

The Facebook Formula

An experimental study into which electioneering strategies used over Facebook are most effective at influencing the Australian youth vote.

Ben Grace

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Department of Government and International Relations

The University of Sydney

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours). This work is substantially my own, and where any part of this work is not my own, I have indicated this by acknowledging the source of that part or those parts of the work.

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Abstract:

Facebook is rapidly changing Australia's political media landscape. Young voters' growing reliance on Facebook for the consumption of political news has corresponded with politicians' increasingly prudent use of social media; suggesting that Facebook will play a defining role as an influential political arena to access future generations of voters. It is therefore important for electioneers and political scientists to understand which electioneering strategies used over Facebook are the most effective at influencing the Australian youth vote. This thesis takes a post-positivist approach to research to examine this causal relationship; using the experimental method to isolate and test the effects of extant online electioneering strategies on the voting habits of young Australians. It employs web-based crowdsourcing services to recruit participants into the experiments, and in doing so encounters sample size problems which prevent it from drawing conclusions against hypotheses. While the thesis is unable to evaluate the causal relationship between online electioneering strategies and youth voting habits, by learning from the sampling issues encountered in the study it makes an important contribution towards our understanding of experiments in Australian political science. Additionally, considering problems in the study were caused by sampling issues rather than the methodological design, the thesis is able to offer a robust methodology for future post-positivist research into this area.

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Chapter 1: Facebook's prominence in Australian politics

Introduction:

The 2016 Australian federal election marked an important milestone for the use of Facebook in Australian political media. Dubbed the 'Facebook Campaign', the election reflected how politicians' increasingly prudent use of social media has corresponded with young voters' growing reliance on Facebook for consumption of political news (Carson & McNair 2018). This has significant implications about the future of electioneering in Australia, suggesting that Facebook will continue to expand its role both in political campaigning and as a primary news source for younger generations (Sensis 2017). If this trend continues, Facebook will establish itself as a dominant forum for political news consumption alongside traditional news media; changing the political media landscape of Australia and having a sizeable impact on the way younger generations vote.

In response to social media's rising prominence, political scientists have closely studied its impact on Australian politics as well as young people's increasing dependence on it for political news consumption (Young 2010; Chen & Vromen 2012; Carson & Lukamto 2016; Gauja et al 2018). In doing so, researchers have identified different types of electioneering strategies used by politicians over social media platforms (Larsson 2015; Chen 2015). However, the relative effectiveness of these strategies at influencing different types of young voters remains understudied. To address this deficit, this thesis additively builds on previous literature which identifies different types of online electioneering strategies and the different voting habits of young Australians. In doing so, it develops a robust methodology capable of establishing a causal relationship between the two typologies. Ultimately, this thesis attempts to answer the research question: Which electioneering strategies used on Facebook are the most

effective at influencing who young Australians vote for?

1.1 Organisation of the thesis:

The thesis will start by reviewing wider studies of political communication; addressing the gap in our knowledge and substantiating the need for this study. Then, it will introduce its post-positivist epistemological approach, and make a case for why post-positivism offers an ideal theoretical framework for answering the research question. Following this, the thesis refers to research design protocols within post-positivist studies of communication in order to construct the experimental methodology. In doing so it, rigorously adheres to the standards of post-positivist scientific inquiry, developing robust experiments capable of empirically testing the effects of online electioneering strategies used over Facebook on young Australian voters. This includes a thorough interrogation of potential biases which could influence the outcome of the study. However, due to sampling issues encountered during the data collection phase, I was unable to draw conclusions against the hypotheses. Therefore, the main takeaway from this study comes from the lessons learned about sampling in experimentation rather than the results of the data. The thesis will conclude with a discussion of the difficulties associated with experimental research in political science and the implications it has for the future of experimentation in Australia.

1.2 The value of the study:

Before reviewing the literature, it is worth being upfront about the academic and pragmatic contributions this thesis offers. My research has a highly contemporary focus, made more relevant by recent political machinations surrounding the Cambridge Analytica scandal that occurred in March 2018 (Burghel 2018). With the increased emphasis politicians are placing

on Facebook to attract voters, developing a methodology capable of ethically testing the causal relationship between electioneering strategies on Facebook and youth voting habits has practical implications for electioneers. While this study specifically focuses on Facebook, electioneers could also investigate whether my methods are translatable to other popular social media sites in order to extend their influence over youth demographics. Additionally, the groundwork this thesis lays for understanding the marginal utility of accessing youth demographics in Australia, as well as the costs of doing so, should be highly informative to campaigners.

In terms of academic contributions, this thesis develops our understanding of experimental research methods in Australian political science. I used the experimental method to explore the relationship between online electioneering strategies and youth voting habits, as it delivers “unrivalled claims for the making of causal inferences” (Margetts & Stoker 2010, p. 309). In doing so, I encountered sampling issues unique to Australian-centric experimental studies which researchers should be made aware of. Considering how political science is increasingly turning to the experimental method to help explain causal relationships (Druckman et al 2006; Margetts & Stoker 2010; Iyengar 2011), I anticipate that these findings will be highly relevant to the future of experimental research in Australia.

1.3 Literature review:

Investigating the causal relationship between electioneering strategies used on Facebook and young Australian voting habits requires me to situate my thesis in the context of wider studies of political communication. In doing so, I am able to address the lacuna in Australian political science literature surrounding my research topic, substantiating the need for this thesis. The

literature review will take an ‘inverted pyramid’ structure; drawing upon broader studies in the field for background reference before narrowing its focus to the specific typologies that played a foundational role in my research design. As such, it will start with a brief overview of the rise of social media and its adoption in political campaigning efforts. Then, it will focus on how recent social media developments have helped shape the Australian political arena — with attention to Facebook in particular. Following this, it will highlight the gap in literature surrounding the research question and reaffirm the necessity for this study. Finally, it will conclude by providing a comprehensive overview of the typologies for online electioneering strategies and young Australian voting habits which informed this study’s methodology.

1.3.1 The adoption of new technology in political campaigning:

Social media has ushered in a new age of political communication (McNair 2018). Prior to the boom of social networking sites (SNSs), political communication was dominated by traditional media sources like print news and television which suited a one-way flow of information from politicians to voters. This limited the ability of citizens to interact with politicians or affect the political communication process (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999; Norris 2001). Early web technology operated in much the same way, enabling very little interactivity in a top-down style of communication which was categorised as the ‘Read-Only Web’ (Berners-Lee 1998).

However, the advent of web 2.0 marked the beginning of a ‘Read-Write-Publish’ era, empowering users with a more interactive role in producing and consuming online content (Bruns 2009). Web 2.0 saw a boom in social networking sites that challenged the traditional top-down, centralised mode of political communication by enabling more interaction between politicians and voters (Lilleker & Jackson 2010). As a result, politicians have been forced to

adapt their campaign strategies to accommodate the vast suite of communication options that have become available in the digital age (Lilleker, Tenscher & Štětka 2014). The most notable example of this is Barack Obama's 2008 election campaign, which has broadly been considered to be the first political campaign to fully exploit the potential of social media (Lilleker, Tenscher & Štětka 2014). The success of the campaign has been cited as catalysing the increased use of social networking sites in elections across the world (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez 2011; Johnson & Perlmutter 2010; Lilleker & Jackson 2010); which leads to a discussion of Facebook's rising influence on Australia's electoral processes.

1.3.2 Facebook in Australian politics:

We can gauge how Australian electioneers have rapidly adapted their campaign strategies to exploit social media following Obama's success by observing how political science literature has tracked changes in the media landscape. In a report published by the Parliament of Australia in 2010, Sally Young responded to the rising prominence of social media in political communication, quoting "despite all the focus on the internet, at this point in time, TV is still by far the most popular medium in Australia... where the audience is most likely to come across political news" (Young 2010, p. 4). However in 2012, building on the rising interest in SNSs Peter Chen and Ariadne Vromen determined that social media was playing a preeminent role in rapidly changing Australia's political media landscape (Chen & Vromen 2012). This claim is further substantiated by Andrea Carson and William Lukamto's investigation of Victoria's state politicians' use of social media in non-election and election periods in 2014. Their study demonstrated that digital technologies, particularly Facebook, are being rapidly adopted by politicians to enhance their political communications (Carson & Lukamto 2016).

Facebook's prominent influence on political communications was epitomised in Carson's 2016 interview with the ABC. Carson confirmed that politicians had become so reliant on Facebook to secure votes that the 2016 Federal Election became widely known as the 'Facebook campaign' (Carson 2016). That being said, 'Double Disillusion', a book published in 2018 containing the collaborative works of prominent Australian political scientists, revisited the 2016 Federal Election to discover that mainstream media was still the dominant news forum for political consumption (Carson & McNair 2018). Nonetheless, the book did reinforce three important facts pertinent to this thesis. The use of traditional media sources over the course of the election went into decline (Bean 2018); young people are becoming increasingly reliant on Facebook as a primary news source (Carson & McNair 2018); and Facebook was the market leader for political engagement on social media during the campaign (Chen 2018).

1.3.3 The gap in literature and scope of the thesis:

Evidently, political science literature has well documented the prominent role that Facebook has come to play in Australian politics. However, in recognition of this increased role, a more nuanced understanding of how politicians specifically adapt their campaign strategies to Facebook, as well as their relative effectiveness towards influencing different types of voters becomes necessary. Kathleen McGraw in the 'Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science' substantiates this point, noting that "a complete understanding (of electioneering tactics) will be out of reach until we take into account the strategic interplay between elites and the mass public" (McGraw 2011, p. 195). McGraw calls for experiments to be used to understand this interplay, as they are particularly well suited to establishing causal relationships (McGraw 2011). As such, this thesis addresses the gap in literature by using the experimental method to investigate the relationship between different electioneering strategies used over

Facebook and different subsets of young Australian voters.

When professing to make a contribution to wider literature, it is important to be explicit about the scope of the thesis and the limits of the experimental methodology's explanatory power. Specifically, this thesis focuses on the electioneering strategies most effective at gaining the vote of swing-voters¹ aged 18-25 during election campaigns. Swing-voters were chosen because they represent "the group most interesting to Australian politicians" (Throsby 2013, p. 98). Young attributes the emphasis electioneers place on these voters to the fact that "the two major parties' loyal supporters tend to be evenly distributed (and therefore cancel each other out), inadvertently leading to one of the defining features of Australian politics – that 'swinging voters' in marginal seats determine election results" (Young 2011, p. 88). Considering that young voters represent the largest undecided age demographic in Australia, this is a well justified approach to the research question (AEC 2018). Additionally, by focusing on young swing voters, the thesis is able to give an indication of the marginal utility of targeting these subsets during election periods. Finally, small age range of 18-25 was chosen to accommodate for differences in political maturity between the teenager-early 20s age group and the late 20s-early 30s age group who may otherwise be considered as 'young' voters (Chan & Clayton 2006; McAllister 2014).

1.4 Typologies of online electioneering strategies and young Australian voters:

The most important elements of the literature review are the typologies which inform the research design of the thesis. As stated in the introduction, this thesis aims to establish a causal relationship between the types of electioneering strategies used on Facebook and the voting

¹ Voters who are not firmly committed to any party and/ or who are "open to changing their vote from the previous election" (Young 2011, p. 88).

habits of young Australians. To do so, it draws on Larsson's categorisation of the ways politicians engage with constituents over social media in Western democracies and Laughland-Booÿ, Skrbiš, & Ghazarian's² subsets of young Australian voters. This section will conclude the literature review by providing an overview of each typology. Then, the following chapters narrow the typologies down to the relevant categories which suit the parameters of the research question; detailing each step of reasoning used to exclude irrelevant components.

1.4.1 Larsson's online electioneering strategies:

Following a wide review of political communications literature, Larsson suggests there are six distinct ways to categorise politicians' engagement with voters on social media (Larsson 2015).

These are:

1. *Acknowledgements*, which refer to positive sentiments posted by politicians towards their supporters and colleagues during election campaigns (Bronstein 2013; Graham et al 2013). Acknowledgements are an easy and effective way to boost the virality of a post on social media.
2. *Campaign reports* refer to posts covering "information from party conventions" (Klinger 2013, p. 724) or "references to campaign events such as rallies, speeches or debates" (Conway, Kenski & Wang p. 1600). Campaign reports provide an easy way for supporters to stay updated with electioneering developments (Larsson 2015).
3. *Informing* is a more traditional strategy in political campaigning, which refers to the

² Referred to as Laughland-Booÿ et al from this point onwards.

discussion of political issues or provision of policy statements in a top-down fashion on social media (Jackson & Lilleker 2009). Historically, this strategy has been effective in traditional print media, as it is suited to a one-directional flow of information (Lilleker et al 2011).

4. *Critiquing* or negative campaigning strategies refers to politicians criticising their campaign opponents and their positions (Glassman, Straus & Shogan 2010). Indeed, studies in political psychology have confirmed that criticism's effectiveness in campaign cycles is largely attributed to the tendency of audiences to reliably recall negative information, making this strategy useful for diminishing the support base of political opponents (Lau 1982).
5. *Mobilisation* refers to politicians using social media to increase political involvement from citizens. Mobilisation plays a key role in encouraging citizens to turn out and vote during election periods (Kim 2011; Baek 2015).
6. Finally, *Personalisation* refers to how politicians use their social media pages to post 'everyday activities of a non-political nature' (Jackson & Lilleker 2011). Use of this strategy has been a point of contention in politics on the basis that it could be perceived by audiences as pandering (Sennett 1977; Habermas 1989). However, from a campaigning perspective, this strategy can foster a closer relationship between politicians and voters by decreasing the perceived psychological distance between them (Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams 2011).

Larsson's definitions of electioneering strategies offer a robust typology for

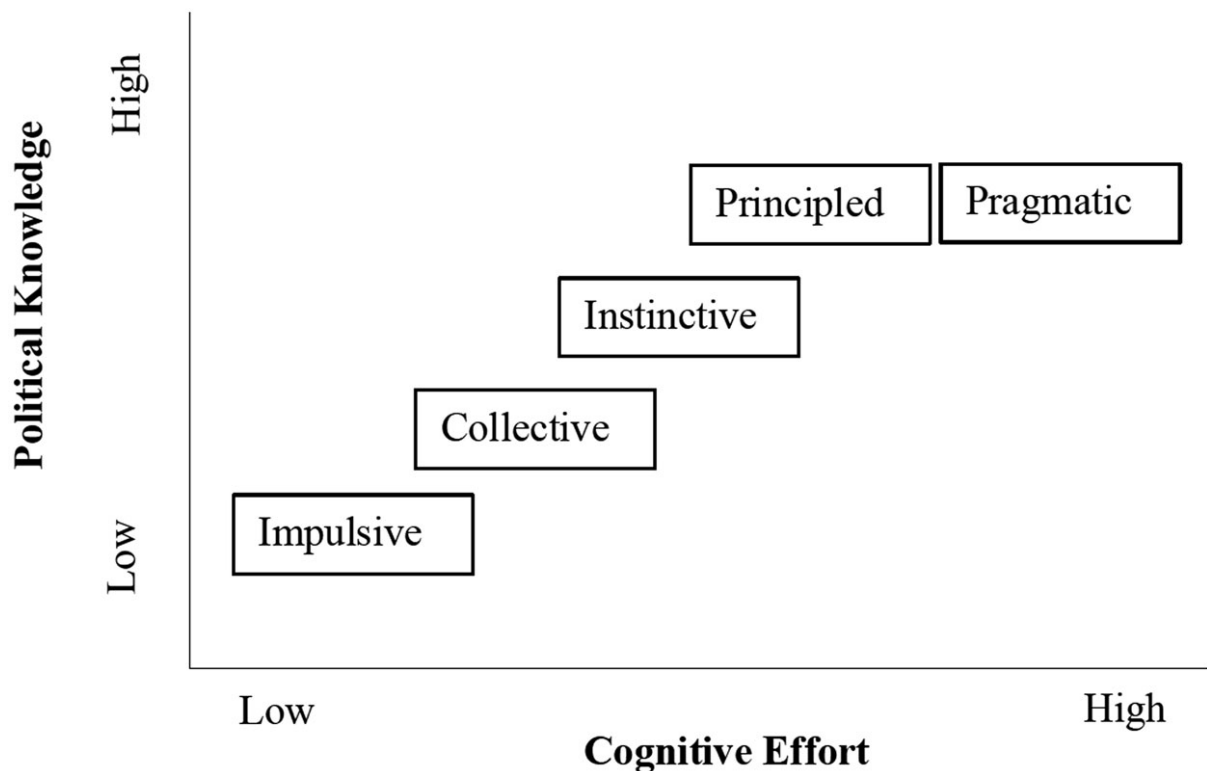
understanding how politicians use Facebook to access audiences. However, it is only useful insofar that it explains what the strategies are, rather than the relative effectiveness of each strategy in its ability to influence individuals' voting behaviour.

Indeed, as Young argues, "Media effects depend upon availability, choice, content and the characteristics of the person who is accessing media content" (Young 2010 p. 102); demonstrating that an individual's context plays a crucial part in the reception of these electioneering strategies. Ivanescue supports Young's claim, stating that "information is never identical for each group member" and that "shaping political opinions are achieved according to each group's characteristics" (Ivanescue 2014, p. 13). Evidently, in order to conceptualise the impact of electioneering over Facebook, it is also necessary to understand the different voting strategies of individuals. Therefore, this thesis draws upon Laughland-Booÿ et al's typology of young Australian voters and their decision-making strategies to establish causal relationships between online electioneering strategies and young voters.

1.4.2 Laughland-Booÿ et al's young Australian voters:

Laughland-Booÿ's team from Monash University provide a comprehensive overview of the different voting habits of young Australians. Their conceptual framework covers a spectrum of voters based on cognitive effort invested in the electoral process and level of political acumen of an individual, which she categorises into the five subsets: 'Impulsive', 'Collective', 'Instinctive', 'Principled' and 'Pragmatic' voters (see fig 1 – sourced from Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018, p. 6).

Figure 1: Five subsets ranked by political knowledge and cognitive effort



1. The Impulsive voter:

‘Impulsive’ voters have the lowest levels of political acumen among the 5 categories. They attach minimal importance to upcoming elections and as such invest minimal cognitive effort into deciding who to vote for. Indeed, these voters only partake in political processes because voting is compulsory in Australia, although the study did not investigate whether young people following this election strategy would be likely to enroll to vote in a timely fashion in the first place (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018).

2. The Collective voter:

‘Collective’ voters do not have much political acumen, and do not spend a lot of cognitive effort in determining who to vote for. However, they crucially differ from ‘Impulsive’ voters in that

they do respect the electoral process, and therefore they have some interest in politics to the extent that they will form a political opinion. Be that as it may, this opinion relies heavily on heuristics, in that it essentially mirrors the political orientation of those around them - particularly their parents (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018).

3. The Instinctive voter:

‘Instinctive’ voters have slightly more political acumen again, and prioritise their vote decision based on their own emotion-based-appraisal of a party or party members rather than relying on familial solidarity. They tend not to be strongly partisan voters, and employ emotional heuristics to simplify their decision to a ‘gut feeling’ about who to vote for (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018).

4. The Principled voter:

‘Principled’ voters are more engaged than previous groups in political processes, and comparatively invest lot of cognitive effort to access different sources to build their political knowledge. They use their vote as has a conduit for expressing values and ideals, and typically have a strong partisan alliance with parties who reflect those values in their policy platforms. Principled voters may also orient their vote around a specific political issue. However, considering how parties “disproportionately emphasise issues as their own” (Dolzal et al 2014, p. 57), this style of voting still lends itself to partisan attachment (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018; see also van der Brug 2004 and Green and Hobolt 2008).

5. The Pragmatic voter:

‘Pragmatic’ voters are rational decision makes who are highly engaged in politics and have political knowledge equal to principal voters, yet they invest more cognitive effort into

collecting bipartisan information to inform their vote. They use this breadth of information to engage in a process of critical reasoning by weighing up multiple factors and priorities before arriving at a choice (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018).

To conclude, Larsson and Laughland-Booÿ et al offer robust typologies which satisfy the parameters of the research question. Indeed, Larsson establishes a framework to understand how politicians engage audiences on social media, essentially answering the first half of the research question's focus: 'What electioneering strategies do politicians use on Facebook?'. Similarly, Laughland-Booÿ et al's analysis of young Australian voters and their voting habits offers a well-tailored answer to the second half of the question's focus: 'How do young Australians decide who to vote for?'. In order to understand the interplay between these typologies, we need a theoretical approach suited to establishing and investigating causal relationships; which leads to a discussion of post-positivism.

Chapter 2: The post-positivist approach to research

Furlong and Marsh argue that each social scientist's approach to their subject is influenced by their ontological and epistemological positions (Furlong & Marsh 2010). Considering the role theory plays in research and analysis, it makes sense to introduce the methodology section with a consideration of how the post-positivist epistemology has influenced this thesis' research design. As such, post-positivists ascribe to a foundationalist ontology, which states that there is "a real world out there" with independent powers that can be measured to establish causal relationships between social phenomena (Furlong & Marsh 2010, p. 192). Post-positivism privileges quantitative methodologies as useful for establishing causal relationships, as they are concerned with developing explanatory and predictive models (Furlong & Marsh 2010). As such, post-positivism offers an ideal approach for establishing casual relationships between different political campaign methods and youth voting habits.

2.1 Distinguishing between positivism and post-positivism and its implications on my approach to research:

Seeing as 'positivism' is widely used as "a term of derision within fields of social research", it is necessary to distinguish between positivism and post-positivism, which has significant theoretical and methodological implications (Miller 2005, p. 36). The key differences between the two are their approaches to conducting objective, unbiased research, and the ways they interact with interpretivist studies. To begin with, positivists believe that natural sciences and social sciences are broadly analogous. As Miller explains, positivists claim that knowledge is best gained through a search for regularities and relationships among components of the social world. Crucially, they state that observation can serve as an independent test of a theory's validity, and that by using the scientific method a researcher can produce objective results

(Miller 2005).

Following this, positivists ignore the contribution of anti-foundationalist interpretivist theories which challenge the ability of researchers to be objective, and by extension the validity of the scientific method to make accurate claims about causation (Furlong & Marsh 2010). In doing so, positivists dismiss important developments made by interpretivists towards understanding the theory-laden nature of observation, instead situating these claims in the “too-hard basket” (Furlong & Marsh 2010, p. 196). To a positivist researcher, the interpretivist tradition “merely offers opinions or subjective judgements about the world” (Furlong & Marsh 2010, p. 200), and is best suited to serving a supporting role to positivist inquiry as a means of generating better questions to be utilised in a positivist framework (King, Keohane & Verba 1994). Finally, considering how qualitative methodologies are most commonly associated with anti-foundationalist inquiry, traditional positivists often discount qualitative methods as being less scientifically rigorous (Furlong & Marsh 2010).

In contrast, post-positivists offer a more sophisticated approach, claiming that theoretical frameworks derived from anti-foundationalism have a key role to play in political analysis (Sanders 2010). While post-positivists, like traditional positivists, focus on developing causal explanations for regularities using direct observation and the scientific method, they temper this approach with insights from the interpretivist tradition. Namely, post-positivists acknowledge the interpretivist claim that it is impossible to separate the researcher from their investigation and to achieve total objectivity in their findings (Putnam 1981). As such, post-positivists treat objectivity as a regulatory ideal rather than an innate feature of the scientific method, and in doing so strive to be unbiased as possible through being aware of values and biases which may compromise the neutrality of their research (Miller 2005).

By accepting the interpretivist stance that our understanding of reality is coloured by socially-constructed values, post-positivists interact with anti-foundationalist studies in a nuanced way. Indeed, Phillips argues that the post-positivist ontology does not deny the notions inherent in approaches advocating a social construction of reality (Phillips 1990, p. 42). Rather, Phillips draws the distinction between beliefs about the reality and objective reality (Phillips 1990). Making this distinction allows a post-positivist scholar to appreciate (and investigate) multiple realities that are constructed by social collectives through communicative interaction (Miller 2005). In other words, so long as these social constructions are reified and treated as objective reality by actors in the social world, post-positivists find it reasonable to study the impact of these reified constructions on our social lives (Tompkins 1997). As a result, interpretivist studies which use qualitative methods to understand how people interact within a social constructed frame are very useful to a post-positivist researcher, as they help identify patterns of social interaction; which is core to the post-positivist epistemology.

Understanding the differences between positivistic and post-positivistic approaches to research is crucial for rationalising my approach. Indeed, while positivists would be averse to employing typologies informed by qualitative methods, post-positivists find it perfectly reasonable. To extrapolate, in answer the research question I investigate Larsson's and Laughland-Booÿ et al's typologies to test a hypothesised causal relationship between them. However, as Collier et al note, building research on upon typologies has been criticised by "scholars who exaggerate both the strengths of quantitative methods and the weaknesses of qualitative methods" (Collier, LaPorte & Seawright 2012, p. 227). This quote directly refers to positivists who undervalue the ability qualitative methodologies to provide rigorous explanations of social phenomena (Furlong & Marsh 2010). In contrast, post-positivists

appreciate that typologies which have been informed by qualitative studies (like the typologies used in this thesis) are valuable for “providing the conceptual starting point in a quantitative analysis” (Collier, LaPorte & Seawright 2012, p. 227). Therefore, additively building on typological analyses informed by qualitative methods is well suited to a post-positivistic inquiry.

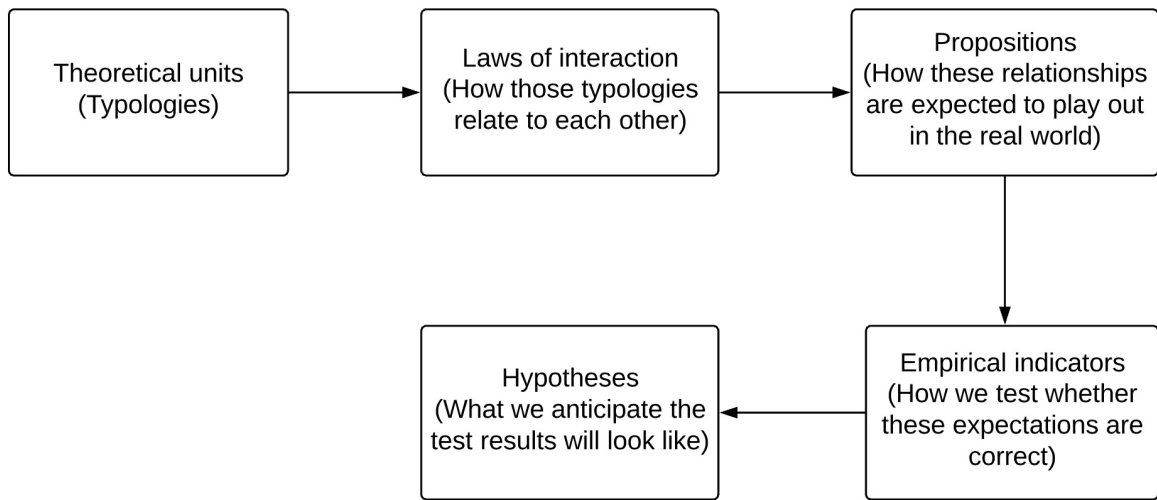
2.2 Post-positivistic research design:

Because of the scientific nature of post-positivist studies, researchers tend to adhere to a set of parameters for “what post-positivists think research should look like” (Miller 2005, p. 41). As such, Robert Dubin’s landmark book ‘Theory Building’ offers an ideal framework for the purposes of this thesis, because it gives comprehensive instructions for research design widely used by scholars in the post-positivist tradition (Dubin 1978; Miller 2005).

Dubin calls for a deductive approach to research in which abstractions of social phenomena are formed and then tested through observation and the scientific method³ (see fig 2). Although his book was written in 1978, the principals it set for constructing post-positivist studies of communication have endured (Stiff 1987; Carpiano 2006; Smart & Ritzer 2009). As such, chapters 3 and 4 detail how the methodology was constructed in accordance with Dubin’s framework in order to answer the research question: ‘Which electioneering strategies used on Facebook are the most effective at influencing who young Australians vote for’.

³ The scientific method is inclusive of methods which test theories through observation, such as the experiments used in this thesis (Miler 2005).

Figure 2: Dubin's framework



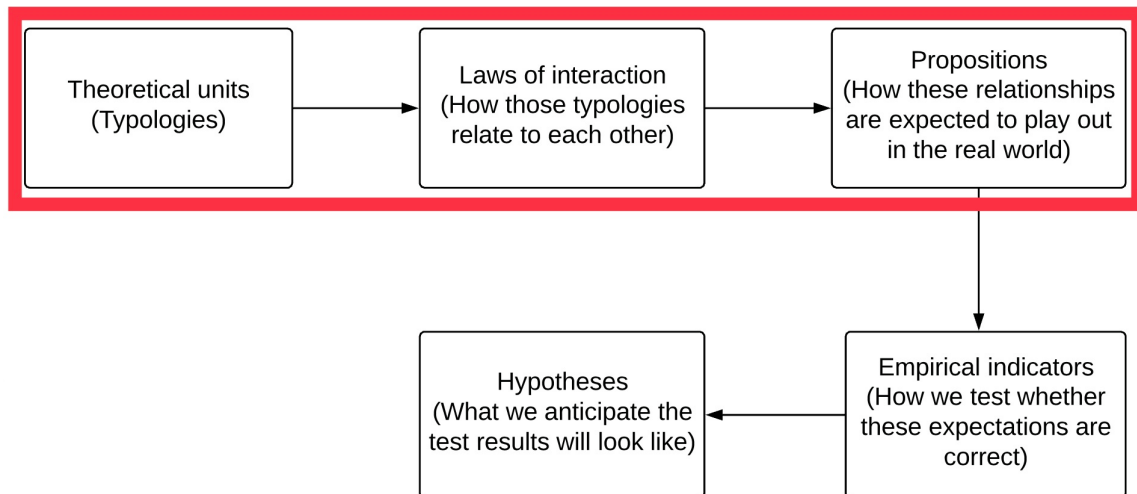
Chapter 3: Designing the methodology

Dubin's framework can be effectively split into two overarching categories. The first category is the 'abstract quality of the theory', which can be summarised as "the way we make sense of the social world" (Miller 2005, p. 22). Abstractions are particularly germane to post-positivist scholars, as they believe that theories should be generalisable beyond the observation of individual events so that they can be considered causal explanations of social phenomena (Furlong & Marsh 2010). The second category is the empirical nature of the study, which refers to the way a researcher links the abstract portions of the theory to the observable world (Miller 2005).

As such, in order to clearly explain my research design, I have separated my methodology into chapters three and four. This chapter, chapter three, will describe the processes used to create the 'abstract portion' of the methodology⁴ highlighted in figure 3 below. Then, chapter four will detail the 'empirical portion', being the methods and hypotheses of the study.

⁴ Ordinarily, this 'abstract portion' of the methodology would also include a brief section detailing the parameters or 'boundaries' of the research question (Miller 2005). However, these parameters were already established as 'young Australian swing-voters aged 18-25' in section 1.2.3, meaning this element does not require further discussion.

Figure 3: The 'abstract portion' of the methodology



3.1 Theoretical units:

Dubin posits that to develop a theory, a researcher must start by explaining the concepts or constructs that make up the 'subject matter of the research' which he refers to as "theoretical units" (Dubin 1978, p. 8). As identified in the literature review, the concepts or 'units' used in this thesis refer to the theoretical frameworks offered by Larsson and Laughland-Booÿ et al. While these typologies effectively outline the 'subject matter of the research', simply identifying them does not answer the research question. Therefore, Dubin notes that the next step in post-positivistic theory building is to specify the 'laws of interaction' between the typologies or 'theoretical units'.

3.2 Laws of interaction:

According to Dubin, the 'laws of interaction' refer to how the typologies or 'theoretical units' relate to each other. As such, this step forms the basis for answering the research question, and

requires a detailed analysis. Importantly, establishing the laws of interaction is core to narrowing the focus of the thesis. In the process of hypothesising ways my typologies would interact with each other, I can omit elements of either typology which are outside of the scope of the study. This process is crucial to the post-positivist approach, as post-positivist researchers traditionally isolate very particular aspects of a theory and then use the scientific method to draw conclusions about that particular aspect with a high degree of veracity (Miller 2005). In other words, it allows me to isolate and test the effects of online electioneering strategies on the voting habits of young Australians with greater precision.

The narrowing process requires a fairly lengthy explanation detailing each step of reasoning employed to arrive at my laws of interaction. Therefore, for the reference of the reader, it is worth giving a clear summary of the outcomes of narrowing the typologies before going into explicit detail. In short, after excluding extraneous aspects both typologies this thesis focuses on Laughland-Booÿ et al's 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' young Australian voters, as well as Larsson's 'Informing', 'Critiquing' and 'Personalisation' online electioneering strategies. After identifying relevant categories from each typology, I hypothesised ways they would interact with each other; representing my 'laws of interaction'. In short, my laws of interaction state that 'Instinctive' voters should be more receptive to 'Personalisation' strategies', and that 'Pragmatic' voters should be more receptive to 'Informing' and 'Critiquing' strategies. The following paragraphs from 3.2.1 - 3.2.7 will outline the logic used to reach this conclusion.

3.2.1 Narrowing Laughland-Booÿ et al's typology of young Australian voters:

When identifying the laws of interaction and narrowing the scope of the thesis, it makes sense

to begin with Laughland-Booÿ et al's typology of young Australian voters. This is because Laughland-Booÿ et al already indicate which voters suit the parameters of the research question, and which are in fact receptive to the ways politicians engage with audiences over Facebook.

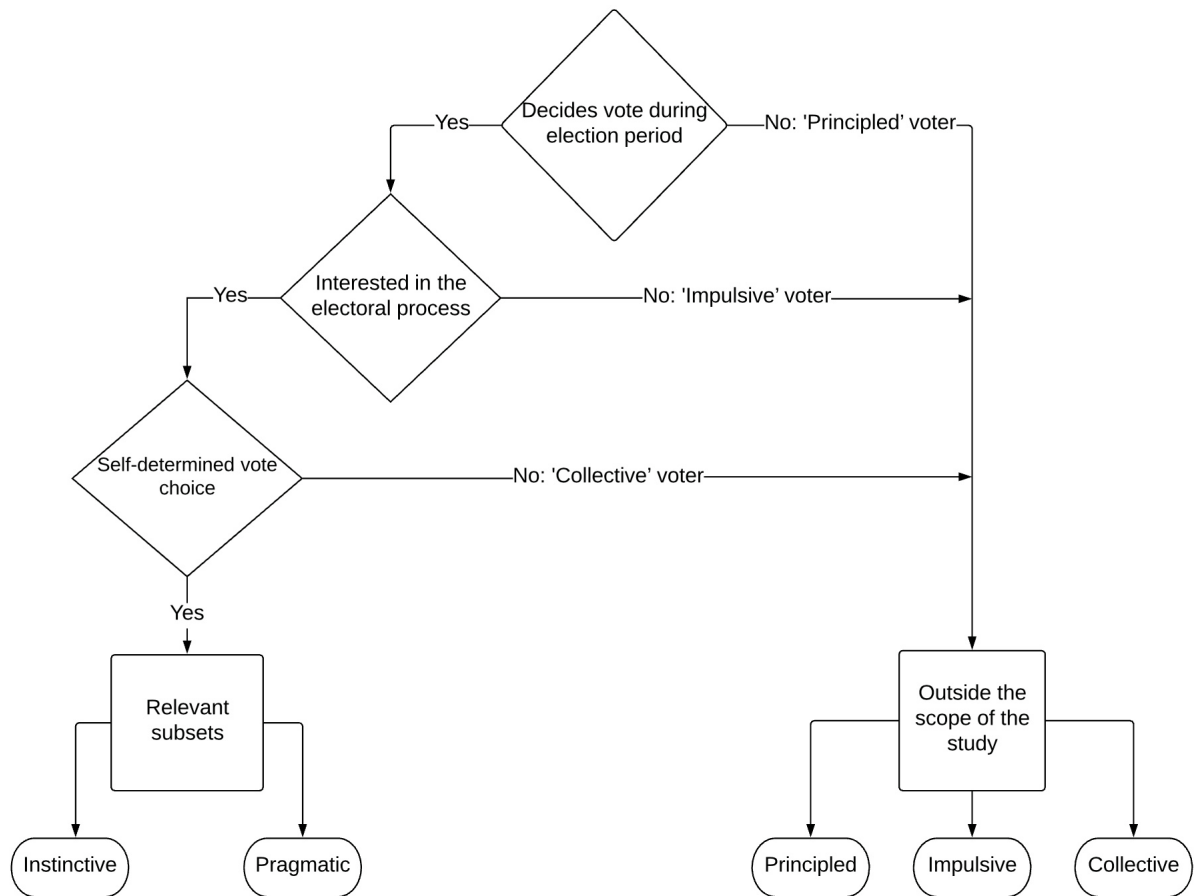
To begin with, the research question is interested in young Australian voters who are swing-voters. In other words, voters who decide their vote during the election period. Therefore, subsets of voters in Laughland-Booÿ et al's typology who have strong allegiances to a political party and who decide their vote prior to the campaign period are outside of the scope of this thesis. As such, the 'Principled' voters do not suit the parameters of the study because they are characterised by their tendency to align themselves with certain parties, thereby deciding their vote outside of the election period. This is because their values are often reflected in the policy platforms of those parties, which are not commonly subject to change (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018).

Additionally, 'Impulsive' voters can also be excluded from the study. Again, based on the description of these voters, it can be reasonably inferred that they would not interact with Larsson's typology. As Laughland-Booÿ et al explain, 'Impulsive' voters are uninterested in political processes, and vote only because it is mandatory to in Australia. As such, these voters are self-reportedly more likely to 'randomly' decide who to vote for as part of a "spur of the moment thing", even going so far as to "close (their) eyes and tick a box" (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018, p. 6). Xenos and Moy's analysis of media effects substantiates the idea that 'Impulsive' voters are unlikely to be receptive to online electioneering strategies. Indeed, they claim that media effects are contingent on levels of political interest, and those with lower levels of interest are less receptive (Xenos & Moy 2007).

Finally, the study can also exclude ‘Collective’ voters from Laughland-Booÿ et al’s typology. Unlike ‘Impulsive’ voters, ‘Collective’ voters do respect electoral processes. However, they are heavily reliant on the opinions of those around them (particularly their parents) to inform their vote (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018). Therefore, online electioneering is unlikely to significantly influence who ‘Collective’ voters vote for, as the decision-making process is essentially relegated to the opinion of others. This pattern of decision making is reflective of ‘Two Step Flow of Communication’ model, where informal personal contacts play a greater role than media in developing political opinions (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet 1944).

In narrowing down Laughland-Booÿ et al’s typology to fit the parameters of the research question we are focusing on ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters as the target voter subsets. Based on their description, we can determine that both of these subsets avoid the elements which excluded ‘Principled’, ‘Impulsive’ and ‘Collective’ voters from the study (see exclusion process in fig 4). This section will round off its analysis of Laughland-Booÿ et al’s typology by detailing the voting habits and decision-making styles of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters.

Figure 4: The exclusion process for voter subsets



3.2.2 Instinctive Voters:

In order to postulate how ‘Instinctive’ voters would engage with electioneering on Facebook, it is necessary to understand the decision-making strategies they employ when deciding their vote. By identifying the heuristics ‘Instinctive’ voters use when they encounter political information, we can hypothesise the ‘Laws of Interaction’ between the two typologies with greater certainty. Specifically, the heuristics used by ‘Instinctive’ voters give insight into which of the electioneering strategies would be more effective at influencing their vote. Therefore, to begin with, Laughland-Booÿ et al reference Popkin’s ‘Low Information Rationality’ model to outline what they refer to as the “gut reasoning” voting habits of ‘Instinctive’ voters

(Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018, p. 8). As Popkin notes, this model describes a strategy voters use when applying “various information shortcuts and rules of thumb...to obtain and evaluate information and simplify the process of choosing between candidates” (Popkin 1991, p. 7).

However, Popkin’s definition as employed by Laughland-Booÿ et al remains very broad in scope, and does not describe *which* information shortcuts ‘Instinctive’ voters employ when voting. Therefore, in order to hypothesise which electioneering strategy will be most influential in deciding their vote, it is necessary to identify specific heuristic rules and shortcuts they ‘instinctively’ rely upon. We can reasonably determine what these heuristics are by further analysing Laughland-Booÿ et al’s characterisation of ‘Instinctive’ voters. From their description, we know ‘Instinctive’ voters are emotion-driven voters who “cast their vote based on general feelings” (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018, p. 7). We also know that they tend to focus on one trait of a candidate or one amorphous element of their political platform as the focus of their emotional attention. To unpack these voting behaviours, it is useful to analyse both the ‘routinised decision making’ model (Betsch, Haberstroh & Hohle 2002) and the ‘emotional voting’ framework (Lee 2000).

The ‘routinised decision making’ model describes procedural decision-making. Individuals who act according to this model invest *some* cognitive effort in making an initial judgement, and then in a cumulative process of decision-making allow that initial judgement to characterise future decisions (Betsch, Haberstroh & Hohle 2002). Understanding ‘Instinctive’ voters’ voting habits through the routinised decision-making model is reasonable, because it aligns with Laughland-Booÿ et al’s description of the moderate levels of cognitive effort ‘Instinctive’ voters invest in their vote decision (see fig 1 above). This has significant implications this study’s research design. Based on the ‘routinised decision making’ model, we

can hypothesise that when presented with a range of political information in a laboratory setting where participants are asked to cast a vote towards a candidate, that 'Instinctive' voters would identify with a very limited range of information which would proceed to characterise their vote.

The second decision-making model useful for understanding 'Instinctive' voters is Lee's 'emotional voting' framework (Lee 2000). Lee explains how voters who act according to this model rely upon emotional heuristics: after forming an initial impression or "implicit feeling", this then informs their subsequent decision making (Lee 2000 p. 10). Lee's framework is applicable to the 'Instinctive' voter, as it closely aligns with the "gut reasoning" to which Laughland-Booÿ et al refer (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018, p. 8), as well as their propensity to rely on an emotion-based appraisal of candidates when voting.

We can see how Lee's 'emotional voting' framework works with Betsch, Haberstroh & Hohle's 'routinised decision making' model to inform the design of the methodology. Indeed, the 'routinised decision making' model suggests that a single piece of information will characterise the 'Instinctive' voter's vote, and the 'emotional voting' framework suggests that information will be something that triggers an emotional response. Therefore, we can hypothesise that 'Instinctive' voters, when presented with a range of information in a laboratory setting, would be likely to base their vote on one piece of information which triggers an emotional response.

3.2.3 Pragmatic voters:

Like 'Instinctive' voters, the decision-making strategies 'Pragmatic' voters employ give us

insight into the way they engage with political information and allow us to hypothesise the ‘laws of interaction’ between them and online electioneering strategies. Unlike ‘Instinctive’ voters, however, ‘Pragmatic’ voters “engage in a process of critical reasoning by weighing up multiple factors and priorities before arriving at a voting choice” (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018, p. 10). This is an example of ‘rational choice’, in which an individual invests a lot of cognitive energy into their vote choice by engaging in a cost–benefit analysis of a range of political information to ascertain how they might best maximise the utility of their vote (Downs 1957; see also fig 1).

Understanding ‘Pragmatic’ voters as rational voters is important for the research design. We can hypothesise that, when presented with a range of political information in a laboratory setting, the ‘Pragmatic’ voter should conduct a comprehensive cost-benefits analysis of all material before deciding who to vote for. We can also hypothesise that due to the ‘rational’ nature of their analysis, they are far less likely than ‘Instinctive’ voters to decide their vote using emotional heuristics.

In summary, after hypothesising the ways ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters will interact with political information in a laboratory setting, we can begin to consider which type of electioneering strategies would cater to their decision-making processes; leading to a discussion of Larsson’s typology.

3.2.4 Narrowing Larsson’s typology of electioneering strategies:

The following paragraphs will determine which categories of Larsson’s online electioneering strategies are best suited to gaining the vote of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters, which will

culminate to inform the research design. Similar to the previous section, this section will exclude irrelevant categories from Larsson's typology. Then, it will focus on the relevant categories to finalise the laws of interaction between online electioneering strategies and young Australian voters.

To begin with, the relevance of political campaigning strategies is dependent on the logic of different jurisdictions' electoral systems (Chen 2015). As such, Larsson's 'Mobilisation' category can be reasonably excluded from the study, because 'Mobilisation' does not have the same impact in Australia's federal elections as it does in other democracies where voting is non-compulsory. Indeed, a crucial function of 'Mobilisation' is convincing citizens *to* vote (Kim 2011; Baek 2015); a goal which is already significantly addressed by Australia's electoral system enforcing mandatory voting. Although compulsory voting cannot guarantee 100% vote enrolment⁵, it does ensure that more people who might otherwise abstain from politics register and cast a vote (Young 2011). As a result, Australia has a higher voter turnout than any other comparable country (Tiffen & Gittins 2009), which diminishes the necessity of 'Mobilisation' strategies.

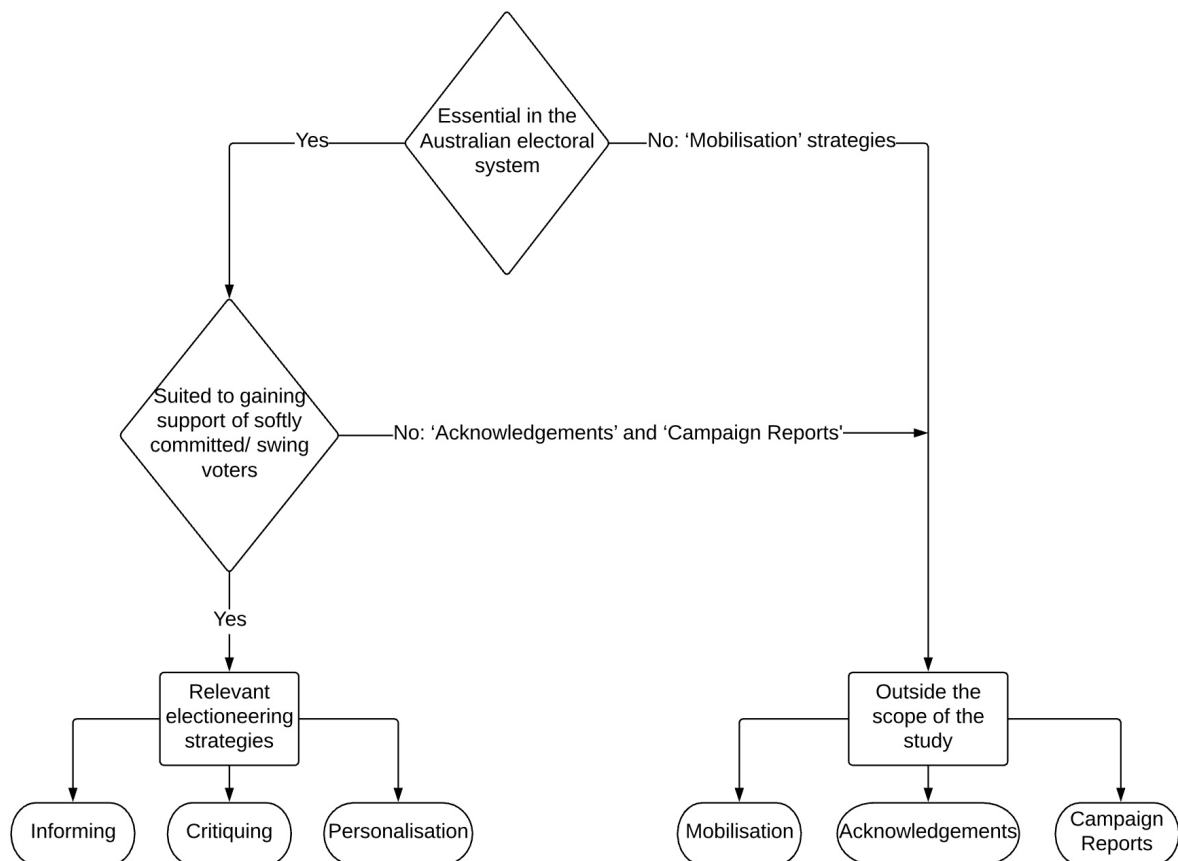
Furthermore, 'Acknowledgements' and 'Campaign Reports' are not well suited to gaining the support of the target subsets. This is because they are designed to strengthen a pre-existing support base by specifically targeting strong supporters or sponsors of the campaign (Larson 2015). They are not geared towards gaining the vote of softly committed or swing voters in the same way that 'Informing', 'Critiquing' and 'Personalisation' strategies are (Young 2011). Considering how 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' voters are not characterised by

⁵ While 'Mobilisation' strategies fall outside the scope of this thesis, future studies could investigate the marginal utility of using them to target unenrolled voters in the Australian electorate.

strong partisan allegiances (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018), it logically follows that the effectiveness of ‘Acknowledgements’ and ‘Campaign Reports’ as electioneering strategies would be diminished.

Therefore, this thesis identifies the remaining ‘Informing’, ‘Critiquing’ and ‘Personalisation’ types of voter engagement as the relevant theoretical units derived from Larsson’s typology (see fig 5). We are now able to identify the ‘Laws of Interaction’ between the ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters and the ‘Informing’, ‘Critiquing’ and ‘Personalisation’ strategies.

Figure 5: The exclusion process for online electioneering strategies



3.2.5 Informing campaigning activities:

‘Informing’ refers to the discussion of political issues or provision of policy statements in a top-down fashion on social media (Jackson & Lilleker 2009). Based on the analysis conducted of the voting patterns of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters, I hypothesise that this strategy would be more effective at influencing ‘Pragmatic’ voters. As mentioned above, ‘Pragmatic’ voters evaluate information using a comprehensive costs-benefits analysis. The ‘Informing’ electioneering strategy facilitates this kind of engagement by giving voters descriptive political information framed as top-down and fact-based for ‘Pragmatic’ voters to rationally evaluate (Larsson 2015).

On the other hand, ‘Instinctive’ voters would hypothetically find this electioneering strategy less convincing, because the procedural and clinical nature of ‘Informing’ strategies does not cater to the ‘emotional voting framework’ they are expected to employ when engaging with political information. Therefore, the first law of interaction states that ‘Pragmatic’ voters would respond well to the ‘Informing’ strategy, and ‘Instinctive’ voters would not.

3.2.6 Critiquing campaigning activities

‘Critiquing’ refers to campaigns criticising campaign opponents and/or their policy platforms (Larsson 2015). Similar to ‘Informing’, I hypothesised that ‘Critiquing’ would have a stronger influence on the voting habits of ‘Pragmatic’ voters over ‘Instinctive’ voters. Indeed, political literature investigating negative political advertising has identified that ‘Critiquing’ strategies, while commonly presented as normatively undesirable, do produce learning effects. Negative advertising has been “‘significantly associated with greater issue knowledge and being more likely to make issue-based candidate evaluations during the campaign’s closing stages” (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996, p. 185). Brians and Wattenberg’s findings closely match Laughland-Booÿ

et al's description of 'Pragmatic' voters' rational political decision-making patterns which rely on high issue knowledge and measured issue-based considerations.

The conclusion that 'Critiquing' strategies would be more effective at influencing the vote of 'Pragmatic' voters than 'Instinctive' voters may not be intuitively obvious. This is because negative voting has emotional connotations (Lovejoy et al 2010). As such, one could reasonably expect 'Critiquing' strategies to resonate stronger with the 'emotional voting framework' that 'Instinctive' voters employ rather than the cost-benefits analysis that 'Pragmatic' voters use. However, recent literature published on negative voting in Western Democracies suggest that negative emotions associated with 'Critiquing' strategies are in fact not well suited to influencing the 'Instinctive' vote.

Indeed, Mederios and Noël's investigation into negative voting in Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and US electorates states that negative emotionality caused by negative campaigning is closely associated with strong partisan allegiances and party identification (Mederios & Noël 2014; see also Abramowitz & Webster 2016). However, 'Instinctive' voters are not strongly partisan in their voting habits, and their emotional evaluation of candidates and their policy platforms are not politically ideologically charged like 'Principled' voters (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018). According to Mederios and Noël's analysis, this would diminish the emotional effect of negative campaigning on their vote choice. Therefore, the second law of interaction is that 'Critiquing' strategies will resonate strongly with 'Instinctive' voters, and will instead be more effective on influencing the 'Pragmatic' vote. This law of interaction can be grouped with the first law to say that 'Informing' and 'Critiquing' strategies will be more effective at influencing 'Pragmatic' voters than 'Instinctive' voters.

3.2.7 Personalisation campaign activities:

The third relevant campaign activity, 'Personalisation' refers to how politicians use their social media pages to post everyday activities of a seemingly non-political nature. This strategy functions to decrease voters' perceived psychological distance with the candidate in order to increase that candidate's likability (Larsson 2015). 'Personalisation' is hypothesised to be more effective at influencing the 'Instinctive' vote than the 'Pragmatic' vote because it aims to establish an emotional connection with voters. As such, it directly corresponds with Lee's 'emotional voting' framework which I have argued to be a crucial informant of the 'Instinctive' vote (Lee 2000).

Conversely, this strategy should be far less effective on 'rational choice' style of voting employed by 'Pragmatic' voters. Lee supports this claim in his description of individuals who avoid emotional heuristics when voting, explaining how "people who are well-informed about politics are better positioned to use cognitive processes to curb the contribution of emotions in their judgmental process" (Lee 2000, p. 116). Therefore, it follows that 'Instinctive' voters should be more receptive to 'Personalisation' strategies than 'Pragmatic' voters will; representing the last law of interaction between the two typologies.

Finally, while the 'Personalisation' strategy can be briefly summarised, the elements which make up a 'likeable' candidate are complicated. Therefore, it is important to describe what traits make a candidate likeable, as it later informs the methodology for testing the impact of 'Personalisation' strategies on the voting habits of 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' voters.

There has been extensive research into the candidate-focused personalisation of western democracies where the profile of political leaders has come to play an increasingly a vital role

during election campaigns (Caprara & Zimbardo 2004; Garzia 2011; McAllister 2015). The literature has identified specific personality traits of political candidates that make them more likeable to voters, which can be broadly categorised under ‘warmth’ and ‘competence’ (Garzia 2011; Costa & da Silva 2015; Lausten & Bor 2017). Costa and da Silva provide a comprehensive list of ‘warm’ and ‘competent’ traits, which are depicted in table 1 below⁶.

<i>Table 1: List of 'warm' and 'competent' candidate traits</i>	
Warmth characteristics	Competence characteristics
Close to my ideas	Able to gather resources
Close to the citizens	Assertive and strong
Good communicator	Careful decision maker
Has charisma	Capable of governing the country well
Honest	Compelling knowledge of economics
In touch with ordinary people	Defends responsible policies
Likeable person	Has authority
Pays attention to the problems and opinions of the people	Has clear political goals
Trustworthy	Has projects for the country
	Has sensible ideas about how to manage economic crises
	Able to handle confrontation
	Is effective

⁶ Sourced and reformatted from (Costa & da Silva 2015, p. 1238).

Knows how to strengthen the economy
Knows the problems of the country
Strong
Well prepared
Responsive

From these traits, there are some which are particularly relevant to the study. Indeed, Larsson’s typology indicates that the ‘Personalisation’ strategies used by politicians on Facebook refer to posts of “a non-political nature” which divulge candidates’ “personal affairs and feelings” (Larsson 2015, p. 463). Based on the list of personality traits shown in table 1, we can clearly identify that traits associated with ‘competence’ are highly political and traits associated with ‘warmth’ which are highly personal. As such, using Larsson’s functional definition, this thesis can narrow its focus to the ‘warm’ personality traits identified in Costa and da Silva’s study to measure the effectiveness of ‘Personalisation’ strategies. This seems reasonable, considering subsequent studies measuring the relative importance of ‘warmth’ against ‘competence’ for politicians during campaigns have concluded that “warmth is found to be more important than competence” (Lausten & Bor 2017, p. 104). Therefore, when this study analyses the impact of ‘Personalisation’ strategies on ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters, it does so with reference to the ‘warm’ characteristics displayed by politicians over Facebook.

3.3 Summarising the laws of interaction:

I hypothesise that ‘Instinctive’ voters will characterise their vote from a very limited range of information which appeals to their emotional voting heuristics. In contrast, I expect that

Pragmatic’ voters will conduct a comprehensive cost-benefits analysis of all available information when deciding who to vote for, without relying on emotional heuristics. Based on these decision-making processes, I have made claims about which electioneering strategies would most likely cater to the decision-making styles of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters. These claims represent my laws of interaction, and can be cogently summarised as follows:

- ‘Instinctive’ voters should be less receptive to ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ strategies, and more receptive to ‘Personalisation’ strategies.
- ‘Pragmatic’ voters should be less receptive to ‘Personalisation’ strategies, and more receptive to ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ strategies.

So far, this chapter has identified the theoretical units and laws of interaction to be employed in the analysis. These steps are what Dubin refers to as the ‘basic features of a theoretical model’, which form the foundation of post-positivistic inquiry (Dubin 1978). Once these basic features are established, Dubin’s framework dictates that the next step in theory building is to make ‘propositions’ about how these laws of interaction can be expected to behave in real life.

3.4 Propositions:

Propositions are the final abstract portion of a theory, and describe “conclusions which represent logical and true deductions about the model in operation” (Dubin 1978, p. 8). They inform the methodology, which is structured to empirically test the claims set by the propositions.

Proposition 1:

- If we analysed the vote choice of ‘Pragmatic’ voters after exposing them to a range of ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ style Facebook posts, we should see a voting pattern that reflects the fact that they have conducted a comprehensive cost-benefits analysis of all available political information before deciding their vote. This is because ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ strategies offer ‘facts-based’ information for ‘Pragmatic’ voters to conduct a rational analysis of, and therefore we should see them cast their vote in a predictably measured and calculated way. We could call this voting pattern ‘consistent’.
- In contrast, if we did the same for ‘Instinctive’ voters, we should see a voting pattern which indicates that they did not analyse the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ posts in depth. Considering that neither ‘Informing’ nor ‘Critiquing’ strategies would appeal to their emotional voting heuristics, it logically follows that they would cast their vote more arbitrarily than ‘Pragmatic’ voters would. We could call this voting pattern ‘inconsistent’.

Therefore, the first proposition is that ‘Pragmatic’ voters will show more consistency in their voting patterns than ‘Instinctive’ voters will after having been exposed to ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ style Facebook posts.

Proposition 2:

- As identified in the first proposition, if we collated the votes of ‘Instinctive’ voters after exposing them to a range of Facebook posts based on the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ strategies, then their vote pattern should appear somewhat inconsistent. However, if one candidate included a ‘warm’ Facebook post based on the ‘Personalisation’ strategy into

that range of political information, then we should see a tendency for ‘Instinctive’ voters to vote for that candidate. This is because it would appeal to their emotional decision-making heuristics and simplify the process of analysing a range of information.

- In contrast, ‘Pragmatic’ voters should be far less likely to privilege that same ‘Personalisation’ Facebook post over the range of other ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ material when deciding their vote. This is because they should analyse all political information available without relying upon emotional heuristics.

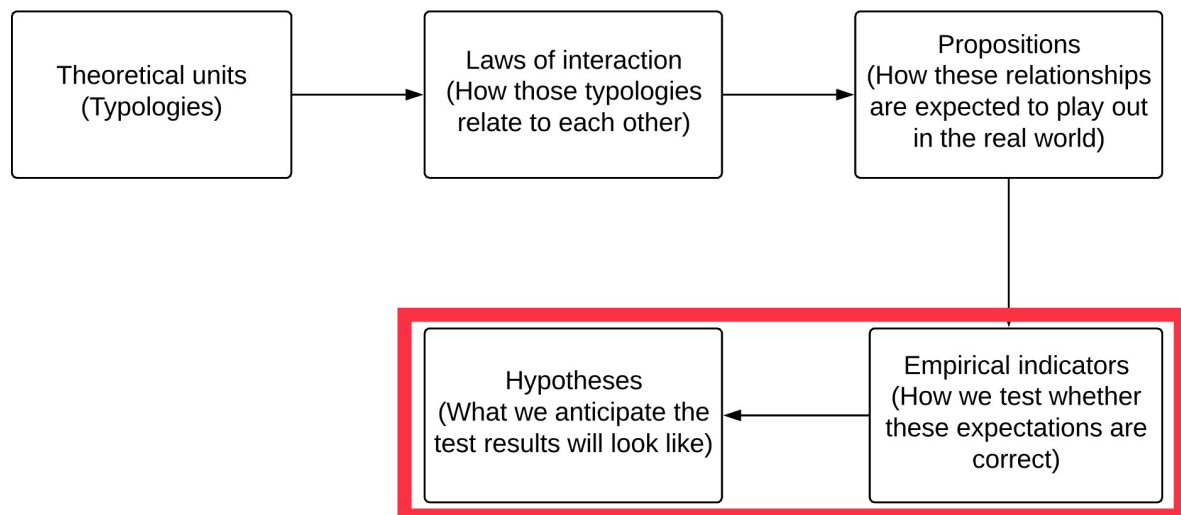
Therefore, the second proposition is that ‘Instinctive’ voters should be more likely to vote for a candidate using warm ‘Personalisation’ strategies than ‘Pragmatic’ voters are.

Evidently there are methodological considerations to be derived from each proposition. The method needs to be able to measure the voting patterns of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters in a way which allows me to evaluate whether those voting patterns are consistent or inconsistent after being exposed to ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ strategies. Additionally, the method needs to identify whether the ‘Personalisation’ strategy is more effective at gaining the ‘Instinctive’ vote than the ‘Pragmatic’ vote. I have developed a methodology capable of empirically testing these propositions, which will be detailed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Constructing the experiments

So far, this thesis has given a step-by-step explanation of how the abstract portion of its methodology has been designed. Following this, a post-positivist theorist should specify “how (that) theory connects with the empirical or observable world” (Miller 2005, p. 41). According to Dubin’s framework, this requires me to use empirical indicators (referring to the methods), and then create hypotheses based on those methods (Dubin 1978; see also fig 6).

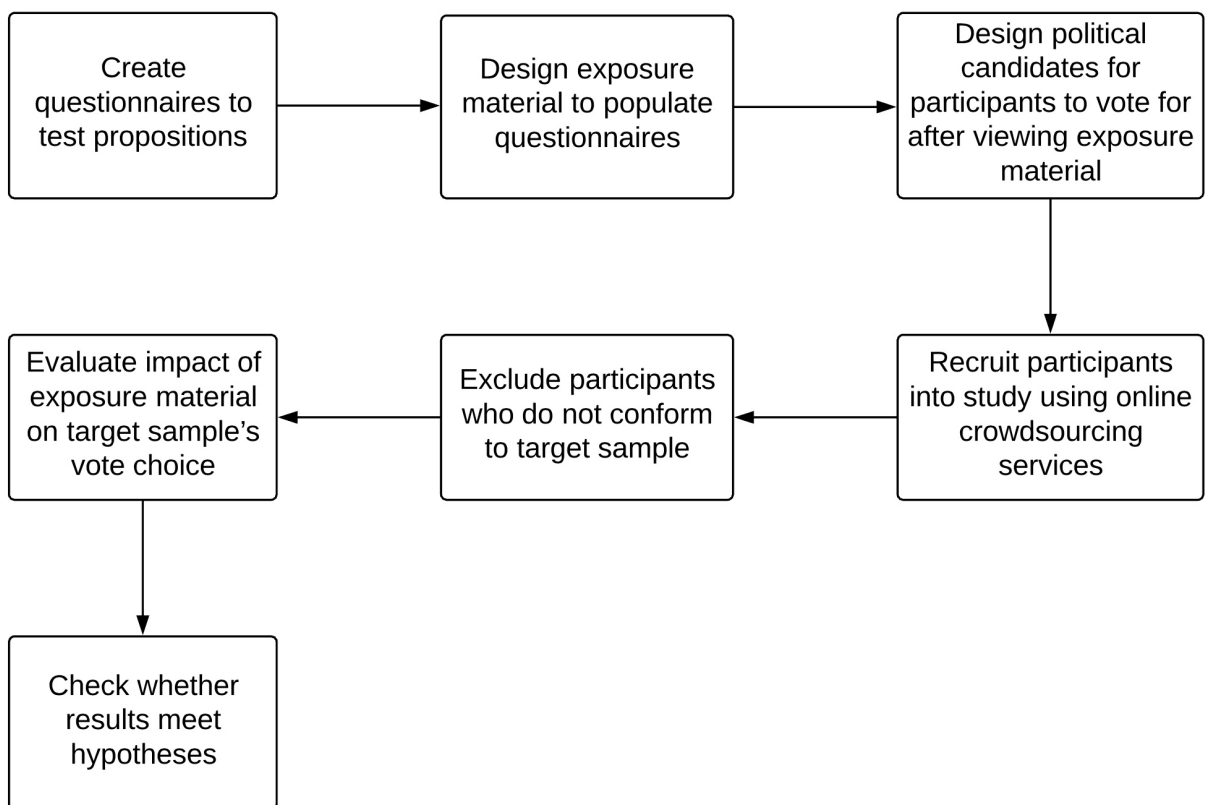
Figure 6: The 'empirical portion' of methodology



For the purposes of this study, I used the experimental method. This is because experiments are “the most nearly ideal method for scientific explanation”, which makes them well-suited to post-positivistic inquiry (Lijphart 1971, p. 684). More specifically, the “principal advantage of the experimental method is the researcher’s ability to isolate and test the effects of specific components of certain causal variables” (Iyengar 2011, p. 75). As such, the experimental method allows me to tailor my approach to better address my propositions, more effectively isolate the impact of Facebook electioneering strategies on young Australian voters and make claims with a higher degree of veracity.

In this chapter, I describe my methods and explain the reasons for using them. I then derive my hypotheses from these methods, and conclude by providing a detailed planned analysis so that future studies may easily replicate my work to verify or falsify my findings. In the following chapter I substantiate the methodological design by discussing the measures taken to reduce bias and enhance objectivity; satisfying the “metatheoretical tenets of post-positivism” (Miller 2005, p. 38). I have provided a brief overview of the construction of the methodology in figure 7 below:

Figure 7: Construction of the methodology



4.1 Independent variable and control groups:

I conducted my experiments by creating three independent variable groups for the

electioneering strategies, and one control group to determine whether the independent variable groups were in fact impacting participants' vote choice. The three questionnaires were populated with 'Informing', 'Critiquing' and 'Personalisation' material, and one questionnaire was populated entirely with placebo material. The independent variable questionnaires, labelled 'Informing', 'Critiquing' and 'Personalisation' respectively, each acted as independent experiments designed to verify or falsify the claims made in the propositions. The 'Informing' and 'Critiquing' questionnaires measured whether 'Pragmatic' voters had a more consistent voting pattern than 'Instinctive' voters after being exposed to 'Informing' or 'Critiquing' material. As such, the 'Informing' questionnaire was populated only with 'Informing' material, and the 'Critiquing' questionnaire was populated only with 'Critiquing' material.

The 'Personalisation' questionnaire, however, was designed to measure whether 'Instinctive' voters, when exposed to a range of political information based on all three electioneering strategies, would vote for a candidate using 'Personalisation' strategies more often than 'Pragmatic' voters. Therefore, the 'Personalisation' questionnaire was populated with 'Informing', 'Critiquing' *and* 'Personalisation' material to test whether 'Instinctive' voters would employ emotional heuristics and rely predominantly on the 'Personalisation' material to characterise their vote. Designing experiments using independent and control variables allowed me to isolate the effects of each electioneering strategy and draw conclusions based on the propositions with greater veracity (Iyengar 2011).

4.2 Exposure material and political candidates:

My exposure material needed to effectively communicate the way politicians employed electioneering strategies in their posts on Facebook. The most realistic way to replicate this was

to create Facebook accounts in the name of manufactured political candidates and use them to make posts which incorporated these electioneering strategies. Screen shots of these posts then acted as the exposure material in the questionnaires, and were arranged in a similar fashion to Facebook's newsfeed (see appendix 4).

To ensure that participants could easily differentiate the candidates from each other, I gave them names and profile pictures. Due to the risk of participants voting based on physical appearance (which is not being tested for), candidates' profile pictures simply featured politically neutral inanimate objects: a wooden fork and a metal spoon. Candidate names were chosen from government records listing the most popular Australian men's names to reduce the potential influence that a candidate's name could have on participants' vote choice (See fig 8 & 9).

Figure 8: Noah Jones Facebook post

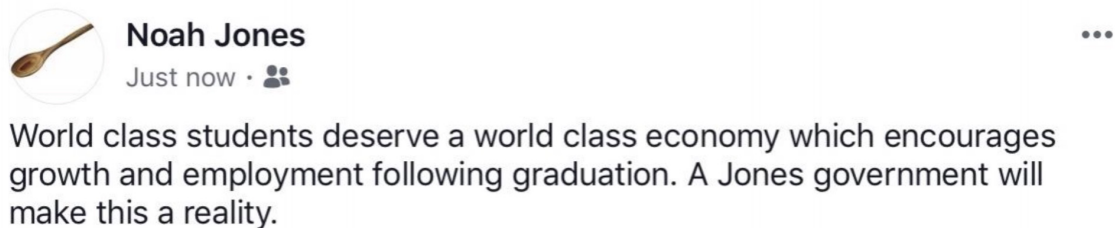
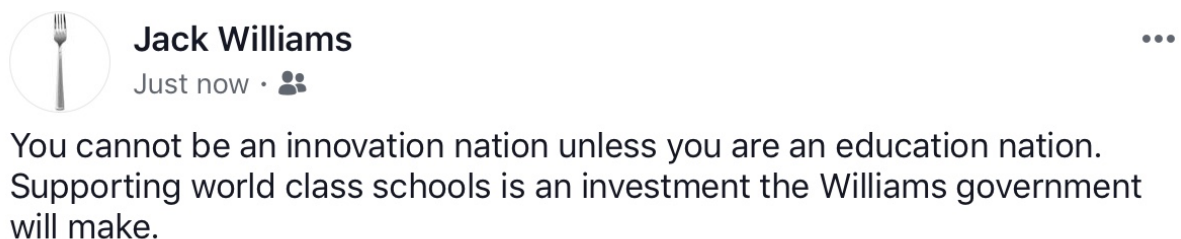


Figure 9: Jack Williams Facebook post



4.3 Recruitment services and issues with sampling:

Initially, I attempted to use Amazon's Mechanical Turk to recruit participants. Mechanical Turk is a cheap online crowdsourcing service with access to large participant pools, commonly used by experimental researchers overseas (Behrend et al 2011; Schmidt & Jettinghoff 2016). Ostensibly, Mechanical Turk provides a cost-effective method of recruiting hundreds of participants globally into online studies (Stewart et al 2015; Cunningham et al 2017). However, after conducting a pilot questionnaire on Mechanical Turk, I encountered fatal demographic issues with the participant pool. Although Mechanical Turk claims to have access to international participant populations, I discovered that questionnaire completion rates in Australia are too low for Australian-centric studies to be viable.

To compensate, I changed my crowdsourcing site to Qualtrics Research Services to run the pilot and to recruit participants into the final study. The primary advantage of using Qualtrics was that it guaranteed access to my target demographic of young Australian voters aged 18-25. However, the trade-off was that their costs were significantly higher than Mechanical Turk's; dramatically reducing the number of participants I could recruit into the study. Indeed, only 80 participants were recruited, with numbers distributed evenly among the experimental groups resulting in 20 participants in each group. This sample size was a significant decrease from the hundreds of participants initially anticipated using Mechanical Turk. Overall, problems with online crowdsourcing services were intrinsic to the sampling issues encountered in this study, and will be expanded on in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

4.4 Participant exclusion process:

Before testing the impact of the electioneering strategies on the voting patterns of 'Instinctive'

and ‘Pragmatic’ voters, I needed a way to isolate these voters from the larger participant sample. Therefore, at the start of each questionnaire I asked participants to respond to questions about their political decision-making processes (see appendix 2). These responses indicated whether participants fit into the target sample of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters, or whether they could be excluded from the study. This step was also crucial for identifying what percentage of the voter population could be categorised as ‘Instinctive’ or ‘Pragmatic’, which allowed me to make claims about the cost effectiveness and marginal utility for electioneers interested in targeting these subsets.

The questions which isolated the target sample from the participant pool acted as proxy indicators for the decision-making strategies employed by ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters. Specifically, I targeted participants who:

- decided their vote during the election (who did not have strong partisan allegiances like Principled voters);
- were interested in and respected the electoral process (were not disenfranchised voters who randomly cast their vote like ‘Impulsive’ voters), and;
- arrived at their vote decision without bowing to familial solidarity or depending on close friends (did not relegate their vote decision to someone close to them like collective voters).

Participants who met these criteria were part of the target sample, as these traits are shared only by ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters (see fig 5 above). Following this, I asked participants questions which revealed whether they used ‘gut reasoning’ or whether they conducted a comprehensive cost-benefits analysis of political information to arrive at their vote (see appendix 2). This was the determining factor which told us whether the remaining

participants were ‘Instinctive’ or ‘Pragmatic’ voters. This section of the questionnaire concluded with an attention check question to protect the validity of the results (see appendix 2). Participants who failed the attention check question had their results discarded and were subsequently replaced with a new participant.

4.5 Evaluating whether the voting habits of Instinctive and Pragmatic voters were consistent or inconsistent:

Evaluating the whether the voting habits of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters were consistent or inconsistent in the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaires required a nuanced methodological approach. Simply identifying who the target sample voted for after being exposed to ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ strategies would not reveal the consistency of their voting pattern. This is because it would fail to take into account the political persuasion of participants undertaking the questionnaires. Indeed, as McGraw notes, partisanship exerts significant influence over individuals’ evaluations of political candidates, and failure to accommodate for this in research carries risks (McGraw 2011).

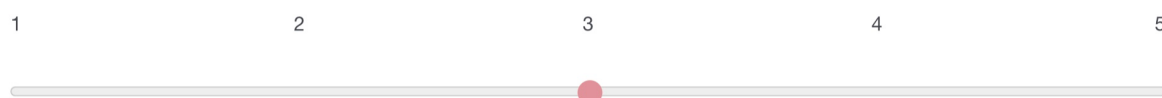
McGraw’s observation is particularly relevant to this study. Without taking steps to control for the influence of partisan attitudes, participants could simply vote for the candidates who most closely represented their political values irrespective of the electioneering strategies they used in their Facebook posts. As a result, the data would be compromised, and I would be unable to make reliable claims about the impact of the electioneering strategies from my findings (assuming the study was not already encumbered by sampling issues). Therefore, I devised a method which both accommodated for the different political orientations of the participants and allowed me to evaluate whether voting patterns were consistent or inconsistent.

The first step of this methodology was identifying participants' political orientations prior to them being exposed to the electioneering strategies. To do so, I asked participants to indicate their policy preferences towards the three most high-profile political issues of the 2016 Australian Federal Election. This was achieved using a Likert scale which ranged from 1-5. Each end of the scale represented an ideological extreme based on positions around state involvement in the economy⁷. The numbers in between gave participants the option to adjust the extent to which their policy preference was ideologically left or right-wing (see fig 10).

Figure 10: Policy preference Likert scales

For the economic management of the nation, which policy option do you prefer?

Tax cuts to business to incentivise economic growth, or more investment in public infrastructure to increase public service standards? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is tax cuts to business**, and the **right end of the scale is investment in public infrastructure**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



Following this, I conducted a multivariate analysis on the responses of the target sample's political preferences. This was an important step in identifying participants' political orientation, as it allowed me to predict for those who expressed decision making that would produce consistency between partisan preferences and vote choice. The multivariate analysis collated and averaged participants' responses across the three Likert scales, and gave each

⁷ This is because the top 3 topics which defined the 2016 Federal Election, being the national economy, health and education, were largely constrained to narrow debates about limited economic growth and austerity (Cahill & Ryan 2018; see also Chen 2018, p. 463).

participant an overall Euclidian distance⁸ measure between 1 and 5 which represented their political persuasion. A Euclidean distance was also assigned to both candidates in order to measure how close each participant's distance was to the politician they voted for. The candidates represented the opposite ends of each policy preference question. Noah Jones (the right-wing candidate) expressed positions which gave him a distance of 1, and Jack Williams (the left-wing candidate) expressed positions which give him a distance of 5.

The Euclidean distances of the candidates were designed to be strongly divergent to capture the effect of the electioneering strategies clearly. In other words, arranging the study in this way allowed me to measure whether 'Pragmatic' voters voted in a more consistent pattern than 'Instinctive' voters did after being exposed to 'Informing' and 'Critiquing' material. The consistency of participants' voting pattern was determined based on whether they had a smaller or greater Euclidian distance from the candidates they voted for post-exposure. A smaller Euclidean distance would show consistency in the voting pattern, where as a greater Euclidean distance would show inconsistency. This method enabled me to empirically test the propositions while accommodating for the different political orientations of participants.

4.6 Evaluating whether Instinctive voters are more likely to vote for a candidate using warm 'Personalisation' strategies than 'Pragmatic' voters are:

Devising an experiment to test this proposition was more straight forward. To evaluate the effect of 'Personalisation' material on my target sample, I simply tallied the votes for either politician in the 'Personalisation' questionnaire and checked whether the candidate who used

⁸ A Euclidean distance is a number formed by averaging distances from different variables.

warm ‘Personalisation’ strategies in their Facebook posts received more votes from ‘Instinctive’ voters than ‘Pragmatic’ voters.

However, while the concept for testing this proposition was uncomplicated, the design of the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire was intricate. This is because the questionnaire needed to accommodate a range of variables. Firstly, like with the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaires, I needed to account for the political persuasion of voters prior to them being exposed to electioneering material. Second, for the ‘Personalisation’ material itself, I needed to portray one political candidate as warmer than the other based on Costa and da Silva’s analysis of warm candidate traits (see table 1 above). Finally, the questionnaire needed to allow me to measure whether the ‘Personalisation’ strategy was more effective at influencing ‘Instinctive’ voters than ‘Pragmatic’ voters.

In this questionnaire, the political persuasion of participants was handled differently. The previous ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaires used a multivariate analysis to accommodate for differences in political persuasion while still allowing me to test the effects of the electioneering strategies. In this questionnaire, however, because I relied on counting the votes from ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters towards the warmer candidate using ‘Personalisation’ strategies, I was unable to accurately gauge the influence that participant partisanship may have had on that vote. Therefore, to accommodate for this methodological limitation, I adjusted my propositions so that the difference between ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters’ preference towards the warmer candidate would be less extreme than literature indicated (McGraw 2011). The potential impact partisan bias on this study will be elaborated upon in Chapter 5.

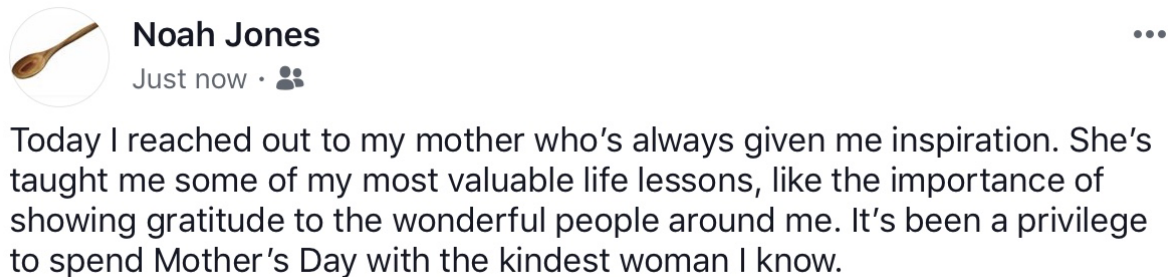
Despite methodological limitations, this approach is still viable. Considering that ‘Instinctive’ voters are not characterised by strong political allegiances, and that they use emotional heuristics to inform their vote, we can expect them to vote for the warmer candidate irrespective of their political alignment more often than ‘Pragmatic’ voters would. As such, with a large enough sample we would see a slighter tendency for ‘Instinctive’ voters to vote for the warmer candidate. This claim is supported by Laughland-Booÿ et al’s interviews of ‘Instinctive’ voters, who when asked to explain why they chose to vote for their candidate in the 2013 Australian Federal Election responded with purely emotional reasoning, such as; “He just seems nice”, “(he) doesn’t seem as down to earth and likeable” and “Tony Abbott’s annoying and Kevin Rudd is okay” (Laughland-Booÿ et al 2018, p. 8). As such, this study has adjusted its propositions to say that on average, ‘Instinctive’ voters are slightly more likely to vote for the warmer candidate than ‘Pragmatic’ voters are.

Following this, to test whether ‘Instinctive’ voters would vote for warmer candidates more often than ‘Pragmatic’ voters, the ‘Personalisation’ exposure material needed to display one candidate as warmer than the other. This step was made easy by referring to Costa and da Silva’s analysis of warm personality traits among political candidates. I started by giving both candidates ‘Personalisation’ material in order to have an even amount of material between candidates to avoid accidental bias. Following this, I randomly selected Noah Jones (the right-wing candidate) to be the ‘warmer’ politician. This meant that the ‘Personalisation’ material Noah Jones used reflected a wide variety of the warm characteristics⁹ shown in table 1. In contrast, Jack Williams’ ‘Personalisation’ post represented the absence of these ‘warm’ traits, and was comparatively ‘colder’. Structuring the ‘Personalisation’ material in this way allowed

⁹ Noah Jones displayed all warm traits from Costa & da Silva’s list of positive candidate traits aside from ‘knows the problem of ordinary people’, which was less suited to an apolitical ‘Personalisation’ post.

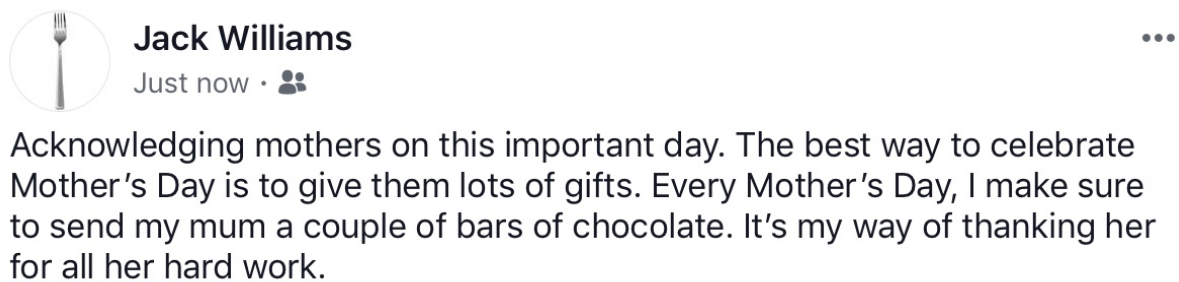
me to test whether the ‘Instinctive’ voter would more regularly vote for the warmer candidate than the ‘Pragmatic’ voter would (see fig 11 & 12).

Figure 11 Noah Jones 'Personalisation' material



A social media post by Noah Jones. The profile picture is a wooden spoon. The name 'Noah Jones' is in bold, followed by 'Just now' and a group icon. The text of the post reads: 'Today I reached out to my mother who's always given me inspiration. She's taught me some of my most valuable life lessons, like the importance of showing gratitude to the wonderful people around me. It's been a privilege to spend Mother's Day with the kindest woman I know.'

Figure 12 Jack Williams 'Personalisation' material



A social media post by Jack Williams. The profile picture is a silver fork. The name 'Jack Williams' is in bold, followed by 'Just now' and a group icon. The text of the post reads: 'Acknowledging mothers on this important day. The best way to celebrate Mother's Day is to give them lots of gifts. Every Mother's Day, I make sure to send my mum a couple of bars of chocolate. It's my way of thanking her for all her hard work.'

Finally, unlike the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaire which were populated entirely with their respective electioneering strategies, the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire needed to include a mixture of all three strategies. By including all electioneering strategies, I was able to test the proposition that ‘Pragmatic’ voters are likely to conduct a cost-benefits analysis of all information before voting, and that ‘Instinctive’ voters are likely to base their vote on one piece of emotionally significant information. The ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire was structured to reflect these propositions, and incorporated all of the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ material from the previous questionnaires with only one piece of ‘Personalisation’

material from either candidate. If the propositions were correct, this structure would reveal that ‘Instinctive’ voters were, on average more likely to vote for the warmer candidate than ‘Pragmatic’ voters.

4.7 Hypotheses:

The last step in Dubin’s Theory Building framework is to provide hypotheses (Dubin 1978). Importantly, hypotheses differ from propositions, as they make predictions about the results of the methodology rather than the way abstract elements of the theory are expected to behave. These hypotheses are then empirically tested using the scientific method to provide verification or falsification of the theory (Miller 2005).

My hypotheses are:

1. ‘Pragmatic’ voters will, on average, have a higher multivariate correlation to the candidates they vote for in the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaire groups than ‘Instinctive’ voters.
2. ‘Instinctive’ voters will, on average, be *slightly* more inclined than ‘Pragmatic’ voters to vote for Noah Jones, the warmer candidate in the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire group.
3. The control group is populated entirely with placebo material, and should wield a random preference for its candidates close to a 50/50 outcome.

4.8 Planned analysis:

Post-positivist research needs to be traceable and easily replicated in order for subsequent researchers to recreate the conditions that the hypotheses were tested in, and to check whether the theory and methods being tested provide regular outcomes (Hollis & Smith 1991). Therefore, the following section will give a step-by-step outline of the planned analysis and methods used to test this study's hypotheses so that future researchers can easily replicate them to scrutinise my design.

Data Sources:

- Participants were recruited through Qualtrics Research Services to complete the online experiments. Experiments were designed and hosted on 'qualtrics.com'.

Study Population:

- Inclusion/ exclusion criteria: Participants had to be age 18-25, Australian, and users of Facebook.
- Participant data: 82 participants completed the study, and two participants were excluded from the results for inaccurately answering an attention check question. Of the remaining 80 participants, 21 conformed to the target sample of 'Instinctive' or 'Pragmatic' voters. Of these 21, 6 were 'Instinctive' voters and 15 were 'Pragmatic' voters.

Study Measures:

- Experimental design: 4 questionnaires were created representing independent variable and control groups: 1 for 'Informing' strategies, 1 for 'Critiquing' strategies, 1 for 'Personalisation' strategies and 1 control group. Each questionnaire received an even

number of participants, and was populated by an even amount of exposure material.

- Subgroups to be considered: ‘Instinctive’ voters and ‘Pragmatic’ voters.
- Exposure variables: ‘Informing’ electioneering strategies, ‘Critiquing’ electioneering strategies, ‘Personalisation’ electioneering strategies and placebo material of a non-political nature (see appendix 4).
- Outcome variables: The political persuasion of participants in the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire (see sections 4.5 and 5.3).
- How missing data will be dealt with: All questions forced an answer before allowing the respondent to move on, so there was no missing data.

Data cleaning

- Participants who incorrectly answered the attention check question had their data removed from the questionnaire they undertook. Because I required an even number of participants in each questionnaire, a new participant was sourced to replace them. Of the 80 participants who originally completed the questionnaire, two needed to be removed and replaced with new participants.

Procedure

- Participants read and acknowledged a Participant Information Statement which allowed me to disclose their results anonymously (see appendix 1).
- Then, participants were asked questions which revealed whether they were part of the target sample (‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters), or whether they could be excluded from the study (see appendix 2).
- Following this, participants were asked policy-preference questions which allowed me to understand their political orientation prior to being exposed to the treatment. These

questions are based on the 3 most prominent issues which defined the 2016 Australian Federal Election¹⁰. This data is only used for the multivariate analysis in the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaires. However, for the purpose of continuity and having an equal amount of questions across questionnaires, I included these political orientation questions in every questionnaire (see appendix 3).

- Participants were then exposed to different electioneering strategies depending on the questionnaire they have been allocated to:
 - ‘Informing’ questionnaire: Participants were exposed to Facebook posts incorporating the ‘Informing’ strategy. The topics of these posts were the 3 aforementioned prominent issues which defined the 2016 Australian Federal Election. Both politicians make an ‘Informing’ style posts about each issue, resulting in 6 electioneering posts in total.
 - ‘Critiquing’ questionnaire: Similarly, participants were exposed to Facebook posts incorporating the ‘Critiquing’ strategy. The topics of these posts were the same 3 prominent issues which defined the 2016 Australian Federal Election. Both politicians make an ‘Critiquing’ style posts about each issue, resulting in 6 electioneering posts in total.
 - ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire: Participants were exposed to all ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ material, as well as 2 pieces of ‘Personalisation’ material — 1 for each candidate. 1 of the ‘Personalisation’ exposure items was warmer than the other. As such, the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire was populated with 14 electioneering Facebook posts.
 - Placebo questionnaire: Participants were not exposed to any of the

¹⁰ Top 3 issues: National economy, health and education.

electioneering strategies. This questionnaire was populated entirely with miscellaneous Facebook posts of a non-political nature.

Analysis software:

- Aside from analytics provided by Qualtrics Research Services, no specialised software was used. Data was analysed on Microsoft Excel 2016.

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a detailed description of the methodology so that it may be easily understood replicated by future researchers. However, a post-positivist research design is incomplete without thorough scrutiny of the biases and confounding variables present in the methodology which may compromise findings (Sanders 2010). Therefore, the following chapter will address biases in the study and steps taken to reduce their impact on the results; satisfying the “metatheoretical tenets of post-positivism” (Miller 2005, p. 38).

Chapter 5: Enhancing objectivity and producing generalisable results

If a post-positivist scholar wishes to be able to make abstractions and explanations of social phenomena, they need to ensure their results are both accurate and generalisable (G.R. Miller & Nicholson 1976). Miller and Nicholson's teachings are particularly relevant to this study. Considering that I have developed new experiments, I need to pay close attention to biases and confounding variables which may undermine the integrity of the study. As a post-positivist, only after this is done can I make reasonable claims about social phenomena and causal relationships (Sanders 2010, p. 40). Therefore, this section will outline the measures taken to reduce bias and confounding variables in the study so as to enhance the accuracy and generalisability of my findings. Although the sample was ultimately too small to make accurate extrapolations from the data, this process will assure future researchers interested in the study that my methodology offers useful framework which adheres to the rigorous standards of post-positivist inquiry.

Social scientists have identified a litany of biases which could skew the results of data. However, considering the length limitations of the thesis, it would be impractical to list all known biases and countermeasures taken against them. Instead, I have identified the biases likely to have the greatest impact on my results and the steps taken to reduce them, being:

1. Threats to external validity
2. Threats to internal validity
3. Partisan bias
4. Researcher bias
5. Instrument bias

5.1 External Validity:

External Validity refers to the extent to which the “causal relationship holds over variations in persons, settings, treatments, and outcomes” (Shadish, Cook & Campbell 2002, p. 83). Considering the importance post-positivist scholars place on producing generalisable results which accommodate for these variations, it is imperative that threats to external validity are minimised.

By using Qualtrics Research Services to conduct my experiment online, I was able to reduce biases associated with lack of population diversity. Indeed, one of the most prominent issues with conducting studies in conventional locals is skewed participant demographics, particularly when drawing inferences about society from a student sample (as is common with experimental political studies; see Druckman & Kam 2011). Indeed, Sears’ widely cited article ‘College Sophomores in the Laboratory: Influences of a Narrow Data base on Social Psychology’s view of Human Nature’ (Sears 1986) has led many social and political scientists to view student subjects as a major hindrance to generalisability (Kam et al 2007).

Conducting research online has the opportunity to transcend the geographical boundaries which have limited researchers in the past, and allows me to access a more diverse range of participants. In this way, “the lack of generalisability associated with experimental studies is largely overcome” (Iyengar 2011, p. 84). Therefore, conducting the study online was ideal for gathering a more representative sample of young Australian voters.

Another problem commonly associated with experimental studies is that the laboratory setting is “quite dissimilar from the setting in which subjects ordinarily experience the target phenomenon” (Iyengar 2011, p. 81). This problem was minimised in the study. By using an

online interface to conduct the experiment, I was able to design the treatment to resemble both the setting and the type of content that participants would ordinarily be exposed to on Facebook. Indeed, using highly realistic Facebook posts as the exposure material, intermixing them with placebo material sourced from Facebook and presenting all the material in a random order allowed me to emulate Facebook's newsfeed in appearance (see appendix 4).

Furthermore, giving participants the option to access the questionnaires from any location via their phone or computer similarly represents the way that young people engage with Facebook (Iyengar 2011). Prominent political scientist Shanto Iyengar supports this type of approach, stating that “with the ever-increasing use of the internet, not only are the samples more diverse, but also the setting in which participants encounter the manipulation is more realistic” (Iyengar 2011, p. 83). Therefore, the experimental realism¹¹ of the study, and by extension the generalisability of the results is greatly increased by conducting the experiments online.

5.2 Internal validity:

Internal validity relates to the number of confounding variables or biases that are in a study (Druckman et al 2011). With higher internal validity, a researcher can be more confident that the effect they are measuring is caused by the independent variable they are testing for. That said, both media effects literature and post-positivistic scholarship acknowledge that total internal validity is unobtainable (Miller 2005; Druckman et al 2011; Iyengar 2011). Iyengar's commentary on this issue is particularly poignant, as he notes that “even at the relatively narrow

¹¹ Experimental realism refers to the extent to which situations created in experiments are real and impactful to participants.

level of campaign advertisements, for instance, there are an infinite number of potential causal forces” (Iyengar 2011, p. 75). Despite this, there are still reliable measures researchers can take to reduce the amount of biases and confounding variables within their study.

To manage unexpected biases to the best of my ability, I used randomisation and control variables. By randomly assigning participants to the questionnaires, I avoided unintentional selection biases and was able to “make appropriate comparisons” between my questionnaire groups (Druckman et al 2011, p. 18). Furthermore, randomising the order in which the Facebook posts and placebo material was presented to participants, as well as the order in which the candidates appeared for participants to vote for at the end of the questionnaires guarded against accidentally influencing participants’ vote choice by presenting material in a certain way. Additionally, confounding variables were reduced by introducing control variables¹². For my study, the control variables I used were stringent demographic requirements for participants to meet before undertaking the questionnaire, standardised word length between electioneering exposure material, standardised amount of material in each questionnaire and a wide variety of placebo material randomly intermixed with the exposure material.

As for expected biases, Druckman et al caution that ‘noncompliance’ and ‘attrition’ are two aspects of experimental implementation in particular which “bear directly on internal validity (Druckman et al 2011, p. 19). Noncompliance, referring to participants being shown the incorrect treatment, was mitigated through the research design and through Qualtrics’ recruitment process. The questionnaires, representing different experimental treatments, were entirely separate from each other. Participants assigned to one questionnaire were unable to

¹² Control variables are variables that an experimenter keeps constant to prevent confounding with independent variables.

view the treatment from a different questionnaire, and if a participant had previously undertaken one of the questionnaires they were barred from completing another. Problems associated with attrition were avoided using a short instrument, and requiring participants to provide an answer to each question and view all exposure material before moving to the next section of the questionnaire. No participants dropped out of the study, and those who did not correctly answer the attention check question were replaced with a new participant.

It is worth noting that resolving attrition problems by forcing an answer from participants inevitably creates a new bias: uninformed response bias. This occurs when participants are unable to make an informed decision, yet are forced to do so in order to continue with the study; potentially leading to the collection of erroneous data (Lavrakas 2008). However, while uninformed response bias may represent a stubborn methodological limitation in other studies, it actually contributes to this study's experimental realism. Indeed, considering the mandatory nature of voting in Australia, forcing participants to make a choice about their preferred candidate even if they are not entirely informed about their decision closely mirrors the Australian electoral process. Therefore, uninformed response bias was not expected to compromise the data collected from experiments.

Social desirability bias, however, was a particular concern in this study. Social desirability bias refers to respondents answering questions in a manner which will be viewed favourably by others. In my questionnaires, the process of sorting participants into their voter subsets using self-report measures carried the risk of participants incorrectly self-identifying with more cognitively rigorous decision-making strategies to appear more intelligent (Gordon 1987). This would have theoretically resulted in an over representation of participants presenting as 'Pragmatic' voters in the study. To avoid this outcome, the study used two measures to reduce

the impact of the social desirability bias on participants' responses. Firstly, by assuring participants that their identity would remain anonymous and their results remained confidential in the Participant Information Statement, the questionnaires facilitated more honest responses (Gordon 1987). Secondly, the self-report questions were repeatedly scrutinised with the help of my supervisor to read as neutrally as possible so as not to present one decision making processes as superior to the other (see appendix 2). Again, this reduced the impetus for participants to incorrectly categorise themselves based on what they considered to be a more socially desirable response.

Confirmation bias was another potential concern. For the purposes of this study, confirmation bias refers to the tendency of participants to search for, interpret, and recall information in a way that is consistent with their previous responses. By asking participants to self-report on their policy preferences towards certain high-profile issues, there was a risk that participants would respond to new information based on answers they had already given rather than engaging with the electioneering strategies. Therefore, to decrease the likelihood that participants would react to treatments based on their prior responses, I intermixed the self-report questions with seven placebo policy questions (see appendix 3). In doing so, I obscured participants' ability to recall answers they previously gave, making them engage with the treatment in a more meaningful and measurable way (Harzing et al 2009).

5.3 Partisan bias:

As referenced in Chapter 4, the most prominent bias present in the study was partisanship. Kathleen McGraw in her study of candidate impressions asserts that "Partisan attachments exert an enormous impact on citizens' impressions and evaluations of political candidates. Failure to

manipulate partisanship (i.e. by holding it constant or ignoring it) carries risks” (McGraw 2011, p 190). Considering the experiment results were ultimately determined by which candidate participants voted for, I took extra precautions to ensure that partisanship biases did not invalidate my findings.

First, I fabricated the identities of my politicians, and ensured that there were no explicit references to the parties they belonged to in the experiments. This way, participants were not able to make an immediate judgement about who their preferred candidate was prior to being exposed to the treatment. Second, instead of my initial plan to incorporate real Facebook posts by Australian politicians who used these electioneering strategies, I wrote the posts myself. In doing so, I prevented participants from associating the experiment’s candidates with real politicians, taking care to avoid campaign slogans which often appeared in Facebook posts in 2016 like ‘jobs and growth’ and ‘mediscare’. Third, by using the multivariate analysis described in the methodology overview, I was able to effectively accommodate for differences in political opinions participants held when choosing their preferred candidate in the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaire.

However, as discussed in section 4.5, I discovered that in my research design I was unable to completely eliminate partisan biases. Unlike the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaire, the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire did not use a multivariate analysis to navigate political differences, as it was testing for a completely different proposition which necessitated different methods. Therefore, in the absence of a robust methodology to deal with remaining political biases, the influence of partisan attitudes was instead factored into the results (McGraw 2011). This was done by adjusting the propositions and hypotheses to make more modest claims about the influence of ‘Personalisation’ electioneering strategies on the decision-making processes

that ‘Instinctive’ voters used in the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire (see section 4.6). Future studies investigating the influence of ‘Personalisation’ strategies on young Australian voters should be keenly aware of partisan bias and develop more robust methodologies to manage it.

5.4 Researcher bias:

A crucial component of post-positivist research is acknowledging biases inherent to the epistemological approach. This recognition differentiates positivists from post-positivist scholars, as post-positivists appreciate the (often unidentifiable) biases the researcher brings to designing the study. In order to manage biases inherent to the epistemology, post-positivists rely on the scientific method. This is because the scientific method “imposes standards of control that reduce the influence of the researcher’s values and biases on the process of observation and interpretation and hence enhance the objectivity of the research enterprise” (Miller 2005, p. 46). However, while post-positivists view objectivity as a regulatory goal and the scientific method as a crucial tool for obtaining it; they acknowledge that observation and the scientific method are not “value-free”, they do not allow for “unassailable objectivity” and they are unable to reveal “objective truths” about social phenomena (Miller 2005, p. 38; Furlong & Marsh 2010, p. 196).

Indeed, the act of observation itself, and the act of reporting my findings, means that I will have interpreted and modified the results (Sanders 2010). Furthermore, the socially constructed nature of the research I have used to inform this study undermines my ability to reveal objective truths about the world. These arguments against social scientists’ ability to conduct bias free research are core the interpretivist critique of positivism; one which is readily accepted by post-positivist scholars (Furlong & Marsh 2010, p. 199). Ultimately, because I am

unable to produce objective results in my study, I rely on the critical scrutiny of other scholars to validate or falsify my research methods (Miller 2005).

5.5 Instrument bias:

As a final precaution against confounding variables, I launched a pilot questionnaire on Amazon's Mechanical Turk which aimed to eliminate instrument bias. This bias refers to poorly calibrated research instruments leading to aberrant results, and is both commonplace in and particularly threatening to quantitative studies (Krishna, Maithreyi & Surpaneni 2010).

However, as raised in section 4.3, this pilot instead revealed the shortcomings of using Mechanical Turk to access Australian participants. When attempting to recruit participants, I received no responses after 3 days publishing my questionnaires. Even after expanding the participant age range up to 30 and offering the most competitive pay of any study available at \$3 USD (the equivalent of \$19.99 an hour)¹³ per participant, I was unable to recruit participants into the study. To reaffirm that the sampling issue was not a fault on my end, I ran the same pilot using American participant pools and received instant results; confirming that the problem laid with the underrepresentation of Australian participants on Mechanical Turk.

Ultimately, Mechanical Turk was a failure that required me to redevelop my method by using Qualtrics Research Services, a professional participant recruitment company, to conduct both the pilot and the main experiment. However, as mentioned above, the drawback of using

¹³ \$19.99 USD an hour was calculated based on Qualtrics' estimated completion time for my questionnaire of 9 minutes. Participants on Mechanical Turk are regularly paid far less. A large-scale analysis studying Mechanical Turk workers' hourly wage found that the median hourly wage of 2,676 workers was approximately \$2 USD (Hara et al 2017).

Qualtrics was that experimental costs were raised dramatically; reducing the sample size I could access. The consequences of a small sample on the data set are portrayed in chapter six's results and then further detailed chapter seven's discussion.

Chapter 6: Results

The data below summarises the results as they pertain to the hypotheses outlined in section 4.6. It also includes a summary of exclusions from the sample who did not conform to the ‘Instinctive’ or ‘Pragmatic’ target subsets. Overall, the response rate was very low, which made drawing conclusions against the hypotheses impossible.

6.1 Hypothesis 1:

‘Pragmatic’ voters will, on average, have a closer Euclidean distance- to the candidates they vote for in the ‘Informing’ and ‘Critiquing’ questionnaire groups than ‘Instinctive’ voters will:

<i>Table 2: Informing questionnaire results</i>		
Voter subset	Sample size	Average Euclidean distance to the candidate voted for
Instinctive	1	0.34
Pragmatic	4	1.915

<i>Table 3: Critiquing questionnaire results</i>		
Voter subset	Sample size	Average Euclidean distance to the candidate voted for
Instinctive	2	1.835
Pragmatic	5	1.932

6.2 Hypothesis 2:

‘Instinctive’ voters will, on average, be slightly more inclined than ‘Pragmatic’ voters to vote for Noah Jones, the warmer candidate in the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire group:

<i>Table 4: Personalisation questionnaire results</i>		
Voter subset	Sample size	Vote choice
Instinctive	1	Noah Jones
Pragmatic	1	Noah Jones

6.3 Hypothesis 3:

The control group is populated entirely with placebo material and should yield a random preference for its candidates close to a 50/50 outcome:

<i>Table 5: Control questionnaire results</i>	
Votes for Noah Jones	Votes for Jack Williams
9	11

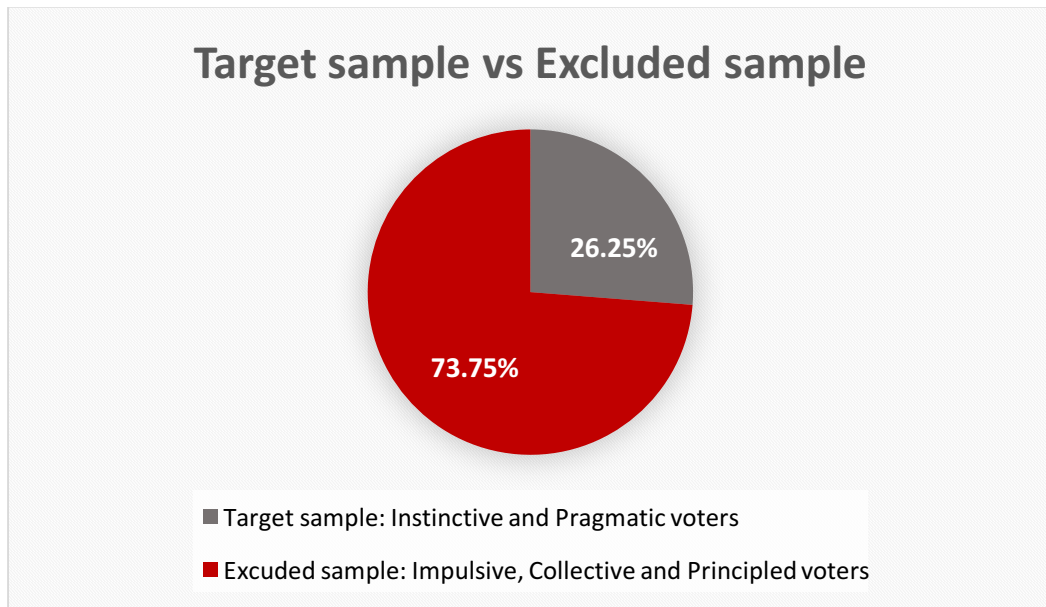
6.4 Exclusions from the study:

Participants who were not part of the target sample of ‘Instinctive’ or ‘Pragmatic’ voters were excluded from the study:

Table 6: Participant exclusions

Target sample: Instinctive and Pragmatic voters	Excluded sample: Impulsive, Collective and Principled voters
21	59

Figure 13: Comparison of sample sizes



Evidently, response rates for this study were problematic. Due to sample size issues, I am unable to provide an answer to the research question. I can, however, provide valuable insight to future researchers about sampling in experimentation by learning from the issues

encountered in this study; which will be detailed in chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This study aimed to understand which electioneering strategies used on Facebook are the most effective at influencing different subsets of young Australian voters. I have taken a post-positivistic approach to research to develop an explanatory model about this causal relationship. My approach builds on previous literature by synthesising two typologies; one about electioneering strategies used on Facebook, and another about the voting habits of different types of young Australian voters. I designed experiments to test the relationship between these typologies, as the experimental method “deliver(s) unrivalled claims for the making of causal inferences” (Margetts & Stoker 2010, p. 309).

However, as shown in chapter six, I encountered fundamental difficulties implementing these experiments due to sample problems. Without enough ‘Instinctive’ or ‘Pragmatic’ participants, the data produced from each treatment questionnaire was insufficient to draw conclusions against the hypotheses. Following this, while the results do give some indication about the portion of the enrolled population that these subsets of young Australian voters represent, the small sample size means that these indications carry a significant margin of error.

Therefore, conclusions associated with hypotheses and voter subsets are secondary in this study. Instead, the primary conclusions pertain to lessons learned about sampling in political experimentation. As such, in this chapter I will only briefly touch on the null hypotheses and the estimated marginal utility of accessing ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters. Then, I will spend more time examining the important methodological lessons learned from the sampling issues I encountered and their implications for experimental studies. Considering that political science is increasingly turning to the experimental method to help explain causal relationships, I anticipate that these lessons will be highly relevant to future researchers (Druckman et al 2006;

Margeretts & Stoker 2010; Iyengar 2011).

7.1 Interpreting the results:

While the results did indicate some directionality in relation to the hypotheses, the target sample was too small to be able to derive conclusions from. As such, a detailed analysis is pointless, because the independent variable questionnaires revealed null hypotheses. Therefore, the following section will only briefly explain the results before moving onto the marginal utility of targeting 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' voters.

7.1.1 Hypothesis 1:

'Pragmatic' voters will, on average, have a closer Euclidean distance to the candidates they vote for in the 'Informing' and 'Critiquing' questionnaire groups than 'Instinctive' voters will:

The results reveal a slight opposite directionality to the hypothesis. When aggregating the results of both 'Informing' and 'Critiquing' questionnaires, we see that 'Instinctive' voters had a Euclidean distance of 1.34 from their preferred candidate, and 'Pragmatic' voters had a Euclidean distance of 1.92. However, by looking at the 'Informing' and 'Critiquing' questionnaire separately, we see that the difference between 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' voters' Euclidean distance is greatly exaggerated by sample issues.

The 'Informing' questionnaire only had 1 'Instinctive' voter and 4 'Pragmatic' voters. As such, the average Euclidean distance of 'Instinctive' voters' could not be calculated, because there was only one respondent. The Euclidian distance of this 'Instinctive' voter (being 0.34) skewed the data to suggests that there is a large gap of 1.575 between the Euclidean distances

of 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' voters; when in reality the small sample size means we have no idea whether this gap is large or not. Therefore, because of sample issues, I cannot derive any meaningful conclusions about how the target sample responded to 'Informing' strategies used on Facebook.

The 'Critiquing' questionnaire had similar sample issues, with only two 'Instinctive' voters and five 'Pragmatic' voters. Although the gap between Euclidean distances was much smaller than in the 'Informing' questionnaire to the point where it could be considered negligible (0.097), the small sample means I am unable to make meaningful analyses. Overall, due to the insufficient data produced by the 'Informing' and 'Critiquing' questionnaires, I am left with a null hypothesis.

7.1.2 Hypothesis 2:

'Instinctive' voters will, on average, be slightly more inclined than 'Pragmatic' voters to vote for Noah Jones, the warmer candidate in the 'Personalisation' questionnaire group:

The 'Personalisation' questionnaire also suffered sample issues which lead to inconclusive results. After the participant exclusion process, there was only one 'Instinctive' and one 'Pragmatic' voter left to complete the questionnaire, and both participants voted for the 'warmer' candidate. It is not possible to make any claims against hypotheses from such a small sample. Due to insufficient data, I am left with another null hypothesis.

7.1.3 Hypothesis 3:

The control group is populated entirely with placebo material and should wield a random preference for its candidates close to a 50/50 outcome:

This hypothesis was validated. In the ‘Placebo’ questionnaire, nine participants voted for Noah Jones and 11 participants voted for Jack Williams, resulting in a 45/55 split between votes.

Because of sampling issues, the hypotheses which tested the causal relationships between young Australian voters and online electioneering strategies remains unanswered. There is no evidence to suggest that my methodology caused problems with the data, which means I have no reason to doubt the ability of my experiments to investigate this relationship. Therefore, in order to learn from the failings of this study, we must instead investigate problems with sampling, which will be developed upon later as part of the ‘lessons learned’ from my methodology.

7.2 Findings about size of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voter subsets:

When making estimations about population that my target subsets may represent, it is important to provide a caveat concerning the margin of error these estimations carry. This is because the sample size is so small that any extrapolations to the wider population could not be considered accurate. Indeed, using my target sample to represent the young Australian voter population with a 95% confidence level carries a significant margin of error of 21% (these calculations will be explained below). Therefore at best, my estimations can only imply the marginal utility of targeting these ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ subsets. Taking the limitations of my small sample into account, my rough estimations about the potential sizes of the subsets are as follows.

By combining the responses of the voter-subset questions across all four questionnaires,

I found that the attrition rate for my target sample was close to four to one. From the five subsets of voters identified by Laughland-Booÿ et al, the 21 participants who conformed to the ‘Instinctive’ or ‘Pragmatic’ categories made up 26.25% of the participant sample. Of these 21 participants, six were ‘Instinctive’ voters and 15 were ‘Pragmatic’ voters, representing 7.5% and 18.75% of participants respectively. If my sample were larger, these findings would suggest that ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters only represent approximately one quarter of young Australian voters aged 18-25.

To extrapolate, if ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters did in fact only represent a quarter of young Australian voters, they could still be fruitful demographics to target during election campaigns. Indeed, considering that “Australian elections are regularly won by 2-3% of votes”, small demographics can still play a pivotal role in deciding election outcomes (Denemark, Ward & Bean 2007, p. 107). As such, for the reference of future researchers who may want to investigate the marginal utility of targeting these subsets, it is worth giving a cursory indication of the portion of the vote-enrolled population these subsets may represent. Making extrapolations from my sample to the Australian electoral population also allows me to calculate the margin of error associated with the study.

Following this, based on the most recent enrolment statistics published by the Australian Electoral Commission, there are approximately between 1.6 and 1.7 million Australians aged 18-25 who are enrolled to vote as of June 2018 (AEC 2018). To use the population estimates derived from my sample, if we took 26.25% of this age group then we would be left with between 420,000 and 446,250 young Australian voters. ‘Instinctive’ voters would account for 120,000-127,500, and ‘Pragmatic’ voters would make up 300,000-318,750 young Australians. By determining the larger population size my sample represents, I can estimate the marginal

utility of targeting these voters and calculate the margin of error in this study (See table 7).

Table 7: Population estimates

Subset(s)	Portion of the participant sample	Representative portion of the electoral population	Estimated percentage of electoral population	Margin of error
Instinctive	6 out of 80	120,000 - 127,500	0.74 - 0.79%	40%
Pragmatic	15 out of 80	300,000 - 318,750	1.86 - 1.98%	25%
Instinctive & Pragmatic	21 out of 80	420,000 - 446,250	2.6 - 2.77%	21%

Evidently, these estimations carry significant margins of error. As such, it would not be academically rigorous to suggest that they were proper representations of the Australian population. All I can say about these estimations is that they provide some incentive for future researchers to investigate the sizes of these subsets further. Indeed, if the combined population of ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters did in fact represent 2.6-2.77% of the total enrolled Australian voting population as table 7 suggests, then they would satisfy the aforementioned “2-3%” victory-margin (Denemark, Ward & Bean 2007, p. 107). Further research with a larger sample size is needed to increase the accuracy of these findings and derive meaningful conclusions about the size of these voter subsets.

7.3 Learning from my methodology — Lessons about sampling in experiments:

In line with the post-positivist epistemology, I have aimed to report my results as objectively as possible (Miller 2005). As such, I have demonstrated that due to issues with the sample I am unable to make any claims against the hypotheses, nor am I able to make accurate inferences about what portion of the Australian electoral population my target sample represents. I am,

however, able to make a methodological contribution to wider literature by way of learning from the issues encountered in my experiments. To reflect on these lessons, the following section will start by reviewing my experimental methodology. It will then discuss sampling issues faced in the study, and build on these issues to outline the problems facing Australian researchers in experimentation. These discussions lead to an overarching conclusion: experiments which target Australian demographics are difficult and expensive to conduct.

That being said, as a post-positivist I maintain that just because experiments may be difficult or expensive does not invalidate them as useful research tools. Indeed, I still privilege scientific and the experimental method as best for delivering “unrivalled claims for the making of causal inferences” (Margetts & Stoker 2010, p. 309). Therefore, I will conclude this chapter with an analysis of the implications of taking a post-positivist approach to the research question seriously by conducting a full-scale study with an appropriate sample size. This analysis will incorporate a description of the corporate and political entities who could afford and benefit from running this study, as well as a preliminary budget outlining the costs of further research. Overall, considering the growing prominence of experiments in political science, the methodological implications derived from this study’s experimental approach should be valuable for future researchers.

7.3.1 A review of my experimental methodology:

This study has taken a deductive approach to investigating the hypothesised causal relationship between online electioneering strategies and the vote choice of young Australian voters. I used Robert Dubin’s widely cited framework for post-positivistic studies of communication in order to meet the rigorous standards of scientific inquiry in political research. This involved a two-

step process. First, I made abstractions about the way we can expect different types of young voters to engage with different electioneering strategies. Then, I designed experiments to test whether these abstractions were valid. Additionally, to adhere to the “metatheoretical tenants of post-positivism”, I went to great lengths to identify and reduce bias in my research design so that my findings would be as objective as possible (Miller 2005, p. 38). Finally, I launched my study using online crowdsourcing services, as they have been widely acclaimed as the ideal forums through which to conduct experiments (Stewart et al 2015; Navarro & Siegel 2016; Cunningham et al 2017).

Ultimately, using these methods I was unable to provide an answer to the research question. However, as mentioned in section 7.1.3, there is no evidence to suggest that this failure was attributed to my methodological design. The simple but fatal problem in my study was a small sample which did not allow me to answer hypotheses or make accurate generalisations about the wider Australian population. Therefore, I maintain that my methodology is sound and should be utilised by future researchers wishing to investigate this causal relationship. That is not to say that my methods did not carry limitations. Indeed, as mentioned in section 4.5 and 5.3, I recommend that future researchers develop more effective ways to accommodate for partisan bias in the ‘Personalisation’ questionnaire. What it does mean, though, is that unless proven otherwise my abstractions and methodology should be considered valid according to the standards of post-positivistic inquiry.

7.3.2 Sampling problems in the study:

In order to learn from the failings of this study, we must investigate sampling issues instead of the methodological design. There are two reasons why this study was reduced to using a small

sample. The first is that during the pilot phase, I discovered that my original and preferred crowdsourcing service, Amazon's Mechanical Turk, was unsuitable for an Australian-centric study. This was an unexpected development. As mentioned in section 4.3 I anticipated that Mechanical Turk would be able to deliver hundreds of participants into my study based on testimonies from the aforementioned literature as well as Mechanical Turk's user description; promising a "global workforce that can help you to complete your work whenever and wherever you need it" (Mechanical Turk 2018). Despite these assurances, my pilot study revealed that Mechanical Turk's access to Australian demographics was extremely limited to the extent that I was unable to recruit any participants into the study.

To overcome this limitation, I switched to Qualtrics Research Services; a professional research recruitment service which could reliably source Australian participants. However, the trade-off for employing Qualtrics to access Australian demographics were the expensive recruitment costs; the second sampling issue. Because the study was entirely self-funded, the added cost of Qualtrics made recruiting a larger sample unfeasible. Indeed, the cost per participant rose from \$3 on Mechanical Turk to \$10 on Qualtrics, which severely limited the number of participants I could recruit.

Overall, the sampling issues I encountered in the study can be attributed to a poor representation of Australians on cheaper international crowdsourcing sites combined with the high cost of accessing Australian samples using professional research services. These restrictions have important implications for the future of experimentation in Australia. If Mechanical Turk, the most "well-known and widely used crowdsourcing website" (Behrend et al 2011; see also Schmidt & Jettinghoff 2017), is unable to offer affordable access to Australian samples then the capacity of Australian researchers to conduct experiments in a cost-effective

manner is reduced (Crone & Williams 2017). To explore these implications further, the following sections will investigate the lack Australian representation on crowdsourcing services and subsequently the costs associated with using professional recruitment services.

7.3.3 Experimentation — easy for the US, hard for Australia:

The difficulties Australian researchers face sourcing participants for online experimentation requires an explanation. I suggest there are two main causes for the barriers to accessing cheap Australian samples using online crowdsourcing services — Mechanical Turk in particular. Firstly, crowdsourcing websites are disproportionately located in America, and as a result are predominantly focused on American demographics. Mourelatos et al's 2016 review of online crowdsourcing platforms revealed that 67.3% operated in the US alone, with a further 15.3% in Europe and 17.3% scattered across the rest of the world. With only 2% of these crowdsourcing websites operating in Australia, it makes sense that gaining access to Australian samples in this study proved problematic (Mourelatos et al 2016, p. 64).

More specific to Mechanical Turk, the recent restrictions Amazon placed on Australian markets has likely undermined the already slim population of Australian sampling pools. In response to a new 10% GST on overseas purchases implemented by the Turnbull government on July 1st, 2018, Amazon blocked Australian customers from accessing US stores (Guardian 2018). This change in policy has reportedly had severe consequences for Australian Mechanical Turk workers. Because Mechanical Turk pays workers outside of the US (with the exception of India) in the form of gift cards rather than transferring money to private accounts, Australian workers have been consigned to spending their earnings on US Amazon stores (Amazon 2018). However, because of Amazon's new policy in Australia, these gift cards have largely been

made redundant. Discussions on informal online forums like Reddit have attributed Australians' decreased use Mechanical Turk to this change in policy. Given the niche nature of this issue, academic literature has not yet investigated the effects of the new Australian GST on international purchases for Mechanical Turk workers. That being said, dissatisfaction communicated via informal online forums suggests that it is another likely cause for the particularly low number of Australian respondents.

Finally, it is important to note that there are lesser known crowdsourcing sites available to researchers. Although, due to lack of Australian political science literature investigating these alternatives, their viability for conducting experimental research remains questionable. The gap in literature is presumably due to the longstanding distain for experiments in the discipline until relatively recently (Lowell 1910; Druckman et al 2006; Margetts & Stoker 2010). There have, however, been noteworthy efforts to explore other crowdsourcing sites from researchers in psychology. Be that as it may, their findings are too preliminary to be considered solutions to the sampling difficulties Australian researchers face; stating that “Microworkers (a crowdsourcing site) *may* offer a promising alternative to Mechanical Turk” (Crone & Williams 2017, p. 39). Therefore, in the absence of cheap reliable alternatives to Mechanical Turk, we must consider the costs of conducting experiments using professional recruitment services.

7.3.4 The costs of experimentation in Australia:

This study has shown that the costs of online experimentation in Australia should be scrutinised. While political science literature has identified online crowdsourcing services as a cost-effective way of accessing larger and more diverse participant pools (Iyengar 2011), researchers should be aware that this advantage is heavily dependent on the geographic location of

participants being targeted (Mourelatos et al 2016). This Australian study, for example, was small scale and requires further research with more participants; however the costs of doing so would be significant. Looking back on the recruitment process, I discovered that I needed to pay for approximately 13 participants before I had access to just one of my target ‘Instinctive’ voters. The participant ratio improved somewhat with ‘Pragmatic’ voters but was nonetheless expensive, costing the equivalent of five participants to access one ‘Pragmatic’ voter.

To extrapolate, if I wanted to access a fully representative sample of the Australian electorate for ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters using these methods then I would be engaging in a very expensive study. According to Qualtrics’ sample size calculator, a sample population which represented 420,000-446,250 young Australian voters with a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error would require 384 participants. However, as identified in section 7.2, there is an approximate four to one attrition rate (73.75%) in the participant sample before I can access ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters. After adjusting for this attrition rate, a properly representative sample for this target population would require 1,463 participants. Considering that Qualtrics charges \$10 AUD per participant, I expect the participant filtering process of this study alone would cost up to \$14,630. These costs raise an important question about using the experimental method in Australia: who would be able to afford it?

7.4 Who can afford these studies:

As mentioned in section 7.3, just because experiments are expensive to run does not invalidate them as useful research tools. Indeed, well-funded bodies who are interested in accessing or influencing young Australian voters, such as political parties, partisan think tanks, digital marketing corporations and Australian Research Council funded academics, would perceivably

benefit from conducting a full-scale version of this experimental study. Considering the growing role of Facebook in facilitating the consumption of political information for youth demographics, conducting this study properly could give valuable insight into ways to attract the youth vote during election periods (Carson & McNair 2018). Therefore, the thesis will conclude by providing recommendations for future researchers interested in the causal relationship between online electioneering strategies and youth voting habits.

7.5 Recommendations for future researchers:

There are two important recommendations from my study. The first is a general recommendation about epistemological approaches to research in political communication. I still believe a post-positivist approach using the experimental method is best suited to answering the research question, despite being unable to draw conclusions against the hypotheses in this study. Considering my approach is not commonplace in Australia, substantiating my methodology is important for reaffirming the value of post-positivistic experimentation in political science.

The second recommendation is more specific to the research question. I advise that researchers take a two-wave approach to conducting a full-scale version of the study; first using a smaller instrument to determine the relative sizes of 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' subsets before deciding whether it is worth pragmatically funding a research project aimed at targeting them. For the reference of future researchers conducting this study with larger samples, this section will conclude by reiterating limitations of this study's methods outside of the context of sampling issues.

7.5.1 Taking post-positivism seriously:

To begin with, I suggest researchers conducting experimental studies in political communication follow the post-positivistic approach. This is because post-positivism sets out a logical set of rules for building and testing communicative theories which allow researchers to effectively establish causal relationships. Indeed, as Kathrine Miller notes, “there is little doubt that the post-positivist perspective on theory can be seen in a great deal of the work that is ongoing in communication studies” (Miller 2005, p. 49). Charles Berger substantiates this recommendation, calling for a post-positivist agenda in communication studies by stating that budding researchers “should be required to explicate theoretical constructs and begin to build theories that explain communication phenomena” (Berger 1991, p. 109). I would further add that researchers use the experimental method to test these theories, as it has an unrivalled capacity to establish causal connections between phenomena (Margetts & Stoker 2010). Therefore, despite the fact that this study yielded null hypotheses, and that experiments are difficult and costly to conduct in Australia, I stand by the post-positivistic experimental approach for building explanatory models of causal relationships.

7.5.2 Conducting my study with a full sample:

The rough population estimates of my target subsets made in section 7.2 suggest that ‘Instinctive’ and ‘Pragmatic’ voters *could* be worth targeting in an election. However, the significant margin of error attached to these estimations carries uncertainty as to whether they represent a large enough portion of the Australian electoral population to be worth spending resources trying to access. Therefore, if my study were to be pragmatically funded, I would recommend a two-wave approach in which researchers would first do a full pilot to get a better understanding of the size of the sample, and then determine whether it justifies the second cost

of running the actual experiment.

To reduce costs, I recommend conducting this full pilot on Amazon's Mechanical Turk using American participants. Importantly, this does not contradict the approach I took to my study wherein I abandoned Mechanical Turk for its poor representation of Australian demographics. Instead, this proposed pilot study would recruit American participants to see indicatively whether there were enough 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' participants in the pilot to be worth committing to the full study in Australia. Furthermore, if the results from the full study mirrored the results from the American pilot study, one could then reasonably argue that expensive Australian experiments would be unnecessary when representative results of the Australian electorate could instead be gleaned from cheap US participant pools. This approach would be amenable to post-positivists, as it involves making broad abstractions about young people in Western democracies and then generalising results across different persons and settings; central to post-positivistic explanatory models (G.R. Miller & Nicholson 1976).

Assuming the pilot study indicated that 'Instinctive' and 'Pragmatic' voters represented large enough populations worth targeting in campaigns, researchers should then conduct the full Australian study. For the benefit of these future researchers, I have provided a budget which gives a comprehensive overview of the costs of this two-wave approach to help them decide whether or not to take the study further:

Table 8: Proposed Budget

	Pilot Study	Main Study
Crowdsourcing site	Amazon's Mechanical Turk	Qualtrics Research Services
Population size	420,000-446,250	420,000-446,250
Confidence level	95%	95%
Margin of error	5%	5%
Sample size	1,463	1,463
Cost per participant ¹⁴ (AUD)	\$1.28	\$10.00
Cost of study (AUD)	\$1,872.64	\$14,630

Overall Cost: \$16,502.64

¹⁴ The cost of recruiting participants on Mechanical Turk is dependent on the researcher. However, guidelines for Academics using Mechanical Turk have indicated that \$0.10 USD a minute is a fair wage (Navarro & Siegel 2016). Because this study takes 9 minutes to complete, I recommend participants be paid at least \$0.90 USD or \$1.28 AUD after conversion.

Conclusion:

Young people's growing reliance on Facebook for the consumption of political news has significant implications for the future of electioneering in Australia. If this trend continues, Facebook will establish itself as a dominant political arena alongside traditional news media; changing the political media landscape of Australia and having a sizeable impact on the way younger generations vote. In recognition of this, politicians are increasingly turning to Facebook as a pivotal medium through which to influence voters; to the extent that the lead up to the 2016 Australian federal election became known as the 'Facebook Campaign' (Carson 2016; Carson & McNair 2018). It is paramount, then, that we gain a better understanding of Facebook's role in accessing youth demographics by asking 'which electioneering strategies used on Facebook are most the effective at influencing who young Australians vote for'.

In attempting to answer this question, I have made methodological and pragmatic contributions to experimentation in political science and to electioneers in Australia. Although I encountered sampling issues which yielded null hypotheses, by learning from these issues I was able to provide important insight into the difficulties facing Australian experimenters and the costs of accessing fully representative sample sizes. Following this, I have also provided a framework for a post-positivist study into the causal relationship between online electioneering strategies and the voting patterns of young Australians. Considering there is no evidence to suggest that my methodology was incapable of answering the research question, this thesis offers a functional research design equipped with a proposed budget for pragmatically funded researchers interested in taking the study further. Overall, I anticipate that the findings of this study will be highly relevant to experimental researchers and electioneers in Australia.

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Appendix 1: Participant Information Statement

About the survey:

You will be asked to fill out a survey to identify what type of voter you are. You will then be asked to look at text-based exposure material modified from real Facebook posts. After looking at the text, you will be asked to vote for your preferred candidate out of a choice of 2 candidates. An in-depth explanation of the survey is provided in the Participant Information Statement below.

Link to Participant Information Statement:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HAti3V7aL3kzFNzLFcrpZrU5rC-LWlvst1pDpmKpnlo/edit?usp=sharing>

It is important that you read the Participant Information Statement prior to taking part in the survey. By clicking 'next' to proceed to the survey you agree and consent to your the terms and conditions of the Participant Information Statement.

In giving my consent I state that:

I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.

I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.

The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.

I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney now or in the future.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand that my questionnaire responses cannot be withdrawn once they are submitted, as they are anonymous and therefore the researchers will not be able to tell which one is mine.

I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

Click next if you agree to participate in the study.

Next

Appendix 2: Participant Sorting Questions

Please select your gender:

Male

Female

Other

In federal elections, do you decide who to vote for during the election period (between the official announcement and the time you cast your vote)?

Yes

No

Have you used Facebook as a resource to inform your political views?

Yes

No

Which option best describes you:

1. I rely on the views or advice my friends and/or family to help inform my vote.

2. I make my own decisions about who to vote for.

Option 1

Option 2

Which option best describes you:

1. I rely on the views or advice my friends and/or family to help inform my vote.
2. I make my own decisions about who to vote for.

Option 1

Option 2

Which option best describes you:

1. I use a few key indicators to decide who to vote for.
2. I analyse a wide range of political information to decide who to vote for.

Option 1

Option 2

Have you ever been attacked by aliens while using Facebook?

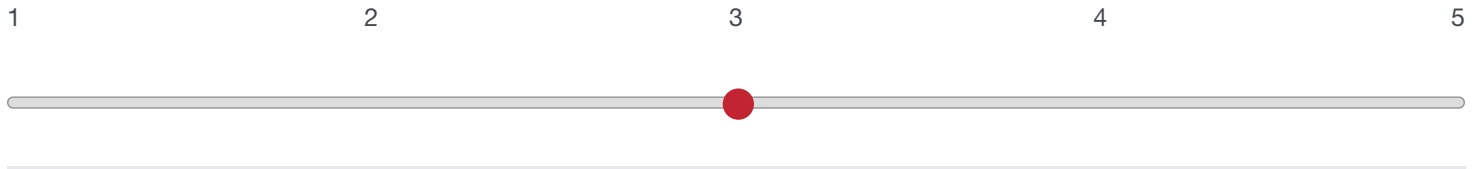
Yes

No

Appendix 3: Policy Preference Likert Scales

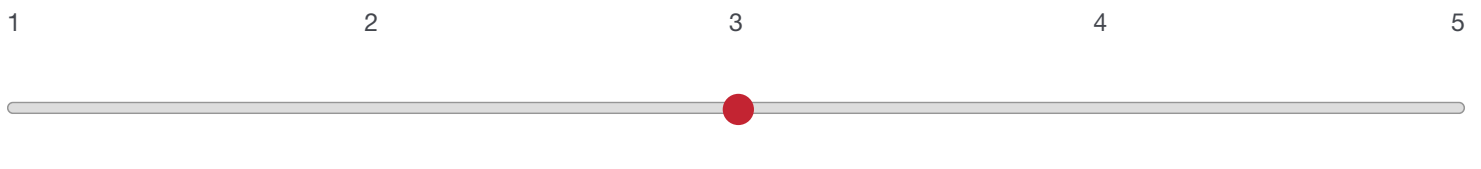
In the interests of commercial nightlife and public noise amenities, which policy option do you prefer?

Should we restrict the operating hours of bars, pubs and nightclubs to an earlier time during weekdays, or allow them to stay open until later during weekdays. Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is to close earlier**, and the **right end is to close later**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



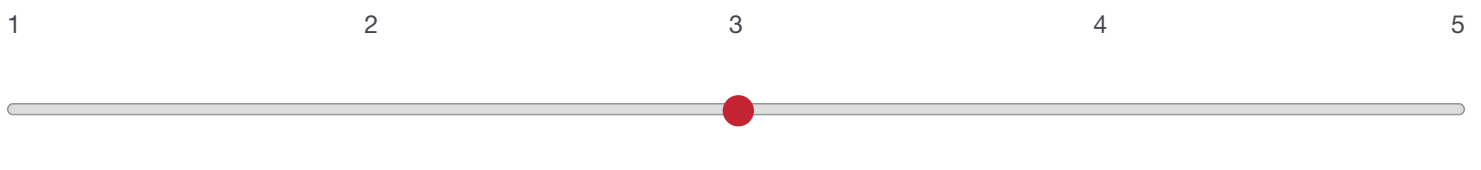
For the economic management of the nation, which policy option do you prefer?

Tax cuts to business to incentivise economic growth, or more investment in public infrastructure to increase public service standards? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is tax cuts to business**, and the **right end of the scale is investment in public infrastructure**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



For healthcare, which policy option do you prefer?

Privatising the healthcare system to reduce national economic debt or devoting a larger portion of the national budget to healthcare to reduce medical costs? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is privatisation**, and the **right end is investment in healthcare**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



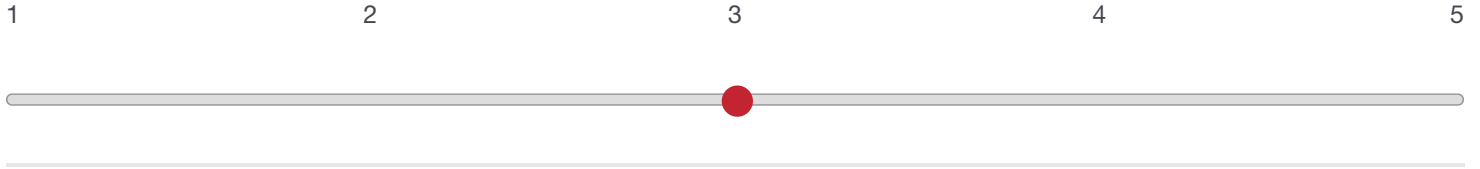
For population and town planning, which policy option do you prefer?

Should we build higher density housing developments near our cities' Central Business Districts, or should we continue expanding suburban neighbourhoods towards cities' fringes? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is in favour of higher density housing development near cities' Central Business Districts**, and the **right end is to expand suburban neighbourhoods towards city fringes**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



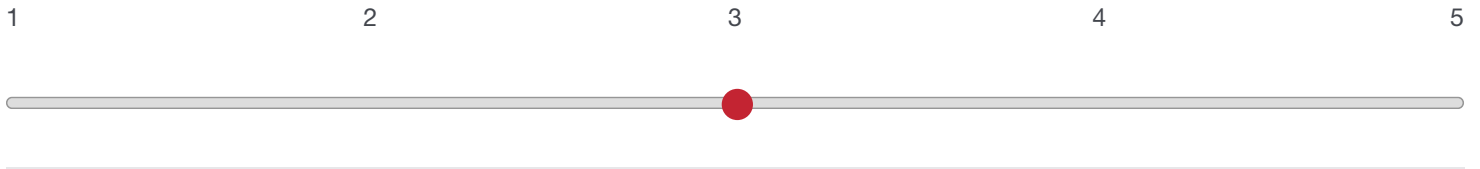
For education, which policy option do you prefer?

Deregulating university fees to reduce national economic debt or devoting a larger portion of the national budget to keep university fees cheaper? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is deregulation**, and the **right end is investment in education**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



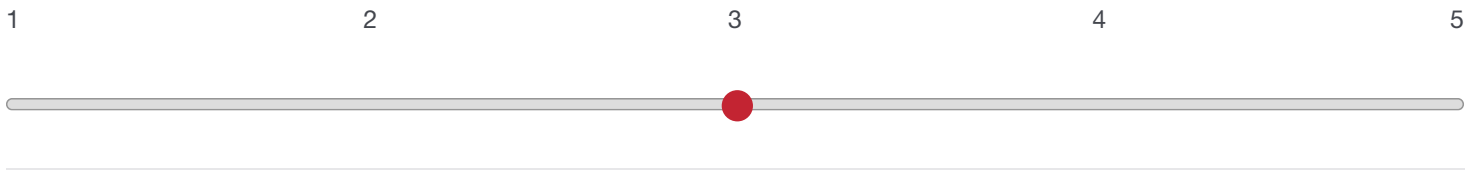
In regards to the legal voting age, which policy option do you prefer?

Should we lower the legal voting age, or raise the legal voting age in state and federal elections? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is to lower the legal voting age**, and the **right end is to raise the legal voting age**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



For Australian gun policy, which policy option do you prefer?

Should individuals go through longer or shorter screening processes to own a gun licence? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is a longer screening process**, and the **right end is a shorter screening process**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



In regards to prosecuting drug use, which policy option do you prefer?

Should we have harsher or lighter sentences for being caught with possession of Cannabis? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is harsher sentences**, and the **right end is lighter sentences**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



In regards to Australian wages, which policy option do you prefer?

Should we decrease or increase the hourly minimum wage? Use the sliding scale below to choose your position. The **left end of the scale is to increase**, and the **right end is to decrease the minimum wage**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



For transport infrastructure, which policy option do you prefer?

Should we build more road or rail infrastructure to help ease congestion for commuters? The **left end of the scale is in favour of more road infrastructure**, and the **right end is in favour of more rail infrastructure**. The options in between give you a choice to adjust the extent of how in favour of either policy you are. The middle option, option 3, is neutral.



Appendix 4: Sample Exposure Material

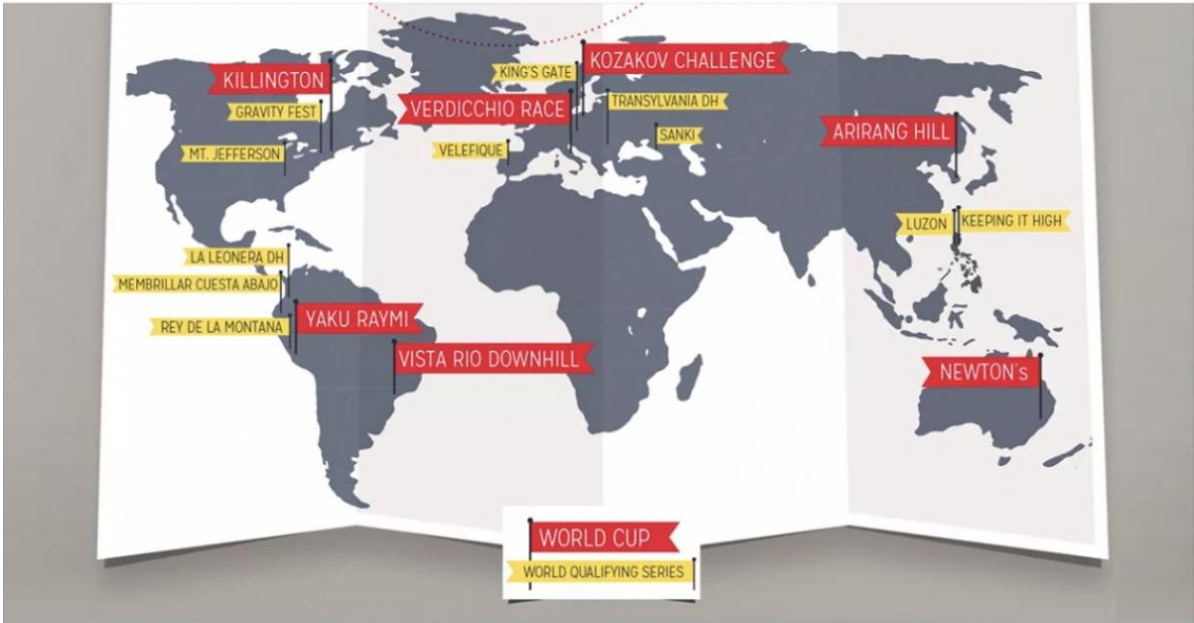


IDF - International Downhill Federation

13 October 2017 · 🌐



IDF is proud to announce the 2018 racing schedule. Enjoy! #idfracing



INTERNATIONALDOWNHILLFEDERATION.ORG

IDF 2018 Racing Season - International Downhill Federation

The IDF official world schedule of 2018 racing season for Downhill Skateboarding and L...

👍❤️ 180

21 comments 189 shares



Engineers Australia

4 hrs · ⚙️



This breakfast event will focus on overcoming project challenges and pushing ahead with new technologies.



ENGINEERSAUSTRALIA.ORG.AU

Young Engineers Breakfast Event - "She'll be Right" | Engineers Australia

Within the Australian engineering industry, the 'She'll be Right' attitude is often associat...

110

👍 2

1 Share



Sirena Tuna

12 June at 9:00 am · 🌐



Premium quality means premium taste.



👍❤️ 23

3 comments 1 Share



Jack Williams

Just now · 👥



This country can't afford Mr Jones' \$50 billion giveaway for big businesses.



Headspace

Thursday at 7:00 pm · 🌐



Go easy on yourself. You're amazing.



HEADSPACE.COM

How to like yourself just a little bit more

New self-image, who dis?

👍❤️😬 343

9 comments 76 shares



Noah Jones

Just now · 👥



The Jones government will ensure a strong economy where businesses are confident of the future and will take the risk of investing, expanding and hiring. Our tax cuts will encourage businesses to do just that.



Noah Jones

Just now · 👥



World class students deserve a world class economy which encourages growth and employment following graduation. A Jones government will make this a reality.



Noah Jones

Just now · 👥



The Jones government will ensure the responsible economic management of our healthcare through privatising the sector; increasing its efficiency while easing our national debt.



PlayStation Australia

15 hrs · 🌐



This week's PS Store deal 💰 65% off Diablo III: Eternal Collection. \$34.95 gets you Diablo III + Reaper of Souls expansion + Rise of the Necromancer pack: bit.ly/2NIqX9C



👍❤️😱 48

108 comments 7 shares



Noah Jones

Just now · 👤



Mr Williams' reckless public investment with jeopardise the economy and cripple students' future employment options. Save our students, vote Jones.



20th Century Fox shared a post.

4 May · 🌐



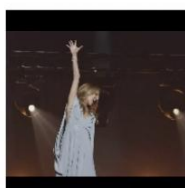
Showtime!



Céline Dion

3 May · 🌐

Over the years I've received some incredible songs and I've been involved in some amazing projects. 'Ashes' is one of those songs and 'Deadpool 2' is off-the-charts! Take the most insane... [Continue reading](#)



Céline Dion - Ashes (from the Deadpool 2 Motion Picture Soundtrack)

Celine Dion "Ashes" (From the Deadpool 2 Motion Picture Soundtrack) Get the song and soundtrack he...

[YOUTUBE.COM](https://www.youtube.com)

👍❤️😱 149

11 comments 13 shares



Allen's Lollies

Tuesday at 4:25 pm · 🌐



The nation is divided! Are you a stretcher or a biter? A splitter or a nibbler? Join the debate - tell us in the comments below how you eat your Allen's?

Allen's Lollies #eachtotheirallens 🦄 🐸 📈



👍❤️ 23

13 comments 3 shares



Roadshow

Monday at 3:32 am · 🌐



Here's to #RomperStomper for taking home the award for 'Most Outstanding Miniseries or Telemovie' at the #Logies last night! 🏆



👍 37

2 comments 2 shares

"It's not until afterwards that you wonder how you ever managed."



DOMAIN.COM.AU

How to stay sane during a major project, according to serial renovators

Serial renovator Julie Saunders once catered a 60th birthday party in the middle of a ma...


 3

2 comments 2 shares



Noah Jones

...


Just now · 

Today I reached out to my mother who's always given me inspiration. She's taught me some of my most valuable life lessons, like the importance of showing gratitude to the wonderful people around me. It's been a privilege to spend Mother's Day with the kindest woman I know.



Noah Jones

...


Just now · 

The economy can't afford to support Mr Williams' irresponsible spending on public infrastructure.



Jack Williams

...


Just now · 

The Williams government will invest heavily in infrastructure so that publicly available services will be cheaper, better quality and more accessible for all. Our investment strategy will encourage public infrastructure to meet this standard.



Jack Williams

...

Just now · 

If Mr Jones is elected, healthcare costs will rise and families will pay more to go to go to the doctor. Save healthcare, vote Williams.



Noah Jones

...


Just now · 

Mr Williams' expenditure on healthcare is financially irresponsible. Make the informed choice, privatise healthcare, and vote for Jones.



Jack Williams

...

Just now · 

Acknowledging mothers on this important day. The best way to celebrate Mother's Day is to give them lots of gifts. Every Mother's Day, I make sure to send my mum a couple of bars of chocolate. It's my way of thanking her for all her hard work.



NBA on ESPN

Tuesday at 6:49 pm · 🌐



The Warriors will be the first team in NBA history to have 3 players who averaged 25 PPG the year before.



👍👎❤️ 17.5K

1.6K comments 4.9K shares



Jack Williams



Just now · 👤

The Williams government will ensure that healthcare remains affordable by investing in our public sector; making high quality medical care accessible to all.



Jack Williams



Just now · 👤

You cannot be an innovation nation unless you are an education nation. Supporting world class schools is an investment the Williams government will make.



Jack Williams



Just now · 👤

Mr Jones' cuts to education will drive university fees to unaffordable highs for students. Save our students, vote Williams.

Appendix 5: Candidate Vote Choice

Which politician would you vote for?

Jack Williams

Noah Jones

