POLITICAL SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNING
IN FIJI'S 2014 ELECTIONS

Jope Tarai, Romitesh Kant, Glen Finau and Jason Titifanue

ABSTRACT

This research explores the contemporary phenomenon of online political campaigning in the 2014 Fiji Elections. With increasing Internet and mobile penetration, Fijian citizens, especially youths, have become more Internet savvy. Fiji's youth represents 47% of Fiji's voting population and some argue that securing the youth vote may have held the key to winning the 2014 Fiji elections. Candidates therefore had begun employing social media to appeal to the younger demographic. This research examines this emerging new trend by analysing the Facebook pages of candidates and parties vying for a seat in Fiji's 2014 elections.

INTRODUCTION[1]

Fiji's new electoral system and its large projected youth voting bloc were two components which distinguished Fiji's 2014 general elections from previous elections. Through the promulgation of the 2013 Constitution on 6th of September 2013, candidates and parties had to campaign in a country-wide multimember constituency. With the voting age reduced to 18 years, the voting population composition was altered dramatically. As a result, 47% of the projected voters were below the age of 35, of which 75% were voting for the first time (Gonedau, 2012). According to Vakaoti (2014), the preferred youth category for Fiji is between the ages 18 – 35. Political parties and candidates were compelled to transform their campaign strategies and accept new methods of campaigning to appeal to the youthful voters. Social media became the modern vehicle for political campaigning. The use of Facebook for instance, was widespread. In recognition of this new means of campaigning, this paper examines some of the following key aspects;

    i.   how many people in Fiji were Facebook users during the election period and how many were eligible voters;

    ii.   reasons for the use of social media as new means of political campaigning and how political parties utilized Facebook for campaigning

    iii.   some quantitative measurements on the performance of these online campaigns supported by qualitative analysis

The relationship between the electoral campaign and its impact on voters is central to electoral outcomes. Knowing how to appeal to voters is crucial in the campaign. The same relationship can be witnessed on social media. The research is divided into two categories, the account users and the campaign pages. Insights on the account users, who can be labelled as the audience, are as crucial as documenting the political parties' page campaigns. Basic insights on the total number of Facebook users in Fiji and other estimates are important in understanding exactly how many possible voters there are, for the specific campaign pages to influence.

The use of Facebook pages and their patterns provide useful insights on apparent methods of online campaigning and its possible implications. Facebook pages which are usually designed as a promotional platform for products and brands are increasingly used for political campaigns. The major political party pages were analysed from August 31 - September 29, 2014. The capitalisation of online campaigning through Facebook could be seen through the concentration of the content that these specific parties had been sharing and discussing. The next section will provide a review of the literature on social media and political campaigning. The section following will provide an overview of the political parties and their social media strategies. This will be followed by a discussion on the methodology and data collection techniques employed in the paper. The analysis of the data will then be discussed, and the paper will conclude with remarks on the significance of ICT and social media in the 2014 Fiji General Election.

INTERNET AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

The use of the Internet for political campaigning is a relatively recent phenomenon but it is a medium that candidates are increasingly using (Aronson, 2011). Social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have become digital battlefields where candidates contest for voters (Gibson & McAllister 2011; Golbeck & Hansen 2014). This increasing use of social media sites is largely attributable to its low cost, ease of use, enhanced personalisation features and its popularity with the younger demographic (Gainous & Wagner 2011). Given its emerging nature, literature on social media and political campaigning is also in its infant stages but is a burgeoning research stream.

With regards to extant research, the potential of the Internet to support the democratic process is represented by two main schools of thought (Aronson, 2011). One school postulates that the Internet is a democratic enabler as it provides greater access to information, enhanced interaction between voters and candidates and encourages higher levels of voter participation (Bimber and Davis 2003). The other school argues that the Internet can actually inhibit democracy as it can be used to reinforce current power structures. The Internet could be used by those already in power for their own purposes and further disenfranchise marginalised groups (Park and Perry 2008; Hindman 2008). However, research is still mixed in this area and a consensus has yet to be reached with regards to the Internet's potential for engendering democracy. In terms of campaigning, a number of studies have been conducted in mostly developed countries during recent elections to examine the impact of the Internet on voter preferences (Girish & Williams 2007; Lusoli 2005).

Early studies suggested that the Internet's impact was minimal but more recent studies have indicated the Internet's growing power in influencing voter preferences (Chadwick, 2012). Barak Obama's victory in the 2012 US Presidential Election was largely accredited to his superior use of social media compared to that of his Republican rival, Mitt Romney (Harfoush 2009; Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011). The link between politics and social media has increasingly become evident around the world. According to Shirky's *The Political Power Of Social Media - Technology, The Public Sphere and Political Change* (2011), social media has proven its utility in being an instrument for coordinating political movements and expanding the public sphere. Social media is arguably the expanding medium through which public opinion, participation and engagement is formed. A rising question within social media research is 'Political Polarisation', where social media users are increasingly only engaging with likeminded views and users (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008). As such it is inferred that people create a digital space, in which disparate political opinions become non-existent. Propositions of the expansion in the Internet contributing to greater political polarisation have been widely argued (see Hindman, 2008). However, there is growing literature that challenges this proposition and claims that political polarisation is reduced through social media usage (Barbera, 2014).

Turning to Pacific Island Countries (PICs), ICT is now changing the way Pacific Islanders interact in their various spheres of life and is also shaping their perceptions about politics. The Internet may have a greater impact in enabling democracy. The implications of the expansion of ICT in exposing corruption through citizen engagement have been witnessed in the Pacific (Cave,

2012; Logan, 2012). According to Cave's *Digital Islands: How the Pacific's ICT revolution is transforming the region.*(2012), the Pacific's wave of ICT has been accelerated through the large youth population. Similarly for Fiji, its 47% youth voting bloc coupled with its 300,326 Internet users (Kemp, 2014), created substantive possibilities for engaging voters through the Internet. It has also been noted by Cave (2012) that the rise of social media is closely connected to the increase in mobile phones. As of January 2014, the estimated total active Facebook users for Fiji was 260,000, which was 29.7% of the estimated 875,000 total population of Fiji (McTaggart, 2012). These statistics underscore the expansion of ICT and the Internet, coupled with the growth of active Facebook users. Social media has been gaining prominence as a powerful medium in Fiji. Social media has changed how people in Fiji are communicating and being informed. In Fiji's 2014 elections, social media also changed the way political parties campaigned.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Seven political parties and one of the two independent candidates used social media in the run up to the general election.

Figure 1 People's Democratic Party (PDP Fiji)

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) page was one of the early pages that started the campaign and was outstanding in the number of likes that it accumulated. These likes were attributed to the pages' early start and sponsorship. However, the analytics tools used by the authors could not measure the page's activity, perhaps due to the inconsistency in page postings and low engagement of the page.

Figure 2 FijiFirst

FijiFirst Party was established in May 2014 and was led by Fiji's former military commander, Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama. Its core members largely included the post-coup government. This party currently holds the majority in parliament and has strong military support. FijiFirst's Facebook campaign was composed of five pages namely *FijiFirst, Frank Bainimarama Is The Man, Fiji First Party, Support Fiji PM Frank Bainimarama* and *Make it Fiji First*. These pages were administered by a local communications company[2].

Figure 3 Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA)

Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), formerly the *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL), was the main political party that was removed from government by the 2006 coup. The party's name and symbol change was due to the Political Parties Registration Decree.. The party was mainly composed of chiefs and individuals who had been removed from power. Its party leader Ro Teimumu Kepa, is one of Fiji's high chiefs who strongly opposes the current ruling government. SODELPA's Facebook campaign had been spearheaded mainly by the young volunteers in the Party. There were also a number of party pages which were utilised but these were not coordinated, rather they appeared to be more spread out across the individual candidates

in the party. Out of the various party pages, four key pages were identified and assessed. These were *SODELPA, SODELPA Fiji, SODELPA National Youth Council Forum* and *SODELPA Fiji Discussion.*

Figure 4 The National Federation Party (NFP)

The National Federation Party (NFP) is Fiji's oldest political party led by an economist and former academic. The National Federation Party also had a number of Facebook pages which were utilised for campaigning, however due to some inconsistencies in these pages only two were assessed, namely; *National Federation Party* and *Support NFP.* At times these pages appeared to be working independently of each other.

Figure 5 Fiji Labour Party (FLP)

The Fiji Labour Party was led by Fiji's first ever Indo–Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, who was deposed in the 2000 coup. The Fiji Labour Party contested the 2014 General Election with both Mr Chaudhry and new leader Dr Rohit Kishore at the helm. The Labour Party had only two Facebook pages that were active initially, both with the same names; *Fiji Labour Party1* and *Fiji Labour Party.* The only difference between these pages was the timing of launches as the

Fiji Labour Party1 was launched first on the 17th of June, while *Fiji Labour Party* was launched on the 28th of June, 2014. These two pages were observed to be duplicates of one another and at times appeared incoherent. Additionally, these pages were launched quite late into the election period.

Figure 6 Fiji United Freedom Party

The Fiji United Freedom Party was established in May 2014. Its President, Jagath Karunaratne had been in the media for allegations of vandalism in public places. The President of the Party was joined by Nayagodamu Korovou, a forty year old who had gained national attention earlier for his invitation to Frank Bainimarama to join his "Youth Party" (Doviverata, 2013). As the elections drew nearer Korovou was unsuccessful in his plans to establish the "National Youth Party" and his invitations to the regime leader fell on deaf ears. The page for Fiji United Freedom Party was launched on the 2nd of August, 2014, which was just a few weeks before polling day. The page content was limited due to the timing of the launch and it lacked the ability to incite discussions and interaction.

Figure 7 One Fiji Party

One Fiji Party was another party that was established close to the elections and led by Filimoni Vosarogo. Mr Vosarogo and his supporters were a breakaway group of SODELPA. Inside sources revealed that the split was due to different views relating to religious orientation. The party had a small base and campaigning was constrained by resource and funding limitations. Its Facebook page was launched on the 18th of August, however the page was constrained due to the short time frame leading up to polling day.

Figure 8 Roshika Deo - Be The Change Campaign

Roshika Deo – Be The Change Campaign was led by one of only two Independent candidates in the 2014 General Election. Her online campaign started early – 12 September, 2013 - and received a lot of media attention for being Fiji's first independent campaign that was run and organised by young people. The page was actively coordinated by Roshika and her campaign managers during the course of the campaign**.**

The next section will discuss the study's methodological choices

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

The study employed a mixed methods research to explore the phenomenon of social media and political campaigning in Fiji. A mixed methods approach utilising quantitative and qualitative instruments was useful in examining the complex issues relating to party – electoral campaigning which provided richer insights.

Social media quantitative analytics tools, called "*Fan Page Karma"* and *"Social Bakers"* were used to extrapolate data from the selected political party campaign pages. These online analytics tools enabled monitoring and analysis of Facebook pages with characterised features. Such features are designed to evaluate engagement and interaction of Facebook users with specific pages being monitored. "*Fan Page Karma"* has been used by major companies to monitor the online activity users have towards their products, while "Social Bakers" has been cited in Lowy Institute research, namely; *Digital Islands; How the Pacific's ICT revolution is transforming the region,* by Danielle Cave. Both analytics tools were used to extract a variety of data and also to

provide a form of methodological triangulation of specifically targeted data. Additionally, data was extracted directly from Facebook's advertising feature, which provided total user numbers and demographic distributions.

Interviews were conducted with a range of candidates that were willing and available, while visits and on site observations were conducted at party headquarters during the course of the elections. Key person interviews were conducted with party insiders who were directly or somewhat involved with the social media campaign of the party in question. Illustrative analysis of the images released by the three major political parties was conducted through three categories namely; *background, foreground* and *patterns & relationships*. This enabled the assessment of the images, based on each major party's character, style and focus of appeal in campaigning.

A montage of the Facebook political pages analysed in this study is presented in *Figure 9*.

Figure 9 A montage of all the Facebook platforms that were analysed and observed for the study

The analysis of these Facebook pages took place from August 31 until September 29, 2014. The analysis was undertaken during this period because it included the polling day of the 17th of September. Additionally, campaigning by all top political contenders was at its peak within this time frame. Undertaking the analysis during the aforementioned timeframe allowed a richer analysis that included a greater number of political parties and candidates. Through the social media analytics tool, data was collated and categorised in *Table 1*.

Table 1 Summary of Facebook Statistics

Fan Page Karma Analysis - from August 31, 2014 until September 29, 2014				
Fan page	**Fans[3]**	**Engagement**	**Service Level**	**Posts per Day**
FijiFirst	39989	8.50%	34%	3.5
People's Democratic Party (PDP)[4]	25844	-	-	-
Frank Bainimarama Is The Man	16675	0.00%	0%	0
Roshika Deo - Be The Change Campaign	14391	1.40%	77%	1.7
Fiji First Party	10208	9.20%	-	0.6
Support Fiji PM Frank Bainimarama	9890	20.10%	69%	1.8
National Federation Party	9295	8.70%	51%	4.3
SODELPA	6710	15.80%	27%	2.2
SODELPA Fiji	4221	44.00%	31%	7.7
Mick Beddoes	4211	6.10%	50%	0.3
Make it Fiji First	4073	1.80%	-	0.7
One Fiji Party	3586	3.30%	26%	1.7
SODELPA National Youth Council Forum	3106	25.80%	8%	2.4
SODELPA Fiji Discussion	1538	1.10%	14%	0.2
Fiji United Freedom Party	841	0.60%	-	0.6
Fiji Labour Party1	266	9.80%	30%	1.3
Support NFP	251	17.80%	0%	0.1
Fiji Labour Party	213	0.00%	25%	0

'Fans' gives a simple indication of how many account users had subscribed to getting updates from the page. It also indicated the total number of account users that had clicked "like" on the page. So the number of "likes" indicates the number of people wanting updates from the page. This may not necessarily mean that the subscribers are supporters of the specific campaigns being promoted by these pages.

'Engagement' measures the consistency of a fan interacting with specific posts from a page. The specific amounts are calculated through dividing the total sum of comments, shares and likes, by the total number of fans.

Calculating "Engagement" by taking an example of three days for Page "A" yields the following interaction values:

ENGAGEMENT RESULTS:

Table 2

	Interactions	**fans/subscribers/ likes**	**Engagement**	**Engagement %**
Monday	30	3500	0.008571429	0.857143
Tuesday	20	3555	0.005625879	0.562588
Wednesday	60	3600	0.016666667	1.666667
			Engagement % - 3 days	3.086397

Monday: 30/3500 =0.0086 x 100 = .86%

Total engagement for three days = roughly 3% -means that on average each fan interacted with the posts of page 'A' = 0.003 times. However, this covers all the days being looked at, including the days when no posts were made.

'Service level' refers to the number of times the Facebook page responds to comments and posts by its fans. This measurement indicates the level of direct response of the page administrators with comments that were made on posts or the page itself.

'Posts per Day' refers to the total number of posts made by the page, within the selected time of analysis, divided by the number of days within that selected period.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The Audience – Voters[5]

Figure 10
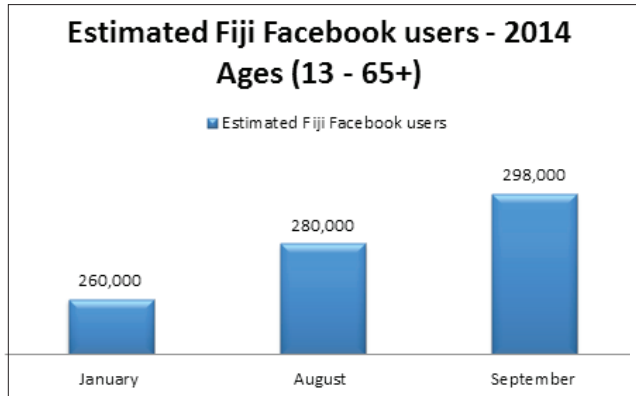
Figure 10 portrays the incremental rise in Facebook users in Fiji during 2014. From January to August, the rise in the number of Facebook users was roughly 20,000. However, from August to September, in a space of a month, Facebook users increased by 18,000. This rise within one month was almost comparable to the rise observed within seven months. It is likely the main reason for this huge leap was the General Election and specifically the polling day on September 17th, 2014. It is clear that the people of Fiji had begun engaging beyond the typical means of mass media, such as print, television and radio, to access more information.

Table 3 presents a breakdown of the total number of account users in Fiji in the month of September, 2014. Out of the approximately 875,000 total population in Fiji, 298,000 were Facebook users in the month of September. This indicates that about 34% of Fiji citizens were active on Facebook during the election period. The 34% level of Facebook penetration in the country is unprecedented and proves the increasing accessibility to ICT.

Table 3

September	Non Youth Facebook users (< 18 & >35)	90,000
	Youth Category Facebook users (Ages 18 -35)	208,000
	Facebook users - 13 - 65+	298,000

WHAT ABOUT THE 47%? (VOTING YOUTH 18 -35)

In September 2014, the youth category consisted of 208,000 Facebook account users. For the political parties, these 208,000 potential voters could have been easily accessed through Facebook. The youth voters represent around 70% of the total online active accounts for September. This statistic (See figure 11) validates the assumption that mostly young people are Facebook users.
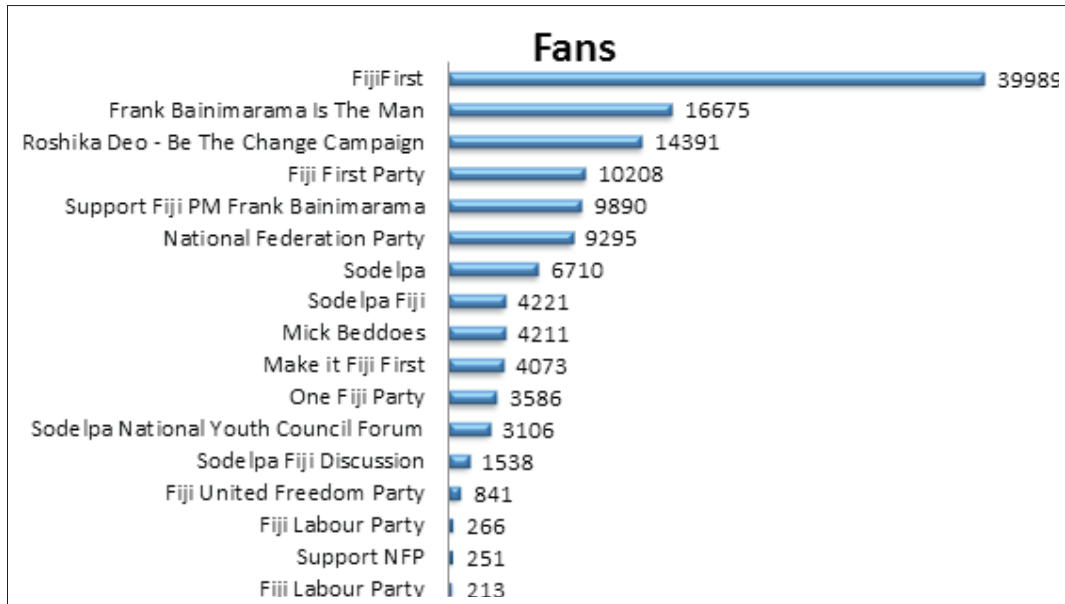
Figure 11
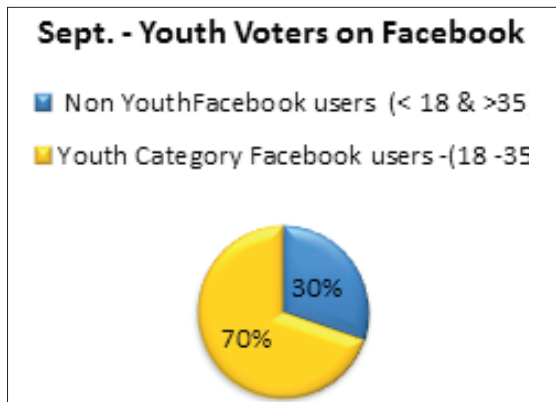
THE CAMPAIGNS

As described in the methodology, a social media analytics tool, *Fan Page Karma* was utilised to collate and divide data to specific categories. These categories include the following; Likes – Fans, Engagement, Service Level and Posts per Day[6]. *Table 4* below presents a summary of these categories by political Facebook page.

Table 4

| Fan Page Karma Analysis - from August 31, 2014 until September 29, 2014					
Fan page	Date Founded	Fans[6]	Engagement	Service Level	Posts per Day
FijiFirst	11/06/2014	39989	8.50%	34%	3.5
People's Democratic Party (PDP)[7]	9/07/2013	25844	-	-	-
Frank Bainimarama Is The Man	27/03/2013	16675	0.00%	0%	0
Roshika Deo - Be The Change Campaign	12/09/2013	14391	1.40%	77%	1.7
Fiji First Party	06/05/2014	10208	9.20%	-	0.6
Support Fiji PM Frank Bainimarama	12/03/2014	9890	20.10%	69%	1.8
National Federation Party	22/08/2013	9295	8.70%	51%	4.3
SODELPA	14/11/2013	6710	15.80%	27%	2.2
SODELPA Fiji	14/07/2014	4221	44.00%	31%	7.7
Mick Beddoes	08/05/2014	4211	6.10%	50%	0.3
Make it Fiji First	09/04/2014	4073	1.80%	-	0.7
One Fiji Party	18/08/2014	3586	3.30%	26%	1.7
SODELPA National Youth Council Forum	03/03/2014	3106	25.80%	8%	2.4
SODELPA Fiji Discussion	08/09/2014	1538	1.10%	14%	0.2
Fiji United Freedom Party	02/08/2014	841	0.60%	-	0.6
Fiji Labour Party1	28/06/2014	266	9.80%	30%	1.3
Support NFP		251	17.80%	0%	0.1
Fiji Labour Party		213	0.00%	25%	0

Figure 12

From figure 12, it is clear that Frank Bainimarama's campaign was in full force online with FijiFirst's official page outranking the others totaling 39,989 fans. Bainimarama's campaign accounts for four of the top five page fan base totals. These include FijiFirst, Frank Bainimarama is the man, Fiji First Party and Support Fiji PM Frank Bainimarama. In third spot was Roshika Deo – Be the Change Campaign.

MULTIPLE PAGE APPROACH

A significant observation derived from this data was a "multiple page approach", where a number of political parties utilised more than one page to campaign and promote their interests or their party leadership. This approach accumulated many and varied fans or subscribers. Therefore such campaigns maximised audience and possible voters. A wider audience meant a wider reach of the campaign among prospective voters. Some political party representatives like those of NFP have indicated that it was not intentional to have multiple Facebook pages. According to Gounder (Political Social Media Campaiging for National Federation Party of Fiji, 2014) the National Federation Party's varying pages were a result of the individual candidates own initiative in seeking to maximise their social media campaigning efforts. Regardless of whether specific parties planned to use multiple pages or not, the expanse of reach and data showed the utility of the multiple page approach. *Table 5* documents the maximised audience numbers, witnessed in having multiple pages for campaigning. As shown below the five pages campaigning for FijiFirst accumulated a total of 80,835 subscribers, while SODELPA had a total of 19,786, and Roshika Deo – Be The Change Campaign amassed a total of 14,391. The top two political parties, FijiFirst and SODELPA both had large audience numbers attributed to the multiple pages that each party had utilised.

Table 5

Cumulative Political Party Campaign Pages	Total Audience
FijiFirst	80835
SODELPA	19786
Roshika Deo - Be The Change Campaign	14391
National Federation Party	9546
One Fiji Party	3586
Fiji United Freedom Party	841
Fiji Labour Party	479

Figure 13
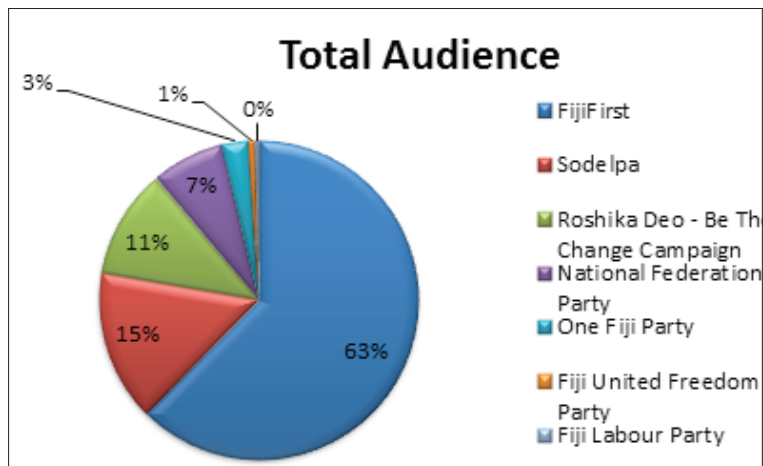
As shown in *Figure 13*, FijiFirst was able to command 63% of the total audience, while SODELPA followed with 15%. The audience distribution relates to the capacity and ability of reach of each campaign. It is instructive to note that not all subscribers were supporters of a particular campaign and some users could have clicked on all the pages to receive updates; however the ability to hold an account user's attention provided space for influence. The fact that such a percentage of users were willing to be informed on the latest updates from the page, whether to admire or admonish the party, reflected the attention the party had attracted.
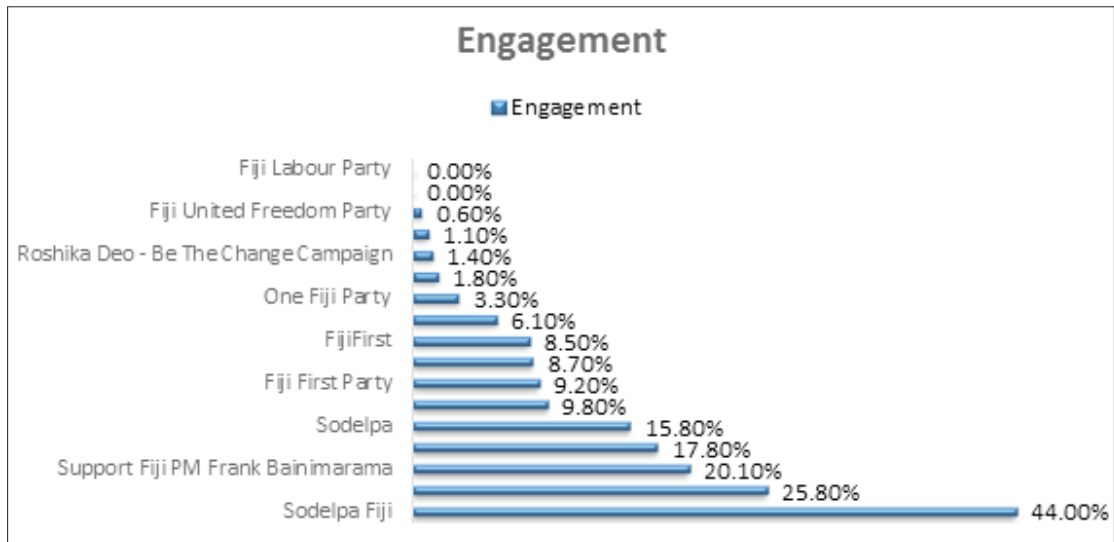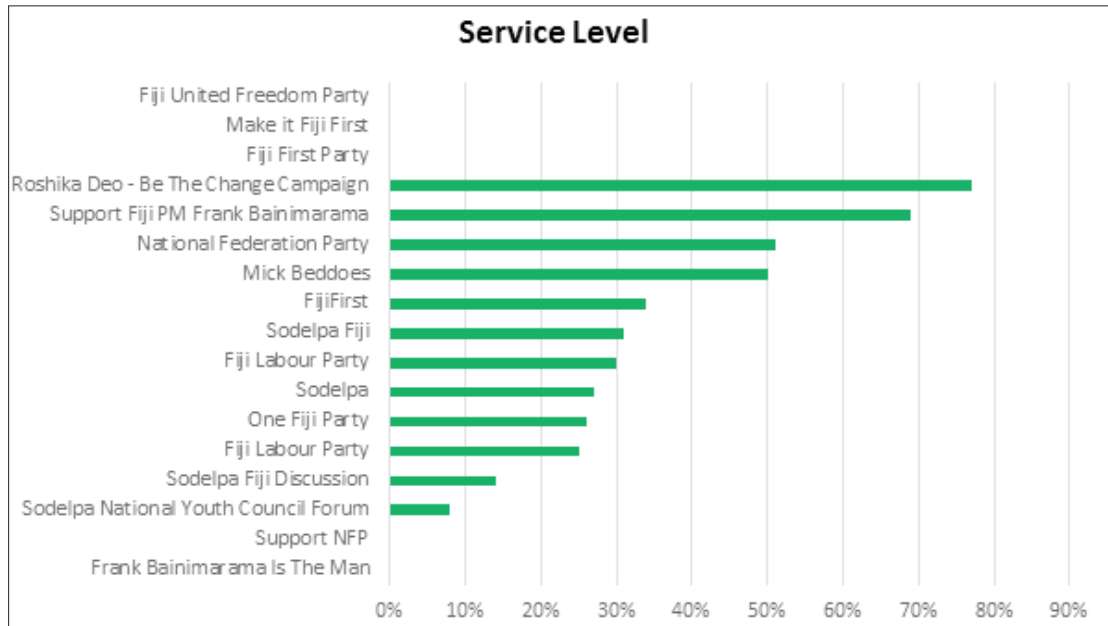
Figure 14

Table 6

Cumulative Political Party Campaign Pages	Total Engagement %
SODELPA	91.70%
FijiFirst	39.60%
NFP	26.50%
Fiji Labour Party	9.80%
One Fiji Party	3.30%
Roshika Deo - Be The Change Campaign	1.40%
Fiji United Freedom Party	0.60%

Engagement (See figure 14) measures a combination of comments, shares and likes divided by the total number of subscribers or fans. This component provides a reflection of the interactive capability and exchange that were provided mostly by the fans. It indicates to what degree the targeted audience responded to the campaigning. From the tallied engagement rates (See table 6), SODELPA has a higher 91.70 cumulative engagement percentage, compared to FijiFirst's 39.60%. This indicated the tremendous interactivity amongst the SODELPA subscribers. However, SODELPA's engagement was limited to its audience base of 19,786 compared to the extensive audience base that FijiFirst had. Therefore, the strength of engagement needs to be considered in line with the audience size. Additionally, it must be noted that two of Frank Bainimarama's pages - "Frank Bainimarama Is The Man" and "Fiji First Party"- were initially disabled to receive comments and responses from Facebook users. This meant that Facebook users were disallowed from commenting or posting on these pages.

Figure 15

Service level (Figure 15) refers to how responsive a page was to posts that were being made by fans. Roshika Deo's online campaign showed impressive service levels (See table 7), however different results were shown when the total service levels of the combined pages were tallied.

Table 7

Cumulative Political Party Campaign Pages	Total Service Level
SODELPA	130%
FijiFirst	103%
Roshika Deo - Be The Change Campaign	77%
Fiji Labour Party	55%
NFP	51%
One Fiji Party	26%
Fiji United Freedom Party	-

SODELPA appeared to be most responsive with a 130% response rate compared to FijiFirst's 103%, while Roshika Deo's Be The Change Campaign followed with 77%. SODELPA's response rate can be attributed to the volunteers that were in charge of their pages during the month of September. The volunteers were young University students eager to handle SODELPA's online

campaigning. It is also worth highlighting that three of FijiFirst's pages were not responsive to its audience; : Make it Fiji First, Frank Bainimarama Is The Man and Fiji First Party. At a certain point, some of these pages' online posting settings were disabled by the page administrators. This meant that Facebook account users could not post comments or questions on the pages. Therefore these pages were not created to induce some level of engagement or initiate discussions from the audience. It appeared that these pages simply sought to produce and project pictures that were deliberately orchestrated to elicit a sense of emotion.

Figure 16
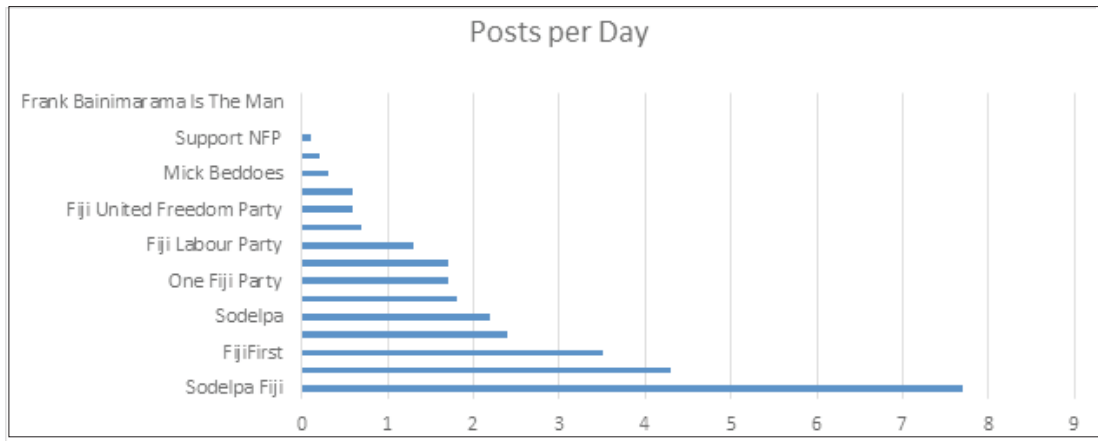
From the given accumulated values of the number of times pages posted per day (See figure 16), SODELPA stood out with the highest number of posts per day. It was estimated that SODELPA made roughly 15 posts per day, while FijiFirst had around 5 posts per day. The expanded campaigns and the looming deadline of polling day, 17th of September, appeared to maintain the momentum of the posts that were being made (See table 8).

Table 8

Cumulative Political Party Campaign Pages	Total Posts per Day
SODELPA	14.6 = 15
FijiFirst	4.8 = 5
NFP	4.4 = 4
Roshika Deo - Be The Change Campaign	1.7 = 2
One Fiji Party	1.7 = 2
Fiji Labour Party	1.3 = 1
Fiji United Freedom Party	0.6 = 1

THE THREE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES – ILLUSTRATIVE ANALYSIS

Figure 17 FijiFirst Images

It was evident from the inception of the Facebook pages that the FijiFirst campaign had sought to maximise the users' attention through the use of pictures (*See figure 17*). With Frank Bainimarama being at the center of these pictures, it was more effective to capitalise on Bainimarama's image because of his already established public persona through the mainstream media.

Looking at these pages in terms of background, foreground, patterns and relationships the following impressions emerge of the FijiFirst Party pages.

Background:

Most of the images captured a background featuring public venues, which were filled with a variety of people from all walks of life. These included public spaces, such as bus stands, public transport vehicles, markets and other venues which gave the campaign an expansive grassroots reach.

Foreground:

The foreground prominently featured Bainimarama, either embracing someone or appearing to converse attentively with the person involved. Selected pictures also showed him embracing children from varying ethnic backgrounds coupled with curated smiles and posture.

Patterns and Relationships:

The common pattern that was observed was the transformation of Bainimarama's image from a military man to a family and friendly man. This involved the consistent attire that Bainimarama wore in almost every campaign outing, where the military styled outfit was replaced with a 'Bula' shirt. Additionally, the pages used were strategic in releasing theme based images. These included portraying Frank as a 'grandfather' figure in one page, through embracing his granddaughter, while other pages focussed on him embracing members of the general public, especially those that appeared frail or were old. Close to the elections, these images were consistently circulated and shared by the page administrators. Other themes observed were of the official Bainimarama where he was seen opening schools and new infrastructure while at the same time continuously hugging and smiling at people.

Figure 18 SODELPA Images

SODELPA's images (*Figure 18*) also focused on the Party leader, Ro Teimumu Kepa and the party executives and its supporters. The images were tailor-made to convey an image of a chiefly woman within a strong cultural context.

Background:

The background prominently featured more indigenous cultural settings which emphasised and amplified Kepa's chiefly status. People in the background typically reflected a single ethnicity and usually of an older age group. The setting of the images depicted hierarchical status highlighting people's deference and adherence to cultural and traditional protocols. The typical venues of these pictures included the SODELPA headquarters, villages where campaigns were held and churches where religious functions were organised.

Foreground:

Kepa is prominently featured in almost all the campaign pictures used, where she is dressed in formal attire. She is not featured with anyone else and is usually at the center of the pictures alone.

Patterns and Relationships:

A prominent pattern in most of the images released is the air of formality and chiefly status. As such the nature of the relationship exuded appears very distant from common people and in minimal contact with the common voter.

Figure 19 National Federation Party Images

National Federation Party launched its social media campaign predominantly featuring the party leader, and party President, Biman Prasad and Tupou Draunidalo respectively. The campaign pictures featured most of the NFP candidates (*See figure 19*).

Background:

The images appeared to be taken in a studio, which displayed a more controlled environment, however they lacked connection to the campaigning environment around Fiji.

Foreground:

The centrepiece of the foreground focussed on the candidates in the picture. It appeared quite rigid without much personality aside from the air of a formal pose and a smile or a grin on the candidates faces.

Patterns and Relationships:

The clear pattern of formality is seen across the images released. This is possibly attributed to the professional capacities that the party president and leader both have. Any possible connection and resemblance to the voters appeared to be non – existent due to absence of people in most of the images released. This, coupled with the formal attire, exacerbated the distance between the voter and candidate. This element of rigidity is witnessed through the somewhat stiff posture in the foreground, which is amplified by lack of a connecting environment in the background.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the research findings that social media tools such as Facebook are an increasingly prominent and popular means of social networking and political online engagement in Fiji. This is accelerating with increasing Internet access and cheaper Internet costs. Social media is particularly appealing to the country's large youth population. The evidence suggests social media changed the traditional political campaigning methods as manifested in the 2014 general elections. The results found appear to corroborate the literature (Gainous & Wagner, 2011) and (Aronson, 2011) that the Internet has been increasingly utilised in political campaigns, with rising appeal to the youth population.

With the increase in Facebook account users, the Internet and specifically social media are enabling political participation in Fiji. However, the opposing view by Park and Perry (2008), where those already in power utilise the Internet to reinforce their interests, which may pose a threat to democracy, can be observed as well.

This is seen through the military led and backed government being able to fully utilise resources to transform itself into a political party, while engaging a local communications company to market its message through social media. From the electoral result, this tactic proved successful for the personalities that had held power since the 2006 coup. Despite this development, the expanding public digital space is noteworthy as more citizens are seeking alternative means to become politically informed and active.

Social media in Fiji has also facilitated the expression of opposition views which since the 2006 takeover had been stymied in the mainstream media. While it is acknowledged that this is a positive step in encouraging democracy it is also prudent to recognise that traditional, mainstream media still commands greater influence. This is mainly attributed to two reasons. Firstly, Fiji's Internet penetration stands at roughly 34%, which means that 66% of the population do not have Internet access. As such, Internet access and social media do provide elements of engagement and participation but the extent of impact is yet to be seen.

In a way, social media became an extension of traditional media in Fiji, where the ruling power's control over traditional media was mirrored in its social media campaign. However there was not enough evidence to explore political polarisation on social media further. Additionally, the campaign pages tended to only elicit comments from already established party supporters, which make considering political polarisation more challenging.

The total number of account users during the month of the elections (298,000) was indicative of the expanding reach of Facebook; almost 34% of Fiji's total population. Citizens are moving beyond the traditional media to become politically informed and active in discussions. As a result citizens were creating digital spaces of engagement, interaction and influence for themselves. For campaigning, political parties and candidates had a new frontier to utilise as a means of reaching voters. With the rising membership of Facebook users in Fiji, this new digital political campaigning space is going to expand quite rapidly in the years to come.

The research was able to statistically validate the common perception that young people constituted the majority of Facebook users. This showed that 70% of the Facebook users in the month of September, 2014 were in the age group of 18 -35. Access to a young demographic was made more convenient for candidates and parties through Facebook, however, it appeared that only some political parties were attune to this level of accessibility.

The *multiple page approach* was a pattern of social media campaigning that was observed during the course of the research. This involved having more than two campaign pages, which would then share information in a coordinated manner. A multiple page approach served two purposes, namely, it maximised the cumulative audience reach and increased the versatility of a campaign's image and tone. In having more than two pages, the audience numbers were expanded, and even if one account user had subscribed to all the pages, it amplified the influence of one campaign. In other words, a specific campaign opened at least three or four doors into the possible voter's room and made itself seen to that specific subscriber in more than one channel or avenue. When a campaign had at least four pages, it was able to project four different images of the same person or issue, therefore catering to four types of audience. For instance, FijiFirst's multiple pages projected Frank Bainimarama as a 'father'and 'grandfather' figure, while also displaying his formal role as a Prime Minister opening new buildings and projects. The same man was projected in at least three or four different ways.

The utility of a multiple page approach was seen through FijiFirst's social media campaign, where it was able to amass the largest audience through the strategic use of five Facebook pages. Engagement levels were outstanding for SODELPA, however this was limited to the audience being engaged. Additionally, FijiFirst had disabled its interactive capability for a few of its pages

during the early stages of the campaigning process. FijiFirst had sought to flood its audience with images rather than take comments or questions from its audience. In essence, FijiFirst did not necessarily want to engage its audience so much as to influence and command their perception through tailor-made and curated images. Meanwhile, individually, Roshika Deo's campaign had the highest service and response rate. While multiple pages are taken into account, SODELPA totalled the highest service and response level to its audience. This was followed by FijiFirst, which had a negligible response and service rate for almost three out of the five of its pages.

The images released by the major political parties had a variety of messages and ultimately thematic angles. FijiFirst appeared to project a wide, extensive public engagement, while SODELPA built upon its comfort zone of its traditional and cultural settings. The National Federation Party revealed a more formal and professional persona. Clearly, FijiFirst's strategy in image portrayal was easier to identify with, typically by virtue of its extensive public reach.

With the increasing accessibility of ICT, social media's expansion is expected to continue exponentially. The election of September 2014 provides important insights into future political and electoral trends in Fiji and the increasingly prominent role of social media.

ENDNOTES:

1. *The authors would like to acknowledge generous funding from the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) for funding the purchase of social media analytics tools.*

2. *The local communications company cannot be named due to sensitivities involved. However, the research team is aware of the details and administering activities of the company with regards to FijiFirst's social media campaign.*

3. *Also indicates the amount of "likes" a page has.*

4. *Similar to the explanation in the previous section, PDP's likes were taken from May 22nd to June 18th but during the month of elections the analytics tools could not measure the pages activity.*

5. *Legal minimum age permitted to sign up to a Facebook account is 13 - Statistics shown here were extracted from Facebook.*

6. *Also indicates the amount of "likes" a page has.*

7. *Similar to the explanation in the previous section, PDP's likes were taken from May 22nd to June 18th while during the month of elections the analytics tools could not measure the pages activity.*

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