

Impact of the social media on elections and electoral administration

1) Family security and safety

- As an independent on a modest budget, without recourse to an electoral office, I was disquieted about the requirement to include my personal residential address on electoral postings and marketing

I understand the case for transparency and disclosure to the electorate, but, in an increasingly partisan social media environment, and the ever-present trolling behaviours, it represents a security concern for independent candidate's family safety.

I can support a residential address being a requirement for Electoral eligibility and administration, but consideration should be given to Post Office boxes for public disclosure

The media will not visit the personal residence for interviews and all public engagements were via mobiles, internet or personal appearance

2) The use of social media and online advertising in Victorian elections

- The increasing recourse to social media and online marketing has resulted in a rapidly diminishing role for personal engagement with electors, the opportunity to challenge and accountability for manifesto representations

This is especially the case for presented commitments and undertakings to the electorate

Financial probity and accountability has been foregone ie promises for significant expenditures across a range of commitments go unchallenged, with zero disclosure on how they are to be funded or introduced

This outcome is probably inevitable ie the absence of personal engagement, challenge and due diligence

3) How is social media changing elections

- It has diminished the element of constructive engagement, debate and consideration underpinning an electoral process

Pre social media there was a frequent refrain of "agree to disagree"; that has been largely foregone, with the refrain now primarily right or wrong at the extremes; a social media campaign trolling a candidate is irrecoverable, in the absence of a right of reply or opportunity to instantly correct

There remain 4-5 Village Hall events with all the candidates, but they increasingly struggle with interest and attendance

- It has elevated the fear factor for candidates and forfeited some highly motivated individuals – over and above the security issues raised earlier, the presence of social media enables an online trawl through the potential candidate's interaction over the last 20 years with Facebook, Twitter and other platforms - this is highly positive for transparency with the electorate, but the absence of personal engagement and the right of reply in a social media environment is an inhibitor for candidates

In terms of potential responses, the Victorian Electoral Commission could consider improved access and visibility to candidates and their credentials within a central eligibility and linked archive – I understand \$60m + is spent administering the election, but a central archive for media engagement wouldn't be a great expense in a digital era

4) Are there other things the Government should be doing

- The annual Edelman Trust survey represents a graveyard for politicians in terms of trustworthiness; they typically rank below bankers

This is a dreadful starting point – contributing to apathy , loss of interest and belief within the electorate

The ongoing failures in exhibiting the expected values and behaviours exacerbates – it's essentially a matter for the members of the legislature and their respective parties to sort out ; a complex issue, but the continuing occurrence merits internal resolution , as behaviours and values reside within , with external bodies such as Integrity Commissions forever setting standards that are not met and The Auditors chasing bonfires as they are alight

- There are 1-2 potential initiatives that support an enhanced electoral engagement

Don't waste a crisis – with the Pandemic response and upgrade in digital awareness , engagement and communication, the Government has the opportunity and platforms to promote civics awareness and participation, within the education and training curriculum, especially with regard to new arrivals ; if in place, it should be revitalised

Government financial reporting and accountability is not for everyone ; the Annual Financial Report is comprehensive and detailed, replete with internal transfer pricing, but probably of little interest and undecipherable to 99%+ of the electorate ; there is overwhelming cynicism and disbelief across all Victorians as to the eternal cost blow outs of Government projects , with no accountability, but the taxpayer forever footing the bill – it would be problematic to avoid the PR agenda, but a plainspeak periodic communication of where the taxpayers money went and a more open and resourced commitment to respond to taxpayer enquiries would serve

5) Summary

Within the electoral process, the Government has to embrace the advice in “The Leopard “ 60+years ago, well in advance of the current digital landscape –

” If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change “

The response to the impact of social media on elections and electoral administration is to revisit the responsibilities to stakeholders, performance opportunities presented, targeted outcomes, strategies to deliver and resourcing to make it happen