Proposed Paper Title:

Broadcasting to the masses or building communities: Polish political parties' online performance during 2011 elections in international perspective

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Introduction
This paper analyses within the context of election contests the extent to which parties use the range of Web 2.0 tools, in particular social networking sites, weblogs and microblogs, in order to build communities online; we contrast this with the more traditional political use of the online environment for broadcasting. Using the 2011 Polish general election as a case study, we analyse the use of the online environment by all political parties, categorising features as offering a range of functions to serve visitors, from informing to allowing interaction. We also assess how different groups of visitors are targeted through different features or platforms. The data from the content analysis thus provides a rich picture of the online strategy of each party and the extent to which the Internet was used in the campaign. These data are supplemented by web cartography analysis which identifies the interlinkages between the websites of political parties, official information sources and the media. The cartography allows us to analyse the direction of traffic flow within the electoral websphere, the extent to which parties create open platforms with high levels of linkage to one another or if they maintain enclosed communities linking only to supportive sites.

Overall our paper will provide an understanding of party election strategies during elections allowing discussion regarding the impact this might have on parties, media actors and voters. In particular we demonstrate how parties can use the range of web features to build communities of specific groups of visitors, in particular those with issue specific interests, those leaning towards supporting a party, and existing partisan campaigners. The use of these tools, we argue, can increase loyalty and lead to the conversion of supporters to activists. The paper leads into a discussion of how social networking tools have the potential to enhance the link between parties, members and supporters but that this depends on how the party utilises the online environment. Finally we aim to fit the Polish case study within a larger picture of political parties' online performance during elections. Here we will compare our data on Poland with similar data which analysed the performance of parties in German 2009 general elections, parliamentary elections in Great Britain 2010 and French parliamentary election in 2012.

Online campaigning: from politics as usual to strategic interaction
In the majority of advanced democracies, the Internet represents a fairly low cost way of reaching a significant amount of the population; therefore unsurprisingly it has become a key campaigning tool. However, early predictions that the nature of online communication, in particular that anyone can publish and interact with other users, could lead political communication away from a purely broadcasting model were

soon confounded. Margolis and Resnick (2000) produced the first study of political communication online and found that this represented what they and subsequent scholars have referred to as politics as usual. Offline inequalities are directly reflected online (Hauben & Hauben, 1997; Shapiro, 1999) and the top-down nature of political communication is replicated as parties, candidates and elected representatives fill their websites with brochureware: material designed for offline use such as press releases or posters (Resnick, 1998; Kluver et al., 2007; Jackson, 2006). The advent of a range of tools facilitated by what are called Web 2.0 technologies may be at least modifying political communication. Web 2.0 platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, represent opportunities to engage with an audience of millions (at least that was the case for US President Barack Obama during his campaign for the White House). However, in using these platforms, as well as embedding sophisticated features such as weblogs or sharing opportunities into websites, facilitates any online user having an active role in disseminating and re-shaping political communication. The Internet has become a giant architecture of participation (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009) where the online user seeks opportunities to read, share and create; not simply to read. While only a minority may seek to participate in the co-creation of political communication, as opposed to celebrity gossip, fan culture or even pornography, the fact that this can happen presents new challenges for strategic political communicators.

The Internet has largely become a tool of campaigning normalised within the traditions of broadcasting and one-way political communication (Kluver et al, 2007; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). Scholars suggest that such uses of the Internet are inappropriate and must evolve (Kalnes, 2009). The online users who are likely to visit political websites are likely to be the most engaged (Norris, 2003) and so are likely to enjoy sharing and creating, being political activists to some extent within online environments (Norris & Curtice, 2005). The politically engaged will not find sites which purely inform attractive. Their abandonment of these sites will mean that they lose their persuasive potential by not being what is referred to as sticky (Jackson, 2003), qualities that encourage visitors to stay on the site and browse as well as return again to that site. The forms of participation that are sought will then take place elsewhere online, disconnecting political parties and candidates from potential activists. Recent studies suggest that campaign communication now resembles a multi-authored diegesis as opposed to a single-authored monologue (Lilleker, 2013). Due to the granularity of communication across online platforms, political communication works within an ecosystem and will become co-created (Chadwick, 2012). Parties and candidates can choose to 'harness the power of the crowd' and allow their online supporters to add to and enhance the campaign (Jenkins, 2006), however this happens rarely and instead the norms of politics as usual are found.

Our hypothesis is that:
H1: parties seeking election will use a range of platforms, both static websites and profiles on social networks, and that the use of the latter will facilitate more participatory opportunities.

Studies of political campaigning online have focused on counting what features are present on a website and then and categorising them by communication style (informing, engaging, interacting) alone (Gibson & Ward, 2000; de Landtsheer et al, 2005; Lilleker et al, 2010). However, to truly understand not only what features are used but why more sophisticated categorisations are required. A comparative study of

political campaign websites noted how they appeared to target a range of audiences. Understanding which audiences were targeted offers an indication of the priority for the website and who the creator believes will visit. Political communication is increasingly targeted and narrowcast (Howard, 2006), yet websites remain a broadcast medium (Kluver et al, 2007).

We identified five potential audiences that parties and candidates might target within the context of an election campaign. The first audience would be random browsers who may stumble across a site and would only stay if they are engaged by the content; high levels of eye-catching content and entertaining features at the front end of a website, as well as relevant and personally interesting content, will indicate browsers as a target audience (Spink et al, 2002; Marchionini, 2006). Secondly, information seekers who would visit for professional reasons, in particular journalists seeking position statements, news feeds or similar simple ways for finding information or having it delivered directly (Panagopoulos, 2009, pp. 7-8; Erickson & Lilleker, 2012). The third group we refer to as issue activists, individuals who want specific policy information and perhaps wish to interrogate party members on their position regarding a specific area of policy. In the case of candidates these may be local political activists and campaigners, at a national level outside lobby groups who do not have direct access to senior politicians or advisors but that parties or candidates may attempt to recruit (Cober et al, 2004) but through using specific forms of informative and interactive communication (Stutzer & Frey, 2006),. The fourth group are supporters, the converted, these would be targeted with persuasion geared to bringing them closer to the campaign and would possibly be the main group for whom interactive mechanisms are designed (Norris, 2003: 42; Gerodimos, 2008). The fifth and final group are activists to whom most tools that aim at mobilisation are targeted and who may be especially active during the campaign (Greer & Lapointe, 2004; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011).

Issue-specific and party activists often form communities online (McLeod, 1999), to further campaigning objectives parties would be expected to create spaces within which communities can form (Small, 2012). Communities have largely formed organically online through the use of social networking tools and other interactive sites, spaces where participants are able to have influence and social status (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Rojas et al, 2005). One of the key lessons taught to political campaigners by the Obama campaign is that a campaign can also build its own community (Harfoush, 2008; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011). In reality there were many pro-Obama communities, some official and some unofficial. The Internet facilitates interaction across platforms so linking together communities; the campaign communication within each community space thus enters into an ecosystem and is diffused and disseminated across the Internet. As Chadwick (2011) spoke of a political news information cycle, there can also be a campaign communication cycle where assemblages of online users comment on, share and create communication that moves across online platforms to create what some have referred to as a big conversation (Anderson, 2006; see also Coleman, 2004).

Our hypotheses are that:
H2: Party websites will show evidence of a strategy that focuses on targeting key audiences; in particular activists.

H3: Parties will create spaces in which communities can form and interact with the purpose of furthering the objectives of the campaign.

The risks associated with diverging from a politics as usual paradigm of online political communication are well documented (Stromer-Galley, 2000). However, arguably the dangers associated with losing control of the message are largely beyond the control of any party online. There is no way to avoid online users talking politics, and no way of controlling what material the online browser might find regardless of how well the official campaign is optimised for being located by search engines (Lilleker, 2013). The question is whether the desire to participate is and can be channelled effectively by political parties. We enquire, holistically, how party campaigning in Poland has evolved, what strategies are observable and do they attempt to tap into network effects through community building to extend their messages. These are important questions in understanding how online political election campaigning is evolving.

Analysing online political communication strategies
Our methodology draws on the longstanding and well-tested feature counting methods developed by Gibson and Ward with features added in order to accommodate the changing usages of the Internet. However, to understand the professionalization of online political election campaigning it is necessary to move beyond simple categorisations in order to gain an understanding of the strategies which underpin website development. Like previous studies (Gibson & Ward, 2000; Foot & Schneider, 2006; Kluver et al, 2007) we divide features into providing information, being engaging, facilitating interaction and being aimed at mobilisation. We also categorise features as belonging to the eras of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 in order to test for innovations and adherence to hypermedia campaigning norms (Lilleker & Vedel, 2013). However, when studying campaigning within a hypermedia era we need to go beyond these. We therefore focused on determining which of our features were most likely to be used to target specific types of website visitors; and which features best indicated adherence to our strategies of sales, personalisation and e-representation. We therefore focus on measures of performance, a continuation of previous work, while building on two new dimensions for the study of online election campaigning: targeting audiences and branding strategy.

Our data is developed from a content analysis of 11 party websites. Content analysis was conducted one week before elections (1st-7th October), all websites were also archived1. All the updates (number of entries, number of friends and followers were counted within two days of the elections). The content analysis identified the presence or absence of 89 features. The websites were coded by three coders, all coders passed inter-coder reliability tests (Cohen's Kappa (.72) and Krippendorff's Alpha (.72)), any irregularities were checked and corrected.

Categorising features as potentiating experiences, in particular engagement, is complex. Any new layer of analytical complexity raises further issues. Features in themselves are a priori in their ability to be communication events. The way that a feature is embedded by the creator determines how its use is intended; however actual

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[1] The data archives were downloaded to local computer at Sciences-Po, Paris. It was performed by TelePort Ultra provided by Tennyson Maxwell Information Systems, Inc.

usage, either as a perceptual or behavioural influence, is the responsibility of the individual visitor. However, given our focus at the strategy side, we propose that we can develop an understanding of what was intended based on study of the website as a series of communication events. It is argued that the only way to discover the strategic intentions of the creators of political communication is through in-depth interviews (Vaccari, 2008), the danger here is that interview data can include a degree of post-hoc rationalisation based on outcomes and strategists can play up or down their input and intentions based on failure or success (Lilleker, 2003). The true way for understanding the processes that underpin particular communication tactics is through observation, a highly time-consuming and complex procedure that depends upon gaining the trust of all those being observed. As Nielsen (2012) argues gaining access is difficult, in particular to meetings where decisions are actually made. We argue that the website as an artefact for research is a static instantiation of strategy (Xenos & Foot 2000). In other words by understanding how features are used through the analysis of usage of the online environment, and how features play specific roles within shaping users' perceptions and experiences, we can gain significant insights into the strategic role of the Internet within a campaign and how this may contribute to the health of democracy within the context of the contest.

The categorisation of features involved a series of discussions between the authors and other researchers involved in a range of projects (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011; Lilleker et al, 2010; Koc-Michalska & Lilleker forthcoming). We also conducted concept testing with web design specialists working within the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice at Bournemouth University. This delivered a categorisation strategy which permits us to understand how features can be read as indicators of specific strategies. The challenge is where features belong to multi categories, in particular when assigning these as targeting specific audience groups. However, through concept testing alongside data collection we determined that it was not a problem that not all features were discrete to specific categories and could apply to more than one targeting strategy. We show our categorisations strategy in Appendix 2.

In order to make direct comparisons between different parties we develop what we entitle an average online performance score (AOP). The AOP score was calculated by initially counting the number of features present for each category to create an overall mean. We then divided the mean score for each category by the maximum possible score eg. in Web 2.0 category AOP for all parties was .35 (all parties mean performance was 10.18 that number was divided by 29 (max possible score). This technique allows us to compare performance within different categories of features (as each have a different number of features) as well as according to different characteristics (for the purposes of our analysis we use party size/resources, vote share gained in elections and political ideology). We are also using Poisson regressions in order to understand the characteristics that influence online performance. Poisson regression was chosen as the best statistical method for estimating count data variables as well as allows us to control for a large number of zeros in the data set (Wooldridge, p.645).

Polish Party campaigns online: 'politics as usual'?

The extent to which sites inform, whether information is presented in engaging ways, or they permit interaction or attempt to mobilise visitors is understood through the construction of a general web performance score (Table 1). Polish party websites

show the expected combination of experiences and a high level of sophistication. While the websites are still more Web 1.0 than Web 2.0 the gap has narrowed since the last study that compared them to their Western European counterparts (Lilleker et al, 2011). Equally the use of features that permit interaction is widespread, usually through the use of weblogs or links out to profiles on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr; all of which allow the sharing of information as well as feedback from the audience.

Table 1: General web performance for Political parties

	Mean performance	Max number of features in category	Average Online Performance (AOP)
Web 1.0	16.636	36	0.462
Web 2.0	10.181	29	0.351
Information	14.545	42	0.346
Engagement	12.636	43	0.294
Mobilisation	7.091	19	0.373
Interaction	9.091	22	0.413

All numbers in the tables are gathered for political parties or candidates present during the Polish parliamentary elections 2011, source: own

The above data suggests that in this dimension politics as usual is no longer an explanatory factor. When analysing whether there are relationships between party performance and their resources (see Appendix 1), using their position in parliament as a proxy for vote share, membership and so the funds they have available, we find politics as usual has equally limited explanatory power. Larger parties use the highest number of features across each category, however, the inequalities are not as clear as were found in previous studies and the patterns of usage show greater diversity in feature use across all parties. Yet inequalities do remain, particularly if we take the adoption of Web 2.0 features as an indicator of sophistication. There are also clear divisions between major and minor parties and again between minor and fringe parties in using features designed to mobilise activists and that facilitate interactivity. The inequalities between parties in the use of those features suggest they do not have the resources to handle large numbers of volunteers or to channel the activities of their supporters. Equally they are not prepared to respond to or moderate interactions on their websites. It is perhaps appropriate that poorly resourced parties do not attempt to create an interactive brand as, to be successful, there needs to be evidence of telepresence: that interactions do not disappear into a void but that there is a human there to interact with. If this is unmanageable then parties with fewer resources will remain unable to develop sophisticated online strategies.

However, regardless of resources, the embeddedness of social networking within political communication is clear and this facilitates a range of interactive opportunities. Eight out of the Eleven parties analysed use Facebook, Five used Twitter and Three the Polish platform Nasza Klasa. Ten out of eleven parties have a YouTube channel, but only two blogtools embedded in their websites. These data show free platforms such as Facebook, which allow fan pages to be created and permit direct communication between the party and those who 'Like' their page are seen as highly valuable. Similarly having a place where the party can 'broadcast' for free is almost becoming a universal campaign tool. The corollary of using such

platforms is that visitors are permitted simple but quite sophisticated ways in which to interact, and so incrementally the use of these platforms may be impacting significantly upon the meaning of political participation in the context of elections. Therefore, in terms of the nature of political communication, it is not simply politics as usual anymore.

Table 2 shows the overall averages in terms of which audiences are targeted, on average, across the websites of all political parties.

Table 2: AOP of audiences targeted by Political parties

	Mean performance	Max number of features in category	Average Online Performance (AOP)
Browsers	10.727	29	0.383
Information Seekers	21.545	59	0.365
Issue Activists	10.273	24	0.428
Supporters	24.091	63	0.382
Campaign Activists	21.182	52	0.407

As the data shows, Polish party websites provide areas for a wide range of visitors but the raw data, focusing on the simple numbers of features within each category, suggests that information seekers, activists and supporters are served best. This is perhaps logical given the context. Persuasion is one key role of a website, in particular during an election contest. Elections also rely on channelling the energy of party activists to work on behalf of the campaign as well as going out to vote. Hence there is a concentration of features designed for supporters and activists. However all potential audiences are served well by party websites.

There is little difference between major, minor and fringe parties, with the most obvious difference being in terms of the overall numbers of features on the party's websites; showing minor and fringe party websites are largely less sophisticated. The data appears to indicate fringe parties, as an overall percentage of the total number of features give greater focus to issue-specific and party-loyal activists. Parties of the right out-perform their centrist and left wing counterparts. However, the overall pattern which maps onto resources is maintained almost exactly across the different groups. It therefore appears that any differences are a factor of the overall average online performance which shows an overall higher sophistication of parties of the right.

Community Building

Can we say anything about the bespoke communities within sites?

Or is this just using SNS?

Polish web campaigning in comparative perspective

E-campaigning: still broadcasting?

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