900	\$1,380	\$1,810	\$2,170	\$2,515
Outside of US	\$95	\$335	\$530	\$745	\$970	\$1,115
Worldwide	\$445	\$1,235	\$1,910	\$2,555	\$3,140	\$3,630

Note: Definition includes general social networking sites where social networking is the primary activity; social network offerings from portals such as Google, Yahoo! and MSN; niche social networks devoted to a specific hobby or interest; and marketer-sponsored social networks that are either stand-alone sites or part of a larger marketer site; in all cases, figures include online advertising spending as well as site or profile page development costs

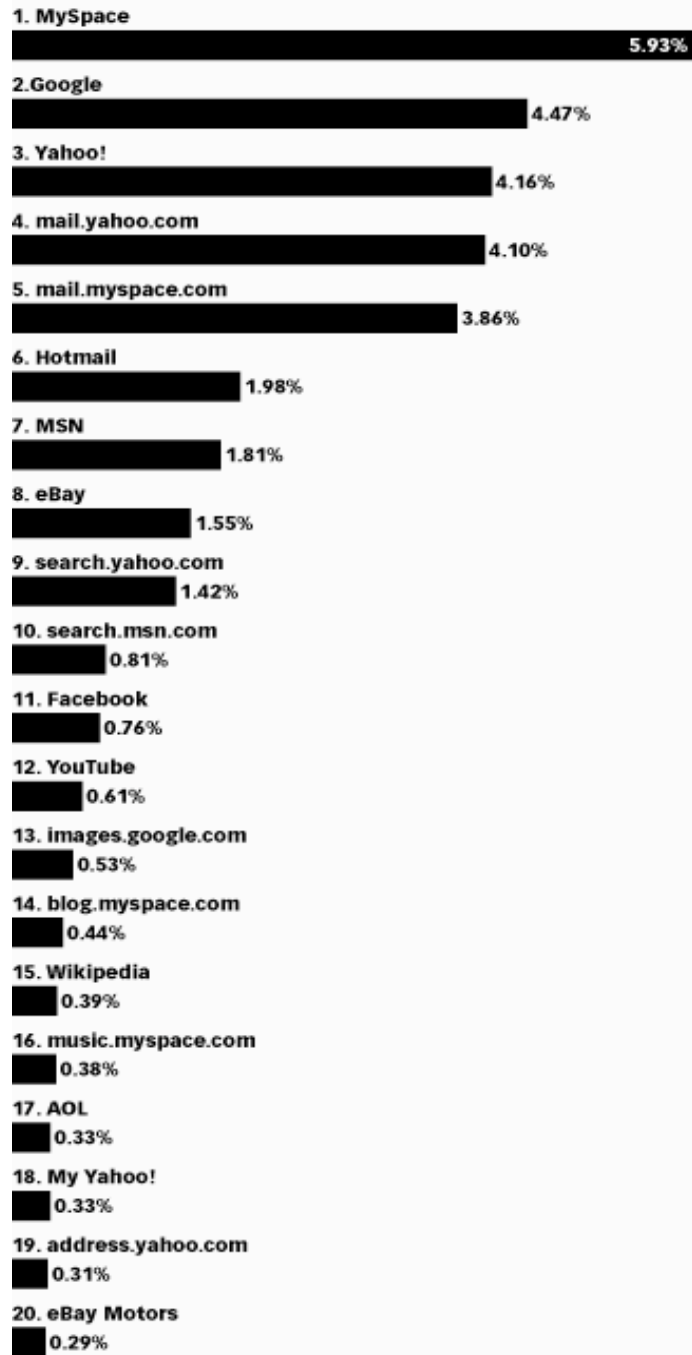
Source: eMarketer, May 2007

083270

www.eMarketer.com

Figure 2: e-marketer chart on spending on online social networks, 2007

Top 20 Most Popular Web Sites in the US, Ranked by Market Share of Visits, February 2007



Source: Hitwise, March 2007

081678

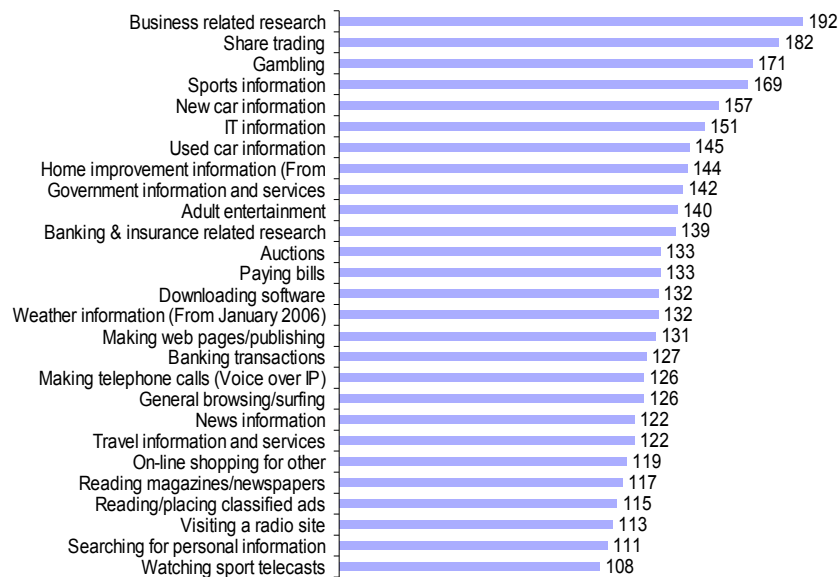
www.eMarketer.com

Figure 3: e-marketer chart on most viewed sites, 2007

Demographics		Users (M)	% Users
Age	All	55.1	—
	Under 18	10.1	18%
	18–34	10.4	19%
	35–44	11.8	21%
	45–54	11.2	20%
	55 and over	11.6	21%
Gender	Male	29.6	54%
	Female	25.6	46%

Figure 8: Youtube demographic data as seen on the Youtube advertising media kit information, 2007

Men 45-54 are more likely to use the internet for...



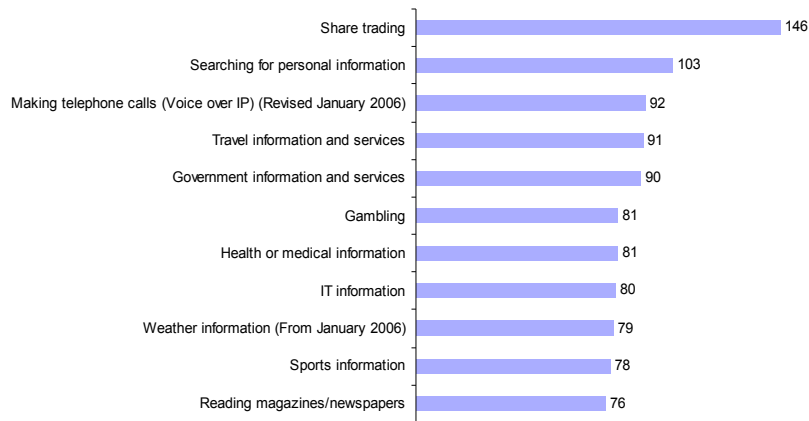
■ Index online population =100

ninemsn

*Source: ROY MORGAN SINGLE SOURCE AUSTRALIA : Oct 2005 – Sept 2006

Figure 9: Roy Morgan Internet Usage profiles, 2006

Men 55+ are more likely to use the internet for...

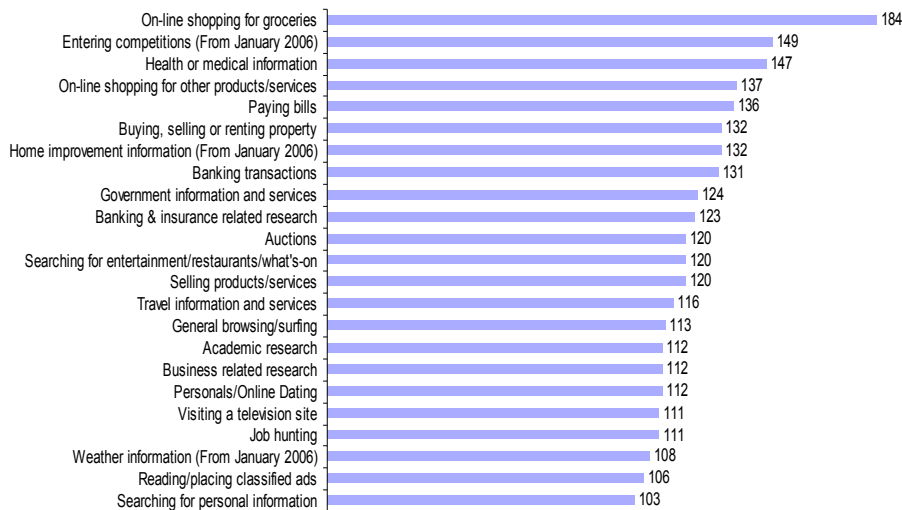


■ Index online population =100



*Source: ROY MORGAN SINGLE SOURCE AUSTRALIA : Oct 2005 – Sept 2006

Women 35-44 are more likely to use the internet for...

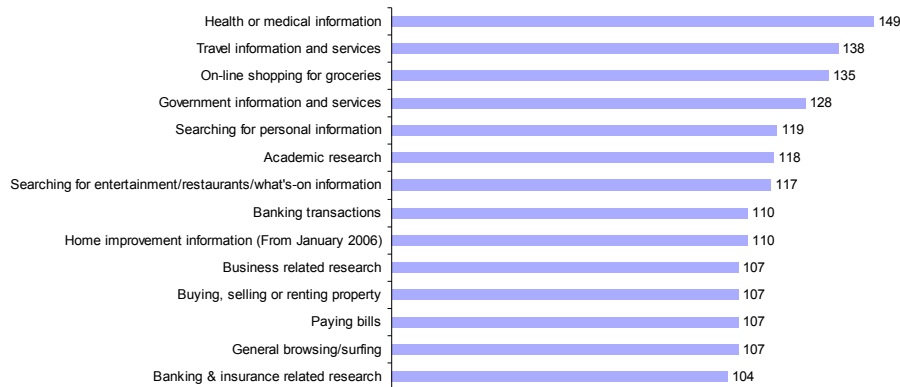


■ Index online population =100



*Source: ROY MORGAN SINGLE SOURCE AUSTRALIA : Oct 2005 – Sept 2006

Women 45-54 are more likely to use the internet for...

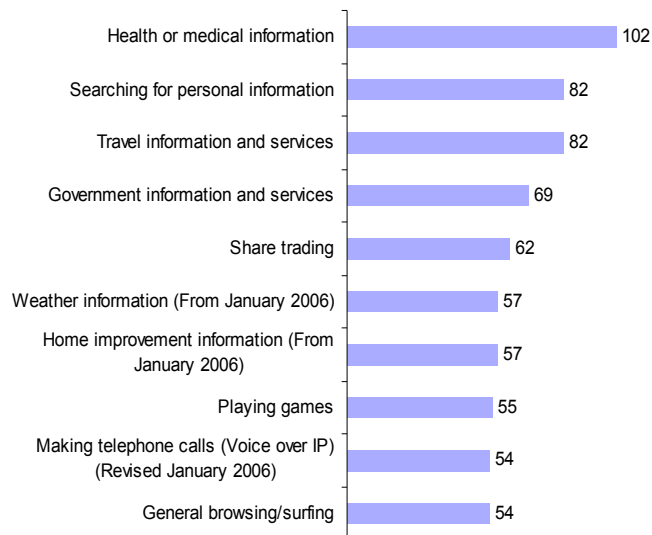


■ Index online population =100



*Source: ROY MORGAN SINGLE SOURCE AUSTRALIA : Oct 2005 – Sept 2006

Women 55+ are more likely to use the internet for...



■ Index online population =100



*Source: ROY MORGAN SINGLE SOURCE AUSTRALIA : Oct 2005 – Sept 2006

