Australian Elected Representatives Use of New Media Technologies 2002

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This research report was only made possible due to the time and effort of the 1,321 elected representatives who responded to the survey

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Executive Summary

This document is based on a survey of Australian elected representatives undertaken during the first half of 2002. The aims of the research were to examine the use of, and interest in, new media technologies, such as the Internet, by Australia's elected officials across four levels of government: Commonwealth, State and Territory parliamentarians, Local Government councillors, and councillors of the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Commission.

Of the population universe of approximately 6,767 elected representatives, 1,321 responded to the survey, representing a total response rate of just under twenty percent. The survey was distributed directly to elected representatives, by electronic mail for those representatives with publicly-available electronic mail addresses (thirty percent of the population universe) and via personal letter for those without electronic mail addresses. The survey consisted of eighteen, mainly multiple-choice questions which attempted to determine:

- The current use of new media technologies across a range of forms;
- The importance of these technologies on the overall work life of representatives;
- The interest of elected representatives in the technology, now and over the next two years;
- The extent to which elected representatives use new media technology for democratic consultation;
- The importance of new media for consultation;
- Enablers of the use of new media;
- The relative importance of new media when compared with traditional "off line" communications media; and
- Interest in online voting.

In addition, the survey instrument allowed for the collection of demographic data for the purpose of comparison of segments of the overall sample. These measures were:

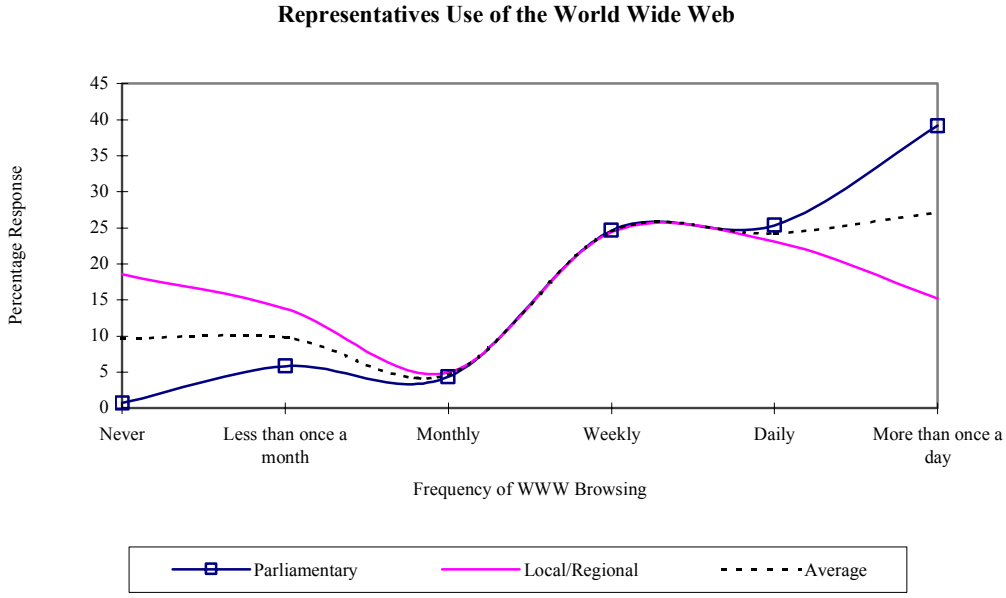
- The level of government of the representative;
- The state or territory of their electorate, ward, or riding;
- If the representatives electorate, ward, or riding could be classified as rural or regional, or urban;
- Gender;
- Length of Service (total); and
- The representatives' level of computer literacy.

Key Findings[1]

Use of the World Wide Web

Eighty-five percent of Australian elected representatives' access the Internet in some form (either directly, or through a member of staff – 17.3% for parliamentarians and 3.6% for councillors), with most representatives browsing on a weekly or daily basis.

[1] In this summary "parliamentarians" refers to members of the Commonwealth, States, and Territory parliaments, while "Councillors" refers to local government councillors and aldermen, and ATSIC councillors. "Representatives" used to refer to all Australian elected representatives.

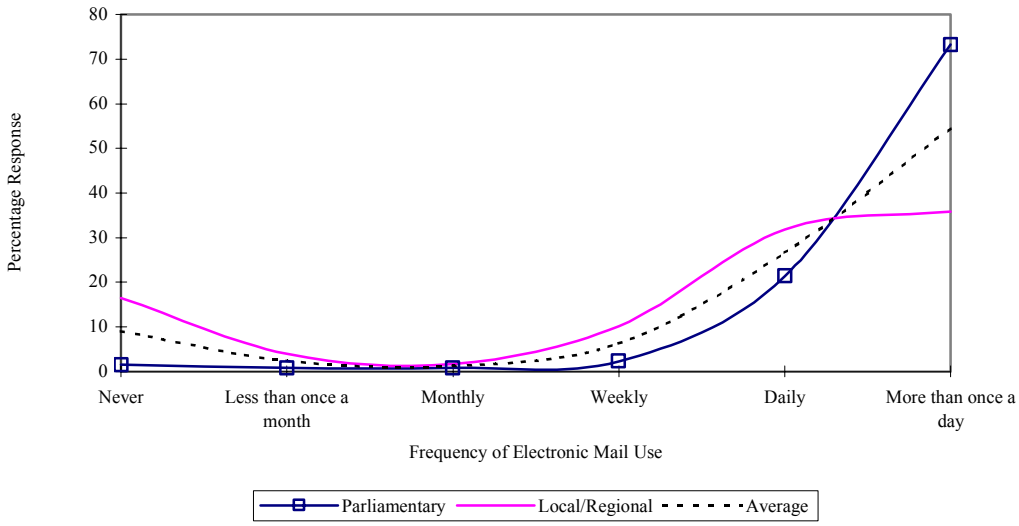


This figure is substantially higher than that of the total Australian population, with use of the Internet in 2001 estimated at only sixty-four percent (National Office of the Information Economy, 2002), however at the highest and lowest usage rate, there is a marked difference between parliamentarians (who tend to use the web more, and more frequently) and councillors (more likely to not use the web, or to use in moderation). Overall, Victoria is the most active online state, followed by the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland. Representatives within the Northern Territory are the lowest overall users of the World Wide Web. In addition to these geographic differences, nationally, rural representatives are less likely to browse the Web at all (22% of rural representatives never browse the web, compared with only 7% for urban), and the use and frequency of use of the World Wide Web directly increases based on the level of computer skill reported.

Use of Electronic Mail

When examining the use of electronic mail by representatives, the differences between parliamentarians and councillors is less distinct, with both groups tending towards a weekly or greater frequency of use overall, and far less sporadic use of this technology. Parliamentarians are clearly the heaviest users of electronic mail, more than seventy-percent using it more than once a day, while Councillors are more likely not to use this technology (17% as opposed to 3% for parliamentarians). Overall, the distribution of usage rates between states and territories is similar to that for web browsing, with rural representatives tending to use the technology less and be more likely not to use it at all. Once again, there is a strong correlation between the computer skill of the representative and the use of electronic mail, although compared with use of the World Wide Web, there is a tendency for higher use at lower levels of skill, indicating that representatives find electronic mail simpler to use than the World Wide Web.

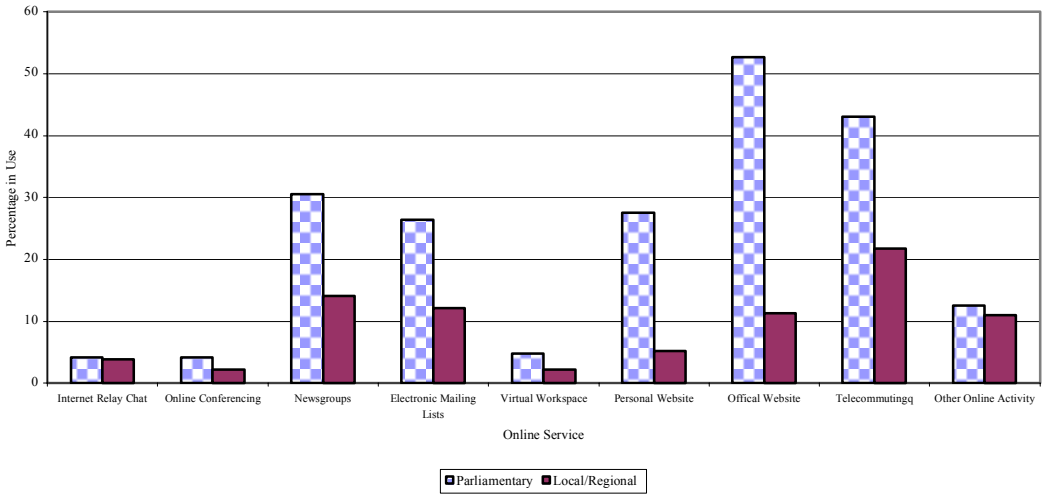
Representatives use of Electronic Mail



Use of Other Online Services

The World Wide Web and electronic mail are not the only online services that are used by representatives. Overall, representatives engage in a range of online activities, with the establishment of websites, telecommuting, and electronic mailing lists and newsgroups most popular. Representatives are least likely to utilise Internet Relay Chat (IRC), online conferencing, or online (virtual) work environments. Overall however, parliamentarians are far more likely than councillors to use these forms of online services, and again urban representatives are more likely to utilise these technologies than their rural peers (double the rate or rural representatives in some instances).

Representatives Use of Other Online Services

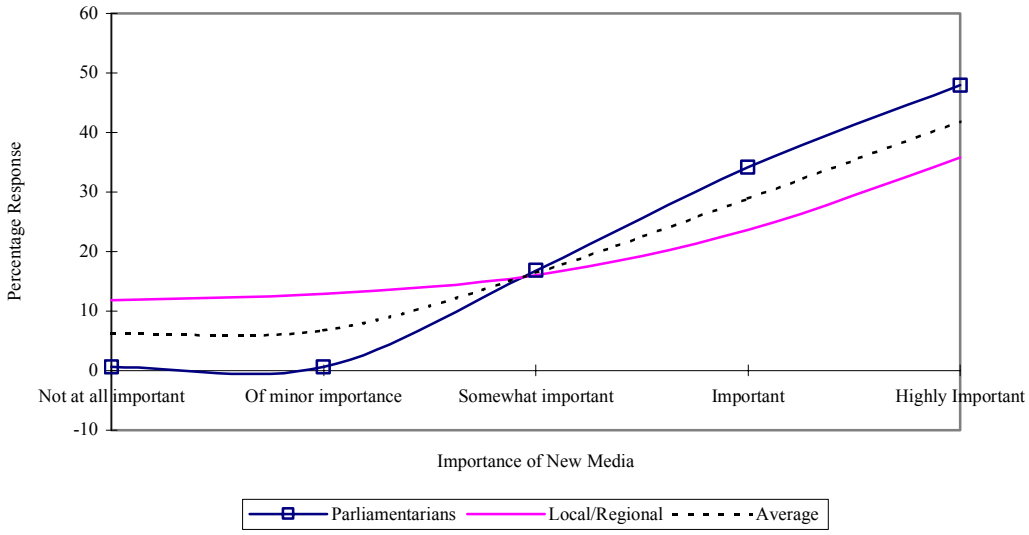


Importance of New Media in Work Life

When asked about the importance of new media for their work lives as elected representatives, both parliamentarians and councillors are likely to see these technologies as “somewhat important”, “important”, or “highly important”, though

parliamentarians place greater importance on the use of the technology in their work lives (with virtually no parliamentarians seeing the technology as being less than "somewhat important"). Councillors are less likely, overall, to see the importance of the technology, with over twenty percent seeing new media as either "not at all important" or of only "minor importance". This distribution is also matched by differences between rural and urban representatives, with rural representatives seeing less overall value in the technology than their urban counterparts.

Importance of New Media on Work Life

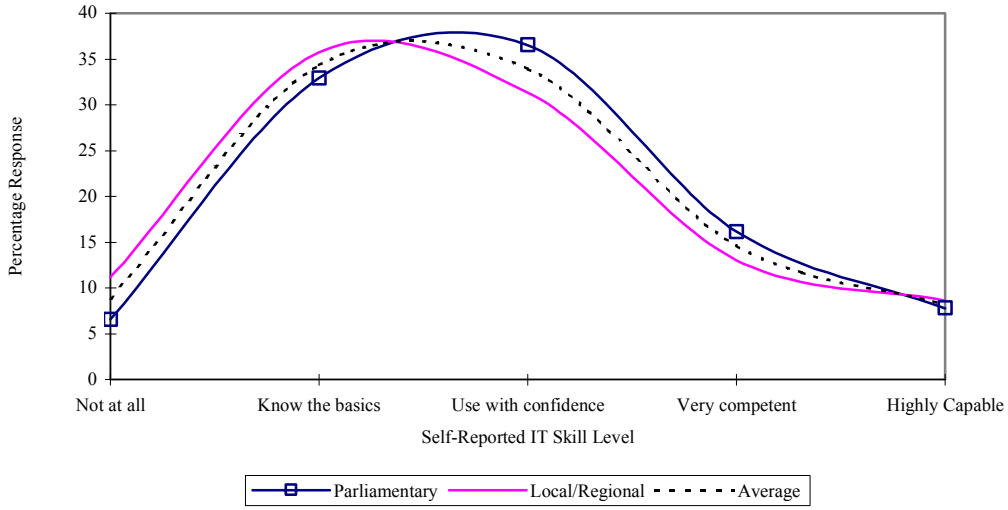


Information Technology Skill Level

As the use and frequency of use of information technology and new media by elected representatives is influenced by their skill level, respondents were asked to self-report their skill in using computers, based on a continuum from "not at all" to "highly capable". Overall, the majority of representatives (both at the parliamentary and councillor levels) reported that they had either a basic understanding of computers, or used this technology with confidence, with a sizeable cohort (of approximately twenty percent) indicating a high or very high level of skill. Overall, approximately ten percent of representatives indicated no skill with computers whatsoever, and lower skill levels are found:

- In local and regional government, compared with parliamentarians;
- Between rural and urban representatives – with rural representatives reporting lower levels of skill overall, with the exception of a approximately thirty-five percent of rural and urban representatives who report "confidence" in computer use;
- Between men and women (men have slightly lower computer skills than women); and
- Based on the representatives length of service (more seasoned representatives report lower levels of skill than newer parliamentarians and councillors).

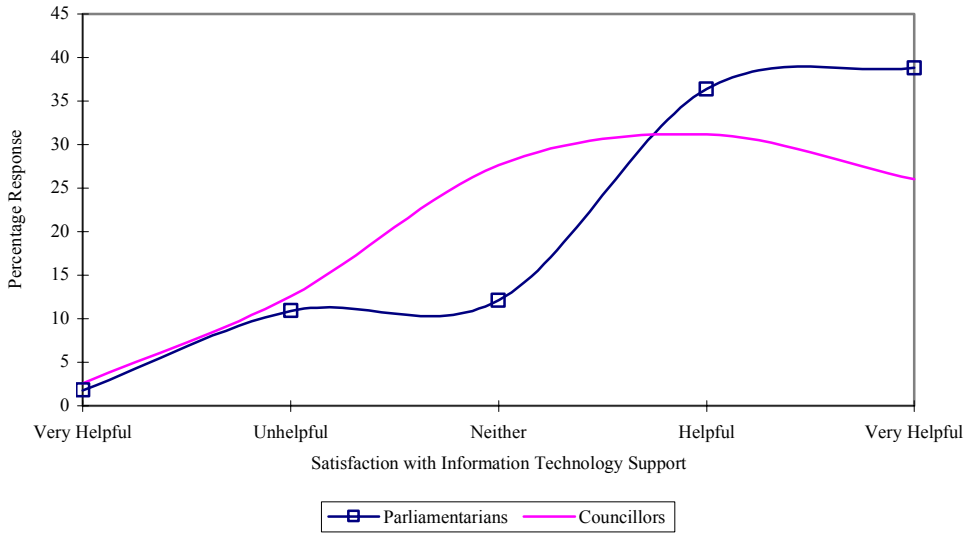
Representatives Computer Skill Level



Quality of Information Technology Support

In addition to the impact of skill on the use of new media, respondents were asked about their satisfaction with information technology support services offered by their parliaments and councils (provision of equipment and software, training, and helpdesk services). Overall, parliamentarians are much more likely to find these services "helpful" or "very helpful" than councillors, reflecting differential levels of funding available through parliamentary departments than across the wide spectrum of local government. Urban representatives are marginally more likely to view their support services more positively than rural representatives, again, indicative of council size and resource differences between the two groups. Interestingly women, who express a high level of skill with computers, are generally less satisfied with their internal IT support than men. While this finding may reflect increasing sophistication of demands that cannot be as easily met, a breakdown of skill level to service satisfaction does not uphold this hypothesis. Gender bias, therefore, may be a factor in explaining lower levels of satisfaction among women.

Representatives Perception of the Quality of IT Support

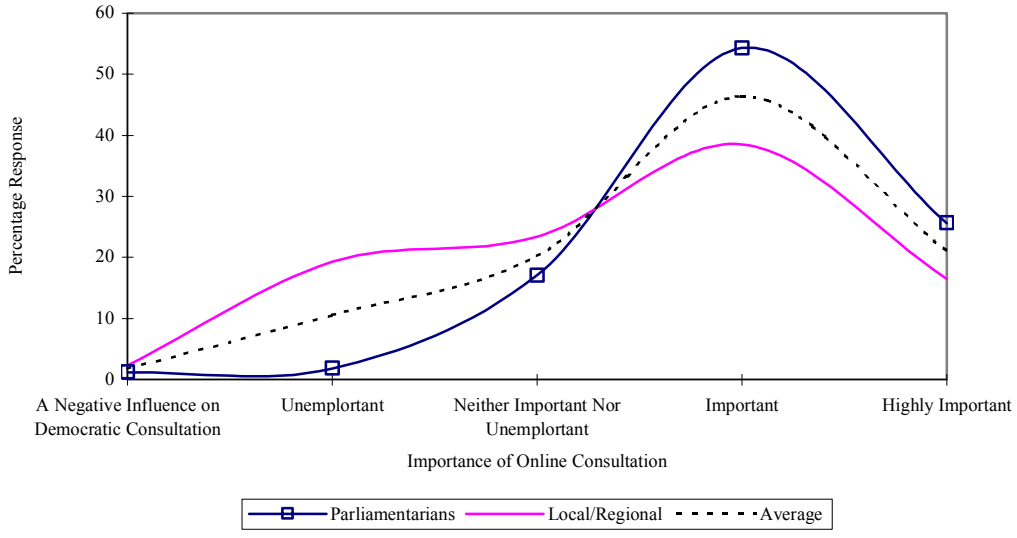


Online Consultation

Turning from an examination of the use of new media, and the enablers for that use, two survey questions determined the level of application of online technologies for democratic consultation. First, the extent of this practice (regardless of form) was ascertained. Overall, parliamentarians are twice as likely (64%) to engage in online consultation than their peers in local government and ATSIC (32%). However, when the pattern of behaviour is broken into states and territories, a very variable pattern emerges. At the parliamentary level, Victoria is the most likely state to engage in online consultation (approximately 80% of representative either personally, or through their staff, engage in some form of online consultation), followed closely by the Commonwealth and New South Wales, while South Australia and the Northern Territory (30%) are least likely to engage in this practice. At the local and regional levels, variations between states and territory are less likely, however again Victoria is the most prolific online consulting state (approximately 40%), while the Northern Territory the least (22%).

Rural and urban variations are quite prevalent in determining online consultation, urban representatives being more than twice as likely to engage in the practice than their rural counterparts (fifty versus twenty-six percent). Women are slightly more likely to undertake this practice than their male peers, and less likely to delegate this activity to subordinates. Length of service also affects the tendency to use staff to engage in online consultation (the longer in office the more likely staff will be given this responsibility), however, the overall rate of online consultation is not significantly affected by the length of service of the representative. Overall, the single largest determinant of the use of online consultation comes from the representatives' computer skill level, with "very competent" and "highly capable" representatives more than ten times more likely to undertake online consultation.

Representatives View of the Importance of Online Consultation



Given these differential usage rates for online consultation, it is not surprising that when asked about the importance of this activity, parliamentarians were more likely to rate this activity as more important than councillors. Overall, however, while

approximately forty-five percent of councillors and twenty percent of parliamentarians see this activity as "neither important nor unimportant", "unimportant" or "having a negative impact on democratic consultation", the respective interest level is higher than current practice. This could again show the limitations of resources and skills in preventing uptake of this activity among representatives. However, a further question, attempting to determine the spread of information between elected representatives into online consultation practices shows that only three percent of representatives can name a specific example of online consultation among their peer-network. Overall, therefore, while interest is high, the low level of "real world" example sharing within the population of elected representatives may be limiting further use of this form of online democracy.

Media Preferences

While this report is concerned with the use and importance of new media, it is also important to contextualise this technology with reference to other media forms to avoid over-emphasising one media form at the expense of the range of communication channels available to elected representatives. When asked to rank nine forms of media, both parliamentarians and councillors identified personal contacts, newspapers, and direct mail as their most valuable political communication tools. New media tends to rank fifth, sixth, or seventh in importance, and while these media have supplanted some channels (outdoor advertising and magazines) in importance, the technology has not yet become of pre-eminent value in communication the political message of parliamentarians and councillors. Overall, electronic mail is seen as more valuable than television (possibly because it can be used as a substitute for direct mail), and urban representatives are more likely to value new media than their rural peers. Overall, the computer skill level of the representative has a direct impact on media ranking, with higher-skilled representatives exhibiting corresponding higher preferences for new media (with mass media, such as radio and television begin substituted lower in their media preferences).

Rank	Parliamentary	Local/Regional
Highest Preference	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts
	Newspapers	Newspapers
	Direct Mail	Direct Mail
	Television	Radio
	Radio	Electronic Mail
	Electronic Mail	Television
	Internet Websites	Internet Websites
	Magazines	Magazines
Lowest Preference	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising

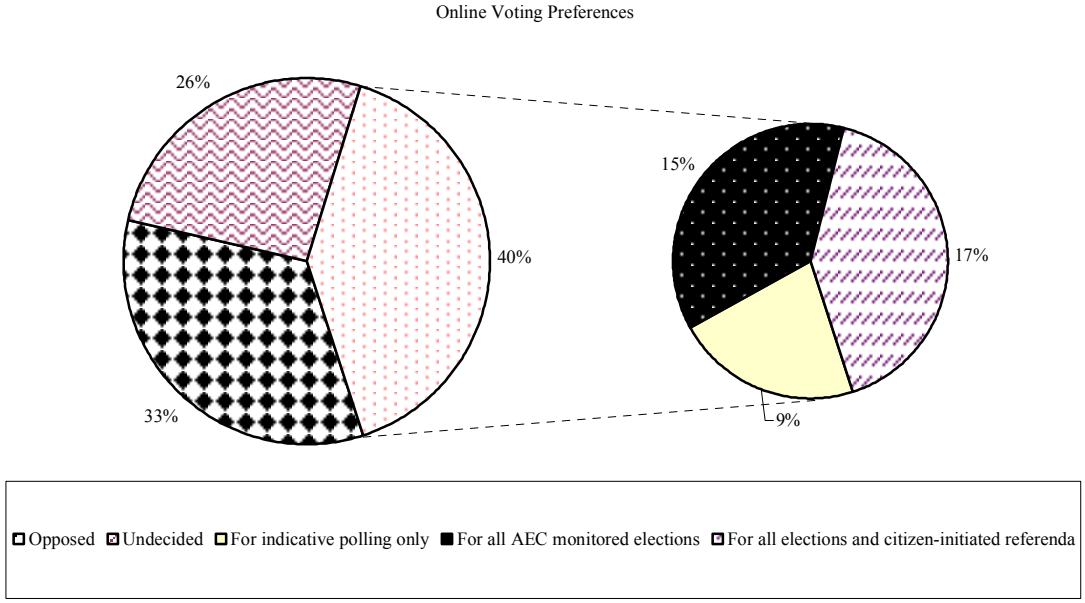
Online Voting Preferences

Moving from an examination of current practice, representatives were asked to specify their preferences for extending existing voting practices into the online environment. To date, while there has been one substantial trial of electronic (but not Internet-based) voting in Australia (the Australian Capital Territory undertook a pilot in October 2001 for their Assembly elections; Green, 2000), online voting has not yet been examined in great detail. Given that the electoral process has been under-review, and a range of innovations to traditional balloting have been introduced (such

as the use of postal voting in some local government elections), it seems reasonable that representatives may have considered some of the possibilities surrounding online voting. Representatives were asked, therefore, to express preferences for online voting either:

- opposed;
- uncertain;
- support for online voting for indicative polling only;
- support for online voting where monitored by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC); or
- support for online voting for all elections and including citizen-initiated referenda.

Overall, there remains a high level of uncertainty about this process, with approximately one-quarter of representatives uncertain about the practice of online voting (uncertainty is higher among parliamentarians than councillors). One third of representatives are opposed to the practice (higher for councillors than parliamentarians), while, overall, forty percent of representatives would support online voting in some form. Within this largest cohort, however, there are mixed responses to the preferred type of online voting among representatives, with seventeen percent (of the total population) supporting online voting for all elections and including the introduction of citizen-initiated referenda, fifteen percent in favour of online voting for AEC-monitored elections, and nine percent for indicative polling only. Within the population, parliamentarians remain the most divided over the subject of online voting, with the Australian Capital Territory expressing the most support for online voting with referenda (50% of ACT members), the Northern Territory for AEC-monitored online voting (65%), Tasmania the most uncertain (75%), and Victoria the most strongly opposed to the practice (40%). Councillors, on the other hand, express far lower geographic variations in their preferences



Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of the report, the following general policy recommendations can be made:

1. The differential levels of information technology support and resourcing need to be addressed between the parliamentary and local and regional levels of government.
2. As skill level is a direct determinant of uptake and use, increasing overall IT skill levels among representatives should be implemented. This should be targeted towards specific areas of need: rural councils, and representatives with longer lengths in office.
3. With respect to online consultation, lesson drawing and experience sharing should be facilitated to allow representatives to match their interest in online consultation with actionable examples of the activity in practice.

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About the Centre for Public Policy

The Centre for Public Policy was established in 1995 to provide a forum for teaching, research and informed discussion of issues relating to policy design and evaluation, public sector economics and public sector management and change. The Centre has established connections with similar institutions overseas. It has reciprocal arrangements with The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and The Public Policy Program at Georgetown University, Washington DC. The Centre also has strategic alliances with a range of institutions within the University of Melbourne, in particular the Faculty of Economics and Commerce, and the Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies, enabling it to offer students a wide choice of options in putting together programs suited to individual needs.

About the Australian Computer Society

The ACS was established in 1966 as a result of the merger of then existing State based computer societies. It has become the recognised association for IT professionals, attracting a large and active membership from all levels of the IT industry, and providing a wide range of services and opportunities for networking and career enhancement. It is the public voice of the IT professional; the guardian of professional ethics and standards in IT; with a commitment to the wider community to ensure the beneficial use of IT.

IT professionals join the ACS because membership of the Society helps to keep knowledge up-to-date in a rapidly changing environment, it adds practical skills to existing skills, it challenges ideas and concepts, it enables participation in peer group activities, and it provides opportunities for extending professional contacts and networks.

The ACS is a member of the Australian Council of Professions and the Information and Communications Technology Alliance and also is a member of the International Federation of Information Processing and the South East Asian Regional Computer Confederation.

1.0 Introduction

The aim of this research report is to add to the increasing empirical evidence that is being collected under the broad rubric of "electronic democracy" or "electronic government". Since the introduction, and subsequent explosive growth of the Internet and its associated technologies as a consumer product, a growing body of research and speculation has developed, examining the impact of this technology on the democratic process. This growth should not be surprising, for two reasons. First, the technologies of the Internet (called "new media" for the purposes of this report) have a number of characteristics that make them valuable for democratic purposes:

- Relative ease of use (compared with other media forms);
- Ease of access;
- Speed of communication;
- Integration with computer applications; and
- Interactivity.

In addition, attention given to the Internet's potential impact on democracy is not unusual. All modern media forms have encouraged speculation as to their potential democratic benefits (Williams, 1974:50-55), drawing in both utopian and dystopian views as to their impacts on the political landscape of the times (Roslaniec, 1998).

The current debate over electronic democracy takes two basic forms: normative views about the value of electronic democracy and how it should be implemented (Nugent, 2001; Toregas, 2001; Geiselhart, 2000), and case analysis of examples in practice (Gibson and Ward, 2002; Williams, 1998; Geiselhart and Coleman, 1999). While not denying the importance of the former work in shaping our future understanding of the technology and it's possibilities for enriching democratic participation and outcomes, this report is firmly located in the latter category: an attempt to develop an understanding of current practice, to situate the normative and aspirational against a baseline data set of current reality.

To undertake this review, therefore, the report examines seven areas of the use of new media pertinent to our over-arching concern about electronic democracy. Each area of inquiry asks a number of questions –

- Accessibility of representatives
  Just how accessible are our elected representatives via new media technologies, such as electronic mail?
- Enablers
  What factors support the use of new media by elected representatives?
- Current use of new media
  What is the current rate of use of new media by our elected representatives?
  How important is new media to representatives' work lives?
- Current use of other online services
  What other online services are being used by elected representatives?
- Consultation online
  How many representatives are using new media for direct democratic interaction with the public?
  How important is this to them?

How have our representatives learned to apply the technology to this purpose?

- Media preferences
  Is new media more or less important than existing media channels?
- Support for online voting
  Are representatives in favour of extending existing voting practices into the online environment?

To answer these questions, in the first half of 2002 a survey instrument was developed (see Appendix B) that was issued to every elected representative in Australia. Representatives were contacted either via electronic mail (where a published electronic mailing address was available for them) or via postal mail. Respondents could respond online, via a HTML form, or via a paper form. Overall, just under twenty percent of Australia's total population of elected representatives (1,321 of 6767) responded to the survey. This compares quite favourably to a similar research project conducted in Europe in 1999 (Caldow, 1999:7), which received a ten percent response rate based on email requests only[2].

This report brings together the complete findings of the survey, and provides detailed breakdowns of the data set within the seven key areas of inquiry. For completeness of analysis, the findings tend to be broken into:

- Jurisdiction (level of government and state or territory);
- Classification of representatives as either Urban (major metropolitan) or Rural or Regional (based on the location of the representatives electorate);
- Gender;
- Length of service in office (total); and
- The information technology skill level of the representative.

1.1 Note on Terminology

"Elected representatives" is used to describe all democratically elected political officials sampled in the survey.

"Parliamentarians" refers to members of parliament of the Commonwealth, States, and Territories (both chambers of parliament, where relevant).

"Councillors" refers to local government councillors and aldermen, including councillors and commissioners of the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Commission (ATSIC).

"New Media" is used to refer to all online (digitally-networked) communications tools.

1.2 Caveats

While the overall response rate was high (for a complete breakdown see Appendix C), a number of groups within the total sample were under represented. Groups with a response rate lower than ten percent are:

- ATSIC councillors (6.66%); and

[2] Unfortunately the two data sets are not comparative, as the Caldow survey was only issued to representatives with electronic mailing addresses and was aimed at examining the use of new media by "early adopters" only.

- Local government councillors of the Northern Territory (5.48%).

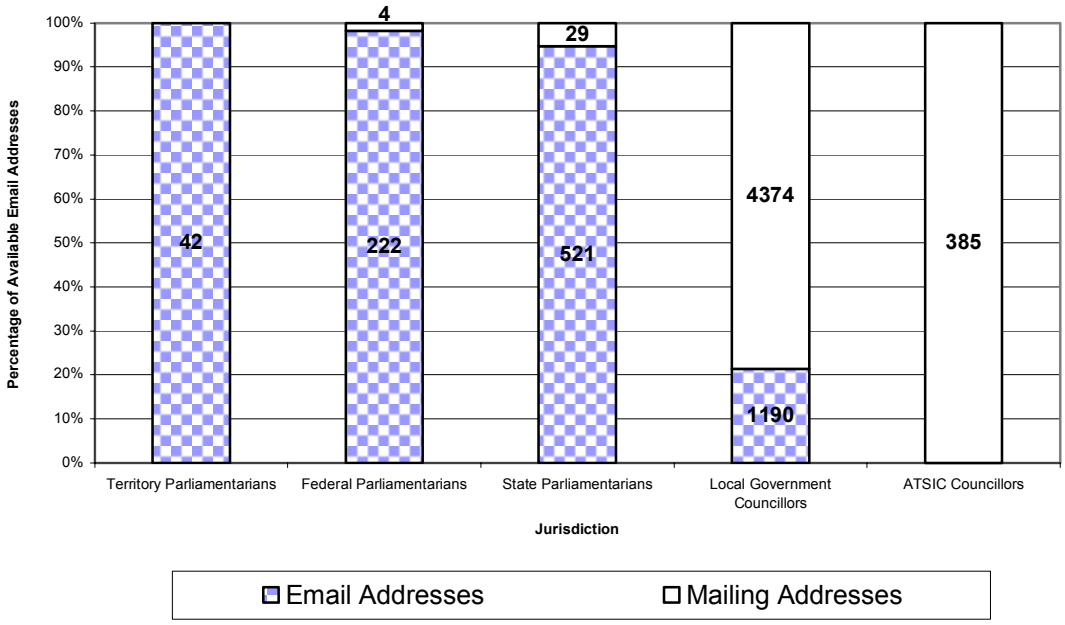
Because of these response rates, caution should be taken in interpreting data based on these groups.

2.0 Accessibility of Elected Representatives Online

The availability of electronic mail addresses for elected representatives is a basic requirement for democratic participation via the Internet (West, 2001). Through the development of the sampling frame as part of the research methodology (see Appendix A) an initial determination of the availability of email contact addresses for elected representatives in Australia can be made.

Figure 2.0.1 shows the overall availability of these contact methods by level of government, utilising parliamentary and council webpages as the source of these contact addresses. What this figure illustrates is that Federal, State and Territory representatives have near universal accessibility to the public via email, while inquiries originating from the ATSIC website (www.atsic.gov.au) does not list any email contacts for regional councillors. Just over twenty percent of local government councillors and aldermen have readily available unique email addresses[3].

Figure 2.0.1: Availability of Email Contact Addresses Online by Level of Government

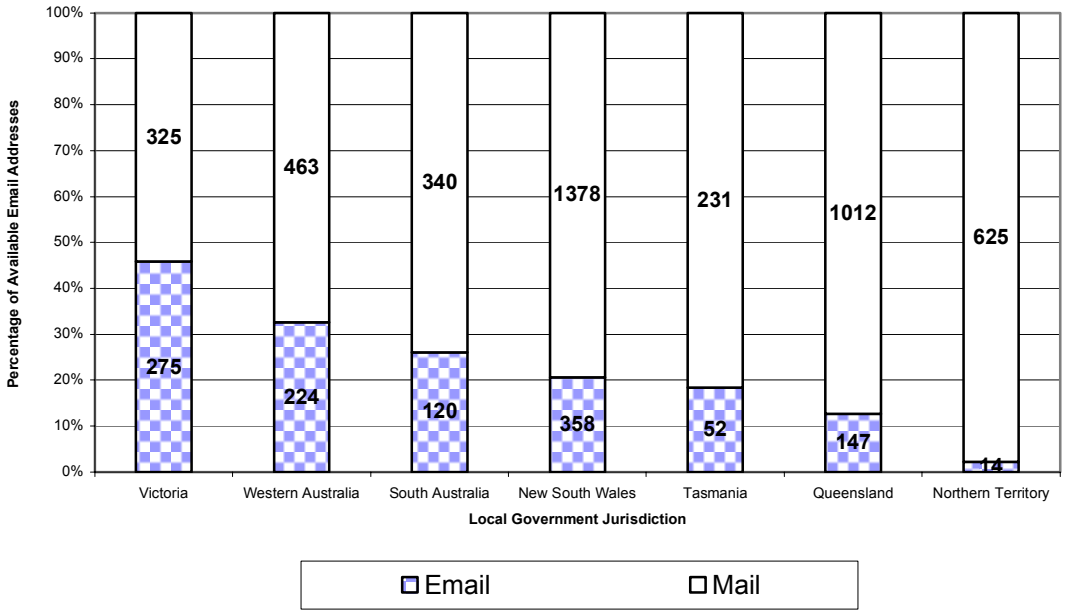


Thus, while the vast majority of state, federal, and territory parliamentarians' email addresses were easily identifiable from webpages set up for their respective parliaments, in some cases local government sites were absent, significantly out of date, or lacked information about the elected representatives. Figure 2.0.2 breaks down the local government sector into states and territory, showing the distribution of available email addresses to mailing addresses was, on average, significantly below fifty percent, with Victoria having the highest number of councillors' email contacts available and the Northern Territory the lowest. The figure shows that there is significant differences in the percentage of available email addresses between the

[3] A small proportion of councils provided a singular email address for all councillors (*i.e.* council@shire.gov.au), these addresses were excluded from the sample. This phenomena does not have a significant impact on the trends in figures 2.0.1 or 2.0.2.

various states and territory. In keeping with this finding, the Northern Territory local government sector had the lowest percentage of council websites, with only a handful of the larger councils online and accessibility to local government contacts limited to local government association printed directory.

Figure 2.0.2: Availability of Email Contact Addresses Online – Local Government



In the construction of the sampling frame it was also noted that, in some cases, attitude to email correspondence was dismissive or not encouraging. One South Australian town prominently articulated that:

> *The Town of* [name removed] *accepts no responsibility for eMail or any other form of correspondence sent to or from this site via the Internet. There is no obligation upon the Council to read, respond or to deal with in any way, any such transmissions. Users who contact the Council via this medium do so at their own liability and without onus upon the Council.*

This questions why the council would establish an online presence at all[4] if the provision of accurate information to the public and interaction with constituents was not the aim in establishing the web site.

[4] The council also informs viewers that all information presented online should be checked by telephone or in writing with the council, as they take no responsibility for its accuracy.

3.0 Enablers for the Use of New Media

This section examines the underlying enablers that support the use of new media by Australia's elected representatives. Enablers can take a variety of forms, such as interest in the technology, availability of support personnel or off-the-shelf software, the facility of representatives with the technology, and the quality and speed of electronic communications networks. Overall, the enablers examined are:

- The skill levels of elected representatives (survey question C3),
- Available support for online activities (hardware, software, network, training, and specialised assistance), and
- Representatives perceptions of the quality of Information Technology support provided by their parliamentary or council service (survey question A6).

Key Findings for this section:

- While there are significant fluctuations between jurisdiction, overall, the self-reported skill level of elected representatives, in using computers is comparative between local government and parliamentarians – with the majority of representatives reporting that they "know the basics" or "use computers with confidence";
- There remains a significant percentage (between 8 to 10 percent) of elected representatives who report no computer skills at all;
- Two jurisdictions are particularly problematic for lack of computer literacy: the Northern Territory and ATSIC councillors;
- Urban representatives report higher skill levels than rural, through the variance is not marked (less than 10 percent at the highest skill level);
- Women report a higher skill level than men at moderate skill levels and are less likely to have no computer skills at all;
- Skill levels taper off slightly given the longer time spent in office;
- Parliamentarians receive, on average, higher levels of IT support and resourcing than local government, with the variance between parliaments limited;
- There are substantial differences between the IT support services offered to local councillors;
- Parliamentarians are more likely to report satisfaction with their IT support services than local government councillors; and
- Satisfaction with IT support is highest among urban representatives, men, and representatives with longer lengths of service.

3.1 Information Technology Skills

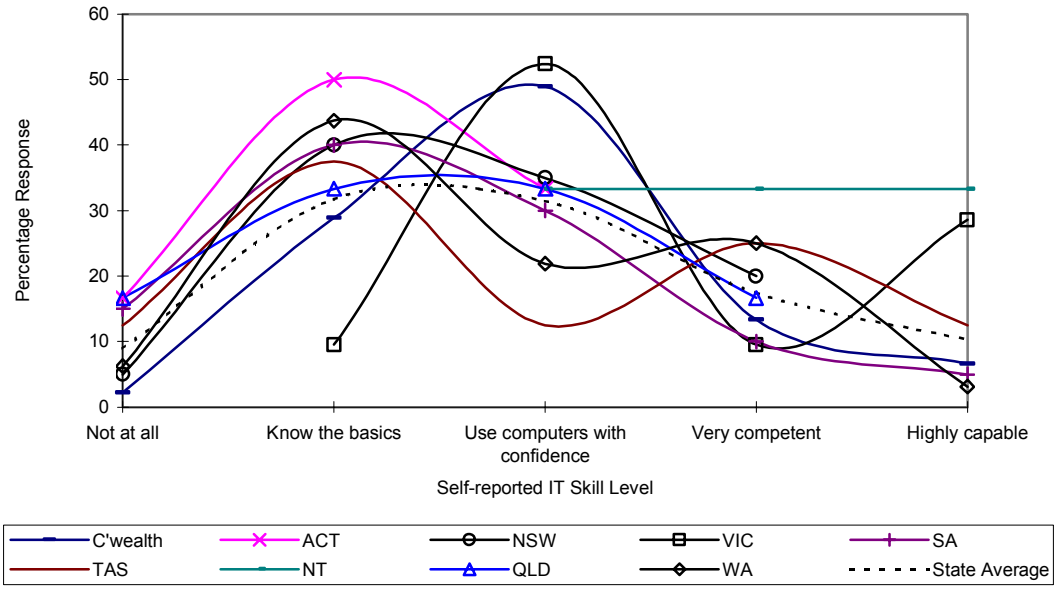
Question C3 in the survey asked elected representatives to self-report their skill level in using computers. The possible responses were positioned along a continuum from "Not at all computer literate" to "Highly capable".

With respect to Australian parliamentarians, figure 3.1.1 illustrates the self-reported skill level by jurisdiction. Overall the figure shows parliamentarians are likely to have a low-medium level of skill on average, with significant variations for:

- Australian Capital Territory parliamentarians, having a lower level of overall skill level when compared to an average for state and territory parliaments; and

- Commonwealth and Victoria parliamentarians reporting a slightly higher skill level than the average for state and territory parliaments.

Figure 3.1.1: IT Skill Level of Australian Parliamentarians



Following from the findings above, figure 3.1.2 illustrates the skill level among ATSIC and local government councillors. Again, a great deal of variance exists between the states and territory when comparing skill levels. Importantly, ATSIC and Northern Territorian councillors report over twenty-five percent of representatives with no computer skills at all, a significant variation from the other jurisdictions.

Figure 3.1.2: IT Skill Level of ATSIC and Local Government Councillors

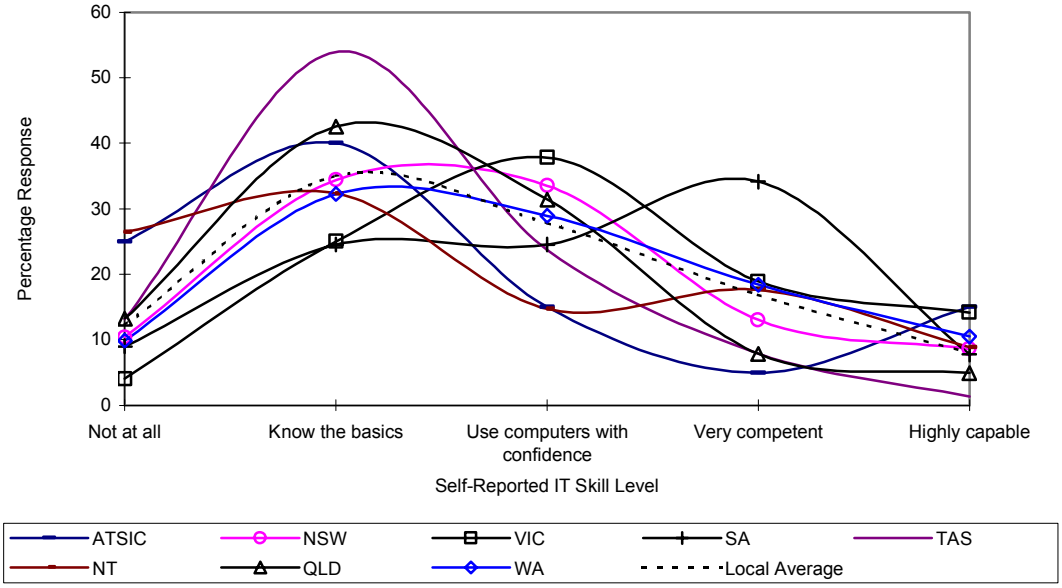
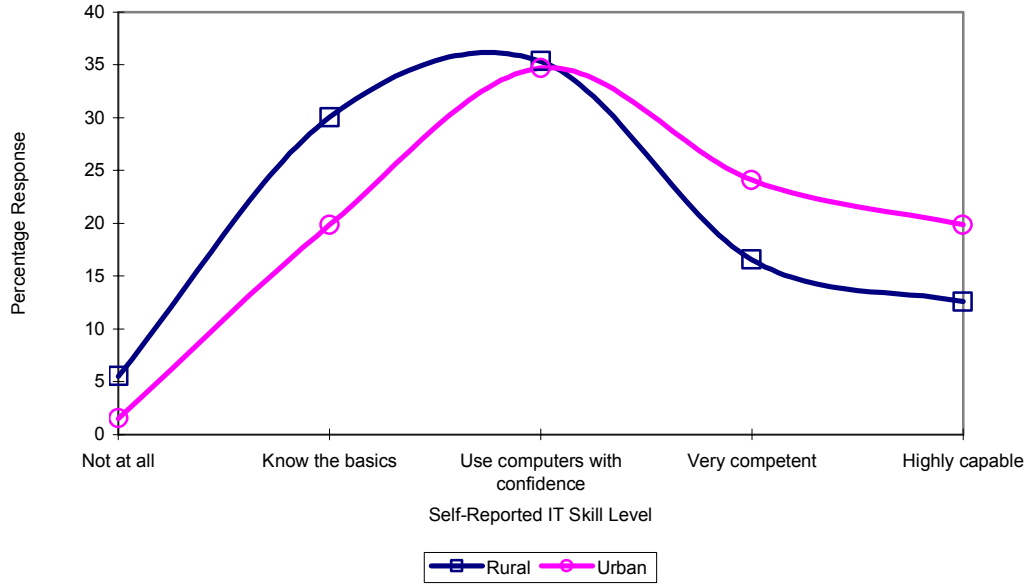


Figure 3.1.3 presents the variance between IT skill levels for rural and urban elected representatives. This figure shows that while some convergence of skill level occurs

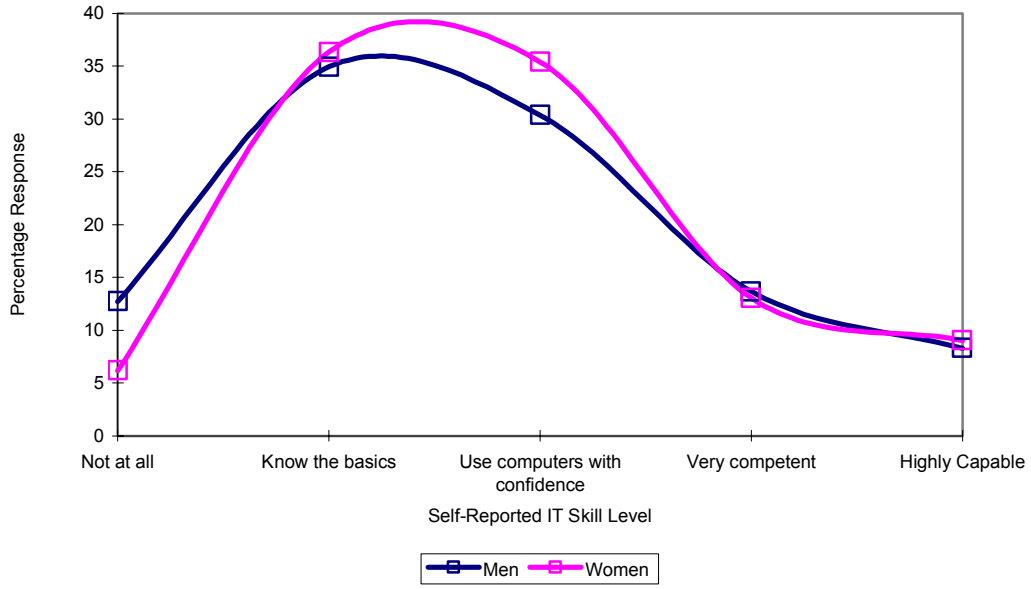
at the medium skill level, urban representatives are less likely than their rural peers to have lower skill levels, and more likely (by approximately seven to eight percent) to report their skill level as "very competent" or "highly capable".

Figure 3.1.3: IT Skill Level – Rural/Urban Variances



In addition to the rural and urban variations, there are some minor differences in reported skill level when comparing men and women. Overall, this is low, however, with some six to seven percent greater response from women in the medium skill level category.

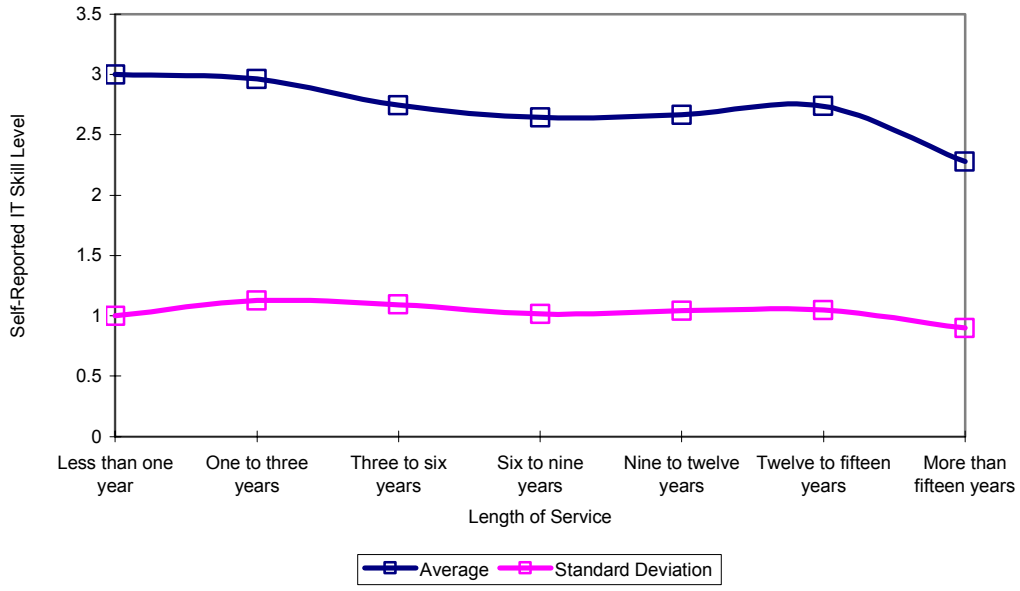
Figure 3.1.4: IT Skill Level – Gender Variances



Skill level also appears to be affected by the length of service of the elected representative. Figure 3.1.5 illustrates that newer representatives report a higher level

of computer skill, while the longest serving representatives average a skill level nearly fifteen percent lower than the most recently elected representatives.

Figure 3.1.5: IT Skill Level – Length of Service Variances[α]



[α]Based on a five-point scale (from 1 to 5), with 1 representing no skill and 5 highly capable.

3.2 IT Support Services

It is anticipated that the ability to use new media services, such as the Internet, will be in part shaped by the availability of support services, training, hardware and software, and specialised web skills for elected representatives.

Tables 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 illustrate the support on offer to elected representatives at various levels of government (a small sample of local government has been included only). Overall, at the parliamentary level, the range of hardware, software, training, and specialised support, is very good, with each parliament having broadly comparative levels of assistance provided to members, the picture from local government is very mixed, with some councils providing support services similar to the range and comprehensiveness of parliaments, while others provide little or no assistance with regard to computer use.

Overall, however, there remains limited assistance to elected representatives, regardless of level of government or location, in the initiation, development, design and implementation of online services – such as electronic chat facilities, voting, or consultation fora. Overall, this may be because of budgetary limitations, but is also, in part, restricted because of the partisan "political" use of these services by members and councillors.

Table 3.2.1: IT Resources Available to Australian Parliamentarians

	Hardware			Software		Network Access				Support			New Media	
Jurisdiction	Desktop hardware in parliamentary office	Desktop hardware in electorate office	Mobile computing hardware provided	Standard office software	Specialist software provided	Internet access in parliamentary office	Internet access in electorate office	Intranet access in parliamentary office	Intranet access in electorate office	Basic training	Specialist training	Helpdesk facilities	Advice on use of new media	Practical assistance on use of new media
Commonwealth[5]	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
ACT	✓	✓	☆	✓		✓	✓				✍	✓	✓	☆
NSW[6]														
VIC	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓		
SA	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✍	✍	✓		
TAS	✓	✓		✓	✍	✓	✓	✓	☆	✍		✓		
NT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✍	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
QLD	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✍		✓		
WA	α	✓	✓	✓	✍	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

✓ Yes ✍ On Request ☆ With Limitations α Laptop used instead of dedicated desktop

Table 3.2.2: IT Resources Available to Australian Local Government Councillors[7]

	Hardware			Software		Network Access				Support			New Media	
Council	Desktop hardware in Council office	Desktop hardware in other location (home, ward office)	Mobile computing hardware provided	Standard office software	Specialist software provided	Internet access in Council office	Internet access in other location (home, ward office)	Intranet access in Council office	Intranet access in other location (home, ward office)	Basic training	Specialist training	Helpdesk facilities	Advice on use of new media	Practical assistance on use of new media
Albury City-NSW			✓	✓		✓	✓			✍		✓		
Bauhinia-QLD										✍				
Baw Baw Shire-VIC			☆		✓		✓			✓		✓		
Bega Valley-NSW			✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓		
Blacktown-NSW	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓					✓		
Blue Mtns-NSW		✓	✓	✓			✓			☆		✓		
Boroondara-VIC	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓		
Campaspe-VIC		✓		✓			✓					✓		
Gannawarra-VIC														
George Town-TAS												✍		
Geraldton City-WA	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓		✓		
Clarence-TAS		☆		✓			✓			☆		✓		
East Gippsland-VIC	✍	✓		✓		✍	✓					✓		
City of Norwood, Payneham, and St Peters-SA	*			*		*								
Peppermint Grove-WA														
Waratah-Wynward-TAS	*			*		*								

✓ Yes ✍ On Request ☆ With Limitations * Provided to Mayor only

[5] IT and online serves support are undertaken jointly by the Senate and House of Representatives Departments (IT support services), the Technical Services Group of the Parliament (networking), and the Department of Finance and Administration (hardware and software provision).

[6] At the time of writing NSW was unable to furnish this information. It is anticipated that the NSW parliament provides similar services to other jurisdictions.

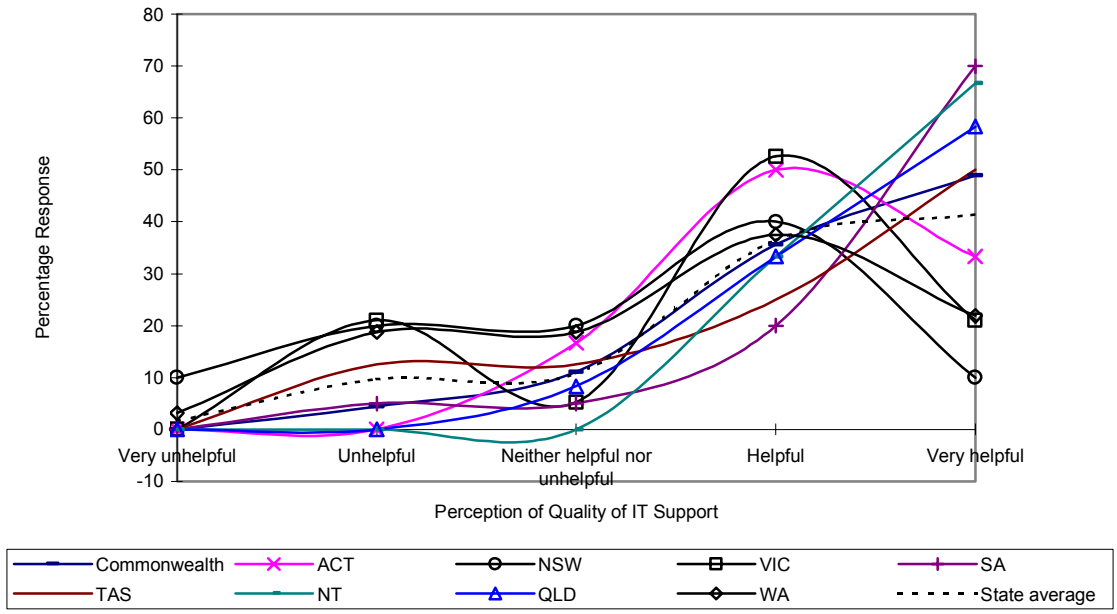
[7] Based on a random sample of councils only.

3.3 Perceived Quality of IT Support

Following section 3.2, survey question A6 examined the level of satisfaction elected representatives received from their respective information technology support services based on a "very unhelpful" – "very helpful" continuum.

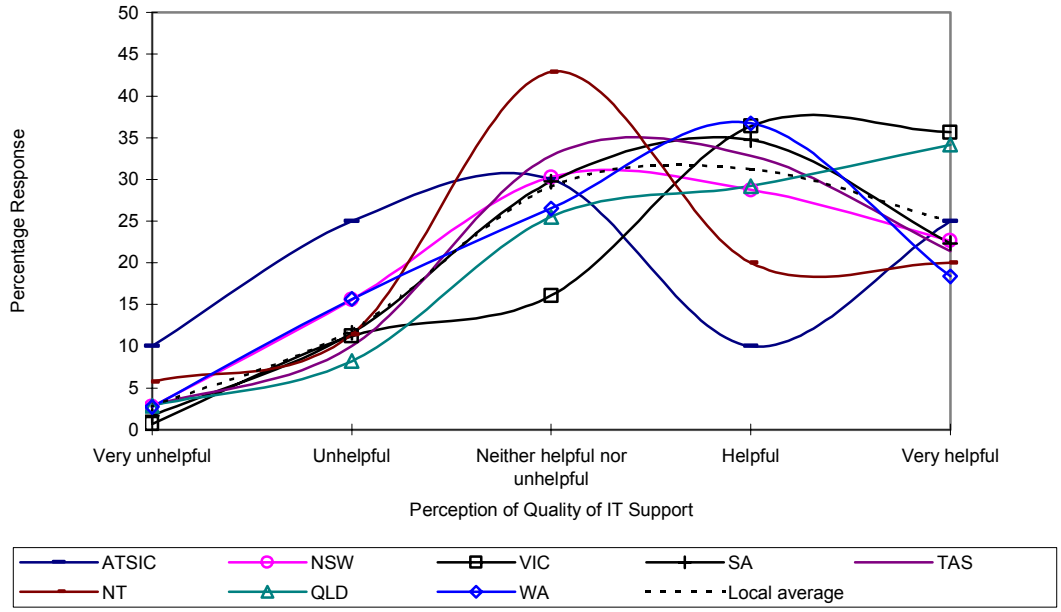
Figure 3.3.1 shows that, with respect to Australian parliamentarians, the majority of members feel their IT support units to be either "helpful" or "very helpful" in empowering members use of online services. New South Wales presents a troubling view, with one in ten members reporting their support service as "very unhelpful".

Figure 3.3.1: Parliamentarians Views of Institutional IT Support Services



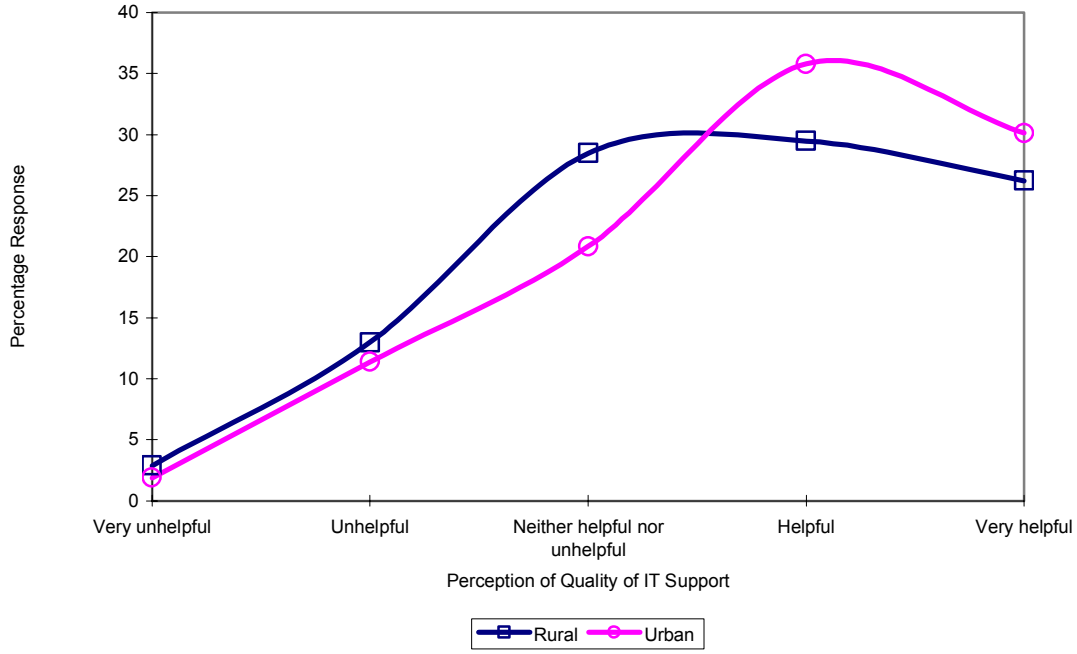
Unsurprisingly given the findings form Table 3.2.2, local government overall reports lower total levels of satisfaction with their information technology support units, with a greater tendency for ATSIC and local councillors to feel their IT support was very unhelpful, unhelpful, or neither helpful nor unhelpful in empowering their use of new media services. Western Australian, Victorian, and Tasmanian Local government councillors report themselves as the most satisfied with the support services they receive, while ATSIC councillors report the lowest overall level of satisfaction, with ten percent of Commission councillors reporting themselves "very unsatisfied" with their IT support.

Figure 3.3.2: ATSIC and Local Government Councillors Views of Institutional IT Support Services



When dividing representatives between rural and urban electorates, wards, or ridings, slight variation in reported satisfaction emerges, with urban representatives more likely to present a clear positive view of their IT support, rather than maintain a neutral posture. This is likely to reflect the size variation between municipal and shires and their ability to fund computer support and hardware for representatives.

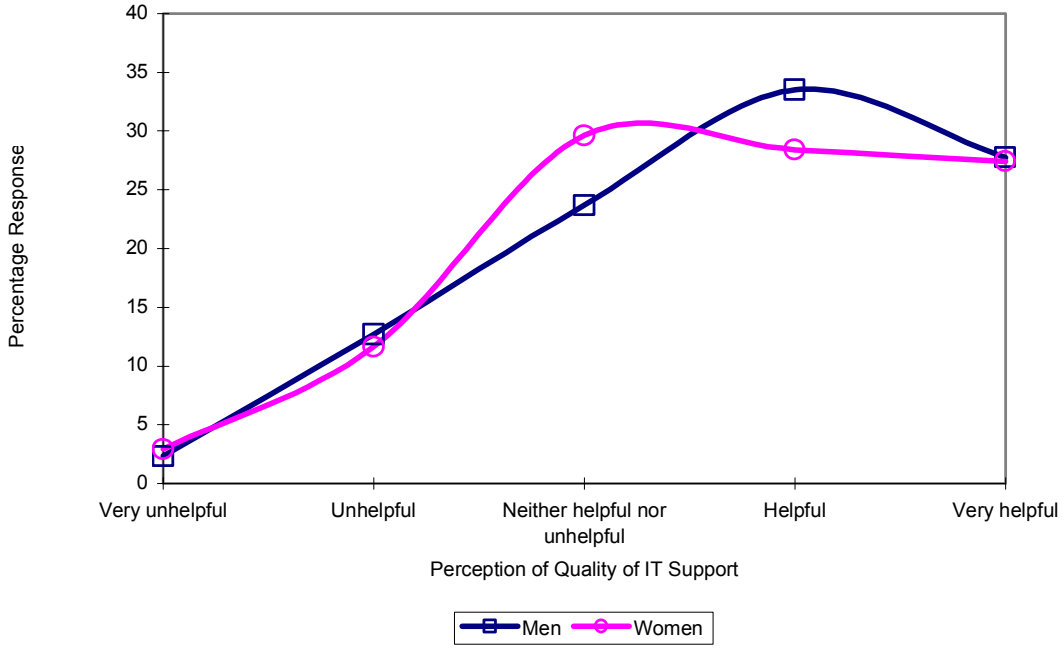
Figure 3.3.3: Views of Institutional IT Support Services – Rural/Urban Variances



Interestingly, a small, but significant gender variation (about eight percent) can be identified between men and women's views of the quality of IT support offered, with

women less likely to report their support services as "helpful" and more likely to view the support offered as "neither helpful, nor unhelpful". This finding is interesting given the overall level of skill reported by women as higher than men and may reflect gender biases encountered when women attempt to access technical services (Shade, 1993).

Figure 3.3.4: Views of Institutional IT Support Services – Gender Variances



In figures 3.3.5 and 3.3.6, the satisfaction of representatives with IT support services is delineated by length of service and IT skill level. Both figures show that service satisfaction is not significantly affected by either of these measures, with length of service having a slight positive impact on level of satisfaction.

Figure 3.3.5: Views of Institutional IT Support Services – Length of Service Variances

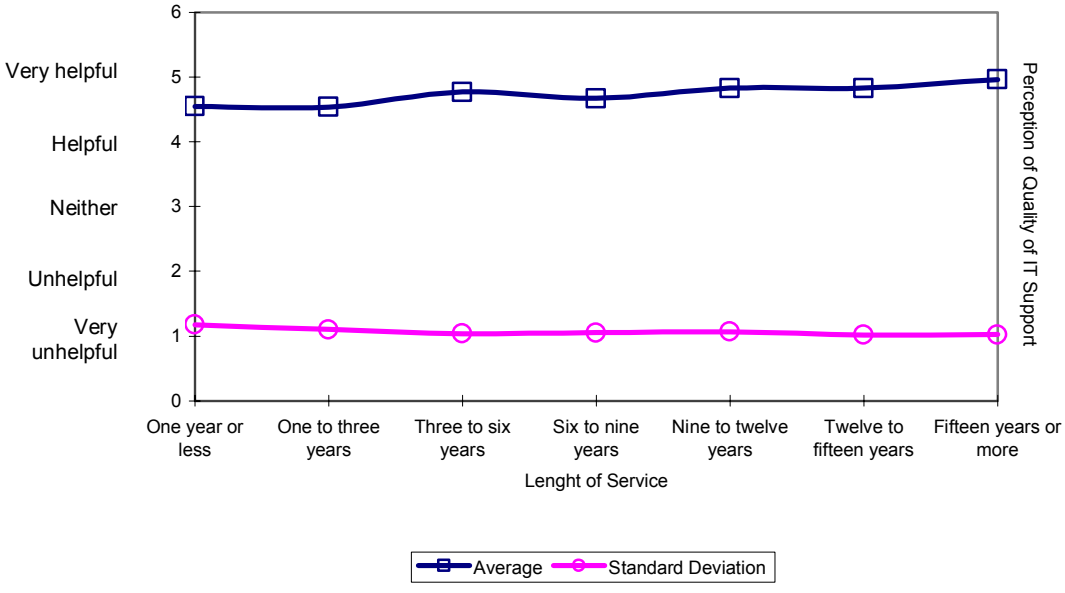
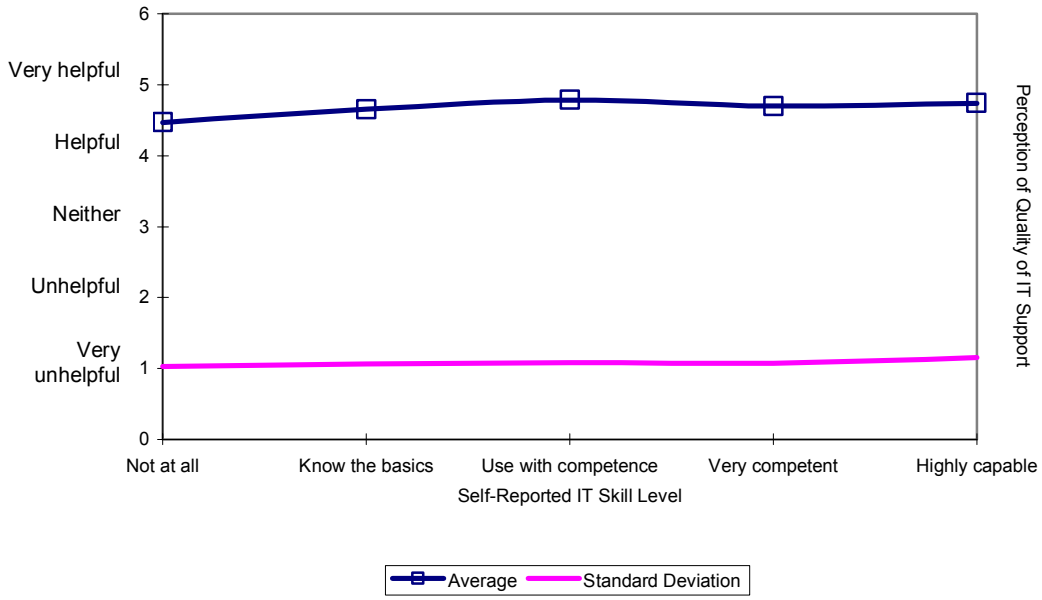


Figure 3.3.6: Views of Institutional IT Support Services – IT Skill Level Variances



4.0 Use of New Media

This section outlines the use of new media by elected representatives and their perceptions of the importance of these technologies as part of their work lives as members of government. Overall the section examines:

- Use of ("surfing") the world wide web (survey question A1);
- Use of electronic mail (survey question A2);
- Use of other online services, such as Internet Relay Chat, Newsgroups, Telecommuting, or Websites (survey question A3);
- The importance of new media on their work life (survey question B1); and
- The projected importance of new media on representatives work life over the next two years (survey question B2).

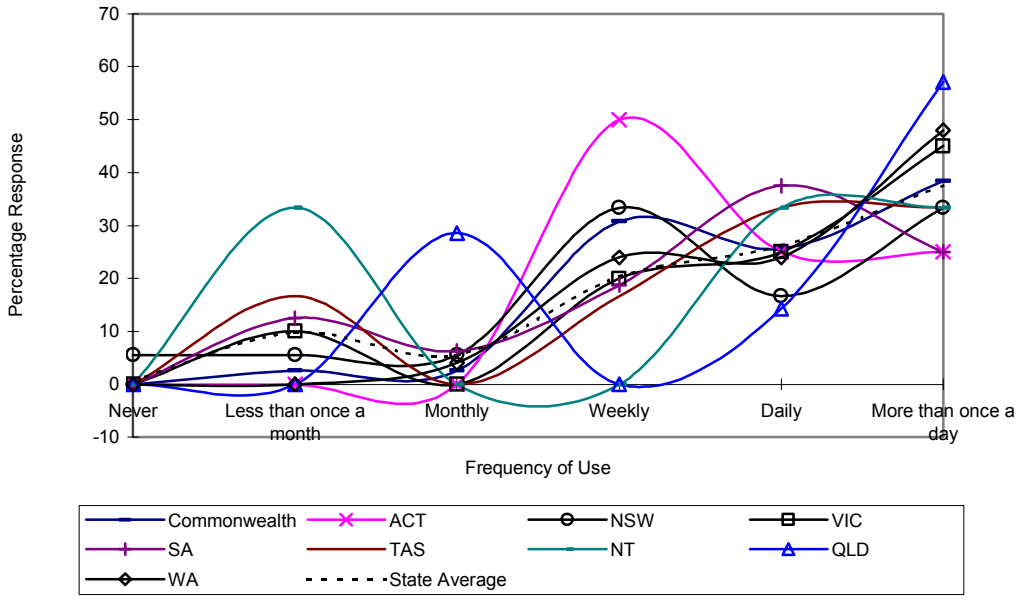
Key Findings for this section:

- Use of the World Wide Web is high for Australian parliamentarians;
- Electronic Mail is highly used by parliamentarians, who are likely to use the technology more than once a day;
- On average, about twenty percent of local councillors do not use the World Wide Web or electronic mail at all;
- Parliamentarians are more likely than local government councillors to have staff undertake Web browsing or use Electronic Mail on their behalf;
- There are distinct differences between rural and urban representatives use of the World Wide Web and Electronic Mail, with urban representatives more likely to both use and use frequently, both technologies;
- Email use among local councillors is an "all or nothing" activity, with councillors either not using the technology or using it quite frequently;
- Overall, IT skill level is the strongest determinant of the use, and frequency of use of all online services;
- Official websites, personal websites, newsgroups, mailing lists, and telecommuting are the most common other online services used by elected representatives;
- Parliamentarians see online services as more important to their work life than local councillors;
- Urban representatives see online services as more important to their work life than rural representatives;
- The perceived importance of these technologies increases with IT skill level; and
- The vast majority of all elected representatives identify the technology will become more important to their work over the next two years.

4.1 World Wide Web

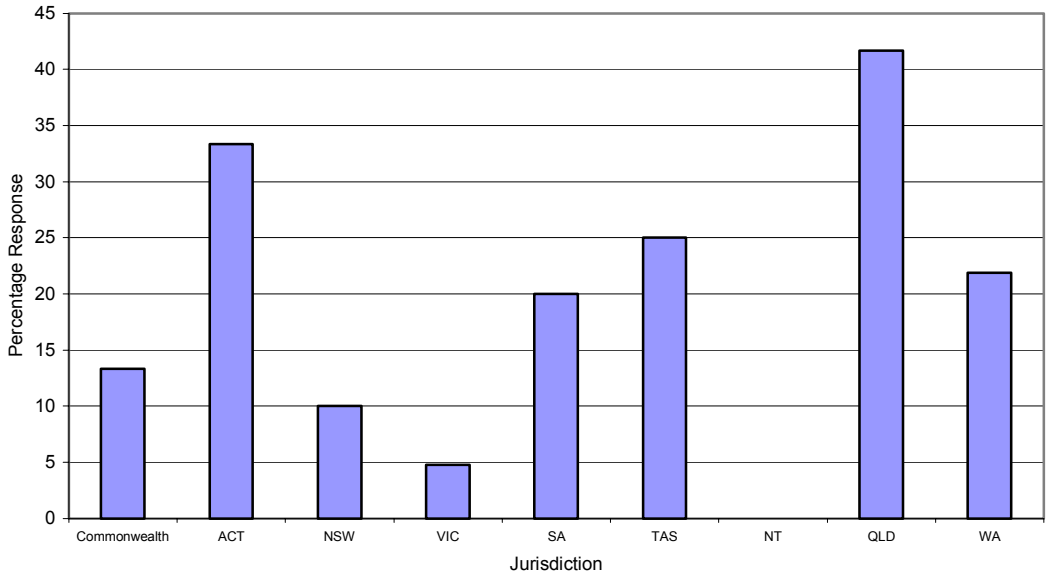
Use of the World Wide Web by Australian parliamentarians is difficult to characterise. Overall, while parliamentarians use this technology on a daily basis, strong variations exist between the various parliaments. Only one jurisdiction, New South Wales, reported more than a few percent of parliamentarians do not use the World Wide Web at all.

Figure 4.1.1: Parliamentarians Use of the World Wide Web



Additionally, the use of the World Wide Web by staff members on the behalf of parliamentarians is quite mixed. The Northern Territory reported none of this behaviour, while Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory reported that over thirty percent of parliamentarians have Web surfing undertaken on their behalf.

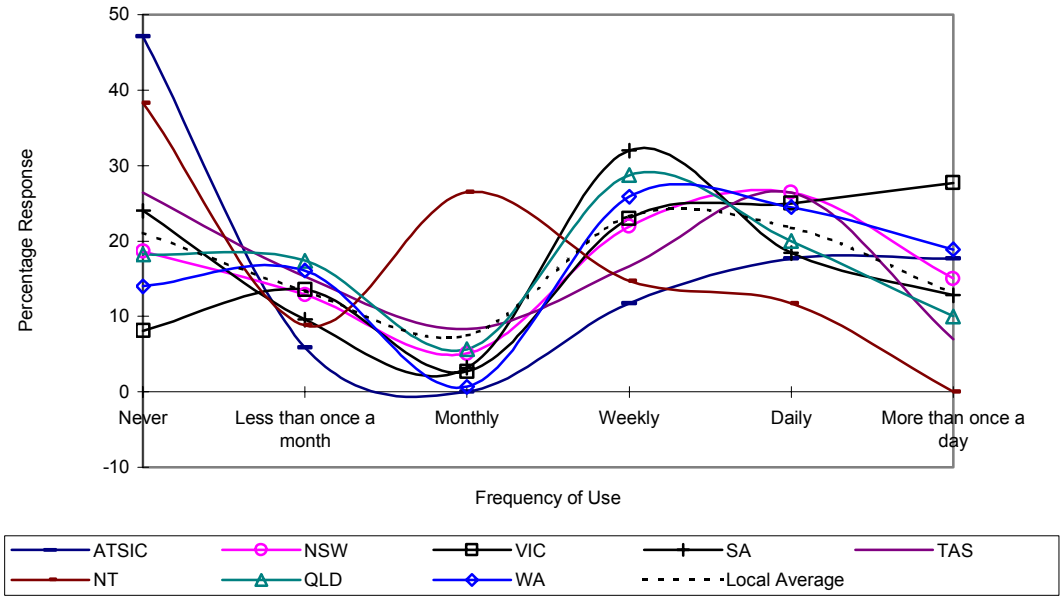
Figure 4.1.2: Use of the World Wide Web by Staff on Behalf of Parliamentarians



For local government and ATSIC the use of the World Wide Web is less mixed, with the overall level of use of this technology significantly lower than that reported by parliamentarians, and a greater tendency for more infrequent use. Overall, while the average percentage of local government councillors who do not use the Web at all is about twenty percent, ATSIC and the Northern Territory councillors report the lowest

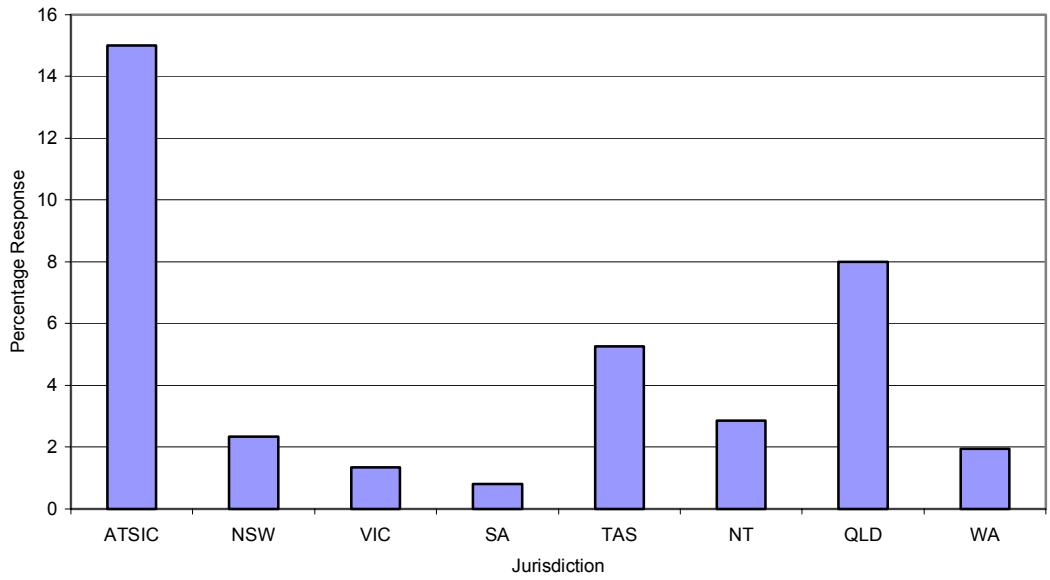
level of use, with between thirty-five and forty-eight percent of these councillors not using the technology at all.

Figure 4.1.3: ATSIC and Local Councillors Use of the World Wide Web



When compared with parliamentarians, local government and ATSIC councillors are unlikely to have staff undertake Web browsing activities for them, with some distinct variations between the average (of approximately four percent) and ATSIC and Queensland councillors.

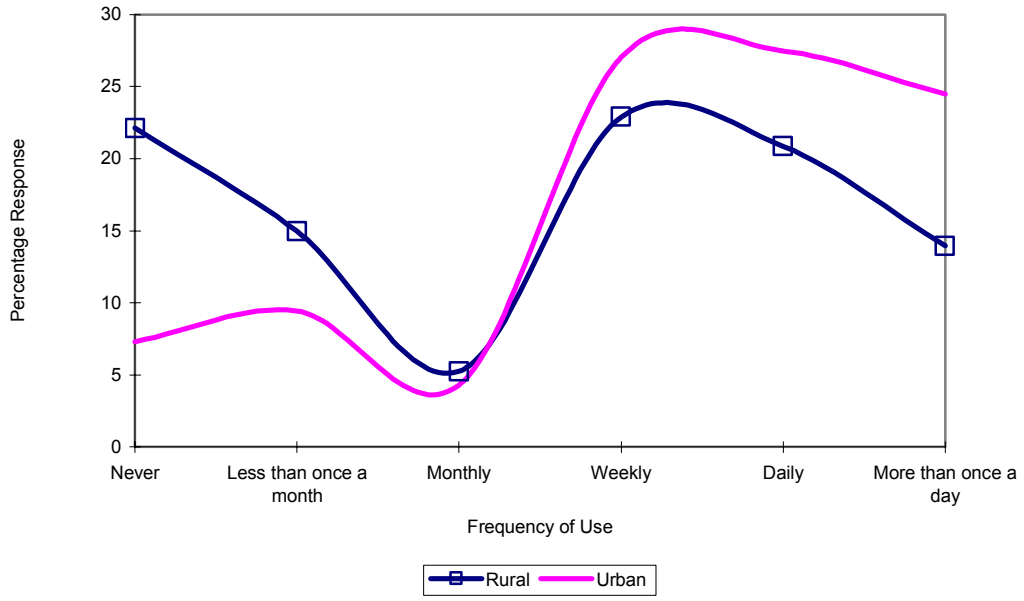
Figure 4.1.4: Use of the World Wide Web by Staff on Behalf of ATSIC and Local Councillors



Use of the World Wide Web between rural and urban representatives takes a different pattern, with urban representatives more likely to use the technology, as well as more

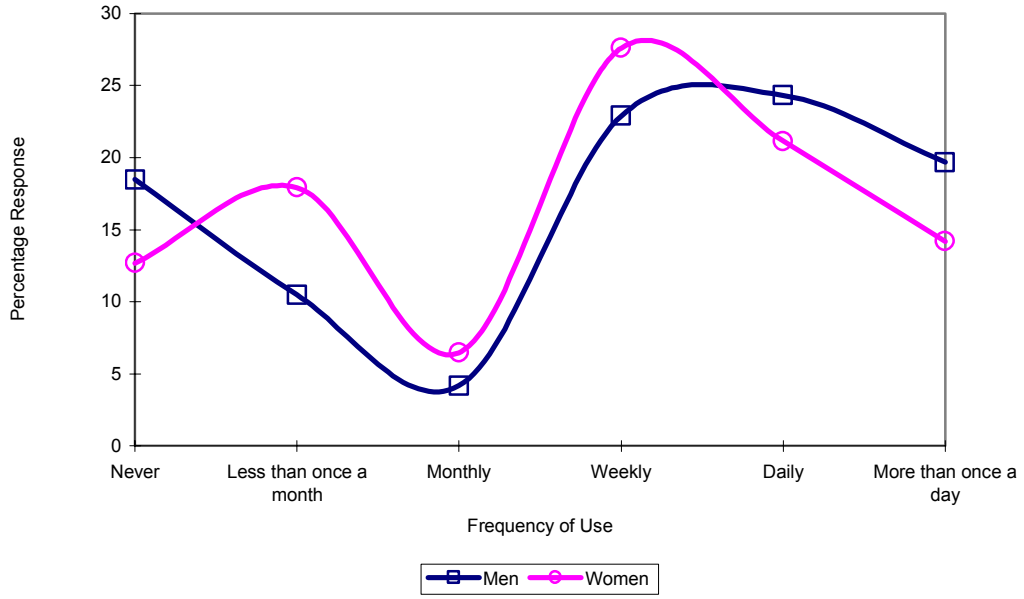
frequently. Overall figure 4.1.5 shows an interesting divergence at either end of the usage scale.

Figure 4.1.5: Use of the World Wide Web – Rural/Urban Variances



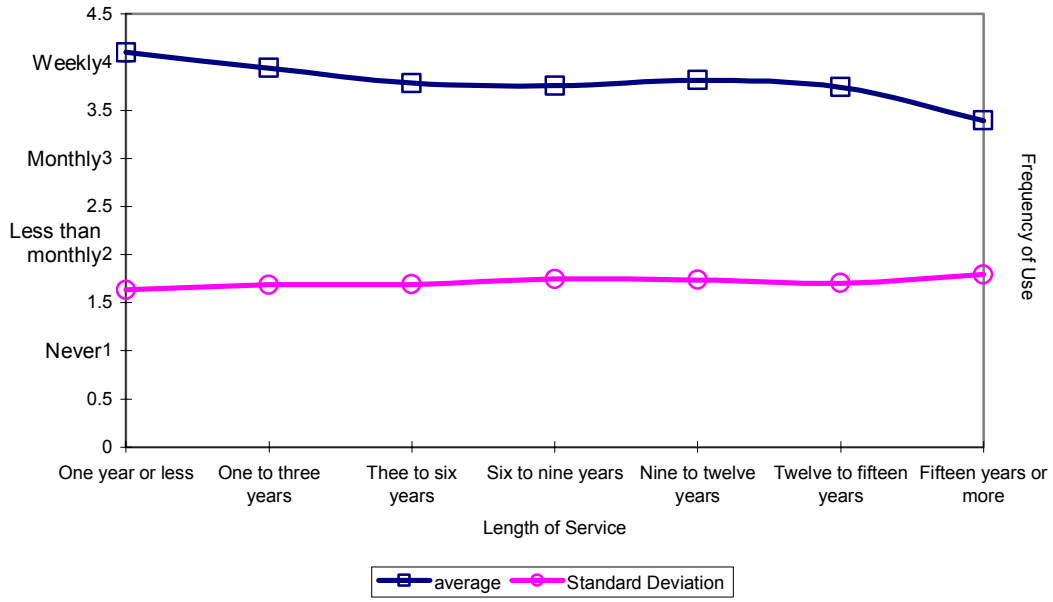
Gender variations emerge in the use of the World Wide Web as well, though less marked than the division between rural and urban representatives. Figure 4.1.6 shows that women are slightly less likely never to use the technology than men, but overall have lower frequency of Web browsing activity.

Figure 4.1.6: Use of the World Wide Web – Gender Variances



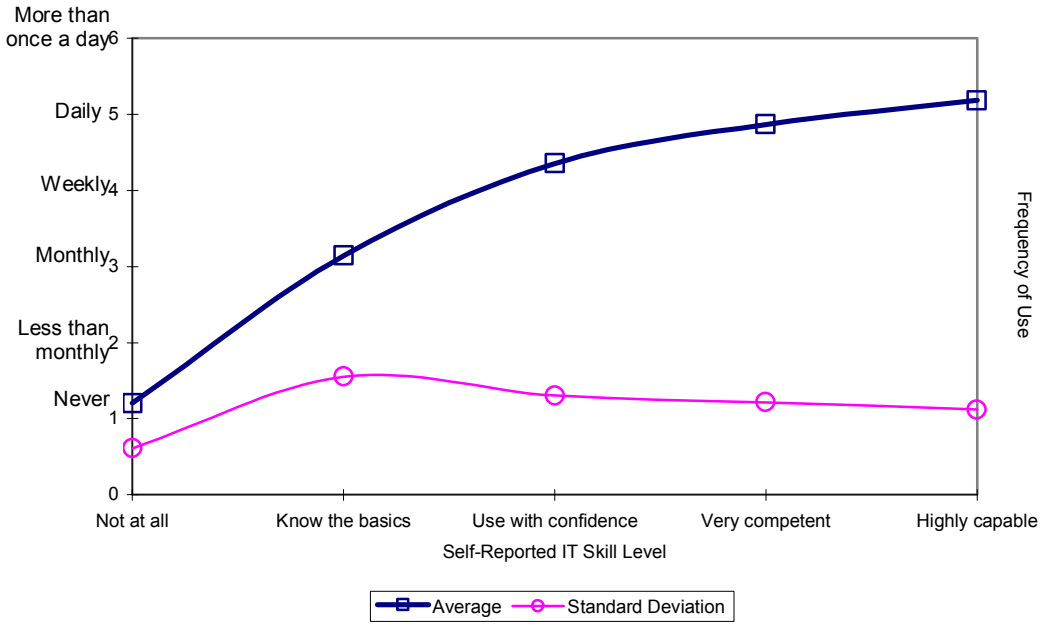
Length of service also affect the use of the World Wide Web, with very minor declining usage rates over time. This decline is most marked for representatives serving less than a year, and those serving longer than fifteen years.

Figure 4.1.7: Use of the World Wide Web – Length of Service Variances



As illustrated in figure 4.1.8, there is a direct relationship between the self-reported IT skill level and use of and frequency of use, of the World Wide Web.

Figure 4.1.8: Use of the World Wide Web – IT Skill Level Variances

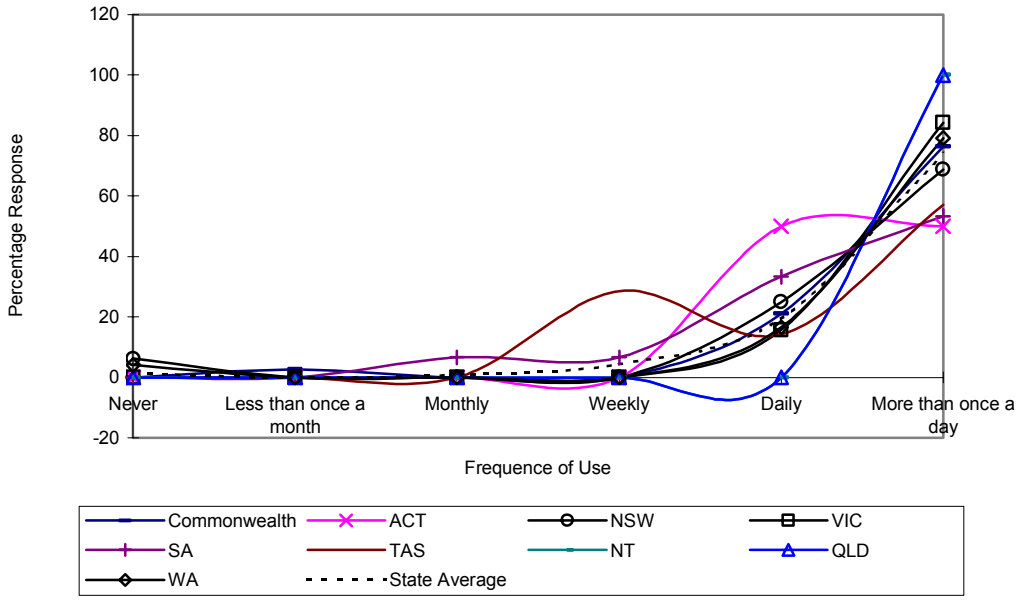


4.2 Electronic Mail

In contrast to the use of the World Wide Web, electronic mail is very popular among Australian parliamentarians. Overall, the vast majority of parliamentarians use this technology either daily or more than once a day, with only minor variations between state and territory parliamentarians. This finding reflects data collected by Burton and Nesbit (2002:11) into patterns of electronic mail use by Australian and Hong Kong

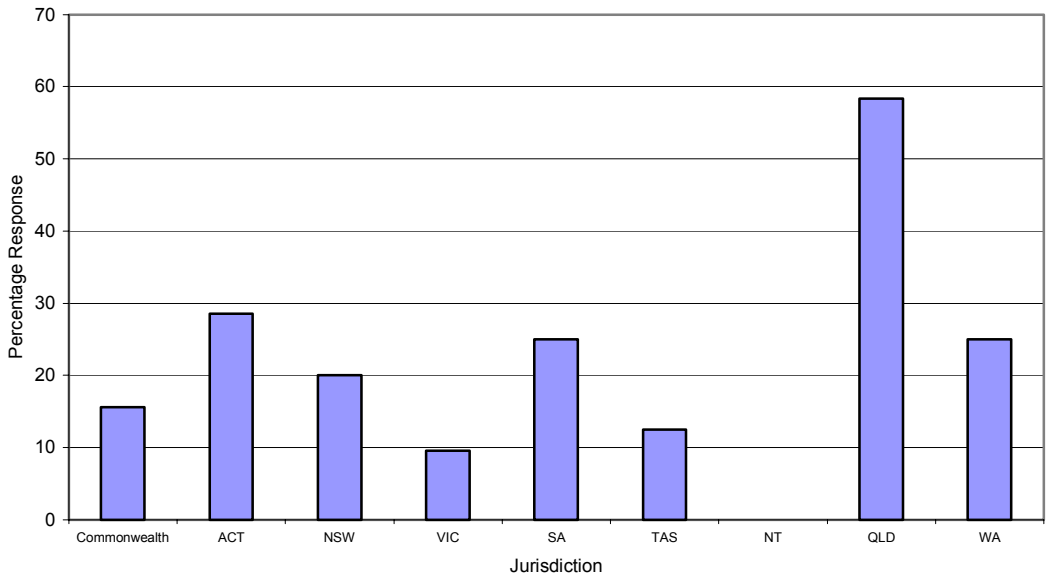
managers. Burton and Nesbit found that, from a sample of 168 managers, use of electronic mails was a daily activity by these senior administrative officers.

Figure 4.2.1: Parliamentarians Use of Electronic Mail



Approximately a quarter of parliamentarians have their electronic mail tasks undertaken by staff. This closely matches the finding for Web surfing activities from figure 4.1.2, with minor variations for Queensland (much more likely to have electronic mail activities undertaken by staff than Web browsing) and Tasmania (where the inverse is the case).

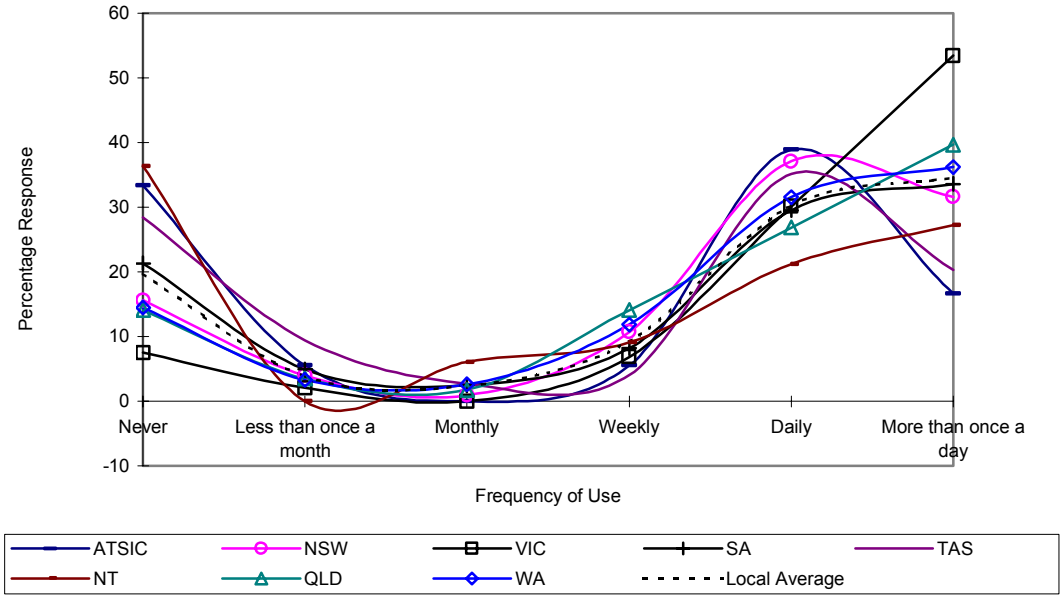
Figure 4.2.2: Use of Electronic Mail by Staff on Behalf of Parliamentarians



In the local government and ATSIC cohort, the use of electronic mail is far less frequent overall, when compared with parliamentarians. However, this difference is

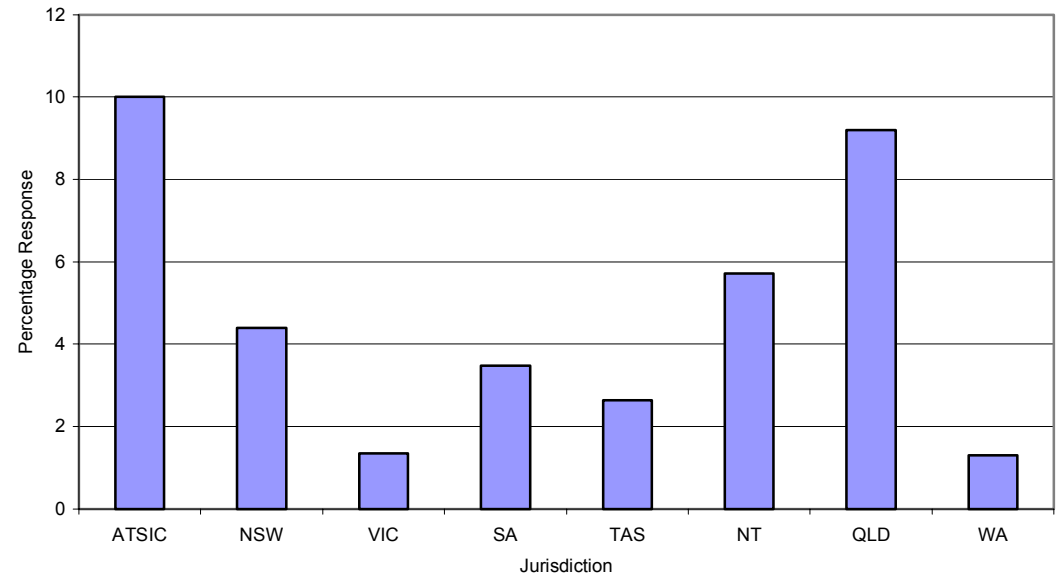
manifested through a strong divergence between those councillors who do not use electronic mail at all (about twenty percent of respondents) and those who use the technology weekly, daily, or more than once a day. While the less frequent use of electronic mail would reflect the part-time nature of much of council work, overall, for one in five councillors, email is not seen as relevant to their work life. This figure is even higher for ATSIC councillors, and those from the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

Figure 4.2.3: ATSIC and Local Councillors Use of Electronic Mail



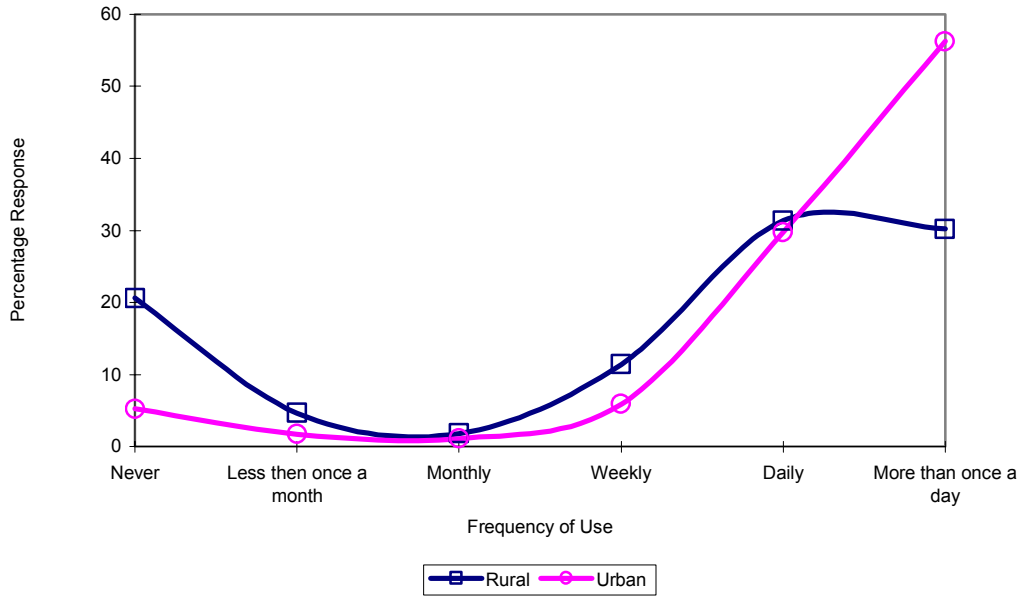
Similarly to the finding for Web use by staff, electronic mail is devolved to staff in a substantially smaller proportion of local governments than for parliamentarians. In figure 4.2.4, overall the variation between jurisdictions is not as marked as that found for parliamentarians.

Figure 4.2.4: Use of Electronic Mail by Staff on Behalf of ATSIC and Local Councillors



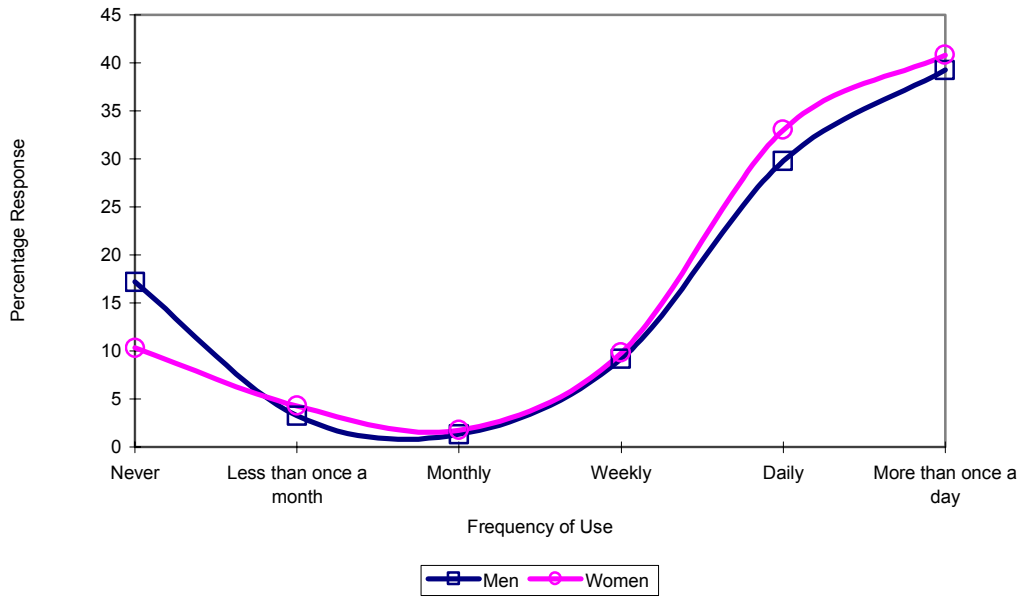
In examining the variations between rural and urban use of electronic mail, figure 4.2.5 shows that, while more rural representatives are likely not to use this technology (just over twenty percent), periodic use is quite similar with the exception of the very high usage category, where urban representatives are almost twice as likely as their rural counterparts to use electronic mail more than once a day. Overall, however, use of electronic mail in rural Australia is higher than the World Wide Web, reflecting, partially, the lower bandwidth requirements of this form of communication, when compared with Web browsing activities.

Figure 4.2.5: Use of Electronic Mail – Rural/Urban Variances



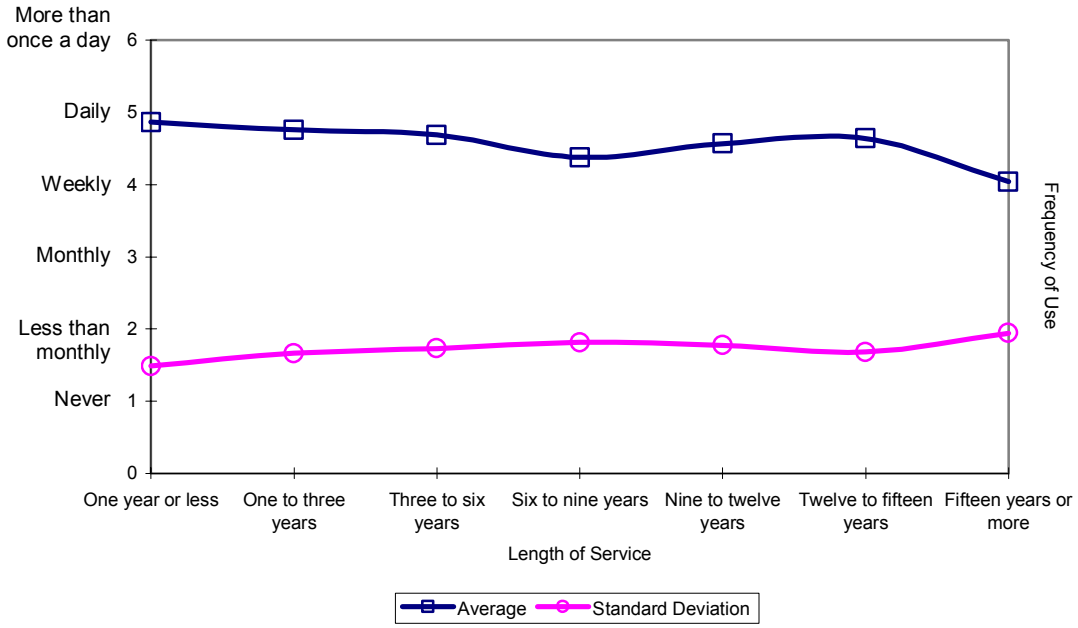
Unlike as was found with Web surfing, male and female elected representative use of email is very similar. Illustrated in figure 4.2.6, men exhibit a slightly higher tendency (seven percent) not to use email at all.

Figure 4.2.6: Use of Electronic Mail – Gender Variances



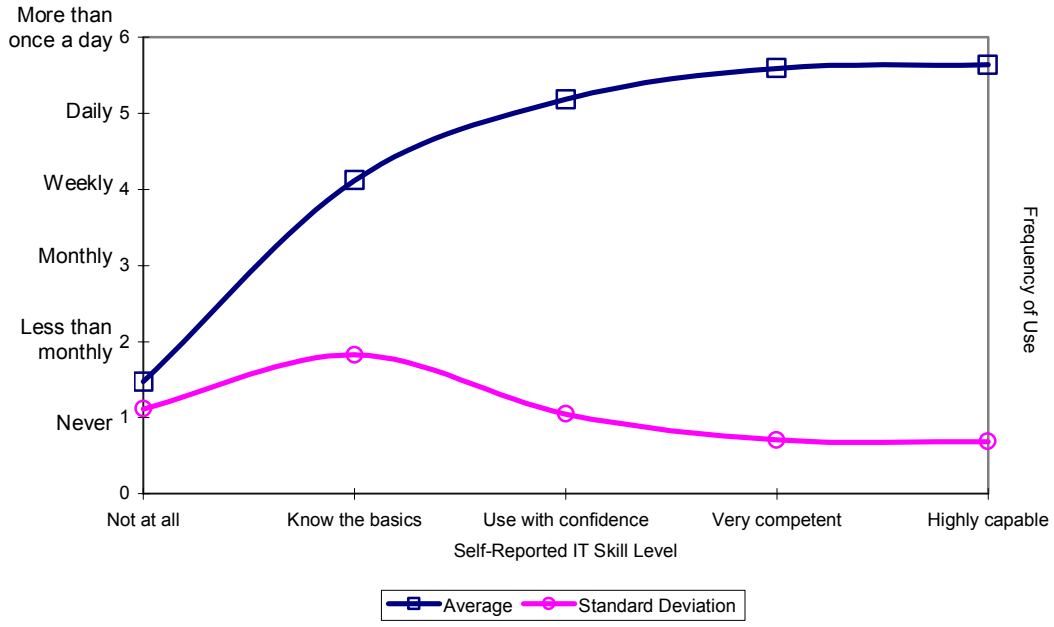
Length of service has a greater impact on the use of electronic mail than gender variances. Figure 4.2.7 shows that the frequency of use of this technology declines, generally, as a function of the length of service of the representatives.

Figure 4.2.7: Use of Electronic Mail – Length of Service Variances



As illustrated in figure 4.1.8, the use and frequency of use of electronic mail is directly influenced by the computer skill level of the elected representative. Note in figure 4.2.8 the higher standard deviation for the skill category "know the basics", indicating a wider range of variation with respect to frequency of use in this skill category.

Figure 4.2.8: Use of Electronic Mail – IT Skill Level Variances



4.3 Other Online Services

While electronic mail and the World Wide Web remain the two most common online technologies utilised by Australian elected representatives there are a range of other activities and technologies that can be included as "new media". These are:

- Internet Relay Chat;
- Online conferencing (Internet meetings);
- Newsgroups;
- Electronic Mailing Lists;
- Virtual Workspace; and
- Telecommuting.

The extent of use of these other technologies was assessed. In addition, survey question A3 attempted to ascertain the use of:

- Official websites (those established by the parliament or council); and
- Personal websites (those established by the representative him- or herself).

Overall, the use of online services other than the World Wide Web and Electronic Mail is quite low for all elected representatives, with the exception of:

- Official websites and telecommuting for parliamentarians.

The range of use of these technologies are presented in figures 4.3.1 to 4.3.3. However, it should be noted that:

- The level of parliamentary recognition of their official websites is lower than the actual prevalence of these sites – it appears likely that parliamentarians see limited value in these static biographic pages as conveyances of political information;
- Victorian and Northern Territorian parliamentarians appear the most interested in online services other than the World Wide Web and electronic mail; and
- Telecommuting appears the most popular form of online work environment.

Figure 4.3.1: Commonwealth Parliamentarians Use of Other Online Services

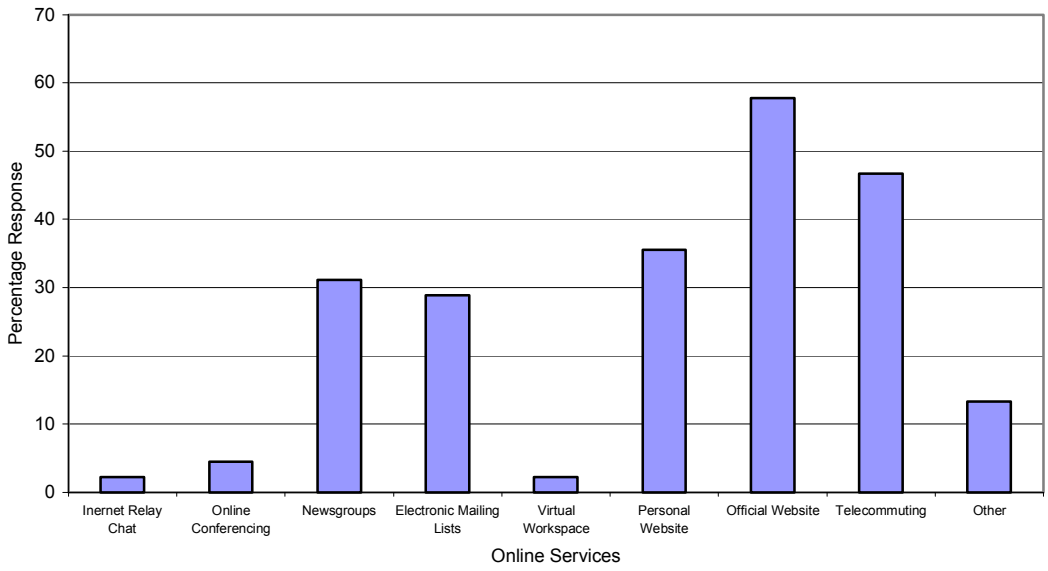


Figure 4.3.2: ACT, NSW, VIC, and SA Parliamentarians Use of Other Online Services

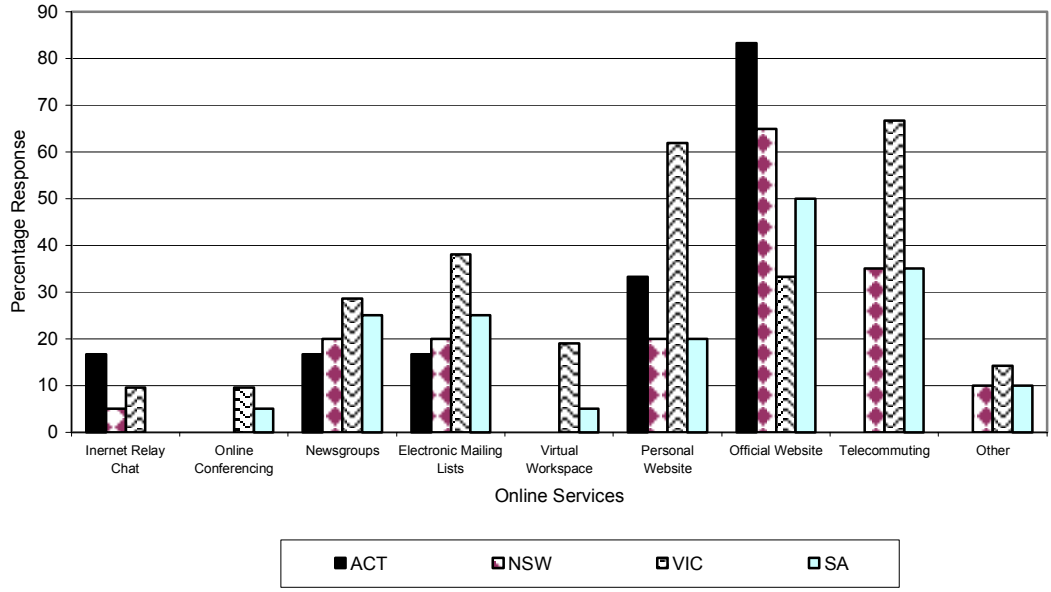


Figure 4.3.3: TAS, NT, QLD, and WA Parliamentarians Use of Other Online Services

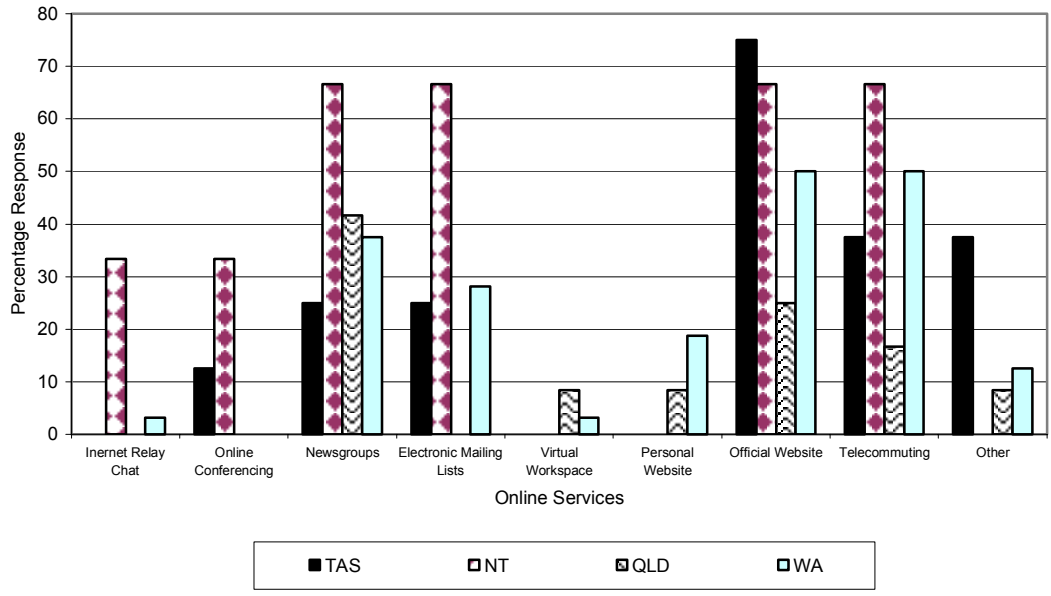


Figure 4.3.4: ATSIC and NSW, VIC, and SA Local Councillors Use of Other Online Services

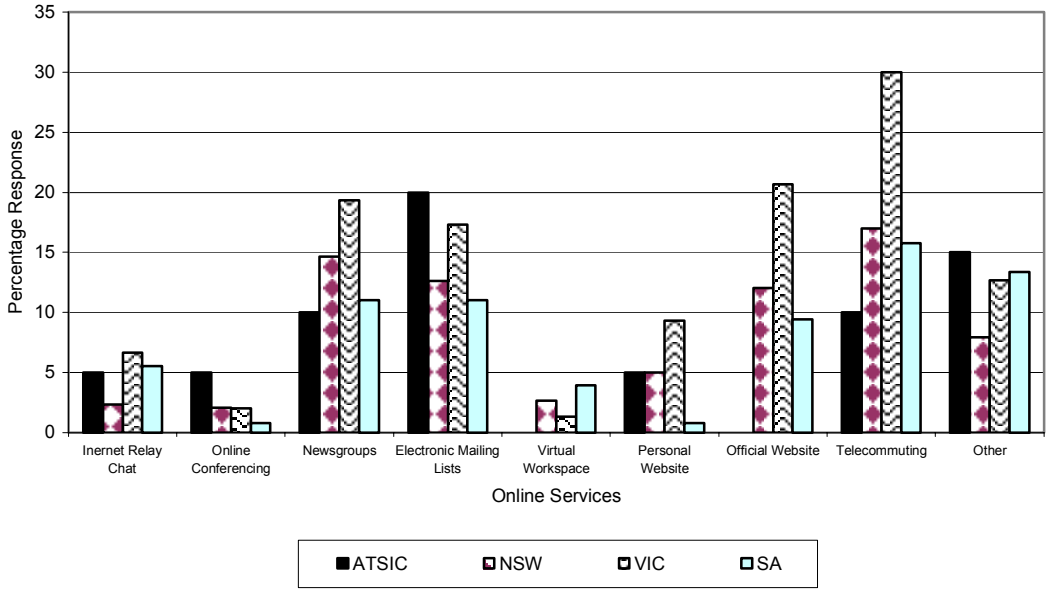
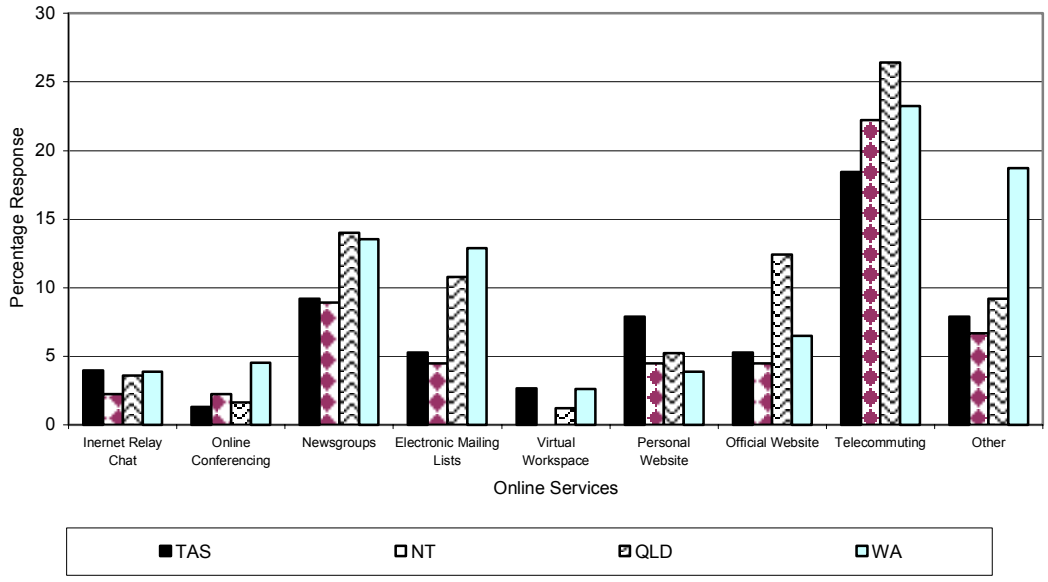


Figure 4.3.5: TAS, NT, QLD, and WA Local Councillors Use of Other Online Services



In examining the use of online services other than the World Wide Web and Electronic Mail, key variances emerge:

- Overall use of other online services is more likely for urban, rather than rural representatives and it appears that rural councillors have not embraced the potential value of telecommuting, online conferencing, or virtual workspaces to overcome rural council sizes (figure 4.3.6); and
- Again, IT skill level has a significant impact on the use of these online services (figure 4.3.9).

Figure 4.3.6: Use of Other Online Services – Rural/Urban Variances

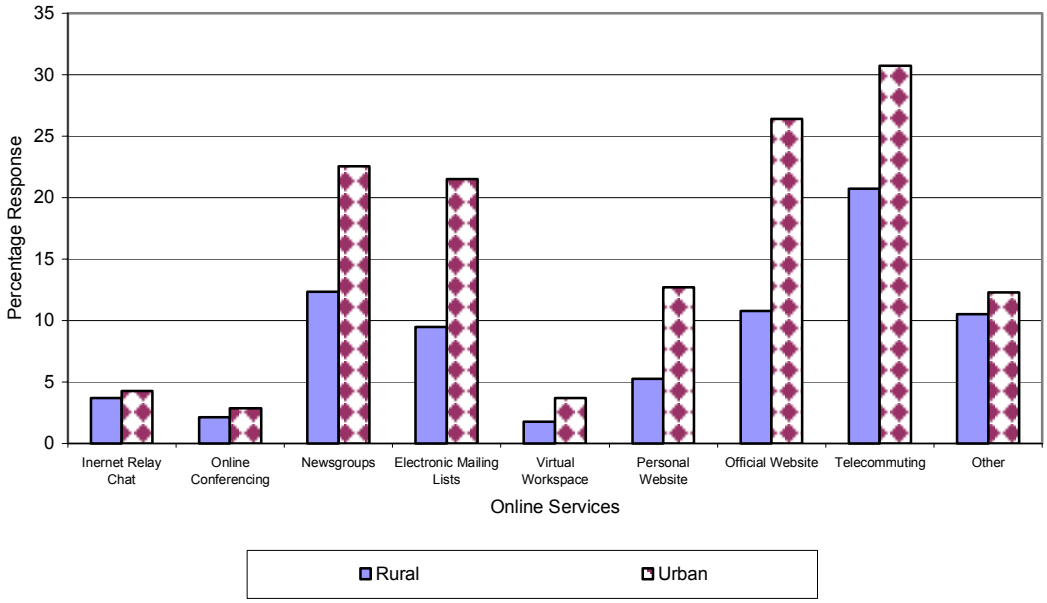


Figure 4.3.7: Use of Other Online Services – Gender Variances

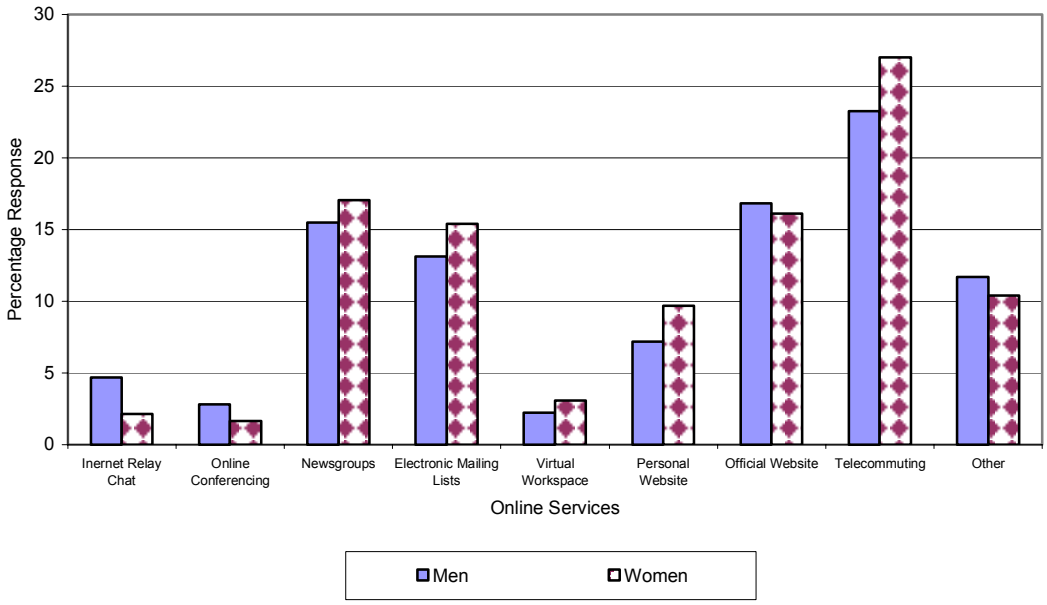


Figure 4.3.8: Use of Other Online Services – IT Skill Level Variances

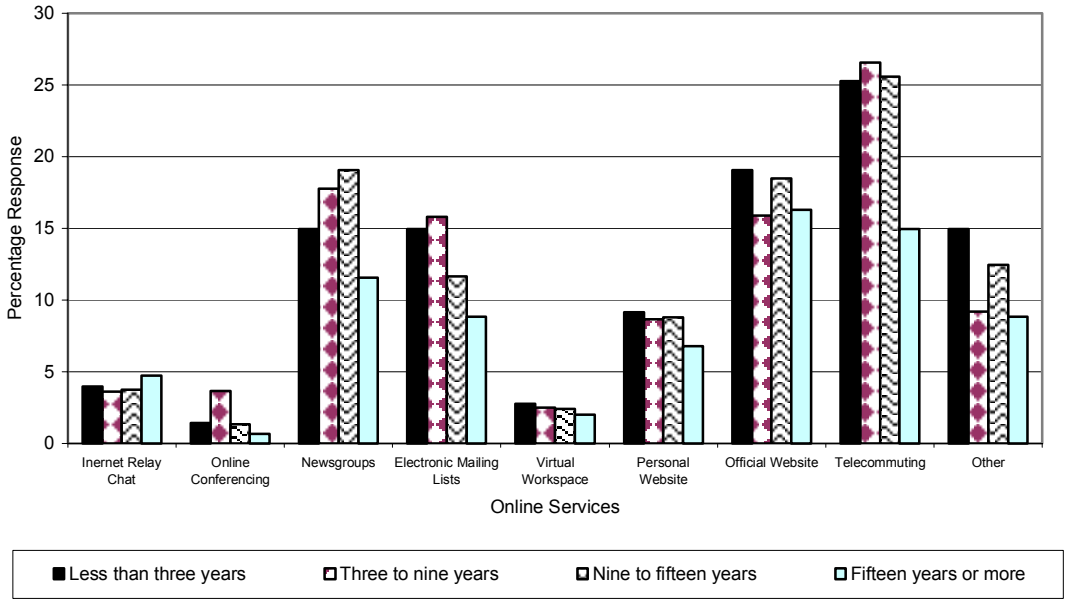
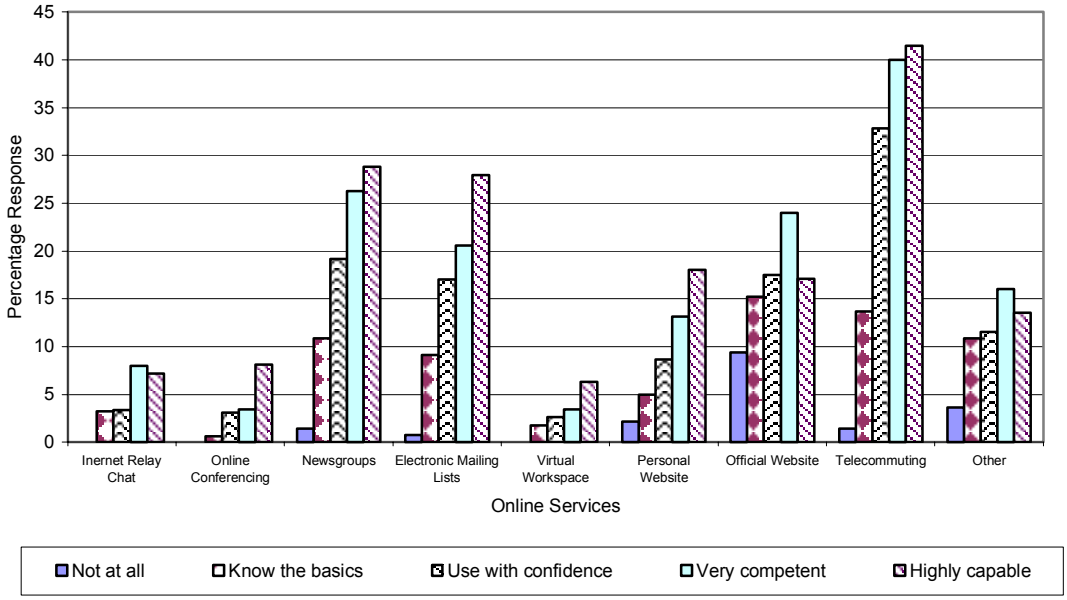


Figure 4.3.9: Use of Other Online Services – IT Skill Level Variances

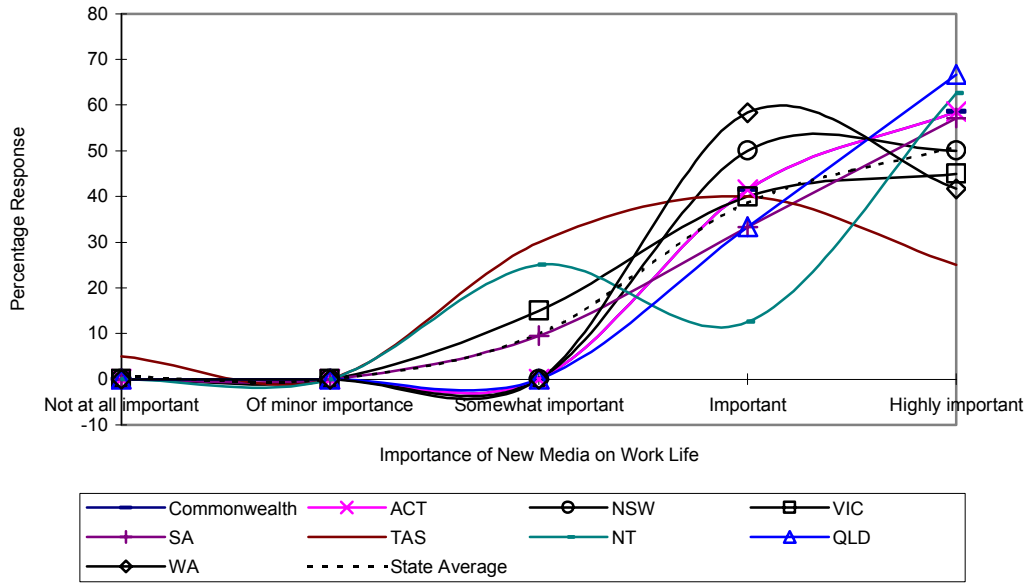


4.4 Importance of New Media

Given the usage rates for the variety of new media forms identified in sections 4.1 to 4.3, survey question B1 attempted to determine the importance of new media as part of the work life of elected representatives.

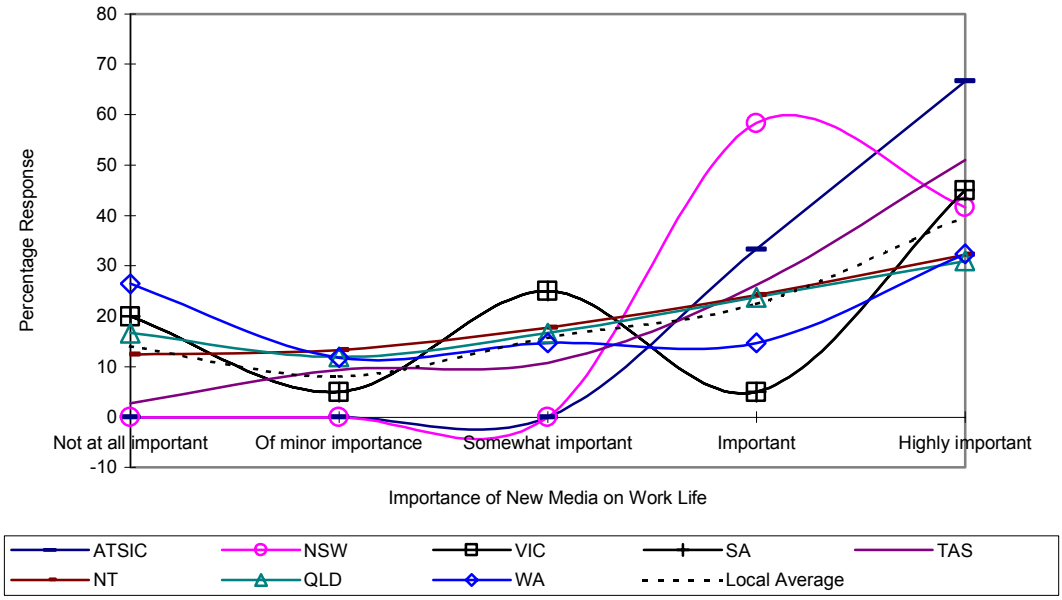
Figure 4.4.1 illustrates the importance of this technology for Australian parliamentarians. Overall, almost every parliamentarian identified these technologies as "somewhat important", "important" or "highly important", with the bulk of elected representatives identifying the technology as "important".

Figure 4.4.1: Parliamentarians Views of the Importance of New Media on Their Work Life



For ATSIC and local government councillors, the importance of new media technologies is not as clearly positive as for parliamentarians. Overall, the majority of these representatives saw the technology as "somewhat important" or greater, however a reasonable proportion (about twenty percent on average) identified that the technology was either "not at all important" or only "of minor importance". Within the local government cohort, New South Wales councillors expressed the strongest views of the importance of new media, while those of Western Australia the lowest views of the value of the technology in their work lives.

Figure 4.4.2: ATSIC and Local Government Councillors Views of the Importance of New Media on Their Work Life



A breakdown of the importance continuum based on the rural / urban division in figure 4.4.3 shows that overall, rural representatives are less likely to value new media technology in their work lives, whereas a gender division (figure 4.4.4) shows some variation between the sexes, but the impact is less than the rural / urban division.

Figure 4.4.3: Views of the Importance of New Media on Work Life – Rural / Urban Variances

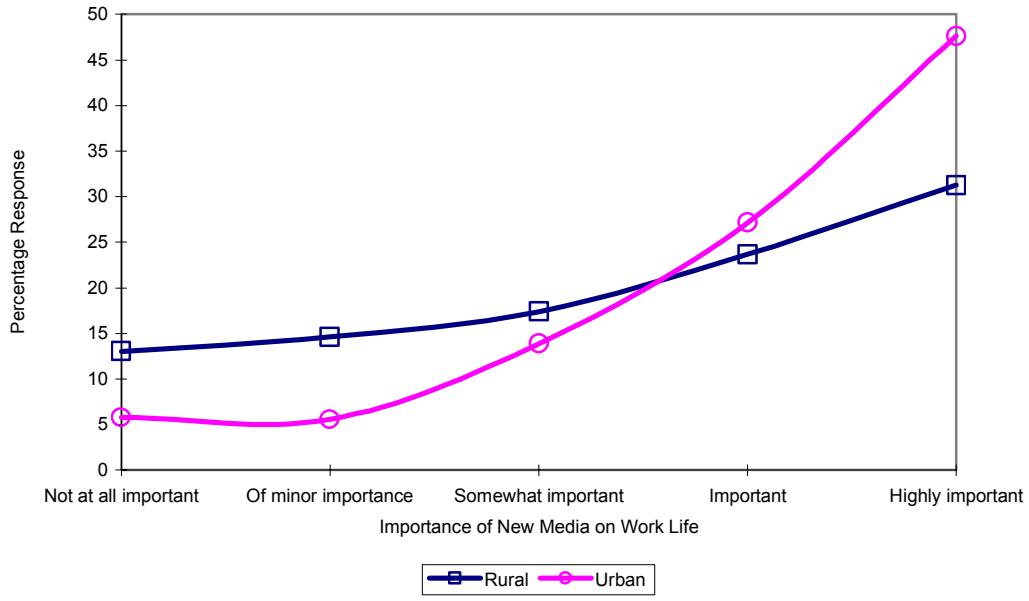
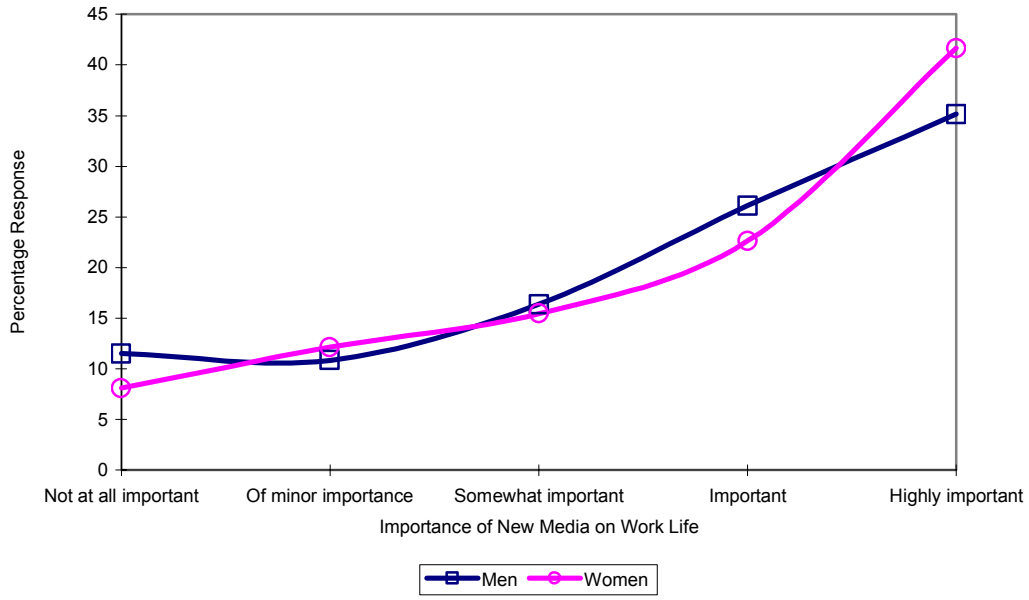
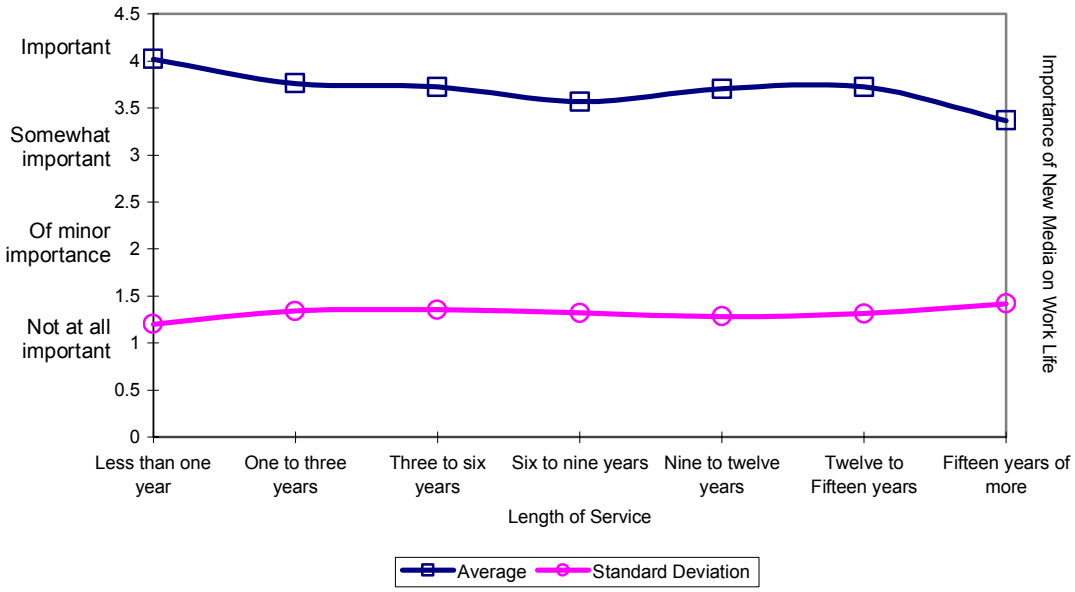


Figure 4.4.4: Views of the Importance of New Media on Work Life – Gender Variances



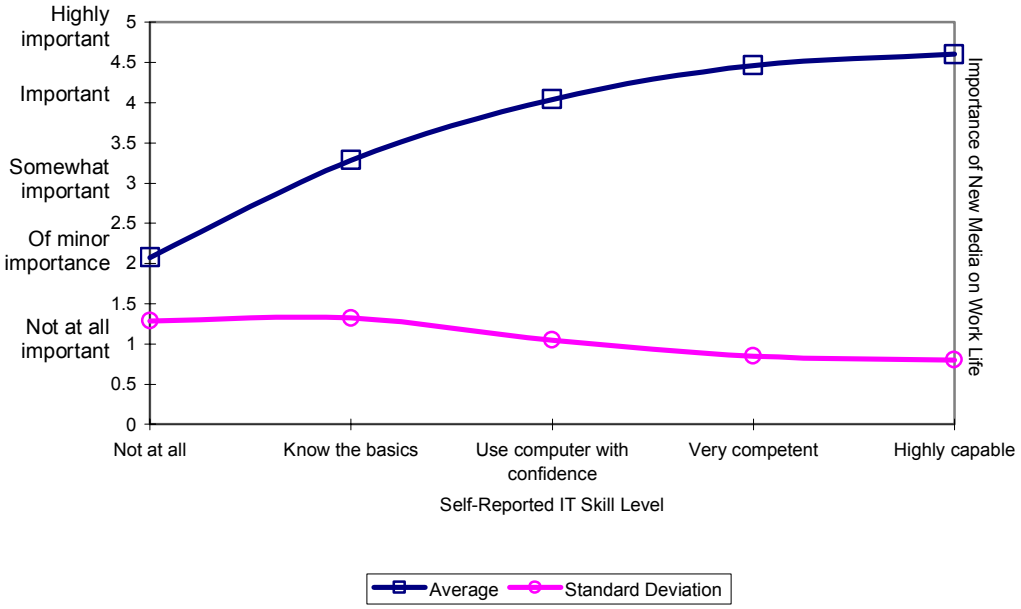
Examining this measure based on the length of services of representatives again shows the minor tapering off effect identified in the usage rate figures, with figure 4.4.5 showing a 0.75 difference between new representatives and those who have served over fifteen years (based on a five point scale).

Figure 4.4.5: Views of the Importance of New Media on Work Life – Length of Service Variances



When looking at the importance of new media based on the self-reported IT skill level of representatives, again the very strong correlation between the skill level of the individual and their perceived importance of the technology as part of their work lives, with the deviation between respondents declining as skill level increases (as represented by the standard deviation line in figure 4.4.6).

Figure 4.4.6: Views of the Importance of New Media on Work Life – IT Skill Level Variances

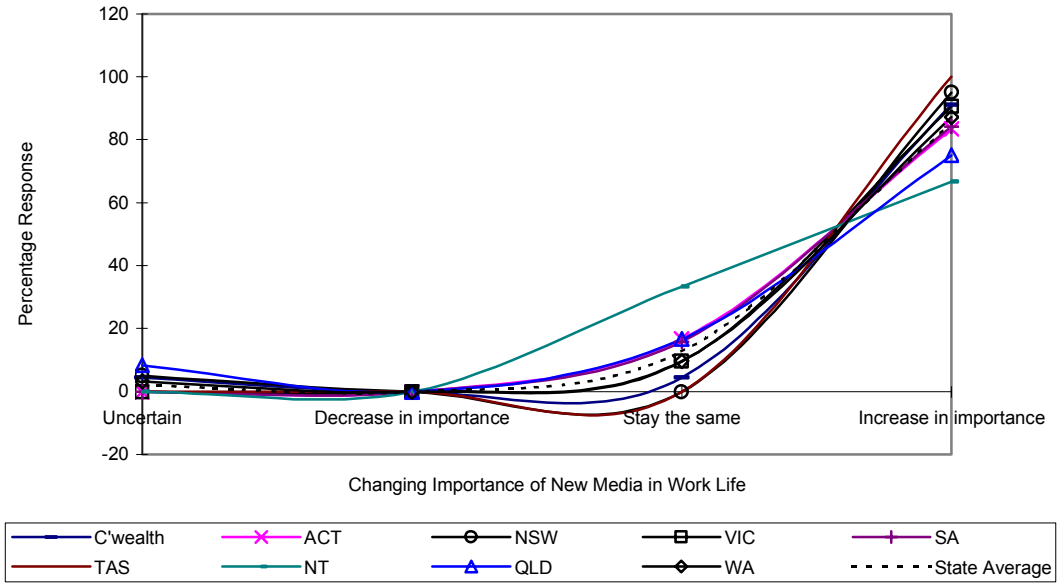


4.5 Importance of New Media: 2002-2004

Given the importance measures listed in section 4.4, survey question B2 examined the perceptions of representatives as to the changing importance of the technology over the next two years.

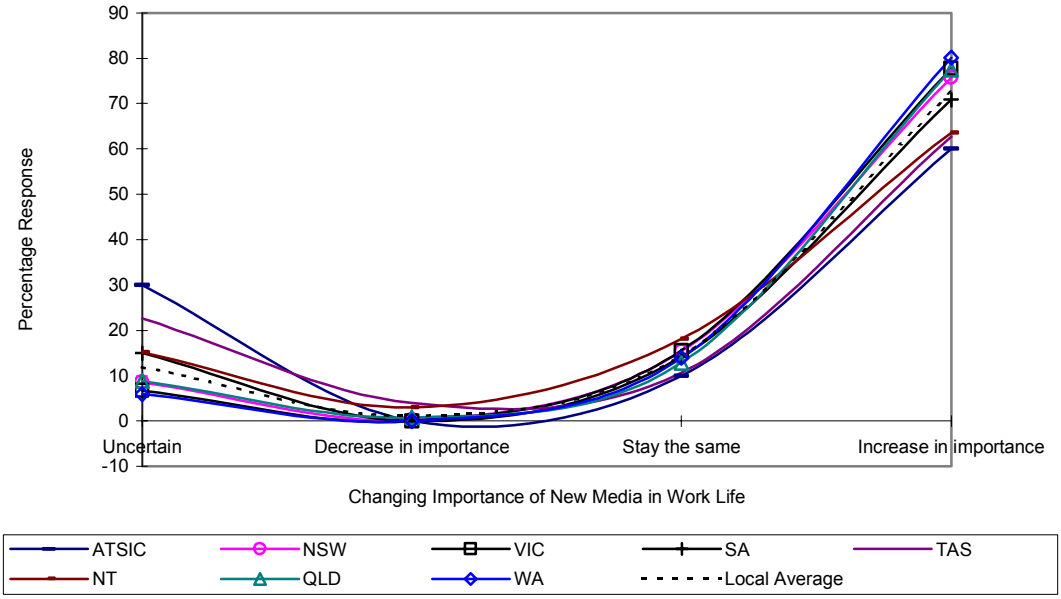
For parliamentarians, figure 4.5.1 shows a very bullish response to this question, with the vast majority of parliamentarians identifying the technologies importance in their work lives will increase over the next two years. A smaller percentage (about eight percent on average) identified the technology would remain the same level of importance, which must be interpreted with attention to the finding, expressed in figure 4.4.1, that the importance of the technology remains strong with parliamentarians.

Figure 4.5.1: Parliamentarians Views of the Importance of New Media Over Next Two Years



For local government and ATSIC councillors, a similar distribution can be seen to that expressed in figure 4.5.1: one strongly oriented to the view that the importance of new media technologies as part of their work lives will increase over the next two years. Councillors, however, report a slighly higher level of uncertainty about the importance of the technology than their parliamentary peers. Overall, about one in ten local councillors are uncertain about the changing importance of the technology for the next two years.

Figure 4.5.2: ATSIC and Local Government Councillors Views of the Importance of New Media Over Next Two Years



When considering rural and urban, gender, or length of service variances for the measure of importance over the next two years, little variation can be seen in either figures 4.5.3, 4.5.4, or 4.5.5. In addition, while figure 4.5.6 shows a slightly lower average level of importance for new media over the next two years for councillors who report the lowest level of skill, skill level does not significantly influence councillors' views of the importance of the technology in the near future. Overall, what the figures in this section show is that, apart from minor variations, the total cohort of elected representatives identify the increasing importance of new media technologies as an ongoing feature of their working lives.

Figure 4.5.3: Views of the Importance of New Media Over Next Two Years – Rural / Urban Variances

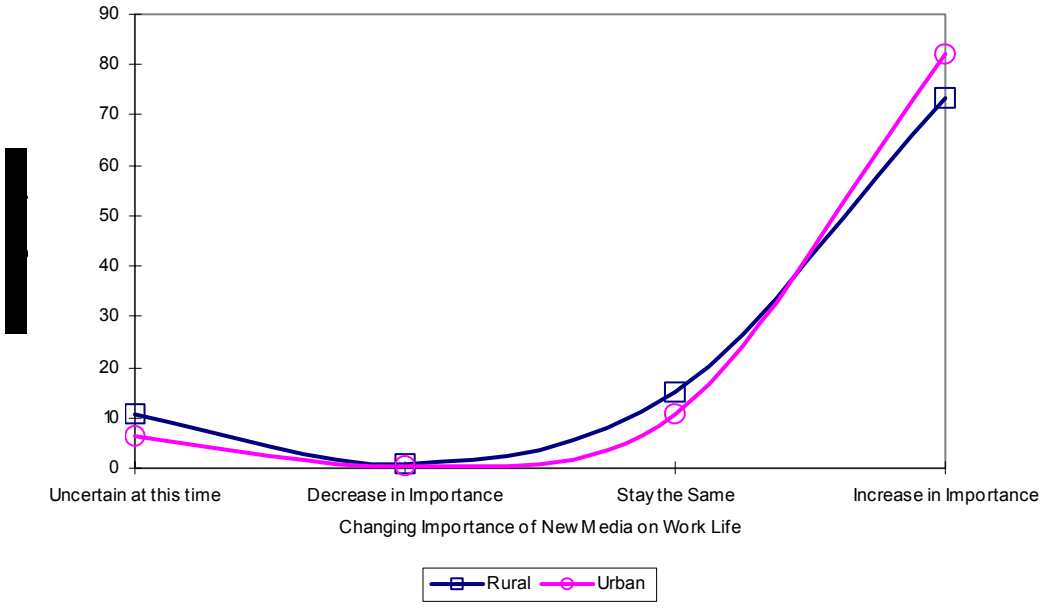


Figure 4.5.4: Views of the Importance of New Media Over Next Two Years – Gender Variances

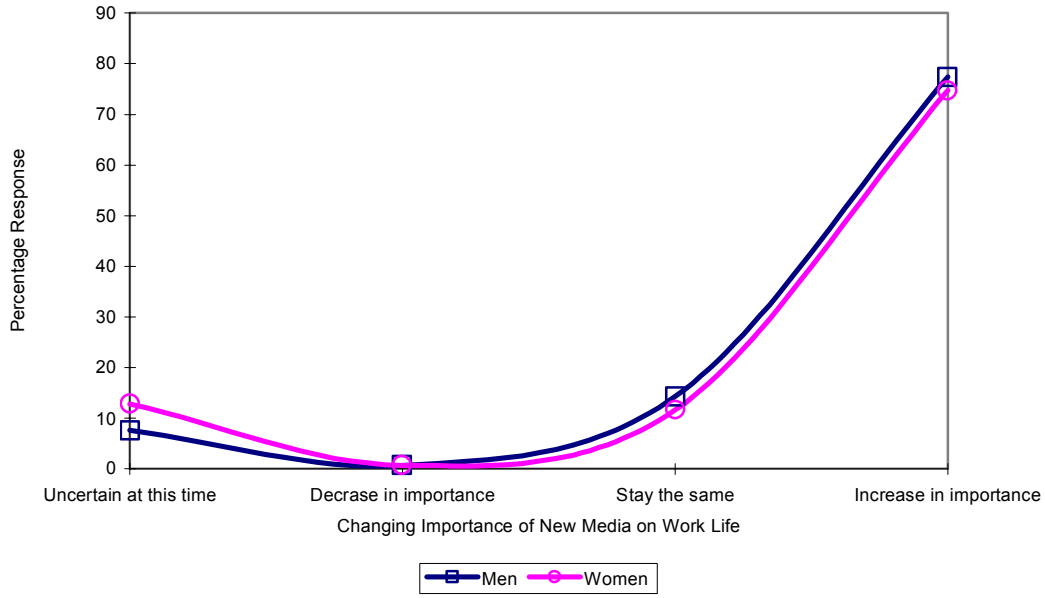
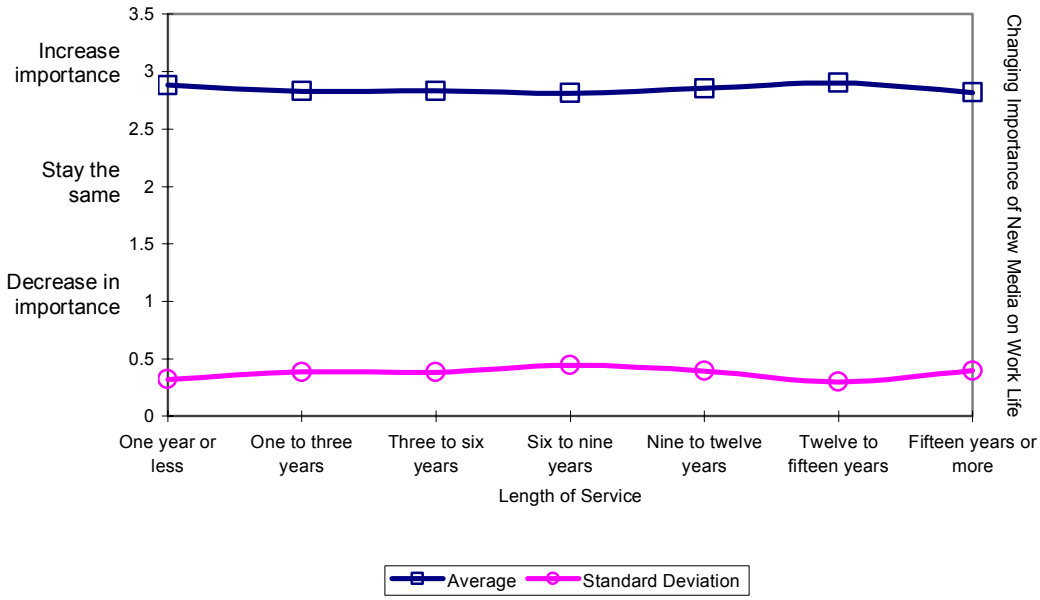
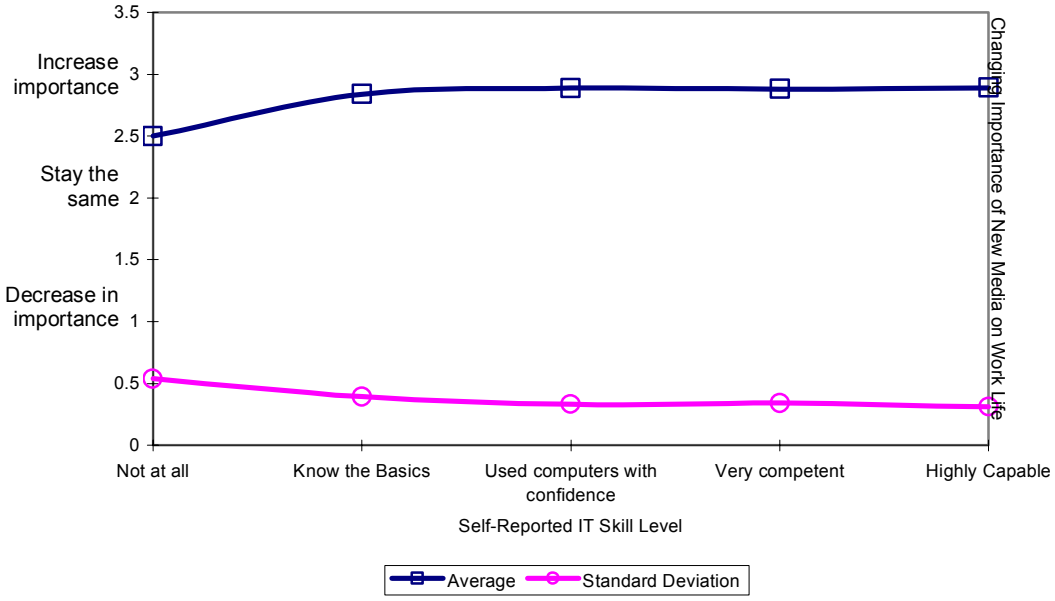


Figure 4.5.5: Views of the Importance of New Media Over Next Two Years – Length of Service Variances



α This table is based on the exclusion of those respondents who indicated that they were unsure of changes to the importance of new media over the next two years.

Figure 4.5.6: Views of the Importance of New Media Over Next Two Years – IT Skill Level Variances[α]



[α]This table is based on the exclusion of those respondents who indicated that they were unsure of changes to the importance of new media over the next two years.

5.0 New Media and Consultation

Following the determination of high levels of use of new media, and the recognition by elected representatives of the importance of new media in their work lives, research questions A5, A4, B3, and C7 attempted to determine the use of online technologies to facilitate democratic consultation. This inquiry took four forms:

- Were the representatives or their staff using new media for consultation with their electorate (activity measure)?
- Were other examples of online consultation well known by representatives (learning function)?
- How important is the technology for the purposes of consultation (salience)?
- Does the receipt, processing, and archiving of electronic mail match best practice for postal communication (technological parity)?

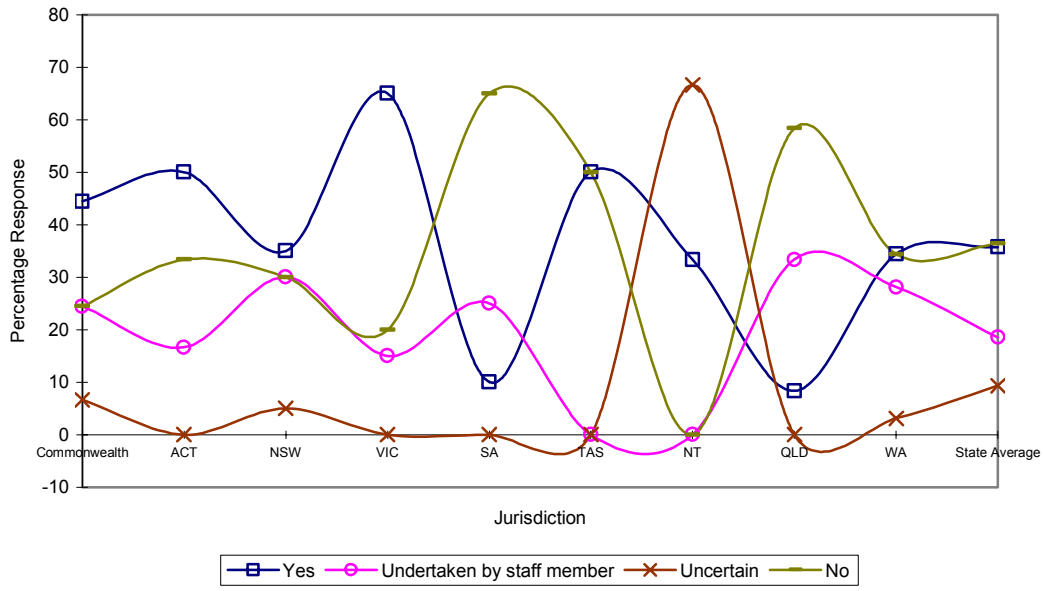
Key Findings for this section:

- Parliamentarians are more likely to be using new media for consultation than ATSIC or local government councillors;
- Online consultation is more prevalent in urban electorates or wards;
- Newer representatives are more likely to engage in online consultation personally, while more seasoned representatives are more likely to have this task undertaken by a staff member;
- Skill level is highly important in determining if an elected representative will adopt online consultation;
- When asked about knowledge of online consultation activities, direct electronic mail exchanges between the public and representatives is the most common example cited, followed by institutional activities undertaken by government departments, political parties, or councils. The overall awareness of other representatives' activities in this area is low;
- Parliamentarians are more likely to see online consultation as important or highly important when compared with local government and ATSIC councillors;
- Overall, there is a clear gap between desire and activity with respect to online consultation, and one partially explained by a limit of clear lesson drawing from other examples of individual (rather than institutional) online consultation;
- Elected Representatives have not yet widely adopted systems for the formal logging of electronic mail, with only about twenty percent of representatives maintaining these communication management systems; and
- Even among representatives who report themselves as "very competent" or "highly capable" in the use of computers, only fifty percent of these representatives have implemented electronic mail logging processes. Adoption of electronic mail logging processes therefore do not appear a function of length of service, skill level, or gender, and may be a function of some other character trait (such as experience with administrative processes).

5.1 Consultation Online

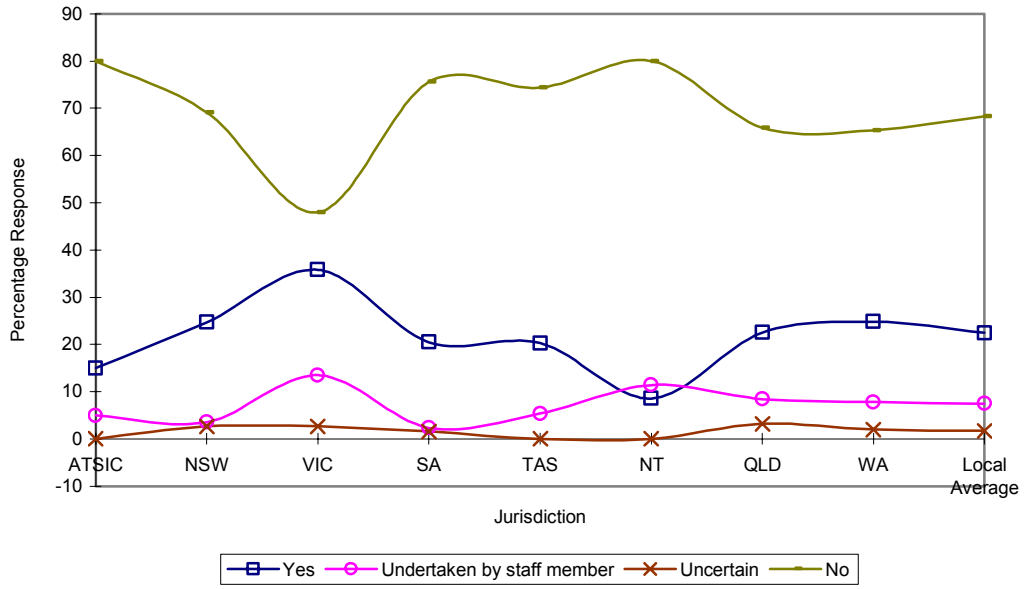
Online consultation applies new media technology to facilitate the information generation and sharing process of elected representatives. When looking at Australian parliamentarians' use of new media for consultation, figure 5.1.1 shows that this practice is wide-spread, with about forty percent of this group using online consultation in some way. Large variation exists, however, within this group, with Victorian, Western Australian, and Australian Capital Territorian parliamentarians most likely to engage in this activity (between sixty-five and eighty percent of respondents), while South Australian parliamentarians are least likely to report this activity. Overall, with the exception of South Australia and Queensland, more parliamentarians report they undertake this activity themselves, rather than having their staff undertake this function.

Figure 5.1.1: Parliamentarians Level of Online Consultation



Within ATSIC and local government, the level of online consultation is lower, but more regular, averaging at about thirty-five percent of these representatives engaging in online consultation. Victoria, again, is the most likely state for online consultation, with about forty-five percent of these elected representatives engaging in the practice. Overall, local government and ATSIC councillors are more than half as likely than their parliamentary peers to have staff undertake online consultation on their behalf.

Figure 5.1.2: ATSIC and Local Councillors Level of Online Consultation



When considering rural and urban approaches to online consultation, figure 5.1.3 identifies that urban representatives are more than twice as likely as their rural counterparts to engage in online consultation. Figure 5.1.4 shows that women are slightly more likely to engage in this practice than their male peers.

Figure 5.1.3: Online Consultation – Rural/Urban Variances

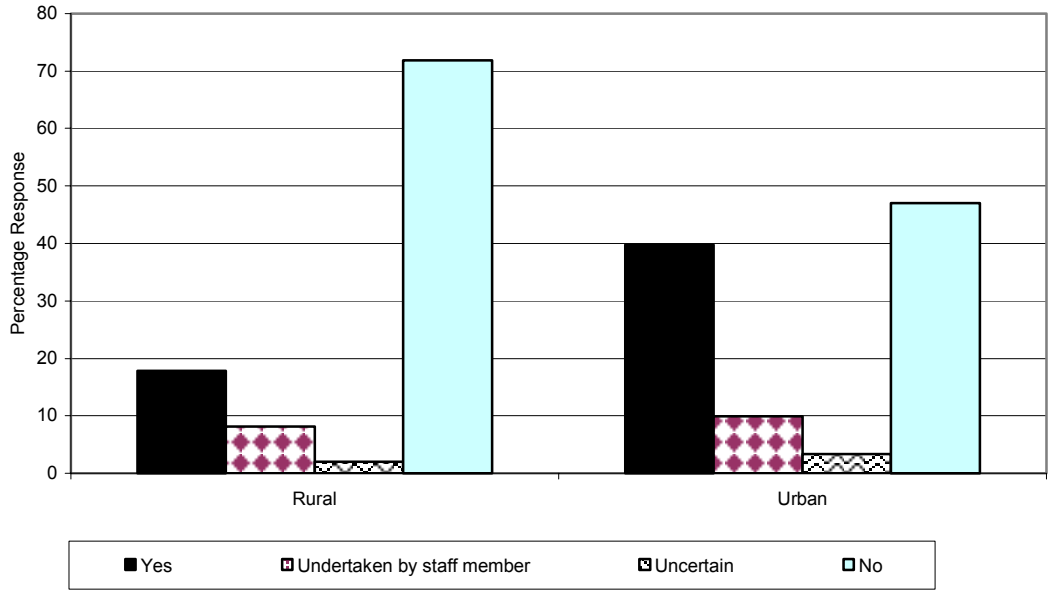
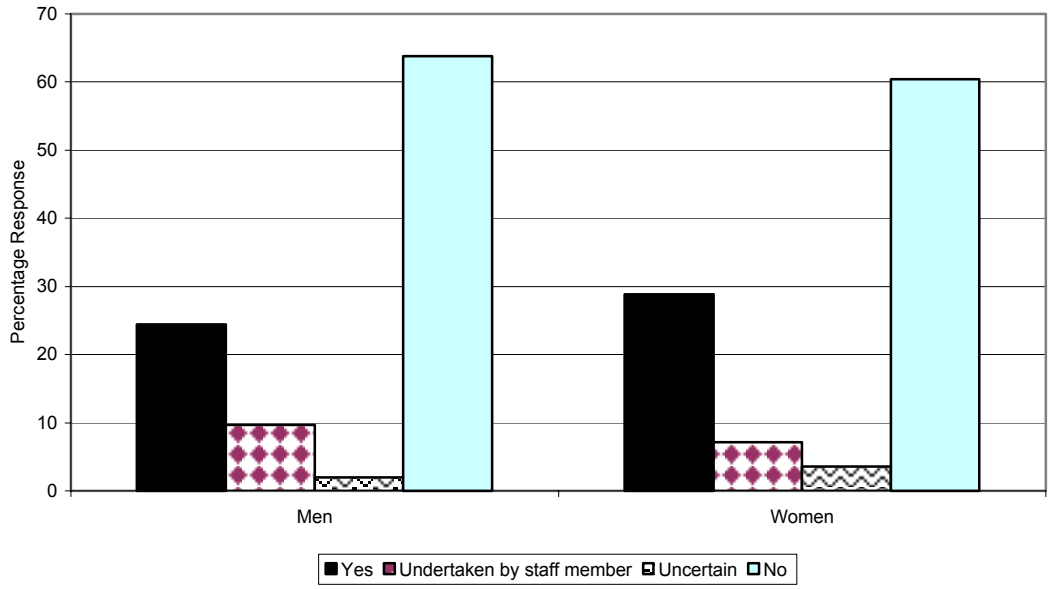
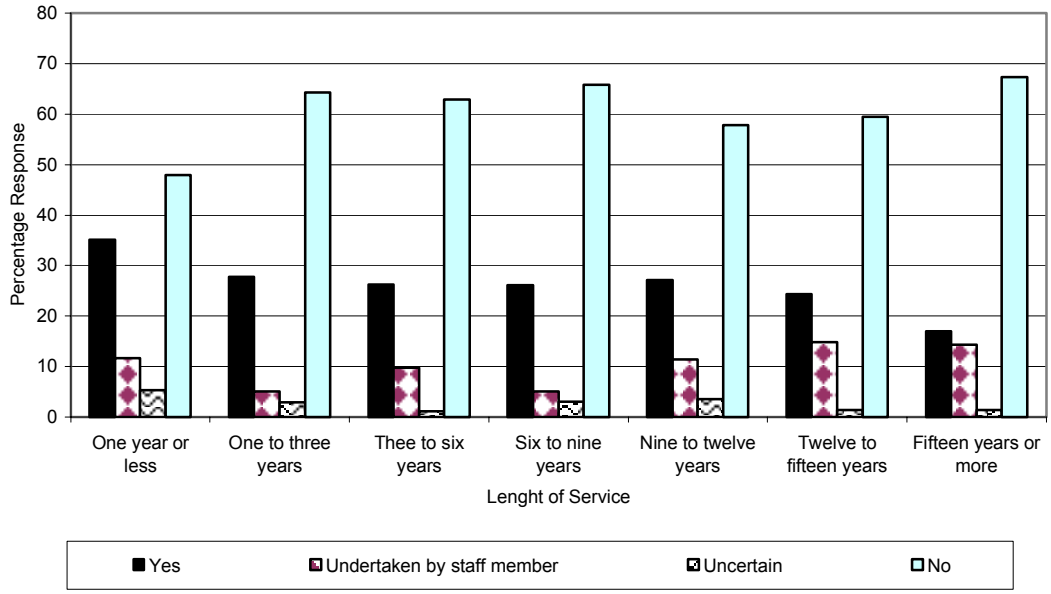


Figure 5.1.4: Online Consultation – Gender Variances



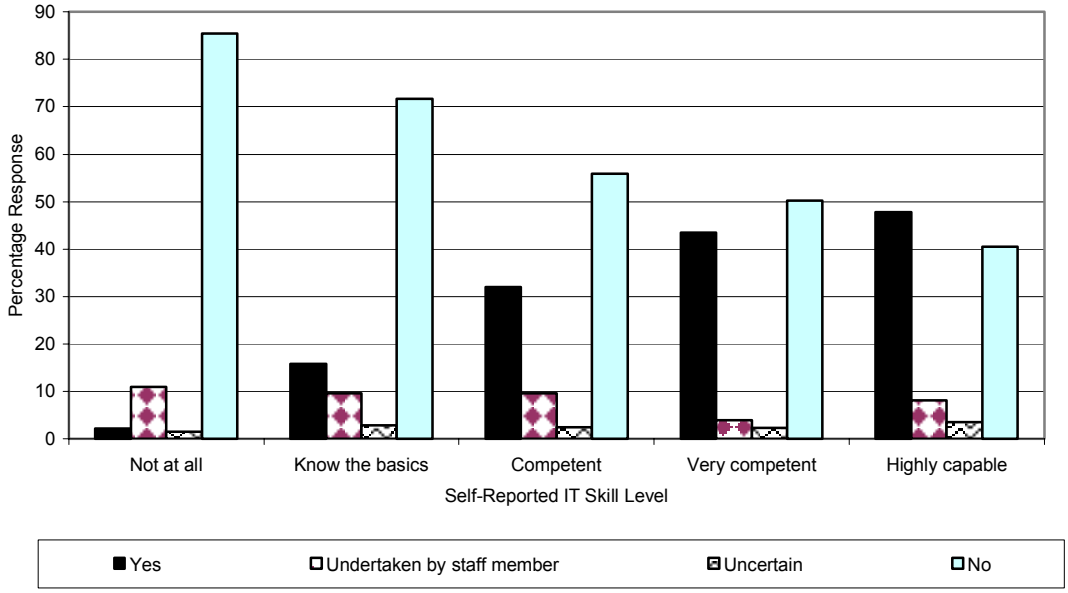
In addition, while the tendency for online consultation is relatively static given variance in length of service, very new elected representatives (serving one year or less) are more likely to use online consultation than their older colleagues (by about eight percent), and about fifteen percent more likely to do so than representatives who have served more than fifteen years. However, these variations are almost completely moderated by the use of staff to undertake online consultation on the behalf of the elected representative.

Figure 5.1.5: Online Consultation – Length of Service Variances



While length of service is less likely to influence the use of new media for consultation, figure 5.1.6 shows that IT skill level has a very strong impact on this behaviour. Online consultation by the representative (rather than by the representative and their staff) has a direct correlation between use and skill level.

Figure 5.1.6: Online Consultation – IT Skill Level Variances



5.2 Awareness of Consultation Online

Given the level of use of new media for democratic consultation by elected representatives, it is important to attempt to develop an understanding of from whence these adaptive approaches stem. Survey question A4 asked representatives to identify concrete examples of online consultation between elected representatives and members of the public.

From this question, only about ten percent of respondents elected to provide a response[8], which has been categorised as either:

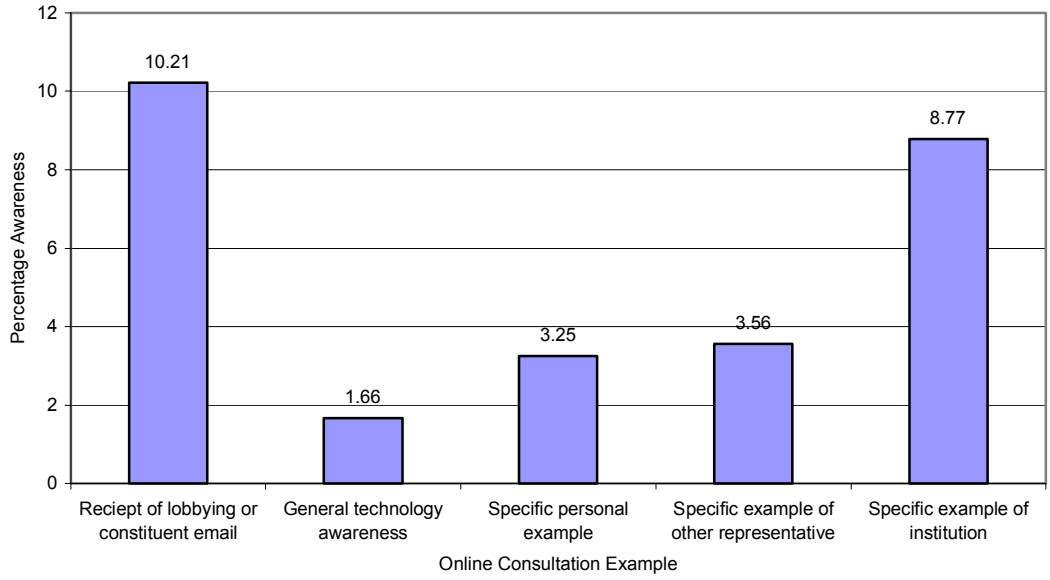
- Details of the receipt of electronic mail, or other forms of online information from members of the public;
- General awareness statements that the technology could be used to consult with the public;
- Specific personal examples of online consultation undertaken by the representative;
- Examples of other individual representatives who undertake online consultation; or
- Examples of organizations (parliaments, government departments, political parties, lobby groups) who undertake online consultation.

Overall, figure 5.2.1 shows that, in general, limited practical examples were cited by representatives, with lobbying and constituent email forming the most common example cited. The second most common response was to cite institutional examples of online consultation, mainly political parties (for parliamentarians and some councillors) or council-based online consultation and voting (for local government members). The most directly comparative examples (personal activities or activities

[8] Note however, this question was not structured in any way, allowing for a free text response from respondents. This may have limited the level of response to this question.

of other representatives outside of institutional consultation) represent a very small percentage of the total number of survey respondents (about three percent of the total). Figure 5.2.1 illustrates, therefore, the limited distribution of peer-specific information about activities in this area, a phenomena which may aid in understanding the limited take-up of online consultation by elected representatives, as discussed in section 5.1.

Figure 5.2.1: Awareness of Online Consultation



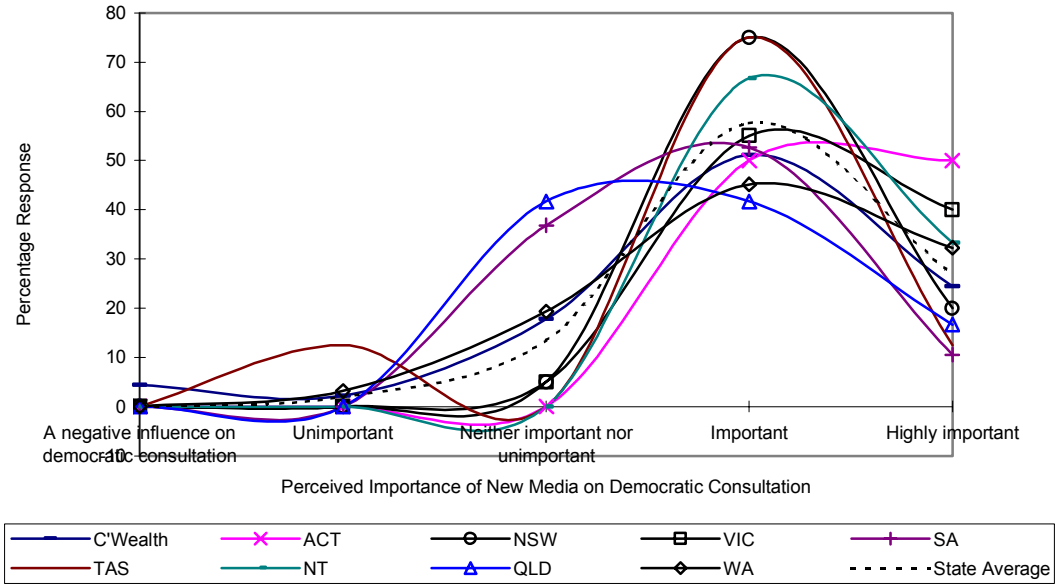
5.3 Importance of Consultation Online

Given the take up of online consultation to date, it is important to match current practice with elected representatives perceived importance of these forms of democratic participation.

Figures 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 show that representatives express the view that new media is generally important in facilitating democratic consultation, however, these figures do not match neatly with the picture presented in section 5.1. Generally, interest outstrips behaviour in this area, reflecting the limited lesson learning from other examples of online consultation identified in section 5.2. This finding indicates a clear gap between desire and practice.

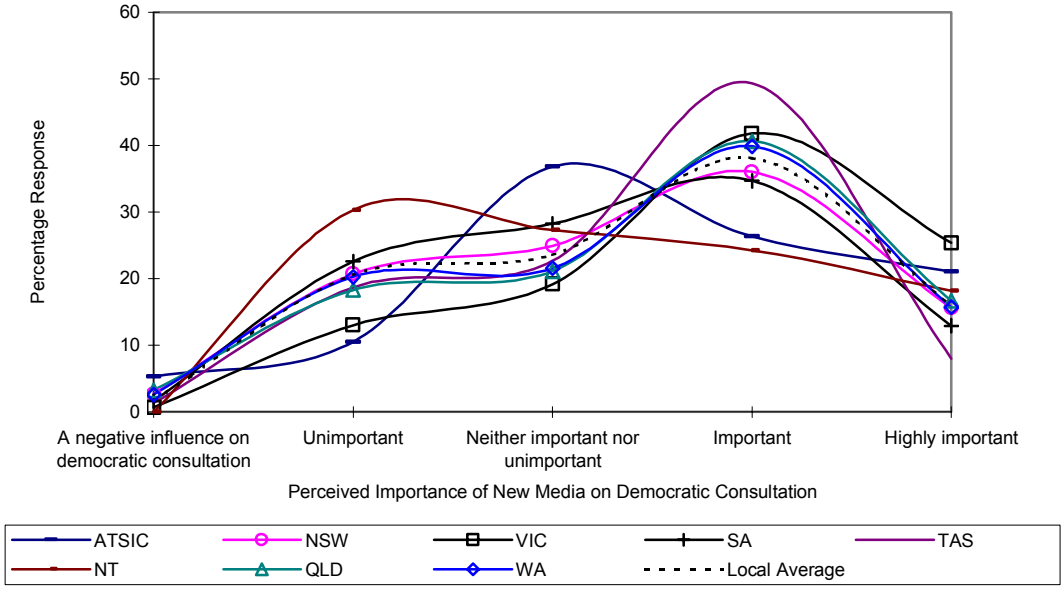
Figure 5.3.1 shows that, for Australian parliamentarians, new media is identified as generally being highly important or important in facilitating consultation with parliamentarians and their constituents. Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and New South Wales report the highest views of the importance of new media in undertaking consultation, with Queensland and South Australian parliamentarians the least importance of this form of representative activity.

Figure 5.3.1: Parliamentarians Views of the Importance of New Media for Consultation



In comparison to figure 5.3.2, but in line with the findings presented in figure 5.1.2, local government councillors report a lower overall view of the importance of new media in facilitating online consultation, with the distribution more evenly spread across the importance continuum. Victorian local government councillors express the highest level of importance of new media technology for democratic consultation, while ATSIC and Northern Territory councillors express the lowest levels of interest in this activity.

Figure 5.3.2: ATSIC and Local Councillors Views of the Importance of New Media for Consultation



Interestingly, with regards to online consultation, very few representatives (less than four percent across the entire population) see new media as having a negative impact on democratic consultation. This view shows that, unlike in the United States

(Goldschmidt, 2001), elected representatives in Australia have not yet had to deal with excessive amounts of constituent electronic mail and SPAM (bulk mail, sent by automatic mailing programs). Where this problem has reached a "crisis level" in the United States (with some congressional offices receiving as many as ten thousand emails per week during the impeachment of former President Clinton), it does not appear to have eventuated in Australia, at this time.

Interest in online consultation between rural and urban representatives matches practice identified in figure 5.1.3, as does the similarity of interest expressed by men and women for this behaviour. Again figure 5.3.5 illustrates that length of service is not a barrier to the perceived importance of new media for online consultation, while figure 5.3.6 shows a direct – but substantially less distinct – correlation between self-reported IT skill level and interest in the use of new media for consultation.

Figure 5.3.3: Importance of New Media for Consultation – Rural / Urban Variances

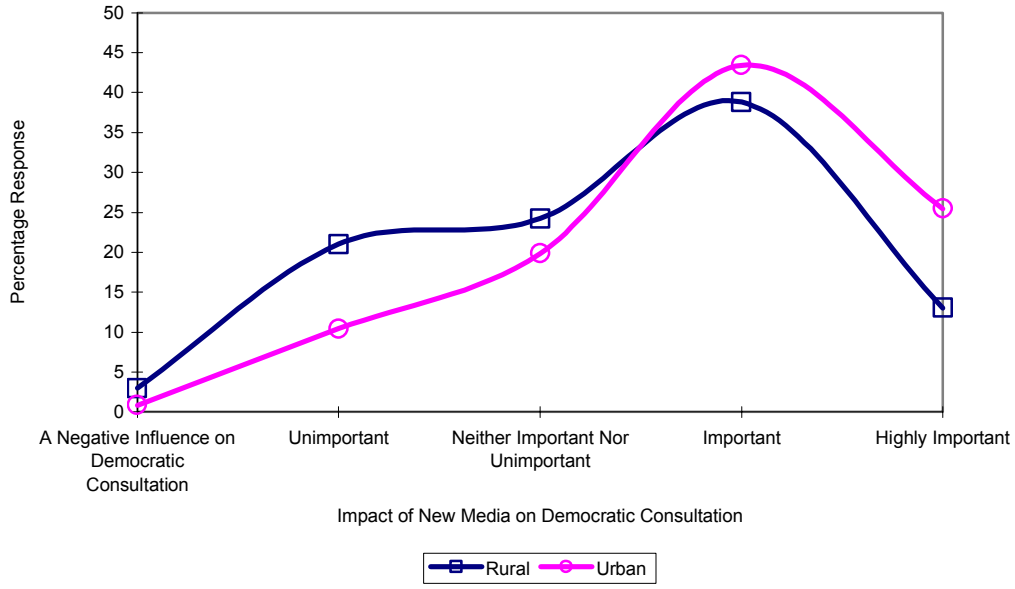


Figure 5.3.4: Importance of New Media for Consultation – Gender Variances

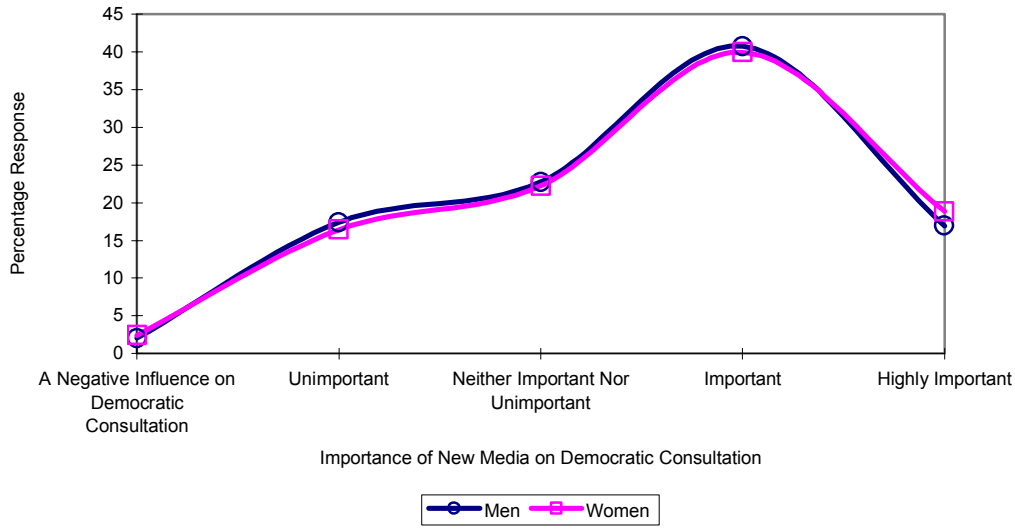


Figure 5.3.5: Importance of New Media for Consultation – Length of Service Variances

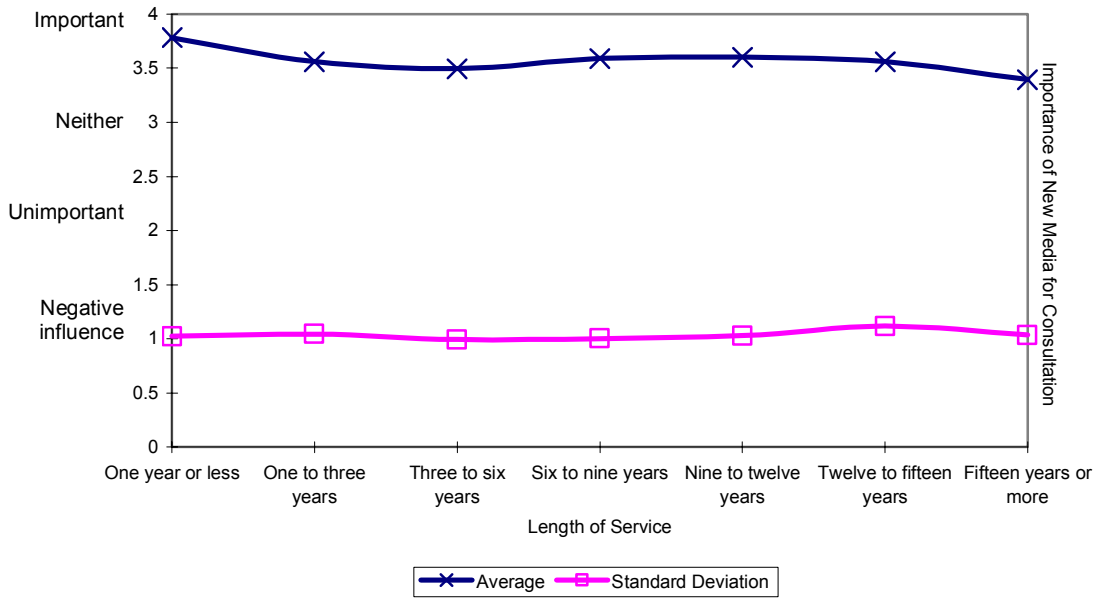
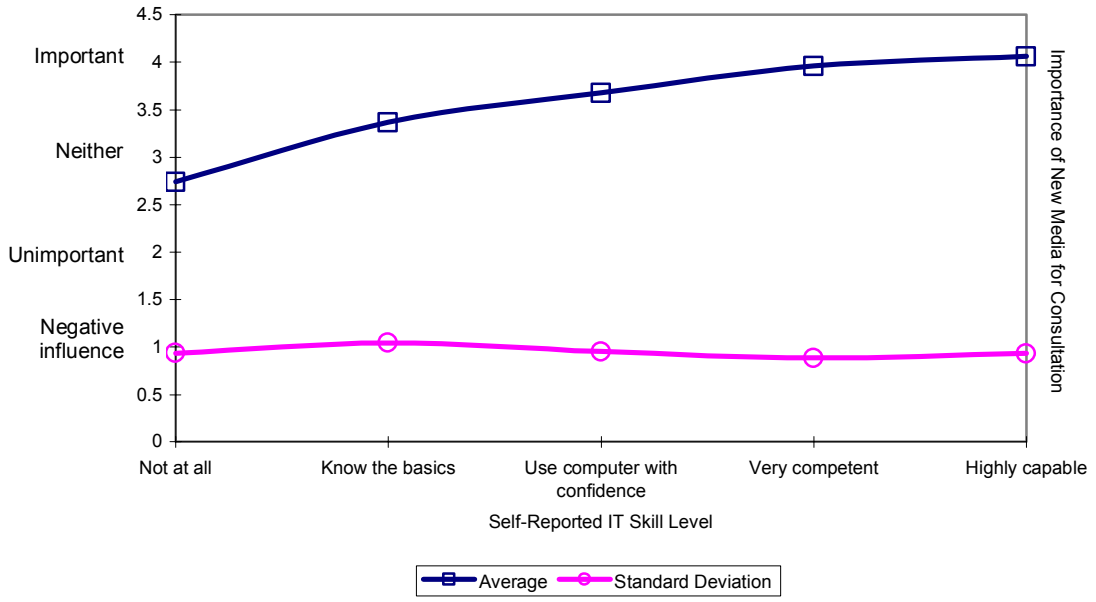


Figure 5.3.6: Importance of New Media for Consultation – IT Skill Level Variances



5.4 Formal Email Logging Processes Implemented[9]

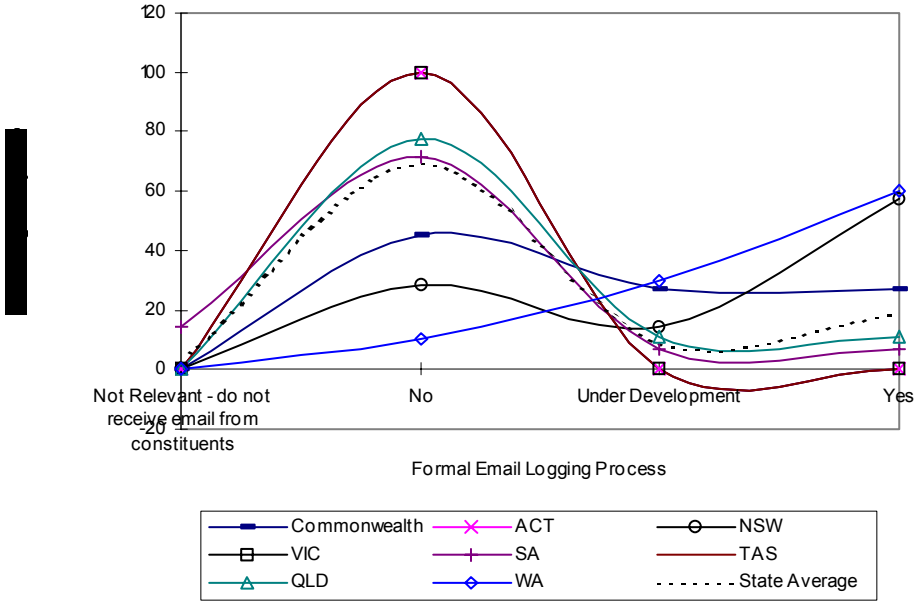
Given the perception of importance of new media for online consultation, survey question A7 attempted to determine if electronic mail was being afforded the same level of records management process as offline correspondence.

With respect to Australian parliamentarians, figure 5.4.1 shows the use of formal email logging and recording processes used. The pattern of adoption of these

[9] With reference to this section, note that 310 online responses were not captured due to a technical error.

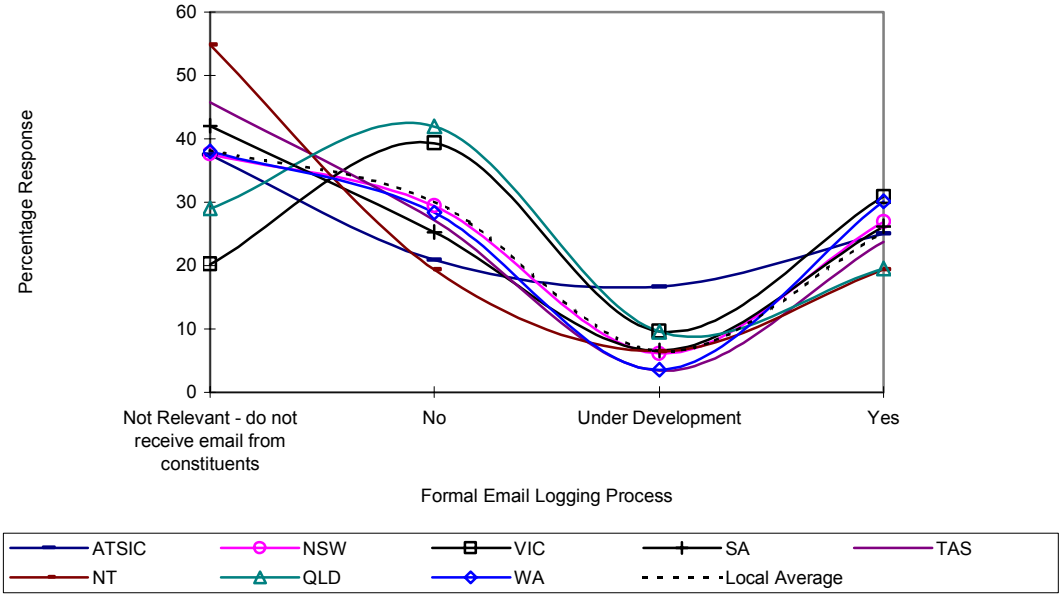
processes remains highly variable between jurisdictions, with nearly sixty-percent of New South Wales and Western Australian parliamentarian reporting these record systems in use, falling to less than thirty percent for Commonwealth members and less than ten percent for the remainder of parliamentarians.

Figure 5.4.1: Use of Formal Email Logging Process by Parliamentarians



ATSIC and local government councillors present a less disparate picture of the adoption of these processes, with a clear trend pattern. Overall, however, adoption of formal email logging processes remains limited, with figure 5.4.2 identifying an average adoption rate of just over twenty-percent.

Figure 5.4.2: Use of Formal Email Logging Process by ATSIC and Local Government Councillors



Formal email logging processes, accounting for variations based on the failure of some representatives to receive constituent email, is seen as unaffected by either rural or urban division (figure 5.4.3) or gender (figure 5.4.4).

Figure 5.4.3: Use of Formal Email Logging Process – Rural / Urban Variances

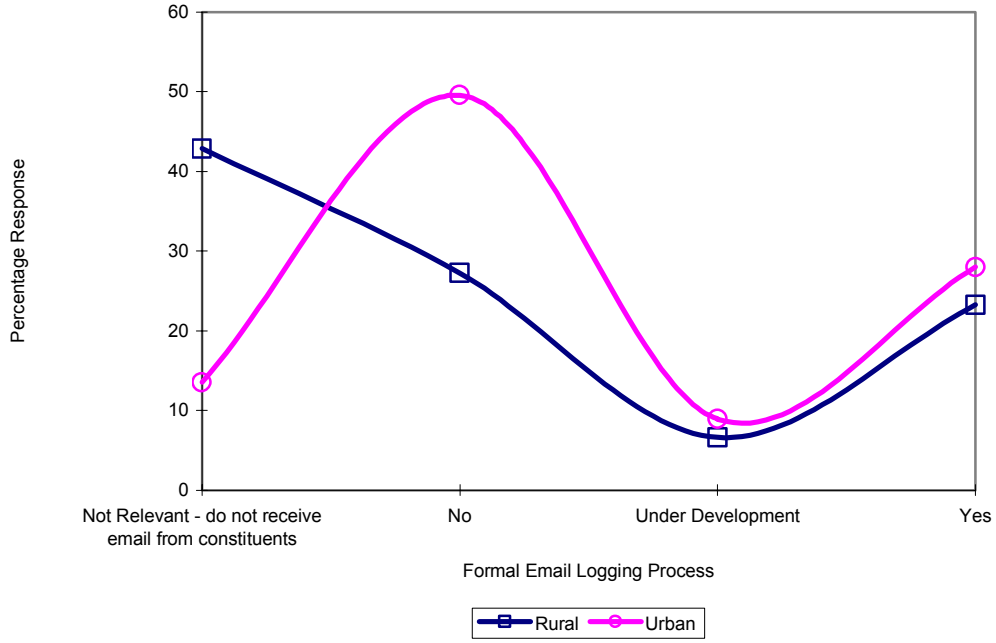
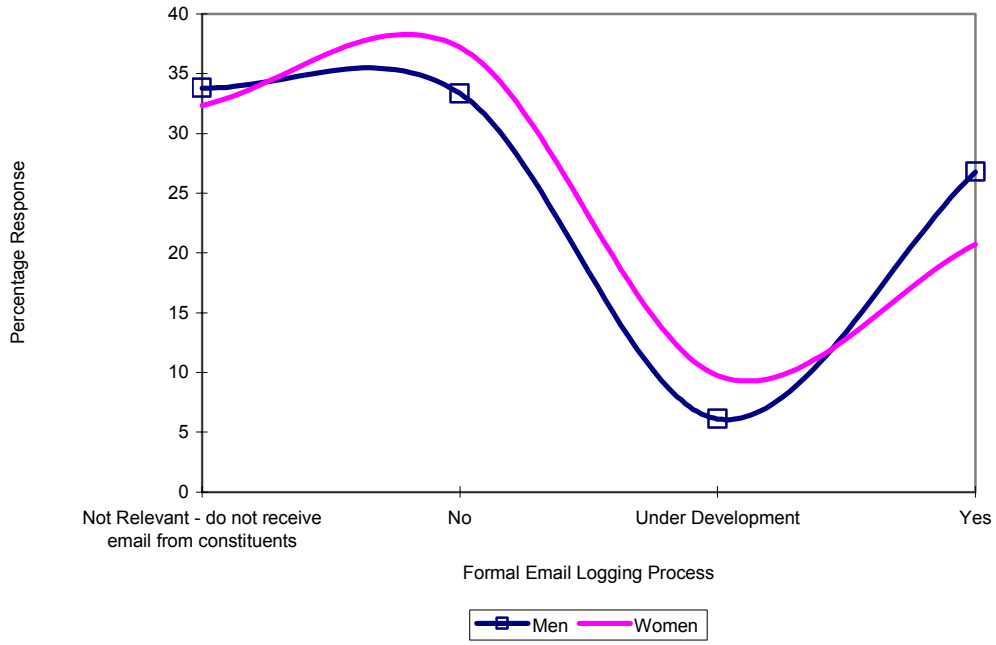


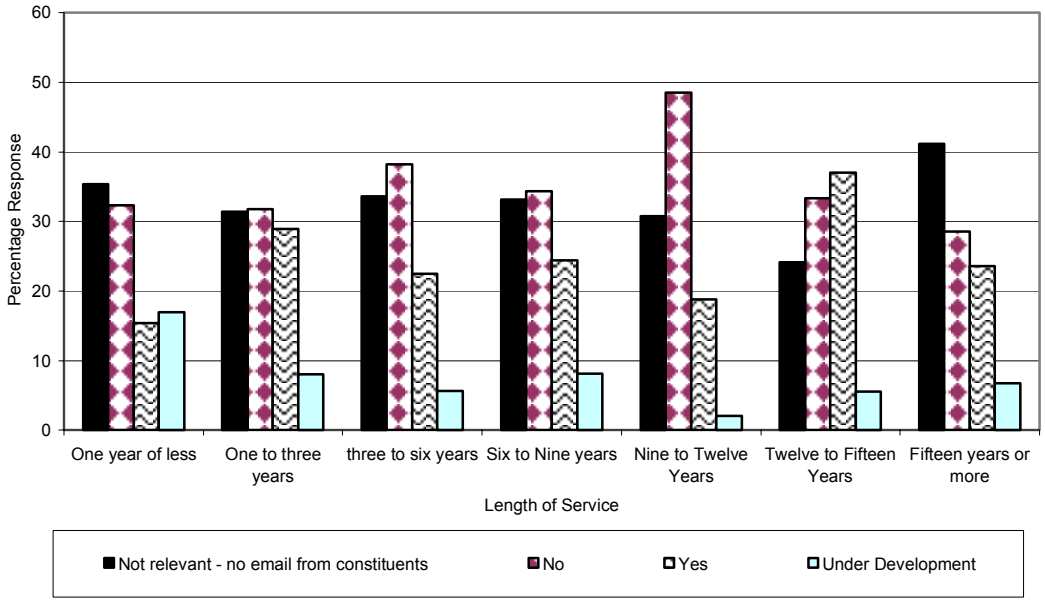
Figure 5.4.4: Use of Formal Email Logging Process – Gender Variances



Length of service impacts upon the uptake of formal email logging processes, with figure 5.4.5 showing that there are wide variations in use of these processes by representatives of various length of service categories. Overall, no clear trend can be

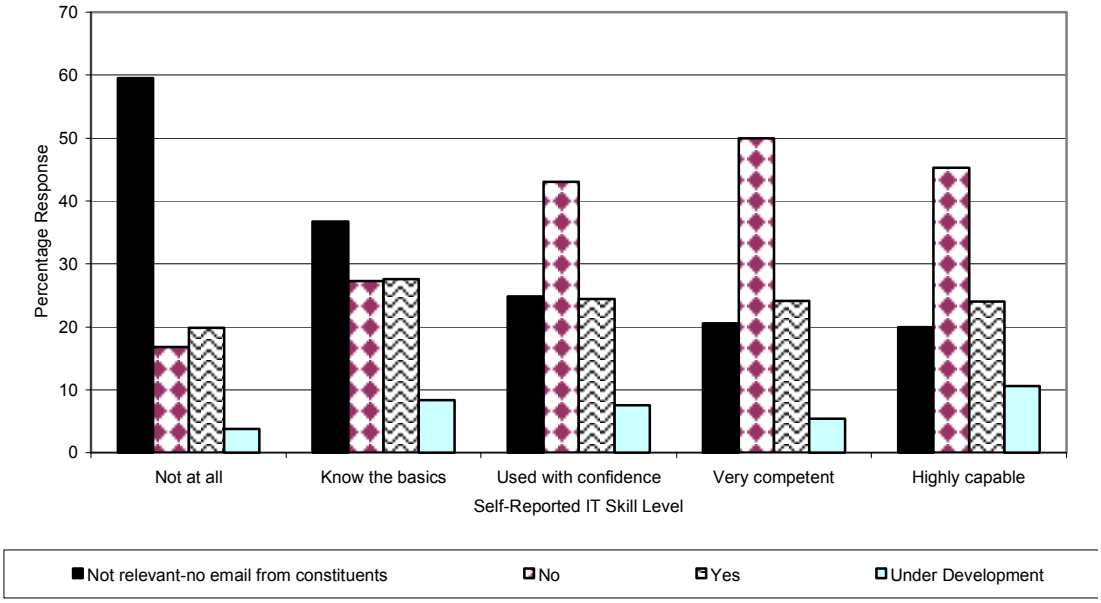
identified, however the low uptake of these processes for representatives serving one year or less may reflect the formative nature of some of these individuals administrative support processes.

Figure 5.4.5: Use of Formal Email Logging Process – Length of Service Variances



Based on an IT skill level breakdown, figure 5.4.6 shows limited impact of skill on the adoption of these processes, with only those representatives who report no computer literacy at all having an uptake level for these processes somewhat lower than the mean (by about five percent).

Figure 5.4.6: Use of Formal Email Logging Process – IT Skill Level Variances



6.0 Media Preferences

This section places the use of new media into the overall context of the variety of communications forms available to elected representatives for communication with their constituencies. Survey question B4 asked representatives to rank nine media forms in terms of their importance in communication with their electorates:

- Television appearances or advertising;
- Radio messages;
- Newspapers (articles or advertising);
- Magazines (articles or advertising);
- Outdoor advertising (billboards, posters, etc.);
- Leafleting or newsletters;
- Internet Website(s);
- Electronic mail or eMail lists; and
- Personal contacts, meetings, or rallies.

In interpreting this section it should be noted that the salience of various media forms is likely to be highly contingent on the representative's position within the electoral cycle, with some media forms – such as outdoor advertising – likely to become more important in the context of campaigning. Overall, tables 6.0.1 through 6.0.5 should be read as general preferences only.

Key Findings for this section:

- Generally, new media is not a communication form that ranks above the forth most popular form of political communication tool for elected representatives across Australia;
- However, new media has supplanted some forms of communication, such as magazines and outdoor advertising, in importance;
- Overall, electronic mail is more relevant than internet websites for elected representatives political communication;
- Across all jurisdictions, elected representatives see personal contacts as the most important form of political communication;
- Magazines are generally viewed as the least important media vehicle for political communication by all elected representatives;
- Local government councillors are more likely to value outdoor advertising than their parliamentary colleagues;
- New media is generally viewed as of low value across all jurisdictions, although local government councillors see electronic mail as more valuable than Australian parliamentarians;
- Leafleting and newsletters remain a popular direct communication channel that may be susceptible to conversion to electronic form with increased penetration of the Internet in Australian households and greater ability for elected representatives to access electronic mailing lists for their constituents;
- Urban elected representatives are more likely to value new media communication than their rural counterparts;
- Newer elected representatives value electronic mail more than their more seasoned colleagues; and
- Preference for new media increases positively with representatives IT skill level.

For Australia's parliamentarians, new media does not hold a high level of importance for the distribution of political information, generally tending to rank sixth or seventh in the nine media forms ranked. Personal contacts tend to be the most popular form of political communication listed in table 6.0.1, with newspapers the most popular form of mass communication. This finding does present a different picture to Party perceptions of the importance of communications methods, as presented by Gibson and Ward (2002:115) where, across a range of minor and major parties, the importance of new media (world wide web and email) was ranked as more important than television and radio news, and newspaper coverage[10]. What this comparison shows, however, is a distinct divergence between elected representatives and their party organizations in terms of media preferences for political information distribution.

Table 6.01: Media Preference Ranking for Australian Parliamentarians

	Commonwealth	**ACT**	**NSW**	**VIC**	**SA**
1	Personal Contacts	Television	Newspapers	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts
2	Newspapers	Personal Contacts	Television	Newspapers	Leafleting
3	Leafleting	Newspapers	Radio Messages	Leafleting	Newspapers
4	Television	Radio Messages	Personal Contacts	Radio Messages	Radio Messages
5	Radio Messages	Electronic Mail	Leafleting	Electronic Mail	Television
6	Electronic Mail	Leafleting	Electronic Mail	Internet Websites	Internet Websites
7	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Television	Electronic Mail
8	Magazines	Magazines	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising
9	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising	Magazines	Magazines
	TAS	**NT**	**QLD**	**WA**	*State Average*
1	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	*Personal Contacts*
2	Newspapers	Leafleting	Leafleting	Newspapers	*Newspapers*
3	Television	Radio Messages	Newspapers	Leafleting	*Leafleting*
4	Radio Messages	Newspapers	Radio Messages	Television	*Television*
5	Leafleting	Electronic Mail	Television	Electronic Mail	*Radio Messages*
6	Electronic Mail	Television	Electronic Mail	Radio Messages	*Electronic Mail*
7	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	*Internet Websites*
8	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising	Magazines	*Magazines*
9	Magazines	Magazines	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising	*Outdoor Advertising*

For ATSIC and local government councillors, personal contacts remain the single most important tool for political communication, with newspapers and leafleting also ranking highly. Television is far less relevant for local government than for parliamentarians, though the popularity of the other broadcast method, radio, is comparative to their preferences listed in table 6.0.1 and reflects the greater number, and more locally-oriented, nature of radio stations in Australia. For local government, electronic mail averages higher in preference when compared to parliamentarians, with Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia having the strongest commitment to new media. Tasmanian local government representatives express least interest in the use of this technology for political communication.

[10] This finding is not based on a ranking scale, as used in the survey instrument for this research, however perception differences are to be expected between political organizations like parties, and individual political candidates. However, overall, when excluding minor parties from Gibson and Wards data set, new media communications channels are more comparative with old media in terms of preference ratings.

Overall, given the local government sector ranks the importance of new media communication lower than parliamentarians (see section 6.3) and has lower and less frequent usage rates of the technology overall (see sections 5.1 and 5.2), this finding may be somewhat counter-intuitive. What this reflects, however, is the low cost nature of the medium to disseminate information to the public and the smaller electorate sizes in local government: making the possibility of compiling electronic mailing lists for constituents easier than for representatives at the parliamentary level[11]. Overall, the clear gap between the preference for electronic mail over website content (which is not found at the parliamentary level) indicates that local councillors recognise the difference between electronic mail as a personalised direct one-to-one communication form, and Internet website content as a more mass medium, with limited potential for personalisation and "pull" content characteristics.

Table 6.02: Media Preference Ranking for ATSIC and Local Government Councillors

	ATSIC	NSW	VIC	SA	TAS
1	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts
2	Radio Messages	Newspapers	Newspapers	Leafleting	Newspapers
3	Newspapers	Leafleting	Leafleting	Newspapers	Leafleting
4	Leafleting	Radio Messages	Electronic Mail	Electronic Mail	Radio Messages
5	Television	Television	Radio Messages	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising
6	Outdoor Advertising	Electronic Mail	Internet Websites	Radio Messages	Television
7	Electronic Mail	Magazines	Magazines	Internet Websites	Magazines
8	Magazines	Internet Websites	Television	Outdoor Advertising	Electronic Mail
9	Internet Websites	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising	Television	Internet Websites

	NT	QLD	WA	*Local Average*
1	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	*Personal Contacts*
2	Leafleting	Newspapers	Leafleting	*Newspapers*
3	Newspapers	Leafleting	Newspapers	*Leafleting*
4	Radio Messages	Radio Messages	Electronic Mail	*Radio Messages*
5	Television	Television	Internet Websites	*Electronic Mail*
6	Outdoor Advertising	Electronic Mail	Outdoor Advertising	*Outdoor Advertising*
7	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Magazines	*Internet Websites*
8	Electronic Mail	Magazines	Radio Messages	*Television*
9	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising	Television	*Magazines*

Figure 6.0.3 illustrates gender and rural / urban variances in media preferences. While no gender variance exists in terms of preferences for media forms, there are significant rural/urban variances with electronic mail far more highly valued among urban representatives, supplanting broadcast media – which is more popular for rural politicians. When comparing rural and urban politicians, the preference for television as a media vehicle is ranked lowly by urban elected representatives. Again, there appears to be a strong divergence between the popularity of media forms between individual political leaders and those of political institutions, such as parties, which view mass media, especially television, as particularly important in the articulation of political communication.

[11] This would be particularly problematic for elected representatives with extremely large electorates, such as upper house members of parliament.

Table 6.0.3: Media Preference Ranking –Gender & Rural / Urban Variances

	Men	Women	Rural	Urban
1	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts
2	Newspapers	Newspapers	Newspapers	Newspapers
3	Leafleting	Leafleting	Leafleting	Leafleting
4	Radio Messages	Radio Messages	Radio Messages	Electronic Mail
5	Electronic Mail	Electronic Mail	Television	Radio Messages
6	Television	Television	Electronic Mail	Internet Websites
7	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Magazines
8	Magazines	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising	Television
9	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising

When considering the impact of length of service on media preferences, figure 6.0.4 shows only minor variations over time spent in office. Overall, electronic mail is ranked slightly less important by representatives who have been in office for nine years or less, while website content remains relatively static over time. Significantly, the top four media forms: Personal contacts, Newspapers, Leafleting or Newsletters, and Radio, remain entirely static over the length of service continuum.

Table 6.0.4: Media Preference Ranking Preferences by Length of Service

	0 - 6 Years	6 – 9 Years	9 – 12 years	12 – 15 years	15+ years
1	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts
2	Newspapers	Newspapers	Newspapers	Newspapers	Newspapers
3	Leafleting	Leafleting	Leafleting	Leafleting	Leafleting
4	Radio Messages	Radio Messages	Radio Messages	Radio Messages	Radio Messages
5	Electronic Mail	Electronic Mail	Television	Television	Television
6	Television	Television	Electronic Mail	Electronic Mail	Electronic Mail
7	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Magazines
8	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising	Internet Websites
9	Outdoor Advertising	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising

The IT skill level of elected representatives has a very strong impact on their preference for new media as a form of political communication, with electronic mail and Internet websites increasing in popularity proportionate with self-reported computer skills.

Table 6.05: Media Preference Ranking Preferences by IT Skill Level

	Not at all	Know the basics	Use with confidence	Very competent	Highly capable
1	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts	Personal Contacts
2	Newspapers	Newspapers	Newspapers	Newspapers	Newspapers
3	Leafleting	Leafleting	Leafleting	Leafleting	Leafleting
4	Radio Messages	Radio Messages	Radio Messages	Electronic Mail	Electronic Mail
5	Television	Television	Electronic Mail	Radio Messages	Internet Websites
6	Magazines	Electronic Mail	Television	Internet Websites	Radio Messages
7	Outdoor Advertising	Magazines	Internet Websites	Television	Television
8	Internet Websites	Internet Websites	Magazines	Magazines	Outdoor Advertising
9	Electronic Mail	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising	Outdoor Advertising	Magazines

7.0 Internet Voting

While online consultation and the distribution of political information reflect the adaptation of new media into the work life of elected representatives, survey question B5 asked elected representatives to express their support for the use of online technology for voting. Representatives could express:

- That they did not support online voting;
- They were uncertain about the value of this approach;
- That they would support online voting for indicative polling only (partial support);
- That they would support online voting for elections monitored by the Australian Electoral Commission (direct conversion of current practice online); or
- That they would support online for all voting, including citizen-initiated referenda (extension of current electoral practice).

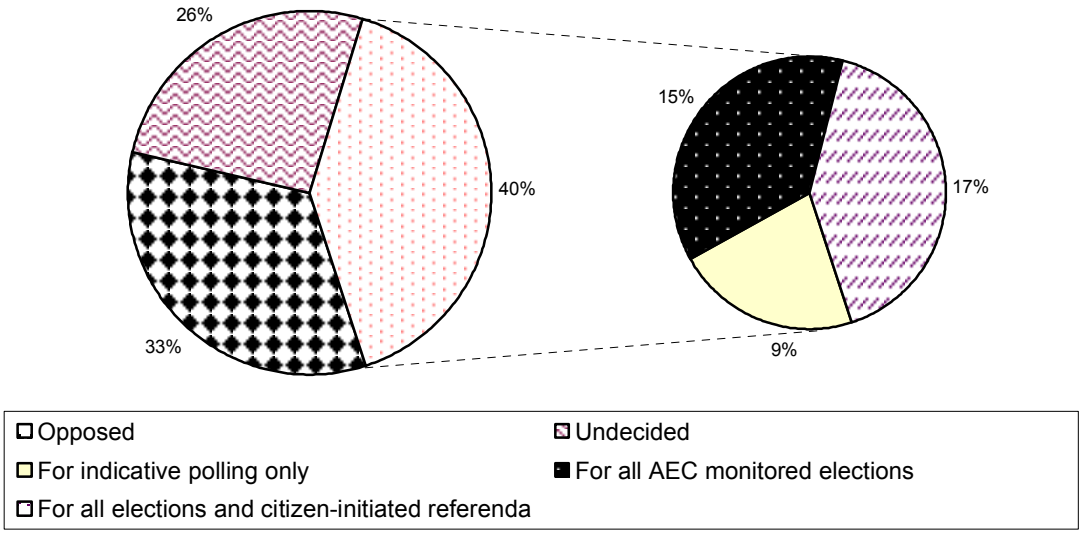
Key Findings for this section:

- Overall, support for online voting is greater than those opposed to this practice;
- Uncertainty, however, remains high;
- There are clear distinctions within the cohort of representatives who support online voting between the three forms proposed.
- Local government councillors are less likely to support online voting than their parliamentary counterparts, and are less likely to express uncertainty in their views;
- Representatives of the Australian Capital Territory are most likely to support the extension of voting online to include citizen-initiated referenda; and
- Support for online voting only marginally increases with the self-reported IT skill level of representatives, however those representatives who report their skill level as "very competent" are more likely to support an extension of current electoral practice to include citizen-initiated referenda.

Within the total population of elected representatives, figure 7.0.1 shows support for online voting. Overall, while a quarter of representatives report uncertainty about the adoption of new media for this purpose, one third of representatives oppose the innovation and forty-percent support the introduction of new voting technology. While this clearly indicates a simple majority support for online voting, within the pro-online voting category, the three different methods – indicative polling, election voting, and election voting including citizen-initiated referenda – attract support ranging from nine to seventeen percent. Interestingly, the extension of current electoral processes to include citizen initiated referenda is the most popular form of online voting method among elected representatives as a whole.

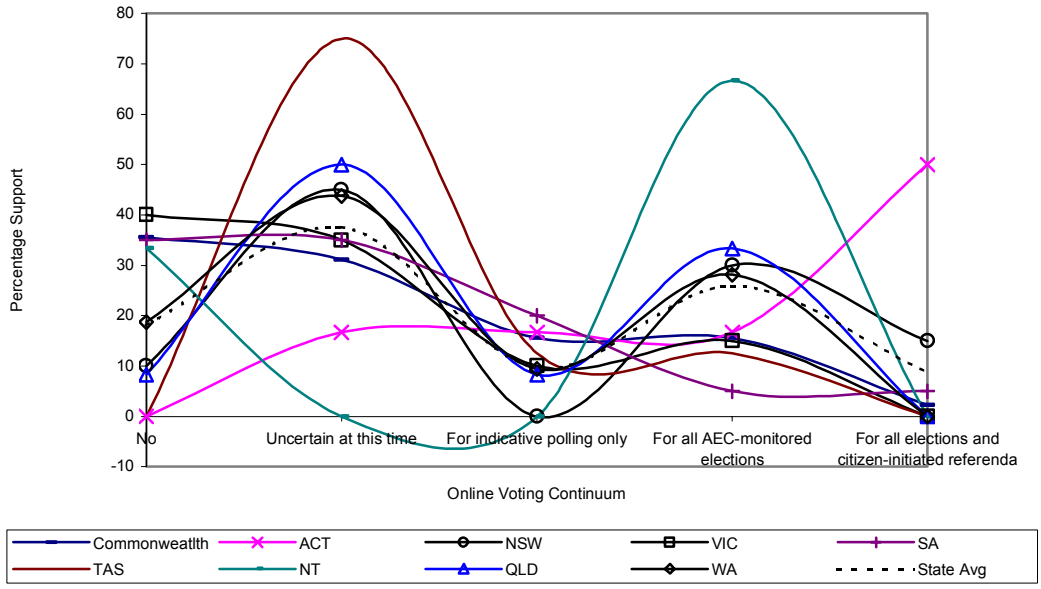
Given the divergent views on the topic, however, it would appear that, unless a consensus model for online voting could be developed, the overall support for this form of voting would be divided and the possibility of introducing the technology into elections around Australia may be limited.

Figure 7.0.1: Support for Online Voting: Overall



In examining parliamentarians' views on the potential of online voting, a clear double hump distribution curve emerges when averaging support for this form of electoral process. Overall, because of the wide variation in support, no generalisation is possible, with Victoria expressing the lowest level of support for online voting[12], closely matched by the Commonwealth and South Australia. Tasmanian parliamentarians express the least certainly about the technological adaptation for voting. Overall, the highest levels of specific support for one online voting form come from the Northern Territory (AEC-monitored elections) and the Australian Capital Territory (all elections and citizen-initiated referenda).

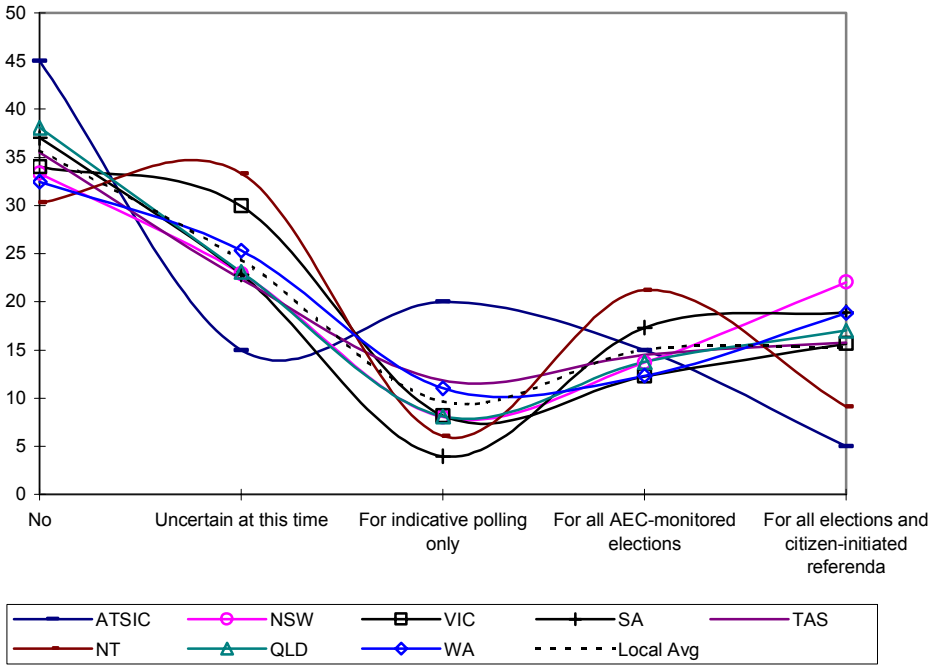
Figure 7.0.2: Support for Online Voting Forms by Parliamentarians



[12] Possibly a problematic finding given the Parliament of Victoria has established an inquiry into electronic democracy and online voting to be conducted in the second half of 2002.

When compared with parliamentarians' views, figure 7.0.3 shows that local councillors and ATSIC councillors express lower overall levels of support for online voting, with a clear majority either directly opposed or uncertain about the adaptation. When compared with parliamentarians' views, councillors have less geographic variation in their levels of support for online voting.

Figure 7.0.3: Support for Online Voting Forms Within ATSIC and Local Government



Rural and urban, and gender comparison show low levels of variation over the support for online voting, with men and women closely matched, while slightly higher support from urban representatives for some form of online voting (about ten percent overall).

Figure 7.0.4: Support for Online Voting Forms – Rural / Urban Variances

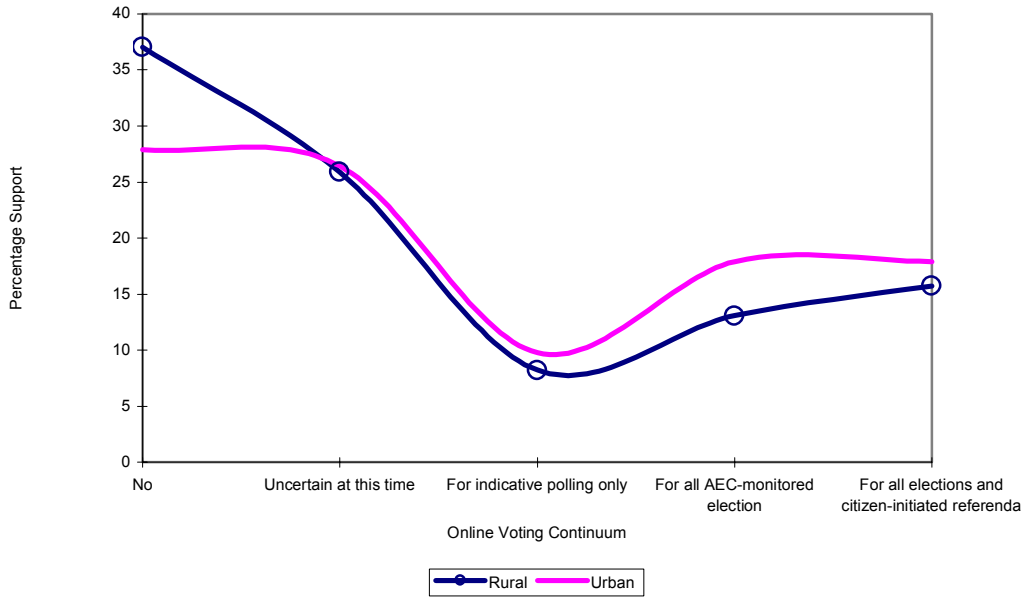
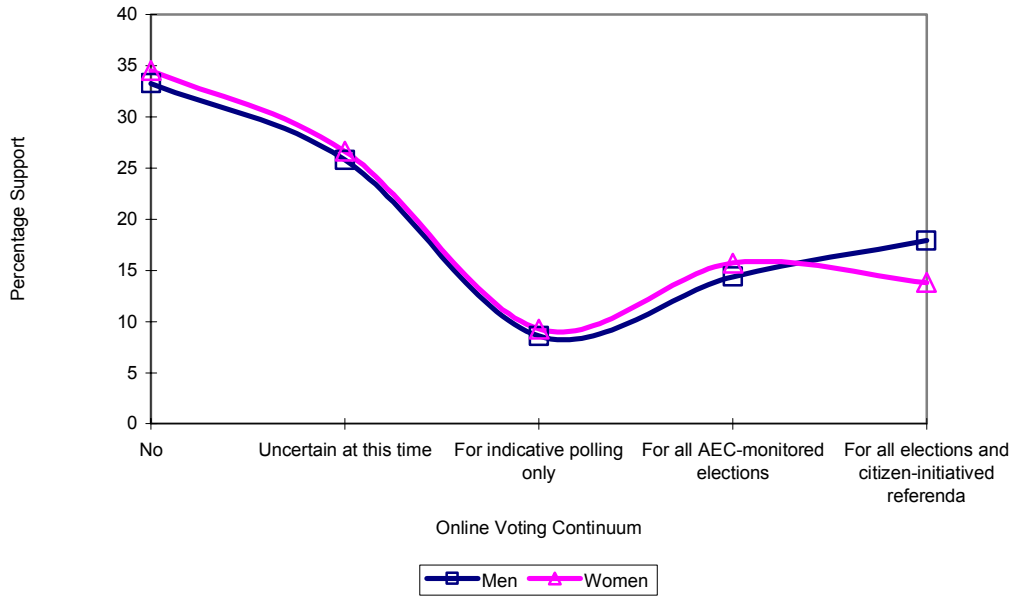
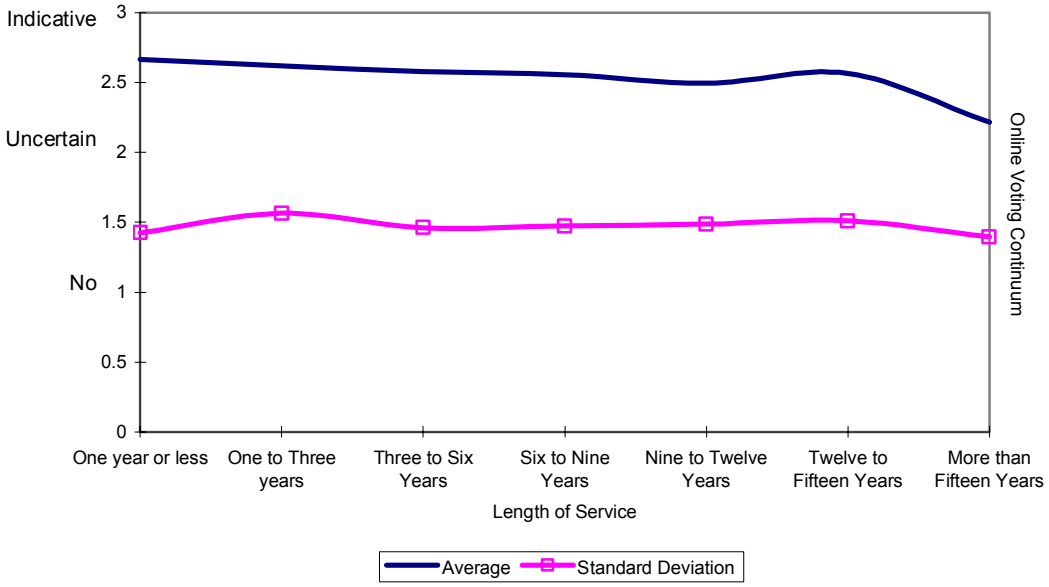


Figure 7.0.5: Support for Online Voting Forms – Gender Variances



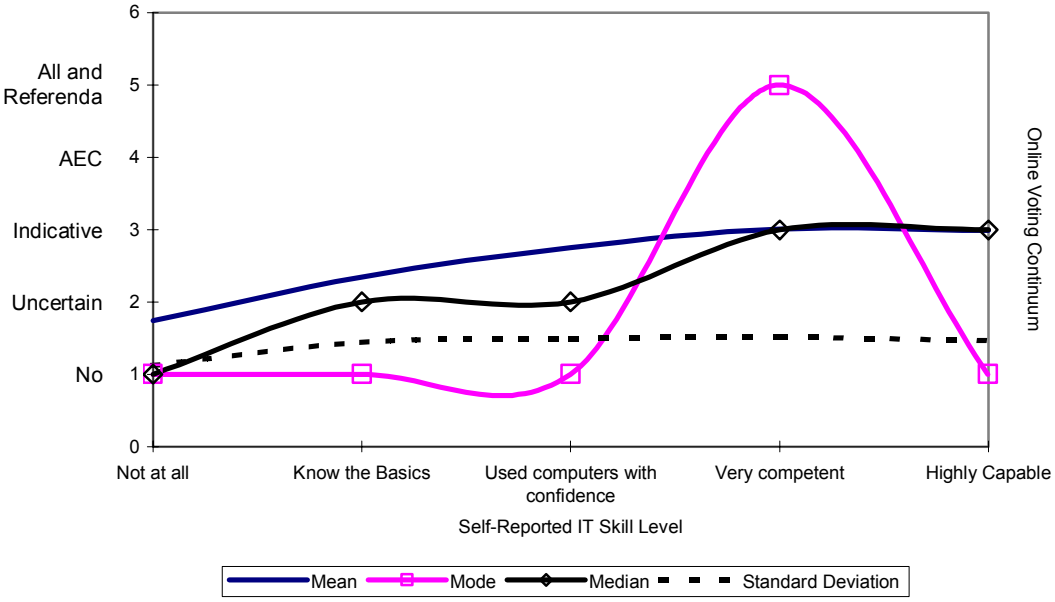
Comparisons between length of service and support for online voting are slightly influential in shaping preference, with a minor tapering off of support for this form of voting among representatives who have spent fifteen years or more in office.

Figure 7.0.6: Support for Online Voting by Length of Service



The self-reported IT skill level of elected representatives has a positive impact in the support for various online voting methods, though the positive impact is only modest, averaging just under one percent increase in support (on the five point scale) from those representatives who report no computer skills to those that report themselves as "highly capable" in the use of computers. Interestingly, for representatives who report themselves "very competent" – the second highest skill level – there is a significant variation in mean, with the use of online voting for all elections and citizen-initiated referenda being the single most preferred voting form. Given no variation in standard deviation for this skill category, we can identify that this group are shifted towards preference to online voting forms in general as opposed to a negative or noncommittal response. Given this variation, therefore, we can determine that, a significant increase in support for online voting is registered with this particular level of skill, which is not carried forward into the highest skill level overall. This illustrates that, while caution exists about online voting for skill levels below "very competent", this is not matched by this category. However this view does not extend into the highest skill level. Enthusiasm, therefore, of the very competent group is replaced with caution as skill increases, possibly reflecting greater understanding of the technical limitations and problems associated with accurate and reliable voting online.

Figure 7.0.7: Support for Online Voting Forms by IT Skill Level



8.0 Conclusion

The survey findings presented in this document represent the state of play as of the end of May 2002. Because of the significant lack of comparative data (either domestically, or internationally), it is difficult to place the findings in a historical or international context. Overall, however, when compared with the population as a whole, Australia's elected representatives are high users of new media technologies, and have very positive outlooks as to the future importance of this media form.

When considering the impact of new media on the democratic process, a number of findings should be considered. First, representatives' media preferences do not place new media as highly important in their information distribution and electioneering activities: a finding that shows that traditional, offline media forms will continue to dominate the electoral process for some time. On the other hand, new media, especially for urban representatives and those with higher skill levels than average, has managed to increase in importance over the last ten years since the popularisation of the technology, supplanting a number of media forms in the importance afforded it by representatives. In addition, there are a large number of elected representatives who see positive value in the use of new media for democratic consultation, and a solid proportion of elected representatives express interest in the use of new media for voting activities.

Overall, however, there appear to be a number of barriers to further uptake and use of these technologies, especially for rural representatives, ATSIC and local government councillors, and councillors with relatively low skill levels. These generally take the form of differential levels of information technology support services (most problematic for local government), infrastructure problems (bandwidth, telecommunications service reliability)[13], and access to representative-specific information about how to use these technologies to support or enrich democratic consultation.

8.1 Policy Recommendations

While the survey instrument was not designed for diagnostic purposes, a number of general recommendations can be identified, should the use of new media be seen as a positive work practice for Australia's elected representatives. These recommendations are:

1. Differential levels of information technology support and resourcing need to be addressed –
    a. Local government especially has wide variations in support services offered to elected representatives. This differential reflects the varying size of councils and their budgets. However should use of new media be seen as a positive work process for good governance, structural bias towards larger councils should be addressed;
    b. Where bandwidth and reliability problems are inhibitors to new media use, consideration should be given to non-terrestrial supply of Internet services (such as two-way satellite);

[13] For a discussion of these issues see the Productivity Commission benchmarking report (2001).

   c. All governments should attempt to provide formal electronic mail archiving and management systems. These systems should be designed with scalability in mind, in the event email from constituents grows to problem levels that have been encountered in the United States; and
   d. Given other council and parliamentary resources are used for consultation and "partisan" political activities (such as the provision of mailing budgets), assistance with the development of interactive new media activities should be considered as a "standard" IT support service.
2. As skill level is a direct determinant of uptake and use, increasing overall IT skill levels among representatives should be implemented –
   e. This increase should be targeted at rural and regional local government; and
   f. As increasing skill level has a direct effect on new media use overall, training should not simply be provided for "basic" computer use, but match interest levels expressed by elected representatives.
3. With respect to online consultation, lesson drawing and experience sharing should be facilitated –
   g. Online consultation tools, case examples, and experiences should be archived in a central repository and a growing resource for parliamentarians; and
   h. Access to this information should also be provided to members of the public (to stimulate electronic democracy initiatives in the commercial and civil sectors), as well as potential candidates (to overcome the advantages of incumbency in the electoral process).

8.2 Further Research

Given the limited comparative value of this research, this survey should be replicated in 2004-5 to provide longitudinal data and examine the changing nature of this cohort over time. In addition, given that the data set upon which this research was based provided only surface level indicators (use, interest, importance, *etc.*) the depth of analysis has been limited to generalisation based on trends. Further research into the exact views of the technology, how the technology is being used, and spread of peer-specific information through the social networks of elected representatives would be valuable in providing more insight into the use and diffusion of these technologies, and provide more data upon which to evaluate the impact of new media on the policy making and implementation processes.

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Appendix A: Methodology

The aim of the research project was to assess Australia's Elected Representatives:

- Levels of use;
- Democratic utilisation; and
- Perceived importance

of new media technologies (Internet and online services) in democratic activity.

To assess these three areas of interest, a seventeen question, largely multiple-choice survey was developed. The survey was developed in two formats: hardcopy for those respondents without an email address and an online survey for those contactable via email. Learning from a previous, unpublished online survey[14], the online survey URL issued to respondents incorporated a check digit that allowed respondents to be automatically verified and allowed for automatic capture of some basic statistical information (tier of government, state or territory of electorate/council, and initial method of contact).

Sample

The identified population of the research project was every serving elected political representative in Australia. A sampling frame was constructed to provide email and mailing addresses for 6,767 of elected representatives from available public sources. From the sampling frame approximately 29% of representatives had identifiable email addresses, the remaining 4,792 were contacted via postal addresses.

Limitations

Two basic research limitations are apparent. First, the sampling method is not perfect. While attempting to sample the entire target population, a number of elected representatives at the local government level could not be contacted because of inability to locate names and addresses and the inevitable shortfall between published information and governments that may have been going through elections. Second, some limitations result from the data capture method utilised. While email invitations were used for representatives with email addresses (allowing respondents to directly "click through" to the online survey) and paper invitations issued to those without, this approach may have some limitations, namely:

- The presence of an email address does not guarantee the representative used it (emails may have gone unread); and

As the survey was concerned with ascertaining the use and interest in the medium, the email invitations may have biased responses back towards those representatives with a higher degree of computer literacy and/or interest in the medium. While this may have been moderated by the use of paper-based surveys, Yun and Trumbo (2000) have observed that in general comparison of post, email and web surveys, the use of multiple collection methods attracted a disproportionate response from those using online response methods.

[14] This initial research utilised a CGI script using Perl language to capture data to a comma delineated text file (CSV). The research instrument in this research developed this technique, using PHP scripting to allow for verification imbedded in the unique URL issued to each respondent, this limited the amount of input required from participants and provided additional security to the data capture instrument. The survey was enhanced slightly with basic java scripting to prevent text entry violation of the designated field separation character. In addition, the use of PHP allowed browser types and domain origins to be automatically logged for analysis. Overall, the PHP script had a number of distinct advantages over the original Perl CGI bin method and would be recommended for future online research of this type.

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Survey of New Media Use Among Australia's Elected Representatives

Thank you for your interest in this research project. The aims of this research are to:

Determine the current use, interest in, and importance of new media technologies (online services) by Australia's elected representatives.

This research is being conducted by Dr Peter Chen of the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Melbourne, thank-you for you time and interest. Please complete both sides of this survey.

(A) Current Use of Online Technology

1. How often do you use the World Wide Web ("browsing" or "surfing" the Internet)? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Less than once a month (or sporadically)
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ A member of my staff undertakes this function on my behalf
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Daily
- ☐ More than once a day

2. How often do you use electronic mail? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Less than once a month (or sporadically)
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ A member of my staff undertakes this function on my behalf
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Daily
- ☐ More than once a day

3. Additional Online Services do you use regularly (more than once a month): *[Check all that apply]*

- ☐ Internet Relay Chat
- ☐ Online Conferencing (Internet meetings)
- ☐ Newsgroups (*i.e.* Usenet, Google or Yahoo Groups, or DejaNews)
- ☐ Electronic Mailing Lists (*i.e.* Majodomo lists)
- ☐ Virtual Workspace (online collaborative work area)
- ☐ I maintain a personal website with political information
- ☐ A personal website with political information is maintained on my behalf by my Party, the public service / council staff, or another other party
- ☐ Telecommuting (working remotely from my office(s) or from home using the Internet)
- ☐ Other

4. Are you aware of any examples of online consultation between elected representatives and the public (if so, please provide details)?

5. Do you use online media to communicate with your electorate? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ A member of my staff undertakes this function on my behalf
- ☐ No
- ☐ Uncertain

6. Do you feel your public service Information Technology (IT) support unit / personnel (*i.e.* parliamentary department, council staff) is sufficiently empowering you to utilise online technologies? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Yes - very helpful
- ☐ Yes - somewhat helpful
- ☐ Neither
- ☐ No - unhelpful
- ☐ No - very unhelpful

7. If you receive email from your constituents, do you have a similar process for logging incoming and outgoing email as for paper correspondence? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Not relevant - Don't receive email from constituents
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Under development

(B) Importance of New Media

1. How important to your work life are new media technologies (email, internet and online services and information)? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Not at all important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Highly important
- ☐ Of minor importance
- ☐ Important

2. Over the next two years, do you think the importance of this technology to your work life will change? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Yes - increase in importance
- ☐ Yes - decrease in importance
- ☐ No - stay the same
- ☐ Uncertain at this time

3. How important are new media technologies in assisting or facilitating consultation with your constituents? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Highly important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neither important nor not important
- ☐ Unimportant
- ☐ A negative influence on democratic consultation

4. Using the boxes below, please rank the listed media from 1 to 9 in terms of their importance in your political communication to constituents, with 1 representing the most important communication method, and 9 the least important? *[Please number each box]*

- ☐ Television appearances or advertising
- ☐ Radio messages
- ☐ Newspapers (articles or advertising)
- ☐ Magazines (articles or advertising)
- ☐ Outdoor Advertising (Billboards, posters, etc.)
- ☐ Leafleting / Newsletters
- ☐ Internet Website(s)
- ☐ Email Communication of eMailing Lists
- ☐ Personal Contacts / Meetings / Rallies

5. Would you support the introduction of voting Online (via a technology like the Internet, interactive television, or interactive voice response telephone system)? *[Select one]*

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes - for indicative polling only
- ☐ Uncertain at this time
- ☐ Yes - for all AEC-monitored elections
- ☐ Yes - for all elections and citizen-initiated referenda

(C) Statistical Information

1. What is your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. How many years, in total, have you served as an elected representative in Australia?

3. How computer literate would you consider yourself? *[Select one]*

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Know the basics
- ☐ Use computers with confidence
- ☐ Very competent
- ☐ Highly capable

4. Please check this box if this survey has been completed by another person on behalf of the elected representative (*i.e.* by a staff member, volunteer, party member, family member or friend):

- ☐ Survey completed on the behalf of the elected representative

5. Please check this box if your electorate / ward / council is in rural or regional Australia (*i.e.* your elector base resides outside a major metropolitan centre):

- ☐ Yes, my electorate, ward, or council is in rural or regional Australia

6. *(optional question)* Can we contact you to discuss any of the issues raised in this survey (if so, please provide contact details, such as an email address)?

(Those respondents providing an email address will be notified of the results of the survey, when completed - email addresses will not be stored with the data gathered from the survey, please specify if you would like a copy of the results sent to your, but not be contacted for follow up questions)

End of survey.

Thank-you again for your participation in this survey, please mail this survey to:

Dr Peter Chen
Department of Political Science
The University of Melbourne
Victoria, 3010

Appendix C: Response Rates

Table C1: Response Rate by Instrument Type

	Issued	Returned to Sender	Responded Online	Responded by Post
Email	1,965 (29.03%)	51	427	19
Mail	4,792 (70.97%)	18	106	769
Total:	6,767	69	533 (40.34%)	788 (59.66%)
	Total Sample:	6,698	Total Response:	1,321 (19.72%)

Figure C1: Percentage of Online Responses by Rural / Urban Division

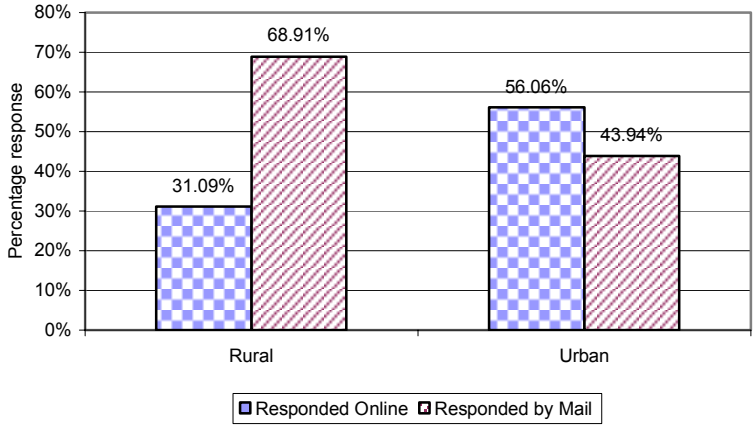

Table C2: Response Rate by Jurisdiction

	Electorate Location	Issued	Received	Response Rate
Federal	ACT	4	1	17.74%
	NSW	62	11	26.53%
	VIC	49	13	20.83%
	SA	24	5	11.11%
	TAS	18	2	25%
	NT	4	1	25.64%
	QLD	39	10	11.54%
	WA	26	3	20.42%
	Total	*266*	*46*	*20.42%*
State and Territory	ACT	17	6	35.29%
	NSW	133	20	15.04%
	VIC	130	21	16.15%
	SA	69	20	28.99%
	TAS	38	8	21.05%
	NT	25	3	12%
	QLD	89	12	13.48%
	WA	91	32	35.16%
	Total	*592*	*122*	*22.15%*
ATSIC	NSW	70	5	7.14%
	VIC	25	3	12%
	SA	32	3	9.38%
	TAS	12	1	8.33%
	NT	74	0	0%
	QLD	81	7	8.64%
	WA	91	1	1.1%
	Total	*385*	*20*	*6.66%*
Local Government	NSW	1736	341	19.64%
	VIC	600	150	25%
	SA	460	127	27.61%
	TAS	283	76	26.85%
	NT	639	35	5.48%
	QLD	1159	250	21.57%
	WA	687	155	22.56%
	Total	*5564*	*1134*	*21.25%*

Figure C2: Percentage of Surveys Completed by Person Other than the Elected Representative

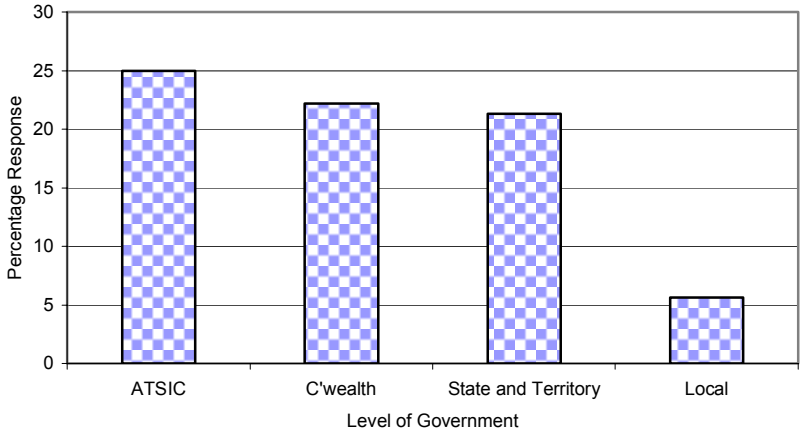

Table C3: Gender Comparison

		Population Demographic		Sample Demographic	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Parliamentarians	C'Wealth (1997)	54%	46%	62.23%	37.77%
	ACT	65%	35%	66.67%	33.33%
	NSW	78%	22%	85%	15%
	VIC	74%	26%	65%	35%
	SA	70%	30%	75%	25%
	TAS	77%	23%	62.5%	37.5%
	NT	72%	28%	100%	0%
	QLD	66%	36%	91.67%	8.33%
	WA	84%	16%	75%	25%
Local Government (as at August 2001)	NSW	85%	15%	68.64%	31.36%
	VIC	79%	21%	68.92%	31.08%
	SA	75%	25%	67.72%	32.28%
	TAS	76%	24%	72.37%	27.63%
	NT	84%	16%	51.43%	48.57%
	QLD	85%	15%	61.6%	38.4%
	WA	78%	22%	70.59%	29.41%

Table C4: Length of Service Comparison

	Population Demographic		Sample Demographic	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
Commonwealth (1997)	8.6 years	5.9 years	8.87 years	6.4 years
Victorian Parliamentarians	7.7 years	5.3 years	8.94 years	7.84 years
Tasmanian Parliamentarians	8.7 years	6.7 years	6.14 years	6.41 years

Table C5: Rural / Urban Division Comparison

		Population Demographic		Sample Demographic	
		Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Tasmanian Parliamentarians[α]		68%	32%	62.5%	37.5%
Victorian Parliamentarians		26%	74%	28.57%	71.43%
Local Government[β]	NSW	53%	47%	68.03%	31.97%
	VIC	27%	73%	54.67%	45.33%
	SA	65%	35%	44.09%	55.91%
	TAS	66%	34%	88.16%	11.84%
	NT	91%	9%	82.86%	17.14%
	QLD	57%	43%	44.09%	55.91%
	WA	73%	27%	49.68%	50.32%

[α] This measure is based on information provided by the Tasmanian Parliamentary Service and is an approximate indicator only.
This measure is based on the Department of Transport and Regional Services 2001 Local Government National Report, the statistics here a representative of council numbers only, not Councillors. In addition, self-reporting of rural/urban division is likely to vary from the Commonwealth classification system.

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