Chapter 6
Online Political Marketing:
The Use of Facebook in the 2010 Greek Municipal Elections

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ABSTRACT

Web 2.0 has transformed user involvement and has created more active, more engaged, more participative, and more demanding users, citizens, and voters. This chapter explores the use of Facebook by candidates during the November 2010 Greek Municipal elections. In particular, this study undertakes an in-depth analysis of the use of Facebook by candidates running for the mayoral offices in approximately 325 municipal races. Using statistical analysis (e.g., chi-square independence tests, t-tests, binary regression analysis), a number of hypotheses are tested to examine the differences in the use of Facebook between candidates and assess the impact the use of Facebook has on candidates' election to office.

INTRODUCTION

The mid-1990s was the period when the web was "discovered" by politicians and parties around the world as a new medium that could be incorporated into their campaign strategy. From an early attempt in the US presidential elections of 1992 (Diamond, McKay, & Silverman, 1993; Myers, 1993; Hacker, How, Scott, & Steiner, 1996) campaigning on the web by politicians has increased its usage in every electoral circle thereafter. Since then, a number of studies investigated web election campaigns in various countries such as the United Kingdom (Yates & Perrone, 1998; Margolis, Resnick, &

Wolfe, 1999; Ward & Gibson, 2003; Marcella, Baxter, & Smith, 2003), Italy (Newell, 2001), Finland (Carlson & Djupsund, 2001), Germany (Gibson & Rommele, 2003), Netherlands (Tops, Voerman, & Boogers, 2000), Australia (Gibson & McAllister, 2003) to name just a few cases from the many studies in the literature. Regarding Greece the study of online politics, has also attracted the interest of researchers (Kotsikopoulou, 2002; Demertzis & Armenakis, 2003; Yannas & Lappas, 2004; Yannas & Lappas, 2005a; Yannas & Lappas, 2005b; Demertzis, Diamantaki, Gazi, & Sartzetakis, 2005; Lappas, Chatzopoulos, & Yannas, 2008).

Up until the mid-1990s, campaign websites were mainly providing political and campaign information. The interactivity features and the interaction of the campaigner with their voters was a favourite subject in almost all web 1.0 campaign related studies. Blogs have provided a more interactive form of communication and have become, since the 2004 election cycle in the USA (Trammel, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006), popular in political campaigns. The term "web 2.0" was used to designate the new web featuring new interactive tools and to differentiate it from the limited interactive capacity of the "old" web 1.0. Thus, the main characteristic of the web 1.0 campaigns signified that electoral campaigns were dominated by information provision material of the campaigner leaving limited space for citizen interaction and participation. On the one hand candidates and parties adopted new communication technologies in their campaigns to demonstrate that they had espoused technological developments and to project an image of a forward looking candidate or party. On the other hand evidence (Stromer-Galley, 2000) showed that candidates were actually trying to avoid interacting with voters. The emergence of Web 2.0 enabled a qualitative shift in the flow of communication from one-way to two-way. Researchers could thus dwell upon the many new interactive tools of Web 2.0

to investigate the use of the new media by parties and candidates in their campaigns.

The emergence of Web 2.0 tools allowed users to change roles from a passive audience of a web page to becoming actual contributors of web content. This dialogic feature brought people together providing opportunities for social networking and dialogic communication. Wikis, Facebook, My Space, YouTube, Flickr and any web medium that users may contribute with content is referred to as social media. The massive content contribution by group of users held the promise for better citizen participation in politics enhancing the potential of e-democracy. Web 2.0 provides opportunities for individuals to become citizen-campaigners capable of assuming a more direct or organized role in a campaign (Gibson, 2009), elevating hopes for the growth of "bottom-up" campaigns. Initial studies of parties experimenting with web 2.0 (Kalnes, 2009) showed that although Web 2.0 offers a weak pluralizing effect in party communication, it enhanced participatory democracy by lowering the threshold for the involvement of the party grassroots and other sympathizers with the party.

The effect of web 2.0 on online campaigning appears already in a number of studies (Gibson & McAllister, 2009; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Jaeger, Paquette, & Simmons, 2010; Kalnes 2009; Lilleker, Pack, & Jackson, 2010), offering interesting findings on the use of web 2.0 in the political arena. Gibson and McAllister (2009) studied web 2.0 campaign in the Australian Federal Elections demonstrating that online campaigning did attract votes. Jaeger et al. (2010) compared the use of social networks in the 2008 campaigns for US President and Prime Minister of Canada respectively. The effect of web 2.0 on parties has been investigated by Kalnes (2009) in the case of Norwegian parties. According to Kalnes, Web 2.0 enhanced participatory democracy and party visibility in Web 2.0 roughly reflected party vote share. Jackson and Lilleker (2009) study of UK parties on Web 2.0 focused on the participatory

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