

Digital Media, Power, and Democracy in Parties and Election Campaigns: Party Decline or Party Renewal?

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Abstract

The role of digital media practices in reshaping political parties and election campaigns is driven by a tension between control and interactivity, but the overall outcome for the party organizational form is highly uncertain. Recent evidence contradicts scholarship on the so-called “death” of parties and suggests instead that parties may be going through a long-term process of adaptation to postmaterial political culture. We sketch out a conceptual approach for understanding this process, which we argue is being shaped by interactions between the organizations, norms, and rules of electoral politics; postmaterial attitudes toward political engagement; and the affordances and uses of digital media. Digital media foster cultures of organizational experimentation and a party-as-movement mentality that enable many to reject norms of hierarchical discipline and habitual partisan loyalty. This context readily accommodates populist appeals and angry protest—on the right as well as the left. Substantial publics now see election campaigns as another opportunity for personalized and contentious political expression. As a result, we hypothesize that parties are being renewed from the outside in, as digitally enabled citizens breathe new life into an old form by partly remaking it in their own participatory image. Particularly on the left, the overall outcome might prove more positive for democratic engagement and the decentralization of political power than many have assumed.

Keywords

parties, campaigns, digital media, power, democracy

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The societal contexts and organizational practices of parties are undergoing remarkable change. Uses of digital media are of vital importance in this process. There is much at stake: Voting and persuading others to vote are arguably the most fundamental forms of political engagement. In different ways and in different contexts, parties have the potential to be organizational engines of mass democratic politics, yet they so often fall short.

Is the party form in terminal decline or is it being renewed? In 2014, when we invited scholars to the workshop that led to this special issue, nobody predicted that the British Labour Party was about to experience an insurgent, social media-fueled grassroots campaign for the party's leadership. Nobody predicted that in Spain, Podemos, a new political party founded in the spring of 2014 out of the ashes of the Indignados protest movements, would within a few years amass the country's second largest party membership and gain 21 percent of the popular vote in a general election, ending a long-established two-party system. Similarly, few in the United States saw billionaire populist Donald Trump and socialist senator of Vermont Bernie Sanders as serious contenders for the 2016 presidential election. Yet in January 2016, Sanders broke Democratic Party fundraising records, attracting \$20 million from an extraordinary 2.5 million individual donors (Yugas 2016). Meanwhile, Trump's social media campaign, with its incendiary tweets and Instagram attack ads, set the agenda for professional media coverage of the Republican primary. The effectiveness of his strategy became evident on the eve of the Iowa caucuses when Trump chose to sit out a high-profile Fox News televised debate. Did this negatively affect his support? No, because he dominated dual-screener's social media conversation during the live televised event (Twitter Government and Elections Team 2016).

The Analytics Turn

Broadcast-era logics of top-down presentational professionalism and tight control of campaign messaging linger in important ways. At the same time, broadcast-era logics are being translated into new technological practices. Discipline and calibration are at the heart of the *analytics turn* in campaigning. By the analytics turn, we mean the increased use by campaign elites of experimental data science methods to interrogate large-scale aggregations of behavioral information from public voter records and digital media environments, with the aim of organizing and mobilizing key segments of the electorate to vote and to publicly and privately share their decision with others. Still in its early stages, the analytics turn is currently most advanced in the United States (Hersh 2015; Karpf forthcoming; Nielsen 2012). There, in 2008 and 2012, the Obama campaign pioneered mobilization techniques combining voter records and social media data and demonstrated their considerable advantage over the Republicans, in the latest installment of a process going back to the early 2000s (Kreiss 2012, 2016; Stromer-Galley 2014).

The analytics turn is now migrating. During the 2015 U.K. general election campaign, the Conservative Party hired two key political consultants: Obama's former campaign manager Jim Messina and Australian campaign veteran Lynton Crosby. The

Conservatives heavily outspent Labour, but it was *how* the money was spent that mattered. In 2015, Messina and Crosby directed an intensive series of private tracker polls in key swing constituencies. They also purchased geographical audience data from Facebook. These two data sources allowed them to identify and target—with phone calls and door knocks—undecided voters with specific concerns and behavioral traits (Ross 2015). In total, the Conservatives spent 30 percent of their budget on this type of work. Labour spent just 8 percent (UK Electoral Commission 2016). Given the Conservatives' unexpected electoral victory, the advantages are obvious.

The analytics turn is producing new and surprising sources of organizational power inside parties. New digital media elites have types of expertise and operating norms that differ from those prevalent among groups who worked in similar positions during the broadcast era. As evolutionary accounts of the role of digital media across multiple U.S. presidential campaigns have demonstrated, digital media, depending upon how they are assembled and organizationally enacted, are just as useful for backstage, data-intensive “computational management” (Kreiss 2012) and public-facing “controlled interactivity” (Stromer-Galley 2014) as they are for fostering openness and grassroots participation in directing a party or candidate's policies and goals.

The role of digital media will continue to be shaped by this tension between control and interactivity, but the overall outcome for the party form itself is still uncertain, for reasons we now discuss.

Parties as Movement-Like, Networked Organizations

Parties are often portrayed as monolithic, but in reality, their organizational boundaries are porous. Parties aggregate the networks of support provided by political formations in related fields—interest groups, social movements, more formally constituted social movement organizations, as well as inchoate popular—and populist—currents of opinion. The extent to which this matters has varied over time, between countries, and between party types.

Party-movement relationships are an important context for understanding how digital media are reshaping parties and campaigns. Some recent evidence of party renewal contradicts scholarship on the “death” of political parties (for declinist accounts, see, for example, Mair 2013; Whiteley 2011). Key here is the role of digital media in enabling personalized repertoires of citizen engagement that aggregate and scale to enable organizational experimentation. Hence, it is not at all clear that political parties are dying. In fact, given the interactive effects we see between digital media, changes in citizens' engagement repertoires, and parties' organizational practices, the reverse may be true. In some cases, parties are renewing themselves from the outside in. Citizens are breathing new life into the party form, remaking parties in their own changed participatory image, and doing so via digital means. The overall outcome might prove more positive for democratic engagement and the decentralization of political power than has often been assumed.

In common with most human organizations not based on coercion, parties are networks. They are built on relations of interdependence among individuals and groups

with different beliefs and expertise. These interdependent actors pool their resources in the pursuit of goals. Today, and contrary to the ghostly typologies of parties that still haunt political science textbooks, coherent ideological beliefs, low levels of internal competition among actors, hierarchical decision-making structures, and formal organizational membership are less important than they once were for binding these interdependent actors together. Parties in some countries, for example, the United States, have always been more *network-like* and *movement-like* than parties in other countries. But things are now changing elsewhere.

Postmaterial patterns of political engagement have spread among electorates, and digital media have played a role in this. The elective affinity between digital media and postmaterial engagement can be seen at work, with varying intensity and across varying levels of society and politics, in what Ulrich Beck termed *sub-politics*, Lance Bennett *lifestyle politics*, Henrik Bang and Eva Sørensen *everyday makers*, and Russell Dalton *engaged citizenship* (Bang and Sørensen 1999; Beck 1997; Bennett 1998; Dalton 2015). These shifts in individual attitudes and behavior involve a move away from older forms of habitual, loyalty-based party engagement and toward single-issue campaigns and protest. There is also a growing disconnection between formal bureaucratic modes of organizational maintenance and looser, more flexible, and less “dutiful” engagement repertoires (see, for example, Tormey 2015; Wells 2015).

But do these shifts necessarily lead to antipartyism? Perhaps not. It could be that the attitudinal and behavioral shifts of postmaterialism are now radiating beyond the protest and movement spheres where they had their initial impact. In other words, parties and campaigns might be undergoing a long-term process of adaptation to postmaterial political culture. The empirical and conceptual foundation for analyzing this shift needs to be established. It will require attention to the interactions between three bundles of variables: the organizations, norms, and rules of electoral politics; postmaterial attitudes toward political engagement; and the affordances and uses of digital media.

Digitally Enabled Activist Networks Are Remaking Parties in Their Own Image

Long regarded as comparatively diffuse and weakly institutionalized, since the early 2000s, U.S. parties have become even looser. They are now more riddled with internal competition among different elites, policy-seeking groups, and activists than at any time in the postwar era. Some of these entities are formally organized, such as the Democratic and Republican National Committees or the better-organized state committees. Some are less formal, such as groups of political consultants, pollsters, and (more or less) self-directed grassroots-netroots networks. Despite the centralizing force of digital analytics in the contemporary election campaign, American parties still have plenty of movement-like characteristics (Anstead and Chadwick 2009; Chadwick 2007; Heaney and Rojas 2015; Masket 2012; McKenna and Han 2014).

This organizational context constantly interacts with digital media use by individuals. Consider insurgent internet-fueled campaigns such as those by Democrat Howard

Dean (2003–04), Republican Ron Paul and the conservative Tea Party movement he inspired (2007–08 and ongoing), not to mention Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign, which he began as a rank outsider. The citizen movement MoveOn has been important as well. But as Michael Heaney and Fabio Rojas have shown, so, too, is the antiwar movement, which overlapped with Democratic Party activist networks. Individuals in these networks have what Heaney and Rojas (2015) term *dual identifications*: they are movement activists, but they are also party activists. Although their energy dissipated when the Democrats came to power in 2008, the patterns of engagement these groups adopted and their generally skeptical approach to political and professional media elites are likely to persist as they carry their habits into middle age.

When the 2016 U.S. election cycle began, no fewer than seventeen candidates stepped forward for the Republican candidacy. By the New Hampshire primary of January 2016, two Republican frontrunners—Ted Cruz, whose base is in the evangelical and Tea Party movements, and populist businessman Donald Trump—were squaring up against the only convincing party “establishment” figure: Florida Senator Marco Rubio. Cruz and Trump are manifestations of a loosening Republican party. The populist anti-elitism of their message and campaign ethos gels with the skepticism toward political authority among the web-enabled Tea Party grassroots. This energizes conservative supporters but causes intense managerial difficulty for the party’s organizational elite in the Republican National Committee (RNC). Research on Tea Party activists suggests that they value individual autonomy to an extent even the organizers of their online platforms cannot accommodate (Agarwal et al. 2014). And the situation is made even more difficult for the RNC because Tea Party policy goals in Congress often conflict with the interests of large sections of the movement’s middle class supporters (Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

Yet, despite the turmoil, wholesale party decline is unlikely to be an outcome of these shifts. Just as likely is that parties will adapt to the new reality of competing networks of supporters. The party-as-movement mentality often (although not always) eschews hierarchical discipline and blind partisan loyalty. Many individuals on both the right and the left now see election campaigns as yet another means for personalized political expression. Digitally enabled activist networks are reshaping parties. This party-as-movement mentality can easily accommodate populist appeals and angry protest—on both the right and the left.

The 2016 Democratic primary campaign of Bernie Sanders provides further evidence of this. Sanders’s main priority was social media outreach and small online donations to enact his rejection of special-interest influence via large campaign contributions. This was an ideological-organizational choice, another medium-is-the-message moment (Chadwick 2007). Before the primaries, Sanders spent more than all other candidates (both Democrat and Republican) on his online campaign. He brought in Revolution Messaging, a company founded by Obama 2008’s External Online Director Scott Goodstein. In an unusual and revealing move, Sanders made Revolution both his online division *and* his finance division. There was no need for a formal director of finance when the digital division would be doing the fundraising (Woodruff 2016). In the latest intensification of e-mail’s

fabled role in election campaigning, Revolution got to work perfecting *one dollar* donation requests. This contrasted with Hillary Clinton's focus on elite fundraising events designed to attract wealthier individuals to donate up to the legal limit of \$2,700 (Horowitz and Chozick 2016).

Sanders's campaign capitalized on social media enthusiasm and sharing to drive individuals to his website. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and the mobile picture and video messaging service Snapchat are now the staples of this approach in U.S. elections. But a surprisingly powerful force in Sanders's campaign was Reddit, the long-established user-generated news and discussion forum. By February 2016, the "Sanders for President" Reddit contained 197,000 subscribers. "Subreddits" were set up for each U.S. state and a wiki maintained to inform newcomers to the campaign about the candidate's policy stances. Reddit became an important node in the self-titled Grassroots for Sanders movement that overlaps with, but is not entirely subsumed by, the official Sanders campaign. This important piece of campaign infrastructure started out as a discussion thread founded by two Reddit users, Aidan King and David Frederick (Guadiano 2015). People for Bernie, a similar grassroots-netroots movement, was founded by two former Occupy organizers Winnie Wong and Charles Lenchner (Hilder 2016).

Two important caveats are due here. First, as we finalized this essay in March 2016, Sanders was highly unlikely to secure the Democratic nomination. Second, we are not suggesting that small dollar fundraising is the only important dynamic in U.S. campaigns—far from it. The other 2016 candidates benefited to varying extents from wealthy individual donors who funneled their contributions indirectly through the so-called super-PACs (Political Action Committees) that were stimulated by the Supreme Court's further move to deregulate campaign contributions in 2010. Big money is more important than ever in U.S. politics.

Then again, so is small money. Sanders's campaign is a reassertion of the power of the grassroots-netroots. It puts a dent in the top-down, analytics-driven, inauthentic, and disempowering side of contemporary election campaigns. Despite convergence around the importance of e-mail testing, targeted social media advertising, centrally directed ground campaigns, and mainstream media-focused, sensationalist social media interventions, there is still no one-size-fits-all approach—not even in the U.S. context where Obama's success has imposed strong behavioral norms on campaign professionals. There still appears to be room for the kind of campaign that Howard Dean and his staff pioneered in 2003.

Similar shifts are underway elsewhere. In Britain, just as parties were being consigned to the dustbin of history, the 2015 Labour Party leadership election revealed more complex forces are at work. In 2014, the Labour Party quietly but radically changed how it selects its leader and deputy leader. In an effort to reengage the public, Labour broke the mold of British party politics by creating an entirely new category of member: the "registered supporter." Upon paying a token fee of £3 and registering support for Labour's values on the party's website, any individual could vote in Labour's leadership and deputy leadership elections. This turned the 2015 leadership campaign into a primary—of sorts.

Like Sanders, Corbyn was an outsider candidate. Corbyn qualified to run in the campaign by only the smallest of margins, securing the support of only thirty-five Labour members of parliament (MP). Yet, he went on to win the leadership with a 59.5 percent landslide, gaining large majorities among trade union affiliate members, constituency party members, and the new “registered supporters.”

The roots of this victory are complex but there is little doubt that digital media were an important ingredient. With its blend of Facebook, Twitter, and e-mail, the Corbyn campaign organized more than a hundred rallies across Britain and in some towns attracted crowds not seen since the 1960s and 1970s. More than 422,000 voted in the leadership election, 105,000 of whom were the new registered supporters. But just as significant was the effect Corbyn had on local constituency parties. In 2014, their membership stood at 194,000. Within three months of Corbyn’s victory, they had doubled to 388,000, reversing a decline that began in 1998 (Syal 2016). And then there is Momentum, a new grassroots movement of Corbyn supporters.

Labour’s membership reforms have their origins in a period of reflection inspired by Obama’s 2008 victory (Anstead and Straw 2008). And, as Susan Scarrow’s (2015) recent comparative analysis has shown, diversifying the channels through which individuals can engage with parties is not exclusive to Britain but is part of a broader trend across western democracies. We are now in a new era of “multi-speed” party membership along the lines predicted by Helen Margetts’s “cyber party” model (Margetts 2006). It has taken a while for the organizational response to emerge, but over the last five years, many European parties have introduced mechanisms that blur the boundaries between formal dues paying and looser modes of affiliation. These include primaries; one-off donations rather than regular subscriptions; online consultations, online voting; online petitioning; and simply encouraging individuals to become the party’s “news audience” for online newsletters and social media feeds. In a similar vein, Rachel Gibson has recently identified the emergence of online “citizen-initiated campaigning” based on “community building, getting out the vote, generating resources and message production” (Gibson 2015: 187). While the intensity of change will always differ across parties and across countries, these accounts capture how postmaterial attitudes and digital media use might be renewing parties.

These accounts stress adaptation by traditional parties, but there are also new party forms. These have innovated organizationally before turning their attention to the mainstream. Since 2009, Italy has seen the rise of the Five Star Movement (M5S), a hybrid fusion of political party, celebrity culture, populism, online mobilization, and street protest. Then there is Spain’s great experiment in fusing movement networks with more traditional party forms: Podemos (“We Can”). Podemos and similar organizations such as Partido X and Guanyem Barcelona grew out of the protests, occupations, self-organizing local assemblies, and open source online deliberation platforms of the Indignados. Podemos, however, quickly moved from the streets and digital networks to more formal leadership structures, stronger organizational discipline, and a broadcast media focus. This has involved hybridizing the decentralized, quasi-anarchist organizational forms of 2011 with a broadcast-era personal leadership strategy. Central to this has been the integration of digital media, television, and local activism.

Podemos crowdfunds using digital media. It runs its own primary elections online. It organizes local discussions through its *circulos* (circles). It established its own La Tuerka online video discussion show organized around party leader Pablo Iglesias. However, it also colonized the Público online news site, turning it into a party organ as Iglesias himself set about successfully breaking into the popular televised political discussion show circuit on Spain's Intereconomía, Cuatro, and la Sexta television channels (Postill 2015).

These are parties, but not as we have known them.

About This Special Issue

The articles in this special issue were first delivered as presentations to a workshop we organized on "Digital Media, Power, and Democracy in Election Campaigns," held July 1–3, 2015, at Washington, D.C.'s Omni Shoreham Hotel and at Greenberg House, Syracuse University's base in the U.S. capital. The papers included here reflect the range of conversations we had about the state of political parties, the ways digital media are being used in the tug and pull of political power between elites and ordinary citizens, and the role of traditional and professional media in those processes.

The six papers that comprise this special issue highlight the transformation occurring in electoral politics. All of the papers underscore the idea that political parties are not undergoing a simple process of decline; they are instead changing in remarkable ways by reaching new potential supporters. Cristian Vaccari and Augusto Valeriani use survey data to identify to what degree party membership is related to party-related engagement in three countries: Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. They find that social media serves as an important bridging platform between parties and the public; those who are not party members are more likely to engage in party-related activities on social media. Similarly, Benjamin Lee and Vincent Campbell find that the new genre of the online political poster (OPP) provides compelling visual persuasion that reaches beyond party members. The OPPs also put politics into spaces such as Facebook that are not intentionally political.

Although political parties may have found new ways to reach the public, the style of messaging is also shifting. Take, for example, the case of Norway. Rune Karlsen and Bernard Enjolras examine individualized campaigning on Twitter. While they find that candidates who adopt a more individualized style tweet more, they also note some important disparities in terms of who has influence. Candidates with already large Twitter follower levels are more likely to be more influential. In the Norwegian case, eight candidates received 66 percent of all of the Twitter @mentions.

The articles here also highlight the complex communication interactions that occur between political parties, traditional news media, and the public. Andreas Jungherr's article suggests that campaigns increasingly use digital tools to influence the professional news media agenda and often to bypass it altogether to speak directly to the public. In the case of Podemos in Spain, Andreu Casero-Ripollés, Ramón Feenstra, and Simon Tormey provide a detailed examination of the strategic ways political parties use digital and traditional media to advance their cause. They explain the ways that

the party grew its visibility by using social media while also using traditional media outlets for strategic purposes.

Finally, if political parties are being remade in the West, can the same be said for developing nations whose parties and the electorate are moving online only recently? The research by Tabarez Ahmed Neyazi, Anup Kumar, and Holli Semetko on the 2014 Indian national elections suggest that political parties are still profoundly important and are strategically engaging new and old media to maximize their reach. Their article reveals that face-to-face contact from parties, a traditional form of campaigning, is still of primary influence. Yet, as more Indians go online, sharing information digitally is now also of significant importance for political involvement.

This special issue reflects the quality and thoughtfulness of the Washington workshop. We thank the participants for making the event so stimulating and memorable; Syracuse University's School of Information Studies for their generous financial support; Royal Holloway, University of London's Department of Politics and International Relations, for funding the workshop's opening reception; and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen for so ably supporting us during our time as guest editors.

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Party Campaigners or Citizen Campaigners? How Social Media Deepen and Broaden Party-Related Engagement

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Abstract

Digital media are often blamed for accelerating the decline of political parties as channels for citizen participation. By contrast, we show that political engagement on social media may revitalize party activities because these platforms are means for both party members and ordinary citizens to discuss politics and engage with and around political parties. Using online surveys conducted in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, we find that party members engage in a wider variety of party-related activities than average respondents, but the same can also be said of nonparty members who informally discuss politics on social media. Moreover, the strength of the relationship between party membership and engagement decreases as the intensity of political discussion on social media increases. This suggests that political discussions on social media can narrow the divide in party-related engagement between members and nonmembers, and to some extent flatten rather than reinforce existing political hierarchies. Finally, we find that the correlation between party membership and engagement is stronger in Germany, where party organizations are more robust, than in Italy and the United Kingdom, highlighting the role of party organizational legacies in the digital age.

Keywords

comparative research, democracy, election campaign, Internet, social media, political parties, political participation

Social media have become central hubs in contemporary flows of political communication across western democracies. By contrast, political parties, one of the key institutions of representative democracy, are facing legitimacy and organizational crises.

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Eight-two percent of European Union (EU) citizens do not trust parties, whereas only 14 percent profess some confidence in them.¹ Party membership has plummeted, inspiring somber assessments that “the party is over” (Whiteley 2011). Digital media have been touted as both the problem and the solution here. On one hand, theorists of the so-called *mobilization* hypothesis contended that under certain circumstances, the Internet may favor political disintermediation: It would enable citizens to engage with specific issues, campaigns, and politicians on their own terms rather than via hierarchical organizations (Edwards 2006), and this would bring new people into contact with parties. Others, however, have suggested that rather than encouraging new voices, the Internet simply provides an additional participatory venue for those already active in traditional organizations, thus stifling rather than rejuvenating political activism (Norris 2003). The core empirical contention of this latter approach, which in the early days of Internet politics research became known as the *normalization* hypothesis (Margolis and Resnick 2000), is that no substantial change has occurred both in the balance of power within and across political organizations and in the typical profile of those who participate.

The debate between supporters of mobilization (often referred to as “revolution”) and normalization has been widely criticized for its straw-men arguments and poorly defined concepts. Scott Wright (2012) in particular has argued that researchers should abandon either/or approaches and be sensitive to the possibility of hybrid “normalized revolutions,” where “new technologies create deeply significant, perhaps wholesale changes to the function of *established* political institutions without overthrowing those institutions” (p. 253). This is particularly relevant when it comes to political parties. In spite of the need for a more nuanced approach, the idea that the Internet simply reinforces political inequalities has become almost entrenched in the literature (Schlozman et al. 2010).

The evidence we present here suggests that reinforcement is not the only relevant outcome of citizens’ political interactions on digital media. Instead, we show that informal political discussion *deepens* party-related engagement by offering new avenues by which party members can provide parties with support, feedback, and resources, and it *broadens* party-related engagement by enabling those who are not party members to get involved. We use online surveys of representative samples of Internet users in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom in the aftermath of the 2014 European parliament elections. These data show that although digital media cannot *per se* enhance political action among disengaged citizens, they can provide avenues by which those who informally discuss politics on social media can find opportunities and incentives to engage with activities related and relevant to political parties. Political discussions on social media contribute to closing the gap in party-related engagement between members and nonmembers, to some degree flattening rather than reinforcing existing hierarchies. Thus, digital media are reconfiguring party-related engagement. This is a “hybrid” development of party activism in Chadwick’s (2007) terms because it combines some features of the older concept of permanent membership with some newer features of what Rachel Gibson (2015) has termed *citizen-initiated campaigning*.

Party-Related Engagement among and beyond Party Members

For the last three decades, political parties have faced sharp declines in their organizational strength and legitimacy, in spite of maintaining their institutional centrality in representative democracies (Mair 1995). Linkages between parties and voters have eroded, resulting in electoral dealignment (Dalton 1984), a hemorrhage of party members (Van Biezen et al. 2012), and declining voter turnout (Blais 2007). Some parties have met these challenges with three strategies: first, offering members process incentives such as primaries to select candidates and internal referenda on key policy decisions (Norris 2006); second, lowering the membership threshold, for instance, by allowing online enrollment and offering the possibility to register as sympathizers rather than full-duty members (Scarrow 2015); and third, reviving voter mobilization efforts, especially in historically low-turnout countries such as the United States (Nielsen 2012) and the United Kingdom (Whiteley and Seyd 2003).

As a result of these developments, volunteers and sympathizers increasingly contribute to party activities without being permanently committed to them (Scarrow 2015), which in turn redefines what it means to be politically involved with and around a party. Such integration between different types of party activists has been noted not only in Europe, where most parties still carry the legacy of their mass-membership past, but also in the United States, where party organizations are more fluid and campaign oriented than in Europe. Recent studies conceptualize American parties as “extended networks” or “long coalitions” that incorporate and bring together different types of elites, supporting organizations, and individual activists (Bawn et al. 2012). Heaney and Rojas (2015) argue that many of the participants in the post-9/11 antiwar movement identified and engaged with both the movement and the Democratic Party, and accordingly pursued “inside–outside” strategies, combining party-style electoral mobilization with movement-style protest, without necessarily depending on the party’s formal structures. The hybridization of roles and repertoires of action between party insiders and outsiders resulted in what Heaney and Rojas (2015) call the “party in the street.”

The media are generally understood to play important roles in selectively influencing different aspects of party membership and engagement. The first generation of research on the transformation and decline of party organizations mostly focused on the mass media, and television in particular, as potential drivers of change in the structure of incentives in party recruitment and activism (e.g., Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988). When digital media spread across western democracies, a consensus emerged that the Internet mostly served as a reinforcing mechanism for those activists who were already engaged with parties (Norris 2003), and that parties did not embrace the Web to democratize their decision making and decentralize their campaigning operations (Ward and Gibson 2009). As “Web 2.0” platforms diffused across western democracies, parties maintained a cautious approach, establishing their presence in social media for fear of missing out but only partially embracing their potential for dialogue and engagement—resulting in what Jackson and Lilleker (2009) termed “Web 1.5,” architectures of limited participation.

However, a second wave of theory and research emphasized that parties have much to gain from marshaling digitally enabled citizen engagement. Political discussion and engagement on social media is based on spontaneous, serendipitous, and lower-threshold practices that occur in informal interactions as part of citizens' everyday lives rather than in environments controlled by parties (Chadwick 2009; Vaccari et al. 2015). As a result, social media may provide opportunities for voters to engage with politics in less asymmetrical power relationships than in earlier Internet Web sites and party apparatuses. Embracing these changes, parties may develop a new organizational model, envisioned by Margetts (2006), of "cyber parties," which "use web-based technologies to strengthen the relationship between voters and party rather than traditional notions of membership" (p. 530). In this new arrangement, parties may marshal what Gibson (2015) termed *citizen-initiated campaigning* by individuals who do not belong to the party staff but carry on some relevant electioneering activities for it through the Web.

In this study, we assess how the Web 2.0 can contribute to what we define as *party-related engagement*. By this, we mean forms of political participation that allow parties to acquire resources, receive feedback, and distribute messages. The studies reviewed so far suggest that the Web may contribute to party-related engagement in essentially two ways. First, by allowing existing party members to find new ways to engage in such activities, digital media may *deepen* party-related engagement among party members, equipping "party campaigners" with new tools to support their parties. Second, individuals who are not party members may find opportunities to engage with parties online as a result of the affordances of social media—in particular, the informality and spontaneity of political discussions that occur therein. In this case, social media in particular may *broaden* party-related engagement beyond party members, allowing "citizen campaigners" to play a greater role in the activities and organizational lives of parties.

As regards "party campaigners," research shows that members still fulfill vital functions for parties (Scarrow 2015) and the Web enables such members to perform new activities that are integrated with existing offline practices, thus resulting in hybrid participatory repertoires (Chadwick 2007). The possibility that those who are already active within parties deepen their involvement by adding new tools to their campaigning arsenals has often been dismissed as irrelevant, at best constituting evidence of reinforcement (Norris 2003). However, these assessments overlook the fact that party activists can relay the information they find online to less-interested individuals through interpersonal communication occurring both on the Web and face to face. For instance, Norris and Curtice (2008) found that people who get election-related information on the Internet are more likely to talk to others about it—a pattern that was confirmed by a comparative analysis of seven Western democracies (Vaccari 2013). Thus, party members can use digital media to act as conduits between parties and other citizens who are not directly contactable by parties (Gibson 2015). The Internet also allows party members to provide input and feedback, which may boost organizational legitimacy by promoting reflexivity (Coleman 2005), and to contribute financial resources quickly, easily, and often in pursuit of specific goals.

As regards “citizen campaigners,” various studies suggest that political discussion and self-expression on social media may enhance engagement. Participation in political discussions on social media can expose individuals to relevant political information, which may motivate them to take further action (Kwak et al. 2005; Vaccari et al. 2015). Moreover, the nonpolitical nature of social media may attract individuals who are not inclined to engage with political institutions (Wojcieszak and Mutz 2009), connect them with “weak ties” (Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela 2011), and accidentally expose them to political information they were not necessarily searching for (Valeriani and Vaccari 2015). Thus, Rojas and Puig-i-Abril (2009) found that the more individuals express themselves politically through information and communication technologies (ICTs), the more they also attempt to mobilize others through social networking sites, which in turn translates into greater offline engagement. Gibson and Cantijoch (2013) found that digital media may be leading to an “upgrading” of political discussion “into a more active participatory form” that pushes citizens up in the ladder of engagement (p. 714). Relatedly, Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) show that political expression on social media mediates the effects of social media use on both online and offline political participation. As political discussion on social media is related to political participation, there is reason to believe that it should also be positively associated with party-related engagement.

Although many studies have addressed how engagement with political parties and political discussion on social media independently correlate with political participation, no research so far has addressed the interaction between these two factors. Looking at generic measures of political information and participation, Xenos and Moy (2007) found that the effects of political information acquired online on civic and political participation are contingent on political interest, with the highly interested experiencing greater participatory gains. However, their study predates the diffusion of social media, whose affordances, we have argued, entail qualitative changes in the relationship between information, expression, and participation. If political discussion on social media can act as a pathway toward greater engagement through serendipitous exposure to information, contact with weak ties, and enhanced self-expression, it could also lead to greater participatory gains among party nonmembers than members, thus narrowing the engagement gap between the two groups.

Hypotheses

We start from a holistic definition of “party-related political engagement” that is sensitive to the increasing integration of online and offline forms of political action (e.g., Oser et al. 2013) and hybridization of participatory repertoires (Chadwick 2007). Party-related engagement may be the purview of both “party campaigners” and “citizen campaigners.” In the former case, party members use online and social media tools to help their parties. We therefore hypothesize that *party membership will be positively correlated with party-related engagement* (H1).

Political parties, however, are complex and have varying structures that organize and recruit members differently across western democracies. To account for some

of these variations, we assess the relationship between party membership and party-related engagement in a comparative framework, an aspect that has been neglected in studies of social media and politics so far. We focus on Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom because they are large western democracies where we can identify meaningful systemic variance while keeping constant other characteristics—such as their political development, parliamentary form of government, and the fact that they voted simultaneously and with the same electoral system for the May 2014 European Parliament elections. Comparing Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom allows us to identify country-level effects, to assess the robustness of our findings across different political systems, and to evaluate how the strength and inclusiveness of party organizations affect the relationship between party membership and engagement.

The characteristics of party organizations differ substantially across the three countries. British party membership declined dramatically over the last thirty years, as the main parties lost more than a million members (Van Biezen et al. 2012). This downfall is not compensated by the recent surges in membership of the Scottish National Party (which had ninety-three thousand members in January 2015), UK Independence Party (thirty-nine thousand), and the Green Party (forty-four thousand; see House of Commons Library 2015). As a result, Britain ranks third to last among the twenty-seven EU member countries in terms of total party membership as a percentage of the electorate, with just more than half a million members in total (Van Biezen et al. 2012).² Italian party membership, although historically higher than in Germany and the United Kingdom (Van Biezen et al. 2012), collapsed over the last decade, as the main Center-Right party (*Forza Italia*) all but neglected enrolling members and the main Center-Left party (*Partito Democratico*) saw its membership decline from one million upon its founding in 2007 to a reported 100,000 in 2014.³ The Five Star Movement, which polled a surprising second in the 2013 general elections and mostly organized online in its early days, does not formally enroll members but allows those who register on the leader's blog to vote in primaries and internal referenda (Mosca et al. 2015). By contrast, German major parties still pursue the model of the *Volkspartei*, which is "mainly concerned with the integration of . . . at least a large share of citizens into the political decision-making process" (Jun 2011: 204) and thus demands that parties recruit substantial memberships. Although enrollment faltered over the last two decades, as of 2012, the six major German parties still enrolled a total of 1.28 million members.⁴ Moreover, German parties receive public funding on the basis of the contributions they raise from members and thus have a particular incentive to recruit them. Finally, there are stark differences in the legitimacy of political parties in the three countries: In June 2014, 30 percent of Germans claimed to trust parties, whereas only 15 percent of British and 6 percent of Italian respondents did.⁵

We expect these differences to play a role in shaping the factors that lead party members to engage with party-related activities due to both supply- and demand-related mechanisms. On the supply side, better-organized parties should be able to more effectively channel members' participation (Heidar 2006), and conversely, less-structured parties should be less capable of mobilizing their members. On the demand

side, where parties are stronger, individuals aiming to influence politics should consider parties as more viable linkages to government and policy making (Lawson 1980), and should thus be more likely to both become members and engage with party-related activities. By contrast, where party organizations are weaker, individuals eager to affect political outcomes should see limited value in party membership and may pursue their political goals by other means. Because German parties are comparatively stronger than Italian and British ones, we hypothesize that *party membership will be more strongly correlated with party-related engagement in Germany than in Italy and the United Kingdom* (H2).

As discussed above, informal political discussion on social media may also breed “citizen campaigners,” that is, individuals who are not party members but who engage with party-related activities. We thus hypothesize that *engagement with political discussions on social media will be positively correlated with party-related engagement, even after controlling for party membership and attitudes toward parties* (H3).

Finally, we explore the possibility that *informal political discussion on social media moderates the relationship between party membership and party-related engagement*. We expect that political discussions on social media reduce the distance between members and nonmembers in party-related engagement by facilitating informal political self-expression, which is a pathway to participation. Thus, we expect the sign of the interaction between discussion and membership to be negative (H4).

Data and Variables

Data have been collected through three online surveys conducted in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom in the aftermath of the European Elections of May 22 to 25, 2014. The surveys were in the field between May 27 and June 20. For each country, a sample ($N = 1,750$) representative of Internet users aged sixteen to seventy four was constructed on the basis of online panels administered by Ipsos where respondents were offered nonmonetary incentives to participate. Invitations were sent in each country until we achieved a sample that matched our target population on the following characteristics: age, gender, region of residence, occupational condition, and educational level. Response rates based on American Association for Public Opinion Research’s (AAPOR 2015) Response Rate 1 (RR1) standard were 17 percent for Germany, 21.4 percent for Italy, and 20.1 percent for the United Kingdom. Because the quota sampling allowed us to achieve a very close fit between sample margins and population margins, no weighting was required for the German and Italian samples, whereas the U.K. data were weighted to ensure that sample margins matched population margins with respect to occupational condition. It is worth noting that in 2014, Eurostat estimated that 92 percent of Britons, 86 percent of Germans, but only 62 percent of Italians used the Internet.⁶ As a result, even if our samples are representative of the populations with Internet access in each country, the Italian sample is likely to deviate from the general voting-age population much more than the British and German ones. When assessing the validity of our data, it should be noted that nonprobability samples such as the one used here tend to produce estimates of relationships

between variables—which is what our hypotheses focus on—that are consistent with those obtained with probability samples (Pasek 2015).

We measured our dependent variable—party-related engagement—as a combination of six different citizen activities that can be beneficial to political parties, listed below. In activities A and B, individuals act as informal spokespersons for parties and candidates; in activities C and D, they provide feedback; and in activities E and F, they contribute time and money.⁷

- A. Encouraging other people to vote for a party or candidate on social media (performed by 9.9 percent of German respondents, 15.5 percent of the Italian ones, and 17.2 percent of the U.K. ones).
- B. Encouraging other people to vote for a party or candidate by sending an e-mail (Germany 6 percent, Italy 12.5 percent, the United Kingdom 13.4 percent).
- C. Commenting on a post of, or sending a message to, a party or candidate on social media (Germany 8.7 percent, Italy 18.5 percent, the United Kingdom 14.3 percent).
- D. Sending an e-mail to a party or politician (Germany 10.2 percent, Italy 15.9 percent, the United Kingdom 17.9 percent).
- E. Financing a political party, candidate, or campaign (Germany 5 percent, Italy 6.7 percent, the United Kingdom 7.1 percent).
- F. Participating in the activities of a political party (Germany 8.6 percent, Italy 11.5 percent, the United Kingdom 9.3 percent).

The data show notable integration across these different endeavors: Cronbach's alpha across the six items is .806 in Germany, .765 in Italy, and .821 in the United Kingdom (.799 when combining data from all three countries). The average values of the index, which ranges from 0 to 6, are .48 in Germany, .83 in Italy, and .80 in the United Kingdom, and the difference between Germany and the other two countries is statistically significant at $p = .000$, based on independent samples t -tests. Although this is only a descriptive finding, it is interesting in itself because Germany also stands out as the country where parties are organizationally stronger and more trusted by citizens. We return to this point below.

We test our hypotheses through multivariate Poisson regressions, which are appropriate when the dependent variable is a count variable. We ran three separate regressions (incrementally including the interaction terms we considered) to estimate the value of the index of party-related engagement. Our key independent variables are party membership⁸ (which allows us to test H1), the interaction between party membership and country (with Germany as reference category, allowing us to test H2), political discussion on social media⁹ (which allows us to test H3), and the interaction between party membership and political discussion on social media (mean centered to mitigate risks of multicollinearity, allowing us to test H4). As some of the questions used to build the dependent variable, as well as those dealing with political discussion on social media, were only asked to those respondents who claimed to have a profile on at least one major social networking site (82.1 percent of German respondents, 88

percent of Italian ones, and 85.9 percent of British ones), our regression models only include—and should be generalized to—social media users. The models control for gender, age, education, income,¹⁰ trust in parties, interest in politics, political efficacy,¹¹ the country of the respondent (with Germany as reference category), and exposure to political news on different media channels. All nondichotomous independent and control variables have been normalized to range between 0 and 1 to facilitate comparisons across coefficients.

Findings

Table 1 shows the results of Poisson regression models predicting the value of the index of party-related engagement. The pseudo- R^2 coefficients at the bottom of the table suggest that the models fit the data satisfactorily and increasingly so as interactions are included.

As shown by the positive and statistically significant correlations between party membership and party-related engagement across all three models, party members engage in substantially more activities than the rest of the sample, thus confirming H1. This is true in all three countries considered, but as Model 1 shows, the relationship is significantly stronger in Germany. Thus, our H2 predicting a stronger correlation between party membership and party-related engagement in Germany than in Italy and the United Kingdom is also confirmed.

Party-related engagement, however, is not solely the purview of party members, as citizen campaigners also substantially contribute to these activities. This is shown by the fact that the coefficient for political discussion on social media is positive and statistically significant, thus supporting H3. It should be kept in mind that the models control for party membership, political efficacy and interest in politics (both of which are positively and significantly associated with party-related engagement in all three models), and trust in parties. This means that political discussion on social media can provide a pathway to party-related engagement even after relevant political attitudes are taken into account.

Finally, Model 2 shows that political discussion on social media moderates the relationship between party membership and party-related engagement, as predicted by H4. The coefficient is statistically significant, and the sign is negative, which indicates that the strength of the relationship between membership and engagement decreases as the intensity with which one discusses politics on social media increases. For instance, a typical¹² Italian respondent who is a party member and discusses politics on social media one standard deviation less than average is predicted to participate in slightly more than one of the six party-related engagement activities we tested (1.22 on a 0–6 scale), which grows to about two activities (2.04) if political discussion on social media increases to one standard deviation above the mean. By contrast, a similar respondent who is not a party member and who discusses politics less than average is predicted to not engage in any party-related endeavor at all (with the index equaling 0.19), but when political discussion on social media is raised to one standard deviation above average, the respondent is predicted to engage in close to one party-related

Table 1. Estimated Coefficients for Party-Related Engagement (0–6 Index).

| | Model 0 | | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|--|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
| | Coefficient | SE | Coefficient | SE | Coefficient | SE |
| Party member | 0.880*** | .056 | 1.206*** | .105 | 1.752*** | .104 |
| Political discussion on social media | 2.121*** | .103 | 2.100*** | .102 | 2.740*** | .110 |
| Country × Party member (Germany = reference) | | | | | | |
| Italy × Party member | — | — | -0.444*** | .119 | -0.380*** | .112 |
| United Kingdom × Party member | — | — | -0.382** | .125 | -0.329** | .116 |
| Political discussion × Party member | — | — | — | — | -1.782*** | .166 |
| Country (Germany = reference) | | | | | | |
| Italy | 0.410*** | .062 | 0.586*** | .084 | 0.542*** | .084 |
| United Kingdom | 0.283*** | .063 | 0.439*** | .089 | 0.442*** | .089 |
| Sources of political information | | | | | | |
| Internet | 0.751*** | .133 | 0.744*** | .134 | 0.709*** | .132 |
| Newspapers | 0.426*** | .096 | 0.415*** | .096 | 0.382*** | .094 |
| Television | -0.079 | .120 | -0.073 | .119 | -0.084 | .118 |
| Radio | 0.180 | .095 | 0.194* | .095 | 0.227* | .093 |
| Political efficacy | 0.792*** | .121 | 0.788*** | .120 | 0.637*** | .114 |
| Interest in politics | 0.369*** | .103 | 0.377*** | .103 | 0.353*** | .096 |
| Trust in parties | -0.114 | .073 | -0.088 | .074 | 0.024 | .071 |
| Gender (male) | 0.090* | .045 | 0.094* | .045 | 0.073 | .043 |
| Age | -0.114 | .104 | -0.116 | .102 | -0.123 | .099 |
| Education | 0.016 | .067 | 0.018 | .067 | -0.009 | .062 |
| Income | -0.045 | .083 | -0.048 | .081 | -0.024 | .076 |
| Constant | -2.984*** | .124 | -3.125*** | .134 | -2.598*** | .136 |
| N | 3,869 | | 3,869 | | 3,869 | |
| Pseudo R ² | .391 | | .393 | | .406 | |
| Likelihood ratio χ^2 | 3,892.983 | | 3,911.868 | | 4,051.167 | |

Note. All nondichotomous independent variables have been normalized in a range between 0 and 1. The variable expressing political discussion on social media is centered on its mean in Model 2. Dummy variables identifying missing observations for income and political efficacy have been omitted from the table, see Notes 10 and 11 for details.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

activity (0.84). The relative numerical differences are substantial—the value of the index grows by 332 percent among nonmembers as opposed to 67 percent among members—but the substantive implications are equally compelling. Higher levels of political discussion on social media make already active party members even more active, as they move from one to two predicted activities, but nonmembers move from political inaction (with effectively zero predicted activities) to at least some level of

engagement (approximating one predicted activity). In sum, political discussion on social media is associated with increased participation among both already active members and otherwise inactive nonmembers.

Further evidence of these dynamics can be seen in the country coefficients in Model 2 (see again Table 1). The positive and significant coefficients for Italian and U.K. respondents indicate that party nonmembers in Italy and the United Kingdom engage in a significantly higher number of party-related activities than party nonmembers in Germany. In other words, where parties are weaker and less legitimate, those who want to get involved with politics are more likely to do so as citizen campaigners than as party campaigners. Recalling that German respondents were overall substantially less engaged than British and Italian ones (as shown by both the average values of the index and the positive and significant coefficients for the Italy and U.K. dummy variables in the multivariate models), the greater ability of German parties to engage their members seems to be an aggregate double-edged sword. The better organized the parties, the better they structure their members' activities on social media, and the less they attract participants from outside their ranks.

Before discussing the main implications of our findings, first, we acknowledge that they are subject to some degree of endogeneity due to the cross sectional nature of our data, which do not warrant strong causal claims even though our hypotheses focused on correlations rather than causal effects. Second, our surveys were administered in the aftermath of European elections, which have specific characteristics that are not necessarily present in general elections. Third, we compared two countries with similarly high levels of Internet access—Germany and the United Kingdom—with another—Italy—with lower levels of access, which suggests caution when generalizing these findings beyond the populations of interest. Because citizens with Internet access tend to have higher socioeconomic status than those without Internet access and because socioeconomic status also predicts political engagement, it is plausible that our sample selection strategy may have led us to recruit Italian respondents who, although representative of the Italian online population, are generally more engaged in politics than they would be if levels of Internet use in Italy were similar to those in Britain and Germany.

Finally, although we see great promise in comparative research on social media and politics, it is difficult to disentangle causal patterns related to contextual factors while studying only three countries at a single point in time. We theorized that the strength and legitimacy of party organizations shape the relationship between party membership and party-related engagement via both supply- and demand-related mechanisms. However, other systemic characteristics, such as candidate and leader selection methods and campaign finance regulations, may also play a role (see Anstead and Chadwick 2009). Primaries and direct leadership elections incentivize outsiders and their supporters to experiment with digital tools, thus mobilizing citizen campaigners. In the countries we studied, however, there is no cross-party convergence (as there is between the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States) in the ways leaders and candidates are selected, so this factor may explain differences between parties rather than countries. Campaign finance regulation also differs across the countries we

studied, with German parties enjoying generous public funding, British parties mostly relying on unlimited private donations, and Italian parties currently benefiting from residual public funding but also facing increasing pressure to tap uncapped private contributions (Vaccari 2013). However, none of these countries limit individual donations, which, Anstead and Chadwick (2009) show, incentivize U.S. campaigns to recruit large numbers of small online donors, many of whom then become citizen campaigners.

Conclusions

In this study, we have questioned two common narratives about political parties and their relationship with the Internet—that parties are facing an unstoppable decline and that digital media contribute to this decline because they distract citizens or they only engage activists who are already engaged. By contrast, we have shown that digital media should be considered part of the solution rather than the problem of party crisis. The fact that party activists are more likely to engage with parties' social media presence is just one half of the story—the other is that activists use these platforms to, among other things, distribute party messages beyond supporters. Nonmembers who engage in informal political discussions online also perform activities that are valuable for parties. The low-threshold nature of the endeavors we conceptualized as comprising party-related engagement makes them appealing across a broader constituency than the narrower constituency of party members. Even if, on average, an individual “party campaigner” provides more activities and resources than a “citizen campaigner,” in most populations, there are likely to be many more of the latter than the former, and so the aggregate contributions of citizen campaigners may conceivably approximate, or even exceed, the aggregate contributions of party campaigners. Social media can thus help parties mobilize support and gather feedback from both their core membership base and a wider subset of engaged citizens who are not committed to parties but enjoy discussing politics on social media. Not only do social media contribute to hybridizing repertoires of party *activism* but they are also promoting a hybridization of party *activists*, bringing together older and newer types of participants who may have different views of party engagement and different reasons for taking part in it.

These developments suggest avenues for future research investigating, for instance, the strategies parties use to channel citizen campaigners toward shared goals, the extent to which citizen campaigners engage in grassroots party politics, and whether internal power relationships are bound to be restructured as a result of their influx. If parties persist in their attempt to cajole sympathizers to become more involved in their activities and decision making (Scarrow 2015), their targeting of citizen campaigners may result in new and more inclusive participatory mechanisms, with important implications for party internal dynamics. For instance, the French Socialist Party in 2007 introduced online membership at a €20 discounted price to promote participation in the primaries to select its presidential candidate. In 2014, the U.K. Labour Party created the category of “registered supporters,” who acquired the right to vote for the party leader by paying a one-off minimum fee of £3 on the party Web site. Outsider

parties such as the Spanish *Podemos* and the Italian Five Star Movement have adopted even more radical strategies, allowing members to enroll online for free. Parties are trying to harness digital media in a hybrid mix with their efforts on the ground to enlist citizen campaigners who can either rejuvenate their core activist bases or create new constituencies of support.

This qualitative and quantitative expansion of party membership could lead to potential tensions in the balance of power within organizations, as party elites may be more at ease with their ordinary rank-and-file members than with citizen campaigners whose behaviors are likely to be more difficult to predict and control. To avoid these risks, parties can be expected to continue pursuing a strategy of “controlled interactivity” (Stromer-Galley 2014) that allows them to maintain power over key decisions while delegating and diffusing some aspects of their execution. However, when it comes to high-profile internal decisions, the party establishment may find it difficult to contain the forces set in motion by the combination of digital affordances for supporter engagement and the opening up of political opportunities.

The complex interplay between older and newer modes of party-related engagement, and its implications for internal party politics, were in full display in the 2015 U.K. Labour Party leadership election, where as many as 105,600 (out of a total 112,000 online-enrolled) registered supporters voted, little less than half the 245,675 (out of a total 292,000) full members. Jeremy Corbyn, a textbook party outsider who had been a backbencher for all his thirty-two years in parliament, was elected leader with the support of an overwhelming 83.8 percent of registered supporters, as opposed to 49.6 percent among full members.¹³ The success of the Corbyn campaign was based on a hybrid mix of traditional volunteering, where trade unions and a constellation of social movements seemingly played a substantial role, and digitally enabled strategies to recruit registered supporters and distribute the campaign message on social media. To some degree, the findings shown here suggest that already in 2014, there was a reservoir of citizen campaigners who were not party members but were ready to participate in party-related activities, which the Corbyn campaign tapped into.

The disruptive potential of citizen campaigners on internal party politics may be contingent on the political opportunities provided by institutional arrangements. These opportunities were present in the U.K. Labour Party’s 2015 leadership election and may also exist in some Italian parties—such as the Democratic Party and the Five Star Movement, which to some degree recruit supporters online and allow them some influence over internal decisions. However, other parties in the same countries, as well as all of the main German parties, do not provide substantial opportunities for non-members to influence internal decisions, which may limit the influence of online-mobilized outsider activists.

Although western parties are facing monumental challenges, social media are not hastening their decline—quite to the contrary, they both help new digital foot soldiers to emerge and allow existing members to expand their repertoires. That said, our data measure (self-reported) involvement with party-related activities but do not address whether such activities were conducted in accordance with party goals and consistently with core party messages. It is an open question whether both party campaigners

and citizen campaigners are reliable “agents” to their party “principals,” as highlighted by Enos and Hersh (2015). Relatedly, our findings speak to a growing body of research (Nielsen 2012) showing that party campaigning on the ground no longer depends solely on grassroots organizing and coordination in physical settings but also on the integration of online and offline tools and endeavors. As the background, motivations, and skills of party campaigners are likely to be different from those of citizen campaigners, coordinating them across both digital and physical environments could be increasingly challenging, even if facilitated by data-driven computational management (Kreiss 2012).

Finally, although the processes discussed in this research are developing in all the three countries we studied and, on theoretical grounds, can be expected to be reproduced across most western democracies, the quality and quantity of such developments vary in accordance with the systemic features of each country. In particular, the strength of party organizations has emerged as a potentially important condition for the broadening of online activities among both members and supporters. Digital media may rejuvenate the relationship between parties and their members in the contexts where this is less needed (such as Germany), whereas appealing more to nonmembers in contexts where parties have suffered steeper organizational declines (such as Italy and the United Kingdom). The extent to which social media deepen engagement among members and broaden it among nonmembers is path-dependent on the organizational legacies of the parties themselves while being an important part of the story of how they can be revitalized.

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Notes

1. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/index.cfm (accessed June 30, 2014).

2. In 2015, membership of the Labour Party surged as a result of two phenomena. First, the party recruited more than 100,000 registered supporters (a development we discuss in the "Conclusions" section). Second, following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader, Labour nearly doubled its membership from 201,293 before the 2015 general election to 388,407 on January 10, 2016 (see <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/13/revealed-how-jeremy-corbyn-has-reshaped-the-labour-party>, accessed 15 January 2016). The Corbyn-led surge in Labour membership can actually be explained by our findings, as discussed in the "Conclusions" section.
3. See http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2014/10/03/news/pd_crollo_iscrizioni-97212221/ (accessed October 7, 2014).
4. See <http://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/systeme/empsoz/schriften/Arbeitshefte/ahosz19.pdf> (accessed October 14, 2014).
5. Data retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm (accessed June 22, 2015).
6. See http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Internet_and_cloud_services_-_statistics_on_the_use_by_individuals (accessed December 21, 2015).
7. All items were introduced by a question asking respondents whether they had performed each of the activities "in the past twelve months." Response modes were "yes," "no," and "can't remember." Our index is a count of all the "yes" answers to each item.
8. We measure this variable through the following question: "Over the past twelve months, have you been member of any political party?" Yes/No/Don't remember. We coded the values in the same way as for the variables included in the index of party-related engagement. Party members were 10.1 percent in the Italian, 6.7 percent in the German, and 10.2 percent in the British sample.
9. We measure this variable through two separate questions, one for posting and another for reading political messages on social media: "Thinking about everything you have posted recently on social media, such as status updates, comments, replies, retweets, and links, about how much of what you have posted is related to politics, political issues, or the 2014 elections?" and "How about the messages you have recently received from people you follow or are in contact with on social media? How many of them are related to politics, political issues, or the 2014 elections?" Respondents could answer both questions by indicating a number between 0 = none and 10 = all. After normalizing the resulting variable in a range between 0 and 1, the country values are as follows: Germany: $M = .20$, median = .05, $SD = .25$; Italy: $M = .31$, median = .25, $SD = .27$; the United Kingdom: $M = .28$, median = .20, $SD = .27$.
10. Because our income variable had 831 missing values, rather than introducing bias through listwise deletion (King et al. 2001), we mean-replace these missing values and add a dummy variable to the analysis identifying these cases. With this setup, the coefficient on any given variable with missing data should be interpreted as the effect of that variable on our dependent variable for the cases for which we have observations of income; we thank Josh Tucker for suggesting this approach.
11. This variable has been created by recoding and aggregating answers to three different questions all introduced by the phrase "How much do you agree with these statements?" The statements were "People like me have no influence on what the government does," "Politicians are interested in what people like me think," "Sometimes politics is so complicated that you cannot understand what is happening." The aggregate variable had 381 missing values because a substantial number of respondents answered "don't know" to at least one question. We performed the same procedure as adopted for income to ensure that these respondents are still included in our analysis (see previous note).

12. The values for the effect size estimates reported in this paragraph are calculated on the basis of Model 2 in Table 1 by setting all variables besides party membership and political discussion to their mean (for ordinal- and interval-level variables) and mode (for dichotomous variables) across the pooled sample.
13. See <http://www.labour.org.uk/blog/entry/results-of-the-labour-leadership-and-deputy-leadership-election> (accessed December 22, 2015).

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Looking Out or Turning in? Organizational Ramifications of Online Political Posters on Facebook

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Abstract

Academic analysis of the growth and nature of political campaigning online has concentrated largely on textual interactions between politicians, parties, their members, and supporters, as well as voters more widely. In evaluating the shift from traditional to online campaigning techniques, the use of social media's increasingly visual capabilities has been comparatively neglected in research. This article considers one type of online visual political communication, the online political poster, in terms of its strategic campaign functions relating to persuasive and organizational roles. The article uses a case study of an extensive data set of online political posters collected from political parties in the United Kingdom, on Facebook, between September 2013 through to and including the general election in May 2015, to try to understand how parties used online political posters and how audiences responded to them. The findings show that despite a clear emphasis on sharing images, very few received widespread attention, arguably limiting their persuasive role. However, their prevalence suggests a role relating to parties trying to maintain relationships with existing online supporters as a form of displaying virtual presence, credibility, and belonging, paralleling the function of traditional window posters and yard signs but in a social media setting.

Keywords

election campaign, social media, political advertising, political participation, new technologies

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Introduction

This article explores a relatively neglected area in studies of the role of digital media in election campaigns. While much attention has been paid to the nature of political discourse on digital platforms and particularly the interactions between politicians, political parties, campaigners, and ordinary citizens, there has been a tendency for such research to “overlook examining visual symbols” (Schill 2012: 119) and to have concentrated on text rather than images (Barnhurst and Quinn 2012). Despite increasing attention to the role of digital social networks in election campaigns around the world (e.g., Baldwin-Philippi 2015; Jungherr 2013; Vaccari 2012; Vaccari and Valeriani 2015), the tendency to concentrate on interaction in terms of text has predominated over the increasingly visual dimensions of these platforms. We aim to address this gap in the research and develop a better understanding of an increasingly common form of visual political communication that we have termed online political posters (OPP). OPPs are political images that are designed to be shared over digital social networks. They are widely used by a diverse range of political organizations including minor and mainstream political parties in many countries.

As an emerging phenomenon, OPPs raise important questions about how the availability and exploitation of digital media are connected to the role of citizens in party structures. Our analysis considers two potential strategic functions for OPPs in this context: persuasive and organizational. Persuasive functions are the traditional objective of campaign communications, aiming to reach and persuade voters. At the same time, social networks such as Facebook have been identified as a potential source of organizational coherence for political parties, allowing them to mobilize weak tie relationships through “low threshold activities” (Vaccari 2012: 119), such as following a party on social media. In this interpretation, OPPs may be inward rather than outward looking, serving to reinforce existing support, that is, “Preaching to the Converted” (Norris 2003). To investigate these possible functions, our analysis took the form of an exploratory and primarily quantitative content analysis approach that coded the presence of both organizational and persuasive appeals in a corpus of OPPs produced by political parties on Facebook in the United Kingdom from September 2013 up to and through the 2015 general election. Our hope is that this work will provide a better understanding of the strategic functions of OPPs within political parties and stimulate further work on digital visual communication. This may also provide some evidence for how political parties are seeking to use social media and integrate it into party structures both within and outside of acknowledged campaign periods and, in particular, how such use is linked to the cultivation of groups of online followers.

This article is also a response in part to a growing interest in the politicization of previously apolitical spaces. Wright (2011) suggested that research agendas need to move on from the polarized revolution versus normalization debate by considering how the use of the Web can serve to politicize previously apolitical spaces. The growing potential importance of accidental, indirect, and serendipitous exposure to political

content through content shared by ordinary citizens on social networks has been noted in several contexts (Chadwick 2009; Gibson 2013; Vaccari 2012; Vaccari and Valeriani 2015). Facebook, in particular, has become recognized across European countries at least as something of a “catch-all medium” for campaigning of this kind (Lilleker et al. 2015: 762). OPPs constitute a specific visual form of explicit attempts by political parties to colonize the potentially apolitical audiences linked to their own supporters. In their persuasive form, OPPs could well open up channels of political communication with previously unengaged voters. In addition, the organizational perspective may contribute to wider debates around party decline and their reinvention. While the addition of online supporters is hardly revolutionary, neither is it “politics as usual” (Margolis and Resnick 2000).

OPPs

Although less studied than broadcast advertising, poster advertising is a near-ubiquitous component of election campaigns in many countries around the world, especially those where broadcast advertising is limited, such as the United Kingdom (Burgess 2011; Seidman 2008a). Posters can take a variety of forms from simple posters in citizens’ windows or U.S.-style “yard signs” (Baldwin-Philippi 2015: 79) to more sophisticated billboard posters that have been prominently used in every U.K. general election campaign since the beginning of the twentieth century (Burgess 2011: 190). In an age of increasing digital distribution of content, however, notable shifts from print to digital posters have begun to emerge, such as the rise of “digital yard signs” in the United States (Baldwin-Philippi 2015: 79). The United Kingdom serves as a good illustrative case of this transition with evidence of explicit party approaches to posters increasingly moving from print to digital since the 2010 general election (Wheeler 2015).

OPPs can be seen as a form of the wider professionalization of political communication (McNair 2012) whereby political party organizations attempt to appropriate communication strategies used in other contexts. Images in the form of online “memes,” for instance, have become an everyday feature of contemporary social media, consisting of a stock image to which users add their own slogans for (typically) comic effect, with some images circulating millions of times (Shifman 2014; see also Miltner 2014).¹ OPPs are arguably an attempt to tap into that potential for widespread dissemination by users, although, unlike memes, they are not intended to be redesigned by their audience, being party-produced messages. They are open to appropriation and manipulation, however. In March 2014, then U.K. Conservative Chairman Grant Shapps tweeted an OPP attempting to trumpet the impact of the recent budget on the price of beer and bingo. Described variously as an advert or infographic by media, the poster generated a “Twitter Storm” as users saw it as revealing Conservative Party’s stereotypical views of the working class (Urquhart 2014). The party lost control of the image as numerous satirical alternatives were distributed online, giving birth to a (relatively short-lived) and unintended meme.

“Going Viral”

Questions arise around how OPPs contribute to parties' communication efforts and what, if any, strategic functions they fulfill. OPPs seem to be designed as a form of viral political advertising. Political advertising can be thought of as “the purchase and use of advertising space, paid for at commercial rates, in order to transmit political messages to mass audiences” (McNair 2012: 87). One potential function of OPPs, in keeping with traditional political posters, is mass persuasion (Seidman 2008a: 7) but rather than seeking to directly change the audience's mind, even simple posters lacking substantive factual content have been noted as contributing to a sense of presence and credibility in a campaign (Seidman 2008b). A study of posters in Japan suggests that while voters are unlikely to base their voting decisions on photos and slogans offered by campaign posters, they still play a familiarization and engagement role (Lewis and Masshardt 2002: 401). Studies of posters in France and Belgium suggest posters help establish a campaign's presence in particular locations, signifying the strength of the campaign (Dumitrescu 2011). Baldwin-Philippi (2015) suggests that digital yard signs in U.S. election candidate social media pages serve a similar function as “visual markers to show support” (p. 79).

Higher prices and the increasing role of media coverage have reduced billboard poster launches in the United Kingdom to largely tokenistic events designed to attract media attention (Wheeler 2015). OPPs, thus, provide a possible solution to disseminating printed poster material for cost-conscious political parties. Coined in reference to the spread of the Web mail service Hotmail, viral marketing or advertising online mirrors models of disease transmission, relying on message recipients to transmit messages on behalf of the originator (De Bruyn and Lilien 2008). Viral advertising is similar in many ways to more traditional word of mouth approaches to marketing but differs in the speed and reach of transmission, the focus on images and text, the control maintained over the message by the originator, and a greater focus on a one-way direction of travel compared with the more conversational word of mouth (Swanepoel et al. 2009: 11). To this list, we can add the capability of a single person to contact many others at once through posting a piece of content on a social media network.

Applying viral advertising techniques to political advertising is to some extent a logical step as a tool through which parties can disseminate a lot of messages cheaply using software easily available to them in-house. Equally, the lower production costs and turnaround time mean that messages can also be timely in a way that conventional poster campaigns with long lead-in times cannot. OPPs also represent a short conceptual leap for political parties that are used to using political posters and relying on their supporters to evangelize on their behalf. Positioning poster-style images within social networks allows parties to effectively add their supporters' social endorsement to party controlled poster content in a manner similar to the use of yard signs.

However, just as OPPs do not clearly fit in the definition of a meme, they may also eschew the precise understanding of viral dissemination. The concept of virality can be seen on different levels. On a broader level, individual news stories may be widely disseminated through multiple outlets, while at the same time, individual pieces of

content may also take on viral characteristics (Nahon and Hemsley 2013). In this instance, we are interested in individual pieces of content, that is, the performance of single OPPs that may or may not contribute to a wider viral event. For content to be considered viral, a number of criteria need to be met, including a specific slow-quick-slow frequency distribution for cumulative views (described as a sigmoid curve), a degree of reach in terms of numbers, and a wider recognition traversing different networks (Nahon and Hemsley 2013: 22). While OPPs are clearly intended to receive this kind of dissemination, the reality may be far more moderate, limiting them to “Word of Mouth” communication, lacking the speed and scale requirements of true virality (Nahon and Hemsley 2013: 37). If OPPs are falling short of going truly viral and jumping between networks, the continued use of OPPs may be explained by strategic functions other than persuasiveness.

“Virtual Belonging”

There is a good theoretical basis for OPPs also to be interpreted as an organizing tool for political parties. In this interpretation, OPPs become a tool for building organizational coherence, serving to create a shared identity between supporters who are unlikely to ever meet physically. Party political organizations are often viewed as conforming to loosely defined ideal organizational types. Like many other polities, in the United Kingdom, political parties have been regarded as having gone through phases of organizational types such as elite or cadre parties with little connection to the voting public (McKenzie 1963), mass parties more reliant on establishing relationships with citizens for support with citizen involvement crucial to political success (Duverger 1954), and then to more marketing-oriented “catch all” parties (Kirchheimer 1966) structured around campaign professionals (Katz and Mair 1995; Mair and van Biezen 2001; Panebianco 1988). The emergence of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) as a possible tool for political parties led to further theorizing about the form of party organization such as Margetts’s (2001) concept of the “cyber party,” based on what she saw as a series of changing circumstances for parties, including declining memberships, the growth of single issue political activity, a growing reliance on symbolic actions rather than mass mobilization, and more generalized expectations among the public that political support, as with other activities, should be possible online. The defining property of the cyber party model for Margetts (2001) was that the Web would be used to connect voters and the party, leading to a new and more integrated form of relationship that would provide supporters with a similar level of inclusion to that reserved previously for full party members (p. 11). In the process, the costs of political participation in terms of time and energy would be drastically reduced, taking some of the more burdensome elements out of political participation, such as evening meetings and constituency canvassing.

Löfgren and Smith (2003) suggested four broad party strategies (mass, cartel, consumerist, and grassroots) linked to how ICTs’ use would be fitted to each parties’ individual strategy. Closest to Margetts’s cyber party model is Löfgren and Smith’s “grassroots” strategy in which permanent organizational forms were replaced with

loose and decentralized connections (Löfgren and Smith 2003: 49). At the same time, the focus shifts from the more traditional aggregation of views performed by mass parties to supporters taking on “democratic identities” (Löfgren and Smith 2003: 49). Despite heavy influence of the United States in party utilization of ICTs in campaigns elsewhere in the world (Jungherr 2013), studies have also shown variation in the integration and adoption of new and social media into party campaigning strategies internationally (Lilleker et al. 2011) and a consideration of the potential for increasing citizen involvement in party campaigning (Baldwin-Philippi 2015; Gibson 2013).

The ubiquity of social media today increasingly takes these discussions out of the realm of the theoretical. Even conservative estimates, for example, now put the numbers of Facebook supporters in the same range as, or in some cases in excess of, formal party membership figures for the three largest U.K. parties, particularly among younger citizens who are more likely to be among these “virtual members” (Bartlett et al. 2013: 8–9). In the context of political parties, social media allows for

. . . direct, free and easy involvement (or disengagement); regular updates and information; and active participation from members. This can help generate a sense of “virtual belonging” towards the specific online group enhanced also by the possibility of interacting directly with likeminded people from all over the world. (Bartlett et al. 2013: 11–12)

Of course, there are acknowledged risks to online-centric party organizational models. Margetts (2001) highlighted potential risks of strategic penetration and the lack of on-the-ground campaigners come election time and the difficulty in extracting money from online supporters compared with those traditional supporters. Early concerns of candidates that online presence would expose them to additional levels of scrutiny and communicative risk (e.g., Stromer-Galley 2000) have not been entirely offset by still persisting limited knowledge of the benefits in terms of persuasive and mobilizing reach (Baldwin-Philippi 2015; Vaccari and Valeriani 2015). Critics question the value of low engagement, online political activism for mainstream political campaigning (Gladwell 2010; Morozov 2011), with weak tie networks such as Facebook and Twitter arguably ill-suited to eliciting large amounts of time, effort, or money from citizens (Vaccari and Valeriani 2015). Nonetheless, party campaigners themselves are increasingly convinced of the value of these platforms to their work (Baldwin-Philippi 2015; Lilleker et al. 2015; Vaccari 2012; Vaccari and Valeriani 2015). U.K. Green Party campaigner Mark Cridge, for instance, cited social media “share graphics” as a key reason for increased party membership in the run-up to the 2015 general election (Ross 2015).

Persuasive and organization roles for OPPs are unlikely to be mutually exclusive, and there is a degree of theoretical overlap between them. After all, the same messages that seek to persuade unaligned voters will likely act to reinforce supporters’ preferences. Commercial advertising material, for instance, is often targeted as much at a company’s own sales force as it is at potential consumers, telling sales people *how* to

sell the product (Schudson 1984). This function, in particular, seems to connect with OPPs as supporters of a party on Facebook have access to a near constant stream of facts and opinions that they can use to try and persuade others both online and in any number of potential conversations, arguments, and discussions supporters have with friends, colleagues, and family. Requesting that supporters share persuasive information with their own networks also has an effect on organizational relationships. Gibson's (2013) conception of "citizen initiated campaigning" sees bringing citizens into the campaigning process itself as being transformative of the expected relationship between the party and the voter. In bringing voters into the process of campaigning by asking them to share persuasive content, parties are delegating some decisions that would have been reserved for centralized and professionalized campaigners under traditional models to individual supporters. However, there remains a significant question over the authenticity and extent of this transformation in organizational relationships (Chadwick 2013). In the case of OPPs, individual-level decision making is limited to deciding to read, engage with, and share content within an individual's own network; design, production, and seeding ultimately remain under the control of party professionals. While the transmission of OPPs is horizontal, their production remains very much a top-down process.

Contextually, OPPs are only one part of a wider campaign message played out on Facebook, online more generally, and through many different offline channels. By themselves, the use of OPPs cannot confirm or contradict any of these organizational theories more generally. Even more nuanced approaches that carve out differing roles for ICTs are still difficult to marry up with the complex reality of political parties. Despite the drawbacks and acknowledged complexity and overlap with persuasive functions, these theoretical approaches do, however, give good reason to see ICTs, and in this context OPPs, as fulfilling an organizational function. Audiences may not be formal party members, or even particularly committed partisans, but they represent an online resource that OPPs may in some respects help to marshal and bind together over an online platform in the absence of more formalized political activities such as attending constituency or national meetings or canvassing for candidates.

Researching OPPs

So far, we have presented two broad theoretical explanations for the use of OPPs by political parties: persuasive and organizational. We have also acknowledged that these explanations are unlikely to be mutually exclusive and that a degree of overlap exists between them. The overarching objective of this article is to develop a better understanding of the strategic function played by OPPs in political campaigning using the United Kingdom as a case study. With this in mind, we have identified four research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): To what extent do political parties in the United Kingdom make use of OPPs on Facebook, and how does this use differ between parties and time periods?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What is the nature of OPP design and content?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What is the extent and nature of mobilizing appeals in OPPs?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): To what extent do audiences engage with OPPs?

Data to answer these questions were manually collected daily between September 12, 2013 and May 8, 2015, encompassing the 2014 European and local elections (May 22, 2014), the Scottish Independence Referendum (September 18, 2014), and culminating with the 2015 general and local elections (May 7, 2015). In this study, we were specifically concerned with OPPs produced by seven parties in the United Kingdom, all of whom are represented in Parliament: Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Green Party, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), Plaid Cymru, and the Scottish National Party. In particular, we focus on the form and style of OPPs, the types of messages being disseminated, and an indication of audience reaction to these images through associated metadata. In total, 2,447 OPPs were collected, alongside associated metadata, including the date of posting and the number of “Likes” and “Shares.” Metadata were collected three days retrospectively, so that an image posted on May 1 would be saved and the metadata recorded on May 3. Research on the “half-life” of social media posts supports the judgment that metadata were unlikely to change substantially after three days (Bit.ly 2011), although to ensure consistency, metadata that could not be recorded on the correct day were reported as missing.

During the analysis, we encountered a huge diversity of images and postings. To be considered an OPP, an image needed to

- appear on the official party Facebook page,
- be posted as an image,
- exhibit elements of purposive design, and
- include a political message.

These criteria excluded images that did not originate on party pages. Photographs were excluded unless they included text clearly produced for the purposes of the image, such as the case with Labour’s use of photos of activists holding written messages for the camera. Photographs and images solely of manifestos, newspapers, and other literature were also excluded.

The coding frame was developed iteratively, going through several versions before being finalized. In total, five variables were coded: design, brand, orientation (positive/negative/other), focus (policy/image/other), and mobilization. Mobilization was coded as being nonmutually exclusive, for example, OPPs may include multiple mobilization appeals such as to visit a Web site and to share an image. As a result, it was broken down into a series of binary (*yes/no*) variables. Coding of OPPs was done by two trained researchers (a pilot test on a sample of the content produced an intercoder-reliability mean of .947 using Holsti’s formula).

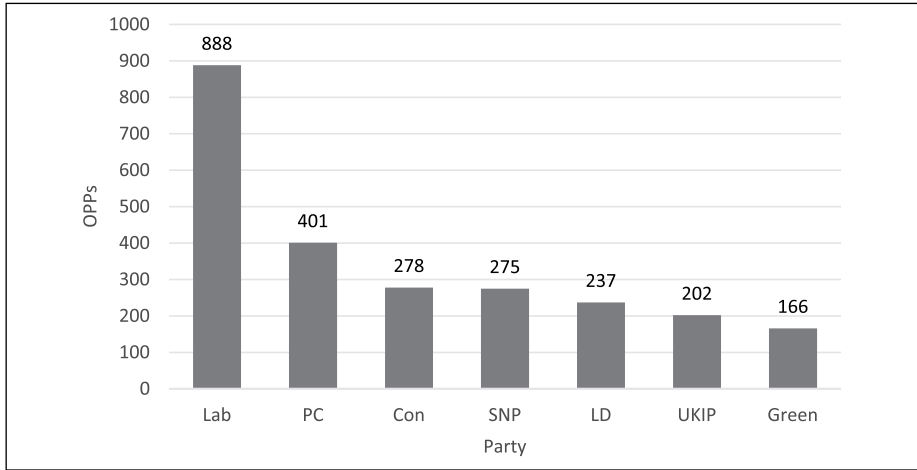


Figure 1. Online Political Poster production September 12, 2013–May 8, 2015 ($n = 2,447$).
Note. Lab = Labour; PC = Plaid Cymru; Con = Conservatives; SNP = Scottish National Party; LD = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party.

Production

In total, 2,447 OPPs were recorded between September 12, 2013 and May 8, 2015, the day after Election Day, and the production by party is indicated in Figure 1. By far, the biggest producer of OPPs was the Labour Party, which posted 888 (36 percent of the total) during the observation period, more than twice as many as any other party and perhaps an indication of efforts to offer a signaling of virtual presence and party strength paralleling the use of traditional posters (Dumitrescu 2011; Seidman 2008a). Labour aside, there was no clear pattern of greater OPP production from the comparatively resource-rich major political parties; indeed, one of the smaller parties included in this analysis, Plaid Cymru, produced the second highest number of OPPs, ahead of the coalition government partners, suggesting that at least in this one form of party communication, minor parties have a potentially slightly more level playing field to compete on.

Figure 2 gives a breakdown of OPP production over time, in thirty-day periods leading to the Election Day (May 7, 2015) by party. The overall trend is a clear increase on OPP production in the run-up to the 2015 general election, with a small uptick at the start of 2015 and a more dramatic increase in March 2015. All parties seem to increase OPP production during this time, but the most dramatic increase came from the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru. Two other significant electoral events are encompassed in this data set, the local and European elections held on May 22, 2014 and the Scottish Independence Referendum held on September 18, 2014. Neither produced as significant an uptick as the general election, strongly suggesting that the largest level of OPP production in the United Kingdom was focused primarily on the general election.

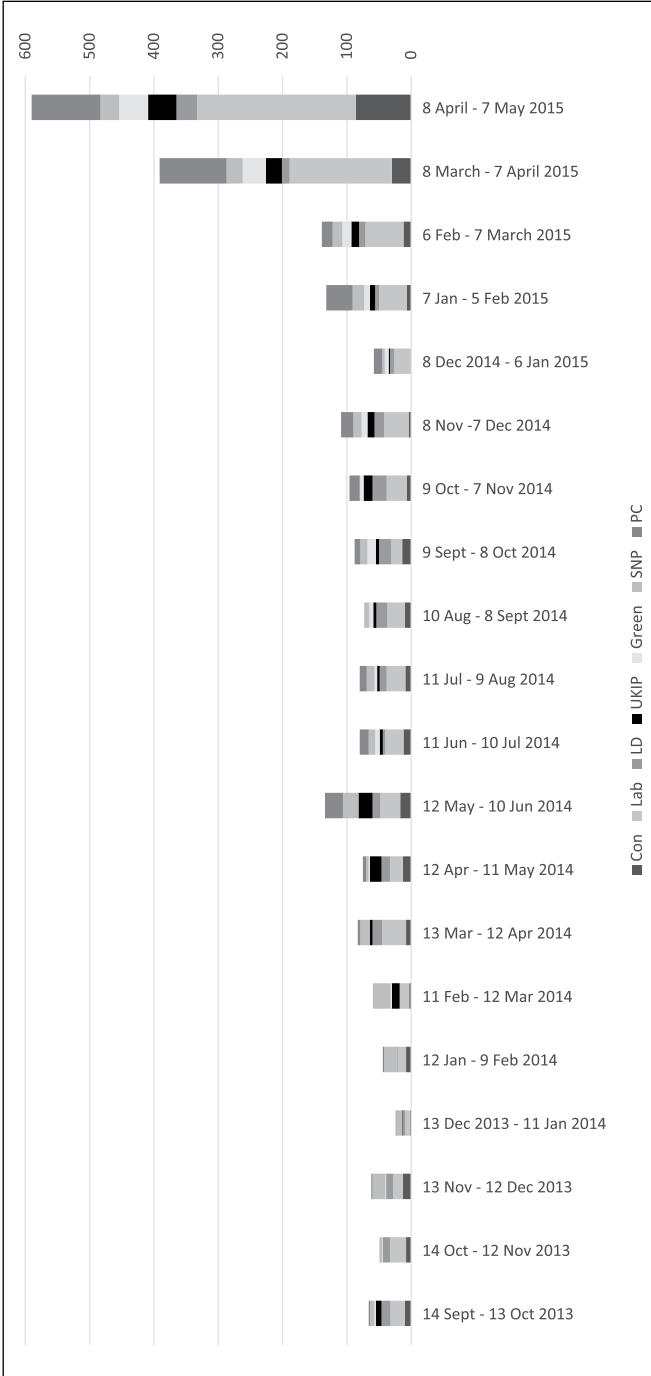


Figure 2. OPP production by thirty-day periods to election ($n = 2,431$)
 Note. Excludes OPPs posted before September 14, 2013 and after May 7, 2015. OPP = online political poster; Con = Conservatives; Lab = Labour; LD = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; SNP = Scottish National Party; PC = Plaid Cymru.

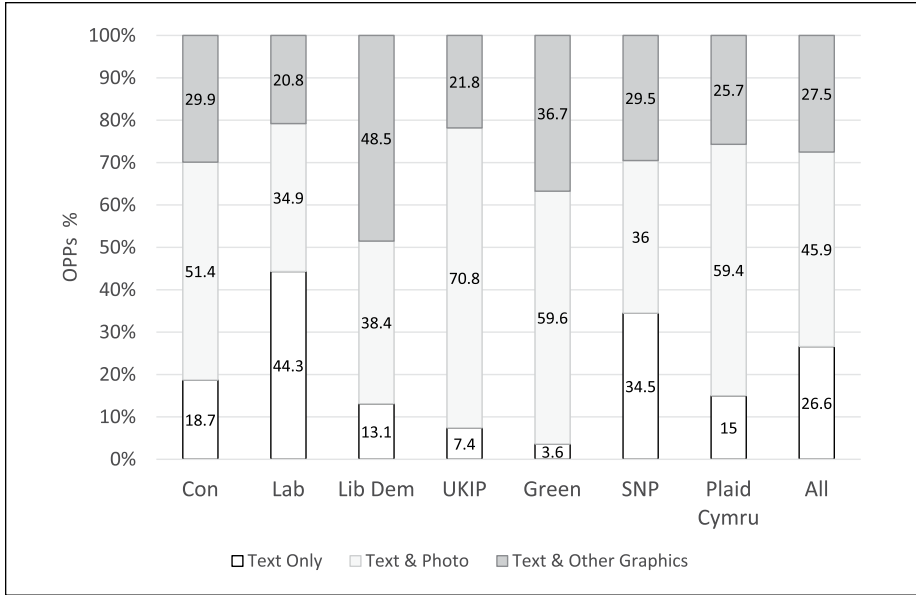


Figure 3. OPP design by party (percent) (n = 2,447).

Note. OPP = online political poster; Con = Conservatives; Lab = Labour; Lib Dem = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; SNP = Scottish National Party.

However, it is notable that, aside from declines reflecting the Christmas holiday seasons in 2013 and 2014, all parties continued to produce a small but steady number of OPPs throughout the time period observed, indicating that, unlike traditional posters, they are now a permanent feature of party communication.

Design and Content

In terms of the design and content of OPPs, several attributes were analyzed. As shown in Figure 3, OPPs were analyzed in terms of their basic composition. As a relatively new form of party communication, some variation in design was evident, with some very simple text-only OPPs, such as Labour’s “Hell Yes, I’m Voting Labour” OPP (Figure 4), which echoed party leader Ed Miliband’s response to a television interviewer’s question over whether he was tough enough to be Prime Minister, to which he responded “hell yes, I’m tough enough.” Overall, just under half of all OPPs featured text in combination with some kind of photograph, quite often a senior party figure (the leader more often than not), with a little over a quarter featuring text in combination with some kind of graphics—sometimes a graph or chart depicting factual information (such as Conservative OPPs showing rising employment figures: Figure 5), and at other times illustrations and drawings (such as Plaid Cymru posters depicting leader Leanne Wood in a manner similar to the now famous Shepard



Figure 4. Online political poster posted by the Labour Party April 27, 2015.
Source. Originally posted to: <https://www.facebook.com/labourparty>.

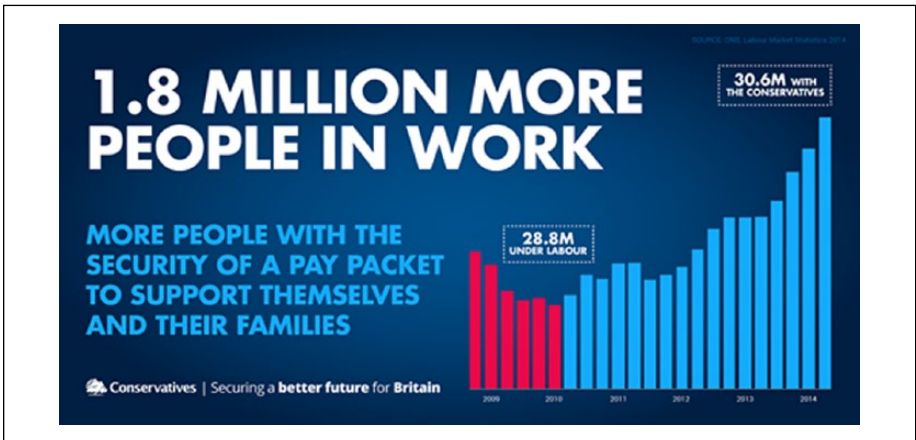


Figure 5. Online political poster posted by the Conservative Party July 16, 2014.
Source. Originally posted to: <https://www.facebook.com/conservatives>.



Figure 6. Online political poster posted by Plaid Cymru April 27, 2015.
Source. Originally posted to: <https://www.facebook.com/PlaidCymruWales>.



Figure 7. Posted by the Conservative Party April 9, 2015.
Source. Originally posted to: <https://www.facebook.com/conservatives>.

Fairey-designed “Hope” poster featuring Barack Obama: Figure 6). While on a few occasions, OPPs were straight reproductions of conventional billboard posters (such as a Conservative poster of Labour leader Ed Miliband in SNP senior figure Alex Salmon’s pocket: Figure 7), in general, it was clear that OPPs were a distinctive type of party communication, at times like traditional billboards, but often much simpler in style and content, closer to constituency window posters.

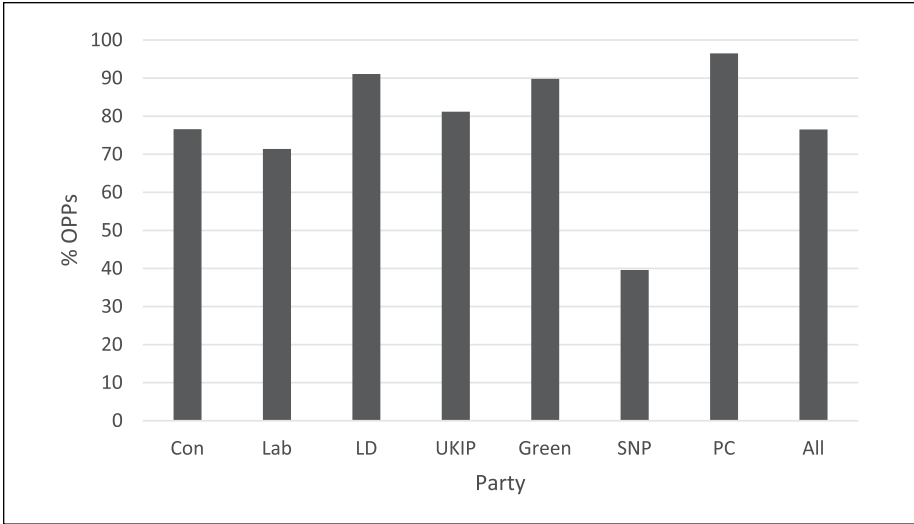


Figure 8. OPP branding by party (percent) ($n = 2,447$).

Note. OPP = online political poster; Con = Conservatives; Lab = Labour; LD = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; SNP = Scottish National Party; PC = Plaid Cymru.

Overall, around three-quarters of OPPs (76.5 percent) also featured clear party branding in some form or other (such as party name and/or logo) (Figure 8), and both the presence and absence of party branding can be explored somewhat further when the OPPs are analyzed for the orientation of their messages (Figure 9). OPPs were coded as being either predominantly positive, negative, or “other” in their message. The other category was used where OPPs featured a balance between positive and negative messages, often this occurred where OPPs compared the policy of the authoring party with that of another party. OPPs were overwhelmingly positive across the data set, with almost two-thirds (64.7 percent) of all OPPs containing messages reflecting positive statements or claims with only just over a fifth containing overtly negative messages (21.1 percent). “Other” OPPs (14.2 percent) were usually either comparative, for example, highlighting a party’s achievements or policy compared with competitors, or concerned more basic information, such as where they referred to media appearances or party conferences. In the main, OPPs may reflect the idea that the more control a party has over its messages, the more likely it is to offer positive messages (Vliegenthart 2012). The positivity of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats may be explained by an incumbency effect, able to point to party achievements in government. The Liberal Democrats had the lowest proportion of negative orientation in their OPPs at just over one in ten. Minor parties, with the exception of the SNP, tended to be more positive in their OPPs, whether branded or not.

Despite this, there was an interesting relationship between negative OPPs and party branding. Unbranded OPPs tended to be far more negative, with negative messages

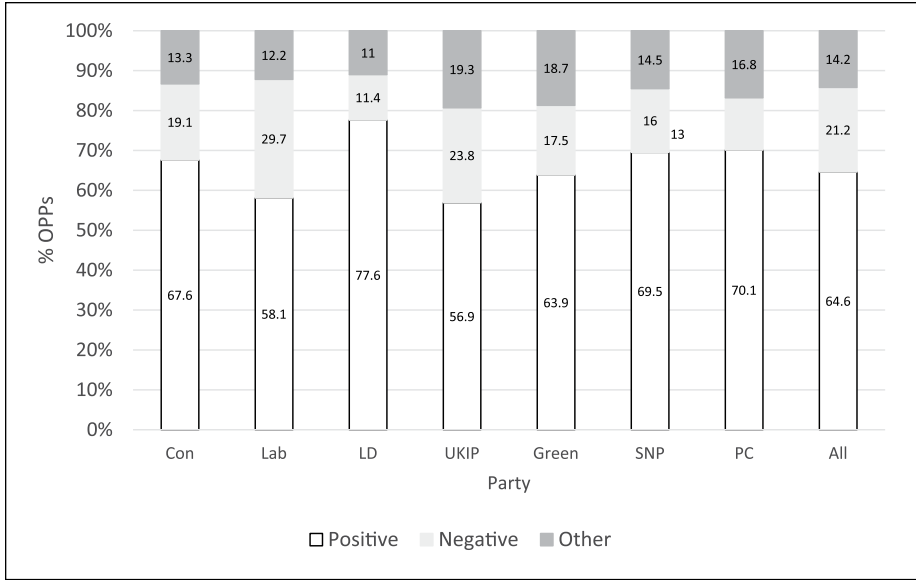


Figure 9. OPP orientation by party (percent) (n = 2,447).
Note. OPP = online political poster; Con = Conservatives; Lab = Labour; LD = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; SNP = Scottish National Party; PC = Plaid Cymru.

increasing to 46.2 percent in unbranded OPPs. This shift is mainly a result of Labour and the Conservatives using nonbranded OPPs for negative attacks on opponents. Labour were the biggest producers of negative OPPs with nearly a third of their output being negative (29.7 percent) overall but rising to more than half of their nonbranded OPPs being negative (57.2 percent). The Conservative Party went negative in just under a fifth of their OPPs overall (19.1 percent), jumping to just under three-quarters (71.7 percent) of their nonbranded OPPs. When these parties wanted to make clear negative attacks on opponents (Labour mostly on Cameron and the Conservatives, the Conservatives mostly focused on Labour and the SNP), there was seemingly more reticence in explicitly branding those attacks, perhaps with a view that the critical message alone might be shared more readily, and be more persuasive, if not seen to be originating from a rival party.

A further feature of the content of OPPs analyzed here was the thematic focus presented in Figure 10. The graph reveals a predominant focus on factual and policy-oriented information over more values and image-based statements (or other kinds of focus such as party events). Across the data set, 71 percent of the OPPs were coded as dealing with policy or facts, although quite often, this was done in broad terms, such as Labour OPPs offering support for the National Health Service (NHS), or Conservative OPPs for small businesses, rather than necessarily with regard to specific policy statements (although these appeared, too). The Liberal Democrats

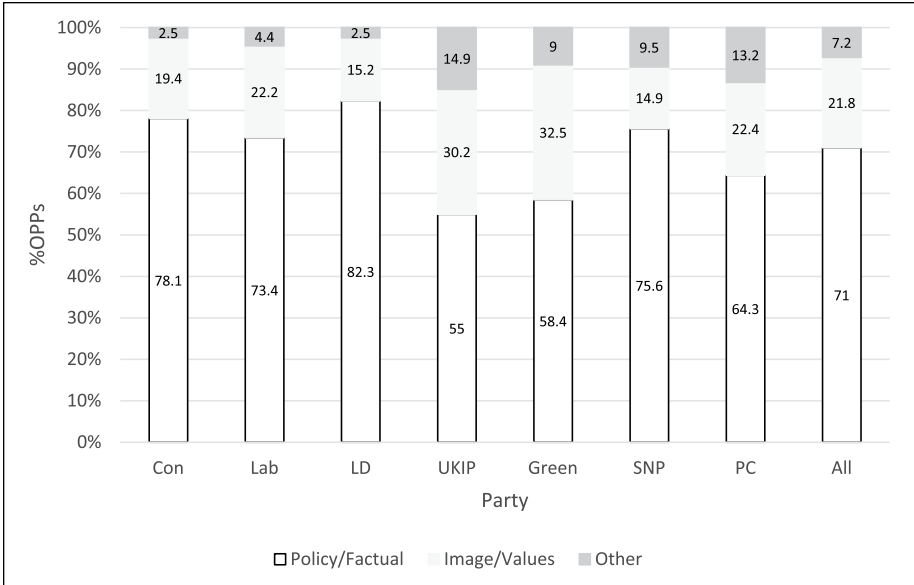


Figure 10. OPP thematic focus by party (percent) ($n = 2,447$).

Note. OPP = online political poster; Con = Conservatives; Lab = Labour; LD = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; SNP = Scottish National Party; PC = Plaid Cymru.

produced the most fact-based OPP campaign, with more than four-fifths (82.3 percent) of their output focusing on policy-oriented statements. The Green Party and UKIP traded most heavily on image and values-based statements in just under a third in both cases (Green 32.5 percent, UKIP 30.2 percent), possibly reflecting the appeal of minor parties with little in the way of political representation and attempts to demonstrate fundamental value-based positions distinct from traditional parties who can concentrate more on specific policy areas. During the general election campaign, both the Greens and UKIP (as well as the Nationalists) portrayed themselves as being outside the traditional political system and political elites that were presented as mismanaging the country, although they did so in noticeably different ways, with UKIP offering a greater focus on negative campaigning than the other minor parties.

A final feature of design and content to mention in relation to aspects of thematic focus is the propensity for OPPs to feature prominent party figures either visually, textually, or both. More than a third of all OPPs featured a prominent political figure of some kind (37.5 percent) (Figure 11). This was more notable among many of the minor parties, where getting wider recognition for party leaders in particular was arguably a clear goal in OPPs. UKIP OPPs featured a political figure three-fifths of the time (61.9 percent), and the vast majority of these were leader Nigel Farage. Both the SNP (40.0 percent) and Plaid Cymru (42.1 percent) featured political figures extensively, again mainly their leaders (Nicola Sturgeon and Leanne Wood respectively).

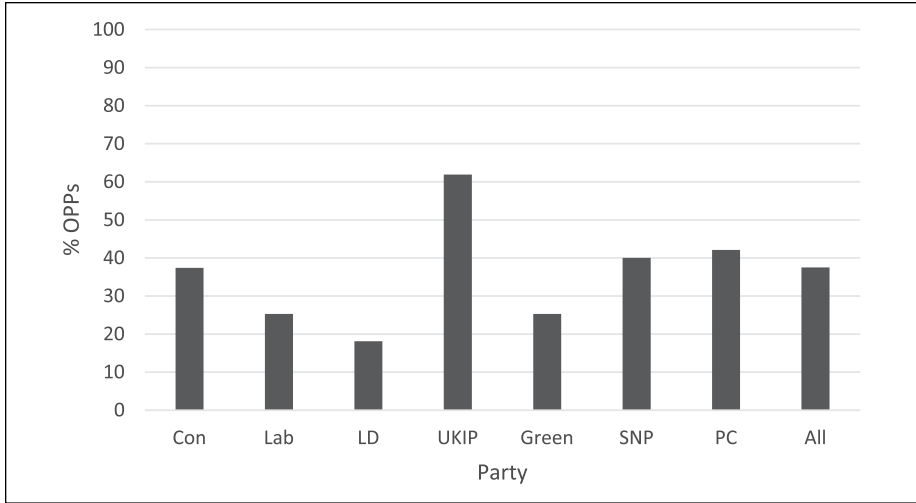


Figure 11. OPPs featuring prominent party figures (percent) (*n* = 2,447).
Note. OPP = online political poster; Con = Conservatives; Lab = Labour; LD = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; SNP = Scottish National Party; PC = Plaid Cymru.

The Greens, perhaps reflecting their party’s reluctance to focus on individuals only, featured political figures in a quarter of their OPPs (25.3 percent) split mainly between leader Natalie Bennett and the party’s only incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) Caroline Lucas. Still haunted by unpopularity over broken election pledges made as part of the coalition government, it is perhaps unsurprising that Liberal Democrat politicians featured in less than a fifth (18.1 percent) of their OPPs. For the two main parties, prominent politicians featured a little more than a third of the time, although these figures include persistent and prominent attacks on opposition figures rather than just featuring the parties’ own political celebrities.

Mobilization

Further evidence of the status and role of OPPs within political parties is available by looking at the mobilization appeals explicitly appearing in OPPs (Table 1). It was common for images to include a variety of mobilizing appeals in OPPs, including to join the party, vote, share content, perform another online activity, watch a media performance, perform a real-world activity (in real life [IRL]), and donate. These appeals were not mutually exclusive, and OPPs commonly included more than one mobilizing appeal, for example, asking audiences both to share the image and visit a Web site. In total, 63.6 percent of observed OPPs included at least one type of mobilizing appeal, in a pattern that suggests the parties focused mainly on low engagement mobilization activities. The most common appeal was to share an OPP, for example, featured in 40.3 percent of OPP output more than twice as prominent as appeals to vote (19.5 percent). Similarly,

Table 1. Mobilizing Features in OPPs by Party (*n* = 2,447).

| | Conservatives | | Labour | | LD | | UKIP | | Green | | SNP | | PC | | All | |
|------------------|---------------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| Join | 3 | 1.1 | 22 | 2.5 | 2 | 0.8 | 3 | 1.5 | 26 | 15.7 | 3 | 1.1 | 8 | 2 | 67 | 2.7 |
| Vote | 70 | 25.2 | 139 | 15.7 | 32 | 13.5 | 58 | 28.7 | 46 | 27.7 | 74 | 26.9 | 58 | 14.5 | 477 | 19.5 |
| Share | 24 | 12.2 | 461 | 52 | 83 | 35 | 49 | 24.3 | 56 | 33.7 | 98 | 35.6 | 205 | 51.1 | 986 | 40.3 |
| Online | 31 | 11.2 | 175 | 19.7 | 5 | 2.1 | 77 | 38.1 | 36 | 21.7 | 17 | 6.2 | 29 | 7.2 | 370 | 15.1 |
| Media | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.8 | 14 | 6.9 | 1 | 0.6 | 10 | 3.6 | 11 | 2.7 | 38 | 1.6 |
| IRL ^a | 1 | 0.4 | 4 | 0.5 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 5.4 | 12 | 7.2 | 3 | 1.1 | 24 | 6 | 55 | 2.2 |
| Donate | 1 | 0.4 | 8 | 0.9 | 1 | 0.5 | 9 | 5.4 | 1 | 0.4 | 1 | 0.4 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 0.8 |

Note. OPP = online political poster; LD = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; SNP = Scottish National Party; PC = Plaid Cymru.

a. IRL: In real life, referring to encouraging the audience to participate in some kind of offline event such as canvassing, hustings, or a conference.

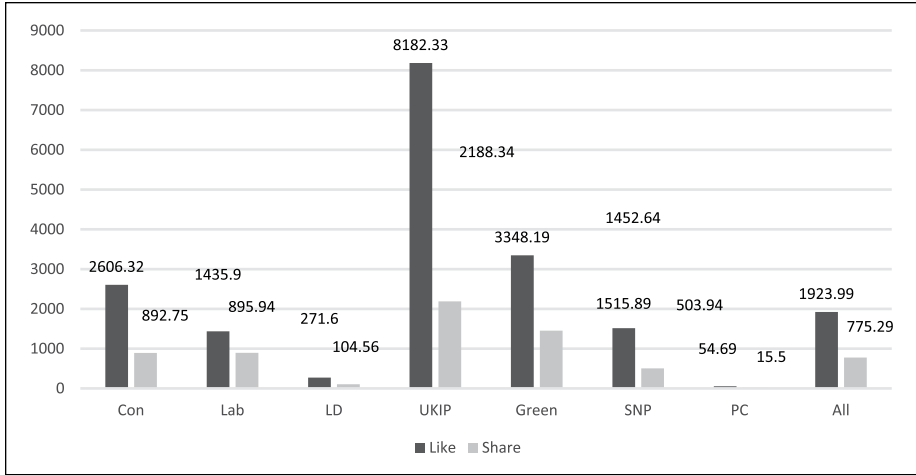


Figure 12. Mean number of likes and shares by party ($n = 2,353$).
Note. Con = Conservatives; Lab = Labour; LD = Liberal Democrat; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; SNP = Scottish National Party; PC = Plaid Cymru.

asking audiences to visit a Web site (15.1 percent) was much more frequent than appeals for high engagement activities such as joining (2.7 percent) or giving money to (0.8 percent) a party. However, there was some significant variation between the parties, suggesting different strategies possibly at work. Some clearly focused more on online engagement appeals like sharing OPPs, such as Labour (52 percent) and Plaid Cymru (51.1 percent), or visiting Web sites, such as UKIP (38.1 percent). Others concentrated proportionately more on offline activities such as voting being the most prominent appeal in Conservative OPPs (25.2 percent), and the Greens devoting a noticeable proportion (15.7 percent) to joining the Party.

Audience Engagement

Thus far, OPPs have seemingly been designed with both persuasion and mobilization in mind—featuring predominantly positive, policy orientated messages and appeals to further disseminate images. This is somewhat contradicted, however, by audience responses. The available metadata include the number of times an OPP has been liked or shared and allow us to judge to some extent how successful any particular OPP has been in terms of audience engagement. Of the 2,447 OPPs recorded over 603 days, data on the number of likes or shares were not available for 94 individual OPPs. Figure 12 shows the mean number of times OPPs were liked and shared by party in the remaining 2,353 OPPs. Comparatively speaking, the Greens and UKIP did better than the main parties, with UKIP in particular seemingly adept at getting audiences to “like” their OPPs. These data should be heavily caveated as a judge of success for individual OPPs. The question of what constitutes “success” for an OPP remains open. Equally, mean values provide only

a relative measure of success. Parties with a higher output may be reaching greater numbers of people overall (or a smaller number more often), with individual OPPs doing less well. For example, despite the difference in means, Labour is much closer to UKIP when measured in total likes (Labour 1,229,129; UKIP 1,595,554) and surpasses UKIP in the total number of shares (Labour 766,922; UKIP 426,726). Nevertheless, for challenger parties to be outperforming larger mainstream parties in this way suggests that they may have a greater affinity for this type of campaigning.

More important than the comparative successes of individual parties, however, is the overall picture. Both likes and shares were heavily positively skewed, that is, the majority of OPPs received very few likes while a small minority of OPPs did comparatively well. As a result of this distribution, the mean values are somewhat misleading. The median number of likes was 831; the median number of shares 297. Overall, 90 percent of images were “liked” less than 4,592 times and 90 percent were shared less than 1,883 times. Overall, while a very few OPPs may escape the political ghetto, the vast majority do not attain the kind of viral transmission they seem intended for.

Conclusion

This article sought to analyze a significant new form of online visual political communication that has largely been ignored in studies of election communication, the online political poster. We set ourselves the overarching objective of establishing the wider strategic role of OPPs, theorizing that OPPs may potentially fulfill roles of external persuasion and/or inward-looking organizational coherence, using a case study of OPP production in the United Kingdom. Much of our analysis firmly points toward OPPs being designed to achieve viral distribution and thereby to be an externally focused persuasive tool. However, while OPPs may be intended to achieve viral distribution, the audience responses in most cases seem to indicate that there is little of the “reach by networks” described by Nahon and Hemsley (2013: 29). For the most part, OPPs have been confined to their own political backyards, unseen by the mass public and, therefore, not much use for the kinds of mass persuasion traditionally associated with posters.

We have demonstrated that while OPPs are in common usage by U.K. political parties of all stripes, they are used to different extents by different parties, with a dramatic increase in the run-up to the 2015 U.K. election with less clear increases evident around the time of the European elections and Scottish Referendum. The design and content of OPPs varied between the parties but was largely positive, broadly fact-based branded imagery, and featured most heavily low engagement mobilization appeals that required little of the audience. Audience engagement with OPPs was, in most cases, relatively low with only a very few examples receiving widespread attention.

In this case, the vast majority of OPPs cannot be seen to be a form of viral advertising, but this does not mean that OPPs are strategically useless. The best information on audience engagement with OPPs is available only to the parties themselves, and they have produced a near-continuous stream of OPPs in the twenty months during which these data were collected. This continued use of OPPs can be explained in three ways.

First, despite the failure of the vast majority of OPPs to go “viral,” a number do receive wider dissemination and may, therefore, fit within the viral model orientated toward mass persuasion. This kind of success is likely difficult if not impossible to predict, and so parties may feel the failure of the vast majority of output is a small price to pay for the benefits of a limited few successes. In this context, success may mean direct persuasive effects or contributing to a subtler signaling of credibility and presence in the online space (Baldwin-Philippi 2015).

Second, there are good theoretical reasons to think that parties are looking for a way to maintain organizational coherence through online networks. Conventional party organizations are still relevant but they are facing a challenging environment, competing for fewer activists with more dynamic social movements and facing a decline in the numbers of active members and consequently offline organizations. Models such as the cyber party suggest that parties will need to find a way of connecting with supporters that does not rely on physical presence. OPPs are lightweight tools that allow the party to communicate the party line to supporters quickly, simply, and cheaply. Equally, the use of slogans and images allows parties to build and maintain a coherent image with supporters online and engaging with OPPs is a way for supporters to connect with the party that does not require huge commitment in terms of time and energy.

Third, there is a ritual value to OPPs. Billboard posters were seen as a way to project party presence in a physical place and insert the party into the everyday lives of voters (Seidman 2008a: 12). Establishing virtual presence through OPPs, while difficult to relate to the actual business of winning elections, may similarly help to establish party credibility with voters. Previous analysis of online campaign presences has confirmed that candidates often see online tools as necessary for representing a party as modern and accessible even where they have little direct effect on the actual campaign (Lee 2013). While they may be of little benefit electorally, not producing OPPs may be harmful, as any party that did not produce them might be seen as somehow lacking by voters.

OPPs are a new phenomenon and, as with visual communication in digital campaigns more generally, they have not received much academic attention (Barnhurst and Quinn 2012; Schill 2012). This is despite the increased focus on highly visual social media (Baldwin-Philippi 2015). This article has engaged in a substantive exploratory analysis of OPP use in the United Kingdom, contributing to wider understanding of how political parties use social media both during and outside of campaigns as well as the role of visual communication in digital campaigning. There remains a great deal of work to be done. Of immediate concern is a better understanding of the content of OPPs. OPPs usually contain text and images and require detailed qualitative analysis as well as large-scale aggregate analysis as presented here. In particular, the data are rich in subcampaigns on specific issues and votes, as well as demonstrating relationships between parties as they co-opt and repurpose each other’s material. Equally, the availability of OPP metadata in the form of likes and shares allows for some predictive modeling of OPP success. Although a large number of factors are difficult to represent in a model, for example the effects of the Facebook algorithm, such an approach, when linked with a more in-depth understanding of OPP content, may yield some insight into the factors driving audience

engagement. In addition, we do not know who makes up the audiences for OPPs. Although there has been some work on this (Bartlett et al. 2013), by and large, it is impossible to say how politically experienced or active contemporary party political Facebook audiences are. It may well be that Facebook audiences are composed largely of established party members; more likely, they are composed of those who feel positively disposed to the party but are not full party members. Alternatively, Facebook audiences could be dominated by those who have little attachment to the party, who clicked “like” once and never went back, or even a negative disposition to the party with an intention of gathering information or disrupting the opposition.

As well as audiences, a significant gap in our knowledge is how OPPs are produced within party organizations. The risks of producing so much content publicly suggests that there must be some level of oversight in the production of OPPs, but the speed of their production points to this being done in-house. There also remains the question of the extent to which the use of OPPs represents a genuine and authentic decentralization of political power within political structures. Gibson’s (2013) “Citizen Initiated Campaigning” suggests that the inclusion of citizens in the campaign process in itself is transformative. Nevertheless, OPPs represent a fairly passive form of political involvement, and it is not clear how valuable either of the roles described here, external persuasion or internal cohesion, are to the party. As a result, it seems doubtful from the evidence presented here that a shift to social media based campaigning will, on its own, result in a radical flattening of party hierarchies. OPPs do, however, represent an acknowledgment from central party hierarchies that they are becoming more reliant on online audiences as offline structures stagnate. Online audiences are becoming an important component in (potentially) distributing political messages and establishing organizational coherence.

Beyond these questions, OPPs are only one aspect of a broader phenomenon of online political advertising in election campaigns. Future research on the production and distribution of online advertising material could consider additional types of content, additional platforms, and additional groups outside of parties. As well as posters, Facebook is being used to distribute short videos either through links to video sharing sites such as YouTube or directly over the recently available Facebook video platform launched in May 2014 in the United Kingdom (Lafferty 2014). In addition, Facebook is also used to disseminate more detailed content aimed at mass persuasion and to highlight media coverage. As well as Facebook, a plethora of social media platforms also serve a similar function, most notably Twitter. Finally, this analysis has addressed the use of OPPs by central party organizations. Further work could consider how OPPs produced centrally are used by local candidates and regional campaign organizations as well as by nonparty groups with a political agenda, including interest groups and social movements.

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Note

1. For more on memes, including examples, see <http://knowyourmeme.com/>.

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Styles of Social Media Campaigning and Influence in a Hybrid Political Communication System: Linking Candidate Survey Data with Twitter Data

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Abstract

Social media have the potential to influence power relations in political parties as they allow individual candidates to campaign more independently of the central party. In this paper, we scrutinize the relationship between individualization and digital social media in a study that combines the 2013 Norwegian Candidate Survey with candidates' Twitter data. We ask, first, to what extent are social media used as an individualistic campaign tool? Second, does an individualized social media campaign style increase influence in the Twitter sphere? Third, what constitutes success on Twitter? We found two main styles of social media campaigning: a party-centered and an individualized style. Moreover, an individualized style did increase the possibility of being active on Twitter, but it had a negative effect on Twitter influence. The Twitter influentials are young, male, and relatively centrally placed in their parties. In a hybrid communication system, it appears that the candidates who gain influence in social media are those who are able to create a synergy between traditional media channels and social media.

Keywords

election campaign, social media, political parties, candidates, twitter

New digital media technology can influence power relations in party politics in several and sometimes contrary ways. For instance, digital media have been said to increase centralization processes, with increasing control of the campaign strategy transferred

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to the party leadership. This is essential in the modernization perspective of campaign change (e.g., Farrell and Webb 2000) and is understood as part of the general centralization processes in political parties (e.g., Katz and Mair 1995). This resonates well with a key development in established democracies in the twentieth century: the increased attention on the role of individuals in politics—often labeled the personalization of politics (Kriesi 2012). The waning of political cleavages and the alleged “decline of parties” (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000), as well as the dominant media logic in political campaign coverage, are factors driving such individualization processes (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Swanson and Mancini 1996). The role of individuals has particularly attracted attention in studies of election campaigns, and the focus has mostly been on the increasing importance of party leaders (Kriesi 2012; Poguntke and Webb 2005). In recent years, new digital media have also been identified as a channel with the potential to increase the focus on the personal side of politics; surely, social media are also another channel for party leaders to highlight themselves, as well as to organize and centralize the party.

Election campaigns are not, however, only fought by party leaders, but also by the candidates standing for election. A focus on individual candidates represents what Balmas et al. (2014) called decentralizing personalization. Internet technology, especially the new online social media such as Facebook and Twitter, provides individual candidates with new opportunities to reach out to voters more independently of the central party (Karlsen 2011; Zittel 2009). With the adoption of social media, the campaigning media landscape has been transformed and described as a “hybrid media system” (Chadwick 2013). In such a media system, politicians and campaign teams target content to different audiences through a variety of media channels (Chadwick et al. 2016). Potentially, because social media allow decentralized and costless content production and diffusion, the hybrid media system may change the relations of power between actors involved in an election campaign.

In this article, we explore empirically whether the power balance between candidates and parties has changed as a result of social media use in election campaigns through a study of candidates running for parliament in the 2013 Norwegian campaign. In an electoral system based on proportional representation by list such as the Norwegian system, candidates may use social media in an election campaign with two nonexclusive goals: They may aim at mobilizing the electorate for their party, increasing their chances to be elected, and they may invest in building their reputational and political capital to increase their power, influence, and autonomy within their party. Both aims are partially dependent upon their ability to reach and influence audiences either as the result of their activity in social media or by accessing traditional media.

We ask three interrelated research questions aimed at assessing the extent to which social media are an avenue for candidates to increase their power, influence, and autonomy in relation to parties’ centralized apparatus: First, to what extent are social media used as an individualistic campaign tool? We explore the extent to which social media are considered important for different communicative aims—including conveying one’s personal side. Second, does an individualized social media campaign style increase influence in the Twitter sphere? We use a combination of survey and Twitter

data to study the extent to which an individualized social media campaign style increases candidates' activity and influence on Twitter. Third, what constitutes success on Twitter? To answer this question, we study the profile of those we call Twitter influentials—the politicians who are most visible on Twitter.

Our data comprise a combination of the 2013 Norwegian Candidate Survey and the candidates' Twitter data. The Norwegian Candidate Survey is a survey of all candidates who ran in the 2013 national election. We combined the survey data with Twitter data gathered through the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) and through a social media analytical tool developed by Crimson Hexagon. Norway is an interesting case, as its politics and campaigning are party centered, and there are limited structural incentives for politicians to highlight themselves during campaigns (Karlsen and Skogerbø 2015). Investigating individualization tendencies within such a setting can shed light on specific effects of social media on processes of individualization.

The results show that politicians use a variety of platforms in today's hybrid political communication system and that social media are considered an essential part of candidates' campaign media mix. Although a relatively small proportion report that they use social media to convey their personal side and to be visible to others in their own party, about half of the candidates using social media found them useful for this purpose. This is related to the candidates' main communicative campaign style: a focus on their own candidacy. An individualized social media campaign style is positively related to activity on Twitter but negatively correlated to influence. The Twitter influentials, however, find social media useful for individual purposes, and their influence is rooted in a hybrid system of political communication.

The Role of Individuals in Party Politics

In the United States, the tendency toward individualization is evident among candidates running for Congress to the extent that the system is labeled "candidate-centered" (Agranof 1972; Brox and Shaw 2006; Plasser and Plasser 2002).¹ In the 1960s, American political parties changed their nomination process and introduced the primaries. One result of the reforms was that candidates set up campaign organizations and expertise independently of the party (Agranof 1972; Brox and Shaw 2006). Candidates hire a campaign manager and additional campaign staff. They identify their own campaign strategy, conduct their own polling, and organize volunteers in grassroots campaigns. Consequently, Plasser and Plasser (2002) distinguished between a U.S. candidate-centered style and a West European party-centered style of campaigning. In the West European party-centered model, the centralizing efforts of the party leadership are emphasized (Plasser and Plasser 2002). However, the level of individualized candidate campaigning can differentiate between and within the countries of Western Europe (Karlsen and Skogerbø 2015).

The concept of individualized campaigning refers to a situation where the candidates campaign independently of the party (Zittel and Gschwend 2008: 980). In this article, the attention is mainly on the "communicative focus" dimension of individualized

campaigning, which refers to the focal point of the candidates' communicative aim. On one hand, the communicative goal of the candidates might be to create as much attention as possible for themselves. On the other hand, it might be to create as much attention as possible for their parties.

Studies of political parties' use of the Internet in the electoral arena have primarily focused on party Web sites and have revealed two main tendencies (Gibson and Ward 2009: 93): (1) standardization of information dissemination on the party Web sites and (2) conservatism in using the interactive possibilities offered by the new media. Nonetheless, the introduction of social media appears to have changed the focus toward mobilization and the innovative use of networks (Gibson 2015; Karlsen 2013). Moreover, social media has increased the scholarly interest in the individual candidates' use of new technology in Europe as well (e.g., Graham et al. 2014; Karlsen 2013; Skovsgaard and van Dalen 2013; Spierings and Jacobs 2014). Studies of Twitter clearly dominate the literature as compared with studies of Facebook, primarily because Twitter data are more easily available.

Four main emerging areas of research can be identified based on the analysis of Twitter data. The first focuses on politicians' reasons for using Twitter and on the demographic and political factors influencing Twitter adoption (Chi and Yang 2010, 2011). The second area of research involves the content analysis of tweets; it provides various classifications of politicians' use of Twitter based on the tweet content (Glassman et al. 2010; Golbeck et al. 2010). The third area of research investigates the extent to which politicians use Twitter to interact with their electorate and how interactivity on Twitter may influence political communication by fostering dialogue or reinforcing one-way communication (Grant et al. 2010; Jackson and Lilleker 2011). The last area of research addresses the networks and media system, constituted by Twitter, and focuses on the networks of communication (Bruns 2012) emerging in election campaigns by collecting tweets based on given hashtags (Burgess and Bruns 2012; Larsson and Moe 2012) or by exploring the hyperlinks embedded in political tweets (Moe and Larsson 2013).

Recent studies of Facebook include studies of why parties use social media and whether social media communication entails permanent campaigning (Larsson and Kalsnes 2015). Several studies have also investigated the notion that social media will increase personalized communication and individualized campaigns (e.g., Karlsen 2011). Social media offer candidates who want to highlight themselves more opportunities to do so not only by reaching out to their own followers but also by reaching a secondary audience through the flow of messages in networks (Karlsen 2015; Vaccari and Valeriani 2015).

The existing literature shows that parties and politicians embrace the new opportunities offered by social media. But we do not know much about why they think it is important and whether social media are used differently by different candidates. In this context, we are particularly interested in whether candidates with a communicative aim of focusing on their own candidacy use social media for such purposes. However, other factors aside from communicative aims might influence social media use. First, social media use might differ based on context. The effect of social media is most

likely related to the role that individual candidates already play in electoral politics. As mentioned above, the role of individual politicians differs between established democracies and varies based on the institutional setting, traditions, and culture (Karlsen and Skogerbø 2015; Plasser and Plasser 2002). Social media might be expected to increase tendencies toward individualized campaigning in systems where candidates are already more or less independent from parties (Karlsen and Skogerbø 2015). The extent of individualized campaigning also differs between candidates in party-centered systems. Candidates who are inclined to focus on themselves might recognize the potential of social media to promote themselves and use social media to a greater extent than others.

Social media should also be considered in relation to other communication channels and platforms. Media systems are arguably in the middle of a rather chaotic transition period induced by the digital media (Chadwick 2013: 4). This transition, characterized by interaction between older and newer media logics, has been labeled “a hybrid media system” (Chadwick 2013). In this hybrid political communication system, actors can use a wide range of media platforms to create, steer, and respond to a flow of communication (Chadwick 2013: 4). In this perspective, the question is not whether social media replace earlier communicative platforms but what role different social media play in relation to a wide range of new and old media platforms in the greater political communicative system.

Norway

The Norwegian political system is characterized by a parliamentary government, a stable multiparty system, and well-organized membership parties (Allern et al. 2016). Hallin and Mancini (2004) identified the Norwegian media system as a typical example of the democratic corporatist model, which is characterized by the historical coexistence of commercial media and media tied to organized social and political groups, as well as by a relatively active but legally limited role of the state (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 11). Internet access and use are comparatively very high, and Facebook in particular is widely used (Enjolras et al. 2013). In 2008, 31 percent of the population in Norway was on Facebook at least once a week, while in 2013, the proportion who used Facebook daily was 67 percent (88 percent for people under thirty).² In Norway, most voters use Facebook, and about 20 percent of the population used Twitter in 2012 (Enjolras et al. 2013).

Although Internet penetration in the population is high, other characteristics might act as countervailing forces with regard to the use of media technology in electoral politics. In Norway, the political parties control the nomination process. The process is decentralized as the nominations are made by representative conventions organized by the constituency branches of the party organization. Moreover, the electoral system is based on proportional representation and a list system; there is only a theoretical possibility of influencing the candidate order. Consequently, when candidates are nominated, their election depends solely on the party vote. Based on these characteristics, it is no surprise that campaigning in Norway is typically party centered,

centralized, and nationwide, and that the candidates campaign as part of the greater party campaign organization (Karlsen and Skogerbø 2015).

Data and Measures

Our data comprise a combination of the 2013 Norwegian Candidate Survey and Twitter data. The Norwegian Candidate Survey is a survey of all candidates running for election for any of the eight parties that obtained representation in the 2009 parliamentary election. We distributed the survey in November 2013 as a Web survey using tools provided by Questback. We obtained a response rate of 42 percent, leaving us with 850 candidates. The responses were about evenly distributed among parties. Candidates from one party typically constitute between 12 and 15 percent of the total, but Progress Party (FrP) candidates are somewhat underrepresented and only constitute 8 percent of all candidates. With regard to gender, 46 percent are female. This echoes the gender difference between men and women running for election for these parties.

The Norwegian Candidate Survey contains several questions on campaigning in general and the use of social media in the campaign. The extent of general individualized campaigning is measured with the following question: *What was the primary aim of your campaign? Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "to attract as much attention as possible for me as a candidate" and 10 means "to attract as much attention as possible for my party?"* Norwegian candidates are extremely party centered: Their mean score is 8.89 ($SD = 1.86$). In the analysis, we will invert the scale so that high values indicate individualized campaigning.

To study the importance of social media in general, we used the following question asked to all candidates: On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates *not important at all* and 5 indicates *very important*, how important were the following communication channels for you in your campaign? The channels listed are as follows: national television, regional television, national newspapers, regional newspapers, local newspapers, national radio, local radio, personal Web site, Facebook, and Twitter. For this question, we also report the results from the 2009 candidate survey.

To tap into different ways of using social media during campaigns, we used the following question: On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates *not important at all* and 5 indicates *very important*, how important were social media for you and your campaign with regard to . . .? (see Table 1 for items). These questions were only asked of candidates who reported that they used either Facebook or Twitter ($N = 684$).

We asked all candidates who reported that they used Twitter to give us their Twitter account names and their authorization to retrieve and store their Twitter data. The question used was as follows: *Were any of the following activities part of your campaign? And if yes, how important were they?* All candidates except those who stated that Twitter was not part of their campaign were asked about their Twitter information. Of the 352 respondents who were asked about their Twitter accounts, 172 candidates gave us information on their accounts and permission to collect their tweets.³

Twitter data were gathered using two types of data collection strategies. First, we gathered data for all candidates who gave us authorization to retrieve and store their Twitter data through the Twitter API, and collected all the tweets of the 172 candidates since they became active on Twitter. We collected number of tweets and number of entities (mentions, retweets by others, and hashtags). These Twitter data were incorporated into our survey data set. Second, we collected all tweets mentioning the 172 candidates; this was done using a social media analytical tool developed by Crimson Hexagon, which enabled us to collect data from Twitter Firehose API and collect all tweets that matched our search criteria. This analytical tool allowed us to use a machine-learning classification algorithm developed by Hopkins and King (2010) and adapted to text and social media analysis within the social sciences. Overall, we identified and collected 29,559 tweets mentioning the candidates active on Twitter during the short election campaign (May to September 2013). These tweets, using a classification algorithm, were classified into six categories⁴:

- Political conversation: The tweet mentions the candidate and is part of a political conversation or an answer from a Twitter user to the candidate.
- Nonpolitical conversation: The tweet mentions the candidate and is part of a nonpolitical conversation or an answer from a Twitter user to the candidate.
- Political comment with @mention: The tweet mentions the candidate and contains a political comment addressed to the candidate.
- Retweet (RT) political message/comment: The tweet mentions the candidate and is a retweet of a political comment or message tweeted by the candidate.
- Nonpolitical comment with @mention: The tweet mentions the candidate and contains a nonpolitical comment addressed to the candidate.
- RT nonpolitical message/comment: The tweet mentions the candidate and is a retweet of a nonpolitical comment or message tweeted by the candidate.

The measurement of influence on social media in general and on Twitter in particular has become a field of research in computer science (Cha et al. 2010; Suh et al. 2010). The most immediate gauge of influence on Twitter is the number of followers. Other measures of influence focus not only on the number of followers but also on the attention received by a Twitter user based on the different modalities according to which the audience may engage with a tweet, such as retweeting, replying, and mentioning. For example, Cha et al. (2010) compared three measures of influence: in-degree (number followers), retweets (number of retweets containing the user's name), and mentions (the degree of engagement with others). They found that the number of followers—a measure of popularity—is not related to other influence measures based on the degree of engagement with an audience. Retweets are driven by the tweet's value (content), whereas mentions are driven by the user's name value (popularity). They concluded that in-degree alone (the number of followers) is not the most adequate metric for measuring a Twitter user's influence. Influence through indirect communication and cascades depends on this active minority of followers, whereas the vast majority of passive followers do not affect the user's influence. In short, a high number of followers may indicate popularity but does not

guarantee influence, which is best measured by the number of retweets and mentions. In this study, we use the number of @mentions by other users to measure influence.

Empirical Analysis

The empirical analysis has three parts corresponding to the three research questions. First, we study candidates’ use of social media in terms of the extent and what they use it for. Second, we investigate the relationship between an individualized social media style and Twitter activity and influence. Third, we explore the candidates on Twitter who are most visible—the so-called Twitter influentials—and study the extent to which they stand out from other candidates.

Table 1. Proportion of Candidates (Who Use Social Media) Who Consider Social Media Important in Achieving Goals.

| | Not Important | | | Very Important | | M | N (100%) |
|--|---------------|----|----|----------------|----|-----|----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| Sharing links | 1 | 2 | 11 | 32 | 54 | 4.4 | 684 |
| Creating involvement | 0 | 1 | 9 | 36 | 54 | 4.4 | 681 |
| Reaching out | 1 | 7 | 16 | 26 | 51 | 4.2 | 684 |
| Direct communication | 2 | 6 | 15 | 34 | 42 | 4.1 | 684 |
| Mobilizing supporters | 3 | 7 | 18 | 36 | 37 | 4.0 | 679 |
| Conveying your side on news stories | 5 | 11 | 25 | 36 | 22 | 3.6 | 678 |
| Increasing visibility to others in the party | 9 | 16 | 27 | 30 | 19 | 3.4 | 679 |
| Organizing the campaign | 13 | 17 | 22 | 30 | 20 | 3.3 | 681 |
| Appearing modern | 15 | 15 | 26 | 27 | 18 | 3.2 | 678 |
| Publicity in traditional media | 13 | 16 | 23 | 29 | 18 | 3.2 | 677 |
| Showing personal side | 14 | 20 | 28 | 26 | 12 | 3.0 | 677 |

Note. Q: On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates *not important at all* and 5 indicates *very important*, how important were social media for you and your campaign with regard to . . .?

Individualized Social Media Campaign Style

Social media are a popular campaign channel for parliamentary candidates in Norway. In 2013, more than 80 percent of the candidates surveyed used social media in their campaigns. In addition, the significance of Facebook has increased considerably (see Figure 1). Facebook is considered far more important in 2013 than social media were in 2009. This also reflects that more candidates used social media in 2013 than in 2009. Candidates who used social media in 2009 considered it important then as well (Karlsen 2011).

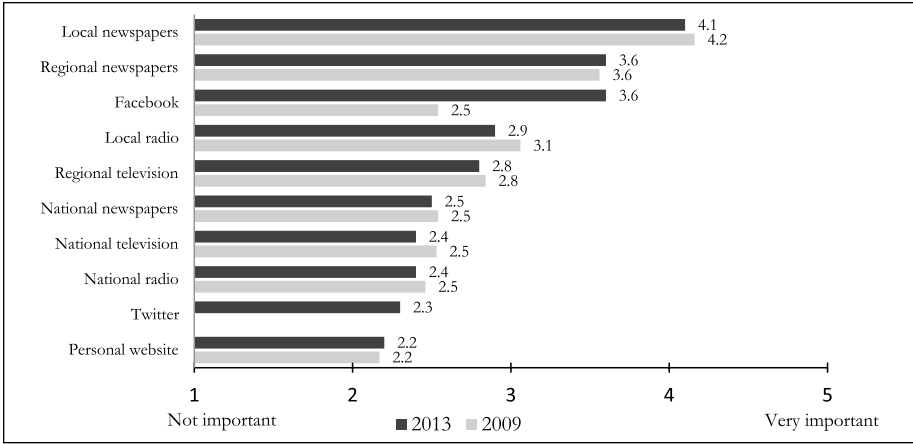


Figure 1. Important campaign communication channels for the candidates: 2009 and 2013. *Note.* Q: On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates *unimportant* and 5 indicates *very important*, how important were the following media for you in your campaign effort? In 2009, the question did not differentiate between different types of social media. In the figure, the 2009 category “social media” is compared with the 2013 category “Facebook.”

Why do candidates consider social media important? Earlier, we discussed how candidates might use social media to enhance their own candidacy and show their personal side. Social media could also be used for several other communicative aims. In Table 1, we present the proportion of candidates who consider social media important for achieving eleven different types of goals.

Almost all candidates consider social media important for creating involvement in the campaign, sharing links, reaching out to as many voters as possible, direct communication with voters, and mobilizing party supporters. Although the importance of social media in conveying the candidates’ personal side was considered the lowest, almost 40 percent of the respondents considered social media important in showing their personal side. If we consider the overwhelming consensus on parties being the focal point of communication, this is quite a high number.

We used principal component analysis to investigate the relationships between the eleven communicative social media aims. This is a method used to simplify relationships between variables by analyzing correlations between them, with the aim of identifying underlying dimensions that might explain the correlations (Foster 2006). The results are shown in Table 2.

Two dimensions were identified using this approach. The first one resembles a party communication dimension. The most important items are creating involvement and mobilizing supporters, which are typical collective campaign practices in party-centered systems. The second dimension resembles an individualized communicative dimension. The two most important items are “increasing visibility to others in the party” and “showing their personal side.” These are both communicative practices with the aim of enhancing the individual candidate.

Table 2. Two Social Media Campaign Styles: Principal Component Analysis.

| | I | II |
|--|-------|-------|
| Creating involvement | 0.769 | 0.136 |
| Mobilizing supporters | 0.728 | 0.096 |
| Reaching out | 0.710 | 0.131 |
| Direct communication | 0.665 | 0.246 |
| Sharing links | 0.561 | 0.217 |
| Organizing the campaign | 0.559 | 0.196 |
| Increasing visibility to others in the party | 0.029 | 0.786 |
| Showing personal side | 0.118 | 0.784 |
| Conveying own version of politics and events | 0.306 | 0.616 |
| Appearing modern | 0.206 | 0.560 |
| Publicity in traditional media | 0.355 | 0.478 |
| Eigenvalue (initial) | 3.95 | 1.37 |

Note. *N* = 645. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization.

In Table 3, we report the results of a multivariate analysis studying the effects of individualized campaigning on individualized social media style. Social media style is measured as an additive index of the two defining items of dimension II from the factor analysis. Earlier research has shown that top candidates have a higher tendency to focus on themselves in the campaign (Karlsen and Skogerbø 2015). Moreover, candidates in some parties are more likely to focus on themselves. Hence, we also included position on the election list and political ideology (as a proxy for party affiliation) in the model, in addition to gender and age. In step I of the regression, we included gender, age, and individual campaigning.

The results reported in Table 3 reveal that an individualized campaign style has a significant independent effect on individualized social media style. According to the model, the individual campaigning variable can move a candidate almost three points on the individualized social media style index. The effect holds even when we control for position on the list and left-right ideology. However, both the position on the list and left-right ideology has independent significant effects on individualized social media style. Hence, candidates who are placed high on the list, who are positioned on the right of the political spectrum, and who have an individualized communicative style are more likely to use social media for individualized purposes.

In the next section, we combine the survey data with Twitter data to investigate the relationship between individualized social media style, Twitter activity, and Twitter influence.

The Effect of Individualized Campaigning on Twitter Activity and Popularity

Candidates use social media to a great extent, including for individualized purposes. But to what extent is an individualized campaign style associated with a higher

Table 3. The Effect of Individualized Campaigning, Position on the List, and Left-Right Political Ideology on the Perceived Importance of Social Media for Individual Purposes.

| | I | II |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Constant | 4.61 (0.01) | 3.12 (0.01) |
| Gender | -0.21 (0.18) | -0.24 (0.19) |
| Age (in years) | -0.01* (0.10) | -0.01 (0.10) |
| Individual campaigning | 0.26*** (0.32) | 0.21*** (0.05) |
| Position on the list | | 0.05*** (0.04) |
| Left-right | | 0.11*** (0.53) |
| R ² | .06 | .09 |

Note. $N = 625$. Dependent variable: individualized social media style index (0–8, 8 = *individualized style*; $M = 4.4$). Individual campaigning (0–10, 10 = *focus on own candidacy*). Position on the list has an inverted scale (0–27, 27 = *first place*). Left-right is the standard self-placement question, with a scale from 0 (left) to 10 (right). B = coefficients; standard error (SE) in parentheses.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

probability of being active on Twitter? To investigate this, we used the combined survey and Twitter data set and studied whether an individualized campaign style, both in general and on social media, has an effect on Twitter activity as measured by the number of tweets. In Table 4, we present the results of a stepwise regression analysis. The stepwise approach will help us identify the specific effects of the independent variables.

Individualized social media style increases the number of tweets by seventy-two for each point on the index. Although this is quite a sizable effect, it is not significant. However, significance testing in regression analysis is about the likelihood of the effect in the model being found in the population. Hence, as we have the population of candidates we are interested in, we should also consider the insignificant results, but we should do so with caution. The standard error is quite high, which indicates that although the b coefficient indicates a substantial increase for each point, there is much variation between candidates. The only variables with significant effects are gender, age, Twitter, and local newspaper importance. Men tweet more than women, and young candidates tweet more than older candidates. As expected, the ones who consider Twitter important tweet more, but gender and age are still significant when we include Twitter importance in the model.

Individualized social media style seems to increase Twitter activity. But, as discussed above, activity is not necessarily related to visibility and influence on Twitter. In this article, we operationalize influence as @mentions of the candidate by other Twitter users during the campaign. In Table 5, we report the results of a stepwise multivariate regression analysis that investigates the effect of individualized social media campaign style on influence on Twitter. We also include the number of tweets in the model to investigate if the candidates' activity is related to influence. As in the previous analysis, we also include age, gender, list placement, and political ideology as control variables.

Twitter activity is the only variable with a significant effect. Candidates who tweet frequently are more likely to be influential. Interestingly, although individualized social media campaign style had a positive effect on Twitter activity, its effect on

Table 4. The Effect of Individualized Social Media Style, Individualized Campaigning, Position on the List, and Left-Right Political Ideology on the Total Number of Tweets.

| | Model I | Model II | Model III | Model IV |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Constant | 2,237.66*** (428.67) | 2,268.47*** (563.09) | 1,312.43** (653.92) | 1,889.38*** (690.43) |
| Gender (male) | 403.41** (199.30) | 447.50** (206.35) | 495.30** (202.80) | 472.89** (202.15) |
| Age (in years) | -31.46*** (8.39) | -30.14*** (8.49) | -27.21*** (8.38) | -29.23*** (8.54) |
| Individualized social media style | 72.02 (49.20) | 80.86 (50.96) | 53.36 (50.91) | 71.32 (51.36) |
| Individual campaigning | | 27.48 (51.10) | 38.896 (50.21) | 36.70 (50.37) |
| Position on the list | | 2.96 (18.70) | 5.051 (18.33) | 17.60 (19.03) |
| Left-right | | -55.02 (41.17) | -48.07 (40.39) | -42.33 (39.95) |
| Twitter important | | | 237.622*** (87.41) | 222.34** (87.09) |
| Television important | | | | 119.08 (91.66) |
| National newspaper important | | | | -34.70 (96.03) |
| Local newspapers important | | | | -234.49** (100.62) |
| R ² (adjusted) | .10 | .10 | .14 | .16 |

Note. Only candidates who reported their Twitter accounts are included in the analysis (N = 154). Dependent variable: number of tweets by candidates (0–3,200). B = coefficients; standard error (SE) in parentheses.
 *p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01.

Twitter influence, although not significant, was negative. Higher placed candidates are more inclined to get attention, even when we control for Twitter activity. This indicates that top candidates have a greater chance of visibility on Twitter compared with lower placed candidates. But the large standard error indicates a lot of variation between candidates; hence, this effect is not significant.

To examine these factors more closely, in what follows, we will investigate whether the most popular candidates on Twitter have anything in common that sets them apart from other candidates.

The Twitter Influentials

As shown by Figure 2, popularity is very unequally distributed. A few candidates received most of the attention whereas most of the candidates are not very often addressed by other users on Twitter. We compare the eight most addressed candidates with the rest of the candidates to get insights about the reasons associated with their success.

The eight most addressed candidates were mentioned 19,628 times during the campaign (May–September 2013) and received 66 percent of all the candidates’ @mentions. The most addressed candidate had 6,130 @mentions, while the eight most addressed candidates had 1,334 on average. In what follows, we study whether these candidates distinguish themselves from the other candidates. We first compare them with others in terms of the categories identified in the data section.

Table 5. The Effect of Individualized Social Media Style, Individualized Campaigning, Position on the List, and Left-Right Political Ideology on Twitter Influence (@Mentions).

| | Model I | Model II | Model III | Model IV |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Constant | 354.74 (253.18) | -278.22 (334.75) | -258.36 (383.35) | -312.02 (416.20) |
| Gender (male) | -1.06 (4.96) | 4.67 (4.99) | 4.64 (5.02) | 2.76 (5.22) |
| Age (in years) | 154.70 (117.71) | 103.26 (118.29) | 101.63 (119.65) | 115.12 (121.04) |
| Individualized social media style | -28.99 (29.06) | -43.79 (29.00) | -43.24 (29.55) | -50.77 (30.39) |
| Individualized campaigning | | 15.88 (28.87) | 15.58 (29.10) | 15.91 (29.66) |
| Number of tweets | | 0.17*** (0.05) | 0.17*** (0.05) | 0.17*** (0.05) |
| Position on the list | | 13.94 (10.56) | 13.89 (10.60) | 13.08 (11.22) |
| Left-right | | -14.88 (23.37) | -14.98 (23.47) | -12.37 (23.57) |
| Twitter important | | | -5.57 (51.81) | -16.41 (52.33) |
| Television important | | | | 12.60 (54.19) |
| National newspaper important | | | | 59.14 (56.47) |
| Local newspapers important | | | | 4.11 (60.24) |
| R ² adjusted | .00 | .08 | .08 | .07 |

Note. Only candidates who reported their Twitter accounts are included in the analysis ($N = 154$).

Dependent variable: number of @mentions (0–6,234; $M = 242.44$, $SD = 679.3$). B = coefficients; standard error (SE) in parentheses.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

The results reported in Figure 3 reveal two interesting tendencies. First, the most successful politicians on Twitter seem to stick more to political issues than their colleagues do. Thirty-six percent of all tweets mentioning the top eight were part of a political conversation, compared with 25 percent of all tweets mentioning all candidates. Furthermore, 21 percent of all tweets mentioning the top seven were political comments with a mention, compared with only 12 percent of all tweets mentioning the other candidates. Second, the Twitter influentials seem to embrace the possibilities for interactivity to a greater extent than others, such as in political conversation. Therefore, the eight political Twitter influentials have a distinguishable Twitter style in terms of content. Do they also distinguish themselves from others in terms of gender, age, position on the list, and communicative patterns?

As indicated by the analysis above, being a man is a success criterion on Twitter, and six of the seven Twitter influentials are men. Their average age is thirty-three years eight months, which makes them considerably younger than the average candidate at forty-four, and the average candidate on Twitter at thirty-nine. The seven Twitter influentials come from four parties: two from the socialist left, two from the Greens, two from the Liberals, and two from the Conservative Party. Their average list position is 5.7, which is considerably higher than the mean for all candidates at 8.1 and

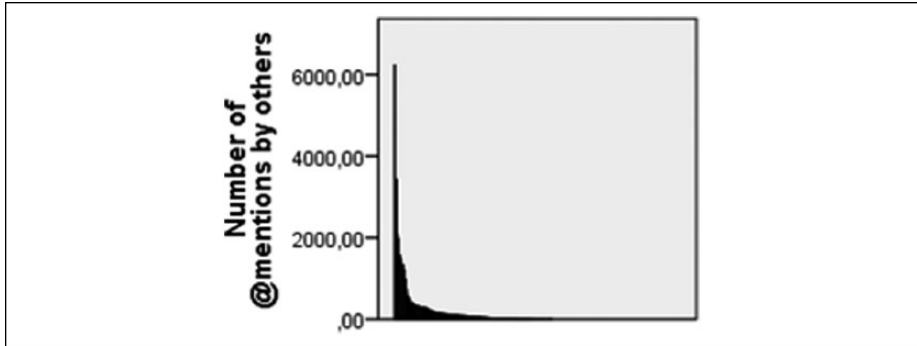


Figure 2. Distribution of attention (number of @mentions by other users) among candidates on Twitter.

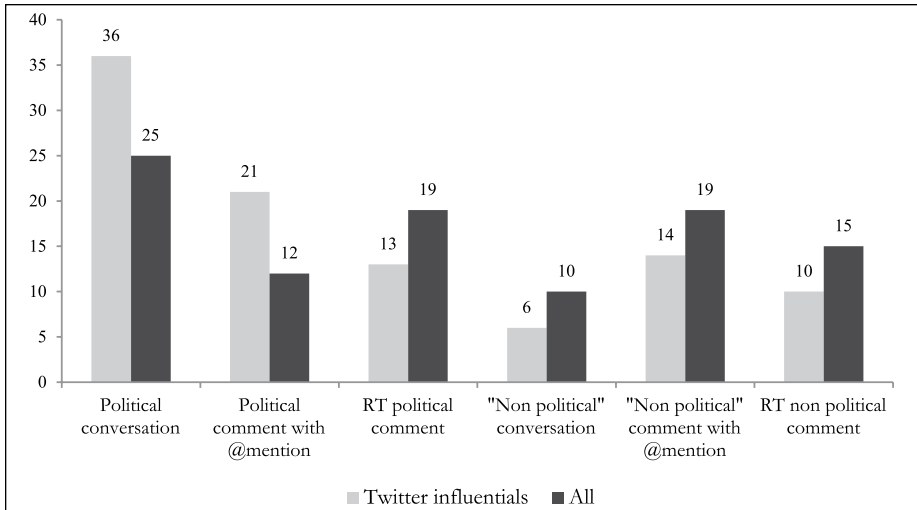


Figure 3. Comparison of types of visibility and influence in the political Twitter sphere between all candidates and the top seven candidates on Twitter.

Note. The figure reports the average of the top seven. RT = Retweet.

the mean for candidates on Twitter at 7.3. However, their positions vary; four of them were placed on top, while the others were placed seventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth. This indicates that success on Twitter is compatible with a strong party position but is by no means a requisite.

When it comes to communicative patterns, the top seven, indeed, consider Twitter their most important communication channel. Moreover, they also rate national television, national newspapers, and national radio more important than the average candidate (see Table 6). This mostly reflects their relatively high national status indicated by their

list placement. In terms of social media communicative aims, they resemble other candidates but consider social media more important in conveying their personal side than the average candidate. In addition, they stand out when it comes to communicating directly with voters (see Table 7). They find the opportunities to organize the campaign via social media of little importance compared with others.

Conclusion

Social media offer candidates new campaign communication channels, and successful candidates use them in tandem with other platforms in the emerging hybrid media system. This influences power relations in political parties. In this article, we have shown that in the context of the contemporary Norwegian campaign, social media are now one of the most important communication tools for candidates in their campaigning efforts, and even in this party-centered environment, candidates emphasize the possibilities to convey their personal side in these media. We found that candidates' use of social media can be divided into two main dimensions: a party-centered and an individualized social media style. Candidates who had a communicative aim of focusing on their own candidacy were more inclined to have an individualized style on social media as well. Increasing a candidate's visibility in his or her own party is an essential part of the individualized social media campaign style.

The individualized social media style increased the likelihood of being active on Twitter. However, in general, the relationship between an individualized social media campaign style and Twitter influence was negative. Based on these results, candidates who use social media to focus on their own candidacy are not the most successful and influential candidates on Twitter. Hence, the distinction between activity and influence is essential. The profile of the Twitter influentials modified this picture somewhat. They found Twitter useful for showing their personal side. Moreover, the influentials used the interactive opportunities to a greater extent than others, and their Twitter conversations were more about politics. The influentials are younger, male, and relatively centrally placed in their parties. However, Twitter influentials do not constitute the absolute top politicians, who mostly consist of party leaders, figuring on national television every day in the election campaign.⁵

These results indicate that Twitter do influence power relations in party politics as social media provide new avenues for candidates to communicate with their constituencies and with the general public. Even though the increase in individualized campaigning seems modest, our results indicate that the candidates who gain influence in social media are those who are able to create a synergy between traditional media channels and social media. Candidates are not created equals on Twitter and those who are influential appear to have communicative and political skills enabling them to harness both the affordances of social media as well as to generate attention and visibility in the traditional media.

As emphasized initially, in Norway, the electoral systems offer few incentives for individualized campaigning. However, the lack of incentives for individualized campaigning is not necessarily a lack of incentives for using social media platforms.

Table 6. The Importance of Different Communication Channels for All Candidates and the Twitter Influential.

| | All Candidates | Twitter Influentials | Difference |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------|
| Twitter | 2.3 | 3.9 | 1.6 |
| National newspapers | 2.5 | 3.7 | 1.2 |
| Facebook | 3.6 | 3.6 | 0.0 |
| Local newspapers | 4.1 | 3.6 | -0.5 |
| Regional newspapers | 3.6 | 3.6 | 0.0 |
| National radio | 2.4 | 3.4 | 1.0 |
| National television | 2.4 | 3.3 | 0.9 |
| Personal Web site | 2.2 | 2.7 | 0.5 |
| Regional television | 2.8 | 2.3 | -0.5 |
| Local radio | 2.9 | 2.3 | -0.6 |

Note. Mean on the scale from 1–5.

Table 7. The Importance of Social Media Communicative Aims for All Candidates and the Twitter Influential.

| | All Candidates | Twitter Influentials | Difference |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------|
| Direct communication | 4.1 | 4.4 | 0.4 |
| Reaching out | 4.2 | 4.3 | 0.1 |
| Sharing links | 4.4 | 4.1 | -0.2 |
| Creating involvement | 4.4 | 4.1 | -0.3 |
| Appearing modern | 3.2 | 3.9 | 0.7 |
| Conveying your side on news stories | 3.6 | 3.9 | 0.3 |
| Publicity in traditional media | 3.2 | 3.8 | 0.6 |
| Showing personal side | 3.0 | 3.4 | 0.4 |
| Mobilizing supporters | 4.0 | 3.3 | -0.7 |
| Visible to others in the party | 3.4 | 3.0 | -0.4 |
| Organizing the campaign | 3.3 | 2.3 | -1.0 |

Note. Mean on the scale from 1–5.

Whether a candidate considers a communication platform worth using is most likely also based on communication needs, and groups that are reachable through the platform. Twitter is an elite medium used by journalists and political elites, and, hence, for Norwegian politicians, this is an essential platform to reach key actors in party politics as well as opinion leaders in the electorate (Karlsen 2015; Vaccari and Valeriani 2015).

It is nevertheless likely that in systems with higher levels of individualized campaigning, candidates will utilize social media to create platforms to focus on their own candidacy to a greater extent than what we have found in Norway. However, we have shown that an individualized social media style is related to increased activity, but not to increased influence. We believe that this finding is not related to the Norwegian context but to the characteristics of the hybrid media system. In hybrid systems,

success to some extent depends on skills and ability that allow politicians to master the game of political communication in both traditional and new media platforms, generating synergies between these communication channels. Hence, this influence is based on candidates' digital hybrid competence, and should be found in most European countries where candidates do not have a professional campaign organization built around them (as in the United States). In Norway, as in most other West European countries, Twitter communication is based on candidates' competence as professional assistance is mostly reserved for party leaders. Hence, although more candidates are likely to embrace an individualized social media style in systems with higher levels of individualized campaigning, influence will depend on candidates' digital and political competence.

Overall, our findings confirm that social media is an essential and integrated part of the emerging hybrid political communication system used by politicians and show that this hybrid communicative structure can be used to gain influence in party politics. This echoes how, in the hybrid political communication system, traditional possibilities interact with new possibilities (see Chadwick 2013), and consequently, although power is not disrupted, it is in some ways transformed.

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Notes

1. The U.S. system is labeled candidate centered based on the dominance of presidential candidates over the parties (Wattenberg 1991) and the independence of individual candidates running for Congress (e.g., Agranof 1972; Brox and Shaw 2006).
2. <http://www.tns-gallup.no/tns-innsikt/facebook-henger-med-mens-snapchat-vokser-rasketviser-social-media-tracker>.
3. Some of the 352 reported that they just used Twitter as an information source; hence, our Twitter data most likely constitute a greater proportion of active Twitter users than 52 percent.
4. We used a commercial tool, Crimson Hexagon (<http://www.crimsonhexagon.com>), which offers a classification algorithm developed by Hopkins and King (2010) as well as access to Twitter Firehose. A noncommercial version of the classification algorithm, ReadMe, is made available for R by Gari King at <http://gking.harvard.edu/readme>. Consequently, the results are replicable, given access to Twitter Firehose.
5. Party leaders are probably not included in our sample, but due to anonymity reasons, we are not able to know for sure.

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Old and New Media Logics in an Electoral Campaign: The Case of *Podemos* and the Two-Way Street Mediatization of Politics

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Abstract

In Spain, the 2014 European Elections saw the unexpected rise of a new party *Podemos*, which obtained five European Parliament seats only three months after its formation. In the Spanish National Elections in December 2015, this party obtained 20.66 percent of the votes, which made it the third biggest party. Our objective was to analyze the old and new elements of *Podemos*' communication and campaign strategies. The methodology followed here used this new party as a strategic case study by a qualitative approach. The analysis focused on three key fronts: (1) the role of communication, (2) mediatization of politics, and (3) use of digital media. The results suggested that *Podemos*' 2014 electoral campaign combined presence on broadcast television and use of intense digital media to boost citizens' engagement and self-mediation. Accordingly, it was established as a new transmedia party. This case also demonstrates that mediatization can also occur in two-way street dynamics, that is, from politics to the media, where the former generates an influence on the latter. This finding opens the door to help overcome the media-centric vision. Finally, we discussed future questions about the influence on other political actors' communication strategies in different parts of the world from an international perspective.

Keywords

political parties, electoral campaign, new technologies, Internet

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Introduction

In Spain, the European elections held on May 25, 2014 had an unexpected result: *Podemos*, a new political party, received more than 1,245,948 votes (7.89 percent of the total), and it won five seats in the European Parliament.¹ This party, formed only three months before these elections, had the fourth best showing in a dynamic political context in which new political parties, closely linked to the activist movement 15-M,² participated for the first time.

Because of 15-M, Spanish politics has been marked by an explosion of activism since 2011 (Castells 2012; Micó and Casero-Ripollés 2014). This activist movement has been diluted on the public scene, but it has led to the development of new activist-based political parties that emerged from 15-M's grassroots and its claims. The two key initiatives in Spain are, nationally, *Podemos*, and, locally, the *Común* parties, *Zaragoza en Común*, *Ahora Madrid*, and so on, which were inspired by the example of *Barcelona en Común* (Tormey 2015; Tormey and Feenstra 2015). Despite their differences, these parties share a political agenda based on antiausterity measures and constitutional reforms in a political context marked by a crisis of confidence in the traditional parties.

From an ideological perspective, *Podemos* could be perceived as a new left-leaning populist party similar to other populist parties, such as *Syriza* in Greece. Furthermore, it shares common elements with *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy, particularly the monolithic “the people” concept in antagonistic opposition to “the elite” (Mudde 2015; Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat 2015). However, in its organizational structure, *Podemos* promotes network dynamics similar to other parties now arising in Europe, such as the *Pirate* parties in Iceland, Germany, and Sweden, which are pioneering Internet-based decision-making structures. Last, *Podemos* is at the forefront, with other parties, such as *Die Linke*, in redefining and rethinking the Left and its (media) tactics, messages, and concerns.

In the national elections in December 2015, *Podemos* obtained 20.66 percent of the votes, making it the third-largest party in Spain after *Partido Popular* (PP; 28.72 percent) and *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE; 22.01 percent) and ahead of *Ciudadanos* (13.93 percent) and *Izquierda Unida* (3.67 percent).³ *Podemos* is one of the first and most successful cases of a new political party stemming from a protest movement. This study focuses on the central role of *Podemos*' communication processes and its ability to campaign in the various areas of mainstream and digital media.

The framework that drives this study is mediatization theory that suggests that mainstream media, particularly broadcast television, has a strong influence on politics. Currently, though, this perspective coexists with the growth in digital media. These media enable the potential for a more diverse, fragmented, chaotic, open, and polycentric environment that may also affect political communication in important ways (Chadwick 2013; McNair 2006).

Our main argument is, on one hand, that *Podemos* is a transmedia political party having strong activist roots: It combines logics of older and newer media as its organizational backbone. On the other hand, the party builds an innovative communication strategy to drive mediatization in a reciprocal way, surpassing its unilateral conception.

In this manner, the political party is driving the media to cover them in particular ways such that the former generates an influence on the latter. This finding challenges the media-centric vision of mediatization theory.

The objective of this study is to analyze the old and new elements of *Podemos*' communication and campaign processes. The specific goals of the study are as follows:

1. Analyze *Podemos*' political and communication strategies in the context of the 2014 European elections campaign
2. Examine how the mediatization of politics works in *Podemos*' political and communication strategies during its campaign
3. Consider the use of social and digital media as communication tools during *Podemos*' campaign

Method

This study uses *Podemos* as a strategic case study to examine the role of communication in this political party. A qualitative methodology is used to observe and understand elements of continuity and discontinuity. Eight sources and materials were used for the analysis as follows:

1. The content of the section "Debates and Opinion" of *Plaza Podemos* on the main party Web site (<https://plaza.podemos.info/debates>)
2. Political documents generated by *Podemos* and available on its Web site, such as the guide of the Circles, the FAQ document on the Circles, and *Podemos*' electoral program or political statutes (<https://plaza.podemos.info>)
3. The contents of *Podemos*' Facebook page and Twitter account (<https://www.facebook.com/ahorapodemos/>; @ahorapodemos)
4. The blog *Otra vuelta de tuerka* (Another Turn of the Screw) by Pablo Iglesias and published in Público.es (<http://blogs.publico.es/pablo-iglesias/>)
5. Those statements and public interventions made by the founding leaders of *Podemos* (Pablo Iglesias, Iñigo Errejón, and Juan Carlos Monedero) at conferences, rallies, and political events that are available on YouTube
6. News media output on *Podemos* published by Spanish mainstream media, such as *El País*, *El Mundo*, *Infolibre*, *La Marea*, *eldiario.es*, and Público.es
7. Newspaper opinion editorials, interviews, and papers published in scientific journals by the leaders and promoters of *Podemos*
8. Divulcation books about *Podemos*

The study period begins when the party was launched (January 17, 2014) and ends at the 2014 European election campaign (from March 16 to May 25, 2014, inclusive). This period was selected to carefully examine the point when the project was consolidated and became highly active in terms of communication. *Podemos* is a highly dynamic phenomenon with constantly evolving internal dynamics and formal structure. This study focuses only on the first stage of the party's existence.

Literature Review: Politics and Activism Faced with the Media and Digital Tools

The Mediatization of Politics

Mediatization theory explains how political communication works (Strömbäck and Esser 2014). The theory is based on the key role of mainstream media, particularly television, in contemporary society as the major intermediaries for access to social knowledge. This position gives the media the ability to condition all of society's spheres (Hepp 2013; Hjarvard 2013). From this perspective, mediatization holds that mainstream media significantly influence societies and democracies. This premise has important consequences for political communication. The citizens' perceptions and knowledge of politics are highly mediatized. Thus, the event representations created by the media and disseminated through news outlets could have relevant effects on citizens' perceptions of politics.

The mediatization theory is grounded in a tradition that advances the idea that media have strong effects. It continues a tradition initially driven in the 1960s and 1970s with other approaches, like agenda setting, or, later, framing, priming and indexing. However, other frameworks suggest that the media have minimal effects on political communication. This paradigm emerged in the 1940s and 1950s with the importance of interpersonal communication and the two-step flow model based on the preponderance of opinion leaders (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), and was taken up again in the 1980s and 1990s. Nowadays, the fragmented media environment that emerges from the increase in digital media facilitates the further supply of information, the many options for the public to choose, and greater selective exposure. For these reasons, Bennett and Iyengar (2008) argue that the future of political communication will be defined by minimal media effects. However, other scholars argue that the strong-effects paradigm remains in the center of the field (Holbert et al. 2010).

Today's media environment is changing with not only the rise in digital media but also the transformation of social and political structures, which affect the press-politics relationship. Political actors can bypass the mainstream media using digital platforms (Schulz 2014). Citizens and other social actors can create and disseminate political content to become potential sources of information (Castells 2009), which result in flows of information that are relatively more fluid and difficult to control (McNair 2006), and a more diverse, fragmented, and polycentric communication environment (Chadwick 2013). This development is opening a fault line in the mediatization of politics because digital media can contest the rules of broadcast television.

However, several critical authors propose that mediatization is a poorly defined concept (Deacon and Stanyer 2014; Lunt and Livingstone 2016). The main criticism lies in its media centrism. It bestows the media with an unassailable leading role as a catalyst of social change, and it overlooks the influences of nonmedia factors (Deacon and Stanyer 2014). The media are perceived as institutions of extraordinary power with strong effects on all types of political and social practices. The media's influence is also perceived as encompassing and affecting all the other social spheres in unilateral, nonreciprocal relationships. Therefore, in this context, we must understand the

contention that politics depends on the central functions of the media according to mediatization theory (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). This contention generates negative views of the media's influence on politics because it highlights the media's perverse effects on politics (Livingstone 2009).

Along these lines, mediatization assumes that political actors have no other option than to adapt to the media's rules and criteria (Strömbäck and Esser 2014). Political actors cannot avoid doing so if they desire public visibility. Yet Deacon and Stanyer (2014) maintain that alternative reactions and responses are possible. Another concern is that mediatization focuses almost exclusively on classical types of mass media and does not account for the media in the digital environment (Jensen 2013).

The Use of Digital Media in Electoral Campaigns

Digital media introduce certain novelties into electoral campaigns because they offer new tools for political communication. Recently, institutional political actors who have incorporated digital media into their communication strategies have engaged in a rapid process of adaptation (Lilleker et al. 2015). The integration of these tools has increased in campaigns to the point of becoming something natural and quotidian that is taken for granted as "mundane Internet tools" (Nielsen 2011). The generalized use of digital media in campaigns has been stressed since the 2008 U.S. campaign led by Barack Obama, which marked an inflection point (Bimber 2014).

The body of literature demonstrates that digital media are part of the total campaign mix and do not function in an isolated way (Enli and Moe 2013). Rather than substituting for the mainstream media and their logic, digital media are added to the arsenal in the communications system. Parties and candidates synergistically combine online and offline tools, merging their communications into a hybridized environment. Campaigns do not abandon their traditional tactics and tools; they enrich them with the new logics and possibilities of digital media.

Digital media offer new potential to political communication and electoral campaigns. Lilleker and Vedel (2013) synthesize them into three functions: to inform, to mobilize, and to interact. Web 2.0 permits candidates and parties to produce and disseminate their messages, launching processes of self-mediation (Cammaerts 2012). Social media makes it possible to mobilize supporters in quick, inexpensive, and efficient ways. One consequence is organizational hybridity (Chadwick 2007), through which parties adopt digital network repertoires previously considered typical of social movements only to emerge as new hybridized organizations. Digital media also offer new ways for citizens to participate in political discourse (Castells 2009), although, according to the literature, its use by institutional political actors is limited in campaigns. These institutional actors are more likely to offer controlled interactivity in which participation is simulated (Stromer-Galley 2014).

Communication in *Podemos* as the Backbone of Its Political Project

Many analysts agree that *Podemos*' electoral success is difficult to separate from the aspect of communication, which is the backbone of its project (Postill 2015; Sampedro

2015). Unlike conventional political parties, which use their communication strategies as instrumental elements at the end of the political decision-making process, *Podemos* situates communication at the core of its political strategy. Thus, from the beginning, communication is integral to the political process and to any political activity driven by this transmedia party.

This approach could largely be explained by *Podemos*' understanding of politics based on discourse theory and the importance of hegemony (Errejón 2011; Howarth 2005). This is a neo-Gramscian perspective, which asserts that political activity is a struggle to dominate "common sense" and assumes that social and political facts are framed by certain discourses. The dominant discourses generate a hegemonic sense that establishes legitimacy and the social support of citizens for policies, parties, and political leaders. This perspective takes a constructivist approach that, following the theories of Laclau (1990) and Mouffe (1995),⁴ asserts that discourse creates political identities constructed by conflict and oppositional relationships based on differentiating "us" from "them" according to Carl Schmitt's friend-enemy scheme.⁵ The significance of discourse to construct identities and impose hegemony situates communication as a strategic tool of great importance to *Podemos*' political action.

Podemos' Strategic Positioning in the Face of Mass Media

The founders of *Podemos* were a group of academics at the Complutense University of Madrid⁶ who often explained the value of communication to the political project and the need to know, the uses of it to their benefit, and the requirements of broadcast television. Pablo Iglesias, secretary general and the main leader of *Podemos*, noted the following:

What many people never imagined is that we reflected very much on our intervention in the media, that it never depended on us, and that we took years getting ready for it.

. . . We began by assuming the audio-visual field, which made up the most important areas of political socialisation. . . . I always say that people do not become members of political parties, unless they do so in the media. (Rivero 2014: 95–96)

Therefore, *Podemos*' choice to participate and intervene actively in the media was not by chance; it was a well-devised strategy. This transmedia party understands that mainstream media are central spaces for the socialization and politicization of citizens. Iglesias summarized this stance: 90% of political discourse is an audio-visual tool, 95% of leadership is an audio-visual tool, 95% of an electoral or political campaign is an audio-visual tool, and 95% of what a political organisation can state is an audio-visual tool.⁷

Podemos' Jump to the Media

Podemos' strategy for broadcast television was implemented in two stages. The first was the creation of an alternative television program in community media. One of *Podemos*' main goals was to mobilize angry voters through mainstream media, and

prepare outlines and speeches questioning the discourses of conventional parties. This goal led the party to create an alternative television program as “a place for training” and to enter mainstream media later.

In November of 2010, the founders of *Podemos* created a political television talk show named *La Tuerka* (The Screw). The director and anchor of the program was Pablo Iglesias. The talk show was broadcast as alternative media, first on two community-based television stations (Tele K and Canal 33) and then on Público television through online streaming. After each broadcast, the content was disseminated via social media, particularly YouTube, following a hybrid logic that allowed for wide dissemination of the content to the public through virality (by March of 2016, the YouTube site had more than 37.3 million hits).

Social media made it possible for *La Tuerka* to achieve wide exposure and notoriety because it overcame the limitations of local community television. The talk show focused on political and economic issues, such as the effects of austerity, the influence of the Catholic Church in Spanish society, the quality of Spanish democracy, and police torture, with a particular focus on topics that had been silenced by (or received scant attention from) mainstream media. The program’s format was based on a search for controversial and provocative arguments to generate an audience.

La Tuerka had a clear and strong political purpose linked to social movements that comprised counterdiscourses to the usual conversation established by the Spanish political elites. The founders of *Podemos* considered this program as a space in which arguments and “distributed ammunition” could diffuse in the battle to create and reproduce political hegemony (Torres Rodríguez 2015). Consequently, to construct counterhegemony, *Podemos* assumed the operating rules and formats of mainstream media. Iglesias clearly exposed this position in a statement:

We do what a political party should do. We are delivering arguments to what Gramsci said that a party had to do as an organic intellectual: arm many people in their workplaces, in their centre study, in the bar, with friends, with family . . . to act as a supporter. . . . We are doing what a political party should do: produce ideology through a new mechanism that is television.⁸

La Tuerka’s audience success, particularly from its dissemination via social media (in March of 2016, its YouTube site had 115,320 subscribers⁹) and Iglesias’ controversial character, encouraged invitations to the *Podemos* leaders to participate in political talk shows on free-to-air national television networks in Spain. Thus, the second stage of *Podemos*’ leap to mainstream media was activated.

On April 25, 2013, Iglesias appeared on the political television talk show *El Gato al Agua* (Intereconomía) for the first time.¹⁰ This extremely conservative program provided Iglesias with acknowledgment and an audience. The appearance indicated that a decisive step had been taken because, shortly after, he was invited to appear on commercial television programs with large audiences, such as *La Sexta Noche* (La Sexta Television) and *Las Mañanas de Cuatro* (Cuatro Television). Iglesias’ televised speeches were prepared by a team that provided him with arguments and examples

(Torreblanca 2015). The idea was to use the rules of broadcast television to their advantage because Iglesias answered provocations and attacks with speech aiming to influence the audience with clearly alternative political content emphasizing criticisms of the established parties and referring to them in the framework of a “caste” (Dader 2015).

Podemos’ experiences in television are reminiscent of the prevalent infotainment tendency. Because of that style, commercial television networks welcomed *Podemos*, recognizing that Iglesias’ controversial nature and willingness to confront conservative commentators would increase audiences (Sampedro 2015). *Podemos* and television benefitted from this relationship in that the former gained visibility and public recognition, whereas the latter profited economically. A complicit partnership developed between these two actors, typical of the relationship between media and political populism (Mazzoleni 2014). Similarly, Iglesias’ later appearances on commercial television were broadly diffused on social media in a hybrid form, which echoed his message and amplified his visibility (Toret 2015).

Mediatization of Politics in *Podemos*

The founders of this new political party stressed the importance of recognizing mainstream media as fundamental outlets for the political socialization of citizens. Iglesias stated that “Television talk shows are much more important than debates in Parliament” (Rivero 2014: 98). *Podemos*’ diagnosis is clearly related to the importance of mainstream media for current political communication. The party heavily invested in participating in television talk shows as a springboard for jumping to the center of the political debate. Iglesias considers this a lesson to the “traditional left,” which scorned this area, and he stated that “It is senseless going to such debates. It is counterproductive. We will continue what we’ve always done, chatting with 12 people . . .” (Rivero 2014: 99).

The 2014 European election campaign was merely an opportunity to implement the political communication that its members had been practicing for years (Torreblanca 2015). During the campaign, *Podemos* used two key elements linked to the process of mediatization for attracting media attention: (1) simplification of the message and appeals to the emotional aspects of politics and (2) construction of media leadership and promoting Iglesias as an electoral brand.

Simplifying the Message and Appealing to the Emotional Aspect of Politics

During its campaign, *Podemos* opted for a clear, direct message that connected with the critical mass that identified with 15-M. The party’s strategy centered on identifying the actors responsible for national corruption and the economic crisis, hence its repetitive and constant appeal to “the caste” as an essential construct and point in its discourse and communication strategy. Spain’s complex political context, with a high

incidence of discrediting the political class and strong concerns about corruption and fraud,¹¹ made this message particularly effective. The message was used to unify, in which identification of “us” and the “people,” as opposed to the “elite” and the “caste,” was sought. In fact, this strategy is key to *Podemos*’ communication and political strategies. The party aims to impose a new distinction between the top (elite) and bottom (common) people to replace the classical political distinction between Left and Right (Errejón 2011).

Podemos’ founders claimed that translating complex political diagnoses into simple, straightforward concepts and sentences was important. The party noted that, along these lines, preparations for *Podemos*’ interventions in the mainstream media were always preceded by one question: “Are you going to talk for the left or for people?”¹² That is, when faced with the choice of a relatively more intellectual or comprehensive discourse, the second option was chosen as a way to reach larger audiences and fit into the culture of broadcast television (Dader 2015). *Podemos* prioritized the creation and diffusion of popular statements addressed to ordinary people and used all of its available discourse tools to that end (Palao 2015).

This strategy included using emotions as mobilization mechanisms. The name of the party, *Podemos*, referred to “We can” or to mottos such as “*Sí se puede*” (Yes, it is possible) to appeal to the emotions of the people who identify with 15-M. Its motto for the 2014 European elections was “When was the last time you felt excited about voting?”¹³ reflecting the use of emotions to target people feeling dissatisfied with traditional political parties in a complex political context. The party also used an emotional discourse on digital media. Sixty-two percent of the posts published by *Podemos* on Facebook during the electoral campaign included emotional content, mainly positive emotions, such as hope or enthusiasm, linked to posts about ideological and programmatic party issues (Sampietro and Valera 2015). Iglesias explained the approach when he pointed to passion plays as key to popular empowerment processes. He further stated that

Politics . . . is not just about diagnosing, and with clarity, when identifying problems, but with one crucial aspect . . . related to collective awareness and emotion . . . What we [*Podemos*] have tried to propose, as a gesture of imprudent boldness and pure impudence, is the possibility of generating an instrument that thrills.¹⁴

Constructing Media-Based Leadership and Promoting Iglesias as an Electoral Brand

Podemos’ successful 2014 European elections campaign is closely linked to Iglesias’ personal popularity. *Podemos* strategically used him as a political personage, a tactic broadly discussed in political theory (Flesher Fominaya 2007; Tormey 2015), in its mainstream media projection and visibility. Regarding media-based leadership, Iglesias stated,

I believe that a leader complies with the same tasks as a television spot does, or a sticker, a poster, or a book, or like the way we produce music, the type of culture we construct . . . It is a political communication tool to contest power in the field of ideology.¹⁵

Iglesias' idea of leadership includes being a good television communicator, a personage capable of bringing his or her message to political debates with clarity. Leadership is understood in strategic and communication terms and as a mechanism to project *Podemos'* politics to larger audiences. One aspect of initiatives claiming to redistribute power and responsibility that occasionally generates internal tension with the base is the dimension of internal organization. One key instance of the party's use of leadership during the electoral campaign was its decision to change the logo on the voting paper in the 2014 European elections at the last moment. *Podemos* opted to replace its logo with a picture of Iglesias' face, a decision made by the person in charge of the campaign, Errejón (2014), who stated,

The decision, never made before in Spain, of placing his face on the voting paper as the most well-known communication sign, was highly criticized for its purism as being decisive in elections in which most voters decided who to vote for on the last day. (p. 1)

The decision was motivated by the *Podemos'* founders' pragmatic attitude to opt for the mediatisation of politics and to follow the parameters of political marketing as an electoral strategy. Errejón concludes that "Pablo Iglesias' media-based leadership was a sine qua non condition and it precipitated a process of popular excitement and aggregation."¹⁶ In the two months before the European elections, only 6 percent of Spanish citizens were aware that *Podemos* existed, but 50 percent were familiar with Iglesias (López García 2015).

Social Media as a Natural Space for *Podemos*

The use of social media in the 2014 European elections campaign was another key factor in *Podemos'* rapid development. Social media were a natural space for this new transmedia party in tune with the social movements from which it emerged. The *Podemos* team included 15-M members who had extensively experimented with an activist use of social network sites (SNS) through hashtags, circulating information, and organizing events. Eduardo Fernández-Rubiño (2015), *Podemos'* head of social media, defended the relevance of 15-M as a test laboratory, stating that "we have lived an experience which has led us to conceive SNS as our own habitat to politically intervene in" (pp. 80–81).

Data regarding *Podemos'* growth on SNS reveal a noticeably superior mobilization capacity in this setting relative to that of conventional parties.¹⁷ During the first three months of the party's existence, its presence on Facebook and Twitter was similar to that of the major parties. Since the electoral campaign until today, the difference between *Podemos* and the other parties has grown significantly.¹⁸ Regarding traditional parties and SNS, Fernández-Rubiño (2015) explained,

No one has ever stopped and really thought about the idiosyncrasy of SNS. These parties conceive social networks as a loudspeaker for questions that arise, which are decided somewhere else. They make a direct diversion that does not respect, as it were, the peculiarities of this medium. (p. 86)

Digital Media as an Organizational Tool: The Círculos

SNS played an important part regarding communication and internal organization because these were the foundations on which the party's organizational structure was laid during its establishment and in the 2014 electoral campaign. The principal manifestation of this was the *Círculos* (Circles).

The combination of traditional and new political logics in the *Círculos* made it an attractive area for *Podemos* to concentrate its communication and organizational innovations. The *Círculos* were the basic political units through which *Podemos* was organized, and that shaped its structure and the groups of people whose main objective was to encourage political participation and attract people to it. In this respect, it is important to emphasize its openness: It was not necessary to be registered with *Podemos* to participate in its activities because, as Iglesias stated in his blog, "spare no one."¹⁹

The *Círculos* could be territorial regarding a city or neighborhood, or it could be sectorial when managing a particular policy area, such as health care or education. Their growth has been remarkable. In the 2014 European elections, *Podemos* had two hundred *Círculos*, which had increased to eight hundred by October of 2014, reaching about 165,000 registered people.

The *Círculos*' appearance was initially spontaneous and chaotic because it developed from a call by party promoters asking citizens to form circles en masse. Initially, the party leadership had little control over these units. Along with some basic guidelines that claimed a need to preserve the *Podemos* DNA and avoid overlapping onto another *Círculo* in the same area or sector, the only requirement to initiate a *Círculo* was a minimum of five members, validation by the party leadership following a protocol,²⁰ and submission of an online form.²¹

The *Círculos* had complete political autonomy and were sovereign regarding policy decisions, but they needed to respect *Podemos*' political strategy as defined by the party leadership. The *Círculos* had four key functions: (1) promote discussion and political dialogue among participating citizens as a "school of democracy," (2) contribute to the collaborative development of party manifestos by proposing measures and amendments, (3) select and support people in party primaries to represent *Podemos* in elections, and (4) spread the ideas of *Podemos* among citizens. Public debate within the *Círculos* developed the political ideas associated with *Podemos* and spread the message across society during the 2014 European elections campaign. The *Círculos* "became an essential fuelling element in territories and during the campaign" (Toret 2015: 130).

However, the role of the *Círculos* has been redefined, as the process of party institutionalization has advanced from an insurgent stage of great effervescence to an

established stage following the evolution of political populism (Mazzoleni 2014). Increased centralization and monitoring of *Podemos* policy activities by the national leadership have diminished the importance of the *Círculos*. Currently, the members apparently feel abandoned and disillusioned because their proposals, debates, and actions hardly matter to the party leadership for defining the political strategies. This change is leading to a demobilization of party supporters, which was evident in the decreased participation during the primary. Thus, the 43 percent of registered members (107,488 people) who voted for Pablo Iglesias as secretary general in November of 2014 declined to 15.5 percent (59,723 people) of registered members who participated in the July 2015 primary for the Spanish general elections of 20-D.

The horizontal structure and collaborative nature of the *Círculos* generally mirror that of social movements, particularly the 15-M. At the beginning of its activities, which were linked to the 2014 European elections, members apparently believed that these units were having real political effects as platforms for the expression of political opinions and forums where members could be heard. However, despite their potential for citizen empowerment, the evolution of the *Círculos* has generated criticism.²² Their assembly characteristic has led to ineffectiveness in the debates and in political action efficiency, which tend to feature apparently endless discussions and poor results. Furthermore, in some cases, the operations of many *Círculos* have created monopolization of activities by small groups of members, which challenges the *Círculos*' principle of openness and horizontal nature.

The newer logics linked to digital media have an important role in the political and communicative activities of the *Círculos*. SNS were key tools for organizing and publicizing their activities. Facebook was the principal instrument through which the assemblies were convened. These assemblies were open to the public, and they were held in the streets and other similar locations because many *Círculos* did not have stable physical headquarters in which meetings could be held. The preferred spaces for organizing and mobilizing were the digital networks. Digital media contributed to extending the *Círculos*, supporting their efforts for calls, discussions, messages, and political activities to reach a diversity of individuals. Twitter was used to propagate messages and stimulate digital conversations. TitanPad and Telegram were used to coordinate some campaign launches, Reddit was used to activate debates and discussions among the people, and Appgree was used to vote for measures to elaborate the collaborative electoral program.

Using new media enhanced the decentralization logic in the creation of SNS profiles. Each *Círculo* became responsible for using its own accounts on digital platforms. The principle of openness led to the proliferation of hundreds of accounts on social media carrying the *Podemos* brand, in some cases resulting in concurrent accounts on Facebook or Twitter for a single *Círculo*. Each one decided autonomously regarding the community managers of these networks, which created a chaotic dynamic (McNair 2006) among digital media spaces for citizens' political participation. *Podemos* managed to promote a connective logic among its actors (Bennett and Segerberg 2012), in which multiple nodes interact freely and autonomously in the creation, promotion, and diffusion of their individual political agendas.

The use of SNS by the *Círculos* led to organizational hybridity (Chadwick 2007) within *Podemos*. The newer digital media logics created transference and transplantation to *Podemos* of the processes, repertoires, and dynamics of the performance of social movements, particularly 15-M.

Conclusion

Examining Podemos' Contributions to Political Communication from an International Perspective

Podemos is a clear and highly representative case of a new type of political party being observed in several democratic countries. These new left-leaning populist parties are linked to recently launched social movements in affluent democracies that are facing crises of trust in their established political parties. These new parties are focusing on antiausterity political agendas and measures. The political communication model that they use is a strategic case study that is extremely interesting because of its two principal novelties that strongly influence politics from an international perspective. First, their structures comprise traditional and new media logics, and such composition defines them as new transmedia party. Second, their communication strategies redefine the way we understand political mediatization because they open up a two-way street outside the dominant media-centric vision.

Podemos' campaign strategy in the 2014 European elections consolidated a multi-dimensional or multilayered strategy linked to technopolitics, which efficiently combined numerous actions and communication spaces (Toret 2015). *Podemos* managed to move forward within two separate spaces (mainstream media and digital media) to mobilize citizens using a constant combination of and feedback from these two types of interaction. Thus, *Podemos* was established as a new transmedia party that moved among types of media and logics while privileging communication as the central feature in its political action.

The party also used digital media to boost citizens' engagement and empowerment by promoting connective action through the *Círculos* (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). *Podemos* linked SNS to political participation and citizens' self-communication. Via these digital platforms, it provided its bases with voice and offered its digital networks to citizens to activate their political self-mediation.

The findings provide new insights into the emergence of mediatization. It moves thought away from the notions that mainstream media are innately powerful over political actors (Deacon and Stanyer 2014), and that mediatization is a unidirectional and nonreciprocal relationship between the media and politics, meaning politics that are inevitably influenced and colonized by the media. The case of *Podemos* demonstrates that mediatization could occur in a disaffected way to promote two-way street dynamics, for example, from politics to the media, in which the former influences the latter.

Thus, nonmedia factors also are influential and can activate this process, which can be found at several analytical levels in *Podemos*. From the macrolevel perspective, a

change emerges in the party system through the brusque appearance of a new populist political organization arising from social activism, which drives democratic regeneration and rejects the political elite, to become an indispensable factor. In the mesolevel view, the incorporation of digital media into the communication strategies of political parties is essential to generate citizen participation in transmedia dynamics that expand and enrich the party's message through media and networks. Another strategic factor is to "hack" the media from knowing how the political economy of communication works, particularly on television. *Podemos* is aware of Pablo Iglesias' personal popularity and his controversial and polemic interventions in political talk shows, which helped to increase audiences and, thereby, television networks' advertising revenues. This benefit made *Podemos*' leader an attractive product for television, and it provided him with access to mainstream media. Indeed, television helped him to become a well-known star in Spanish politics.

Finally at the microlevel, Pablo Iglesias' use of new political communication tools, based on the creation of his own alternative television program (*La Tuerka*, which he directed and anchored), the activation of specific YouTube sites and other SNS profiles to expand the message in viral disseminations, and the appeal to emotions and/or message simplification, all played significant roles. The combination of the effects at these three levels, and the centrality of digital media, created the two-way street mediatization of politics.

Podemos' campaign strategy in the 2014 European elections suggests that adapting the rules and criteria of mainstream media is not the only possible response. Without abandoning the paradigm of mediatization, other reactions and communication strategies are possible. This finding comprises significant originality because it introduces a new interpretation of the concept, which clears the way to surpass the media-centric vision that has dominated research. The process is not only an asset to the media. Other actors, such as mainstream political parties, political leaders, and new grassroots parties, could also be active agents toward achieving their goals, as this case demonstrates.

Therefore, the mediatization process does not necessarily mean that the media system colonizes the political system. Media-conscious politicians, such as Pablo Iglesias, could mediatize for their political purposes (Birkner 2015), primarily as a way to legitimize and influence journalistic agendas. There could be other cases of new political leaders who approach the populist style, such as Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, and Alexis Tsipras, who could be studied from this perspective to understand emerging communication strategies.

These findings problematize the notion of strong effects inherent to mediatization theory, and highlight the interdependent nature between political actors and mainstream media. This is possible because (1) the changes in society linked to the economic crisis and lack of faith in the political system (2) lead to the appearance of new populist parties such as *Podemos* in conjunction with (3) the rise of digital media. These phenomena manifest the prominence of exogenous and nonmedia factors in the mediatization of politics. Two-way street mediatization demonstrates another interpretation of this process. The ways *Podemos* strategically maneuvered *vis-à-vis* the media

suggests that the media is not necessarily powerful on its face. There is a complex negotiation and even manipulation of the agenda of the mainstream media. Thus, our analysis of *Podemos* lends support for the arguments of Bennett and Iyengar (2008). We note, though, that other forms of media influence, such as agenda setting, indexing or priming, may still be important.

Podemos' strategy challenges the mediatization of politics theory (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Strömbäck and Esser 2014) by demonstrating that this theoretical approach must be reconceptualized to expand its dimensions, to incorporate the rise of digital media in political communications, and to recognize the emergence of hybrid dynamics (Chadwick 2013). This strategic case study poses questions and offers new directions for research on the role of digital media and new populist parties in election campaigns. Should we anticipate a contagion from the *Podemos*' style infecting other political actors and other countries? The answer to this question considers three possible futures. The first scenario is that the *Podemos* experience encourages other social movements to borrow the framework of parties whose purpose is to participate in the electoral and representative process. This could be an option for activists in transnational movements like Occupy or for the Mexican movement #YoSoy132. This option relates to the possibility of outsiders completely entering institutional politics, which was the case with 5SM, the "Común" parties, and *Podemos*.

Podemos' ability to inspire this contagion depends on its capacity to maintain a balance among several logics. *Podemos*' early stages managed to appear as so-called "horizontal" to horizontals. At the same time, this party deployed the traditional repertoires of political performance, or so-called "vertical." This strategy sought to appeal to the hearts and minds of ordinary voters. Of course, there are unanswered questions begging for further research into *Podemos* and its possible international reproductions. Is it possible to maintain the tension and balance between the two tendencies over a long period? Will the further development of outsiders' transmedia parties, with their increasing institutionalization, be able to consolidate the novelties of a participatory SNS and interactive model, or will the mediatization of politics determine future party structures?

The second scenario is that the communication strategy influences other traditional left-wing parties mired in identity crises. Corbyn's success in the Labour Party has demonstrated how the so-called "outside" is rapidly becoming the so-called "inside" of a traditional party, using a discourse that resonates as an antidote to elite-driven politics. Some similar trends can be found in Sanders' struggle within the U.S. Democratic Party. In Spain, the PSOE responded to *Podemos*' success with a new communicative strategy, and by sometimes assuming that one must accept the rules of the mainstream and digital media to better reach one's opposed public and to keep the mediatization of politics in one's favor.

Last, a third future could be one in which right-wing parties adopt some transmedia elements to strategically promote two-way street mediatization and to bend transmedia logics to their electoral benefit. The Alternative for Deutschland discourse accuses governors of being traitors, and Donald Trump's rhetorical and xenophobic antiestablishment diatribes in the United States are two examples of this. The outcomes of these

three scenarios include increased organizational hybridity (Chadwick 2007), through which established parties adopt the digital network repertoires previously considered within the purview of social movements, and the latter could take on a party structure. In this case, new organizations with hybrid forms and transmedia styles could emerge. The *Podemos* case is relevant because it is a pioneer of these possible changes in political communication and democracy, which will certainly emerge in other parts of the world.

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Notes

1. <http://elecciones.mir.es/resultados2014/99PE/DPE99999TO.htm>.
2. <http://www.publico.es/politica/pablo-iglesias-presenta-metodo-participativo.html>.
3. http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2015/12/20/actualidad/1450627692_212116.html.
4. This matter has been thoroughly studied by *Podemos*' members, particularly Iñigo Errejón, whose 2012 doctoral thesis was titled "The Struggle for Hegemony during the First MAS Government in Bolivia (2006–2009): A Discursive Analysis." Retrieved June 20, 2015 from <http://eprints.ucm.es/14574/1/T33089.pdf>.
5. Laclau and Mouffe's influence on *Podemos* was widely analyzed in Luke Stobart's series on *Podemos*—Left Flank—and José Antonio Palao's blog *La Suficiencia de la Obvio*.
6. Members of *Podemos*' promoter group include Juan Carlos Monedero, Pablo Iglesias, Iñigo Errejón, Carolina Bescansa, and Luis Alegre. See the following article to know more: http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/11/15/actualidad/1416083204_351563.html.
7. Retrieved March 15, 2015 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfK2Bl4NjGM> (minutes: 13:22–13:45).
8. Retrieved June 20, 2015 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3me4hDrbzU>.
9. On March 24, 2016, the numbers of subscribers to YouTube channels of the major political parties in Spain were *Partido Popular* (PP; 7,491), *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE; 10,207), *Ciudadanos* (19,220), and *Podemos* (69,978). The YouTube channel of La Tuerka had 115,320 subscribers in this period.
10. Retrieved June 10, 2015 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dKkeGybvFw>.
11. Since 2009, surveys of the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS; Sociological Research Center) have noted a steady discrediting of the Spanish political class. Retrieved June 9, 2014 from http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/11_barometros/indicadores.html.
12. Retrieved March 15, 2015 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yizw-RySZnl> (minutes: 2:07–2:11).
13. Retrieved March 20, 2015 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unFxEn2gcTs>.

14. Retrieved March 15, 2015 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDYDSQIF0go> (minutes: 1:03.28–1:05.12).
15. Eduardo Muriel “*Cinco claves del éxito de la campaña electoral de Podemos*” (The Five Keys to *Podemos*’ Successful Electoral Campaign), *La Marea*, May 26, 2014. Retrieved December 19, 2014 from <http://www.lamarea.com/2014/05/26/cinco-claves-del-exito-de-la-campana-electoral-de-podemos/>.
16. Muriel “*Cinco claves del éxito.*”
17. Shortly after the European elections, *El País* published an article on the importance of *Podemos*’ social networks. Retrieved June 5, 2015 from http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/05/28/actualidad/1401305050_166293.html.
18. On March 24, 2016, *Podemos* had 1,046,108 followers in Twitter, PP had 511,096, and PSOE had 402,091. On Facebook, *Podemos* had 1,061,108 likes, PP had 139,243, and PSOE had 121,497.
19. <http://blogs.publico.es/pablo-iglesias/760/circulos-podemos/>.
20. <https://files.podemos.info/Nvuzas93bt>.
21. <https://participa.podemos.info/es/circulos/validacion>.
22. See, for example, this debate in *Plaza Podemos*. Retrieved December 10, 2015 from <https://plaza.podemos.info/debates/313>.

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Four Functions of Digital Tools in Election Campaigns: The German Case

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Abstract

This article presents a case study of the use of digital tools by campaign organizations in Germany's 2013 federal election. Based on observations and in-depth interviews with key personnel in the campaigns of six of the parties running for Parliament, I examine whether German campaigns' use of digital tools follows the usage practices that have been identified in studies of campaigns in the United States. I group how campaigns use digital tools into four categories: organizational structures and work routines, presence in information spaces online, support in resource collection and allocation, and symbolic uses. I show that these categories capture how German parties use digital tools. U.S.-based studies can thus provide helpful interpretive frameworks for studying digital campaigning in other countries. However, I also reveal that there are important differences between German and U.S.-based online campaigning. These differences stem from the different levels of intensity with which digital tools are deployed in each country.

Keywords

campaigns, parties, Internet, digital tools, online campaigning, Germany, campaign innovation, election campaigns, Bundestagswahl 2013

Digital Tools in Election Campaigns

The Internet has become an important infrastructure for political campaigns, and digital tools have become pervasive campaigning devices. They are deeply integrated into the structures and practices of political organizations. Still, somewhat surprisingly, most research on political uses of digital tools focuses on their role in collective action,

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protests, or as a perceived catalyst for political change (e.g., Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Bimber et al. 2012; Earl and Kimport 2011; Karpf 2012). This focus on the exceptional and the transformative in politics leads researchers to neglect how digital tools are used by established political actors under unexceptional conditions. Most extant research focuses on the fringes of politics while neglecting the center (for notable exceptions, see, for example, Hersh 2015; Kreiss 2012b; Nielsen 2012; Stromer-Galley 2014). This is problematic if we want to understand the true impact of the digital revolution on politics and power.

Most of the studies of digital tools in election campaigns focus on presidential campaigns in the United States. Due to the specific institutional context of the United States, these studies might not provide accurate accounts of the role of digital tools in campaigns in other countries and other electoral contexts (cf. Anstead and Chadwick 2009). This raises the importance of examining the use of digital tools outside the United States.

I aim to address these research gaps by closely examining the use of digital tools by parties during their campaigns for the 2013 federal election in Germany. I base my analysis on observations of the uses of digital tools in the campaigns, manifested in field notes, digital artifacts, and in-depth interviews with leading campaign personnel responsible from six parties running in the election. This article extends our understanding of digital campaigns by providing a detailed analysis of a country with electoral, cultural, political, and legal contexts that contrast with those in the United States.

To guide my discussion, I propose a new framework for understanding how campaigns use digital tools. This is based on digital tools' potential contribution to four central campaign functions:

1. Organizational structures and work routines;
2. Presence in information spaces online;
3. Support in resource collection and allocation; and
4. Symbolic uses.

I show that these four functions provide an intuitive means of grouping various findings on the specific uses of digital tools in the literature. This framework contrasts with Foot and Schneider's established framework of coding digital campaign content based on its informative, participatory, linking, and mobilizing features (Foot and Schneider 2006). While their framework has been influential and has provided the basis for valuable international comparisons of digital campaigning practices (Kluver et al. 2007; Lilleker and Jackson 2011; Vaccari 2013), it is from a time when digital campaigning was largely confined to Web sites. More recent accounts show that the uses of digital tools in campaigns have become increasingly multifaceted (Chadwick 2013; Stromer-Galley 2014). The organizational structure of campaigns has changed to accommodate digital tools (Kreiss 2012b). Campaigns are adapting their strategies and practices to newly available data sources that are computable through digital tools (Hersh 2015; Nielsen 2012) and extend their symbolic performances of politics to the online realm to influence media coverage and public perceptions (Anstead and

O'Loughlin 2014; Kreiss 2014). To account for these and other uses of digital tools in campaigns, we need to rethink our interpretative frameworks.

Approaching the observations and interviews from the perspective of my guiding framework revealed a surprisingly uniform picture. The general campaign functions of digital tools identified by U.S.-based studies were clearly identifiable in the uses of digital tools described by my German interviewees. German parties thus seem to follow the same kinds of uses identified in the U.S. literature. However, I observed important differences between the United States and Germany. In general, German parties aimed to integrate digital tools into their larger campaigns. Interviewees even went so far as to state that there was no such thing as a separate “online campaign.” Parties predominantly used in-house personnel for the planning, administration, and sometimes even the design of digital tools. The interviewees did not cite international campaigns as reference points but, instead, emphasized their own party-specific learning opportunities during the General Election of 2009 and various state elections. Overall, German parties mainly seem to use digital tools to try to influence media coverage and to get around the filters of traditional media outlets. For most parties—the Green Party, the Pirate Party, and the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) being the exceptions—digital tools are not significant for the collection and allocation of resources. Overall, while there is a degree of convergence between the United States and Germany on some common aspects of online campaigning, in Germany, digital tools are not as central to the broader campaign as in the United States and they are less intensively deployed.

Four Functions of Digital Tools in Election Campaigns: Organizational Structures and Work Routines, Presence in Information Spaces, Resource Generator, and Symbol

In recent years, the roles of digital tools in election campaigns has attracted considerable attention from researchers. Early research focused predominantly on digital content provided by campaigns, either on Web sites or social media profiles (Foot and Schneider 2006; Kluver et al. 2007; Lilleker and Jackson 2011; Vaccari 2013). While this has led to a valuable and strongly interconnected body of research, various authors have turned from the analysis of digital content to examine the impact of digital tools on the organizational structures of campaigns (Kreiss 2012b), routines and practices of personnel (Nielsen 2012), and the interconnection between campaigns' digital efforts and media coverage (Kreiss 2014).

A significant number of studies in this field focus on three exceptional campaigns—Howard Dean's campaign of 2004 (Hindman 2005, Kreiss 2012b) and Barack Obama's campaigns of 2008 and 2012 (Kreiss 2012b, 2014; Vaccari 2010). These campaigns are obviously exceptional cases, even in the U.S. context, so we should be careful not to treat these as ideal types. Still, while the Dean and Obama campaigns are best seen as outliers, some studies have started to show that the general patterns identified in these exceptional cases seem to hold for other campaigns (Gibson 2015;

Stromer-Galley 2014). Thus, the campaigns of Dean and Obama might offer us insights into some of the general functions digital tools can perform for campaigns.

We can use the wealth of findings drawn from these and other U.S.-based cases to identify digital tools' significant general functions. Here, I present such a framework, grouping the specific uses of digital tools identified in existing research into four categories. First, digital tools have influenced the organizational structures and work routines of campaigns. Second, they have been used to influence a campaign's presence in the information space online. Third, they have been used in support of resource collection and allocation. Finally, digital tools have been used by parties for symbolic purposes. Next, I discuss these functions in greater detail.

Organizational Structures and Work Routines

Digital tools have impacted campaigns at the fundamental level of organizational structures and daily work routines. Specialists in the use of digital tools have become ever more central in the organizational structures of campaigns and have started to become part of the campaign elite (Kreiss 2012b). Specialists have also become crucial in decisions on how to allocate resources, evaluate activities, and produce campaign content, in a process Kreiss terms *computational management* (Kreiss 2012b). Digital tools have also become central in the daily working practices of nonelite campaign workers. This is especially true for "mundane" tools—such as e-mail (Nielsen 2011). Finally, campaigns and politicians use public reactions to politics on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter increasingly as informal cues to assess public opinion (Anstead and O'Loughlin 2014; Chadwick 2013; Hamby 2013; Kreiss 2014).

Presence in Information Spaces Online

Early discussions of the impact of digital tools on political campaigns focused on campaigners' potential to use Web sites to post information and thereby circumvent the gatekeeping function of traditional media (Bimber 2003; Bimber and Davis 2003; Wilhelm 2000). Although much of the current debate focuses on the potential of digital tools for mobilization and online donations (Hindman 2005), the presence of political actors in political communication spaces online remains an important function in political campaigns (Stromer-Galley 2014). This is especially true as the Internet is increasingly becoming a trusted news source (Edelman 2015).

In analyses focusing on the uses of Web sites by campaigns, studies regularly find high levels of information provision (Foot and Schneider 2006; Gibson et al. 2003; Lilleker and Jackson 2011; Vaccari 2013). Campaigns thus seem to use their Web sites very actively to provide interested visitors with direct unfiltered information. Increasingly, studies also show that campaigns use digital tools to interact with political bloggers to prompt them to cover specific aspects of the campaign in the hope that this will attract coverage by traditional media. In other words, they use digital tools to indirectly influence the communication environment during a campaign (e.g., Karpf 2010; Stromer-Galley 2014). This process is enabled by traditional media's

willingness to incorporate information found on blogs, YouTube, or on Twitter in their coverage (Anstead and O'Loughlin 2014; Chadwick 2013; Farrell and Drezner 2007; Hamby 2013). Also, campaigns try to use social media to reach younger voters they might otherwise be unable to contact (Stromer-Galley 2014).

Support in Resource Collection and Allocation

Digital tools have proved very valuable for generating political donations in U.S. campaigns, and this has enhanced the status of digital strategists (Hindman 2005; Kreiss 2012b; Stromer-Galley 2014). In addition, digital tools appear to be increasingly important for U.S. campaigns to mobilize and coordinate volunteers (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011; Kreiss 2012b; Nielsen 2012). U.S. campaigns also increasingly use digital tools to collect and aggregate data on potential voters and supporters. Based on these data, campaigns build models of voter mobilization, persuasion, as well as individuals' propensity to donate money (Hersh 2015; Issenberg 2012; Kreiss 2012b, Nickerson and Rogers 2014; Sides and Vavreck 2014). For U.S. campaigns, these particular uses of digital tools are becoming central.

Symbol

Digital tools have also been used very consciously by political actors to convey specific attributes of candidates and parties. This has involved creating digital content that is in step with online communication culture, to attract media coverage focusing on innovative or controversial usage practices, as well as to illustrate campaign momentum. Campaigns now use rhetoric associated with the digital revolution and try to attract endorsements from public intellectuals and entrepreneurs prominent in the development of digital tools. Specifically chosen phrasings and public interactions thereby become symbols—this practice can be termed *cyber-rhetoric* (Kreiss 2011, 2012a; Stromer-Galley 2000, 2014). Campaigns also use digital tools to create humorous or controversial content that will attract media coverage focusing on their usage practices.

Increasingly, publicly available online metrics of campaign activity, such as a candidate's Twitter mentions or number of Facebook fans, are becoming objects of media coverage to illustrate a campaign's momentum (Jungherr 2012a). This has become the digital equivalent of traditional "horse-race" media coverage. At the same time, journalists and politicians now use digitally mediated public reactions to campaign media events such as televised debates in discussions of which candidate or campaign "won" (Anstead and O'Loughlin 2014; Hamby 2013). Through this coverage of the "digital horse race," publicly available metrics on campaign activities are becoming de facto symbolic representations of a campaign's momentum.

Germany as a Contrasting Case

Germany offers an interesting context for examining campaigns' uses of digital tools. In general, Germany and the United States differ significantly with regard to their

media systems, political communication systems, political information environments (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Pfetsch 2001), and system-level variables associated with campaigning styles (Esser and Strömbäck 2012; Pfetsch and Esser 2014). More specifically, campaigns in Germany are fought in the context of a two-tier electoral system based on proportional representation and significantly lower campaign budgets. Also, in Germany, nationwide election campaigns are organized by central parties and not by organizations founded and led by leading candidates, as occurs in the United States. These factors have been identified as potentially influencing the use of digital tools by German parties (Geber and Scherer 2015; Stier 2015; Zittel 2010). My aim here is not to explain the use of digital tools by German parties with reference to contextual, organizational, or individual factors but to assess the value of an interpretative framework developed on U.S.-based findings. It suffices, therefore, to point out that Germany is an adequate contrasting case.

Method

This case study is based on my observations—in the form of field notes and my collection of digital artifacts—of parties' uses of digital tools as well as in-depth interviews with key personnel from six parties running in the election. This inductive and qualitative approach has been proven in previous work in this field (Chadwick 2013; Kreiss 2014; Nielsen 2011; Vaccari 2010).

To establish context for my notes and to account for the motives of campaign professionals, I conducted a series of semistructured interviews with key campaign personnel. The first wave of interviews was conducted before the election during the summer of 2013. The second wave of interviews started after the election in spring 2014. Interviewees were selected for their centrality in the planning and execution of digital campaigning in their parties. As parties differed significantly in how they organized their digital roles, the job titles of my interviewees varied. I spoke with Thomas Diener, head of dialogue in the Free Democratic Party's (FDP) Department for Strategy, Dialogue and Campaigning; Robert Heinrich, a campaign manager for Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance '90/The Greens); Dr. Stefan Hennewig, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany's (CDU) head of personnel and the Supporter Campaign teAM Deutschland; Mathias Richel, in-house consultant for the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD); Dr. Markus Riedhammer, head of politics 2.0 for the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU); and Matthias Schrade, campaign coordinator for the *Piratenpartei*. Unfortunately, representatives of the German Socialists (Die LINKE) and the new Euro-sceptic party AfD declined to be interviewed for this project.

While one is probably well advised to interpret answers given by campaigners on their behavior and motives with some caution (Berry 2002), various interview-based studies have shown their worth (Chadwick 2013; Kreiss 2012b; Vaccari 2010). That said, this approach has a limitation that should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. Germany's two-tier electoral system means that some candidates for Parliament fight local campaigns to win districts and thus directly enter Parliament. But parties

also fight a central campaign to increase the total number of candidates they are allowed to send to Parliament. My results only speak to the use of digital tools by German parties in their central campaigns (for the uses of digital tools by candidates in their constituency campaigns, see Geber and Scherer 2015; Zittel 2009, 2015).

Four Uses of Digital Tools in the Campaign for Germany's 2013 Federal Election

Organizational Structures and Work Routines: Integrated Campaigns

Probably the most interesting theme emerging from the interviews with German campaign professionals was their strong objection to the term online or Internet campaign. Robert Heinrich (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) put this most strongly, but his sentiments were shared by most other campaigners:

We should see the Internet as a natural part of campaigns. I find the incessant talk about online-campaigns really irritating. If it were up to me, I would prefer people stopped using the term altogether.

Thus, in the eyes of campaigners, digital tools have become so central to the organization, performance, and day-to-day workings of a campaign that they are not seen as separate elements of the campaign. Instead, all parties use digital tools to support traditional campaign elements and functions.

There were differences among the parties with regard to the position of personnel responsible for digital tools in the campaign structure. One approach was to establish a dedicated online department (CDU, CSU, and SPD). This structure was situated below the campaign leadership on equal levels with traditional departments—such as press or marketing. All campaigners emphasized the importance of flat hierarchies and fast reaction times. In contrast, campaigners for the Green Party and the Pirates emphasized that they had no dedicated online teams. Instead, digital tools were integrated in the workflow of their regular staff.

There was very little evidence of “computational management” (Kreiss 2012b). Some campaigns tracked user visits and interactions on their Web sites or profiles on social networking sites in rudimentary ways (CDU, CSU, and SPD). Information gained through these evaluations was used to assess content placement. Still, this information was not seen as important for general decision-making during the campaign. Other parties—the FDP, the Greens, and the Pirates—were much more cautious in using software to track user interactions. Interviewees gave diverging reasons for this. Some invoked German privacy laws or, in the case of the FDP and the Greens, specific pro-privacy policy positions. The Pirates cited a lack of financial resources. Still, nearly all campaigners emphasized the potential to use digital tools to gather quick feedback on the campaign’s performance. This could be feedback gleaned from their own supporters on social networking sites or closed online groups, or from the use of professional tools that track the volume and sentiment of political talk online.

For the most part, parties used their own staff to plan and manage the use of digital tools. Often the technological development of tools and Web sites was provided by firms closely connected with the party (CDU and SPD). Smaller parties tended to outsource the technological development of their tools. Nearly all parties used professional communication agencies to make decisions on design. But nearly all interviewees emphasized how their campaign workers' experiences with digital tools during previous campaigns had been useful for engaging supporters and critics online.

Thus, German parties have integrated digital tools into their work practices and organizational structures. However, while digital tools seem as deeply integrated in the day-to-day practices of German campaigns as in the United States, the digital teams do not seem to have achieved as central a role as they did, for example, in the Obama campaigns. The reason for this is the much smaller role of "computational management" in German campaigns.

Presence in Information Spaces Online: Web Sites and Social Networking Sites

Web sites were central to the campaigns of German parties for the federal election of 2013. Still, there were major differences between the parties' approaches to design, content, and strategy. In fact, Web sites came to mirror the central narrative of each campaign. Campaigners for the SPD, the Greens, and the CSU emphasized the centrality of the Web site:

For us the Web site was the most important element. There we publish content that was not determined or edited by others. . . . Everything we do should pay dividends for our Web site. (Markus Riedhammer [CSU])

We believe . . . that our Web site is still the most important source if a user wants information about the SPD. If you google SPD you're directed to our Web site; if you search for our party platform you're directed to our Web site. This makes the Web site central to our efforts. . . . I believe that of the public's impression of everything we do online 70 to 80 percent of these impressions focus on our Web site. . . . We react to this by our banner ads on news platforms and other popular online services. The normal user visits these sites, sees our ads by which we direct him to our Web site. (Mathias Richel [SPD])

Richel emphasizes two points: First, party Web sites were the most visible elements of campaigns online and thereby were of high importance. Second, the campaign worked very consciously, for example, through online advertisements on news portals or contextually relevant Google ads during the televised candidate debate—to attract users to their site.

Richel also emphasized how important it was to actively "push" political information to online users. Users who voluntarily "pull" political information were to him only a minor part of the audience for online political information. In his view, for political actors, the Internet was as much of a push medium as traditional media.

Robert Heinrich raised a similar point while discussing the Greens' use of social networking profiles:

We attempt to do very little exclusively on social networking sites. Instead, we want to draw as many users to our Web site as possible. We believe that it is smart to bundle all our activities on one site. Thus, we try to have the heart of our online campaign on our Web site. There we try to mobilize and to inform. All other campaign elements online are satellites with the aim to draw people to our Web site. This is how Obama did it and we believe this makes sense.

In a follow-up conversation, Heinrich qualified this statement. While he still held the Web site to be the most important digital element of the campaign, he also stated that following the 2013 campaign, the Greens were developing specific strategies for the use of their Facebook profiles because their supporters did not tend to click through from Facebook to their party Web site. This learning process was also evident in the use of Web sites and social networking sites by the CDU. Stefan Hennewig argued that the CDU tried to use their Web site to attract visitors to their presence on social networking platforms and get them to voice their support for the party there:

Our Web site is important in the campaign. Still, I'm not sure if it is the most important element. In a recent relaunch for the campaign we changed our strategic goals for the Web site and, therefore, also changed its structure. Our new goal is to use the Web site not as a landing strip for politically interested users but instead as a runway for politically active users. And in this context politically active means politically active on the social Web.

There were also differences in Web site design. The strongest contrast was visible in the design of the Web sites of the CDU and the SPD, shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The CDU chose a design dominated by one image, accompanied by short text snippets, illustrating recent events during the campaign. In contrast, the SPD used a Web site that in design and content was inspired by online news platforms. The SPD Web site featured a very prominent banner inviting visitors to further engage with the campaign—by posting on social networking platforms, checking out further information, or registering for the get-out-the-vote effort. These design decisions mirror the campaigns' central narratives. The CDU focused visitors' attention on selected content often featuring their leading candidate Angela Merkel. This focus on Merkel was also prominent in other campaign elements and was only logical given her strong public support in opinion polls. The leading candidate of the Social Democrats, Peer Steinbrück, proved to be a challenge for the campaign as media coverage focused on his personal gaffes, and he enjoyed little public support. Consequently, the SPD focused much more strongly on issues and on publicizing their get-out-the-vote effort. This campaign strategy is mirrored in the design of the SPD Web site.

Robert Heinrich (Die Grünen) also emphasized the importance of digital tools for presenting political information. In 2013, for the first time in Germany, the Greens used specifically designed and edited graphical elements on their Web site guiding the

The screenshot shows the CDU website's campaign page for the 2013 Bundestag election. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Menu', 'Spenden', 'CDUplus Login', and the CDU logo. The main banner features a portrait of Angela Merkel and the text: 'Heute wählen gehen! Kanzlerin für Deutschland. Beide Stimmen CDU!' with two crossed-out 'X' marks. Below the banner is a video player titled 'Angela Merkel: "Geben Sie beide Stimmen der CDU"'. The main content area is divided into three columns under the heading 'Bundestagswahl'. The first column is titled 'Gemeinsam erfolgreich für Deutschland. Regierungsprogramm 2013 - 2017' and includes a thumbnail for 'Gemeinsam erfolgreich für Deutschland. Regierungsprogramm 2013-2017'. The second column is titled 'Unterstützen Sie jetzt die CDU!' and includes a thumbnail for 'Ihre Spende für die CDU'. The third column is titled 'Parteiplakate und Großflächen zur Bundestagswahl 2013' and includes a thumbnail for 'Plakate zur Bundestagswahl 2013'. Below this is an 'Aktuelles' section with three items: 'Angela Merkel: „Geben Sie beide Stimmen der CDU!“', 'Auf Tour mit der Kanzlerin', and 'Merkel: "Um beide Stimmen für die CDU kämpfen"'. Each item has a video player thumbnail and a brief description.

Menu Spenden CDUplus Login CDU

Heute wählen gehen!
Kanzlerin
für Deutschland.
Beide Stimmen CDU!

Angela Merkel: "Geben Sie beide Stimmen der CDU"

Bundestagswahl

Gemeinsam erfolgreich für Deutschland. Regierungsprogramm 2013 - 2017

Unterstützen Sie jetzt die CDU!

Parteiplakate und Großflächen zur Bundestagswahl 2013

Gemeinsam erfolgreich für Deutschland. Regierungsprogramm 2013-2017

Ihre Spende für die CDU

Plakate zur Bundestagswahl 2013

Aktuelles

Angela Merkel: „Geben Sie beide Stimmen der CDU!“

Auf Tour mit der Kanzlerin

Merkel: "Um beide Stimmen für die CDU kämpfen"

Mit rund 3000 Anhängern leitete die CDU-Vorsitzende Angela Merkel am Samstagvormittag den Wahlkampf-Endspurt der Union ein. „Lassen Sie uns gemeinsam...

Politik als Herzenssache: Das TEAM Deutschland macht sich für die Wiederwahl von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel stark. Unterstützer des Freiwilligenetzwerks der...

Noch vier Tage bis zur Bundestagswahl. Im Interview mit der Rheinischen Post wirbt Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel dafür, die gute Ausgangsposition zu nutzen und dafür...

Figure 1. CDU Web site: Screenshot taken on September 22, 2013.
Note. CDU = Christian Democratic Union of Germany.

Einloggen | Registrieren

Animation Stepp | Impressum | Kontakt | Datenschutz

AKTUELLES PARTEI THEMEN PRESSE SERVICE **SPD** MEIN BEREICH Suchen

72h live mit der SPD - Update: Talk mit Sawo, Chobi und Astrid Hoff

Tweets über "#72hSPD"

← **Steuern & Märkte** **Rente** **Wirtschaft** →

MACH MIT! UNTERSTÜTZE UNS IM WAHLKAMPF!

Ich habe 1 Minute Zeit. **1**

Ich habe 5 Minuten Zeit. **5**

Ich habe eine Stunde Zeit. **1**

|| Folge uns auf Twitter!
|| Folge uns auf Facebook!
|| Folge uns auf Youtube!

|| Unsere Wahlkampfthemen
|| Schau Dir unseren TV-Spot an
|| Neulich in der CDU-Zentrale ...

|| Mach mit, beim Tür-zu-Tür-Wahlkampf
|| Eure Wahlkampfaktionen

AKTUELLES

Abschlusskundgebung in Frankfurt
„Noch einen Tag, dann können Sie die los sein“
Super Stimmung auf dem Römerberg: 7000 Menschen kamen am Samstag zur Abschlusskundgebung mit Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel und Peer Steinbrück nach Frankfurt. Steinbrück betonte, dass nur die Wählerinnen und Wähler die Wahl entscheiden: „Sie haben es in der Hand. Machen Sie von Ihrem Wahlrecht Gebrauch“.

appellierte der Kanzlerkandidat. [weiterlesen](#)

21. September 2013 - [Jobs](#) [Stes](#) [5](#) [5](#) [5](#) [5](#) [5](#)

Endspurt mit Peer Steinbrück
72 Stunden kämpfen
Begeistender Start in die letzten 72 Stunden bis zur Wahl. Über 6000 Menschen sind am Donnerstag zur Veranstaltung „Endspurt mit Peer Steinbrück“ auf dem Alexanderplatz in Berlin gekommen. Steinbrück machte in seiner Rede klar: „Ich will Kanzler werden.“ SPD.de überträgt bis Sonntag 18 Uhr nonstop live! [weiterlesen](#)

20. September 2013 - [Jobs](#) [Stes](#) [5](#) [5](#) [5](#) [5](#) [5](#)

Bundestagswahlkampf
Motive zum Schlusspurt
Für die letzte Woche im Bundestagswahlkampf hat die SPD für alle Unterstützerinnen und Unterstützer Materialien für Online- und Straßenwahlkampf zusammengestellt. Hier können Sie die Materialien herunterladen. [weiterlesen](#)

18. September 2013 [5](#) [5](#) [5](#) [5](#) [5](#)

PEER-STEINBRÜCK.DE

MITMACHEN.SPD.DE

WAHLKAMPF-TUMBLR
Zeigt uns eure Wahlkampf-Aktionen!

UNSERE DIREKTKANDIDATINNEN/-KANDIDATEN
BIRDS WAHLKAMPFEE

Figure 2. SPD Web site: Screenshot taken on September 22, 2013.

Note. SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany.



Figure 3. Bündnis90/Die Grünen Web site: Screenshot taken on September 1, 2013.

visitor through a two-minute tour of key elements of the party platform (shown in Figure 3). In so doing, in their use of digital tools, the Greens also echoed their campaign's major themes while experimenting with new forms of political communication online. Heinrich told me that one million Web site visitors used this feature. Thus, they clearly reached exceptionally high visibility. Consequently, Heinrich cites this tool as one of the central campaign innovations by the Greens during the 2013 campaign cycle.

Parties also used different channels for providing their supporters with information unfiltered by traditional media. The CDU focused strongly on YouTube. The party even equipped their headquarters with a small television studio from which

campaigners were able to provide live coverage during important campaign events. Consequently, the campaign produced a comparatively large number of YouTube videos and provided live commentary by politicians accompanying the televised leaders' debate on the main CDU Web site. Similarly, during the last three days of the campaign, the SPD used prominently featured video streams to provide short clips illustrating the campaign and coverage of important campaign events with their leading candidate. These activities showed that both the SPD and the CDU consciously used digital tools to provide alternative political coverage of their campaigns, independently of traditional media. For the SPD, this was particularly important as traditional media coverage proved to be very critical of their leading candidate. Campaigns also used their presences on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter very consciously to interact with journalists and to get them to quote their candidates:

We do not want the press to write about the fact that Sigmar Gabriel is on Facebook. Instead, we want them to write about what he says on Facebook. We want to be quotable with our social media presences. We followed through on this with the announcements of the shadow cabinet. We announced each member first on Twitter before announcing her or him in a press conference. This introduced completely new dynamics in the news coverage. . . . During the campaign, it was very difficult for us to get the media to cover our positions. But these new practices allowed us to determine our own exclusive news items. This was very important for us. (Mathias Richel [SPD])

Statements by other campaigners echoed this position. Campaigners thus used social networking sites very consciously to communicate with journalists and to influence the media agenda. This echoes the use of social networking sites by politicians in other countries to influence what Chadwick has called the "political information cycle": the increasingly complex interaction between political actors, journalists, and citizens in the evolving coverage of political events (Chadwick 2011, 2013).

Support in Resource Collection and Allocation: The Limited Role of Fund-raising Online

German parties have had mixed success in using digital tools for fund-raising. Campaigners for the CDU and the SPD stated that online fund-raising was of no great importance for their campaigns, although Stefan Hennewig (CDU) stated that online fund-raising had picked up somewhat when compared with 2009. Mathias Richel (SPD) added that online fund-raising might play a stronger role in the campaigns of local candidates. Two reasons might contribute to the limited importance of online fund-raising for German parties. First, several campaigners argued that Germany's regulations for political fund-raising mean that a donation only helps a party if it is above 5 to 6 Euros. Donations below this value create administrative costs surpassing the donated sum. This makes many of the small donations routinely collected by U.S. campaigns of little interest to German parties. Second, most supporters of parties donate money by voluntarily increasing their monthly membership dues. This is an

easy and habitually used channel for political contributions in Germany, and it significantly reduces the potential for online fund-raising.

However, in contrast with these assessments, smaller parties did report efficiently using online tools for fund-raising. The Greens managed to collect the equivalent of 270,000 Euros online. The Greens were particularly keen to get supporters to donate money to pay for cinema ads and billboards at dedicated locations. This success built on the experience of the Greens in the 2009 campaign, when they managed to collect a similar amount of dedicated donations.

During the 2013 campaign, the Euro-sceptic AfD staged a heavily publicized fund-raising event online. For forty-eight hours, the campaign ran what it called a “Money bomb for Germany.” Over this short time, the campaign raised 432,751 Euros given by 6,200 donors. Although the party did not exclusively count donations given during this time span through online channels, this success can be attributed to their use of digital tools because the party used its online presence to mobilize for this fund-raising event. In this case, the AfD clearly followed examples from the United States where fund-raising drives are routinely used to attract media coverage.

Many parties offered supporter platforms for volunteers: teAM Deutschland (CDU), MITMACHEN.SPD (SPD), and Wurzelwerk (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen). In their design and use of the platforms, all parties built on their experiences going back to campaigns in 2009 and 2005. The SPD in particular focused in the 2013 campaign on the use of MITMACHEN.SPD and their platform for professional campaigners KAMPA.NETZ. Both platforms were designed to provide technological infrastructure for the party’s get-out-the-vote (GOTV) effort. In both—the design of the platform and the emphasis on GOTV—SPD campaigners were clearly inspired by U.S. campaigns while developing tools in accordance with German privacy laws. Differences from U.S. campaigns become obvious once we examine the functionality offered on these platforms and their use in the campaigns. First, in contrast with the United States, German parties did not make much use of their supporter platforms for raising donations. Second, the GOTV effort was limited by the fact that these platforms largely reproduced local party structures. Supporter platforms of German parties might be more efficient as symbols of campaign momentum and participatory practices than as tools for persuasion and mobilization (Jungherr 2012a).

Finally, it should be mentioned that digital tools provided the Pirate Party and the AfD with technological infrastructure that was vital for their campaigns. Without digital tools, parties not represented in Parliament would have found running coordinated campaigns much more difficult.

In assessing the importance of digital tools for resource collection and allocation, we therefore have to distinguish between big established parties—such as the CDU or SPD—and new or small parties—such as the Green Party, the Pirates, and the AfD. On the whole, the big and established parties now appear to have funding and mobilization mechanisms in place and feel less pressure to develop new mechanisms. In contrast, small or new parties seem much more ready to experiment (the Greens) or they might simply depend on digital infrastructure (the Pirates and the AfD) to get their campaign going in the first place.

Symbolic Uses: Cyber-Rhetoric, Merkel-Raute, and the Digital Horse Race

Over the course of the campaigns, German candidates tried very consciously to publicly communicate their knowledge of digital tools and their grasp of social change associated with the digital revolution. Some candidates adopted the use of cyber-rhetoric very openly in public statements, interviews, or opinion pieces. Others organized press events where they could be seen using digital tools and interacting online. The direct interactions between leading candidates and the public did not matter much for these events. What mattered was that the candidates were seen by journalists to interact with people online. While German candidates clearly mirrored the symbolic activities and rhetoric of American candidates, German campaigns aligned themselves with representatives of Germany's digital tech-sector to a much lesser degree. An exception to this was the SPD, which recruited Gesche Joost, a professor of technological design, into Peer Steinbrück's shadow cabinet. This ensured the SPD positive Internet-related press coverage.

In 2009, the SPD and political activists were very successful in using digital tools to influence the public narrative of the campaign (Jungheer 2012b). In 2013, the initiative shifted to the CDU. Early in the campaign, the CDU asked supporters of Angela Merkel to send in digital snapshots of their hands forming a typical hand gesture used by Merkel—the fingers of both hands touching and forming a diamond shape—which came to be known as Merkel-Raute (Merkel's diamond). The campaign received 2,800 snapshots of supporters showing Merkel's signature gesture. The party used a collage of these snapshots to create a huge poster depicting Merkel's hands in the diamond gesture at a prominent spot in Berlin (see Figure 4). Unsurprisingly, this campaign device created a lot of attention in the media and online; it even spawned a Tumblr blog on which remixes of this motif were collected. This campaign poster conveyed a strong focus on the candidate with relaxed irony. It was a clear example of the convergence of online and offline campaign elements and the successful use of digital media to create traditional media coverage.

The digital horse race mattered little to campaigners from all parties. Nearly all interviewees stated in no uncertain terms that their total number of fans on Facebook or followers on Twitter mattered little to them. Instead, their focus was on how many people reacted to their posts and interacted with their social media profiles. This view offers an interesting contrast to 2009 when all campaigns communicated their total reach on social media platforms very proactively to journalists and the public (Jungheer 2012a). One reason for this change could be the absolute dominance of Angela Merkel on Facebook. From early on in the campaign, Merkel's fan count was much higher than Steinbrück's. The digital horse race between the leading candidates, therefore, offered no suspense and consequently little incentive for journalists to cover it.

Differences in Degree Not in Kind

In 2013, German parties used digital tools very confidently and consciously in support of their larger campaign. In 2009, parties seemed to use digital tools—especially



Figure 4. The “Merkel-Raute” billboard shown at Berlin main station.

Note. Picture courtesy of CDU-Bundesgeschäftsstelle.

various forms of social media—predominantly for their own sake, or for the sake of being seen to be using them. In 2013, campaigners reasoned much more confidently about which digital tools they should use to achieve specific goals and which they could consciously ignore. This was the result of an intraorganizational learning process that took place between 2009 and 2013, and which allowed campaigners to assess the use of digital tools in practical campaign contexts. As a consequence, there was very little evidence that digital tools were seen as a “game changer” for political campaigns or as fundamentally restructuring the political balance of power. Instead, digital tools were seen as ubiquitous campaign elements. They were seen as changing organizational practices and some elements of political performance but not as fundamentally transformative agents. Online campaigning seems to have disappeared as a campaign element in itself but digital tools seem to have become integrated in the campaign as a whole and seem to be routinely used in support of various campaign functions and elements.

In general, in 2013, German campaigners used digital tools to fulfill campaign functions similar to those identified in the literature on U.S. campaigns. The differences between German and U.S.-based online campaigning stem from the differing levels of intensity with which digital tools are deployed. For example, although digital tools are used for fund-raising in Germany, interviewees—with the notable exception of Robert Heinrich (Green Party)—ascribed little importance to this. This contrasts sharply with the U.S.-based literature, where fund-raising has been identified as one of

the most important aspects in the use of digital tools for campaigns (Hindman 2005; Kreiss 2012b).

In the 2013 campaign, the main emphasis was intraorganizational learning, not emulating international examples. A statement by Stefan Hennewig (CDU) illustrates potential reasons for this:

Of course your own experiences have a deeper impact than experiences you are told about by others. For example, you meet international campaigners on these typical three-day-meetings. You arrive on Friday. On Saturday, representatives of six campaigns, or so, are speeding through case studies presenting their campaigns, their experiences, and their learnings. Of course, you exchange some words during the coffee break. But still, best case: you can take a few examples or observations from these cases back home and maybe you can adapt them to your campaign. But still, this is very different from really experiencing a campaign and thereby knowing how to adapt experiences and learnings to your own contexts.

German campaigners were conscious of U.S. digital campaigning but claim not to have copied it. Instead, they spoke of having developed methods suitable for their specific campaign environment. How and to what extent general technological affordances are translated into specific campaigning practices will depend on system-level contextual factors, budgetary and legal restraints, specific campaign contexts, or even individual decisions by a campaign leadership. To fully understand the impact of digital tools on campaigns requires that scholars move away from simply analyzing the political content campaigns post online and toward a focus on the embeddedness of digital tools in organizational structures and practices.

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Abstract

Early research in western contexts finds evidence of online participation leading to political engagement. We test this hypothesis in a nonwestern campaign context. We discuss India's complex "hybrid media system," political parties, leaders, and issues in the 2014 national election that saw more use of digital information channels by all parties, and more so by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the young Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) than the incumbent Indian National Congress (INC). We hypothesize that online engagement and, specifically, sharing of campaign information is a significant predictor of political engagement in the campaigns of each of these three parties. Our dependent variable is a scale of engagement in campaign activities. Independent variables include campaign interest, issue salience, exposure to outdoor party publicity, attention to political information in various traditional media, party contact and sharing information with others (both measured face-to-face and electronically), and controlling for age, gender, and education. Our models, based on survey data from Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, show that party contact, sharing campaign information, and campaign interest are significant predictors of engagement while the other items vary in terms of significance.

Keywords

election campaign, Internet, political participation, political parties, India, media effects

Barack Obama's 2008 presidential election campaign, with its grassroots online engagement, is often considered a model for bringing citizens as stakeholders into the election campaign process (Stromer-Galley 2014). Nevertheless, traditional media still occupy

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an important place in the evolving campaign media ecology in advanced industrial democracies in what Chadwick (2013) has termed the hybrid media system. Digital information channels are opening new pathways of influence on political attitudes and participation (Gil et al. 2010). Political parties have leveraged new forms of information channels, including relatively individualized digital channels such as social media, blogs, and text messaging in the mix of evolving hybrid media environments that include traditional mass channels (Chadwick 2013; Dalrymple and Scheufele 2007; Hendricks and Denton 2010; Lilleker and Vedel 2013; Stromer-Galley 2014). Studies have focused on effects of a mixed/hybrid regime of information channels on political knowledge and civic participation (Dimitrova et al. 2011; Shah et al. 2005). Given the changing information pathways in a hybrid media environment, it does not come as a surprise to learn that these studies share the common finding of minimal effects.

In this evolving web of information ecology, scholars have recognized the potential for a return to what was reported in the early days of communication research by Klapper (1960) as the “minimal effects” paradigm, not only because of rich media diversity especially since the growth of the Internet (Bennett and Iyengar 2008). It is also because in the hybrid information ecology, a compelling case can be made for another long-standing concept in communication research to reemerge: The “two-step flow” model of personal influence, in which political information is filtered through social interactions with others, is emerging in both face-to-face and online communities (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). In the 1950s, society was relatively more localized and cohesive around group identities, whereas today, the digital revolution has given rise to a sharing culture built around individualized information channels that are networked in a wider social world, contrary to the atomized society that some scholars had predicted (Putnam 2000). Yet, the evidence comes mostly from western democracies with advanced traditional as well as new digital media environments.

Less is known about the evolution of hybrid media systems in countries such as India, in which access to the Internet is still quite low despite the growing use of mobile technology by ordinary citizens, as is the case in many low-income economies. India offers an interesting case study of a nonwestern democracy in the global South that is witnessing growth in print, electronic, and Internet channels while those in rural areas remain far less likely to have Internet access. A study of the Internet in India’s 2004 national election found that although most major parties had Web sites, the impact was limited due to spotty access (Tekwani and Shetty 2007). Access increased significantly in urban areas by the time of the 2014 national election. We argue that to understand the influence of the new hybrid information ecology in India, we need to look at the ways in which political parties campaigned and citizens engaged with campaigning in the urban context via traditional and digital channels of information. Our focus is on how use of the Internet, compared with other sources and channels of information, influenced public engagement with each of the parties’ campaigns. We draw on surveys in India’s three largest cities that also had the largest number of Internet users in 2014: the nation’s capital city of Delhi, which is also a Union Territory or State, in the North; Bengaluru, formerly known as Bangalore, in the State of

Karnataka in the South, described as India's software and defense industry hub; and Mumbai, the nation's finance capital in the State of Maharashtra in the West.

Although Internet penetration is still low in terms of the percentage of India's population, a more rapid process of change in access may be on the horizon. By June 2015, the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMI) estimated the number of Internet users to be at 350 million and to reach more than four hundred million by the year's end, although that still leaves two-thirds of the country's 1.2 billion unconnected (Beaver 2015). Assuming access continues to grow, it reminds us of the early work on "wired cities" in western contexts in which scholars imagined the multitude of possibilities for social change given widespread use of the Internet (Danziger and Kraemer 1986; Dutton 1987). India has been described as one of the leading countries, and crucial for explaining emerging trends, in the "New Internet World," a world in which the majority of users are from countries that "were not prominent" in the early years of the Internet (Dutton et al. 2013: 4).

Our discussion of India's party political context and evolving hybrid media system precedes our sections "Research Questions and Hypotheses," "Method and Model," and "Findings." In the section "Conclusion," we discuss the significance and limitations of this research, and the prospects for campaign engagement given the growing number of Internet users.

The Political Context of India

India has a multiparty political system with two national political parties and many smaller regional parties. Most regional parties are primarily active in one or two of the twenty-nine ethno-linguistic states and National Territories that constitute the federal polity. At the national level, electoral competition is between two major political alliances that form coalition governments: United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the center-left Indian National Congress (INC) party, which has ruled the country for most of the period since Independence in 1947, and National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the center-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). While both parties, INC and BJP, speak about inclusivity of all Indians on their Web sites, the INC is ideologically progressive and favored by the Muslim minority while the BJP is conservative and is identified with the Hindu majority. Since the 1980s, there has been a vibrant history of electoral volatility and vote switching between parties in the UPA and NDA alliances, and across them.

In addition to the two major parties and their coalition partners in the alliances, a new insurgent political party, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), also emerged as a major contender in the 2014 national election to the Lok Sabha, the national parliament. Launched in 2012 in Delhi, the AAP emerged from the anticorruption movement (known in Hindi as the Jan Lokpal Andolan) in 2009–2011 led by Anna Hazare, who made world news and the cover of *Times India* calling for an end to political corruption and urging the passage of legislation to provide for an independent authority to investigate politicians and government officials (Kumar 2014b). The AAP surprised the nation by taking twenty-eight seats out of seventy in the Delhi Assembly election

in December 2013, and it formed a minority government led by party leader Arvind Kejriwal who, only two months later, stepped down from the job of Delhi Chief Minister to run as a contender for the prime minister position by declaring himself a candidate against the BJP's Narendra Modi in the constituency of Varanasi, India's holiest city.

India's Hybrid Media System

Chadwick (2013) provides a compelling analysis of the complexity of hybrid media systems in which political life is mediated through the web of networked actions involving offline and online communication as well as grassroots activism. The arrival of newer media does not displace older media but instead facilitates the emergence of a hybridized media system. Mobile phones are a good example of this phenomenon; once only used for communication between two people, they have now become multimedia devices that are used for a plethora of activities including social communication. Yet, research has also shown that the Internet is far from revolutionary and democratizing given that the medium has largely benefited those elite political actors who were active in the mass media era (Margolis and Resnick 2000). The new hybrid media ecology, in which traditional journalistic processes compete with new citizen-driven digital media, also makes it difficult to identify the creators and sponsors of media frames of events or news (Hermida 2010).

The context in which similar developments in the shift to a hybrid media system are occurring in India is made more complex because the country has not one but several media systems and party systems, based on particular regional configurations of competition. India's complexity is both driven by, and to a great extent reinforced by, the nature of the growing news market, which is occupied by multiple vernacular Indian languages as well as English (Neyazi 2010, 2014).

Regular (short messaging service [SMS] capable) mobile phones are important for our understanding of information flows and symbiotic relationships among all actors in the 2014 electoral campaign. About 70 percent of all Internet users in India accessed the Web via smartphones in 2014 (Kemp 2014). There was a much higher percentage of voters using regular cell phones in 2014. The significance of mobile phones and access to social media applications was by no means lost to the political parties during the campaign. The use of Twitter on smartphones and texting via SMS on both regular cell phones and smartphones to influence and shape campaign information flows was widely witnessed and reported, especially in urban constituencies (Goyal 2014). Research found that the BJP and its leader Narendra Modi exploited the emerging hybridity and successfully bypassed the traditional news media, which they viewed as inimical toward the party, to reach out to their supporters (Baishya 2015).

The comparatively low Internet penetration rate in India has led many political analysts to discount the capacity of the social media to have any significant impact on political communication. But such a view ignores the convergence and interconnectivity between newer and older media and the ways they influence each other. Current

affairs prime-time television programs during the campaign were broadcasting live tweets on the screen during talk shows and interviews with political actors that at times influenced the discussion, and viewers without access to social media were made aware of social media. Political parties now tailor their content for multiple forms of consumption that can be reappropriated and reassembled in different platforms to suit the requirements of a particular medium, a process that Howard (2006) refers to as a hypermedia campaign in which communication is relayed simultaneously across a wide range of outlets.

Although the Internet and cell phones were embedded in campaign strategies in India in 2014, the Internet had not reduced the importance of grassroots campaigning characterized by face-to-face contact with political parties on the streets and their door-to-door canvassing. Parties in India's cities often set up booths in the vicinity of one another and shout out to passersby to take a leaflet, rather like a vendor shouts to attract customers in a traditional outdoor market. And just as in the market, many shoppers have a look at what is on offer from the different vendors.

Large billboards on the roads and posters on the streets are also important and play a major role, and political parties compete for space in the best strategic locations for their advertising. The parties also rely heavily in terms of advertising spent on traditional media, including newspapers, television, and radio, the last of which reaches an estimated 158 million listeners and was an important venue for the BJP ad spend in 2014 (*The Economic Times* 2014).

The 2014 Lok Sabha Campaign

Three unprecedented developments came together just months before the campaign's official launch in March 2014. The first was the recognition that millions of young people would be eligible to vote for the first time, a group that is more inclined to obtain political information online. The second was the growth of Internet access particularly in the cities, and the growing use of new media and social networks especially by young adults, including the vast majority who were *without* smartphones. And for those with smartphones but who lacked an expensive data package, it was not an impediment to having a Facebook page as mobile phone companies were offering Facebook access at a nominal price of Rs. 1 (<0.5 cents).¹ The third was the uncertainty provided by the disruptive force of the AAP.

India's Electoral Commission runs the national elections that are held in multiple phases to guarantee voter security at the polls. As India voted in nine phases in 2014, one could argue that there were nine different campaigns. There is a national ban on reporting *exit polls*, which minimizes bandwagon effects in subsequent phases of voting. Opinion polls were permitted and were the subject of much discussion in the prime-time shows in different news channels, as well as in newspapers and on social media. By late April and early May, there were debates on whether there was a "Modi wave, or Modi hype" in the media (Kumar 2014a). Sentiment scores for political parties and leaders were published daily throughout the campaign in many newspapers, on television, and online news and aggregation sites.

Party Strategies and Party Leaders

With three party leaders the subject of most public opinion polls in January 2014, the leaders were emphasized to varying degrees in each party's national strategy. At the same time, given the fact that India does not have a one party system, local strategies could be expected to vary. From the outset, across the country, the AAP and the BJP emphasized the competencies and strong personalities of their party leaders, touting their prime ministerial potential. However, the INC's Rahul Gandhi had early on announced that he wanted to run the campaign but did not want to be considered as the INC prime ministerial candidate even though his name was used by pollsters along with Mr. Kejriwal's and Mr. Modi's in the "most favored Prime Minister" question.

The BJP announced early on that the party had identified 160 "digital constituencies" ripe for a digital strategy, many of which were in urban areas in which the party could communicate online via a social networking service (SNS) to a sufficient number of volunteers and potential supporters so that a robust digital strategy would accompany the BJP's more traditional channels of campaigning, which included SMS messaging on regular cell phones (Kaushal and Agarwal 2013). The 160 seats, including all constituencies in eight states, were those in which digital would be "an amplifier and booster" to traditional campaigning tools (Kaushal and Agarwal 2013). The BJP then developed a way to play speeches on regular mobile phones and distribute Mr. Modi's tweets via SMS text messaging to those who could not access the Internet. The BJP's 2014 digital campaign strategy was marked by Mr. Modi's online and related activities, while both BJP and INC used online tools to track and predict vote support (Sruthijith 2013). All parties also utilized the local innovation of the "missed call" advertising strategy to engage and gain supporters (*First Post* 2014).

The BJP's "Mission 272+" involved a national program of volunteers who communicated daily with the platform's national headquarters in Bengaluru to build a database of cell numbers from supporters who could then receive SMS messages, calls, and invitations from the party and Mr. Modi himself. In comparison with the BJP's central strategy and platform, the AAP's national strategy appeared to ride even more on the reputation of Mr. Kejriwal, the party's leader, than on any central implementation of a campaign strategy. Mr. Gandhi was much less evident online, focused more on traditional media, and lacked a clear digital strategy.

In Delhi, the competition was largely between AAP and BJP, with INC in the background. The BJP won all of Delhi's seven Lok Sabha seats. The main contest in Bengaluru was between BJP and INC, despite the presence of Janata Dal Secular (JD(S)), a regional political party, and the new party, AAP. This was also evident in the election result as the BJP won all three urban seats in Bengaluru, and nearly 90 percent of votes were shared between the BJP and INC, with both JD(S) and AAP a distant third. The electoral battle in Mumbai was more interesting as there were already three dominant regional parties—Shiv Sena, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) on the right and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on the left, in addition to the two national parties BJP and INC, along with the new AAP. Shiv Sena, a right-wing party

with strong anti-immigrant rhetoric, had a formal alliance with BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha campaign, while NCP had an alliance with INC. The MNS party fought the election on its own without success. The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance took all six parliamentary seats.

In terms of the issues, the AAP championed the issue of corruption, but the party also focused on the issues of women's safety and law and order. While these three topics were also acknowledged by the campaigns of the INC and BJP, the two parties approached voters with emphases on different issues. INC focused on jobs and employment while the BJP focused on the issues of inflation and economic growth, for example. INC also utilized newspaper advertising to emphasize its strong stance against communal violence, implying such an environment would again emerge if a BJP-led coalition were to come into office. While AAP, INC, and BJP each utilized digital tools, the general consensus was that the BJP's digital campaign was the most robust, engaging, and strategic of the three parties (Price 2015).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The campaign strategies of all major political parties in advanced industrial economies seem to have incorporated the hybrid media ecology into their respective campaign strategies (Lilleker and Vedel 2013). In major metropolitan cities, Internet access had reached a critical mass of about one-third or more of the population, which suggests that India is witnessing an emergence of a hybrid media system and potentially a growing importance of face-to-face contact and interpersonal networks in influencing political engagement. In view of the massive digital divide in the country, online channels in 2014 were being used to supplement the far more common traditional campaign communication channels.

Hypotheses

We are interested in how online activity by potential voters may lead to political engagement with each political party's campaign. We use a broad definition of political engagement, described below, as the dependent variable in each model (Galston 2001). Our main research question is:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How did traditional face-to-face campaigning compare with electronic campaigning by each of the three parties in the 2014 Lok Sabha election among our respondents, in terms of their respective influence?

Although digital has been growing, we expect to find that in 2014, traditional face-to-face approaches remain influential. As cell phones, including smartphones, have become an important part of the tools available to political parties and citizens, we also expect that telephone contact in the form of calls and SMS texts will influence political engagement, but that face-to-face contacts will remain more important. And as the sharing of information has long been an important part of the influence process, given

the “two-step flow” model, we expect that sharing will be an important influence on political engagement.

Given the context of the three cities in our study in 2014 in which a not insubstantial minority of citizens accessed the Internet, and guided by the literature from western democracies on political engagement, our general hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Political engagement in each of the parties’ campaigns will be significantly influenced by party contacts and online activity, controlling for issue salience, campaign interest, exposure to outdoor publicity, attention to campaign news in traditional media, and demographics.

We also have specific hypotheses for each of our groups of independent variables:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Party contacts, both face-to-face and telephone (calls, SMS, SNS, e-mail), will be significant predictors of engagement with each party campaign, with face-to-face contact remaining more important, controlling for all other variables in the model.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Sharing information, both face-to-face and electronically (via social media, SMS text, e-mail, and WhatsApp), will be significant predictors of engagement with each party campaign, controlling for all other variables in the model.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Demographics (age, education, gender) will not display a consistent pattern as predictors across the parties. All parties sought to attract first-time and younger voters. We expect that voters with less education will be more engaged in the campaigns of INC and AAP, and that women will be significantly less engaged than men with the BJP’s campaign, controlling for all other variables in the model.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): General campaign interest and the salience of issues will be significant predictors of engagement with each party’s campaign, controlling for all other variables in the model.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Attention to campaign information in traditional media, including newspapers, television, and radio, and party publicity (outdoor posters and leaflets) will emerge as significant predictors of engagement but inconsistently across the parties, controlling for all other variables in the model.

Method and Model

Surveys

We utilized a merged data set of three cross-sectional representative surveys in the cities of Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, to maximize the number of respondents as well as the number of Internet users in our analysis. Using the merged data set ($N = 6,254$), we have an overall average of 40.8 percent of respondents who are Internet users, varying from 38.8 percent in Mumbai ($n = 1,949$), to 40.2 percent in Delhi ($n = 2,876$) and 44.9 percent in Bengaluru ($n = 1,429$).

The sample for each city was based on proportionate to population sampling (PPS) method and is demographically representative of the residents of the city. We did not weight the data. Delhi respondents were interviewed over a period of two weeks before citizens went to the polls on April 10. The response rate was 55.6 percent, based on 5,171 doors knocked. In Bengaluru, 2,812 households were contacted, of which 1,429 completed the survey with a response rate of 50.8 percent, while in Mumbai, 4,425 households were contacted, of which 1,949 completed the survey with a response rate of 44 percent. Bengaluru residents went to the polls on April 17, and residents of Mumbai voted on April 24.²

Model

We present three models with identical independent variables; each model predicts political engagement with one party's campaign. The dependent variable is described below. Table 1 presents the means and Cronbach's alpha for the scales and each of the variables in the model, with Table 1 including all independent variables except for party contacts, which are in Table 2. Table 3 pertains to the dependent variable in each party model. The measures are described further below in the context of the ordinary least squares regression model. See Table 1.

Our independent variables include the following:

Demographics. We include age, gender, and education. Age is on a 6-point scale dividing the participants into groups from *youngest* = 1 to *oldest* = 6. Gender is included as a dummy variable, with female scored as 1. Almost one-quarter of the population remains illiterate, and many work as daily-wage laborers in big cities. Education was measured on an 8-point scale, grouped from *illiterate* = 1 to those with *college degree* = 8.

Campaign interest and issue salience. We assume that respondents who are more likely to be politically engaged are the ones who show interest in the campaign and the issues being debated in the elections. Campaign interest was measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = *no interest* to 4 = *very interested*. To measure issue salience, the following items were measured individually on a 5-point scale with 1 = *not at all important* and 5 = *very important*—price rise/inflation, corruption, law and order, women's safety, communalism/religious strife, jobs, and economic growth. These descriptions for the items on scale are translations from the original survey languages of Hindi in Delhi, Marathi in Mumbai, and Kannad in Bengaluru. The individual issue items were computed to arrive at a 5-point Likert-type scale for issue salience.

News media (traditional and online). We measured attention to "news about national politics" in newspapers, on television, and on radio, with one question about each medium, using a 5-point scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *moderate amount*, 4 = *a lot*, and 5 = *a great deal*).

Table 1. Measures Used in the Models Predicting Engagement with the Political Parties' Campaigns: Potential Influences on Political Engagement.

| Independent Variables | M | SD |
|---|------|------|
| Age | 3.04 | 1.34 |
| Education | 5.62 | 1.66 |
| Campaign interest | 2.72 | 1.12 |
| Issue salience (Cronbach's alpha = .71) | 4.30 | 0.55 |
| Price rise/inflation | 4.64 | 0.69 |
| Corruption | 4.59 | 0.73 |
| Law and order | 4.31 | 0.93 |
| Women's safety | 4.45 | 0.84 |
| Communalism/religious strife | 4.59 | 1.22 |
| Jobs | 4.35 | 0.83 |
| Economic growth | 4.22 | 1.02 |
| Outdoor publicity (Cronbach's alpha = .87) | 2.14 | 1.86 |
| Pamphlets | 1.96 | 1.92 |
| Posters and billboards | 2.34 | 2.02 |
| Attention to campaign in newspapers | 2.73 | 1.13 |
| Attention to campaign television | 3.24 | 1.02 |
| Attention to campaign on radio | 2.07 | 1.16 |
| Sharing info (digital) (Cronbach's alpha = .84) | 0.70 | 1.25 |
| Social media | 0.68 | 1.51 |
| SMS (text) on cell phone | 1.19 | 1.79 |
| WhatsApp on smart phone | 0.45 | 1.22 |
| E-mails | 0.49 | 1.95 |
| Sharing info (face-to-face) | 1.94 | 1.95 |

Note. SMS = short messaging service.

Party outdoor publicity. To measure influence of attention paid to campaign publicity, we included measures for party electioneering pamphlets, and party posters and billboards. We used a 5-point scale (1 = *less often*, 2 = *once in two weeks*, 3 = *1 or 2 days in a week*, 4 = *3–5 days in a week*, and 5 = *daily*). The separate items were merged to compute a 5-point party outdoor publicity scale (Cronbach's alpha = .87). We did not include advertising in news media as it would conflate with our attention measures for news about national politics in newspapers, television, and radio.

Sharing of political information with other citizens. In a growing sharing culture, much personal influence is taking place both via digital tools and traditional face-to-face interactions. Digital items included social media, text messages on phones, and in e-mails. Frequency of sharing was measured on a 7-point scale (0 = *never*, 1 = *less often*, 2 = *once in two weeks*, 3 = *1–2 days a week*, 4 = *3–5 days a week*, 5 = *once a day*, and 6 = *multiple times a day*).

Table 2. Measures Used in the Models Predicting Engagement with the Political Parties' Campaigns: Party Contact.

| Independent Variables: Party Contact | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Party Contact AAP | — | — |
| Telephone (Cronbach's alpha = .71) | 0.16 | 0.43 |
| Call | 0.15 | 0.52 |
| SMS/text message | 0.18 | 0.54 |
| Face-to-face (Cronbach's alpha = .73) | 0.38 | 0.67 |
| At home | 0.28 | 0.64 |
| On street | 0.47 | 0.85 |
| Party Contact INC | — | — |
| Telephone (Cronbach's alpha = .59) | 0.16 | 0.43 |
| Call | 0.15 | 0.49 |
| SMS/text message | 0.17 | 0.53 |
| Face-to-face (Cronbach's alpha = .75) | 0.52 | 0.79 |
| At home | 0.44 | 0.80 |
| On street | 0.61 | 0.95 |
| Party Contact BJP | — | — |
| Telephone (Cronbach's alpha = .59) | 0.23 | 0.52 |
| Call | 0.22 | 0.60 |
| SMS/text message | 0.25 | 0.63 |
| Face-to-face (Cronbach's alpha = .73) | 0.59 | 0.81 |
| At home | 0.49 | 0.84 |
| On street | 0.69 | 0.97 |

Note. AAP = Aam Aadmi Party; SMS = short messaging service; INC = Indian National Congress; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party.

Contacts made by party campaign. To measure contacts made with potential voters by each party's campaign, we included the following two channels of communication: telephone (voice) and telephone (SMS/text). The nonmedia channels included face-to-face interaction with party worker (on streets and at home). The four contact channels were measured on a 4-point scale (0 = *never*, 1 = *once*, 2 = *twice*, and 3 = *more than twice*). The two telephone items were merged to compute a 4-point telephone contact scale. Similarly, the two face-to-face contact measures were merged to compute a 4-point face-to-face contact scale.

Political engagement. Engagement was measured as involved with activities of political parties by participating in party political rallies, party neighborhood meetings, door-to-door canvassing, contribution of money to party campaigns (offline), distributing party campaign material (leaflets), and watching campaign videos. Each form of engagement with a party's campaign was measured with a 4-point scale (0 = *never*, 1 = *once*, 2 = *twice*, and 3 = *more than twice*). The items were merged to create a 4-point political engagement scale as in Table 3.

Table 3. Measures Used in the Models Predicting Engagement with the Political Parties' Campaigns: Voter Engagement with the Electoral Campaigns of the Parties.

| Dependent Variable: Political Engagement in Each Party's Campaign | M | SD |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Engagement in AAP campaign (Cronbach's alpha = .72) | 0.04 | 0.16 |
| Political rallies | 0.10 | 0.38 |
| Neighborhood meetings | 0.07 | 0.35 |
| Door-to-door canvasing | 0.05 | 0.28 |
| Collected money | 0.02 | 0.18 |
| Donated money | 0.01 | 0.13 |
| Distributed leaflets/literature | 0.04 | 0.24 |
| Watched party campaign videos | 0.04 | 0.26 |
| Engagement in INC campaign (Cronbach's alpha = .68) | 0.07 | 0.20 |
| Political rallies | 0.17 | 0.51 |
| Neighborhood meetings | 0.11 | 0.40 |
| Door-to-Door canvasing | 0.05 | 0.27 |
| Collected money | 0.02 | 0.18 |
| Donated money | 0.01 | 0.14 |
| Distributed leaflets/literature | 0.08 | 0.38 |
| Watched campaign videos | 0.10 | 0.40 |
| Engagement in BJP campaign (Cronbach's alpha = .70) | 0.09 | 0.23 |
| Political rallies | 0.20 | 0.57 |
| Neighborhood meetings | 0.12 | 0.44 |
| Door-to-door canvasing | 0.07 | 0.35 |
| Collected money | 0.02 | 0.17 |
| Donated money | 0.02 | 0.18 |
| Distributed leaflets/literature | 0.12 | 0.43 |
| Watched party campaign videos | 0.12 | 0.44 |

Note. N = 6,250 respondents in Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai interviewed in March and April 2014. AAP = Aam Aadmi Party; INC = Indian National Congress; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party.

Findings

We find that two variables are consistently important in predicting political engagement with the campaigns of each of the three parties: party contact and sharing information. The findings from the multivariate regression analyses are provided in Table 4.

H1, that political engagement in each of the parties' campaigns will be significantly influenced by party contact and online activity, controlling for all other variables in the model, is thus supported. How did traditional face-to-face party contact compare with digital or electronic contact in terms of influencing political engagement? Face-to-face party contact was consistently significant and the most robust of all the independent variables whereas telephone contact, while important, was less important across all three parties, supporting H2. The Betas for engagement with the BJP's campaign from party face-to-face contact (.316) and telephone contact (.216) by BJP were the strongest

Table 4. Predicting Political Engagement with the Campaigns.

| Independent Variables | BJP | | | INC | | | AAP | | |
|------------------------------------|----------|------|----------|----------|------|----------|----------|------|----------|
| | B | SE | Beta | B | SE | Beta | B | SE | Beta |
| Constant | -.112 | .026 | | -.092 | .023 | | -.006 | .019 | |
| Age | -.001 | .002 | -.004 | .004** | .002 | .029** | -.003 | .002 | -.020 |
| Female | -.016*** | .006 | -.034*** | .000 | .005 | .001 | -.009* | .004 | -.027* |
| Education | -.001 | .002 | -.007 | -.004** | .002 | -.032** | -.003* | .001 | -.026* |
| Issue salience | .002*** | .005 | .005*** | .016*** | .004 | .041*** | .004 | .004 | .014 |
| Campaign interest | .016*** | .003 | .076*** | .009*** | .002 | .048*** | .005** | .002 | .030** |
| Party outdoor publicity | .014*** | .002 | .110*** | .002 | .001 | .017 | .002* | .001 | .026* |
| Face-to-face contact (AAP) | -.033*** | .006 | -.094*** | -.042*** | .005 | -.138*** | .069*** | .004 | .276*** |
| Face-to-face contact (INC) | -.038*** | .005 | -.128*** | .108*** | .005 | .413*** | -.020*** | .004 | -.095*** |
| Face-to-face contact (BJP) | .092*** | .005 | .316*** | -.041*** | .005 | -.060*** | -.015*** | .004 | -.070*** |
| Telephone contact (AAP) | -.010 | .007 | -.021 | .005 | .006 | .011 | .077*** | .005 | .224*** |
| Telephone contact (INC) | .020** | .008 | .037** | .079*** | .007 | .165*** | -.010 | .006 | -.026 |
| Telephone contact (BJP) | .097*** | .007 | .216*** | -.010 | .006 | -.026 | .009 | .005 | .028 |
| Attention to newspapers | .001 | .003 | -.004 | .014*** | .003 | .075*** | .001 | .002 | .007 |
| Attention to television | .020*** | .003 | .088*** | .002 | .003 | .008 | .000 | .002 | .002 |
| Attention to radio | .005 | .003 | .025 | -.003 | .002 | -.017 | .001 | .002 | .008 |
| Sharing info (face-to-face) | .005*** | .002 | .039*** | .002 | .001 | .019 | .004*** | .001 | .004*** |
| Sharing of campaign info (digital) | .015*** | .002 | .080*** | .022*** | .002 | .133*** | .011*** | .002 | .083*** |

Note. Model 1: Political Engagement with BJP $R^2 = .193^{***}$ $N = 6,125$. Model 2: Political Engagement with INC $R^2 = .167^{***}$ $N = 6,125$. Model 3: Political Engagement with AAP $R^2 = .149^{***}$ $N = 6,125$. BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; INC = Indian National Congress; AAP = Aam Aadmi Party.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

predictors in the BJP model, which were also the case in the INC model for the Beta for face-to-face contact (.413) by INC and telephone contact (.165) by INC in predicting engagement with INC’s campaign. For the new AAP, the Betas were closer for each type of contact than with the two older parties. For the AAP model, the Betas were face-to-face (.276) by AAP, and telephone contact (.224) by AAP, for engagement with AAP’s campaign. Our expectations were confirmed that telephone contact in the form of calls, SMS texts, on cell phones, and online contact on smartphones will influence political engagement, but in 2014, this was less important than face-to-face contact. It is also noteworthy that face-to-face contact with other parties was also significant but in the negative direction in each model, indicative of the dynamic and multiparty ways in which citizens were approached at home and on the streets in these cities. We also see that in the model predicting engagement with the BJP, telephone contact from the INC actually contributed significantly and positively, and this could be a result of INC’s approach to calling potential voters as well our respondents’ feelings about the incumbent party.

Sharing information digitally was consistently significant across all three parties, supporting H3, and of greater influence than sharing information face-to-face, in predicting engagement in each of the party’s campaigns. As sharing information has long been an important part of the influence process, given the “two-step flow” model, we conclude that influence via electronic sharing was more effective than face-to-face sharing. Yet the Beta for sharing digitally was always smaller than the Beta for party telephone contact in

each model. Telephones were important in establishing citizens as influencers when they were using them to share information about the campaign, but party contact by telephone was a stronger predictor of engagement with the party's campaign in each model.

With respect to demographics, there was not a common pattern across all parties. Women were significantly less inclined than men to be engaged with BJP and AAP campaigns, but gender was not a significant predictor of INC engagement. Older and lower educated citizens were significantly more likely to be engaged with the INC's and AAP's campaign, but neither education nor age were a significant predictor of engagement with the BJP's campaign, supporting H4.

While general campaign interest was a significant predictor of engagement in each party model, supporting H5, issue salience was less important than campaign interest and significant only for BJP and INC. This may be because the AAP was largely running on one issue, as the anticorruption party.

Outdoor party publicity (large posters on the streets, pamphlets, and leaflets) was significant in the BJP model, with a strong Beta (.110), following face-to-face and telephone contact with the BJP. However, INC party publicity outdoors was not significant in the INC model. AAP publicity was significant but with a low Beta (.026) in the AAP model.

Attention to political information in the press, on television, and radio did not display any particular pattern in predicting engagement across the parties. Attention to television was the only significant measure of the three media in the BJP model, whereas attention to political information in newspapers was the only significant variable of the three in the INC model. Attention to any of these three forms of traditional media was not a significant predictor of engagement with AAP's campaign.

One possible explanation for these findings is research that suggests the nonbusiness press in India is traditionally a more progressive source of news than vernacular television news and especially the most popular Hindi news programs viewed by our respondents that are part of independent or family corporations traditionally supportive of the center right (Downey and Neyazi 2014). We did not ask about exposure to political advertising on television or in the press because it would conflate with our attention measure that specifically asked how much attention was paid to information about national politics in each of these media. So another part of the explanation for this finding that attention to information in the press significantly supported engagement with the INC campaign, whereas attention to campaign news on TV supported engagement with the BJP's campaign, could be that respondents were influenced by political advertising in these venues.

These three models predicting engagement with each of the parties' campaigns were each significant ($***p < .001$), with the overall R^2 for the BJP model being .193, INC .167, and AAP .149, as shown at the bottom of Table 4.

Discussion

Our study shows that respondents from Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai who shared information with others, either online or face-to-face, were significantly likely to be

engaged with a political party's campaign. Sharing information was a significant predictor for political engagement in each of the three parties' campaigns, controlling for all other variables in the political engagement models. Party contact (face-to-face) was the most important predictor of political engagement, followed by party contact via phone. Our findings support earlier research in western contexts that found evidence of online participation leading to political engagement (di Gennaro and Dutton 2006).

Our study is limited by the fact that our models are based on cross-sectional surveys and confined to three major cities. With cross-sectional data, we cannot confirm causality. Nevertheless, we have benchmarked the significant contribution for political engagement made by both traditional forms of campaigning and online activity. India's urban campaigning contexts may serve as a paradigmatic case for other low per capita income democracies in the global South experiencing growing mobile use and Internet access. This case study of India's first Internet election may help to generate expectations about how digital media work alongside other media and communication in promoting campaign engagement in electoral contexts different from those in higher per capita income democracies.

An important implication of the findings of this study is that as the penetration of digital media grows further in growing economies such as India's, especially in rural areas, we will see more use of social media and mobile phones in electoral campaigns by all the political parties, which will likely increase the influence of mediated interpersonal channels and their feedback in the flow of information coming through traditional news sources in a hybrid media environment. In 2014, BJP and AAP, and their respective leaders Mr. Modi and Mr. Kejriwal, used their tweets and SMS/text messages to foster the buzz on their issues during the campaign and also attract traditional media toward them by trending on social media (Pal 2015).

Mr. Modi's 2014 campaign is perceived as heralding a new era in political communication practices in the country. At the same time, many commentators questioned the role of media in setting the agenda for the public. The extensive use by Narendra Modi of both online and traditional media for campaigning has been dubbed as "maidan" to "media" (Sardesai 2014). Traditionally, the most visible and high impact campaign events were big public rallies that were mostly, and are still, held in "maidan" or the public grounds in most cities that are meant for holding large public events. But Mr. Modi did not hold fewer rallies than the other party leaders, indeed, he held far more. He simply added another highly visible communication layer to his campaign over which he and his followers had direct control—social media updates via Twitter, Facebook, and Google+, among others. A hybrid logic informed Mr. Modi's campaign that creatively combined the logic of older and newer media and integrated it with traditional campaigning styles, targeting grassroots mobilization, organizing rallies and volunteer activism both within and outside of India among the diaspora, radio, entertainment media, mobile messaging, and recorded calls as well as innovative mobile apps, all of which have forever changed the dynamics of political communication in India.

Strategy, specifically each party's decisions on where, when, and how to deploy campaign resources, influenced many of the multiparty constituency battles for the

543 Lok Sabha seats in 2014. The incumbent INC obtained 106.9 million votes (19.3 percent) but lost 163 seats and held only 44. The AAP obtained 11.3 million votes (2 percent) and won four seats. The BJP, with 171.7 million votes (31 percent), won an absolute majority with 282 seats. Across the country, 52.3 percent of votes cast were for these three parties, while the remaining 47.7 percent were spread across more than three-dozen regional parties.

The BJP's comparatively technologically sophisticated campaign strategy in 2014 may be an indication of what we might expect from all parties by the time of the next Lok Sabha election in 2019. In the 2015 state-level elections, the BJP was more than matched by the AAP in Delhi and by a united opposition in Bihar. Upcoming state-level elections mark important milestones for assessing party campaigning, citizen engagement, and the growth in the numbers of people using online media to access political information in India's evolving hybrid media systems.

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Notes

1. Singh (2013). See also: Airtel Commercial August 2013. Facebook for 1 Rupee. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amKXT_0araU (accessed July 26, 2015). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_9V4Ykt_i4 (accessed July 26, 2015).
2. Fieldwork in Delhi was conducted from March 22 through April 6; Bengaluru: April 18 through April 27; Mumbai: May 1 through May 13. The Delhi sample was larger as it was the first wave of a panel.

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Book Reviews

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Engin Isin and Evelyn Ruppert

Being Digital Citizens. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015; 220 pp. ISBN 978-1-78348-055-5

Reviewed by: Brian McNair, *Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD, Australia*

DOI: 10.1177/1940161216649949

The concept of digital citizenship has become increasingly important to our understanding of the relationship between media and political action, and the possibilities for democratization, decentralization, and diversification of power offered by the Internet. In the era of the digitalization of just about everything, citizenship and its related concepts are in processes of technology-driven transformation, with important implications for the global future of democratic culture. Isin and Ruppert's book is a timely engagement with these questions, and with the emerging notion of the "digital subject." As they ask in the first chapter, "if what we are saying and doing through the Internet is dramatically changing political life, what then of the subjects of politics?" Elsewhere they observe that "the struggle over the things we say and do through the Internet is now a political struggle of our times" (p. 2).

The concept of digital citizenship is of course itself a subject of struggle, or at least of debate, as to its meaning. It may refer to at least three broad categories of activity entered into with a political or civic motivation: access to and use of the Internet by citizens as a means of obtaining and sharing information, the use of the Internet by governors to enhance citizenship (as in the online release of information, or the provision of tools for online voting), and the use of the Internet by citizens to campaign or advocate for political action. Isin and Ruppert address each of these dimensions in *Being Digital Citizens*, within a distinctively Foucauldian theoretical framework which stresses the subjectivity of the online user, and his or her capacity to articulate and advance "digital rights claims" as a defining feature of citizenship. Put more simply, "How do conventions such as microblogging [Twitter] platforms configure actions and create possibilities for digital citizens to act?"

The authors are clear that digital citizenship implies both rights and responsibilities, but are more concerned with the former insofar as they identify and focus on acts of "being digital": citizen journalism, for example, defined here as digitally enhanced witnessing which aspires to the role and functioning of the predigital Fourth Estate, but is "performed" by not-journalists to a degree never previously possible. Then too is the much broader category of user-generated content, which includes forms of communication by digital citizens that may be accidental and random, or noisy and

chaotic, lacking the structural or aesthetic characteristics of what used to be called “journalism.” Today, an article published online by a professional journalist will often be accompanied by hundreds of readers’ comments, often short, angry, even abusive of the author, or of other commenters. The nature of journalism, and of the public sphere in which it embedded, is changing radically.

The digital transformation of journalistic culture is a big topic on its own, and if this book has a flaw, it is perhaps that there simply is not enough space in 160 pages to discuss the myriad questions and debates referenced by the authors. The section on citizen journalism highlights some important trends, but can do no more than summarize the key literature and scholarly debates. Similarly, references to Assange, WikiLeaks, and Snowden in their capacities as data dumpers and whistle-blowers are tantalizingly brief, leaving the reader wanting more.

The authors’ main concern in this study is with the performativity of digital citizenship, aspects of which occupy the first five chapters of the book. By this they mean the acts of participation in and engagement with the digital communication system which articulate and signify the citizenship (actual or aspirational) of the online user. Through these “doings and sayings,” online subjects become digital citizens, “we approach cyberspace,” Isin and Ruppert explain, “as a relational space in which digital citizens come into being through digital acts” (p. 35). In doing so, they are centrally concerned with the digital dynamics of control and power as exercised in acts of social protest, democratic deliberation, and other markers of citizenship online.

Chapters 3 to 6 then go through a range of speech and digital acts which the authors deem significant in terms of citizenship—“callings” (chapter 4), referring to participation, connectivity, and sharing; “closings” (chapter 5), meaning the capacity to filter and track information; and “openings” (chapter 6), including the witnessing of the citizen journalist, hacking, and “commoning,” or the removal of copyright and other restrictions on resources such as software and content.

In laying out these species of act, not unique to but greatly enhanced by the digital environment, the authors avoid declaratory statements of a utopian or dystopian kind. Rather, they sketch out an intriguing, often enlightening conceptual framework that can assist our understanding of the ever more complex digital space, and the capacities it provides for citizens now and in the future.

Jessica L. Beyer

Expect Us: Online Communities and Political Mobilization. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; 197 pp. £19.99, ISBN: 9780199330751

Reviewed by: Paolo Gerbaudo, *King’s College London, London, UK*

DOI: 10.1177/1940161216646105

Something remarkable happened in February 2008 with the launch of project Chanology, the campaign of the hacker group Anonymous against the Church of

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Something remarkable happened in February 2008 with the launch of project Chanology, the campaign of the hacker group Anonymous against the Church of

Scientology. What had been up to that point fundamentally a subcultural group of Internet hackers and trolls engaging in pranks and online raids for the “lulz” suddenly became something more similar to a social movement, protesting against a powerful religious institution on the basis of political grievances. Anonymous is one of the four groups and websites discussed by Jessica L. Beyer in her book *Expect Us: Online Communities and Political Mobilizations* (2014). Besides Anonymous, the volume looks at Pirate Bay, the file-sharing website that gathered millions of users and inspired the foundation of the Pirate Party; World of Warcraft, the multiplayer online videogame; and IGN.com a videogame posting board with more than a million users. What is shared across such different cases according to Beyer is the way in which nonpolitical websites have become in their own way a site of political mobilization; how politics is being transformed in “unexpected, darker, and more anonymous corners of the Internet” (p. 6).

The book by Beyer contributes to a growing literature that has been developing in recent years and which includes among others the work of Gabriella Coleman (2014) on Anonymous and of Tim Jordan (2015), looking at hacking and gaming cultures as a site of political organizing and mobilizing. The volume adopts a two-pronged argument. On one hand, it argues that “nonpolitical social websites are central to understanding civic engagement in the information age” (p. 168). On the other hand, it proposes “we are seeing the emergence of a freedom-of-information-based social movement” (p. 168.). Thus, the book suggests that we need to look more at subcultural spaces that develop on the Internet as spaces where political movements are bred, an argument that I find very persuasive.

Beyer highlights three factors involved in determining the extent to which these websites can constitute propitious sites of political mobilization: anonymity, regulation, and spatial divisions. First, the more anonymous, the more websites are to become conducive channels of political mobilization. This is particularly clear in the case of Anonymous and its use of the image board 4chan.com which allowed users to post comments anonymously. Going against much of contemporary commentary that sees anonymity as the cause of many problems of the contemporary social web from trolling to stalking, Beyer argues that anonymity is fundamental for the emergence of political groupings. She proposes that “anonymised spaces foster creative and collaborative cultures” (p. 6), the likes of which are fundamental to develop political discussions and to develop criticism against the power-that-be.

Less interesting and revealing is the second factor discussed by Beyer. Quite unsurprisingly, the less regulated these spaces are, the more they are likely to become hotbeds for political movements. Thus, for example, in the case of Anonymous and Pirate Bay, the level of regulation was very low, which allowed for some members to turn the conversation more easily toward political issues, rather than just subcultural discussions about pranks, videogames, or TV series.

Third, spatial divisions affect the extent to which these websites can act as a space of political mobilization. Anonymous and Pirate Bay profited from the possibility for large-scale discussion and mobilizations afforded by the platforms they utilized. World of Warcraft instead proved to be quite limited in this regard mainly due to the fact that

players are organized in small groups called “guilds” which do not lend themselves much to the task of large-scale mobilization.

The main contribution of the volume is its linking subcultural groups and political mobilizations, demonstrating how the two are part of a common social continuum, as well as in showing how the freedom of information has become a factor of aggregation for both subcultural and political groups online. The volume, however, has also some important limits. For a start, I was not too convinced by the selection of case studies. There is an obvious difference between more radical and militant phenomena as Anonymous and Pirate Bay and more commercial videogame websites as World of Warcraft and IGN.com. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the latter are less conducive to political activity. Furthermore, at points, the analysis is too structuralist, too focused on the nature of the platforms utilized and their affordances, rather than on the dynamics of actual groups and their culture. This said, I think that *Expect Us* makes a useful contribution to contemporary debates on digital politics and provides some useful insights on how to situate online political movements in the terrain of digital culture.

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