

Copyright is owned by the Author of the research report. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The research report may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

## **The rise of the 'citizen satirist'**

A 60-credit Journalism Project presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Journalism at Massey University

SARAH AUSTEN-SMITH

15121637

2017

### **Plagiarism Statement**

By submitting this assignment I acknowledge that: I have read the statement on plagiarism and agree that my assignment conforms to Massey University's plagiarism policy. Where I have made use of ideas of other writers, I have acknowledged the source in every instance. This is an original assignment and entirely my own work.

### **Abstract**

This project explores New Zealand's satirical landscape in 2017. It analyses the ways millennials are reimagining and redefining the country's tradition of satire in response to changing norms of citizenship, digital technology and a corporatised media. It aims to trace the rise of the so-called 'citizen satirist' by looking at the ways millennials have co-opted New Zealand's satirical tradition and taken it online.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Long-format piece of journalism: The rise of the 'citizen satirist' .....	6
The State of Satire .....	7
The Transition Online .....	10
The Millennials.....	12
Ben Uffindell, The Civilian.....	12
Robbie Nicol, White Man Behind a Desk.....	14
Alexander Sparrow, DJ Trump.....	16
Sebastian Boyle, Canta.....	18
Advice from Satire's Old Guard .....	19
Literature Review .....	24
The Tradition of Satire in New Zealand .....	26
Satire as a Tool for Civic Participation.....	29
Political Efficacy.....	34
Satire and Power .....	37
The Characteristics of Millennials.....	39
Satire in the Age of Social Media.....	41
Conclusion.....	45
Discussion .....	47
A History and Definition of Satire.....	48
Satire in the Land of the Long White Cloud .....	51
Satire and Civic Participation .....	54
Satire Digitised.....	58
Satire as a 'Weapon of Choice' for Millennials .....	60
Conclusion.....	64
References .....	66
Interviews .....	69

## Introduction

This project explores New Zealand's political satirical landscape in 2017. It begins with a long-format piece of journalism, which is informed by the subsequent literature review and discussion. By traversing the varied definitions and traditions of satire, including conceptions of satire and civic participation; satire's relationship to power structures; and the impact of social media on political discourse this project will establish the landscape for satire in New Zealand which can be tested with satirists themselves. It argues that millennials are reimagining and redefining the country's tradition of satire in response to changing norms of citizenship, digital technology and a corporatised media. It aims to trace the rise of the so-called "citizen satirist" (McClennan & Maisel, 2014, p.130) by looking at the ways millennials have co-opted New Zealand's satirical tradition and taken it online.

Satire is defined as "the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics" (English Oxford Living Dictionary, n.d.). The millennial cohort is defined, in the broadest sense, as those people born between 1981 and 2001, covering both the Generation Y and Generation Z groupings, on the basis that technological change and technology shapes much of their world view (Urban Dictionary, n.d.).

This project asks whether millennials producing political satire are motivated by a desire to hold the powerful to account, or whether they see a role for themselves stepping into public debate where the mainstream media have stepped out. It will ask whether political satire is a weapon of choice in the digital environment (Colletta, 2009, p.859), or simply a collective coping mechanism, used by millennials to address feelings

of guilt and uselessness in the face of what might feel like insurmountable power structures (Dagtas, 2016, p.5). It will also test the assumption at the core of this project, that millennials are taking satire in a new direction in order to more effectively engage their peers in political debate.

In order to focus on the rise of the citizen satirist online, this research will exclude satirical print cartoons. The rationale for this is firstly one of scope - this project can't cover everything. But, more importantly, it is a response to a hypothesis around the form and function of satire online. Specifically, satire in 2017 is a digital "performance of scrutiny and critique" (McClennen & Maisel, 2014, p.112) where audiences are asked to play with, interact with share the joke, in real time, demonstrating their understanding of folly through active engagement. This is quite separate to reading a satirical cartoon in print, to watching a scheduled television show or attending a variety show. The performance of satire online is social, its questioning of authority is instant (for example including a politician's Twitter handle in a joke) and, as a result, its effects are fundamentally different to satire which is simply observed at a distance.

Taken in its entirety, this project will be a study of satire as an actor in our democracy. It will ask questions about whether it is cast in a major or minor role, and draw conclusions around what that means for the health of our democracy.

**Long-format piece of journalism: The rise of the 'citizen satirist'**

***Amateur writers, or 'citizen satirists' are popping up everywhere, winning audiences on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter with commentary on politics and pop culture that puts a new spin on New Zealand's proud tradition of satire. With the loss of giants like John Clarke and Murray Ball in short sequence, Sarah Austen-Smith talks to satire's last line of defence and the next generation looking to take their place.***

In 2017, New Zealand lost two of satire's favourite sons. The late John Clarke, best known for his portrayal of the Kiwi farmer Fred Dagg, and Murray Ball, the man behind Footrot Flats. Both men are household names, their work teaching us more about ourselves and New Zealand culture than we probably cared to consider.

Today, the distinctly Kiwi satirical tradition played out in shows like *McPhail and Gadsby*, *Facelift*, *Skitz* and *Eating Media Lunch*, has been replaced with laugh-out-loud panel shows like *Jono and Ben* and *Seven Days*. It seems like poking fun at the powerful with prosthetic faces, puppets and pithy one-liners has been replaced with stunts and stand-up routines.

Perhaps new technology, coupled with cuts to public broadcasting and an increasingly corporatised media, have pressed pause on New Zealand's once strong tradition of 'seriously joking'.

The commercial calculation might be that panel shows like *Seven Days* please more people. Host Jeremy Corbett's humour is the kind that leaves you laughing, without asking you to question or critique what's being laughed at. This, is satire's territory.

Satire, which points to the foibles and follies of the powerful using irony, exaggeration, and ridicule, is often funny, but doesn't stop at laughs. Satire gets you laughing and questioning at the same time. It raises the eyebrows of an audience, not by telling us what to think, but by reminding us that we must think. In an era of post-truth politics, where it can feel like language itself has no meaning or consequence, satire has never been more important.

But what state is New Zealand satire in? In print, columnists like Steve Braunias, Toby Manhire and Jane Clifton fly satire's flag, but there are few following in their footsteps. The next generation appear to be making a bid for eyeballs online, dodging traditional media and the public funding process altogether.

Where the satire of John Clarke and Murray Ball was built on the back of New Zealand's relative isolation, millennials are making the most of access to global audiences and influences online, putting a new stamp on Kiwi satire.

### **The State of Satire**

Jeremy Wells has been up since 4:30am, towing a billboard from Taranaki to Auckland. Despite being obviously tired, the satirist and comic, best known as the host of *Eating Media Lunch* (which ran on TVNZ from 2003 to 2008), is happy to have the opportunity to vent about the state of satire in New Zealand.

Wells was something of a media golden boy in the 2000s. His work with Paul Casserly and Graeme Hill-Humphreys on *Eating Media Lunch* and *The Unauthorised History of New Zealand*, took satire to a new level. The team's merciless approach saw them hauled before the Broadcasting Standards Authority on multiple occasions. Perhaps most memorably for the *Eating Media Lunch* episode that showed two newsreaders fornicating in a parody of the Canadian pornographic subscription website, *Naked News*.

With a sort of nostalgic energy, Wells says the landscape for satire has completely changed: "When we started *Eating Media Lunch*, we were very lucky that TVNZ and New Zealand on Air were happy to support it. There wasn't that pervasive commercial imperative that there is today."

Wells said in 1989, the media landscape in New Zealand consisted of TVNZ and TV3, which had just emerged and was owned by a bunch of New Zealanders. In fact, TV3 launched with a two hour special featuring David McPhail and Jon Gadsby as cameramen.

But by 2008, government cuts to public broadcasting saw the funding dry up. *Eating Media Lunch* Producer Paul Casserly says the show was no longer attractive to TVNZ management, who figured they could get more viewers, for less money, elsewhere. He says: "There was a new mood of low tolerance for shows like ours that often bit the hand that fed."

While getting a satirical show on television might be more difficult than it once was, Wells says the model New Zealand is grappling with today has also been a great enabler for satire: "The internet has meant that in some ways, the barriers to entry are

less than they ever have been. You can make your own content at home and theoretically you can get to people easier and cheaper.”

Wells notes that before video sharing sites like YouTube and TV on-demand through sites like Netflix, satire was inaccessible.

“I was influenced by Chris Morris from *The Day Today* and *Brass Eye* - the greatest satirist ever. The difference was, the only way you knew about these guys was if your friend taped the show and posted it to you.”

Today, Wells says his kids get confused if they have to sit through an advertisement. He says that while content is more accessible, there's a lack of free-to-air local programming, especially for kids: “My kids watch YouTube and whenever they watch a TV show with ads they can't understand what's going on. I think very few children will be viewing local media.”

When asked about the material satirists work with today, Wells pauses, incredulous: “Things have got pretty weird. It's like all the things that we were making fun of are now reality. A TV Star and property magnate is now the President of the United States! When the most extreme idea you can think of becomes a reality, it's hard to know where you can go next.”

Despite the heightened drama in America, Wells says politics hasn't been that terrifying here: “We've had a really popular government, led by one of the most popular Prime Minister's in New Zealand's history; that's not often a great time for satire.”

Wells also believes that people aren't doing the silly things that they used to: “People genuinely think things through now. They're frightened of a PR crisis,” he says.

While today's mainstream media might not be interested in a satirical comedy like *Eating Media Lunch*, Wells says smaller audiences aren't all bad for the young ones coming through: "To write comedy you need confidence and experience, sometimes it's good that that develops away from critical eyes."

### **The Transition Online**

Today, rather than waiting for friends to mail videotapes, millennials are taking the entire process of production into their own hands. Brought up on a diet of 'infotainment', millennials are approaching satire in different ways to their parents and grandparents, with less concern for the delineation between information and entertainment, and more of a focus on interaction with their audiences.

Millennials are winning audiences in real-time using channels like YouTube and Facebook. They're looking to the British and American traditions, taking a steer from the success of satirists behind comedy shows like, *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* and *Last Week/Tonight with John Oliver* and satirising news as-it-happens. By bringing offshore influences closer to home and giving them a Kiwi twist, millennials are offering New Zealanders a new slant on satire.

Millennials aren't producing columns for people to read and respond to in private. They're creating satirical content at the same time real news is being written. They aren't waiting, and wondering, whether people are reading their work, they're addressing them directly on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, asking their audiences to play with and share their work, in real-time. This kind of peer-to-peer communication, like satire itself, is a great leveller. By addressing those in powerful

positions, publicly and directly, millennials are shifting the power dynamics associated with citizenship in favour of the audiences they seek to please.

The characteristics of the millennial generation (born between 1982-1996) have been the subject of countless stories and interviews. A lot of people think the bite-sized snippets of information and videos that make up the millennials media diet mean they have short attention spans, which suggests all content that is short is stupid. In reality, the communications landscape millennials are responding to is completely different to that experienced, even by the slightly older Generation Xers (1961-1981). Rather than being raised during the 'information revolution' (from the post-war period right up into the 1980s), where higher rates of literacy saw more people paying attention to public debate, millennials have come-of-age during a time of 'information overload'.

The promise of the digital revolution has not been realised. The idea that everyone can access all of the knowledge, all of the time, while technically true, has been made impossible by the sheer volume of information available. For the most part, millennials are attuned not to gather information, but to monitor it.

The rise of what is called the "monitorial citizen" describes a situation where millennials act as gate-keepers, taking a defensive, rather than proactive, approach to knowledge. Media theorist Henry Jenkins explains this, saying millennials may "look inactive, but they are poised for action if action is required". This perspective challenges the idea that all millennials are apathetic and lazy by stepping back from ageist tropes and instead taking a look at the environment in which millennials are operating.

The resulting 'performance of scrutiny', or the shape and style of satire produced by millennials, is necessarily distinct from older generations.

## The Millennials

We talk to four millennials about why satire is their 'weapon of choice' in 2017. We quiz them about what they are trying to achieve, whether they see themselves as stepping in where the mainstream media have stepped out, whether it's about holding the powerful to account and whether the American influence and left-wing bias are big, or beltway concerns.

### Ben Uffindell, *The Civilian*

At 26 years old, and with a reputation as one of New Zealand's most promising young satirists, Ben Uffindell, the writer behind satirical news website, *The Civilian*, is planning to call it quits.

Launched in 2013 by the University of Canterbury graduate, *The Civilian* is a bright light in New Zealand's recently desolate satirical landscape. But *The Civilian's* most popular post was read by more than half a million New Zealanders. That's no mean feat when you consider the [highest rating](#) Shortland Street episode of all time reached 700,000 viewers.

The web traffic caught Uffindell off-guard. He says the post was a tiny little story written in 30 minutes with a headline along the lines of: "Civil Defence evacuates whole of New Zealand", but right after the Kaikoura earthquakes, it struck a chord.

"I got more hate mail over that than I've ever got over anything," Uffindell says. "A lot of New Zealanders overseas saw it and got panicked, calling relatives to see if they were okay. People really believed it."

Despite *The Civilian's* almost immediate success and his loyal readership, Uffindell says he doesn't want to struggle on for too much longer: "I've been living on the bones of my arse for four years and I'm getting kind of sick of it."

At a time when trust in politicians, media and government is at an all-time low, and when the public are highly cynical of political process and openly distrust the official communication, Uffindell's voice will be missed. His planned departure begs the question: Is satire entering its most transient era yet? Where talented writers emerge and disappear as readily, what surety do we have that satire will survive in the digital age?

Uffindell says we can take heart in the fact that Kiwi humour is completely unique and not likely to be overtaken by international influences. He says: "New Zealanders are really pathetic in some ways and poking fun at that is really fun...we are really pathetic about rugby, we're really pathetic about being mentioned overseas. When you put those things on paper people respond to it."

So if taking the piss out of his peers isn't going to sustain his satirical career, why not transition to print? Uffindell sighs: "There are plenty of barriers for millennials looking to translate success online to success in New Zealand print or television media." After taking a moment to choose his words Uffindell says: "I think it's print's fault... print is hostile to the kinds of things that we do...you don't feel respected by the old front and your best work gets edited down."

Uffindell admits that for millennials, the luxury of writing online is hard to beat: "I've turned down a lot of opportunities because they weren't a good fit. People like me let frustrations get in the way of actually doing work." Mainstream media aside, Uffindell seems to have mastered content curation in an era of clickbait: "It's about balance. I still do the in-depth pieces that I know not many people

will read. But I also try to do really lazy stuff - just because I know it will get clicks and people will like it.”

Uffindell says it would be poetic to be able to say that he started *The Civilian* out of a desire to hold the powerful to account, but that was never a part of his motivation: “The people I looked up to most growing up were the people who made me laugh. Satire’s an important thing and I don’t think there’s enough of it. But you have to be able to make a living.”

### **Robbie Nicol, *White Man Behind a Desk***

Robbie Nicol (23) answers his phone on a bus into Wellington. The New Zealand International Comedy Festival means he’s working all hours producing the live version of his YouTube series, *White Man Behind a Desk*.

Nicol’s YouTube channel boasts almost 7,000 subscribers. His videos, on topics from tax policy to pornography, clock-up tens of thousands of views on Facebook. Started in 2015, with the support of his close friends, Elsie and Sally Bollinger, *White Man Behind a Desk* is a relative newcomer to the satirical scene. With the General Election around the corner, Robbie, Elsie and Sally are making the most of the country’s heightened interest in politics, with sell out shows at Wellington’s Bats and Circa Theatres.

Nicol, often described as “the Kiwi John Oliver”, says he gets a thrill out of teasing powerful people. But his motivation to go into satire was about entertaining his friends. When asked whether satire was a sort of “collective coping mechanism” for young people disaffected by politics and political process, Nicol says: “nah, it’s just about making people laugh”.

There are suggestions that millennials have started writing satire to fill a vacuum left by an increasingly ineffective mainstream media. The idea being that satire holds politicians and the powerful to account in a way that the media is failing to. But Nicol pushes back on this premise saying satire is completely separate to journalism: "There's a reason we're comedians not journalists or politicians, we get into this to make people laugh."

Nicol says while he enjoys pointing to the absurdity in the media, satire is positioned firmly on the outside of institutions - including the Fourth Estate: "Comedy is different; proper journalism can say, 'this system has been proven to work', and that's really important information...but comedy can't really ever point to good things because the good things aren't funny. We can only ever really point to the flaws and inconsistencies and absurdities because that's where the gag comes from."

*White Man Behind A Desk* boasted sell-out shows at Wellington's Bats Theatre during the Comedy Festival. Nicol used props, like free glasses of wine and real-life politicians, to engage his audience in what felt like a backstage television experience. Nicol himself gives off a larger-than-life energy, eyeballing his audience with long, impassioned political monologues akin to American satirist's like Stephen Colbert. This overtly American approach is something Nicol owns: "I think mimicking the American style has been a cool way to start. It allows you to learn; you have to start doing stuff to get good."

When asked about stuffing up on camera, Nicol is pretty honest: "The great thing about the internet is that the number of people who see your work is directly linked to

how good it is. You know, if you do a video that's not that great you know it's self-moderating!"

But does satire require a thick skin? On this, Nicol is earnest: "There are people out there who are going to make you feel sad for trying and I think as a nation we are getting better at ignoring those people."

### **Alexander Sparrow, DJ Trump**

Alexander Sparrow (24), is one of New Zealand satire's stand-out performers. The Upper Hutt-born character comic's impersonation of American President Donald Trump has won him critical acclaim. His show, *The President*, was awarded Breakthrough Performer at the 2016 Wellington Comedy Awards and his 2017 show, *DJ Trump*, demonstrates a style of character comedy rarely seen since Fred Dagg hit our screens in 1975. At 24 years old, Sparrow is starting out at roughly the same age John Clarke did, but admits he didn't know who Clarke was until he died: "I suppose that's sacrilegious for a character comic...I'd heard of Fred Dagg, but John Clarke didn't mean anything to me."

When asked about his road into character comedy and satire, Sparrow is thoughtful and honest: "Because I didn't know who he [Clarke] was, it's hard for me to assess whether people like him made the road easier for me."

Unlike many of his peers, Sparrow hasn't had formal actor training. He has a tertiary qualification, but is firm in his views about its value: "I don't want any aspiring comics or actors to think that a \$20,000 degree is the way to do it - because it's not."

Talking to the American influence directing his and other millennials' work, Sparrow says it's probably overstated: "People who are obviously influenced by

Stephen Colbert, Trevor Noah and John Oliver basically preach. I find that really boring...for me, the challenge is actually finding a way to satirise the political system in a way that isn't preachy."

Sparrow says his satirical character comedy aims to help his audience understand why people think a certain way: "I think the reason Trump won is because people are sick of being told what to think and not why they should examine other viewpoints. Telling people that they're stupid, racist and sexist isn't going to change anybody's mind."

By all accounts, it's a tough time to be conservative in New Zealand's comedy scene. Sparrow says left-wing political bias is a real issue on the comedy circuit: "I think 98% of comedians in Wellington would be voting Labour or Greens and I'm not. I wanted to put across the other side, not because I want people to vote a certain way, but to show that you can engage in political discussion without it just turning into ad hominem."

Ben Uffindell echoes similar concerns: "*The Civilian* has tried really hard to be non-partisan. To not show hostility to another person or group. I think that's what creates echo chambers in our politics...I'm not saying *The Civilian* is a great rainbow coalition. My readership is probably 80% left wing, but I don't feel like I alienate people outside of that."

Uffindell says he can understand conservative New Zealanders with a sense of humour might be frustrated, but it's actually left-leaning activists who give him the most grief: "When I write stuff about the left I get hate mail. When I write about right-wing figures everyone seems to have a great time. I think left-wing satirists and comedians

are used to being the ones doing the laughing and the right-wing person's used to being laughed at."

Uffindell's view is that it might be the insidious stuff that happens on the right, the racism and the sexism, that makes them a more acceptable target: "But the left are virtuous. It annoys me sometimes that I can't throw it both ways and just have people accept that."

Unlike Uffindell, whose work is entirely online, Sparrow's satire is performed live on stage, and most of his profile has been generated by corporate and television appearances profiling his character comedy. Sparrow says he's fairly traditional in that respect, but uses Facebook to market his shows. He says his web presence is about experimentation and building a following that transcends one-off interviews and specific shows: He says social media means anyone can market their stuff without big budgets and that's good news for aspiring creatives.

### **Sebastian Boyle, *Canta***

Sebastian Boyle, a former Editor at Canterbury University's student magazine *Canta*, was embarrassed to be called for an interview; "I'm a non-disciplinarian artist and playwright - I don't think I should be put up next to the others."

But Boyle's situation offers a lot of insight to New Zealand's satirical scene in the age of social media. Despite an interest and talent for satire, Boyle joins the ranks of part-time political satirists like Scott Yorke, from left wing blog *Imperator Fish*, who also has a fulltime job to pay the bills.

Boyle says while millennials have publishing tools available to them that other generations didn't, there are other barriers to entry :“The demise of student media is tough. When I wrote for *Canta* I felt we as a team had some legitimacy- in that it was a regular printed publication that wasn't dulled or filtered by commercial considerations, concerns about mainstream appeal or by older editors.

“I think online publications like *The Spinoff* and *The Wireless* are a more natural extension of what student media could have grown up to be...had it not been cut off at the knees.”

When asked whether he thought satire was growing increasingly popular as a form of dissent he said; “young people have always sought outlets to make their voices heard, to rebel, and just to feel like they have a place in society. Some channel that into activism and protest, some into art, some into mild illegal activity, some into debating their parents and some write.”

“For me, good satire is sunlight against darkness. It's a motivator. It's an effective way of highlighting our shortcomings and lesser behaviours. It's actually less antagonistic - and less futile - than getting into direct debates.”

But when asked about his future in satire Boyle was coy: “I mean, what can I achieve in satire?”

### **Advice from Satire's Old Guard**

It takes five goes to get New Zealand Herald columnist Steve Braunias on the phone. On the third call the one-way conversation ends abruptly in a barrage of expletives as he realises there is something wrong with the line.

Braunias is one of New Zealand's finest satirical writers. At a time when there's an obvious vacuum of content on television, aspiring satirists don't have to look far before finding comfort in his regular columns. Alongside Jeremy Wells, Jane Clifton, Toby Manhire and Paul Casserly, Braunias could be considered a part of satire's soon-to-be 'old-guard'. But he doesn't seem to be well-liked. Even among his peers, his ruthless satirical style seems to have bitten more people than it's blessed.

When the technical phone issues are sorted out, and with the performance of the school pick-up playing out in the background, we talked about the role of satire in democracy, the pervasive expectation of politeness in New Zealand culture and the value of pissing people off.

Satire has been talked about as a tool for engagement, a way to make politics fun. But Braunias is quick to dismiss the idea that satire has a responsibility to democracy: "I think that's ludicrous - no one ever mentioned to me that satire was supposed to service democracy."

Braunias says aspiring satirists would do well to understand that satire has every right to not be positive or charming or cheerful. Satire, he says has a responsibility to be funny. But the assumption proves to be food for thought with Braunias musing on the expectations placed on Kiwi satirists: "There is an expectation in New Zealand that satirists are all "matey, matey" with the people they ridicule. Sometimes there's a need for satire to be really bitter and unfair."

To younger satirists he has some honest advice: "Say you might be dealing with a politician who you have nothing but contempt for. Then sometimes I think it's OK to

express that - and not just sort of slap them on the back and say here's a funny column about you... sometimes you have to say, actually, no, go fuck yourself."

Braunias might be outspoken, but he's not alone. Jeremy Wells says great satirists can't expect to have a lot of friends: "I'm not saying Steve doesn't have a lot of friends, 'coz I'm his friend, but you know, he can be brutal."

Wells believes that the nature of satire is that you have to be rude and mean: "You've got to weigh up your life don't you? You live your life as a person and you live your life as an entertainer or satirist - and if you want to be a great satirist, you cannot also be a kind person and be liked by everyone."

Wells admits that can be difficult: "New Zealand is a small country so you see people. You run into them in the Koru lounge and they have friends and they talk to people and make sure things don't go your way."

Braunias and Wells are not the only members of the old-guard to take issue with the idea satire should give way to political platitudes. *New Zealand Listener* political columnist Jane Clifton says New Zealanders just don't like biff that much. With a coffee grinder whirling in the background and her dutiful husband, Labour politician Trevor Mallard, fetching her a scone, Clifton says New Zealander's pretend to welcome confrontation and criticism, but that it actually makes them really uncomfortable. The veteran Press Gallery Journalist should know, she's had a fair few run-ins with politicians herself: "I once had one of our more timid MPs call me a malicious bitch about an inch from my face...he later calmed down when he realised I was an equal-opportunities piss-taker."

While Clifton doesn't consider herself a political satirist ("my work is analysis with piss-taking rather than satire"), she says the important thing for the next generation, particularly in the age of the 'echo chamber', is to make sure you're not only hearing from people who press your buttons.

"For me the role of the satirist is to have a play...it's a hallmark to not actually know quite where a person is coming from...we should die wondering how you voted."

She says the satirist's responsibility isn't to put forward a view or argue a point, but to lampoon social mores and manners: "What John Clarke did so brilliantly, was even though he was spearing someone in the guts, there was always a lot of whimsy around that."

Scone in hand, Clifton talks about the unique elements of Kiwi satire, and our traditions roots in the UK. At the time, Armando Iannucci, the Scottish satirist behind *The Day Today*, and the political sitcom *The Thick of It*, was in town for the Auckland Writers Festival. Clifton was clearly a fan of his characters: "Malcolm Tucker can be in the stream of invective and it can be so ugly and horrible, and then he will say something like "from bean to cup you fuck up", and you're just delighted because it's immediately obvious he's riffing on a coffee ad."

She says it's this playfulness in the middle of "grinding people's faces" that makes New Zealand satire so palatable, even for a somewhat timid audience. Despite New Zealand satire's deep roots, Clifton says true satire in print is becoming quite rare.

“A lot of what I read is quite polemical. I know how they vote and therefore I feel like I always know what they are going to say. Whereas with some of the new ones coming through - like The Civilian - it's like whoa, where did that come from?”

With some reluctance Clifton says it's the younger people who are really showing the older writers what can be done: “The media is such a moribund, sickly institution and the internet is still very much the Wild West... it's an uncertain environment.”

With a collective portfolio of work dating back into the 1980s, satire's old guard isn't short of credibility. The danger today, according to Clifton, is that satirists fall into the trap of confusing satire with opinions and funny lines. For Braunias, there's a risk that during a time of technological change and fundamental shifts in our media landscape too much responsibility is loaded onto satire as a genre.

While the impact of satire online is uncertain, it is far from entertainment without consequence. With a commercial media that appears increasingly risk averse, driven by the dual requirements of making content cheaply and ensuring an immediate return on investment, it's just as well millennials are taking matters into their own hands. These new 'engaged citizens', with access to new channels and energy to burn look to be better prepared to build large communities online and on the streets than any other generation.

Paul Casserly's not stressed about the future of satire. He says those with “an abiding hatred of bullshit” will always take on the responsibility to be funny: “Satire is a good mental game and a challenge that lets you call bullshit while having a laugh -- it's good for you.”

## Literature Review

This literature review explores different academic perspectives, studies and debates on satire as it relates to civic participation, public discourse and power structures. It summarises key critiques and theoretical frameworks to better understand the scope of the literature to date, including its strengths and limitations as applicable to both a discussion and long-format piece of journalism.

The research for this long-format piece of journalism can be grouped into three distinct phases. The first phase was about identifying and narrowing down a topic on a matter of substance, both in relation to personal interests and expertise, as well as through desktop research. With the death of New Zealand satirists John Clarke and Murray Ball, as well as the proximity of September's General Election, political satire seemed a timely topic. Newsworthiness, relatability and public interest were also considerations. The characteristics and attributes of millennials have been topical in the New Zealand news media, meaning narrowing the project to this cohort provided a point of difference within an established area of public interest.

The second phase was about understanding the academic perspective and history of political satire. Most academic articles reviewed for this research were based in the American context. To counter this bias an attempt was made to specifically seek out academic contributions from outside of America, in particular, those of millennials and New Zealanders. While the nationality of authors was a limitation, satire seems to draw interest from researchers across the academic spectrum, with the literature reflecting a diversity of academic backgrounds. For example: Lisa Colletta, author of the article "Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon

Stewart" (2009), is a Professor of English Literature at the American University of Rome. Colletta's work is grounded in literary history as it relates to narrative, modernity and gender politics ("*Prof. Lisa Colletta*," n.d). Unlike other authors in this field, Professor Colletta's theoretical framework looks to the aesthetics of humour as they relate to pleasure, displacement and the ego.

By comparison, Secil Dagtas, author of the article "'Down with some things!' The Politics of Humour and Humour as Politics in Turkey's Gezi protests" (2016), is guided by a background in anthropology. Dagtas' Turkish heritage shapes her work, with her ethnographic study of secular politics in Istanbul and Antakya informing her analysis of humour which she describes as an entry point to understanding and explaining cultural difference.

Andrew Dean, a New Zealand Rhodes Scholar, was one of the few millennials to have written on themes relevant to this research, for example, the influence of neo-liberalism on participation in New Zealand's public sphere. His chapter, "Speech and Silence in the Public Sphere", published in the book; "The Interregnum: Rethinking New Zealand" (Godfrey, 2016), brings a unique perspective in that it reflects on the experience of young New Zealanders, including award-winning author Eleanor Catton, who have been shamed for expressing their personal views on politics. Despite having not contributed a great deal to academic literature in comparison to some of the other authors, Dean's reflections on the cultural curiosities in the New Zealand public sphere provide important context for this research.

Pennsylvania State University Professor Sophia McClennen and undergraduate student Remy Maisel's book "Is Satire Saving our Nation? Mockery and American

Politics" (2014), demonstrates the ability of satire to bring people together in unlikely circumstances. This collaborative partnership is particularly relevant to this project, not only because Remy Maisel, a millennial, has contributed directly to it, but because she has done so on the basis that she brings a specific perspective to the subject of satire as a millennial. McClennen and Maisel's book, while not as current as some of the other literature, is extensive in terms of its analysis of the satirical frame. The book poses critical questions about the role and effect of satire on democracy and political participation, and it is ultimately a defence of satire at a time when people were said to be concerned about the future of political public discourse.

The third phase involved interviews with political satirists and millennials themselves. The political satirists selected for interview were those who have made a recognisable contribution to the field as judged by their body of work in print, on television and online in the past 20 years. The process for selection was subjective, and relied heavily on availability for interview. Every satirist shortlisted was able to be contacted, and in total six interviews were conducted with political satirists, four by phone and two in person. Those millennials selected for interview (four in total) were identified by informal canvassing of people interested in satire, over a period of some months. The International Comedy Festival provided a range of individuals to consider, and attending both Robbie Nicol and Alexander Sparrow's live shows tested their satirical bent and helped facilitate interviews.

### **The Tradition of Satire in New Zealand**

While there are many examples of satire in New Zealand, there are few academic or critical explorations of its form and function. There are many examples of

retrospectives such as the book "Bryce Hart - New Zealand's Advocate of Laughter" edited by Noel "Wig" Gardiner and Maxwell Hart (1986), which pays tribute to Auckland-based humourist and barrister Bryce Conrad Hart (1920-1957). Hart, who wrote verses, witticisms and articles for the Auckland Observer is said to be New Zealand's equivalent of London's A.P Herbert and Australia's Banjo Paterson (Gardiner & Hart, 1986). "The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature" (1998), also offers a record of work by satirists including New Zealand-born character comic John Clarke (also known as Fred Dagg).

"How you doing? A selection of New Zealand Comic and Satiric Verse" (1998), authored by two New Zealand-based academics, Harry Ricketts and Hugh Roberts, is another attempt, if not to critique the satirical tradition in New Zealand, to at least bring it together. It informs this literature review, not because it aligns with other academic literature, but because it speaks to the gaps that exist in this literature and seeks to address them. The authors describe their motivation for the book as addressing the lack of attention paid to New Zealand humourists, particularly poets, in their own formative years. The aim of this book was to "celebrate New Zealand comic verse" and in doing so the book contributed a great deal to the comic and satirical foundation on which many millennials today, knowingly or otherwise, draw. Ricketts and Roberts speak to the role humour and satire play in speaking truth to power in the New Zealand context and the way humour can give people a sense of control over issues which seem otherwise hard to fathom or grasp. The book purposely lumps tramping songs, literary parodies, pop songs, political satire and poetry together in order to challenge "notions of categories" in literature and satire (Ricketts & Roberts, 1998, xviii). The authors'

rebellion against the idea that satire should take a certain form is interesting and topical given the digital context in which we investigate satire today.

The authors' backgrounds in literature enable them to speak authoritatively on the components of comic verse in New Zealand. Ricketts and Roberts suggest that incongruity, paradox and contradiction define satire in New Zealand, more so than cynicism and derision, which can dominate satire in other cultures, including the American tradition (Ricketts & Roberts, 1998, xviii). Understanding what makes a joke funny and how that differs in New Zealand is a point of academic difference. This book provides useful groundwork for further study into the use of satire as a tool of engagement by a cohort affected by the American influence in particular.

Journalists themselves contribute to the literature on New Zealand satire, and while not academic sources, do offer interviews and analysis which provide insight into the state of satire in New Zealand. Many interviews, particularly following the recent death of John Clarke, can be read as attempts to take stock of New Zealand's satirical landscape.

For example, John Drinnan, an opinion writer for The New Zealand Herald, recently wrote the piece "No laughing, this is New Zealand TV" (2017), which talks about the difference between satire and "taking the mickey" in New Zealand. Drinnan's argument - that Kiwis prefer the latter- suggests the Kiwi preference for egalitarianism infiltrates our comic preferences. This argument is reflected in the academic literature, which dissects conceptions of elitism in satire and how cultural preferences can impact on the way satire is understood and received by the public. In an interview with Drinnan, New Zealand Herald writer Dave Armstrong also points to some of the barriers to

content creation. Armstrong argues that today's broadcasters lack the courage to challenge authority with political satire and that, "a lack of interest over several years has stopped innovation" (as cited in Drinnan, 2017). Armstrong suggests New Zealand is in need of something "new and younger" that takes aim at New Zealand's supposed cultural values. His contribution is a useful segue to New Zealand's televised satirical history.

The political satirical comedy series "Facelift", which screened on Television New Zealand (TVNZ) between 2004-2007, is a good example of televised political satire in the New Zealand tradition. The sketch comedy show, which was funded by New Zealand on Air (NZOA), featured actors wearing prosthetics caricaturing New Zealand politicians. The show was unique in that it sourced its content from more than 50 amateur writers around the country and covered a broad range of political perspectives. The shows were written by a team of staff writers including well-known New Zealand writers such as Dave Armstrong, Paul Yates and Jane Clifton ("*Facelift*", 2007), and were created for an audience whose primary source of news was still television and print media. While not an academic source, this 'documentary evidence' of New Zealand's satirical tradition provides a useful measure of how different satirical political content was in New Zealand, only a decade ago. Today, as this research details, references for political satire in the New Zealand context are not likely to be drawn from print or television news sources, but from online channels and international influencers, including media personalities and politicians' social media feeds.

### **Satire as a Tool for Civic Participation**

Satire as it relates to civic participation is at the core of this research and is a key

theme in much of the literature. Whether satire is used by millennials as a tool to engage their peers or to fill a void they feel has been left by the corporatisation of mainstream media are primary questions this research seeks to address.

The nature of civic commitment by different generations is thoroughly explored in Russell Dalton's book, "The Good Citizen" (2009). This book studies older generations', or 'baby boomer', conceptions of duty-bound citizenship, as compared to the more engaged citizenship of the millennial cohort, to support a wider argument which negates pessimism around the contributions of American youth (Dalton, 2009, p.2). Dalton argues that social, political and technological change has in fact enhanced democracy, despite what you might believe if your measure was voter participation alone. Millennials, according to Dalton, relate to government and society in different ways to that of their parents and grandparents but this does not mean that "the foundations of citizenship and democracy are crumbling" (Dalton, 2009, p.2).

Looking to the New Zealand context with Dalton's thesis in mind, it can be argued that despite persistently low voter turnout among young people, New Zealand millennials are active in their communities, but that activity is more likely to manifest online, or virtually, rather than face-to-face. This shift of preferences and political communication is being leveraged by politicians, with campaign strategy moving away from town hall meetings and road-side meet and greets to a more professionalised politics, where politicians seek the broadest possible audience with online tools. For example, Facebook live chat sessions now often replace electorate clinics and public meetings.

Ahead of the 2011 New Zealand General Election, the Parliamentary Library

published a research paper looking into the use of social media channels by New Zealand politicians. The paper, titled: "New Zealand Parliamentarians and Online Social Media" (Busby & Ballamy, 2011), found social media overtly influenced the 2008 New Zealand General Election campaign. It also suggested social channels were likely to play a key role in future campaigns, with a majority of elected members having at least one social media account. The Library found that for many New Zealanders, the internet was a more important source of information than television, newspapers or radio ( p.1).

This research draws on a number of secondary sources including New York Times columnist, Anand Giridharadas, who has written extensively on the impact of social media as an enabler for "Athenian-style direct democracy" (Giridharadas in Busby & Ballamy, 2011, p.8). It also draws on learnings from the 2008 presidential campaign of former United States President Barack Obama, which used social media including Facebook, Twitter, blogs and wikis to modernise campaigning and communication with voters with a digital-first model that is still being replicated around the world close to ten years later. The paper argues that citizens no longer want a "broadcast-only" relationship with their MPs but a two-way, participatory conversation and connection (Busby & Ballamy 2011, p.11).

Themes of participation and engagement are closely linked throughout the academic literature. Colletta (2009) argues that the very existence of satire depends on engagement, explaining that if the satirist and the viewer don't think the object or topics of their attack are open to change, then the medium would revert to simple criticism.

Colletta (2009) positions satire as a "hopeful genre" (p.860), but also asks questions about its effect on political participation. For example, she argues that a

primary product of satire is shame and questions how useful shame can be in eliciting political participation. This is particularly relevant when considered in relation to the peer-to-peer communication that is understood to resonate with millennials (Edelman, 2017). Shame, especially if it comes from peers, is a powerful and disempowering tool.

Looking to satire and civic participation in the New Zealand context, Andrew Dean's chapter, "Speech and Silence in the Public Sphere", is again instructive. Dean, a millennial himself, looks to the near-current New Zealand political environment and attempts to explain why political participation, particularly among young New Zealanders, is waning. Dean argues that changing patterns in democratic participation are "a matter of structure and design" (Dean, 2016, p.31). He speaks directly to the underfunding of public broadcasting, the Government-sponsored stripping back of union power and capacity and specific examples of legislation that he claims have curbed the ability for citizens to "think, speak and act together in the public sphere" (Dean, 2016, p.32). Dean's central point is not that people no longer wish to participate in public and political debate, but that those institutions that traditionally organised and facilitated dissent have been reformed so as not to allow it.

Dean's chapter uses the public criticism of New Zealand novelist Eleanor Catton in 2015, where she was attacked for criticising the National Government's lack of support for the arts, to demonstrate the performance of neoliberal logic in New Zealand as it impacts participation. He frames the attacks on Catton, which essentially painted her publicly as a traitor to her country, as a response, knowingly or not, to a neoliberal value system of free market individualism and economic rationality which has had the effect of "empowering some and silencing others" (Dean in Godfrey, 2016, p.31).

The literature on civic participation in New Zealand, Dean aside, is probably light due to the comprehensive reporting undertaken by the New Zealand Electoral Commission.

The New Zealand Electoral Commission is required to report to the Minister of Justice following each General Election on the administration of the election, including its performance objectives and learnings, enrolment and voting statistics, and any major issues arising (Electoral Act, 1993). This report, while not an academic source, contains a wealth of information not published elsewhere and might be the reason academics have steered clear of additional quantitative analysis.

Today, the Electoral Commission sees itself as responsible not only for making voting as accessible as possible, but for championing participation as a critical priority (Electoral Commission, 2015, p.3). In its "Report into the 2014 General Election" the Electoral Commission analyses trends in voter turnout across a range of demographics and cohorts, in a way that provides useful context for this research. The Electoral Commission's observation that "New Zealand has a serious problem with declining voter participation" (Electoral Commission, 2015, p.45) is a problem statement that in itself helps to shape this project's area of enquiry.

The report details some of the environmental factors that influence voter turnout, including barriers for overseas voters, blind and visually impaired voters, and the changing role of advance voting. These issues give useful context to the broader themes identified in other academic literature about the changing norms of citizenship and voters' interaction with the political public sphere. The report also details some of the issues facing the Commission and influencing the voter experience. For example, the rise of "selfies" taken at polling locations in the 2014 General Election raised

concerns about potential non-compliance with the Electoral Act and the implications for protecting the secrecy of the vote. The regulation of social media use around elections is of particular relevance to this field of enquiry, where changing patterns of engagement are often realised online.

Electoral Commission research places the goal of increasing voter participation in context, which is useful in understanding the broader societal trends by which subgroups, like millennials might be influenced. It finds that enrolment rates for all age groups between 18-39 have dropped over the past three elections, with the greatest drop seen for those aged between 25-29 (Electoral Commission, 2015, p.45). The report posits that: "voting is a habit that needs to be formed young, and if it is not, non-engagement persists as one ages" (Electoral Commission, 2015, p.45).

While the method used for this research was based on quantitative analysis of New Zealand statistics, it also includes some comparative analysis with other developed democracies. For example, the report compares voter turnout in New Zealand since 1945 with that recorded in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom to demonstrate that the decline in turnout in New Zealand is particularly persistent (Electoral Commission, 2015, p.10). This research, as well as an interview with Electoral Commission Civics Education Specialist Richard Thornton, provides useful insight and analysis to support the objects of this research.

### **Political Efficacy**

Hoffman and Young (2011) look at the effects viewing political satire has on knowledge and participation, social capital and communication, and how citizens use

the internet to become engaged with politics ("Lindsay", n.d.). Their article, "Satire, Punch Lines, and the Nightly News: Untangling Media Effects on Political Participation", discusses the psychology and influence of political entertainment. While both authors take an American-centric approach to examining the effects of different types of media use on political participation, the tool of political efficacy to measure media effects is one that could be used in a comparative context.

The authors propose that political efficacy, defined as, "the belief in one's own competency and the feeling that political and social change is possible" (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller in Hoffman & Young, 2011, p.161), is an important mechanism to measure media effects such as political participation. They argue that a person's judgement of their own political efficacy can incentivise political participation. Their article aims to establish whether or not late night comedy, satirical programming and traditional television news has similar or divergent effects on political participation. To set their study apart from other literature into political and media effects, Hoffman and Young draw a line between late-night comedy, such as *The Late Show* and *The Tonight Show* and political satire such as *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report*, suggesting that each has unique effects on political participation. Late-night television is said to focus on punchline jokes and caricatures of public figures, while political satire such as *The Daily Show* asks viewers to evaluate issues. The authors found this distinction impacts on political efficacy and, in turn, participation.

Hoffman and Young differentiate each show's viewership (arguing that younger viewers were more likely to watch satirical programming, while older viewers preferred late-night programming), before constructing a study to measure the implications of

viewing each type of programming. Like other literature looking at the effects of political satire, a generational divide was deemed important and relevant to the study.

The theoretical framework for Hoffman and Young's research (2011) relied on a mediation model, whereby media use predicts efficacy, which predicts participation. The methodology saw the authors engage close to 500 students at Eastern University in an online survey where they were asked to answer a number of questions around their media use. The study's findings suggested that while American parody and traditional television news increase participation in politics, American late-night comedy programming does not.

The limitations of the study include the fact participants were mostly self-selecting and drawn from a small pool of college students. The evaluation uses a bootstrapping technique of mediation analysis, controlling for age, ideology and political interest, and found that there was a positive correlation between viewing traditional and satirical news and political participation which was not shared by those who only viewed late night comedy. The authors extrapolate that the cognitive effort required by satirical programming (which is not required for the punchline comedy of late-night shows) engages viewers in a unique way, thereby increasing the salience of their political efficacy.

This research is in keeping with other literature into the effects of political satire and participation, in that it demonstrated there are positive effects between viewing political entertainment and increasing participation. The method and sample size of the survey mean the study is limited, particularly in terms of its applicability outside of the American context.

For this project the learning from this article is in the use of political efficacy as a measure of media effects, rather than the method or specific findings.

### **Satire and Power**

When thinking about the action millennials in New Zealand are taking to engage with politics, whether through satire or other means, it is useful to situate their effort within the context of the international experience of similar cohorts.

In her article, "'Down with some things!' The Politics of Humour and Humour as Politics in Turkey's Gezi protests", Dagtas (2016) explores "the relationship between humour and power in contemporary activist practices" (p.12). In Turkey's Gezi Park, Dagtas study found a physical location for a discussion of humour, satire and politics, where protesters from a broad range of backgrounds came together in opposition to their neoliberal, authoritarian government. Despite a lack of coherent political agenda, this group used humour to destabilise political targets and unite people in opposition to a common enemy.

Dagtas cites her past ethnographic study of secular politics in Istanbul and Antakya as a building block for her analysis of how humour is an entry point to understanding and explaining cultural difference. She also makes use of theories of humour such as superiority theory, which is the idea that people "acquire a sense and feeling of superiority by laughing at the misfortune of others" (Dagtas, 2016, p.13). This approach grounds her arguments in broader conceptions of power allowing her to speak to the possibilities and limitations of humour as a political tool.

To explore the way Dagtas' speaks to identified themes in the literature, including satire's rejection of rationality and relationship with participation, it is worth explaining

the title this article references. During the initial period of the Gezi uprising, a protester's graffiti reading; 'kahrolsun bagzi seyler!' which in English translates to; 'down with *some* things!' became a slogan for the movement thanks to its use of humour to articulate both rebellion and confusion with the status quo (Dagtas, 2016, p.29). By misspelling the Turkish word for 'some' the slogan draws attention to public dissatisfaction with the system, while at the same time poking fun at the inability of language and rationality to aptly describe their dissent. In this example, and many others discussed by Dagtas, humour and satire give activism the focus and reach it needs to have impact and increase participation.

Her article also looks to the role young people play in propagating messages and how humour is a select form of dissent against authoritarian regimes. Dagtas' insight that, for many, not taking things seriously is a way to address feelings of guilt and uselessness in the face of seemingly insurmountable power structures (Dagtas, 2016, p.5). While the Turkish political context is vastly different from that experienced in New Zealand, Dagtas' focus on youth and the way they employ humour as a weapon or collective "coping strategy" (Dagtas, 2016, p.15) is relevant to research into millennials and political participation in the New Zealand context.

Like other authors in the field Dagtas is careful to define satire as both "emancipatory and disciplinary" (Dagtas, 2016, p.13), with its role ultimately being to "demarcate difference" (Carty and Musharbash, 2008 in Dagtas, 2013, p.13). The bond satire creates between the joker and the audience is not defined by simply understanding the humour, but rather "the distance they establish, through the joke, between themselves and the object of ridicule," (Dagtas, 2016, p.26). This definition,

like others in the literature, is illustrative in that it speaks to satire's potential for relationship building.

The structure of Dagtas' article is particularly useful to this project. By looking at the history of political satire in Turkey the reader is opened up to the Turkish worldview which is useful in that it reminds the reader that satire is understood in context. By citing many examples and including pictures to illustrate humour as a means of resistance in this context, the article is engaging and easy to understand. While this article offers specific insight into a moment in time it also highlights themes which help situate this study, namely, satire as it relates to power, participation, rationality and trust.

### **The Characteristics of Millennials**

The ways which satire is employed by different generational cohorts is not well researched. Academics including McClennen & Maisel (2014) are certainly conscious of the contribution of different groups, but the literature on the characteristics of millennials at large is a more fertile area for research. Authors Charles Schewe, Kathleen Debevec, Thomas Madden and William Diamond (2009) have explored the millennial cohort from a marketing perspective. Schewe et.al. define cohorts as: "people who are born together and who travel through life together" (2009, p.3). Their article, "If You've Seen One You've Seen Them All! Are Young Millennials the Same Worldwide?" has both academic rigour and real-world application.

The aim of the article is to study the similarities and differences of millennials' values in the United States, New Zealand and Sweden in order to give marketers some evidenced-based assumptions to inform international marketing strategies. The idea being that if millennials hold similar values, no matter their country of origin, marketers

can be confident in pursuing a global marketing strategy rather than a differentiated regional strategy. This article provides some important definitions relevant to research into millennials' use of political satire in New Zealand. According to Schewe, et.al. New Zealand millennials are those people born between 1982 and 1996, but their year of birth is not their defining feature. Instead, the defining features of this cohort are the shared values which Schewe, et.al. argue are defined by external events in those impressionable years of a person's life (between the ages of 17-23). In this way, studies of the "millennial cohort" (Schewe,et.al, 2009, p.4) differ from generation based analysis in that they seek to understand the impact that events have on a person's values and behaviours in the long-term, rather than fixate on a specific date range as the means of defining the group.

In the American context, The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of the late 2000's meant American millennials became more conscious of how they spend their money. In Sweden, millennials have experienced a period of state deregulation meaning they are more likely to change jobs, and have different expectations of employment than their parents. In New Zealand, the striking difference between millennials and Generation X (1961-1980) is noted in their reliance on social media, with a majority relying on digital media and Facebook to reinforce social ties (Schewe,et.al, 2009, p.4).

While these observations are based on analysing millennials as consumers, it also provides a useful frame to consider a person's political coming of age as they reach 18 and are eligible to vote. This study provides a comparative analysis which describes the characteristics of millennials: Namely, that millennials are more educated, technologically savvy, ambitious, community-minded and driven to make a difference

than other cohorts.

While the theoretical framework of this study is useful, as is its comparison of New Zealand and American millennials, there are also some striking limitations. While the authors admit that there is a lack of empirical evidence in the New Zealand context, little effort is made to apply cohort theory to New Zealand-based events as was done in both the American and Swedish context.

In New Zealand, we know that the rise of neoliberalism and the impetus it placed on competition and individualism moved New Zealand away from the social democratic tradition of the post-war period. The research of Schewe et al posits that New Zealand millennials are more likely to take risks, but in rebellion with some of these market drivers, millennials are also seeking out values-based approaches to community, valuing equality over individualism. There is also an over reliance on data supplied by human resource companies which include Australia as well as New Zealand in the results.

Because much of the literature reviewed for this research is written in the American context, the real value of this article is in its differentiation of American millennials. Its finding that New Zealand millennials are more liberal than their American counterparts, is worth keeping in mind as we extrapolate the rationale for political participation and engagement with satirical debate.

### **Satire in the Age of Social Media**

Digital channels like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have increasingly become venues for satirical content as the political public sphere moves online. These forums

for entertainment and networking are also forums for debate, particularly among millennials. The impact of digital media on communication could form a separate thesis. For the purposes of this project, there are some technological shifts and implications discussed in academic literature that are worth reviewing.

There is a large volume of literature that deals specifically with the impacts and effects of the modern media environment on participation, and conceptualisations of the mass media and the public sphere (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, p.707). The political effects and agenda setting literature is valuable in that it demonstrates the need to think critically about new channels and their impacts on civic participation. This is particularly important when coupled with a rise in professionalised politics, where changes in traditional political communication can impact conceptions of democracy and citizenship (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Whether an environment is studied through the lens of political efficacy, power structures, audiences or channels, the constant remains: satirical political communication requires some recognition of context.

In their article, "The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features", Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) survey the shifts in political communication by grouping technological changes in society into three key periods. The first is characterised by stable institutions and societal beliefs, the second by a mobile electorate and the professionalisation of politics, and the third by an economic model characterised by the dual imperatives of abundance and diversification (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999, p.210). Using these distinct phases, this article discusses the impacts of a proliferation of avenues for political communication in relation to the power dynamics between different political actors. While this article provides a sound

contextual basis on which to study the rise and impact of social media on satirical political communication, it is limited in its relevance to the discussion of the digital public sphere itself. For example, there is reference to "computer-based research" (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999, p.215) which demonstrates how out of date the authors' observations around technological change are.

But the digital age is not the first to prompt discussion about the effect a channel has on content. Colletta (2009) looks to the impact television as a medium had on satirical discourse. Colletta's work is set apart from other academics in this field in that it is grounded in postmodern theory. The theoretical foundation of her analysis is based on the idea that "reality is constructed rather than perceived or understood" (Colletta, 2009, p.1). She argues that television in particular is slave to a certain "self-referential irony", defined as an awareness of our own role in constructed meaning, which can present as a "cynical knowingness and self-referentiality" (Colletta, 2009, p.1) or pastiche, which is often satiric. Colletta argues television's self-reflexive format can actually trivialise the seriousness of satire. She says televised satire is often saturated with meta-jokes, spectacle and competing opinions which can mask its serious intention (2009).

But unlike other literature on satire and political participation, Colletta (2009) deals with televised satire in terms of aesthetics, as a form of seduction and emotional response. Colletta argues we are seduced by the medium and comforted by the idea that we are aware of the seduction (Colletta, 2009, p.858). This framework underpins her argument in a unique way. The strength of McClennen and Maisel's (2014) contribution to the literature is their detailed analysis of trends in satire by channel. In

their chapter; "Mesmerized Millennials and Byte-ing Satire" the authors traverse the various online channels where satire has taken root. For example, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and Tumblr to name only a selection.

The value of McClennen and Maisel's (2014) work is that it focuses on the specificity of the digital format. They argue that "shorter forms of social critique...repackage the news in witty, brief, sarcastic ways" (p.139) have spurred a "viral phenomena" (p.139) allowing independent satirists and big cable channels alike to slice up content in a way that sees it shared instantly with international audiences. The ease with which citizens are able to add, amend and editorialise existing news has seen a "convergence between producer and consumer" (Jones in McClennen & Maisel, 2014, p.139) that supports the further democratisation of satire. In drawing conclusions about the impact of this 'byte-sized' political communication McClennen and Maisel argue that "millennials are strong believers in community and collective action...and are adept at creating communities larger and more diverse than any previous generation" (Well, Winograd and Hai in McClennen and Maisel, 2014, p.150). They suggest that rather than dumbing down political debate the digital environment has allowed millennials to repackage and rebrand citizenship, "not abandon it completely" (p.150).

The immediacy and access provided by digital media was another common theme in the literature. The direct engagement between satirist and subject, enabled by channels like Twitter and Facebook, where satirists can "tag" people or organisations, thereby speaking directly to them --changes the dynamic of the message being sent compared with say a televised broadcast or printed column (McClennen & Maisel, 2014). While digital media enables quick-fire communication to large audiences on

converged digital channels, it can also limit audiences or stymie the ability for satire to access audiences where genuine political debate can take place. As Bershidsky (2017) argues in the article "Democracy has never faced a threat like Facebook", there are increasing concerns that the demographic and political silos enabled by targeted advertising and campaigning on social media actually destroy chances for meaningful debate (Vestager in Bershidsky, 2017). So where satirical content used to be viewed on national television by a fairly widespread portion of the population, content today can miss entire demographics, not based on their personal decision to turn the television on or off, but based on algorithms generated by browsing activity. While this is a concern for students of civic participation it also explains the unique environment in which millennials are operating.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review demonstrates the vast terrain covered by the academic literature on satire and gives some context to satire's broad and often varied definition. Satire in the New Zealand context presents as relying heavily on the tools of humour and 'piss-taking', with irony and contradiction often preferred to cynicism and sarcasm. This is an important element in the literature that was tested with satirists themselves in interviews for the long-format piece of journalism.

The literature also demonstrates a more earnest conversation in the American context, where satire is seen as an important tool for political participation, and for drawing people together for political purpose. In the New Zealand context, by contrast, many of the satirists interviewed expressed a dogmatic commitment to humour without any reverence or attention to satire's service to democracy. Themes in the literature

related to political efficacy revealed the causal link between satire and civic participation is limited, particularly in terms of an evidence base in the New Zealand context. This was supported by interviews with satirists in New Zealand who had no data on which to assess the impact of their work, and were not seeking to quantify their impact on those terms. In fact, overall the literature is light in terms of its applicability to the New Zealand experience, meaning interviews were essential to fully explore the subject of satire and the rise of the citizen satirist in New Zealand.

Indeed, satire in the age of social media is presented with some unique challenges, a theme the long-format piece of journalism explores in detail. While there is a lot of literature around changing norms and conceptions of citizenship, as well as the impacts of digital technology, the corporatisation of New Zealand media is a thread which requires further investigation. There is a gap in the literature in this area. Overall the American and international bias in the literature will be countered by a focus on New Zealand sources, interviews and observations in the discussion to follow.

## Discussion

Depending where you look, it could be argued that New Zealand's strong satirical tradition has all but disappeared. On television at least, the art of "seriously joking" (McClennen & Maisel, 2014, p.1), popularised by satirists like McPhail and Gadsby, John Clarke, and television shows like "Facelift" has been replaced with panel shows, a point of contention for many satirists interviewed as part of this research. The persistent underfunding of public broadcasting and the corporatisation of New Zealand media seems to have pressed pause on satirical television programming.

At a glance (and while out of scope) the work of cartoonist Sir Gordon Minhinnick and Neville Lodge has been replaced by Tom Scott and Peter Bromhead, but newcomers, such as Cory Mathis and Toby Morris, who were both identified as promising young cartoonists by the *New Zealand Listener*, have only made a fleeting impression (I. Grant, personal communication, May 1, 2017). On stage, satire is almost exclusively limited to the New Zealand International Comedy Festival.

At a time when trust in politicians, media and Government is at an all-time low (Edelman, 2017), when the public are highly cynical of political process, openly distrust official communication, and express declining confidence in New Zealand's leaders, it is hard to believe that satire itself is dead.

This discussion argues that in 2017, satire is entering New Zealand's public sphere in new ways, as evidenced by interviews with millennials who are using online channels to attract audiences. Websites like Ben Uffindell's "[The Civilian](#)" and Robbie Nicol's YouTube series "[White Man Behind a Desk](#)", draw heavily on the American influence, leveraging audiences in real-time by virtue of free, networked, digital channels (McClennen, 2014). Taking a steer from the success of overseas satirists,

including those behind satirical news website “The Onion”, Comedy Central shows including “The Daily Show” and “The Colbert Report” as well as “Last Week/Tonight with John Oliver”, millennials are offering New Zealanders a new slant on much-loved local satire. The observation put forward in interviews with both Nicol and Uffindell is that at a time when funding for traditional media outlets is hard to come by, mimicking international satirists is a safe and easy place to begin building confidence (R. Nicol, personal communication, May 30, 2017) Before looking to this shift and its implications in more detail, this discussion will define satire and situate it in the New Zealand context. It will then look to satire and civic participation, exploring whether millennials are motivated by a desire to influence change, or a desire to have fun, and what the answer says about the state of satire in New Zealand.

### **A History and Definition of Satire**

The origins of satire are found in Athens and Rome, the world’s oldest democracies. It could be argued that the birth of satire and democracy are inextricably linked. Kharpertian (1990) explains that satire is understood to have its origin in classical poetics and dramatics. Links back to the plays of Aristophanes in the 5th century BCE speak to the role of satire in its earliest forms as ridiculing the powerful and pointing to the follies of the State.

Imagine Athens in 424 BCE -- the city was celebrating its 84th year of democracy, the empire spanned the Aegean, and its poets and philosophers presided over an age of culture and achievement that has been admired ever since. In that year, a play called *The Knights* won first prize at the Lenaia – Athens' annual festival of dramatics (“The Knights” n.d.). “The Knights” was a comedy written by the famed

playwright Aristophanes, and it lampooned Cleon, a pre-eminent Athenian general and statesman of the day. The play characterised Cleon as a corrupt, sycophantic, populist demagogue, but it was not just a political diatribe. The Cleon of the play was not portrayed as a statesman but a wheedling and venal slave who attempts to win over Demos (representing Athens) with rabble-rousing, theatrics, and cheap flattery – all before losing Demos' favour to a humble sausage-maker. The sausage-maker administers a quick "boiling", Demos/Athens is symbolically rejuvenated, and Cleon is reduced to selling sausages outside the city gates (Maguire, personal communication, 29 March 2017).

In "The Knights", as in his other plays, Aristophanes made his points with exaggeration, wit, and metaphor. He wrote to illuminate the foibles and follies of the powerful, but his purpose was also to critique Athenian society and how its moral and political failings were complicit in the demagoguery of Cleon, and of those like him. Aristophanes was one of the earliest employers of satire, and his work flourished in the new kind of society that a democracy cultivated – one where the political and the public spheres shared access to audiences (Maguire, personal communication, 29 March 2017).

This is not to suggest the origins of satire are undisputed. Quintilian's declaration in the *Institutio Oratoria* demonstrate satire's mixed Greek and Roman origins, as do poems by Ennius (239-169 B.C.), Lucilius (180-102 B.C.) and Varro (116-27 B.C.). In fact, the link between modern satire, satyr-drama, and old comedy have been disputed for centuries. By most accounts, the origin of satire depends on how far back you begin your search.

Today, definitions of satire pay homage to those age-old attributes of wit and humour, which are used as tools to expose or discredit vice or folly (English Oxford Living Dictionary, n.d.). Academic literature on satire takes this definition further, defining it as an outlet for critical thinking and a means by which to critique contemporary politics. McClennen and Maisel (2014) describe satire as a vital part of the democratic tradition (p.107). The authors explain that the act of understanding the joke, which is not always obvious, is a tool which engages audiences in a way that inspires activism. This point was reiterated in the interview with "Canta" writer Sebastian Boyle (Boyle, personal communication, 16 May, 2017). This definition is framed almost in defence of satire, which has come under attack in the American context as being captured by leftist ideology. McClennen and Maisel (2014) suggest satire is "a witty invigoration of democracy, not an attack on it" (p.20). Satire does not tell people what to think, but simply that they ought to think. In rebuttal to concerns over leftist bias, McClennen and Maisel (2014) explain that there is a very important difference between saying what you mean, with opinion, conjecture or malaise and asking an audience to question what is meant.

To discuss New Zealand's unique tradition of satire, we first need to understand how satire differs from humour and irony. New Zealand has strong traditions of humour and irony, borne out in interviews with satirists themselves. McClennen and Maisel (2014) argue that while satire often uses irony, irony is not always satirical or comedic. They say the difference between irony and satire is that irony can make you feel mad, without asking you to muse on that madness. It is the language of opposites, about "extreme understatements or overstatements where you say one thing and mean

another" (McClennen & Maisel, 2014, p.111). The value of irony, like satire, is that it demands audiences to "negotiate meaning" (McClennen & Maisel, 2014, p.117). But it does not call for an active audience as satire does. Where satire points its audience in the direction of action, irony often stands alone (McClennen & Maisel, 2014, p.117). These distinctions proved to be important to satirists. New Zealand Listener Political Editor, Jane Clifton was careful to draw a line between opinions and "funny lines" in New and satire, her opinion being that the latter is increasingly rare as writers look "to write opinion for buttons" (J. Clifton, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

### **Satire in the Land of the Long White Cloud**

New Zealand's satirical hall of fame is long, and distinguished. Only recently did it lose two of its favourite sons, the late John Clarke, best known for his portrayal of the Kiwi farmer Fred Dagg, and Murray Ball, the cartoonist behind long-running comic strip Footrot Flats. These men are household names with their work creating a sense of identity for New Zealanders from the 1970s that holds today.

But New Zealand's satirical roots go deeper than this. While this project has excluded cartooning, no history of New Zealand satire can ignore the pre-eminence of drawn satire. According to Ian Grant, New Zealand satirist and founder of the New Zealand Cartoon Archive at the Alexander Turnbull Library, the three great periods of political or editorial cartooning helped shape the style and tone of satire in New Zealand (I. Grant, personal communication, May 1, 2017). As such, it is worth recapping a history of satirical cartoons for context.

According to Ian Grant, the glory days of New Zealand cartooning date back to the 1890s, where the provincial accent of New Zealand's longest-serving Prime Minister

Richard John Seddon was, among his other attributes, satirised by cartoonists (“*Story: Seddon, Richard John*” .n.d.). The second period was the 1930s where Sir Gordon Minhinnick, a conservative cartoonist, took aim at the First Labour Government. Minhinnick continued to draw into the 1970s but arguably was at his best in his “angry early years” (I. Grant, personal communication, May, 1, 2017). The third period was the 1980s where Prime Minister Robert Muldoon’s “pugnaciousness and divisive policies gave an edge to the work of cartoonists like Peter Bromhead, Bob Brockie and Tom Scott” (Grant, 2017). This tradition of political cartooning, often with a satirical edge in response to crisis and mass change, holds that in New Zealand, as in other countries, satire thrives during times of upheaval and change.

Tramping songs, literary parodies, pop songs and satirical political columns also have an important place in New Zealand’s satirical history. Ricketts & Roberts (1998) explain that each were the product of New Zealand’s unique, remote place in the world, particularly during the Cold War, where absurdist traditions in theatre influenced the arts and New Zealand satire offered an outlet to speak truth to power in a way that was socially acceptable. While there is very little analysis of the cultural drivers of satire, Ricketts and Roberts (1998) do suggest that throughout New Zealand history, humour has been used as a break from “the serious work of nation building” (p.xv), an escape, which allowed reflection in a culture not always comfortable taking a critical look at itself. New Zealanders perceptions of themselves was something that surfaced in relation to the way satire is received. In an interview Jane Clifton said that in her experience New Zealanders are actually very uncomfortable with “argy bargy” even though they pretend to welcome conflict or challenges to their views ” (J. Clifton, personal communication,

May 18, 2017). This observation demonstrates the importance of seeking out the experiences of satirists themselves as well as academics to better understand the context in which satire has developed and is delivered in New Zealand.

New Zealand's satirical tradition on screen is perhaps most relevant as we seek to explore the ways millennials are taking satire online. Programmes including "McPhail and Gadsby", "Public Eye", "Skitz" and "Facelift" were staple satirical shows in the 1980s and 1990s. However, a demise in funding for public broadcasting (Dean, 2016) as well the commercialisation of New Zealand's media model, saw this content dry up by the early 2000s, replaced instead with panel comedy shows which focus on humour, rather than the stinging critique of satire.

The reasons for this are not clear. It could be that commercial media are more risk averse (I. Grant, personal communication, May 1, 2017) driven by the dual requirements of making content cheaply and ensuring an immediate return on investment. Or it could be related to the growing gap between the rich and poor in New Zealand, with those less fortunate who might in the past have engaged with satirical content more isolated and disconnected than they once were. Some suggest that the lack of satirical content is the result of an increasingly politicised public service (I. Grant, personal communication, May 1, 2017) and others suggest that it has been the preference of our politicians to prioritise harmless humour over anything that could turn the electorate against them. This was certainly an environment fostered by former Prime Minister John Key who was a great joker, but fell short of being a great wit. The John Key era will be important during this project, not only because of John Key's personal leadership style, but because it is during his Prime Ministership that many

millennials likely became politically aware. In interviews with millennials, it was clear that shows like "McPhail and Gadsby" and "Facelift" were actually too old to have had any tangible influence on millennials work. This underlines the theory put forward by Schewe et.al. which is expanded on again shortly. Satire is a response to contemporary political issues and follies, after all.

### **Satire and Civic Participation**

The concepts of civic engagement and participation are central to this research. Questions around the salience of these issues were central in the interview process. But before we can explore satire as a tool for engagement employed by millennials, we need to unpick the premise that satire as a genre is inextricably linked to engagement, and define what a millennial actually is. This is important in the New Zealand context, because increasingly we are witnessing a preference, at least by politicians and the mainstream media, for humour and light-hearted banter over satire - particularly on television. While this might mean that we end up with political communication that's more enjoyable or entertaining, it is not communication that necessarily brings people together for purpose, or encourages questioning and critique of the powerful in society.

Colletta (2009) argues that the very existence of satire depends on engagement, explaining that if the satirist and the viewer don't think the object or topics of their attack are open to change, then the medium would revert to simple criticism (p.859).

McClennen and Maisel (2014) take this a little further, suggesting that the act of understanding a satirical joke builds the social bonds necessary for democracy to thrive. All of this sounds very positive, which brings us to the disconnect in the narrative in New Zealand in 2017, specifically around millennials and participation.

According to Schewe, et.al. (2009), New Zealand millennials are those people born between 1982 and 1996. However, unlike other academics who study generational cohorts, Schewe, et.al. argue that the millennials' year of birth is not their defining feature. Instead, as discussed, they suggest shared values give the group cohesion. They argue that shared values are defined by experience, particularly formative experiences in those impressionable years of a person's life, which Schewe, et.al. place at between 17-23 years old. While this definition is arguably too narrow, there are synergies between this thought and some of the work done by New Zealand scholars including Andrew Dean (2016). Dean argues that neoliberal ideology has had a lasting impact on millennials. For many, it has come to be a way of seeing the world that they feel compelled to rebel against as a cohort. Neoliberalism in the New Zealand context is defined as the pre-eminence of values including "individualism, competitiveness, and tiered thinking" (McKinlay, 2017), explained as hierarchical capitalism which focused almost entirely on social mobility as a value we should hold above all else.

In his chapter "Speech and Silence in the Public Sphere" (Dean in Godfrey, 2016), Dean points to the underfunding of public broadcasting, the Government-sponsored stripping back of union power and capacity, and specific examples of legislation to mount a claim that neoliberal policies have in fact curbed political participation in New Zealand. If you read only newspapers, it would be fair to assume that neoliberalism has nothing to do with trends in millennials participation in and engagement with democracy, and in fact, the steep and persistent decline in voter turnout among young people is actually the result of disinterest or laziness (R. Thornton, personal communication, 28 April 2017).

This narrative, that millennials are disengaged and disinterested, jars with the premise of this research, and with the views of millennials themselves.

In their book "Is Satire Saving Our Nation? Mockery and American Politics", which has been a central source for this research, McClennan & Maisel (2014) dedicate an entire chapter to how the millennial generation thinks. In this they argue "baby boomer rhetoric" (p.129) about millennials being at a disadvantage due to their consumption of mere "snippets" and "brief flashes" (p.20) of information suggests all content that is short is stupid. The point the authors labour is that information online, as in more traditional forms, is not created equal. This is useful analysis in that it highlights some of the generational biases we are likely to face in the New Zealand context, both when studying the satirical contributions of millennials and interviewing people about their effect and impact. The other useful point made in this chapter is around the space millennials see themselves occupying in the satirical sphere. Using examples from popular television show "The Colbert Report", McClennan and Maisel (2014) look at the satirical contributions of millennials, particularly bloggers, in the context of an ineffective mainstream media, which in America is seen to be failing to hold the powerful to account. The authors argue that satirical content increasingly provides an important alternative to the information offered in mainstream news outlets (p.130).

A recent article published by journalist Bernard Hickey on the news website "Newsroom" titled; "Trolling gen-rent easier than getting them to vote" (2017) is a perfect example of this kind of rhetoric in the New Zealand context. The premise of Hickey's article, which is centred on the housing crisis, is that "Generation Rent are more interested in The Bachelor than in understanding how politicians and voters are working

to keep them as tenants” (Hickey, 2017). Thus, what we are seeing in 2017 in New Zealand, are the same themes and concerns raised by academics like McClennen and Maisel in the American context. Namely, the perspective that millennials and young people generally are politically disengaged measured only by the yardstick of voting in elections. As McClennen and Maisel rightly point out: “information and meaning are not the antitheses of comedy and entertainment” (2016, p.150). Just because millennials want to be entertained, does not mean they cannot also convey important messages. In fact, the digital environment has enabled new ways of “doing citizenship” with a broader spectrum of activity (p.151). It is important to remember that just because activism is online, that does not mean it is not also taking shape in the real world. Online activism is the first step, for many people, in getting involved in a cause. This was cited as a motivation for citizen satirists like Ben Uffindell who said satirical blogging offered an important connection between real life events, entertainment and action (B. Uffindell, personal communication, May 26, 2017).

In 2017, voting in elections seems to be the default measure of engagement due to a lack of a universally agreed definition of what citizenship means and looks like (R. Thornton, personal communication, 28 April). That means organisations like New Zealand’s Electoral Commission have their work cut out. With a limited mandate around encouraging citizens to vote in elections, efforts to address the drivers of engagement and participation, such as values, habits and behaviours, are outside of scope. In New Zealand there is no cross-agency group responsible for increasing participation, and recommendations for a national strategy have not been actioned. This means that at an institutional level the conversation we are having around civics is constrained.

As Russell Dalton argues in his book "The Good Citizen" (2009), patterns of engagement have shifted away from duty-bound conceptions of citizenship to engaged citizenship, where activity including, but not limited to, voting defines modern citizen-craft. While voting is and remains a vital element of democratic tradition, it is not the only measure of democratic success. Millennials, who are increasingly seeking to engage their peers online and push the boat out on what constitutes political engagement, do democracy a service, not a disservice, by both making citizen-craft fun, as well as engaging audiences which, for the most part, remain out of the reach of institutions.

### **Satire Digitised**

So what does the transition of satire to the online sphere mean for political communication and participation in our democracy? In the book, "Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide" (2008), Henry Jenkins argues that while some digital media replicate traditional techniques online, others encourage and demand that people hone new skills (such as photo shopping, online forms, surveys and Graphics Interchange Formats (GIFs)) to participate in the democratic process in entirely new ways as digital citizens.

Digital, on-demand channels are a great leveller when it comes to political communication in interviews for the long-format piece of journalism it was clear that digital channels gave millennials a means by which to both build confidence and raise their individual voice and those views of their peers in public debate.

Networked, social spaces, accessible on personal smart phones, at an individual's leisure, break down barriers between satirists and audiences that were not

possible before handheld devices. This new relationship between politics, people and popular culture (Jenkins, 2008, p.217) has implications for content as well. Jenkins explains that social channels are perfect platforms for metaphors, memes and jokes that bring big issues closer to home. For example, in 2004, during President George W Bush's administration, a video created by political action group "True Majority" went viral after it seized on the popularity of the television show, "The Apprentice", to call for the President to be "fired". The message was effective, because the reference was understood by a large audience, it was memorable and it made serious allegations of poor performance at the highest echelon of the political system seem simple to solve. To quote Jenkins (2008): "These popular-culture-inflected campaigns...shift the public's role in the political process, bringing the realm of political discourse closer to the everyday life experiences of citizens" (p.219). Examples like this demonstrate the ways digital campaigns are changing the way citizens think about political power dynamics, in turn transforming the way people look at both governance and citizenship (p.219).

The idea that digital channels allow people to master the skills they need to be participants in democratic process is a very American interpretation of political communication. The idea that digital channels offer the opportunity for people to create and promote "counter-perspectives" (Jenkins, 2008, p.226) is probably closer to the New Zealand experience. In New Zealand, millennials are increasingly making use of digital channels to cultivate a new club of satire fans it can be argued that the opportunity technology offers amateurs to get started in satire has opened the genre up over all, growing the bandwidth of our democracy, engaging more people in real-time, than satire has ever done before. And while some voices command greater audiences

than others, "no one voice speaks with unquestioned authority" (Jenkins, 2008, p.219).

### **Satire as a 'Weapon of Choice' for Millennials**

This snapshot of satire and citizen engagement provides good context for a discussion around whether New Zealand millennials are using satire as a form of dissent, a way to hold the powerful to account, or whether, contrary to the literature, they are entering into satire simply to hone their experience of popular culture in the direction of civic responsibility (Jenkins, 2008, p.235). It is clear that in the American context a lot of weight is put on the idea that satire is about pointing people in the direction of action. But this is not necessarily borne out in the New Zealand context. Most millennials upon interview were open about satire being a personal preference, and a way to engage and entertain their friends for entertainment's sake.

New Zealand satirical website, "The Civilian", started in 2013 by Ben Uffindell, a political science graduate from The University of Canterbury, is a case in point. At the height of its popularity, "The Civilian" was receiving 15,000 site views a day (Gates, 2013). The content and style of the website, which promises readers "all the news that's fit on a page" takes obvious direction from the American satirical site, "The Onion". But Uffindell says holding the powerful to account was never a part of his motivation (B. Uffindell, personal communication, May 26, 2017). He says his intention was always to "write something funny, something engaging, that would get attention" (B. Uffindell, personal communication, May 26, 2017). Like American satirist Stephen Colbert, Uffindell is open about the site using in-character satire to make people laugh. For example, in an article written by Toby Manhire shortly after the site's overnight success, Uffindell explains his inspiration for starting the website:

I was sitting in my apartment watching popular television show *The News*. Did you know *The News* is watched by more than one million people every week? That makes it one of the most watched television programmes in all of New Zealand, only slightly behind such favourites as *Border Security* and that one with Alison Mau. And I was thinking on this as I watched it, and I suddenly realised "Wait, why doesn't anyone put *The News* on the internet? (Uffindell in Manhire, 2013).

The idea that millennials are using satire as a tool to show their disdain for the corporatisation of New Zealand media and politics is assumed. Talking to millennials, it seems their motivations are in fact quite mixed, with a common denominator of honesty to an audience, rather than to an ideology. Uffindell's irreverence for news media processes, and his desire to 'take the mickey', was about marrying up the American tradition of character comedy with a very unique New Zealand style (B. Uffindell, personal communication, May 26, 2017). Uffindell says in New Zealand satirists still have the ability to mock mainstream media because by-and-large New Zealanders are still watching just two channels, One News and TV3. "You can make these jokes you can't make in other countries. We have a vague common experience that we can tap into," (B. Uffindell, personal communication, May 26, 2017).

Robbie Nicol's YouTube series "White Man Behind A Desk" (Nicol, n.d.) understands the first lesson in communications - go to where your audience is. Millennials and young New Zealanders are increasingly turning to video-based content for information and entertainment. Nicol uses video to grab the attention of new audiences with two to six-minute clips on topics from climate change to social bonds

(Nicol, n.d.). Nicol appears to be attempting to inform his audiences on topical issues providing context, explanation and analysis which is often missing in news stories.

However, in an interview with Nicol, he disputed the premise that satire was in any way a ring-in for news content. Nicol says comedy is different: "proper journalism can say, 'this system has been proven to work', and that's really important information...but comedy can't really ever point to good things because the good things aren't funny. We can only ever really point to the flaws and inconsistencies and absurdities because that's where the gag comes from" (R. Nicol, personal communication, May 30, 2017).

Nicol says satirists seek out absurdities but sit permanently on the outside. According to Nicol, there is no evidence to suggest "White Man Behind a Desk" influences anyone at all. He says his team thinks of the series as an entertainment show: "nothing we do on the show matters" (R.Nicol, personal communication, May 30, 2017).

The Facebook Page "Backing the Kiwi Meme" ("*Backing the Kiwi Meme*", n.d.) is a relatively new addition to New Zealand's online satirical environment. Started in late 2016, the Facebook page takes aim at the New Zealand Labour Party's slogan "Backing the Kiwi Dream" (New Zealand Labour Party, n.d.). The page uses photoshopped images, videos, memes and GIFs to satirise New Zealand politicians, putting the most focus on Labour and the left-leaning parties. As Jenkins (2008) identified, this specific style of satire latches on to popular culture, allowing people to "apply fan expertise to their civic responsibilities" (p.235). There is an argument that Facebook pages like this are using humour as a means by which to unite the otherwise fragmented left-side of politics. While this page openly takes aim at the perceived stupidity of certain Labour Party policy positions or comments by Members of Parliament, it also makes plain that

Labour is the lesser of two perceived or positioned political evils. At a time when peer-to-peer communication has a lot of resonance, the impact of features like Facebook's feed notifications, which alert users to organisations, causes and posts their friends "like" cannot be underestimated. Indeed, in the American context, a Pew Research study found that young Americans were getting more campaign information from entertainment media than they were from news media (Jenkins, 2008, p.235). The impact of satirical Facebook pages in the New Zealand context is not certain. It is clear that sites like "Backing the Kiwi Meme", with just over 4000 followers, have limited reach. Other channels, like Snapchat, which allows users to send short videos to contacts which disappear after 10 seconds, might be increasing satire's reach again. In New Zealand, the widespread use of Snapchat for satirical purpose has not been taken up, at least not that this project has uncovered. The immediacy of time-limited videos does bring an urgency to satire that can really amplify the joke in the right setting. McClennen and Maisel (2016) argue that this "flash satire" (p.144) is a part of the brave new frontier for citizen satirists and could well give activism the focus it often needs to have effect. Satire, coupled with popular culture and fan culture does seem to be the satirical channel of choice for millennials. Whether the purpose of these platforms is to inspire action or opposition, however, is a question for millennials themselves. Certainly the proliferation of content online pointing the finger at poor performing politicians demonstrates satire as a genre is not dead, but thriving in the hands of the younger generation.

## Conclusion

This project has explored the ways millennials are reimagining and redefining the country's tradition of satire in response to changing norms of citizenship, digital technology and a corporatised media. The process of interviewing satirists, both older and from the millennial cohort, was vital to understand the intersect and deviance of New Zealand satire as it is practised and published, from academic interpretations. Academic research suggested the immediacy of online channels has steered satire in a new direction, both in terms of the interaction it enables with powerful and diverse audiences, as well as in the way it has allowed millennials or citizen satirists to perform new modes of citizenship or ways of being in the political public sphere. This research was supported by interviews with millennials who found a freedom and agency online that was not attainable in traditional media. Both in the academic research and by way of interviews it is clear digital technology has broken down barriers to entry for citizen satirists, while at the same time introducing new limitations and challenges, many of which are still being realised. The American influence, prevalent in academic literature, and also manifesting in the political satire produced by millennials is a trend to watch. The dominance of this cultural frame, particularly for political satire, could have implications for New Zealand's tradition of satire.

The corporatised media model remains an assumed limitation. While there are not any home-grown televised satirical shows on either TVNZ or TV3 in 2017, it is hard to draw a conclusion as to whether that is purely a funding decision, or due to a lack of applications given the available alternatives. The outtake? Satire may be in its most transient period yet. As millennials pop up and disappear with the urgency each new channel inspires, each with limited audiences, but a collective command online, what

we can expect to see is a new generation of satire, defined not just by the author but by their channel and their audience.

## References

"Backing the Kiwi Meme". (n.d.). Retrieved from:  
<https://www.facebook.com/NZLPmemes/>.

Bennett, W. & Iyengar, S. (2008). A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication. *Journal of Communication*. 58 (2008), 707-731.

Bershidsky, L. (2017, June 9). *Democracy has never faced a threat like Facebook*. Stuff.co.nz. Retrieved from: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/technology/social-networking/93496176/democracy-has-never-faced-a-threat-like-facebook>

Blumler, J., & Kavanagh, D. (1999). The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features. *Political Communication*, 16, 209-230.

Busby, C. & Bellamy, P. (2011). *New Zealand Parliamentarians and Online Social Media*. Retrieved from: <https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/00PLSocRP11021/aa491c9b610115dfc4de18cc536decd6e9a83b24>.

Colletta, L. (2009). Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 42(5), 856 – 874.

Cunliffe, M. (1966). Humour as an American Political Style: The Case of Abraham Lincoln. *Jahrbuch fur Amerikastudien*, Bd.11, 29-40.

Dagtas, M.S. (2016). 'Down with some things!' The Politics of Humour and Humour as Politics in Turkey's Gezi protests. *Etnofoor*, 28(1), 11-34.

Dalton, R. (2009). *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*. Washington D.C., United States of America: CQ Press.

Dean, A. (2016). Speech and Silence in the Public Sphere. In M. Godfrey (Ed), *The Interregnum - Rethinking New Zealand* (pp. 23-36). Wellington, New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books Limited.

Edelman. (2017). *2017 Edelman Trust Barometer Reveals Global Implosion of Trust*. Retrieved from: <http://www.edelman.com/news/2017-edelman-trust-barometer-reveals-global-implosion/>.

Electoral Act 1993, No 87 (1993). Retrieved from: <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/p>.

Electoral Commission. (2015). *Electoral Commission Report on the 2014 General*

*Election*. Retrieved from: [http://www.elections.org.nz/sites/default/files/bulk-upload/documents/report\\_of\\_the\\_ec\\_on\\_the\\_2014\\_general\\_election.pdf](http://www.elections.org.nz/sites/default/files/bulk-upload/documents/report_of_the_ec_on_the_2014_general_election.pdf)

English Oxford Living dictionary. (n.d.). *Satire*. Retrieved from: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/satire>

"*Facelift*". (2007). Retrieved from: <http://www.gibson.co.nz/screen-projects/facelift>

Gates, C. (2013). Satirical spoofs spread word for The Civilian. *The Press*. Retrieved from: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/christchurch-life/8493353/Satirical-spoofs-spread-word-for-The-Civilian>.

"*Geert Hofstede*". (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html>

Gibson, D. & Ellis, C. (Producers). 2007. *Facelift*. [Television series]. Auckland, New Zealand, TVNZ.

Grant, I. (2017, March 7). Political cartoons more relevant than ever. *The Dominion Post*. Retrieved from: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/90087230/ian-grant-political-cartoons-more-relevant-than-ever>.

Hickey, B. (2017, April 12). Trolling gen-rent easier than getting them to vote. *Newsroom*. Retrieved from: <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2017/04/12/19118/trolling-millennial-renters-is-easier-than-getting-them-to-vote>.

Hoffman, L. & Young, D. (2011). Satire, Punch Lines, and the Nightly News: Untangling Media Effects on Political Participation. *Communication Research Reports*, 28(2), 159-168.

Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

"*Lindsay Hoffman*". (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.communication.udel.edu/faculty-and-staff/bio>

Manhire, T. (2013, March 25). The Civilian: a new NZ satire site. *Noted*. Retrieved from: <http://www.noted.co.nz/archive/listener-nz-2013/the-civilian-a-new-nz-satire-site/>.

*Marcus F. Cunliffe*. (1990). Retrieved from: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history>

McClennen, S. (2014, December 19). Was Colbert The Best Political Satirist Of Our Time? *Footnote*. Retrieved from: <http://www.footnote1.com/was-colbert-the-best-political-satirist-of-our-time/>.

McClennen, S. & Maisel, R (2014). *Is Satire Saving our Nation? Mockery and American Politics*. New York, United States of America: Palgrave Macmillan.

McKinlay, T. (2017, 28 April). A question of values. *The Otago Daily Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/magazine/question-values>.

New Zealand Labour Party. (n.d.). *We're backing the Kiwi dream*. Retrieved from: <http://www.labour.org.nz/>.

Nicol, R. (n.d.). White Man Behind a Desk. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCo46lpsBPqg8k6lh0qYzIMA>.

Prof. Lisa Colletta. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.aur.edu/discover-aur/lisa-colletta/>.

"University of Delaware". (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://sites.google.com/site/dgoldyoung/>

Ricketts, H. & Roberts, H. (1998). *How you doing? A selection of New Zealand Comic and Satiric Verse*. Canterbury, New Zealand: Lincoln University Press.

Robinson, R. & Wattie, N. (1998). *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*. Auckland: New Zealand: Oxford University Press.

Schewe, C.D., Debevec, K., Madden, T.J., Diamond, W.D., Parment, A., & Murphy, A. (2013). "If You've Seen One You've Seen Them All!" Are Young Millennials the Same Worldwide? *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 25(1), 3-15.

*The Capping Show: Really Old*. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <http://www.critic.co.nz/features/article/132/the-capping-show-really-old->

T.D Kharpertian. 1990. *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, London and Toronto. Retrieved from: <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=um0h0arlUdoC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=true>

*The Knights*. n.d. Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Knights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Knights).

Urban Dictionary (n.d.). Millennial. Retrieved from: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Millennial>.

## **Interviews**

A Sparrow, personal communication, May 23, 2017

B. Uffindell, personal communication, May 26, 2017

J. Clifton, personal communication, May 18, 2017

J. Wells, personal communication, May 16, 2017

P. Casserly, personal communication, May 20, 2017

R. Nicol, personal communication, May 30, 2017

S. Boyle, personal communication, May 16, 2017

S. Braunias, personal communication, May 12, 2017

T. Mallard, personal communication, May 18, 2017

T. Manhire, personal communication, May 16, 2017