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Abstract—The influence of Social Media is intensifying in global societies. As the technologies become cheaper and the acceptance of Web 2.0 becomes widespread, the power of social media on citizens, particularly the integrated influence of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Blogs cannot be underestimated. In this paper, we attempt a deliberation through the lens of carbon tax debate in Australia where the influence of Social Media has perhaps begun to portend the role of elected representation in this representative democracy.

Keywords: Representative Democracy, Web 2.0, Facebook, Carbon Tax, Australia

INTRODUCTION

We live in a globalized world where democracy is an accepted and popular form of governance. As the protuberant philosopher Dahrendorf (2004) writes, “Democracy is an ensemble of institutions aimed at giving legitimacy to the exercise of political power by providing a coherent response to three questions: (1) How can we achieve change in our society without violence? (2) How can we, through a system of checks and balances, control those who are in power in a way that gives us assurance that they will not abuse it? and (3) How can the people – all the citizens – have a voice in the exercise of power?” (Dahrendorf, 2001: p1). While democracy continues to remain a trendy form of governance that can either foster a cohesive political structure by engaging citizens or destabilize ephemeral societies by dissolving accord and fuelling differences (Hay, 2005), the notion of democracy itself has been changing by countless stimuli such as ideologies, politics, religion and more significantly, technological evolutions (King, 2006) and the rise of Web 2.0 in recent times (Fraunholz and Unnithan, 2010).

The focus of this paper is on the representative democracy of Australia. Seminal allusion (Norris, 2003) argues that theoretically, citizens are allowed to choose candidates to represent their opinion in this form of democracy. Information is communicated to citizens, so that they are sufficiently informed to cast a vote in favor of a suitable candidate. The elected representatives then collect citizen referendums on behalf of the citizens, to debate and agree upon in the governmental institutions (Norris, 2003, p4). Underlying principles of representative democracy is that governance is kept accountable as an opportunity is provided to the citizens to have their preferences weighted equally in their choice of leaders, through elections. However, as we have argued previously, the concept of democracy itself is no longer synonymous with a united understanding of the citizen objectives, due to apathetic voters (Fraunholz and Unnithan, 2008). In modern times, there is increasing advocacy for participatory democracy (Kramer, 1972), a process that highlights broader participation of
constituents in governance processes or rather strives to create opportunities for all citizens to make equal and meaningful contributions. And in the last decade, this process has been facilitated by e-governance.

The use of ICTs and Web 2.0 in combination to facilitate governance by engaging citizens in democracies is commonly referred to as e-governance. Since 2001, e-voting, weblogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter etc has been deployed in e-governance in the process of transitioning democracies into e-democracies or cyber democracies. Good governance is often visualized as the engagement of citizens in public policy-making via e-Forums, e-Consultations, e-Referenda, e-Voting, and other forms of e-Participation (Gupta, 2006). The use of Internet is emphasized for typical enhancements such as making processes more accessible, extending citizen participation in public policy making so that the broader influence will result in smarter policies, increasing accountability and political legitimacy.

Representative democracies depend on informed and engaged citizen votes. Traditionally, the print media and lately the television were protagonists in informing citizens. The newspaper had been the most powerful medium in stirring public debate and influencing voters for decades. As the television era progressed, the information that was originally provided to citizens via the print media, became more thought provoking. For example, instead of passively watching news, today, we have debates, or even question time where real people pose questions, which is then to be answered by a potential candidate. This discussion is telecast to wider audiences. In a representative democracy, these forums enabled a better conduit for casting the informed vote, to elect a representative.

Nonetheless, as a corpus of research indicates (Putnam, 2000) these traditional forms of media were still not rousing a reaction from the disinterested common man, resulting in a steady decline from mid 20th century until present, in civic engagement. At this juncture, scholars concerned with the future of democracies had begun turning their attention on to the potential of Internet-based social practices to perhaps assuage this trend (Freelon, 2010). Today, online social media is powerful and pervading daily life. Unlike the other forms of media, online media prompts interaction and it can be integrated well with other different types of media.

In recent times, there has been a shift towards integrating various forms of media in an effort to merge citizen views. For example, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has varied channels for informing citizens, such as radio, television, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter. A news item can be commented upon and debated via Facebook page or as a comment if it is available via YouTube. Taking a cue from this integration, the Australian government has attempted to reach out to citizens via direct mail to households, which not only informs the citizen of a particular issue, but also seeks opinion from them, which can be provided via online channels such as a website or Facebook page. This seamless integration gives rise to constant feedback directly from citizens, raising interesting challenges to the role of the elected representation in this democracy. Our paper is set in this premise, and focusing on the carbon tax debate.
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Our earlier research on presidential elections in 2007 (Fraunholz and Unnithan, 2009) revealed an increased citizen-to-citizen engagement including Internet based debates, speculation and partisan opinion exhibited via Blogs. Nevertheless, the question remained as to whether Web 2.0 tools, while engaging citizens, had also manipulated public opinion to an extent, and is so, how? In this continuum, we explored the carbon tax debate in Australia, which has perhaps not only swayed public opinion, but also threatened the role of elected representation in this representative democracy.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 offers the background on carbon tax. The subsequent section offers taxonomies that are relevant in this research followed by a section on theoretical lens used for analysis. Consequently, in section 5 and sub sections, we deconstruct the carbon tax discourse in Australia via Web 2.0 and conclude with rhetoric.

**BACKGROUND—THE CARBON TAX**

Preservation of environment is on the agenda of every nation today. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, produced the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC or FCCC), an international environmental treaty in 1992 (Hoeller & Wallin, 1991). The objective of this treaty is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that could prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system (Hoeller & Wallin, 1991). National science academies (Climate Change at the national academies, 2009) and the Assessment Reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007) have pointed out the potential impacts of human-induced climate change. Conversely, scientific accord worldwide is that human-induced greenhouse gas emissions are the main cause of global warming and carbon dioxide is one of the most vital of the many heat trapping greenhouse gases. It is estimated that 27 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide are produced annually by human activity.

Carbon taxes are one of the policy measures that can be used in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels (Hepburn, 2006). A carbon tax is essentially an environmental tax that is levied on the carbon content of fuels. It is an indirect tax, which is a tax on a transaction, which is opposed to the direct tax that taxes income. A carbon tax can be implemented by taxing the burning of fossil fuels—coal, petroleum products such as gasoline and aviation fuel, and natural gas—in proportion to their carbon content. Carbon taxes are a regressive tax, in that they disproportionately affect low-income groups. The regressive nature of carbon taxes can be addressed by using tax revenues to favour low-income groups (IPCC, 2007). However, there is substantial opposition to such taxes in most countries of the world, especially those countries which rely on coal as a major generator of low cost power, and which are among the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide. Prices of carbon (fossil) fuels are expected to continue increasing as more countries industrialize and add to the demand on fuel supplies (International Energy outlook, 2010). In addition to creating incentives for energy conservation, a carbon tax would put renewable energy sources such as wind, solar and geothermal on a more competitive footing.
Many OECD countries have taxed fuel directly for many years for some applications; for example, the UK imposes duty directly on vehicle hydrocarbon oils, including petrol and diesel fuel (OECD, 2008). The duty is adjusted to ensure that the carbon content of different fuels is handled with equivalence. While a direct tax should send a clear signal to the consumer, its use as an efficient mechanism to influence consumers' fuel use has been challenged in some areas (OECD, 2008):

• There may be delays of a decade or more as inefficient vehicles are replaced by newer models and the older models filter through the 'fleet'.
• There may be political reasons that deter policy makers from imposing a new range of charges on their electorate.
• There is some evidence that consumers' decisions on fuel economy are not entirely aligned to the price of fuel. In turn, this can deter manufacturers from producing vehicles that they judge have lower sales potential. Other efforts, such as imposing efficiency standards on manufacturers, or changing the income tax rules on taxable benefits, may be at least as significant.
• In many countries fuel is already taxed to influence transport behavior and to raise other public revenues. Historically, they have used these fuel taxes as a source of general revenue, as their experience has been that the price elasticity of fuel is low, thus increasing fuel taxation has only slightly impacted on their economies. However, in these circumstances the policy behind a carbon tax may be unclear. Some also note that a suitably priced tax on vehicle fuel may also counterbalance the rebound effect that has been observed when vehicle fuel consumption has improved through the imposition of efficiency standards. Rather than reduce their overall consumption of fuel, consumers have been seen to make additional journeys or purchase heavier and more powerful vehicles (OECD, 2008).

**CONTEXTUAL TAXONOMIES**

**Media** in the context of this paper refers to all forms of media, including print, radio, television, Internet and Web 2.0 based social media. However, the focus is on Internet and Web 2.0 integration with other media formats. We have considered a few of the social media that has been found relevant for this deliberation, in this taxonomy, which is not an exhaustive list.

**Blogs** which are a shortened version of web logs, a form of micropublishing, have become an established way of citizen participation on the Web (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Blogging as a concept began with publishing online diaries. From then, building on the power and capacity to engage people in collaborative activities, debates and sharing knowledge and due to the ease of use from any Internet connection point, they have become an established web based communication tool. Many Blog clusters have formed links according to common interests. Among these, political Blogs seem to be the fastest growing in the past few years. The term *Blogosphere* is often used to denote the collection of Blogs, as they exist in communities.
YouTube is a company founded in February 2005 (YouTube, 2011) which has become the world leader in online video provision, and the leading platform to watch and share videos globally through the web. It has become a forum for people to connect, inform and inspire others and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers. It allows easy upload and sharing of video clips on www.YouTube.com and across the Internet through linked websites, mobile devices such as the iPhone, blogs, and email.

The highlights of this venture are that it enables presentation of first hand accounts of current events and sharing of quirky/unusual video clips. It empowers people to become broadcasters, involving them in events. In November 2006, YouTube was purchased by Google Inc. and has since developed numerous partnership deals with content providers such as the BBC, Universal Music Group, Sony Music Group, Warner Music Group, NBA, etc. In 2008, the Interactive YouTube feature Annotations was launched and Sony Bravia television sets integrated YouTube. In 2009, YouTube Auto-Share to social networks and Webmail were launched. The same year, the first major network deal was signed for catch-up TV on YouTube: Channel 4 (YouTube, 2011).

Facebook is a social networking service and website launched in February 2004, privately owned by Facebook, Inc (Facebook, 2011). The name originated from the colloquial name for the book given to students at the start of academic year by university administration in the United States, to help students understand each other better. Initially, the facility was limited to Harvard students, later extended to Boston, Ivy League and Stanford and eventually to anyone 13 years and older. In July 2011, Facebook had more than 750 million active users. Users may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile.

A January 2009 Compete.com study ranked Facebook as the most used social networking service by worldwide monthly active users (Kazeniac, 2009). In the context of this paper, it is worth considering that over a million people installed the Facebook application “US Politics” in order to take part and the application evaluated user responses to specific comments made by debating candidates (Goldman, 2007) This debate showed the broader community what many young students had already experienced i.e. Facebook was an extremely popular and powerful new way to interact and voice opinions. An article in Uwire.com illustrates how the facebook effect has affected youth voting rates, support by youth of political candidates, and general involvement by the youth population in the 2008 election (Sullivan, 2008). In February 2008, a Facebook group - One Million Voices Against FARC organized an event in which hundreds of thousands of Colombians marched in protest against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, better known as the FARC (from the group's Spanish name) (Brodzinsky, 2008).
Twitter is an online social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, informally known as tweets (Twitter, 2011). It was created in March 2006 and has 200 million users as of 2011 generating over 200 million tweets and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day (Rocket News, 2011). It is sometimes described as the SMS of the Internet.

Theoretical Lens

In the last decade past, analyzing online political forums has become a major research topic that intersects politics of communication and online communication (Freelon, 2010, p1). While researchers interested in online political discussions have contributed to an understanding of how the online spaces influence politics, the approaches were narrowly focused on deliberative features or applied ad-hoc and difficult to generalize multiple sphere conceptualizations (Freelon, 2010, p5). To advance theoretical understanding of the cluster phenomena of analyzing divergent forms of political discourse, this seminal author introduced a new integrative framework, of three models of democratic communication, which we have based our analysis. The three models are explained as follows.

The liberal individualist model is characterized by monologue of self interest, personal revelation in public forums, personal showcase or advertising and flaming or rather showing hostility. The communitarian model features ideological homophile or the proposition that citizens tend to assemble themselves into politically homogeneous collectives that rarely include outsiders, focused on mobilizing action, with strong community identification, with intra-ideological response and questioning. The third model, known as deliberative, features rational critical argument capability for common good, public issue focus, sense of equality, discussion topic focused, and inter-ideological response and questioning.

We have attempted to use this pivotal and modern framework, to analyze the online political discourse on Web 2.0 to find meanings from the integrated media perspective.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we provide a synopsis of the background in order to emphasize the issue and then provide revealing examples in the following section to illustrate the viewpoint.

Australia and the Carbon Tax—A Synopsis

In recent years, as a response to environmental protection and climate change adaptation, Australia has considered both cap-and-trade schemes and a carbon tax (Age, 2007; ABC, 2009). Chronologically, on 30 April 2007, the State Labor Governments in Australia commissioned the Garnaut Climate Change Review, whose sponsorship was joined by the national Labor government, lead by Kevin Rudd soon after taking office in December 2007. The resulting report, delivered on 30 September 2008, recommended an Emissions trading cap-and-trade system. Subsequently, the National Labor Government proposed a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, which after much criticism, was voted down in the Australian Senate for being too ineffective by the
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Australian Greens Party, and the for the effect on key economic sectors, by the conservative Coalition of Australia, as well as independent Senators and climate change skeptics. As a result, in April 2010, the proposal was withdrawn at least until 2013 (Taylor, 2010).

In February 2010, the Australian Greens proposed an interim carbon tax of AUD 23 per tonne for two years (Taylor, 2010). In April 2010, academics from the Australian National University published a proposal for a carbon tax on major polluters (such as coal-fired power stations and oil companies) that would provide increased funding for Australian public hospitals and other health costs associated with climate change (Macintosh & Faunce, 2010). On February 24, 2011, Australian Federal government announced a framework to implement a Carbon Tax from July 1, 2012. It was set up to be implemented over a 3–5 year period upon which it will switch to a cap and trade system. The announcement came after an agreement between the Federal Labor government, the Greens and two Independent MPs and included commitments to ensure all funds collected go back to homes and businesses to assist in the transition to renewable (Leslie, 2011).

This led to accusations that Prime Minister Julia Gillard had breached a pre-election promise not to introduce such a tax where she stated to Network TEN: "There will be no carbon tax under the Government I lead". The Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, called for a ‘referendum’ (rather a plebiscite) over the issue (Hudson, 2011). On June 5, 2011, the Say Yes demonstrations were held in most major cities in support of a price on carbon pollution (ABC/AAP, 2011). Many demonstrations have also been held around the country and in regional towns against the proposed Carbon Tax. Nonetheless, on July 10, 2011 the Gillard lead federal Government announced publicly that the 500 largest polluters in Australia would be taxed at AUD23/ton of carbon emission, effective from July 1, 2012 (Farr, 2011).

During anticlimax, over 6000 protesters gathered on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra, Australia, to send a message to the Prime Minister and the Greens/Labor Government. Protests called for the carbon tax to be scrapped and for a new election. A Ford F650 four wheel drive delivered a coffin to the rally, a symbol of the death of democracy. The coffin was carried by pall bearers and was filled with the Government's Carbon Tax brochure and delivered to the steps of Parliament House. Meanwhile, workers inside the building sorted through thousands of Government propaganda packs that outraged householders had sent back (NoCarbonTax, 2011). While the issue continues to be debated, we now focus on the Web 2.0 in this climate.

Web 2.0 in the Milieu

From the time of the first proposal regarding carbon tax, and the information that came through via different forms of media including print, radio and television, the issue had been in focus in the online media as well. In the forefront have been Facebook, where several groups that directly and indirectly influenced and mobilized public opinion.
Carbon Tax Know the Facts

https://www.facebook.com/groups/carbontaxfacts/

Establishing the facts in the "CO2 tax" debate: The "CO2 tax" in Australia have potential to affect millions of lives. 'Carbon tax! Know the facts' is dedicated to uncovering the facts about CO2 tax. This page will function in the form of a debate to which everyone is welcome to provide evidence for their argument. NO slander or unjustified personal criticisms will be tolerated.

Australians against an ETS

https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=112819729599

This group is not about the debate surrounding the ever doubtful global warming. This is not a group nit picking between Liberals, Labor, Greens or Independents. This is a group for people who do not want yet another tax being placed on them, for something that is still being debated about. The pro-ETS people preach about doing 'something' before it's too late. I agree, let's clean up the environment, let's lower pollution, lets re-plant forests, let's do what we can - but DO NOT TAX US.

The ETS works on business level, taxing them for using 'carbon'; this can be traded between businesses. End user pays - which means everything from your milk to your petrol and your bread will cost you more. No alternative has been looked at by ANY political party. Governments all of a sudden care about our environment, and about being 'world leaders' in climate change. You want to change things? The aim of this group is nothing dramatic, perhaps to raise a bit of awareness - in my ideological thinking I would love for this to lead to a referendum, give the people of Australia their power back.

Say No to the Carbon Tax in Australia


If you care about the environment, but think the Carbon Tax is the wrong way to go about it; this is the page for you. A page for those who care about the environment but think the Carbon Tax in Australia is the wrong way to be going about it. If you agree please 'Like' the page and share with your friends. Note: Whether you believe in man-made Climate Change or not is not the point of this page; rather you think the Carbon Tax is not a workable solution and you care about the environment.

A Million Aussies against Carbon Advertising

https://www.facebook.com/groups/213422425366568/ (18 members)

Members of this group are opposed to the use of advertising - by government and industry bodies - used to debate the need, or otherwise, for a carbon tax or carbon
trading scheme in Australia. We will act by boycotting media channels that accept such advertising. Our aim is to reach one million signatories, from both sides of the carbon debate, who do not want to see democracy abused in this way. With such a tide of support we aim to stop all advertising on this issue and encourage diverse treatment of the matter through more balanced channels.

**Table 1: Australian Carbon Tax on Facebook**

| Australia is not an actual democracy, Gillard Agrees (176 members) Open Group. https://www.facebook.com/groups/169427363124561/ |
| This is a page dedicated to restoring the rights of ALL Australians. That is that despite good or bad policy, right or wrong decisions, the decisions are no longer being made by the public and we are being forced to accept things we have no say in and never did. It has become apparent that Australia is no longer an actual democracy, and the Prime Minister agrees: |
| "Democracy is not one long opinion poll-democracy is making the right choices for the nation's future, I'm determined to build a clean energy future for this country and I'm happy to be judged on it." Julia Gillard - 11/jul/11Well Julia, a democracy is actually where the public have some, if not all of the input as to who runs their country and what changes occur. Whether in our best interests or not, decisions so overwhelmingly against public opinion are not yours to make. Right or wrong, the decision is not yours, it's the publics. In summary, we are being given something we didn’t ask for by someone we didn’t vote for. (ON THE CARBON TAX...YES, SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE DONE. YES, THE ENVIRONMENT IS IMPORTANT. THAT'S NOT THE POINT. THE POINT IS WE ARE BEING DENIED THE CHOICE, IT IS BEING FORCED ON OUR COUNTRY!) Please have your say on this page, that is why it's here, add your friends and other lovers of freedom and democracy. Australia is no longer the lucky country and everything previous generations of Australians have lived for and previous/current generations of soldiers have DIED FOR is being thrown in their/YOUR FACES. |

Stop Gillard’s Carbon Tax (Community Page)

While Table I illustrates the typical group pages carrying the debate on Facebook, Table II demonstrates the integration from the Facebook to Blogs, Twitter, and YouTube. It may be noted that most of the television news is also broadcasted via the Web, and many are re-telecast via YouTube. There is seamless integration of all the online social media. Conversely, we considered the print media. The issue of carbon tax was presented in brochures and directly mailed to households from the federal government. What was the aftermath? The brochures contained a website where people could provide their feedback on the system. While many citizens did resort to this site to provide feedback, the others rallied in protest on August 16th at the parliament house, mobilized through protest sites, Facebook Pages and others. Outraged householders had sent back the propaganda – or rather informative brochures – sent by the governance. The debate now threatens the whole existence of the representative democracy, as protesters call this issue ‘the death of the democracy’.
Table 2: Illustrating Web 2.0 Integration

In the leadup to the 2010 election, Prime Minister Gillard swore a solemn oath to the Australian people – that she would never introduce a carbon tax. On 23 February 2011 she broke this promise. In a deal with the Australian Greens, Prime Minister Gillard announced a multi-million dollar tax on carbon, with no offset in other taxes. This is a tax that will hurt every single Australian: electricity bills alone for the average family will go up by over $300 a year. But the real cost will be far greater than just electricity prices. The price of everyday day items will increase as the costs on doing business – transport, production and so on – rise. This is simply another grab for cash by a wasteful government that will do hardly anything to address climate change.

SIGN OUR PETITION AND HELP SEND CANBERRA A STRONG MESSAGE: AUSTRALIA DOES NOT WANT MORE TAX! Authorized by Natalie Keys, 130 Fig Tree Pocket Road, Chapel Hill, QLD 4069

Links to this website: http://www.stopgillardscarbontax.com/

Welcome to Stop Gillard’s Carbon Tax - the central portal and information resource for Australians opposing Julia Gillard’s destructive Carbon Tax. We are supported by a broad coalition of organizations, a full list of which you may find here. You can download the Open Letter to Julia Gillard signed by 22 Organizations here.

Furthermore, it goes to “On our website you will find campaign material, media clippings, rally lists and a petition to oppose this destructive new tax - which has already been signed by over 20,000 Australians! You may also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter! Make no mistake: is a tax that will hurt every single Australian: electricity bills alone for the average family will go up by over $300 a year. But the real cost will be far greater than just electricity prices. The price of everyday day items will increase as the costs on doing business – transport, production and so on – will rise. This is simply another grab for cash by a wasteful government that will do nothing to address climate change. SIGN OUR PETITION AND HELP SEND CANBERRA A STRONG MESSAGE: AUSTRALIA CAN NOT AFFORD THIS TAX!”

From here it links to blog site, www.nocarbontax.com.au. It features YouTube videos, chronological order, and links to Facebook, twitter etc.

On Twitter:

NO CARBON TAX SAY NO! CARBON TAX
SIGN OUR PETITION: AUSTRALIA CAN NOT AFFORD THIS DAMAGING CARBON TAX!
Analysis through the Theoretical Lens

If the discussions on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Blogs were to be closely analyzed, features of the three models of communication are apparent in this debate. If the liberal individualist model is to be considered, there is monophony, as there are individuals who dominate without really exchanging arguments on different websites, blogs and even Facebook. To certain extent, there is personal revelation and showcasing on Twitter. Flaming is apparent, where hostile intentions have been characterized by insults. However, if the Facebook pages were to be considered as a metric, this model of online communication would be considered a minority, which cannot be given much relevance in this debate. For example, there are 18 members in one community page, which may not be significant.

In the communitarian model, is ideological homophile apparent? We contend that there is a proposition that citizens assemble themselves as homogeneous collectives and to an extent, it may also be true that engagement with outsiders range from optimistic to hesitant in the case of an average Australian. Political insularity is also visible to an extent, as the community forums are aimed at mobilizing citizens for protests and campaigns. There is a sense of community identification as the participants view themselves as members of a community or other. In other words, there is ‘face validity’ on Facebook forums. Conversely, intra-ideological responses seem to be strong with intra-ideological questioning. Members of the groups have conversational type of responses as well as engaging questions that tend to persuade members to engage with other participants.

The final model is deliberative which focuses on rational-critical argument. While the other two models are significant, the rational-critical argument is central to this model. Is this feature apparent in this debate? We find that, in analyzing the conversations, there is reflection of this feature, but it may not be the central theme that drives the communication. There is definitely the public issue focus – as the debate has now turned political and questions the validity of democracy itself. From carbon tax, it has lead to the validity of the current federal government and its representation of the people, to sustain a democracy. Every forum also features equality between discussants and every discussion focuses on the topic. Is inter-ideological responses and questioning visible? In other words, is there a cross-cutting deliberation? We would say affirmative as this is also visible in the debated forums.

Conclusion and the Rhetoric

Carbon Tax is an environmental tax, which globally, all nations are contemplating on, in the recent years. In this context, Australia had taken a step ahead to propose a carbon tax scheme, although it is new to its people. When it was first proposed in the government, via the elected representation of the country, the federal opposition voted it down. It was then shelved for at least few years. At this stage, we felt that the representative democracy of the nation had undertaken its role.
In the second avatar, the Australian Greens made a carbon tax proposal, which was then debated upon furiously in the parliament, as well as many a forum online. To an extent, as the proposal progressed, the online forums became rampant. The mobilization of public opinion went outside of the elected representation, into the hands of the citizens. As it seem to be apparent, via providing a feedback loop i.e. a direct mail to household brochure that offered a website to post comments, the citizens became interactive, but to an extent had taken the governance out of the hands of its elected representatives. It reveals lack of confidence in elected representation and the power of online media to churn this sentiment.

When the proposal passed, the citizens are enraged that their opinions albeit through e-governance channels no longer hold weight. As apparent in Table I, "a democracy is actually where the public have some, if not all of the input as to who runs their country and what changes occur. Whether in our best interests or not, decisions so overwhelmingly against public opinion are not yours to make. Right or wrong, the decision is not yours, it's the public's. In summary, we are being given something we didn’t ask for by someone we didn’t vote for", Australians are protesting, as they feel their views are not considered by their elected representatives. While the channels of information became more interactive, is the elected representation in this democracy becoming futile? Is the very notion of representative democracy under threat from the pervasion of social media?

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