



## Dr Sally Young's talk

'Media and Politics – the impact of the media in the 2007 federal election'.

Dr Young is Senior Lecturer in Media and Communications at the University of Melbourne.

Sally described campaign financing in Australia: The estimated \$30 million spent on advertising in the 2007 federal campaign; the lack of restrictions on public funding; and the unlimited private funding available – a unique situation compared with other western democracies.

Sally talked about the role of the media broadly. She talked about the ways in which politicians use media through 'paid media' they can control (eg. advertising, marketing, direct mail letters) and 'free media' (their attempts to influence media stories including nightly news representations, talkback radio and newspapers).

She talked about pay TV and Sky News in particular as a key new development of this election. While only 20% of Australians have pay-TV, it was nonetheless influential given the nature of its news programming. Sky-news ran 24/7 coverage of news and the election with live broadcasts of all major events. The 24/7 Sky broadcasting had a marked influence on other media outlets, since both Rudd or Howard could go on Sky and re-butt the other side immediately, rather than wait for an evening or next day news broadcast. Sky also did their own exit polling and was the first media outlet to call the election winner at 5.30! Sky News also broadcasted the press conferences in full.

Sally also spoke about swinging voters, the percentage of which appears to be growing – campaigning is increasingly targeted to those large groups of swinging voters. The free to air channels appeal to swinging voters, who (according to the parties' research) aren't really interested and wonder what is in it for them. These programs often feature sound bites and lots of visuals with the journalist talking over the top.

New internet media were explored, such as YouTube, in which parties were able to respond to each other's advertising, producing quick turnarounds and getting messages out to the public.

One feature of the 2007 election campaign which the Howard and Rudd campaign teams sought to control was the way in which journalists were systematically bussed around to various pre-arranged photo media

opportunities. Journalists often didn't know where they were going until the very last minute. These photo opportunities were generally highly staged events, peopled with supporters of the political party. Both leaders sought to control the image which they wished to portray as tightly as possible.

Sally has collected ads and campaign speeches on her 'Soapbox' site, which she is currently building (she has had problems with copyright in displaying off-air commercial broadcast material).

Sally Young's soapbox website can be accessed here:

<http://soapbox.unimelb.edu.au/>

2007 Election political advertisements are here:

[http://soapbox.unimelb.edu.au/pages/elections/2000\\_/2007.html](http://soapbox.unimelb.edu.au/pages/elections/2000_/2007.html)