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Towards a non-hierarchical campaign? Testing for interactivity as a tool of election campaigning in France, the US, Germany and the UK.

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Abstract

Interest in the Internet and its role within political communication and election campaigning has now an established body of theoretical and empirical history, with mixed predictions and findings. The bulk of the empirical research has been in single countries, and where there has been comparative research it has tended to use a range of methodologies conducted by different authors. Largely, empirical studies have agreed with the politics as usual thesis, that political communication online is of a similar if not identical style to offline: top-down, information heavy and designed to persuade rather than consult with voters. The mass take-up of Web 2.0 tools and platforms challenges this approach, however. Internet users now have opportunities to interact with a range of individuals and organisations, and it is argued that such tools reduce societal hierarchies and allow for symmetrical relationships to build. Theoretically democratic politics is a fertile environment for exploring the opportunities potentiated by Web 2.0, in particular the notion of interactivity between the campaign (candidate, party and staff) and their audiences (activists, members, supporters and potential voters). In particular, Web 2.0 conceptually encourages co-production of content.

This research focuses on the extent to which interactivity is encouraged through the use of Web 2.0 tools and platforms across a four year period focusing on four discrete national elections; determining take up and the link to national context as well as assessing lesson learning between nations. Using the Gibson and Ward coding scheme, though adapted to include Web 2.0, we operationalise the models of interactivity proposed by McMillan (2002) and Ferber, Foltz and Pugiliese (2007). This methodology allows us to assess whether election campaigns are showing evidence of adopting co-created campaigns based around conversations with visitors to their websites or online presences, or whether websites remain packaged to persuade offering interactivity with site features (hyperlinks, web feeds, search engines) only. Indications are that the French election was largely politics as usual, however the Obama campaign took a clear step towards a more co-produced and interactive model. There may well be a clear Obama effect within the German and UK contests, or parties may adopt the look if not the practice of the US election. This paper will assess the extent to which an interactive model of campaigning is emerging as well as detailing a methodology which can capture and rate the levels and types of interactivity used across the Internet. Whilst specific political cultural and systematic factors will shape the use of Web technologies in each election, we suggest that an era of Web 2.0 is gradually replacing that of Web 1.0. Within this era there is some evidence that campaigners learn from previous elections on how best to utilise the technology.

Introduction: The Internet and Elections

Analyses of the role of the Internet during election campaigns conducted over the last decade have largely found it to be an underused campaign tool outside of the US. The innovations highlighted as central to the successful gubernatorial campaign of Jesse Ventura, and the capacity to mobilise activists through the failed bid for the Democratic nomination by Howard Dean using Moveon.org, indicated a new type of political engagement that is potentiated through the use of the Internet. Elsewhere, studies consistently find that party and candidate websites are created largely to provide a space for offline material to be posted for viewing in a non-mediated environment (Morris, 1999). Predictions that the Internet would rebalance the offline inequalities between parties by providing them access to an audience were soon proven inaccurate (Lusoli, 2005), and it is argued that the Internet largely has adhered to a normalisation hypothesis (Margolis & Resnick, 2000). Recent comparative studies also found a low level of innovation online, and that providing information packaged in engaging and persuasive formats is the predominant use for party websites (Kluver et al, 2007).

Online party political communication does expand upon offline material by offering more substantive content; providing some mechanisms for feedback, usually asynchronous and private; and offers a unified and coherent message within a sophisticated, user-friendly design; all features sought by users according to one study (Foot & Schneider, 2006, p. 199). The sophistication of political party sites, as measured by the extent to which features are engaging (De Landtsheer et al, 1999); interactive (Sundar, 2004) or technologically advanced (Jackson et al, 2009) is evolving and increasing (De Landtsheer, 2005; Schweitzer, 2008a) and so providing a user experience similar to that of a corporate site. Broadly, however, we find two interlinked conclusions based on analyses of the use of the online environment by political parties. Firstly, the *normalisation of power relations* follows from observations that those parties with the greatest amount of resources have the most sophisticated web presences and lead innovations (Resnick 1998). Secondly, the *normalisation of political communication* as traditions of campaigning override any Internet specific style of communication that may encourage dialogue between candidates or parties and those whose votes they seek (Rohrschneider 2002; Schweitzer, 2008b). However, Gibson and Ward (2009) suggest these meta-narratives for explaining Internet usage mask a range of country and organisation specific variables. They argue there are three specific sets of factors which hold the key to explaining organisational behaviour. Firstly, systemic and technological opportunity structures: the media environment and the extent of media partisanship as well as the penetration of the Internet; and the political environment, systemic differences between presidential and party systems and levels of centralisation of control over elections campaigning. Secondly, organisational capacity, which focuses on the staff time, skills and organisational resources required. Thirdly, organisational incentives, with the key variables being fit between ideology and the ethos of the Internet and Web 2.0; the extent to which the target audience is likely to be online; the age of the organisation and how tradition constrains communication; and the status of the organisation and whether they seek to an equal share of voice via the Internet due to marginalisation by the mainstream media. While these variables cover many aspects of Internet use, these could also apply to aspects of Web 2.0 use also.

Studies consistently find parties providing websites which act as online information resources designed to communicate outwards to their audience, so taking advantage of lack of mediation and distortion that is a feature of mass media reporting of politics. As a consequence of the strategy underpinning Internet use, as articulated previously, elements which allow interaction are eschewed as these would detract from the core function and lead to resources being spent on responding to inbound communication (Stromer-Galley, 2000). Despite arguments that citizens

desire greater asynchronous and synchronous communication with political decision makers (Tedesco, 2007; Coleman & Blumler, 2010), there is little evidence of political parties embracing the tools that facilitate conversations. Their strategy and concomitant tactical use of the Internet are locked into styles and modes of communication synonymous with the Web 1.0 philosophy of 'we will build it and they will come', (Birdsall, 2007) they provide a location for audiences to visit in order to be persuaded. However, as the Internet user becomes familiar with the more participatory nature of many websites, designed within a Web 2.0 'they will come and build it' philosophy designed around allowing co-production and empowering the producer-user (produser), it is questionable whether political communication and campaigning can remain purely in information mode and whether the opportunities Web 2.0 offers are too tempting.

Elections, Web 2.0 and participatory campaigning

The growth in use of websites built around participatory modes of communication concomitant with the global explosion of social networking (with Facebook and Twitter being key examples), as well as online communities and forums such as Mumsnet, is argued to have created a network society (Castells, 2007, Van Dyck, 2006). Within the network society, power is held by the community members who act as information hubs, creating, sharing and disseminating material across one or many communities. Secondly, and with most direct relevance to election campaigning, the way that campaigns such as anti-globalisation and environmentalist movements (Rodgers, 2005; Rushkoff, 2003) have harnessed the notions of the network society to complement and enhance their communicational reach suggests a new communication ecosystem is in place which political actors need to understand and embrace. While many raise cautions regarding the potential impact of the Internet for enhancing democracy (Hindman, 2009), others focus far more on the inclusivity and connectedness potentiated (Coleman & Blumler, 2010). Advocates of the Internet as a democratising force accept the reality of low participation, yet point to the potential offered. Theoretically there exists a win-win zone for citizens and electoral contestants. While the former seek self-efficacy through voicing their opinions and attitudes and having these heard, the latter can address key concerns and create an online adjunct to offline campaigning. Online public meetings, and the replication of canvassing techniques within Internet based forums, it is argued, can go some way to reconnect citizens and their representatives at a time when trust and connectedness is lacking globally in democracies (Stoker, 2006; Coleman & Blumler, 2009).

Historically the Internet has played a set range of functions within election campaigning (Gibson *et al.,* 2003b). Developing on established schema we propose the key functions are as follow. Firstly, a website is a key medium for information provision, a space for parties and candidates to present their brand character, personnel and key political proposals in an unmediated environment. While some have been critical of the extent of information provision on party websites, we would argue this remains a key function as the Internet presents parties with an opportunity to talk directly to visitors. Secondly, websites are used for campaigning; in terms of presenting persuasive arguments and cues to inform voting behaviour. Thirdly, and a corollary of campaigning, is the use of negativity. Increasingly we have seen campaigning be as likely to take an attacking stance against opponents, as presenting a positive image of the host and the Internet presents an opportunity to reinforce campaign messages (see also Schweitzer, 2010). Fourthly, websites can

be a key tool for resource generation, usually gaining donations but also to mobilise supporters and increase activism. Fifthly, and linked to mobilisation, is networking: providing spaces for supporters and activists to discuss issues and tactics and for the party to communicate directly to their supporters; historically this has taken place on password protected intranets or via email to closed lists (Norris, 2001). Finally, websites are used to promote participation; traditionally limited to getting out the vote.

However, Web 2.0 presents a new set of potentials and challenges for political parties, underpinned by a range of philosophical notions (O'Reilly, 2005; Anderson, 2007; Chadwick, 2009). These suggest the Internet having a fundamentally different role in society and presenting opportunities for the user; as opposed to those who create sites. We present these notions as a framework for understanding the potential for a democratisation of political communication as offered by Web 2.0 tools, applications and platforms as well as how parties can harness Web 2.0 to improve the efficacy and reach of an election campaign. Firstly, it is argued that Web 2.0 provides the capacity for individual production and user generated content. Users are able to easily upload comments, pictures and videos with minimum effort and technological ability and these can all become part of an online milieu of campaign communication. Parties are also able to harness producer-users (produsers), to enhance the campaign both as creators of supportive material and endorsers through comments and sharing. Linking to this is the notion of harnessing the power of the crowd. The online user can be mobilised to support a campaign, sign a petition, and reinforce the messages of a range of brands and organisations; social networks in particularly provide multiple opportunities for leveraging power through crowd-sourcing theoretically creating a win-win situation for both organisations and supportive publics. Thirdly, the Internet provides access to data on an epic scale allowing users to be fully informed about any issue if they wish; this links to the function of information provision though the sources of information change fundamentally with, in Web 2.0 environments, user communities being a key source of information. Fourthly, and underpinning the 'they will come and build it' notion, the Internet is argued to be evolving into a huge architecture of participation. Sites such as Facebook or Twitter provide a space for individuals to create content; without users they would be barren landscapes and their success is reliant on usage; any organisation can create such a space. Central to this is the promotion and encouragement of participation; online community members act as conduits of information sharing links, ideas and, importantly, campaign communication. The final notion is openness. The increased transparency and accessibility implicit is a challenge for political communicators which many see as outweighing the benefits making many apply the brakes when innovating online (see also Stromer-Galley, 2000).

At the heart of Web 2.0 is interactivity; a process by which face-to-face communication is replicated through the use of online tools. These can be asynchronous, such as email, discussion forums and the participatory spaces within social networks; alternatively they can be synchronous chat facilities that allow one-to-one or many-to-many conversations to take place. While technologies which facilitate using the online environment are often discussed in terms of being interactive, Stromer-Galley (2004) offers a useful distinction in types of interactivity. Interactivity-as-product refers to the ability of the user to click links, play videos and dovetails neatly with McMillan's definition of user-to-document interactivity where users have choices over access only. Interactivity-as-process replicates conversation and is contiguous to definitions of user-to-user interactivity. While this dual distinction is useful, Ferber et al (2007) suggested a refinement

of definitions of online communication. Supporting notions of user-to-document and product-driven interactivity, they discuss the notion of one-way, top-down communication. Asynchronous and private communication is two-way but the host retains control over the process of communication. In contrast, three-way participatory communication can involve multiple users in an open forum and conversations can be either synchronous (ideally), but also asynchronous with users contributing at numerous points within what some refer to as a global conversation. It is argued that these offer differing levels of user control over communication, with one way communication offering the least and three way the most. These definitions map out the various modes of communication offered across various parts of the online communication ecosystem. Our intention is to assess the extent to which political party websites adhere to these various models of communication and user control during election campaigns and how or whether campaigning has evolved in line with developments in technology and the social uses of the Internet over a key period 2007-2010 as social networking reached a critical mass. Our study assesses whether there is a shift away from a Web 1.0 era, towards Web 2.0 in election campaigns.

Methodology

Within our analysis of party and candidate websites we employ an operationalisation of models of interactivity developed by Ferber et al (2007) and McMillan (2000). The operationalized model (Lilleker & Malagon, 2010) conceptualises interactivity across two axes. Firstly, the Ferber et al one-way, two-way and three-way directions, the first relating to on-demand information provision with no opportunity of feedback; two-way encompassing asymmetrical tools such as email or contact forms which may well lead to non-public conversations or aggregations of frequently asked questions to be presented publicly. Three-way communication replicates as closely as possible symmetrical public conversation between two or many participants and is most consistent with open participation, user generated content and the use of the network effect central to Web 2.0. The Ferber et al model is visualised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Ferber *et al.,* Six-Part Model of Cyber-Interactivity

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                        One-Way              Two-way              Three-way
|Feedback               |Mutual Discourse    |Public discourse    |
|[pic]                  |                    |                    |
|Monologue              |Responsive Dialogue|Controlled Response  |
|[pic]                  |                    |[pic]               |
|                       |[pic]               |                    |
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The second axis is the level of control offered to users by the site. This we rate out of ten based on functionality with no control, not even choices over reading, as the lowest and openly encouraged participation within a debate being the highest (see Table 1 for a schematic). This conceptualisation of interactivity allows us to assess the extent to which the ideas of Web 2.0 have filtered into the e-campaigning element of political communication. We analyse the content of websites by checking the presence and absence of features, and the frequency with which they appear, drawn from a list of 69 discrete items (tools, applications or functions) derived from previous coding sheets used for website analysis (Gibson & Ward, 2000).

Table 1: Scale for measuring levels of receiver control

Category	Scale	Definition
	1	One-way hyperlink with unclear destination
	2	One-way hyperlink with defined destination
Low Receiver Control	3	Hyperlinks created with user input, language is dynamic using second person
	4	User has control over read and link options, video play is optional, content can be downloaded
	5	Users have control over interfacing with content (above) and can send information
	6	Users can send and receive information. i.e. debate forums
	7	Users have multiple options to send and receive information, their input has transformational power – can be seen. i.e. text only chat.
	8	Users can upload content, questions, including videos, and can receive answers from receivers
High Receiver Control	9	User can choose time, type and amount of information sent and received, the information sent is transformed by the receiver and the transformation is transparent. Communication is asymmetrical
	10	Sender and receiver have equal levels of control, communication is conversational

This project is designed to map out the evolution of the use of the Internet within the context of election campaigns. The nations were selected on the basis that the elections were a standard distance apart, were national contests and would see a high degree of professionalisation (Negrine et al, 2008). The nations, France, US, Germany and the UK are also all advanced industrial nations with established democratic institutions and are all within an elite group of nations globally. This suggests that the nations would have independent traditions of campaigning, with specific national constraints; but that there may also have been a significant amount of cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices. There has been argued to be elements of standardisation; for example the Americanisation debate has been related to all the four nations within research articles. There has also been a crossover of personnel working within nations. One of Sarkozy's online strategists Loic le Meur went to work with the US Democrat party in 2007; Blue State Digital, creators of Obama's website were prominent in the UK and worked with both the Conservative and Labour parties in an advisory capacity; similarly a number of strategists from the US were present in Germany in the years preceding the campaign with all the major parties showing an interest in what lessons could be learned from the Obama campaign. This cumulatively suggests that looking across elections is a useful way to understand evolution in practice. Resources mean that the US cannot be directly compared to campaigning practices within the EU, parties are capped on spend and cannot attract the same levels of donation from either major sponsors in the corporate lobby, private donors, or the comparatively smaller national populations. The US and France have similar electoral systems, and both are presidential with a separately elected lower chamber; the UK and Germany are parliamentary systems where the leader of the party or coalition with the most seats within the parliament becomes the national political leader; these factors also suggest variations that may effect comparability (Gibson & Ward, 2009). However, in reality, parliamentary systems have become more personalised and presidential in style; suggesting differences in messages will be significantly less than was previously the case (Karvonen, 2009). Equally, similarities between the media system between the US and UK, with overlapping systemic similarities between France and the US and Germany and the UK suggest there are strong reasons why these nations can be comparable to a degree. However, the key factor we highlight is the functions of websites themselves. While they may be created to promote an individual or a party, the objective is still to gain greater public support and to win government; outright in the US, France and usually the UK or win representation within a

coalition as is usual in Germany but was not the result in 2009 and in the UK which occurred unusually in 2010. Websites will therefore be likely to perform the same functions across nations, though perhaps to varying degrees.

The sample includes the websites of the main contenders across four discrete contests within four nations. The first two are the French 2007 and US 2008 presidential contests and the sites of the two final contenders, Nicolas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal in France, and Barack Obama and John McCain in the US, are analysed. The second two are the sites of the top six parties which stood nationally in the parliamentary election contests in Germany 2009 and the UK 2010; in our analysis of German parties we include the sites of Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU), Christlich-Soziale Union (CSU), Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP), Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Green), and Die Linke (Left); in analysing the UK parties we included the sites of Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats (LibDem), Green Party, United Kingdom Independence party (UKIP) and the British National Party (BNP). The four countries are similar in terms of internet access, though there are national conditions to consider and the ongoing increase nation by nation each year: France had 51.8% access, and were laggards in terms of penetration in comparison, a year later with the US 74.7%, Germany 75.3% and the UK 76.4% the highest in 2010 (Internet World Stats); these figures reflect the sharp increase in Internet penetration across the developed nations over the last five years. A range of analyses was carried out (see Jackson & Lilleker, 2011), for the purposes of this paper we offer an overview of levels of public participation allowed. Firstly we give an overview and internal comparison of the national campaigns' use of the internet prior to comparing the systems, and offering a global overview of evolution across the four contests and the timeframe in which they took place.

The evolution of web campaigning 2007-10

As would be expected perhaps the French contest was the least sophisticated and the candidate sites offered the lowest levels of public participation. While due to the lower penetration of the Internet in France, and the then low take-up of social networking, arguably a key factor was the branding strategies of the candidates which, though divergent, were designed to convey a number of perceptions to their site visitors. Segolene Royal offered access to a forum, and there were a number of options that allowed visitors to share aspects of her site via email or across their own web presences; however public participation was not encouraged. Her brand position was to be the unifying figure of the left-wing in France, a reaction to the split in the left vote and consequent disastrous result in 2002 which saw neo-fascist Le Pen reach the second round. The Royal website thus gave the sense of her as a figurehead of a movement; the Cahiers d' ésperance was presented as a collaborative manifesto and the Segosphere a grassroots online movement; both of which were key aspects of her brand. In contrast, Sarkozy presented himself as a typical authoritarian leader with the endorsements of a variety of experts, including economists and sociologists within his video wall entitled NStv. His site also hosted a forum and he offered opportunities to test-drive his presidency within Second Life; however again participatory elements are very limited. Thus neither site adhered to any significant extent to the philosophical notions of Web 2.0, 94% of Royal's website and 95% of Sarkozy's was one-way communication which invited visitors to read or view content and not create any aspect of the site. On average both sites were locked into a

Web 1.0 mode of communication, with both averages being within the realm of one-way communication and user control being four; linked to which is defined as permitting users to control read, video play and link options, and to download content. With social networking not having taken off in France by 2007, there were no official external profiles or use of public participatory spaces.

The raw data, see figure 1, hide the distinctions between the sites, however. In particular the perceptions of openness and inclusivity offered by the heavily hyperlinked site of Royal. In themselves they offer little more than the choice of a click, however, because these mainly linked to supporters weblogs it give the impression that Royal was providing a gateway to an interactive community. Within this community politics was the main topic for discussion; though this external and supportive public sphere was, on occasions, a threat to the Royal brand (Lilleker & Malagon, 2010). More vibrant was the debate section, though due to it being embedded within the website it was heavily moderated causing contributions to appear disconnected from one another and conversations to be disjointed. Overall, the Royal and Sarkozy websites adhered to all the traditions of online political campaigning with a few innovations introduced on the margins.

Figure 1: Overview of features present on the websites of the French presidential candidates

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|10  |                   |             |SR – 7       |
|    |                   |             |NS – 10      |
|9   |                   |             |SR – 1       |
|    |                   |             |NS – 2       |
|8   |                   |             |             |
|7   |                   |SR – 1       |             |
|    |                   |NS – 1       |             |
|6   |                   |             |             |
|5   |SR – 5             |SR – 6       |             |
|    |NS – 3             |NS – 7       |             |
|4   |SR – 676           |SR – 1       |             |
|    |NS – 1328          |NS – 1       |             |
|3   |SR – 2             |             |             |
|    |NS – 2             |             |             |
|2   |SR – 103           |             |             |
|    |NS – 26            |             |             |
|1   |                   |             |             |
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Direction of Communication

The Obama and McCain sites in the US offer a sharp contrast to those of the French presidential contenders as well as to each other. There was a clear shift towards a more Web 2.0 approach by both men fighting for the American presidency. The McCain site could be described as transitional; predominantly the features adhered to the traditions of Web 1.0. However, the site offered a range of downloading and sharing options and contained a lively weblog which elicited a strong following and numerous supportive comments. Providing information and persuading visitors, however, was the key function of the McCain website; and it included a range of attacks against his opponent alongside his own campaign documents. The Obama website had the appearance of being a sharp contrast both in terms of its function and underlying strategy. The appearance, and in many ways reality, was of one single participatory architecture which sprawled across the main domain and a variety of social networking sites. Obama presented news in weblog format, allowing visitors to comment and discuss a range of issues, both campaign and policy related. Given the supportive nature of most comments it is likely there was heavy moderation as

this presented an opportunity for opponents to place anonymous attacks directly within the heart of the campaign.

This does not mean that debate did not take place and that the campaign would not respond to constructive criticism and disagreements from the Obama online movement, posts would often follow up user comments and he famously made a political u-turn following pressure via the weblog. The website also contained a campaign-specific social network mybarackobama.com (MyBO), designed to capture supporters and mobilise them into becoming activists. This area had a hierarchy of campaigners, some were clearly event organisers and others foot soldiers, but every member was openly encouraged to take on more organisational roles. Obama also dominated social networks, amassing 10 million supporters worldwide. His own eighteen profiles were used to promote his message but also encouraged users to share pages and promote via word of mouth as well as contribute to the pages; again all posts were supportive suggesting moderation took place.

The contrast in number of features and opportunities to contribute is stark, figure 2, and the overall average for the Obama site was three-way and scoring nine out of ten for user control showing the level of participation permitted. McCain shared the exact same average as his French counterparts, one way with user control scoring an average of four. The reason for this disparity was that while the Obama site provided a range of policy documents, on demand video and biographical and political information, the aspects that could not be shared or commented upon constituted only 4% of the total space occupied by his website. McCain, while clearly offering significant opportunities for online users to contribute to the site, this was only across 6% of the total pages. Thus, while the site experimented with weblogs, encouraged promotion through the online network and used social networks to reach out to US voters, it remained in between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0; architectures of participation appeared but they were not core to the McCain site to the same extent as was the case for Obama, equally they did not have the same level of traffic as measured by contribution. On average a post on the McCain weblog elicited 54 comments, the maximum being 198; on Obama's the average was 184 with some gaining over a thousand comments and replies. Obama's online strategy fitted with his brand positioning as a man of the people leading a public revolution against the Washington system; his background as a community organiser, as well as lessons from the Ventura and Dean campaigns, informed his strategy. While it may not have been influential in securing him the White House, it reinforced and reflected the positive public perceptions and news coverage that he appeared to have throughout his campaign. Obama was also vaunted as having changed political communication by placing Web 2.0 features and tools at the heart of the postmodern professional election campaign.

Figure 2: Overview of features present on the websites of the US presidential candidates

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|10  |             |           |BO - 57465      |
|    |             |           |JM - 284        |
|9   |             |           |BO - 2          |
|    |             |           |JM - 2          |
|8   |             |           |BO - 2          |
|7   |             |BO - 1     |                |
|6   |             |JM - 1     |                |
|5   |BO - 127     |BO - 8     |                |
|    |JM - 30      |JM - 6     |                |
|4   |BO - 2172    |BO - 2     |                |
|    |JM - 1294    |JM - 1     |                |
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|3    |BO - 4           |BO - 1           |                 |                 |
|     |JM - 1           |                 |                 |                 |
|2    |BO - 120         |                 |                 |                 |
|     |JM - 29          |                 |                 |                 |
|1    |                 |                 |                 |                 |
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Direction of Communication

The prediction that Obama had provided a new model for campaigning was partially borne out when analysing the websites of German political parties. The major organisations adhered to traditional campaign functions, such as information provision and resource regeneration. Their Internet presences were highly standardised and showed only few differences in their overall design and technical sophistication. Web 2.0 features were introduced for the first time by all parliamentary parties. These allowed site visitors to subscribe to newsletters and RSS feeds, share content with other users through social bookmarking or forward material within their social networks. In addition, citizens could respond to parties' news releases via online feedback forms or leave comments on their YouTube channels,. Despite their extensive usage, though, these web 2.0 features remained more or less aesthetic tools embedded in order to drive perceptions, as opposed to connecting with voters at a more substantial level. Genuine political discussions were scarce. For example, four of the parties maintained separate weblogs in the final campaign season, with no more than 240 official posts, the largest being that of the CDU. Discussions forums required users' prior registration and the entries could either not be seen or not commented by the wider public. This also applied to the contents provided in supporter communities. These were built by all organisations according to the MyBO concept (e.g., CDU/CSU: teAM Deutschland, SPD: meineSPD, Grüne: Wurzelwerk; FDP: my.fdp; Linke: Linksaktiv). Access however, was restricted to members and those users who had left private information. German parties thus aimed at controlling the political conversations on their websites. Critical bottom-up discussions, particularly on controversial policy issues, were avoided. In this way, parties' web strategies resembled digital window-dressing.

As figure 3 shows, on average, across all parties, 83% of site content was classified as one-way communication, identical to that of John McCain. However, some of the instruments which Obama introduced to web campaigning featured, in particular social networking sites. The German parties created groups on all major national platforms simultaneously, though gaining meagre levels of support when compared to the Obama campaign. In general, fan pages for leaders gained more attention than member groups for parties. At present (May 2010), CDU leader Angela Merkel has a 33,779 strong fan base on Facebook (members of the CDU group on Facebook: 2,603), while former SPD candidate Steinmeier is supported by 7,084 followers (members of the SPD group: 9,183). Despite these innovations the web performances of the German parties fall primarily into the one-way communication model with low to medium degrees of user control. As regards the latter, the Grüne scored lowest with an average of three, showing hyperlinks being the most common interactive feature; the FDP, CDU and CSU averaged five which permits control over clicking and sending information and the SPD six showing they allowed a greater amount of debate to take place. Linke, the left party, averaged within the two-way communication quadrant and also gained six for the average level of user control. However this is due to the overall size of the site and the paucity of features, which allows the weblog containing one hundred posts to make it appear more interactive than the competitors which in reality is not the case. Overall, it is fair to conclude that even in the web 2.0 era, interactivity in

German e-campaigning is used in a strategic manner to demonstrate electoral professionalism and modernity. The basic nature of parties' political communication , however, has not changed (see Schweitzer, 2011).

Figure 3: Overview of features present on the websites of German parliamentary parties

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|      |One-way            |Two-way           |Three-way         |
|10    |                   |                  |CDU - 266         |
|      |                   |                  |CSU - 11          |
|      |                   |                  |SPD - 228         |
|      |                   |                  |FDP - 106         |
|      |                   |                  |Linke - 107       |
|      |                   |                  |Grüne - 11        |
|9     |                   |                  |CDU - 2           |
|      |                   |                  |CSU - 1           |
|      |                   |                  |SPD - 2           |
|      |                   |                  |FDP - 2           |
|      |                   |                  |Linke - 2         |
|      |                   |                  |Grüne - 1         |
|8     |                   |                  |CDU -  2          |
|      |                   |                  |CSU - 1           |
|      |                   |                  |SPD - 2           |
|      |                   |                  |FDP - 2           |
|      |                   |                  |Linke - 2         |
|      |                   |                  |Grüne -  2        |
|7     |                   |CDU - 1           |                  |
|      |                   |SPD - 1           |                  |
|      |                   |FDP - 1           |                  |
|      |                   |Linke - 1         |                  |
|      |                   |Grüne - 1         |                  |
|6     |                   |CSU - 1           |                  |
|5     |CDU - 2440         |CDU -  9          |                  |
|      |CSU - 1245         |CSU - 6           |                  |
|      |SPD - 857          |SPD - 9           |                  |
|      |FDP - 167          |FDP - 8           |                  |
|      |Linke - 43         |Linke - 9         |                  |
|      |Grüne - 236        |Grüne - 8         |                  |
|4     |CDU - 91           |CDU - 1           |                  |
|      |CSU - 36           |SPD - 1           |                  |
|      |SPD - 135          |FDP - 1           |                  |
|      |FDP - 240          |Grüne - 1         |                  |
|      |Linke - 77         |                  |                  |
|      |Grüne - 156        |                  |                  |
|3     |CDU - 3            |CDU - 1           |                  |
|      |CSU - 2            |CSU - 1           |                  |
|      |SPD - 3            |SPD - 1           |                  |
|      |FDP - 3            |FDP - 1           |                  |
|      |Linke - 3          |Linke - 1         |                  |
|      |90/G - 3           |90/G - 1          |                  |
|2     |CDU - 43           |                  |                  |
|      |CSU - 26           |                  |                  |
|      |SPD - 16           |                  |                  |
|      |FDP - 217          |                  |                  |
|      |Linke - 202        |                  |                  |
|      |90/G - 53          |                  |                  |
|1     |                   |                  |                  |
```

Direction of Communication

This conclusion is also partially applicable to the websites of the parties in the UK; however here we found far more divergent strategies in the use of Web 2.0. Two parties' websites, those of the Greens and UKIP, retained a highly traditional Web 1.0 appearance with very simple tools that allowed sharing and in the case of the former only links to social networking sites. The LibDem site was equally built around the function of information provision but also had an area which

promoted activism; this was also true of the Labour website. LibDem Act network and Labour's membersnet.org both were used as supportive campaigning hubs. While they gave the impression that they were designed for party members, both were accessible to the general public and anyone could join, create their own profile, form and join campaign groups and comment on the wall spaces. The Conservatives copied one of the tactics of Obama more overtly; myconservatives.co.uk provided a space where activists could join and contribute financially or more directly to campaigns. Many were linked to UK constituencies, where the first past the post voting system means local representatives are elected through a majority system and so invitations were to support those standing for election at the local level. The Conservatives also had a party weblog, The Blue Blog, to which participation in the form of posting and commenting were encouraged. These features across the sites of the three largest UK parties were in addition to the now standard sharing features and links to social networks. The anomaly in many ways, due to both the size of the party, a metaphor for resources, and its right wing ideological stance, is the BNP. The site mirrored the nature of Obama's, offering news in the form of a weblog and providing an open access forum for site members. This provided a sense of community around the party and its policies. Many areas of the site encouraged visitors to provide pictures, video or anecdotes to support their stances opposing immigration, multiculturalism and tolerance of homosexuality. While offering complete ideological cohesion, the site was co-authored by a support network but all speaking with a single, far-right voice.

Overall, therefore, the UK parties offer stark contrasts internally. As figure 4 shows, on average, Labour, the Green Party and UKIP all provided predominantly one-way communication across their sites; though the extent of usage of Web 2.0 differed strikingly between Labour and the other two parties. Average direction does not reflect this adequately due to the amount of information provided; neither do averages of user control scores. UKIP scored four, the Greens and Labour five. The LibDem website on average reached 2.4 for direction, due to the sheer scale of the Act area, the Conservatives just topped that with 2.7 due to the opportunities to participate on the Blue Blog and the party-specific social network. However, the greater openness of the LibDem Act area, and larger amount of user generated content gives them eight for user control reflecting the greater participatory experience that could be witnessed and joined; the Conservatives score seven. The BNP site, as the figures suggest, averages as three-way and scores nine for user control; the only party website to match that of Obama.

Figure 4: Overview of features present on the websites of UK parliamentary parties

```
|10 |                      |                 |BNP – 38851        |
|   |                      |                 |CON – 7886         |
|   |                      |                 |Green – 399        |
|   |                      |                 |LAB – 569          |
|   |                      |                 |LDEM – 11266       |
|9  |                      |                 |BNP – 295          |
|   |                      |                 |CON – 51           |
|   |                      |                 |Green – 129        |
|   |                      |                 |LAB – 5            |
|   |                      |                 |LDEM – 126         |
|8  |                      |                 |BNP – 1            |
|   |                      |                 |CON – 1373         |
|   |                      |                 |Green – 2          |
|   |                      |                 |LAB – 4            |
|   |                      |                 |LDEM – 2           |
|   |                      |                 |UKIP – 1           |
|7  |                      |BNP – 3          |                   |
|   |                      |CON – 2          |                   |
|   |                      |Green – 1        |                   |
|   |                      |LAB – 2          |                   |
```

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|    |              |LDEM – 2       |           |           |
|    |              |UKIP – 1       |           |           |
|6   |              |               |           |           |
|5   |BNP – 105     |BNP – 10       |           |           |
|    |CON – 104     |CON – 41       |           |           |
|    |Green – 194   |Green –   7    |           |           |
|    |LAB – 624     |LAB – 76       |           |           |
|    |LDEM – 1024   |LDEM – 348     |           |           |
|    |UKIP – 40     |UKIP – 7       |           |           |
|4   |BNP –  300    |CON – 1        |           |           |
|    |CON – 11688   |Green – 1      |           |           |
|    |Green – 2778  |LAB – 2        |           |           |
|    |LAB – 505     |LDEM – 2       |           |           |
|    |LDEM – 2809   |UKIP – 1       |           |           |
|    |UKIP – 796    |               |           |           |
|3   |BNP – 2       |BNP – 1        |           |           |
|    |CON – 1       |CON – 1        |           |           |
|    |Green – 2     |LAB – 1        |           |           |
|    |LAB – 1       |               |           |           |
|    |LDEM – 2      |               |           |           |
|    |UKIP – 2      |               |           |           |
|2   |BNP – 107     |               |           |           |
|    |CON – 65      |               |           |           |
|    |Green – 50    |               |           |           |
|    |LAB – 31      |               |           |           |
|    |LDEM – 155    |               |           |           |
|    |UKIP – 112    |               |           |           |
|1   |              |               |           |           |
```
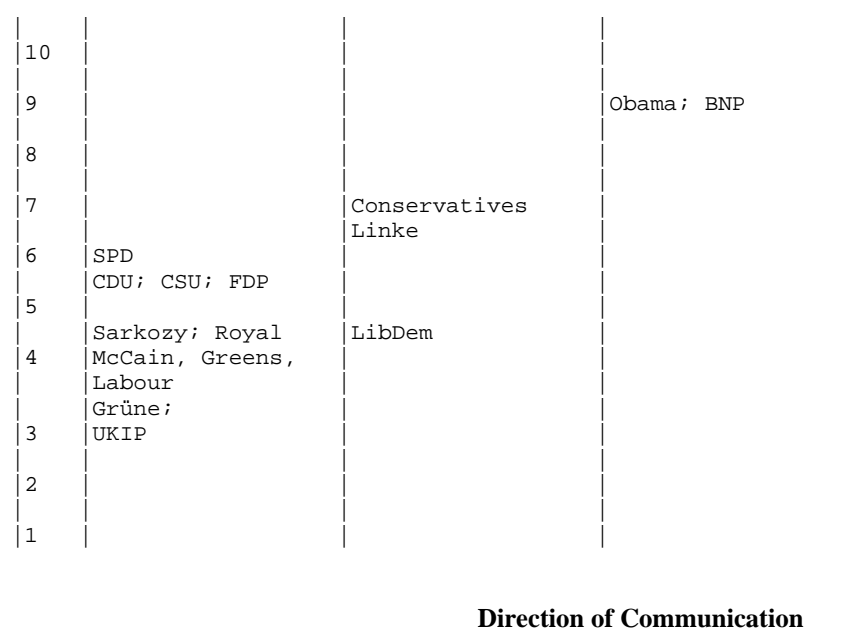
Direction of Communication

The differences belie a more fundamental similarity across the UK party websites, however. They each adhered to two key functions: providing information and generating resources for the party, they simply did this using different means. While the UKIP website lacked sophistication, many of the sites had numerous ways to donate, join and become active. Equally, many of the Web 2.0 elements were geared towards encouraging sharing and promotion by the online network, so crowdsourcing and harnessing the network effect for the party. Where visitor's voices could be found, they were all supportive and much of the material was gathered online and then repackaged so presenting the perception of interacting and encouraging participation but regulating how visitors participated and moderating contributions. At no time is there evidence of contributions having political influence, or even shaping any element of the campaign.

Evolving Interactivity?

It was clear in the UK that many of Obama's online tactics were adapted to the national campaigning context; this is exemplified by the fact that Blue State Digital worked with both Conservatives and Labour and did several seminars on using the Internet in the UK. There was similar interest in Obama in Germany, his online campaigning tactics were borrowed to an extent across party sites; and all offered a number of participatory Web 2.0 features, in particularly creating internal communities to attempt to mobilise supporters. The averages, displayed in figure 5, tell an interesting story on their own. When looking at the extent to which sites, as a whole communicational item, adhered to Web 2.0 we find that only two demonstrate a full commitment to permitting participation: BNP and Obama. While ideologically polls apart, their strategies offer some similarities. Both had a strong populist element to their politics; both also saw the value in creating a movement that would support the party, reinforce their arguments and increase their reach and both could perhaps be described as outsiders of the system; or at least Obama emerged initially as the outsider. The Conservatives and LibDems clearly demonstrate there is a middle

way to be found. Their sites partitioned off information provision and participation quite clearly, though there were of course interlinkages between all areas of the sites it was very clear of the function of the areas that allowed participation and those that did not. The rest of the parties and candidates show little overall difference in terms of the average nature of their websites and visitor experience offered. Largely they predominantly provide information and Web 2.0 is either bracketed off in a small area, or links to external areas is part of the aesthetics as opposed to the substance of the site. It features links to social networks such as YouTube, offers a range of features that demonstrate technical sophistication but they eschew tools that permit participation. This may well be sensible in terms of resources, and in terms of the dangers that participation can cause, but also can prevent parties from gaining advantages that may be potentiated by embracing the rules and harnessing the power of the online community.
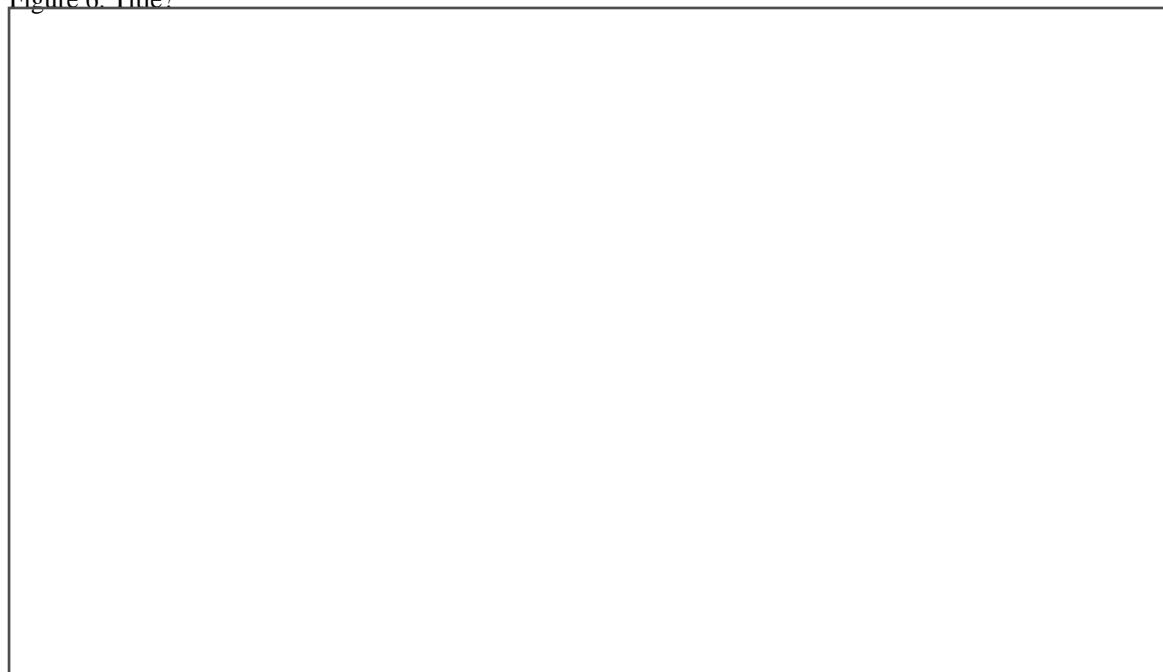
Figure 5: Revised user-to-user interactivity model comparing all parties and candidates

```
|    |               |               |               |
|10  |               |               |               |
|    |               |               |               |
|9   |               |               |Obama; BNP     |
|    |               |               |               |
|8   |               |               |               |
|    |               |               |               |
|7   |               |Conservatives  |               |
|    |               |Linke          |               |
|6   |SPD            |               |               |
|    |CDU; CSU; FDP  |               |               |
|5   |               |               |               |
|    |Sarkozy; Royal |LibDem         |               |
|4   |McCain, Greens,|               |               |
|    |Labour         |               |               |
|    |Grüne;         |               |               |
|3   |UKIP           |               |               |
|    |               |               |               |
|2   |               |               |               |
|    |               |               |               |
|1   |               |               |               |
```

Direction of Communication

The averages do not, however, give a full picture of the evolution between 2007 and 2010. The problem, when creating averages for interactivity, with many party websites is the predominance of information, in particular the loading of websites with press releases and other archives of material which is packaged and on demand but reduces the overall average a site can attain. Websites cater for multiple audiences, journalists being one key group, and so one would expect a balance of both information and other features; equally, however, any means of aggregation skews the data in some way and gives an imbalanced perspective. If we look simply at the percentage of the overall websites which offered three-way participation, figure 6 shows both has an average for each nation and using the party or candidate with the highest number of interactive features as an indicator we find a more mixed and evolutionary picture. Barack Obama in the US and the UK's BNP were clear outliers in terms of the extent to which participation was allowed. In many ways both French presidential candidates were outliers in the opposite direction with only 1% of both sites allowing participation by visitors. What we find looking at Germany to an extent, and due mainly to the use of weblogs, greater participatory opportunities allowed, and here and in the UK there were clear attempts to mimic the tactics of Obama. Our S-curve rejects both the logic of a gradual progression in online use and the impact of the US campaign. Rather, idiosyncratic

factors shape each party/candidate and country use of interactivity online.

Figure 6. Title?

Conclusions: Towards a new model of campaigning?

Due to the lower levels of Internet penetration and adoption of social networking, France is in many ways acting as the control nation in our analysis. This represents the pre Web 2.0 mode of campaigning despite the contest taking place well within the era of Web 2.0. It seems Obama has clearly changed the game in terms of use of the Internet within an electoral contest, and we see three innovations developed by the Barack Obama campaign which have become standard within professional campaigns. The most profound is the shift from private to public community areas for supporters. The MyBO model was replicated in Germany by the CDU and SPD and in the UK by the Conservatives, who followed the model most closely, the BNP, Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The latter parties essentially opened what had previously been areas for party members only to public access. Secondly, the use of online social networks with existing penetration in society emerged as a key communication tool. Obama used eighteen different networks including those for a range of ethnic groups and GLEE, for gays, lesbians and everyone else. In Germany, Xing, VZnetworks and Facebook were used alongside (see also Jungherr, 2010) which was also widely used by parties in the UK. Finally, and perhaps least innovative, was the use of weblogs. Obama and the BNP created the largest participatory networks by converting the presentation of news into a participatory forum; for the rest of the UK and all the German parties who used weblogs these were adjuncts to other forms of information that allowed varying degrees

of user interaction.

Overall, websites do not, however, have vastly differing functions within the era of Web 2.0. Campaigning was the clear objective, which one would expect in the context of an election campaign, and if the strategy of the party was to go negative the website would be a key forum to reinforce those messages. Resource generation was also key, but went beyond seeking donations to attempting to activate supporters online and create a network of activism. Thus the participation that was promoted is appearing to go beyond the act of voting and be also about promoting the party widely across social networks, weblogs and websites and offline by joining canvassing teams, displaying posters and promoting by word of mouth. This cumulatively suggests that websites are now a strategic tool aimed at the audience most likely to visit the party online: the supporters. While all the sites provide information and simple voting cues for the passing browser, supporters are targeted by a range of features that encourage them to move up the loyalty ladder (Christopher et al, 1992) and be advocates for the party in the course of the campaign and beyond.

That only two of our sample of 16 political actors may have created, or least the illusion, of non-hierarchical campaign raises some interesting questions. It would appear that the variables identified by Gibson and Ward (2009) have little predictive value here, and perhaps reflects that adoption and use of the Internet is governed by a range of internal factors specific to parties as opposed to systemic effects. In terms of Web 2.0 there seem to be no specific differences that can be traced to the presidential or party system, not indeed to the media environment. Resources clearly played a role and provided Obama with a huge advantage; yet this did not make him the only one to see Web 2.0 as offering electoral advantages. Ideology also fails to play a key role, though perhaps both Obama and the BNP sought to create the most active communities the former focused on mobilisation while the BNP wanted to build cohesion around its ideological and political stances. Organisational age, status or support also lack any predictive power; this suggests that the ebb and flow model remains useful and that we see this not only within each national context but may be also detecting an ebb and flow of innovations between nations. Overall, however, it appears the only safe conclusion is that the more interactive use of the Internet is driven by idiosyncratic factors internal to the candidate or party and their strategy teams.

That said, we should note some extent of standardisation of practice. Activism is the key element supported by Web 2.0. The tools that allow simple conversations to take place allow supporters to network with each other within the party site and across social networks and Twitter. This network effect is harnessed to spread the word and acts as a form of crowdsourcing, encouraging latent supporters to get involved through the word of mouth campaign. Due to the constraints of the campaign user generated content is minimal and supportive only, this provides a perception of unity and community, though also appearing in some cases as an echo chamber around the party leaders and their policies (Sunstein, 2008). Thus the openness and transparency synonymous with the Web 2.0 participatory architecture may appear limited due to the purpose of the sites. However, given that these sites are analysed in the final throws of an election campaign, perhaps the level of participation is quite surprising. Clearly, electoral contestants are all adopting Web 2.0 to offer opportunities and it seems that for the parties in Germany and UK, despite the more limited resources available to them, Obama led the way in Internet campaigning.

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Level of Receiver Control

Level of Receiver Control

Level of Receiver Control

Level of Receiver Control

Public Discourse

Level of Receiver Control

Mutual Discourse

Feedback

Controlled Response

Responsive Dialogue

Monologue

High

Level of Receiver Control

S

R

P

P

P

P

P

Low

S

R

S

R

S

R

P