"A Canadian E-lection 2008? Online Media and Political Competition"

by

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Introduction

For more than two decades scholarship on the political impact and use of digital media (information and communication technologies, ICTs) has been characterized by dichotomous thinking. On the one hand cyber-optimists see a bright new day ahead for democracy at a time when representative democracy is said to be particularly troubled if not in decline. On the other hand cyber-pessimists see through a glass darkly, fearing these technologies will be used as a means of dominance and control with the consequent hastening of democratic decline. Between the antimonies of hope and fear is a growing, but smaller, camp that insists that context matters, that it is necessarily to go beyond arguments of technological determinism (the cyber-optimists) and social determinism (the cyber-pessimists). They argue the relationship between technology and society is complex and dialectical and that one should expect variability across societies and countries in terms of how ICTs will be used for political purposes, not homogeneity which is the inevitable result of any determinist perspective. This makes the study of any society's use of Internet technologies for political purposes of particular importance. The impact of ICTs on Canadian elections should be expected then to be different from the United States, worthy of study in its own right.

With the above as a backdrop, this paper examines the use and impact of an array of established and emerging digital media on the 2008 Canadian federal election. Based on data sourced from a broad set of methodologies (see below), the paper explores the application of digital media by candidates and political parties. The analysis examines two broad areas of interest: the extent to which various forms of digital media were employed as campaign tools in the election (either *ad hoc* or as an integrated element within wider campaigning), and the role of digital media in extending or closing the access gap between major and minor political parties (what is called the "democratization versus normalization" debate).

From this analysis, the paper argues for a mixed picture of the role of digital media in the election, providing mixed evidence for both democratization and normalization. While the use of digital media is one area of campaigning that suffers from the lowest performance gap between different political actors, the research identifies that structural, human and financial factors advantage established parties' access to both conventional and digital media. This gap can be identified in the levels of direct adoption of digital media by parties and candidates, as well as the indirect impacts of "echo chambers" on the visibility of established parties and their leaders in the emerging online media landscape. This finding demonstrates the complex evolving relationship between offline and online channels in the media ecology.

By examining the "presence" of candidates online, the research demonstrates equalization in access to online representation, but with distinct variations in the use of different Internet sub-media by established and minor parties, and interesting variations between candidates in Quebec and the remainder of Canada. The paper argues that it is better to compare Canada, not to the presidential system of the United States, but rather

to other Westminster democracies. Taking a specific interest in the role of local candidates, the research demonstrates a considerable "gap" between the "optimal" use of digital media and actual levels of new technologies in close political races and large electoral districts. Overall, a positive relationship is identified between investment in digital media for online campaigning and electoral success, but this positive correlation is not distinct from the advantages afforded to established parties with incumbent candidates.

The paper is divided into the following sections: The first is methodological. The next section situates the paper within the dominant themes of the literature followed by a brief overview of Internet usage in Canada. The next sections detail our research findings in terms of candidates, political parties, and the relationship between centralization and control, a relationship underscored by Canada's parliamentary system and the residual power of television broadcasting in Canada's complex media ecosystem. Finally, the paper concludes by offering some possible explanations of Canada's particular use of digital media in the 2008 federal election.

Methodology

Examining the role of digital media in the Canadian election *a pedibus usque ad caput* necessitates the use of a range of data sources and collection strategies. The result of this was a large set of data from which to draw descriptive and interpretive conclusions. The reasons for this breadth are: First, the changing nature of political competition using digital media, with new strategies and communications channels being employed in a rapidly evolving process informed by competitive pressures, experimentation, and inter-jurisdictional learning. This necessitates the capture of data on established channels in contemporary political campaigning (e.g. campaign websites), as well as emerging channels and online communities (e.g. social networking, microblogging).

Second, taking a media ecosystem approach, we were conscious for the need to consider different Internet sub-media (e.g. email), channels (e.g. online video), and online communities (e.g. social networking services)[2] as occupying different parts of a continually changing, interactive ecosystem of media. This perspective has clear methodological implications: the need to consider the use and perception of different media channels in relation to other channels and understanding that communications activities and strategies may be single-channel or multimodal (and strategic use of media cannot be understood without considering the range of media forms involved in any action or event).

Five research methods were employed in this study:
- Content analysis of candidates' use of digital media;
- Candidate survey;
- Semi-structured interviews with key party personnel;
- Analysis of online video published by parties; and

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[2] See Glossary, at the end of this paper.

- Quantification of party leaders' mentions in blogs and online advertising from open sources.

Content analysis of candidates' use of digital media

In recognising the increasing sophistication of campaigning using digital technologies in integrated campaign strategies, the methodology of this paper recognises the need to pay greater attention to the wide range of online tools, not simply website content and functionality, available for political candidates. This includes their characteristics as communications channels, their inbuilt biases and audiences and the relationships between different channels of communication.[3] The aim of this approach was:

- To identify the number of different channels or means of self-representation online ("points of presence") candidates' maintained across a range of channels and sub-media; and

- To determine the extent to which each point of presence has been used by candidates.[4]

Following random sampling of the population of candidates[5] (see Table A in the Methodological Appendix), candidates online presence was quantified to determine their use of various digital media. Search tools employed to identify candidates points of presence included:

- Elections Canada's official list of candidates;

- Google (market leader) search engine;

- The search functions of the social networking / content hosting services studied (Facebook, Myspace ,Hi5, YouTube, Linked In, Bebo, Friendster, Flickr, and Twitter)[6, 7]; and

- Party website search engines to identify and classify candidate's entries within the website ("mini-sites", as discussed below).

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[3] Following a developing methodology previously employed in the 2007 Australian national and Alberta provincial elections (see Chen 2008a) and the 2008 New Zealand (see Chen 2009, forthcoming), analysis of the use of digital media in the Canadian national election extends upon previous research which has tended to focus on the analysis of website content and functionality (see Chen 2005).

[4] This differs from "buzz" (e.g. blog mentions) or network based analysis (e.g. Ackland 2004) in that it retains a focus on material generated by the candidate and their campaign staff directly.

[5] Based on the official list of candidates, candidates were selected by electoral district, with all candidates in selected districts analyzed. This allowed for comparisons within electoral districts, in addition to other analysis (by gender, by province, etc.).

[6] At present social networking profiles are not always identified through Google, requiring each service to be searched individually.

[7] In the identification of candidates, ambiguous entries were excluded from analysis. This was common with social networking profiles that could not be identified as definitely belonging to a specific candidate. Candidates were commonly identified by: Unambiguous photo recognition; Use of party of electoral district name in profile; Membership of related groups or networks; and/or highly unique name.

Data interpretation was undertaken using two constructs[8]:

- Plotting *depth-width* measures: The creation of the depth and width measures was a deliberate attempt to delineate between the increasing ability to have a large number of points of presence and the investment of time and effort to "populate" each (e.g. to fill a website or content sharing service with content and/or functionality, or to collect nodes and/or subscriptions in social networking and content syndication services); and

- *Intensity*: A single compound number was generated to measure the absolute "intensity" of the candidate's online presence. This measure was useful in determining correlations.

Candidate survey

In addition to the content analysis, a small survey of candidates from the content analysis group was conducted during the month following the election (n=38, response rate 17.51%). The survey was distributed via email and physical post. The survey examined:

- Candidates' self-perceptions of technology literacy;

- Candidate perceptions of the value of different campaigning communications channels;

- Candidates' self-reported use of each channel;

- Levels of support provided to candidates for the use of digital media;

- Use of "back end" information technology systems; and

- Rates of constituent contact with candidates via online channels.

This instrument is particularly useful in elaborating the strategic choices of candidates in the selection and application of digital media in a manner that is not possible from

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[8] The approach presents a number of limitations, the most significant being construct validity. Understanding of the role of social networking and other "web 2.0" tools in the average internet user's lived experience remains sketchy in Canada. Thus, the creation of scales based on assumptions about the importance of width is unproven. The use of these scales, however, is in response to the increasingly well-recognized limitations of using basic content analysis (e.g. function or content counts) of candidate websites as *de facto* performance measures. The measures of depth and width were generated from raw data using the creation of artificial scales (0 to 100) for both depth (a compound measure of the extensiveness of online content and number of collected social networking ties), and width (the number of services or sites employed by the candidate). The scales were relative rather than absolute, thus each candidate score is measured against the highest performer within the total sample group. By social networking ties we refer to friends, contacts, or connections depending on the social networking service's nomenclature.

observational data (e.g. content analysis). The population and sample characteristics are provided on Table B[9] in the Methodological Appendix.

Semi-structured interviews with key party personnel

To examine the role of digital media in central party campaign strategies, a number of semi-structured interviewers were conducted with key officials from the Liberal Party of Canada, Conservative Party of Canada, The Green Party of Canada, and the New Democratic Party.

These interviews focused on the use of digital media in the election campaign process, internal decision making about strategic acquisition of technology, and tactical use of technology during the campaign; and internal measures of success or failure in the use of digital media.

Analysis of online video published by parties

There has been considerable interest in the use of online video (either embedded in party websites or distributed via third-party content hosting services like YouTube) in recent online campaigns. This interest is related to the expansion in user access to faster, "always on" broadband connections. As part of the research methodology, the researchers identified these videos for quantification and content analysis. The number of analyzed videos (372 in total) is listed in Table B in the Methodological Appendix.

The content analysis of the video material published online included:
- Date of publication;
- Length of video;
- Genre conventions of the video (e.g. advertisement style, speech or rally, street walk); and
- Tone (positive, negative, mixed, other).

A detailed discussion of this methodology is can be found elsewhere (Chen, 2008b).

Quantification of party leaders' mentions in blogs and of online advertising from open sources

Throughout the campaign data was collected from two online metrics services, Technorati (an blog search engine and analysis service) and Google Adwords (an advertisement hosting service) for the following individuals: Stephen Harper, Stéphane Dion, Jack Layton, Gilles Duceppe, and Elizabeth May.

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[9] Table B clearly illustrates the limitations of this approach: overall small sample size and skewed distribution of responses, with a particularly small response from members of the Conservative Party of Canada. However a criticism that the survey could be biased in favor of candidates with higher levels of interest / use of digital media is unlikely, with the intensity score of the survey sample was 2.328% higher than the average for the population group.

This data collection allowed for:
- The quantification of the appearance of these leaders in blog posts throughout the election campaign, allowing their respective coverage in the alternative media sphere of blogs to be tracked over time; and
- Monitoring competition for advertisement placement in the Google search engine against searches associated with the names of specific party leaders.

Literature

The two dominant claims on the impact of digital technologies on democracy implicitly accept the notion of determinism: *technological* viewing innovation as the most important variable shaping our societal, political and cultural systems, and *social* in which societal and political factors shape the impact of technology (Anstead and Chadwick, 2008).

Initial perspectives on the impact of ICTs on democratic processes focused on the association between networked computing and reduced barriers to the production and exchange of politically-relevant information (Jenkins and Thorburn, 2004). Barney, a sharp critic of the inevitability thesis, saw this hope as an article of "faith augmented by an anticipation that the democracy networks will be contagious and impossible to quarantine." (2000:19) This was part of the broader emancipatory discourse surrounding ICTs (Malina, 1999) most forcefully argued by Barlow's "Declaration of Independence for Cyberspace" (1996).

These types of arguments and expectations are reminiscent of the views advanced by Canadian political economist and media theorist Harold Innis. Innis argued that each communication medium had a particular bias shaping society, culture and political power, and that those on the margins of society are the first able to see the potential of each new media (1950, 1951). Innis's work proved later immensely influential on later media theorists who emphasized the creative possibilities of each new medium. Innis's shadow hangs over those who see in new communications media the possibility of those on the margins to challenge or equalize the political playing field. With reference to political competition, this has become known as the equalization thesis.

According to Ward, Gibson, and Nixon, the equalization thesis, promoted by cyber-optimists:

> …is based on the ability of small or fringe parties to exploit the relatively low costs of the medium, the lack of editorial control and supposedly non-hierarchical nature of the Internet. Thus, with relatively few skills and resources a minor party can have just as sophisticated a site as a governing party and sit alongside it in cyberspace. (2003:22)

One hope then was that ICTs could reinvigorate representative democracy faced as it was by a severe legitimacy crisis with falling party membership, falling voter turnout and increasing perceptions of "voter apathy" and disengagement from formal political processes and organizations.

It did not take long for cyber-pessimists to challenge with an alternative interpretation of the relationship between ICTs and social, cultural and political life. Socially determinist in nature Anstead and Chadwick note that "pre-Internet power brokers will come to define the online world autonomously of technological change." (2008:58) This alternative has been more generally expressed as the "normalization thesis" with Strangelove observing that "It is generally assumed that online activity and content are becoming a mirror of the corporate mode of cultural production." (p.20)

In terms of political parties and elections this approach has most notably advanced by Margolis and Resnick in their conclusion to *Politics as Usual: the Cyberspace 'Revolution'* in which they argued that the market and politics will primarily "shape the fate of cyberspace." (2000:202) Elsewhere Resnick argued that "if we ask which political parties and candidates are likely to provide sophisticated web sites, the answer is clear: those who command the resources to hire the talent to produce them." (1999:63) In brief, the parties with more resources both in terms of money and people are more likely to dominate minor parties at election time.

This gloomy prognosis has become dominate on both the political right and left in the past decade. However, it is a perspective still very much contested. Strangelove, for example, claims that there is no reason for pessimism, that all is not lost:

> Overlooked by the normalization thesis is the tremendous significance of non-market cultural production by the online community. The Internet is doing far more than reproducing commercial media products. It is also producing an enormous volume of cultural products that circulate entirely outside the market economy. (p. 20)

Despite Strangelove's optimism on the emancipatory impact of the Internet there is little doubt that the debate over its impact on political parties and elections remains very much shaped by the debate between proponents of the equalization versus normalization thesis each in their own way determinist. This debate, for example, shaped the pioneering work of Small on the impact of the Internet on Canadian political parties and elections. Small argued that in the 2004 federal election:

> The Internet has not led to equalization in Canada. Accordingly, there is no evidence that Canada as a party-centred country is more resistant to normalization. Despite equal access to the Internet, there is unequal success in cyberspace for Canadian parties. (2008a:52)

Small's work concentrated primarily on the study of the websites of nine political parties and was not situated within a broader media ecology.

In part to escape the somewhat narrow deterministic confines of the normalization versus equalization debate scholars have begun to emphasize a number of interdependencies: between different types of media, and between society and technology. Ward, Gibson and Nixon point out "the net does not exist in a vacuum divorced from the traditional media" (2003:23). Ward and Gibson go on to "reject … 'one size fits all' explanations and argue that social and political shaping are crucial to understanding the development of an

organization's approach to new technologies." (2009:35) Anstead and Chadwick maintain that:

> The relationship between technology and political institutions is best perceived as dialectical. Technologies can reshape institutions, but institutions will mediate eventual outcomes. (2009:58)

According to these perspectives one would expect variances in the impact of the Internet on election campaigning in different representative democracies.

While scholars disagree tend to have their own lists of factors which shape the use of ICTs by political parties during elections four factors in particular are identified in this paper: 1) political-systemic; 2) organizational; 3) financial; 4) media environment. While distinct factors they are not mutually exclusive. The political system, for example, can regulate campaign spending which in turn has an impact on financial resources and how they are used. Each factor is outlined briefly below.

Political-systemic factors

The political system can have a significant impact on the use of ICTs. In particular, the degree of pluralism produced by a political system will encourage greater use of ICTs in elections. The prime example is that of the United States with its presidential system, separation of powers and federalism. According to Ward and Gibson:

> Presidential, candidate-centered, federal systems are more likely to be responsive to interactive online technologies than highly centralized polities because multilevel government with large numbers of independent actors is likely to result in greater experimentation and innovation in terms of campaigning. (2009:35)

On the other hand a parliamentary, unitary system such as the United Kingdom is said to foster greater party cohesion and discipline which, in turn, facilitate more national coordination, integration and control from national headquarters. (Anstead and Chadwick, 2009) The result is that the technological affordances of the Internet "for creating loose horizontal networks have fewer affinities with this set of arrangements." (Anstead and Chadwick, 2009:63)

Organizational factors

While a host of organizational factors are claimed to have an impact on the adoption and use of ICTs of particular salience are organizational resources and organizational culture. Organizational resources speak principally to organizational capacity and the ability of parties to maximize their use of ICTs. While the equalization thesis asserts that minor or marginal parties can, with the fewer resources required by the medium, project a sophisticated web presence, the counterargument is that resources still matter in shaping Internet use. According to Ward, "while initially the Internet might lower the threshold for campaigning, increasingly … financial and human resources [are] becoming important, as with other types of campaigning." (2008:5) Moreover, the addition of so-called "Web 2.0" technologies means that website are becoming more sophisticated and with greater sophistication comes the need for greater resources which minor or marginal parties may not have. (Ward and Gibson, 2009)

Organizational culture is also emphasized as a variable shaping the use of ICTs by political parties. (Ward, 2008; Ward and Gibson, 2008) For example, parties on the left such as the Greens are viewed as having a stronger, participatory, grass-roots organizational culture said to have a better fit with the interactive capacities of the Internet, particularly in terms of new social networking tools.

Campaign financing

How parties and candidates are financed and the degree and type of regulatory control over financing are now recognized as shaping their use of digital media. Here electoral systems vary in the amount of money candidates and parties may spend. The United States, for example, has much greater latitude in terms of the amounts of money that parties and candidates may raise and spend. The result is that campaigns are expensive and "candidate or party websites flourish not only in quantity but also in quality." (Davis, *et al.* 2008:264)

Where there are legal restrictions on spending by candidates and/or parties there may be effects on the adoption and use of ICTs in election campaigns. For example, in both the UK and Canada candidates are more restricted than parties by campaign spending limits. (Anstead and Chadwick, 2009; Davis, *et al.* 2008) According to Davis, *et al.* "the result is a funneling of resources to party organization rather than campaign organizations, and the strengthening of party Internet activities rather than candidate online communication." (264) In turn, this result may well heighten and centralize the role of national party headquarters in determining the use of digital media.

"Old" media, "new" media and the relationship between the two

Until recently there has been a tendency to study digital or "new media" separately from "old" media. Now there is greater recognition that established media with wide distribution (broadcast and daily newsprint), continue to play a significant role in the design of campaign strategies, particularly at the central party level. Moreover, old and new media are, in many ways, interdependent. How each media is used depends very much on the characteristics of the medium (timeliness, influences on the character of message, likely audience; Ward, 2008)

The growing interdependence of old and new media has become a widely accepted feature of contemporary media and election campaigns. The rise of bloggers and alternative journalism, for example, has created a complex interdependence between new media and old media, one that Hiler calls "mutually parasitic". (2002) The use of the biological metaphor has promoted the notion of a media ecology or a media ecosystem with interacting subsystems of old and new media – television broadcasting, radio, print and the Internet, the latter with its wide assortment of social networking tools which facilitate increasing amounts of user-generated content. (Naughton, 2006; Deuze, 2005) The resulting changing relationships between audience and different media (interactivity, audience sizes) produce a complex and shifting set of relationships which varies country

by country. This produces different effects in terms of centralization and decentralization depending on the factors discussed previously in this section.

The result is that the American model of Internet use in elections is very much an anomaly and hardly a prototype that others will necessarily emulate. What Davis, et al., see as key "ingredients for Internet impact" are particularly American as evident in:

> High rates of Internet access, a media structure that is private and commercial, … extensive candidate resources due to limited finance regulation, a porous electoral system, … a presidential system, a weak party system, … a resulting candidate-centered process that rewards entrepreneurial candidates who find their own means for campaign communication. (2008:268)

As Canada differs from the United States in these ingredients one should expect differences in terms of the impact of digital media in elections.

One common area of difference between comparative nations is the level of Internet adoption in the jurisdictions. Compared to other countries Canada has a very high Internet penetration rate. As of 2007 73% of Canadians 16 and older used the Internet, up from 68% in 2005. While this figure indicates strong adoption of the technology, Statistics Canada identify a number of enduring "digital divides", lower levels of adoption based on differences in income, education, age and locality (urban or rural). Correspondingly, younger Canadians with higher incomes and education, who live in urban areas are the highest adopters of the technology. Rates of Internet adoption were highest in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, three of Canada's wealthier provinces. (The Daily, 12 June 2008)

	2005 %	*2007 %*
Newfoundland and Labrador	55	61
Prince Edward Island	61	69
Nova Scotia	67	69
New Brunswick	57	65
Quebec	62	69
Ontario	72	75
Manitoba	66	70
Saskatchewan	66	73
Alberta	71	77
British Columbia	69	78

Table 1: Rates of Internet adoption in Canada, 2005 and 2007[10]

Considering differences in the use of different online channels, there are also important variations in the use of social networking services in Canada. In Quebec, for example, only 12% of the population uses Facebook, compared to 30% in neighbouring English-Ontario and 25% nationally. (SEO and Web Marketing News, January 2, 2008) One

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[10] Source: Statistics Canada, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080612/t080612b-eng.htm accessed: May 6, 2009. According to Statistics Canada, "Caution is required comparing these results with those from 2005, when the survey was restricted to persons 18 years and older. In 2007, respondents aged 16 and 17 accounted for almost an entire percentage point of the overall increased in Internet use since 2005. They also affect estimates of online behaviours."

reason for the lower Facebook usage Quebec is that it was not until April 2009 that a distinctly French-Canadian version of Facebook was made available. (Winnipeg Free Press, April, 9,2009)

Candidates' use of Digital Media

This section discusses the use of digital media by individual candidates, focusing on the role of these technologies in the local campaign and factors leading to the adoption of technology by candidates. The discussion also considers the impact of direct and indirect influences of central party administration on technology adoption by candidates.

Use of specific channels

A conventional way of examining the use of digital media technologies by individual candidates is to examine the extent of their use of various Internet sub-media and channels. This approach is useful in identifying the types of technologies that candidates gravitate to, and considering the rapidity of adoption of emerging channels.

In considering these choices, we see a diverse pattern of technology adoption across the political spectrum in Canada. Looking at five methods of campaign communication in table 2 below, candidates are quite selective in their adoption of digital media. The adoption choices of candidates are not correlated with the established nature of the channel (where a familiarity/experience hypothesis would reason that older technologies would have higher levels of adoption), but appear to be related to barriers to adoption: those channels with comparatively low adoption costs (email, "mini-sites" associated with their party) are more commonly used, whereas the use of websites (almost universally used in the US electoral context) have lower levels of adoption in Canada.

Two candidate characteristics are related to the use of websites. First, incumbency. Parties where candidates are more likely to employ websites tend to be those with higher levels of parliamentary representation.[11] Second, instrumentalism. Where a party's candidates are more likely to employ websites for the solicitation of donations, party membership, and/or recruitment of volunteers, the overall level of use of websites among party candidates is higher. This implies a relationship between incumbency, the use of political marketing tools for resource acquisition, and the choice of websites as a useful vehicle for this type of activity. That incumbency remains a factor in this process of technology acquisition is interesting, however, as a number of factors (growing market for hosting, development of sophisticated open source content management software, etc.) has dramatically reduced the cost of hosting personal websites over the last decade. The connection between adoption and deliberate instrumental choice appears to be associated with professionalism within the party, where established parties are able to provide turnkey sites or "plug in" fundraising or membership e-commerce tools (or links

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[11] Interestingly, while Conservative and Liberal Candidates' use of websites increased between the 2004-2008 elections, NDP candidates' use declined significantly (down from 75%; Small, *et al.* 2008:116). Given the high level of use of mini-sites, it would appear that there has been a substitution effect.

to central party website ecommerce pages) that can be embedded in individual candidates' websites.

Party	Website %	Email %	Mini-site %[12]	Social networking service %	Secondary site[13] %
Bloc Québécois	37.5	100	100	75	25
Christian Heritage	9.090	100	100	45.454	9.090
Conservative Party	95.454	95.454	100	63.636	11.363
Green Party	44.186	100	97.674	65.116	16.279
Independent	0	28.571	0	28.571	0
Liberal Party	75	88.636	100	75	18.181
Marxist-Leninist	0	0	100	0	0
New Democratic	54.545	95.454	100	59.090	15.909
Other	16.666	58.333	75	66.666	8.333
Total / average	36.938	74.050	85.852	53.170	11.573

Table 2: Candidates' use of digital media, by party

While the use of *mini-sites* is the most common form of "online publication" by candidates, the provision of candidate-specific information on party websites in Canada is quite modest, as illustrated in figure 1 below. Comparatively, the use of these sites has been growing in other Westminster systems – a structural factor related to the "strong party" model – including extensive multipage entries with rich media capacity (effectively stand alone websites in their own right). The advantages of *mini-sites* are numerous: simple to use by candidates (as a service provided by the party), low cost to parties (reusing their existing content hosting and content management technologies), clear branding association with the party (including the possibility to control the content and presentation of candidates more easily), and advantages in terms of discoverability and search engine ranking.

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[12] A candidate-specific entry, page, or subdomain within a main party website.

[13] An additional website associated with the candidate other than their main campaign website. Examples would include candidate blogs on 3rd party hosting services.
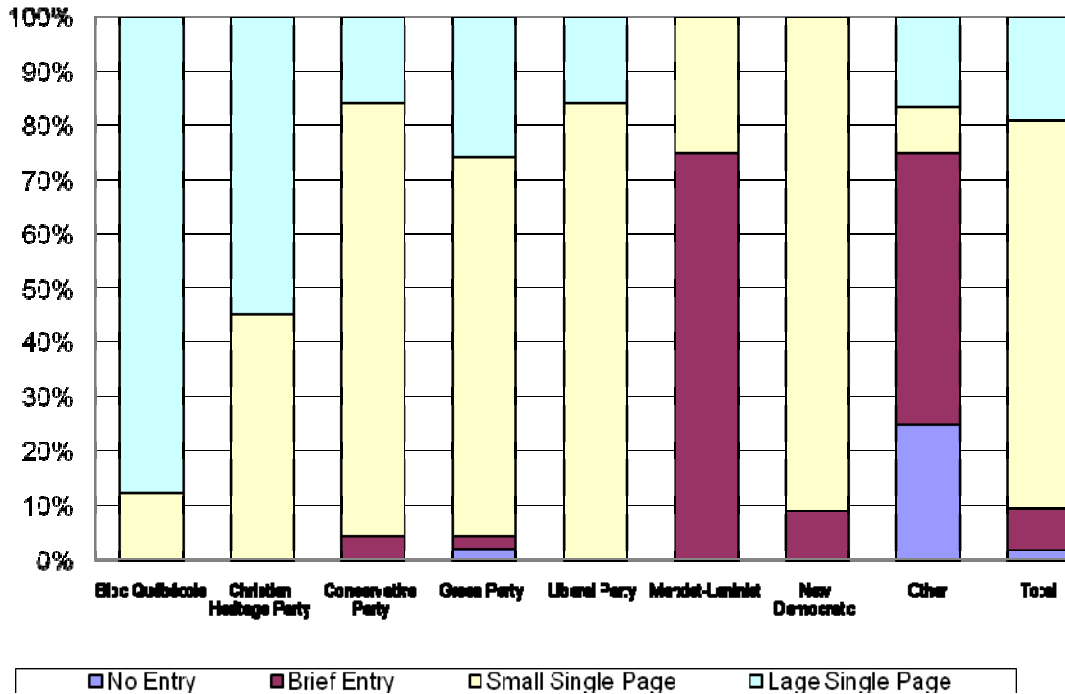
Figure 1: Size of candidate "mini-sites", by party

Turning to the use of social networking services – an area of activity that has attracted considerable attention in recent years – it is clear that there has been strong growth in the adoption of these services by candidates. This fits within a focus on the impacts of barriers to adoption: setting up a social networking profile requires comparably low levels of initial effort, and the services provide useful tools for the recruitment and management of social ties relative to other forms of community building online (Small, 2008b:85-6).

Like the finding with *mini-sites*, however, we see that the overall investment in these channels is not high. Candidates tend not to maintain a large number of social networking profiles[14], as illustrated in table 3 below. This provides some insight into the way these services are perceived by candidates. If candidates saw social networking services as a useful means to access different constituencies online (e.g. the voters of the "Facebook community", the voters of the "Myspace community"), it would be reasonable to expect candidates would employ large numbers of social networking profiles as they extended their "reach" into different "gated communities" online. In addition, as campaign resources are limited the use of different services would be rationally distributed to those with the largest market shares (in Canada, Facebook and Myspace)[15]. However, as illustrated in figure 2 below, this small number of average profiles was concentrated on Facebook. While Facebook was the emerging market leader at the time of the election,

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[14] The maximum number of social networking profiles of any candidate in the sample was five. The mode for the sample was one.

[15] This was observed in the 2007 Australian national election (Chen, 2008a). It would also be shaped by imperfect information (membership numbers tend to be highly dynamic).

there is no relationship between candidates' use of social networking services and their market share, indicating that use of these services tended towards symbolic association with the channel[16], rather than seeing specific benefit in the communities represented in these services. What this indicates is that candidates are yet to perceive the advantages of the social networking elements of these services (e.g. recruitment and organization of volunteers, use of social media to distribute candidate and party messages via friendship groups, etc.), as opposed to their value simply as "online brochures".

Party	*Average[17]*
New Democratic Party	1.692308
Green Party of Canada	1.5
Independent	1.5
Average	1.448529
Liberal Party of Canada	1.333333
Conservative Party of Canada	1.321429
Bloc Québécois	1.166667
Christian Heritage Party	1

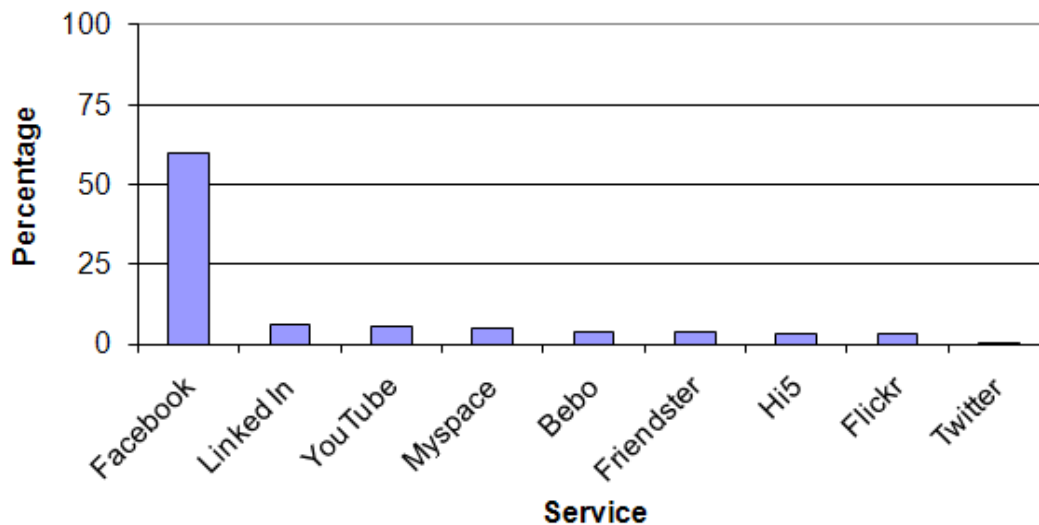**Table 3**: Average number of social networking profiles per candidate

Figure 2: Candidates' social networking service profiles, by service

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[16] This may well have been informed by perspectives on the relative position of these services held at the party level, with a number of party key campaign staff highlighting the view that Myspace (in particular) was seen as a service in considerable decline (McDonald, October 31, 2008, Poorooshasb, October 30, 2008).

[17] Excludes candidates with no social networking profiles.

Candidates' overall online presence

It is useful now to consider the aggregate picture of the position of candidates, grouped by party. Figure 3 below shows the relative position of parties, as expressed by their candidates' use of a variety of digital media tools for campaigning (expressed as "width") and the average investment in each point of presence ("depth"). The radius is an expression of variation within the party (average standard deviation).

As we can see from figure 3 there the major political parties are all closely clustered together, indicating that, regardless of political, demographic, and/or resource differences (see below) the aggregate extent to which digital media is employed by candidates is remarkably consistent across the political spectrum in Canada.[18] The key exception to this observation is the Bloc Québécois, an outlier with candidates having, on average, far fewer points of presence online, but "populating"[19] the channels they do use to a greater extent. Overall the total level of investment in digital media by candidates of the Bloc is consistent with that of other parties, and so this does not represent a lower level of activity in the online environment during the campaign. This variation would, therefore, appear to be the result of a more limited competitive environment in Québec that provides the Bloc with greater access to conventional media within the province and reduces the need for Bloc candidates to spread their media activity broadly to catch the attention of potential voters and/or the lack of Québec French language native online services and the correspondingly low take-up of social networking services by Québécois.

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[18] Australian, Albertan and New Zealand studies show considerably higher levels of variation between party.
[19] This can be the extent of content hosted on websites, in party mini-sites, or other content hosting services, or in the number of social ties collected in social networking services.
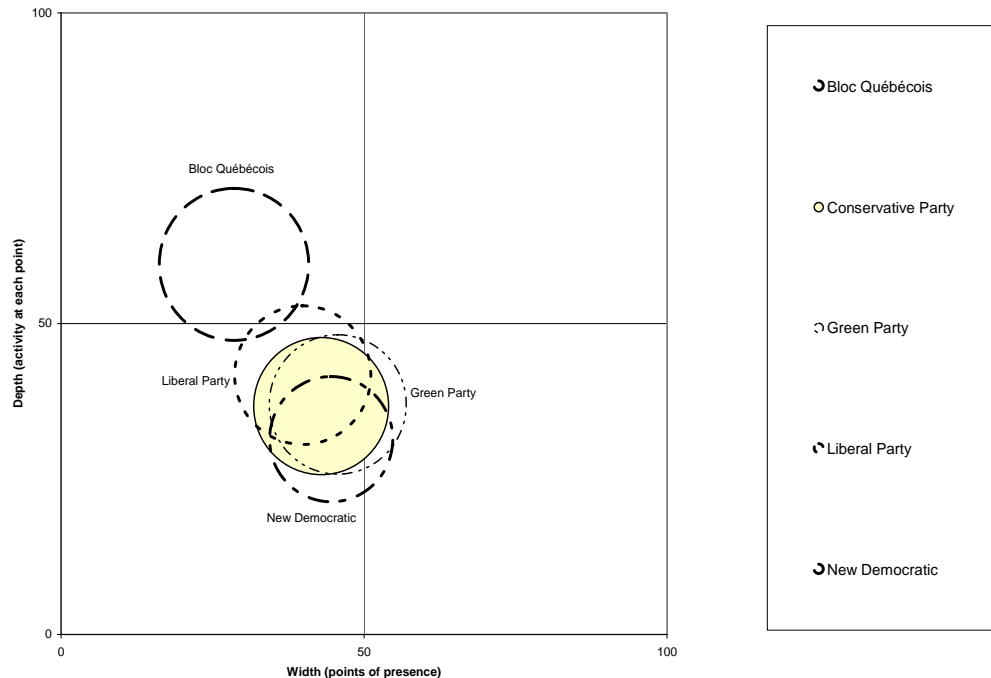
Figure 3: Distribution of candidates' use of digital media, by party

At the electoral district level the research identified a modest positive correlation between individual candidates' use of digital media (their intensity score) and the average intensity score of all candidates in their electoral district (0.326). This finding points to a "competitive effect" in technology adoption choices by candidates (however rural-urban uptake factors may also be relevant here in directing adoption). This has an interesting implication: while the extent of online information available to voters is quite variable depending on their electoral district, there is an equivalency in the amount of online information available that voters can expect *within* electoral districts.

In considering provincial/territorial variations (table 4 below) there is no relationship between the average intensity of candidates' digital media campaigning with either population size (0.156) or density (-0.130). There is, however, a positive relationship between the level of candidates' use of digital media and the total size of the province (0.298). This is an interesting observation that points to rational use of the technology to compensate (to a modest extent) for difficulties (particularly in the use of location based communication techniques) when campaigning in large provinces.
w

Province	Average Intensity
New Brunswick	1796.503
Territories	1628.331
Alberta	1615.425
Saskatchewan	1529.584
Ontario	1528.443
Québec	1484.809
British Columbia	1465.030
Newfoundland and Labrador	1341.445
Prince Edward Island	1335.767
Nova Scotia	1269.861
Manitoba	1075.630

Table 4: Average candidates' intensity scores, by Province

The use – value dimension

While the types of measures discussed above talk about the behavior of candidates based on content analysis, the use of survey data allows these observations to be enhanced with an understanding of the value perceptions of different media forms. Based on a simple Likert scale (1-4), figure 4 below shows survey respondents' value perceptions of a wide range of campaign activities (both digital and conventional media), demonstrating enduring preferences for established techniques (face-to-face communication in particular), and ongoing strong preferences for traditional advertising (lawn signs, television advertising, and radio advertising). What is interesting is that websites are now recognized as the second most valuable campaign tool, and social networking services are identified as number six. Overall we see that perceptions of the value of digital media channels now rivals that of established campaign tools (conventional channels average at 3.108 while digital media averages at 3.000, with similar standard deviations 0.532 versus 0.594 respectively).
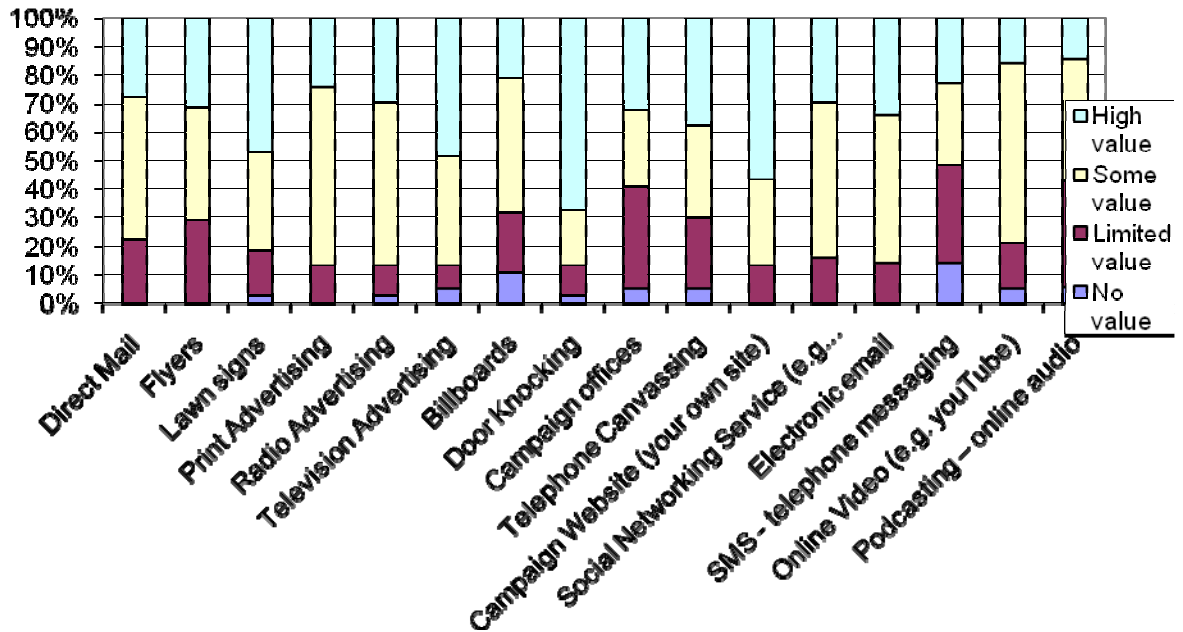
Figure 4: Candidates' value perceptions of communications tools

Data on candidates' value perceptions of different communications channels for campaigning can also be compared with the self-reported usage levels of these channels. This is illustrated in figure 5 below, which demonstrates the overall underutilization of different media based on candidates' perceptions of value[20]. The figure illustrates that all candidates report they employed different media to a lower extent than their perceptions of the channels' utility would indicate would be optimal, reflecting resource constraints felt by all modern candidates.

What is interesting to observe, however, is the channels with the highest discrepancy between value perception and reported use. Some can be explained relatively simply in terms of financial cost (advertising using television, radio and billboards), while others – particularly digital media – are more interesting discrepancies which appear to be related to technical capacities (online audio and video, and the use to mobile telephone messaging). Figure 5 is particularly interesting as it indicates possible growth areas of activity given changes to the barriers of adoption, especially the different effects of the amelioration of financial versus technical barriers to adoption. While the established parties demonstrate remarkably similar levels of activity in the online environment, it must be recognized that they demonstrate different fundraising capacities. Taking Ontario as an example, candidates of the Conservative Party spent, on average, 77.806% of their legally-imposed spending limit, Liberals 70.865% and New Democrats only 31.185%, yet their overall online presentation was very similar in absolute terms.[21] While this could argue strongly in favor of the equalization hypothesis, the impact of financial

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[20] Collecting both use and value of different communications channels from sampled candidates on a four point scale allows these levels to be compared.
[21] The provincial average was 41.77%; source: Election Canada Database, 6 May 2009.

resources on the capacity to campaign is focused on conventional media, particularly paid advertising.[22] Thus, equalization online does not overcome the advantages of some candidates in their capacity to buy advertising media.
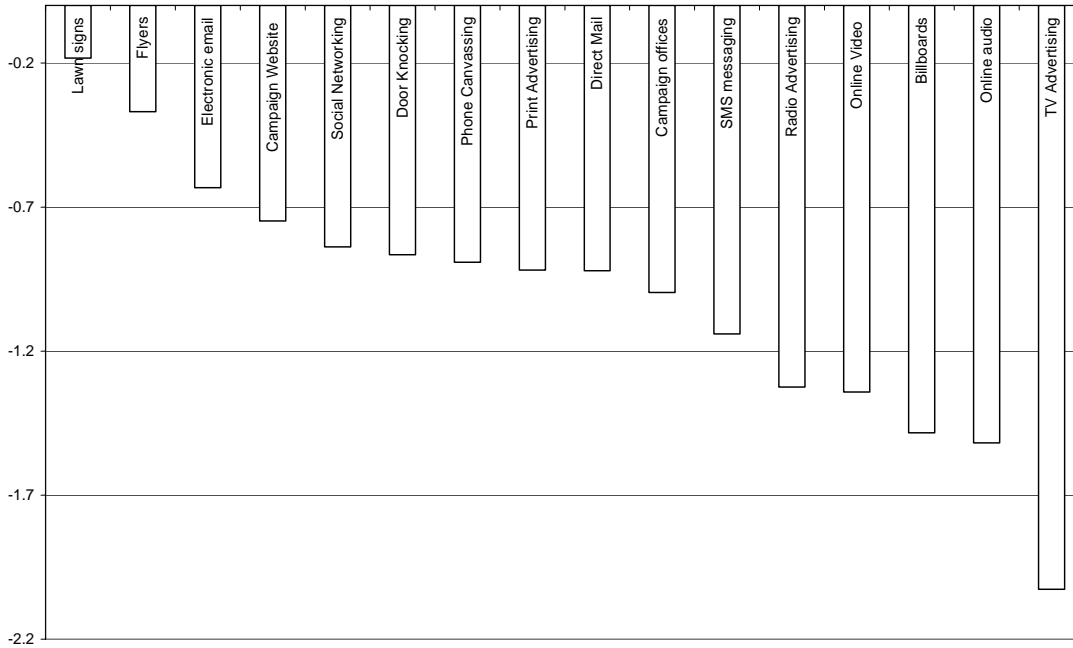

Figure 5: Comparative under-utilization of different communications channels by candidates

Technical capacity constraints appear to also carry over into the use of technology as "back office" support tools in the campaigning process. As illustrated in figure 6 below, candidates tend to use ICT support tools that are either directly supported by their party (e.g. electoral role database systems) or are provided as services (e.g. bulk email). More technically sophisticated systems that value-add to existing databases are the least likely systems to be employed by candidates.

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[22] This could have future implications if increased use of online media displaces the consumption of conventional media. While it is speculated that Internet use will have a considerable impact on other "screen time" (television), evidence to date does not support this for Canadian media consumers (Veenhof, 2006:15).
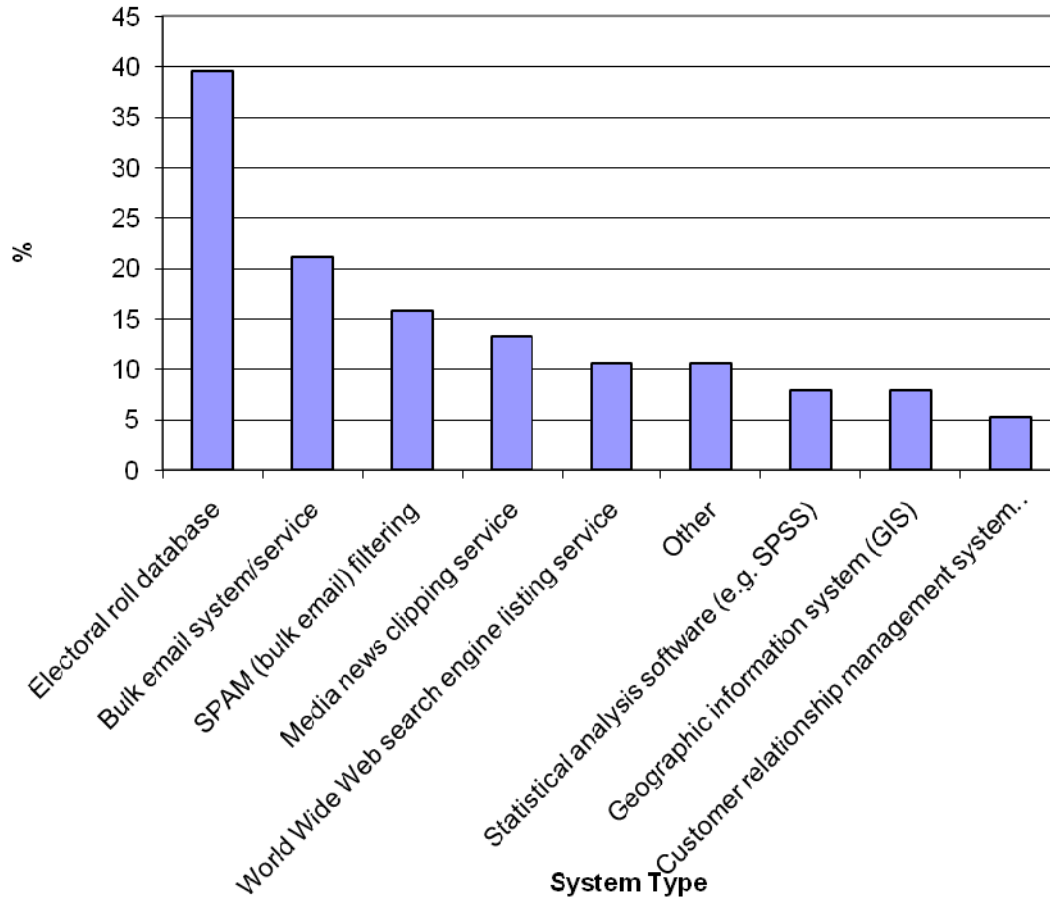
Figure 6: Technology used within candidates' campaign organizations

Influences on technology adoption by candidates

The strategic and tactical choices candidates make in their use of different media are informed by a number of sources, including personal experience and media literacies, local organizational supports, and the impact of party institutional factors. In terms of the personal characteristics of candidates and their experience using computer systems, figure 7 below demonstrates a standard distribution of skill levels, but with no respondents reporting the lowest level of literacy[23].

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[23] No direct comparison is possible, but a 2002 study of elected representatives in Australia reported approximately eight percent responded at the lowest level of literacy (Chen, 2002).
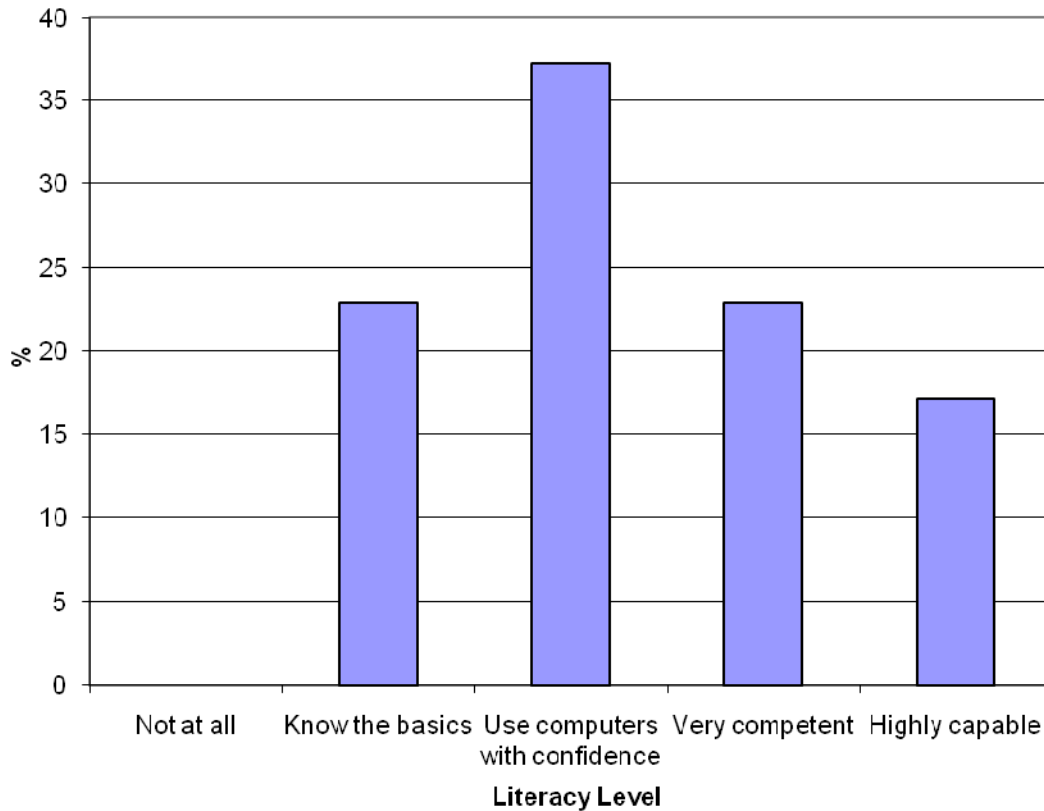
Figure 7: Canadidates' self-reported information technology literacy level

The extent to which candidates' use of digital media (or any campaign strategy) is the result of support provided by their party is a core question in the "centralization" thesis of modern campaigning. Candidates' strategies are influenced by a number of factors (direct command and control management, provision of resources "tied" to specific purposes, consensus development through daily email or fax "blasts" or teleconferences), as the Online Campaign Director of the New Democratic Party reported:

> We made the support that we give to our candidates a real priority. …Specifically online we developed mini-sites.…We had daily bulletins that we sent to all our candidates and often twice a day. … We equipped them with tools and tips on how to improve their campaign and also sort of the messages of the day and how they can help take advantage of the national message which will get into the evening news. (Nammi Poorooshasb, October 31, 2008)

To some extent centralization is a response to a growing weakness in the capacity to organize locally: the decline of political parties, especially their inability to find sufficient volunteers to mount robust local campaigns. The National Campaign Director of the Conservative campaign observed:

> … volunteers are getting harder and harder to come by. Some campaigns that I ran locally that had a 1000 campaign volunteers. … [Today] in that same riding … you are lucky to get 50 volunteers. This is pandemic, right across the country, right across all parties. There are too many competing things for volunteers to do.

So more and more campaigns are becoming centralized, at least in our party anyway. We asked candidates locally to raise volunteers and money for their own campaigns, to canvass extensively and campaign on things locally. We basically supply everything else – the messaging, the materials, the designs, the demographics, you know, the talking points, everything comes from the central party.

The candidate survey focused on direct support (such as training and advice) given to candidates across a range of campaign activities: advertising, canvassing, media relations, use of Internet, and recruitment. As figure 8 below illustrates, candidates perceive that their parties provide the most assistance with media activities (in general, and Internet technologies specifically) over interpersonal and organizational ones (e.g. canvassing and recruitment). This demonstrates that, at the level of candidates, the message of the importance of digital media is being projected strongly by their party machines.
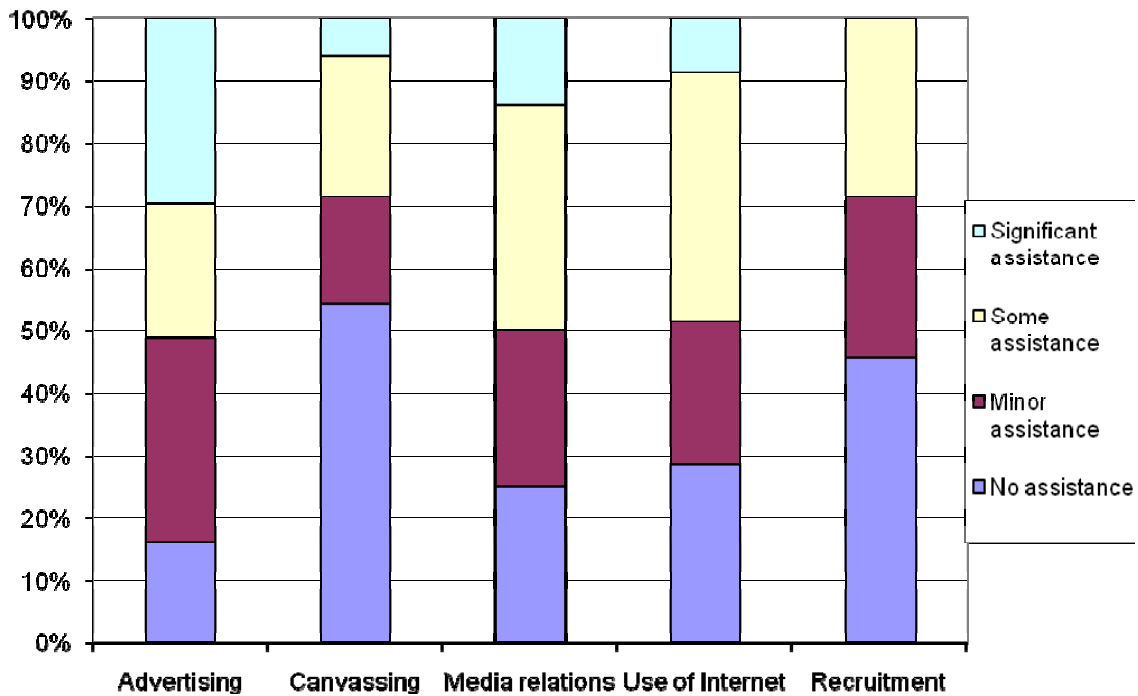

Figure 8: Candidates' perception of assistance provided from party, by campaign activity

While this would indicate strong direct support in the use of digital media, the translation of this effort on the part of central party campaign administrators into activity by candidates is not always direct.

On the one hand, the Conservatives exercised the greatest control and centralization over the party's online presence and website use. This is in large part due to the fact that as the frontrunners they had the most to lose and did not want any "surprises" from the party or their candidates' online presence. The National Campaign Director of the Conservative campaign observed that:

… in many ways the online media has to be just as tightly controlled as your more traditional media is. It is very easy to have a lack of discipline among your regulars or contributors … The risk of mistakes is extremely high. (Finley, October 29, 2008)

To lessen their risks the Conservatives National Headquarters offered an online template to their candidates which two-thirds took advantage of. In effect, headquarters "managed the websites for them." As Finley admitted "the advantage of this is that you have some control over the content." Overall, "there was a lot of control exercised from the central party on the [local candidate's] website." (October 29, 2008)

On the other hand, the extent to which parties exercised control across the whole digal space is less clear. No significant correlation exists between the candidates' reported perception of the extent of assistance provided in the use of the Internet with their overall intensity score (-0.021), indicating that there may not be a direct "pay off" for party investment in this area of activity. The research did find, however, a modest positive correlation between a candidate's intensity score and the average intensity score of their party (0.346), indicating a "referral effect" with candidates more likely to adopt more digital media campaign tools when in parties with higher average use by other candidates. What this points to, therefore, may be a halo effect generated within parties through the systematic promotion and discussion of the benefits and application of digital media in the campaigning process.

Parties' use of Digital Media

By nature the use of digital media by centralized party campaign teams was a more complex and co-ordinated activity than that seen at the level of individual local candidates. Parties increasingly employed digital media to support their other campaign activities: either as direct vehicles of organizational activity, or as elements of integrated marketing and communications strategies. As the Coordinator of Online Social Marketing for the Liberal Party observed:

…we were able to encompass everything altogether. What we are talking about is instant information. By using the online strategy we wanted to synchronize whether it was Facebook or Twitter or Flickr or any of those social media components that people were constantly using. As I am sure you know. I think our information says that the average Facebook user checks in two or three times a day. So, if you want to get people information you use Facebook (Adam Miron, October 24, 2008).

Whereas candidates tended to focus on channels with low barriers to entry, parties tended to focus on technologies that gave them greater control over the content they produce, and particularly through the use of websites and online video.

Campaign websites

The primary online campaigning tool of parties were their main campaign websites (pictured, below), which – over the last five years have shifted from static information

repositories to dynamic information hubs focused on shaping individual preferences and other media coverage of breaking issues (Small, *et al.*, 2008:115-6). These sites provided the primary online point of presence for parties, with strong visibility in search engine rankings (an essential element if content online is to be readily discovered by users), supported by considerable use of online advertising across generalist and specialist websites to drive traffic to the campaign (Miron, October 24, 2008; Poorooshasb, October 30, 2008; Finley October 29, 2008)..

While resources and perception factors tended to shape party responses to the opportunities of web publishing in the 1990s, over the last decade party campaign websites have demonstrated an isomorphic tendency. In the Canadian context this has tended to be driven by structural factors (increasing party centralization), media ecosystem factors (attempts to rapidly respond to and set other media agendas), and as a result of lesson drawing, particularly from high profile campaigns in the United States.

The convergent tendency is particularly true in four areas:
- Focus on the leader (name, image) and increasingly disciplined use of consistent party branding;
- Positioning of video within the front page of the website (a function of maturing communications markets where low value "dial-up" Internet connections are in decline);
- Key content areas (media releases, candidate lists, policy documents); and
- Website functionality/activity (online donations, email subscription services).

Overall, campaign managers have come to accept the role of websites (as a "pull" rather than a "push" medium) as skewed towards supporters and professional media. The tone of contemporary campaign websites, therefore, focuses on maintaining the core branding of the party and leader and ensuring that external communications are focused and "on message", rather than persuasion of a mass audience. This corresponds with Henneberg's distinction between "ideology" and "packaging" strategies in political marketing (2002:118). The dual nature of the audience of party sites is seen in the difference between dynamic media outputs (conventional press releases, but also through "push" elements, like the use of RSS feeds and email) and the use of fundraising as the key supporter focus of party websites. The Conservatives, for example, described online fundraising "as the only kind of fundraising we did." (Finley, October 29, 2008) The reliance on online fundraising extended across the board. The Green Party acknowledged that "we probably raised ninety percent of our cash online." (Jim McDonald, October 31, 2008)

These similarities belie interesting variations, however, and the 2008 election is notable in the different levels of investment in the design and "population" of party websites. In 2008 the Liberal and New Democratic parties invested considerably more in their websites in terms of design and content than the other major parties, reflecting resource differences between the campaigns (either in absolute terms, or in the proportion of

resourced put towards the online campaign elements).[24] This was particularly true of the Liberal party, with Stéphane Dion using a daily video diary that provided commentary on the campaign and key issues of the day[25], and the party generating an issue-specific websites to highlight the party's environmental policy (www.thegreenshift.ca). This approach was also used in the negative strategies employed in the campaign (as seen elsewhere). Attempting to distance the main party website and message from negative campaigning the Liberals and Conservatives used separate websites *without* key party branding elements: www.bushharper.com by the Liberal's, associating Harper with the unpopular US administration, and www.notaleader.ca by the Conservatives attacking Dion's leadership credentials). This strategy was also employed in the 2004 election cycle (Small, *et. al.*, 2008:117) demonstrating the parties are using successive electoral cycles to experiment and learn, and retaining lessons from successful strategies over time.[26] This has not always been the case, particularly when digital media was seen with a more skeptical view by campaign professionals.

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[24] Interestingly the comparatively more sparse nature of the Conservative Party's website mirrors the 2004 and 2006 elections, which Small *et al.* (2008:119) attribute to the recent formation of the party. Finley of the Conservative Party reported that only 1.5% of the campaign budget was spent in the online space (October 29, 2008).

[25] While maintaining, as Small, *et al.* (2008:124) a focus on the campaign as an extended "road trip" which demonstrates the leader's stamina.

[26] Other similarities with negative campaigning employed in the 2004 election campaign can be found, such as the public backlash against a tasteless video used by the Conservatives (Showing the Liberal leader being defecated on by a bird; CTV.ca, 2008), which is reminiscing of the "Paul Martin supports child pornography" media release of 2004.
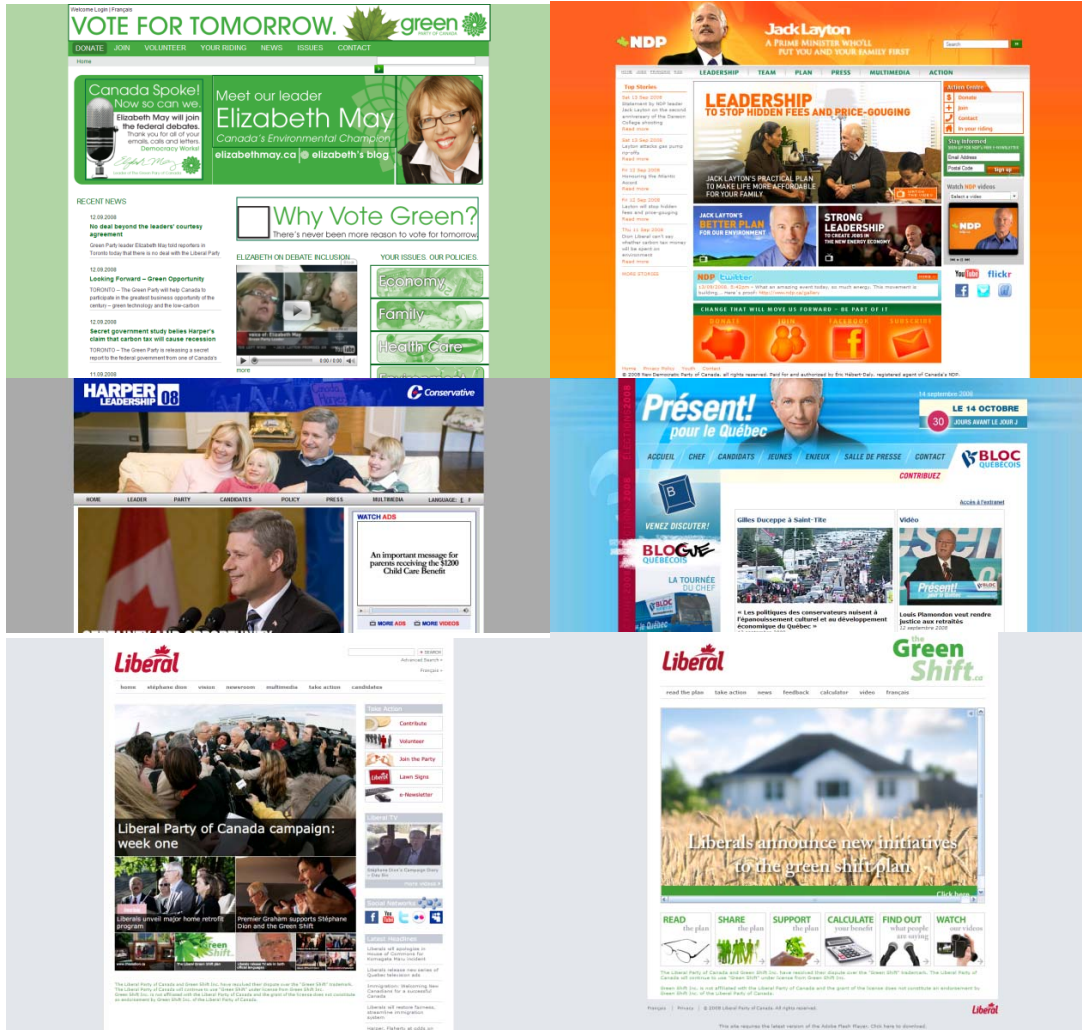
Figure 9: Party websites during the campaign period

The social networking dimension

The emphasis on the party leader is also evidenced by their use of social networking services (inherently structured, as they are around individuals). While these pages attracted considerable attention, Small has argued that these services are not being employed to their full potential as key points of presence and sites for voter/supporter engagement (2008b:86):

> … the Facebook profiles were static and low on information. Whereas hundreds of press releases and reality checks were uploaded to the home pages of the party Web sites, none of it was uploaded to Facebook. Mainly, the profiles featured photographs from the campaign trail and/or the parties' television advertisements.

Here the relatively investment in these services differed by party. While the Conservatives considered these sites as "passé" (Finley, October 29, 2008), the other major parties saw these services as considerably more valuable, with the Liberal Party

and NDP developing their own applications to take advantage of the services (McDonald, October 31, 2008; Miron, October 24, 2008; Poorooshasb, October 30, 2008).

Again we see a halo effect stemming from the centralized campaign team's use of social networking in promotion the leader-as-brand. Looking at table 5 below, there is a strong correlation between the extent to which the party leader has Facebook "friends" and the average number of "friends" of their party's candidates (0.525).

	Leaders' "friends"[27]	Candidates' average "friends"[28]
New Democratic Party	25,127	253.8
Conservative Party of Canada	17,903	95.68
Liberal Party of Canada	14,263	400.06
Green Party of Canada	5,377	76.81
Bloc Québécois	2,383	54.67

Table 5: Facebook "friends" - party leaders and average candidate

Party use of online video

Matching the growth in available bandwidth among the electorate has been an interest by parties in the use of online video to communicate with key stakeholders (supporters, potential supporters and media). Video has been a way for parties to project their messages more strongly: highlighting key branding elements (leaders) and correspondingly attracting a strong audience response (Miron, October 24, 2008; Finley, October 29, 2008). As the Online Campaign Director of the New Democratic Party observed the use of video material had strong appeal:

> … presenting people with more interesting content than just a traditional boring press release. People are more inclined to go see the videos from the actual announcement in the town halls and … we certainly saw that on our main website ndp.ca. The video selection was the most popular page on the site (Poorooshasb, October 30, 2009)

In the analysis of online video published by the major parties we can examine a number of factors: construction of the videos in terms of the content ("genre conventions"), the overall tone of the material (positive-negative), and the provision of content in French.

Examining the genre conventions employed by parties, figure 10 below presents a number of interesting observations:
- While focus on the party leader is a dominant element of videos (61.827% of all videos featured the party leader exclusively) the two largest parties tended to use the leader the least (Conservative and Liberal);
- Individual candidates (either singularly (9.677%) or with the leader (6.720%) rarely feature in online video content, providing more evidence of the relative lack of interest in candidates other than the leader in centralized party campaign strategies;

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[27] Source: Small, 2008b.
[28] Sourced from content analysis dataset.

- Resources tended to shape the content of online video considerably: with the Conservative Party of Canada more likely to re-post made-for-television content online[29], while the other parties more likely to post video of events (e.g. rallies)[30]; and

- In terms of democratic dialogue the use of online video appears to continue the "one to many" nature of most political advertising. Few videos served as response to the positions or content of other parties, focusing on key party messages rather than a more general policy debate. In this regards a small number of Conservative videos are an exception to this finding, focusing on a critical response to the Liberal Party's economic and environmental policies.
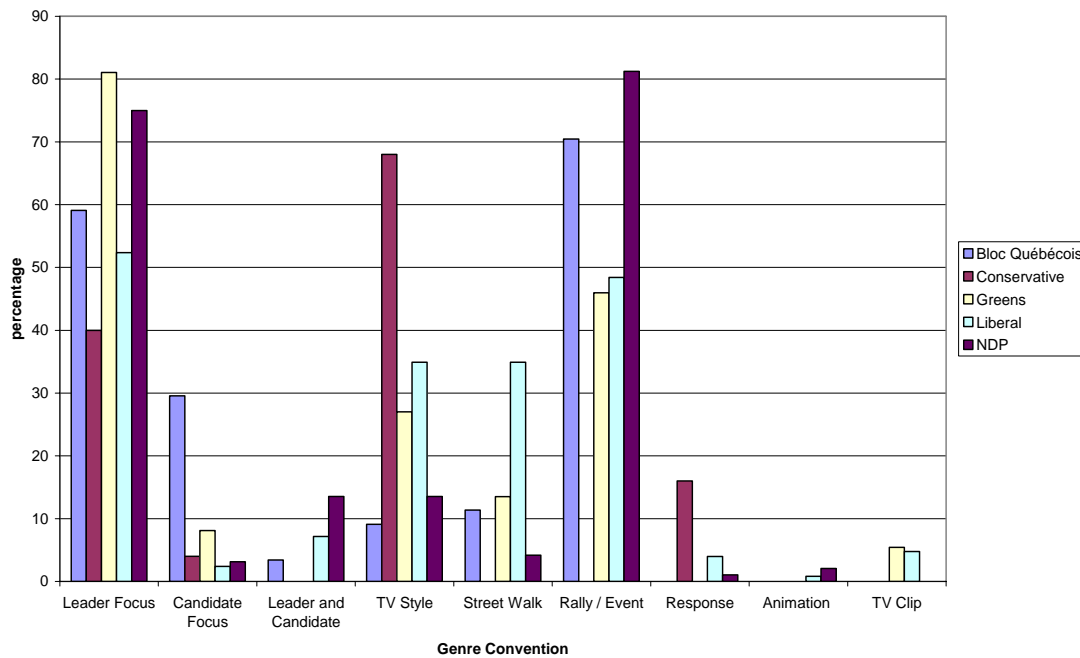

Figure 10: Genre conventions of online video published by parties

Similarly, there was considerable difference between parties in the tone of the videos published online. While the Green Party of Canada was the most likely to publish videos with only positive content (content that discussed topics in a favorable manner, these are normally associated with discussions of party candidates and/or manifestos), the Bloc Québécois and Conservative Party of Canada were more likely to publish negative content (so-called "attack ads"). The Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party tended to favor mixed content (generally in the form of comparative content, attacking the previous government and presenting alternative proposals). Generally, this last finding would appear consistent with the inference that the two major parties of

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[29] Some of which was never aired on television (Finley October 29, 2008).

[30] Interestingly the Conservatives did not publish any of this more informally produced content, while the New Democrats produced a considerable amount of this content – including nearly identical speeches given in different locations across the country.

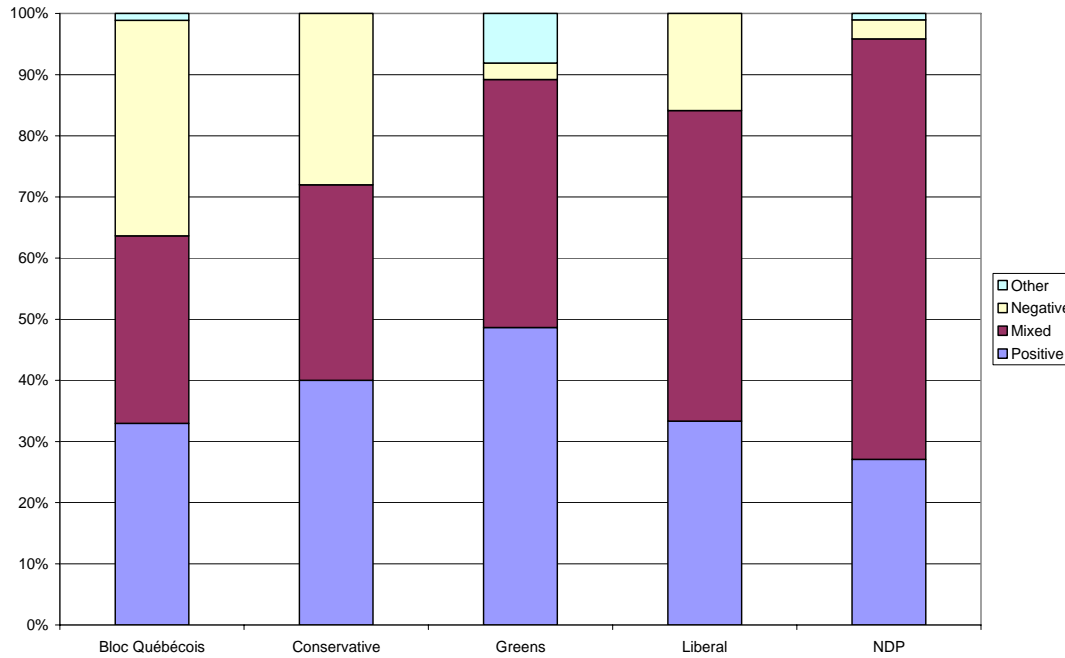opposition need to both discredit the incumbent government while proposing viable alternative programs or leaders.[31]

Figure 11: Orientation (tone) of video content published online

The major parties also varied considerably in the amount of video material they published in French throughout the campaign, as illustrated in table 6 below.

Party	Number of videos in French	Percentage of videos in French
Bloc Québécois	88	100
Conservative Party of Canada	10	40
Green Party of Canada	4	10.81081
Liberal Party of Canada	62	49.20635
New Democratic Party	42	43.75

Table 6: Production of French-language online videos, by party

Leader visibility: blog references and search engine advertising

The open nature of the Internet means that the direct publication of content is only one means by which parties are able to have public exposure online. In recent years campaign professionals have turned to the generation of third party content (such as through the provision of material to key bloggers and the distribution of easily republishable content) as a means of increasing the total media exposure to their party and key figures. The

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[31] Drawing concrete conclusions from this data has a number of limitations because the content is now weighted by either actual user exposure or the differential investment of parties in promoting some video content over others.

relationships between parties and alternative media varied between the parties. While some maintained loose relationships (the Conservatives and the Liberals; Finley October 29, 2008, Miron, October 24, 2008) the New Democrats were more systematic in cultivating coverage in blogs, creating "NDP Rapid Responders … a direct appeal to bloggers and others online who wanted to help with campaign" (Poorooshasb, October 30, 2008). On a more passive level, blogs also served as good measures of "instant feedback" on messages that the campaigns were generating, with the larger parties maintaining formal surveillance of the blogs deemed to be significant opinion leaders or good third party judges of campaign messages.

While the success of these types of "cultivation" practices are hard to determine, it is possible to track the overage of key figures across the blogosphere. Compiling data against party leaders' names, figure 12 below shows the number of daily mentions of party leaders throughout the campaign period. As the figure shows, the incumbent Prime Minister enjoyed a considerable advantage over his rivals in blog mentions (assuming that all publicity is good publicity)[32], generally receiving twice the coverage of any of his individual rivals. In addition, figure 12 also shows that blog discussions are – to some extent – reflective of coverage of issues in mainstream media. This is evidenced by the spikes in discussion of all leaders following the announcement of the election date in early September, blogger responses to the two leaders debates (the only time during the campaign we see a spike in discussion of Gilles Duceppe), and following the research of the Conservatives' economic policy in the final week of the campaign.[33]

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[32] Further, more detailed content analysis is needed in this area.

[33] Harper's incumbency also favored him in competition over search results also, with "Stephen Harper" outstripping other leaders in search (almost twice the combined search for "Jack Layton" and "Stephane Dion"). Similarly "Stephen Harper" was the most sought after name for the purchase in Google Adwords, leading "Jack Layton" and "Elizabeth May".
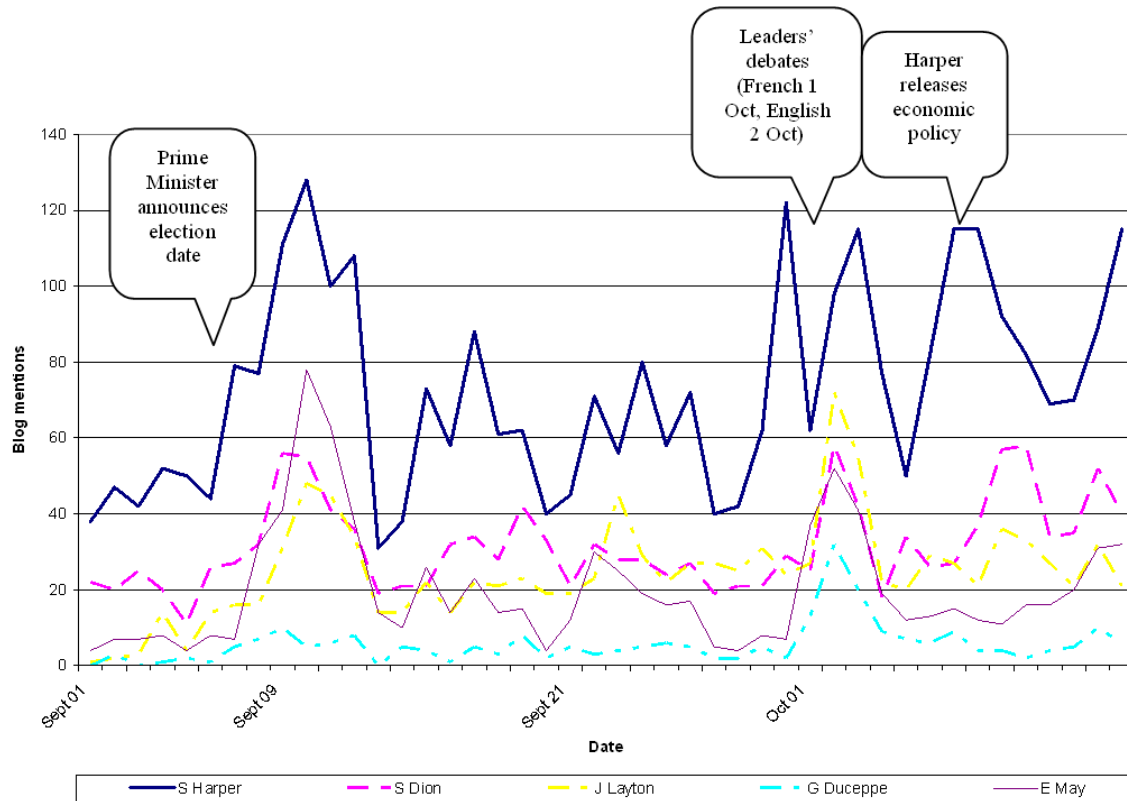
Figure 12: Leader name mentions in blogs, campaign period[34]

Conclusion

The role of digital media in election campaigns in Canada emerges as a complex and interesting picture. This complexity results from a number of sources: the broadening technical nature of digital campaigning, the increasing audience for online content (both as a percentage of the Canadian population and as consumers of increasingly sophisticated content online), the evolving media ecosystem and developing interrelationships between different media forms (online and off), and developing norms about what is effective and what is not effective when parties and candidates engage with new channels of communication.

In considering the factors that shape the electoral use of digital media we can clearly see the impact of political-systemic, organizational, financial, and media environment variables in the way different media are perceived, adopted and employed. Overall, the research points strongly to political-systematic (centralization tendencies associated with the strong party model of political organization in Canada and attempts to overcome problems associated with the great distances of Canadian life), organizational (through attempts at co-ordination and control) and resource (but not strictly financial resources) on the patterns of adoption of digital media by candidates and parties. At a tactical level,

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[34] Source: Technorati data, http://technorati.com/, 8, 27 September and 15 October 2008.

central party machines have become increasingly aware of the emerging nature of the media ecosystem, employing strategies to "win" earned media through the innovative use of digital media and using the online environment as a useful surveillance system as part of their marketing-orientation focused on message control, the minimization of risk, and branding.

The impact of these activities on Canadian democracy is also complex. There remains a considerable argument for the equalization effect of digital media when we examine the way candidates and parties engage with technology to self-represent online, with minor parties (centrally and through the candidates they field) having an *equivalency of representation online*, particularly through the use of services with low barriers to entry. However, a broader view of the impact of media ecosystem factors supports many of the arguments associated with the normalization hypothesis: the relationship between major parties capacities to access established institutional and commercial media (either through financial resources and paid advertising or through the "incumbency effect" of their status as "parties of government") means that the emerging media ecosystem is also, to some extent an "echosystem" with a *dis-equivalency of visibility online*. To date this advantage appears to be self-maintaining, with major parties better placed to leverage their visibility into other resources (especially online fundraising), which serve to maintain established relationships within Canada's political landscape.

Definitions

Channel	Following Rogers (1983) broad definition of a channel (as a means 'by which messages get from one individual to another'), a meta term that sits above technically-defined methods of communication (sub-media) and socially-defined methods of communication (e.g. communication with an online community, or via a specific online genre, like a blog). Channels includes electronic, conventional ("offline"), and digital ("online") media.
Digital media	Communications channels based on digital technology. These include Internet sub-media (world wide web, email, instant messaging, etc.), mobile telephone technology, and emerging broadcast technologies (television, radio)
Electronic media	Traditional term used to refer to television and radio broadcasting.
Internet sub-media	A technical specification which shapes the process of communication. Conventionally, the term sub-media (of the Internet) is used to refer to different communications protocols operating on top of the TCP-IP protocol (Holmes 1997).
Online community	A social network connected through information technology (Su, *et al.* 2005). The emphasis is on social ties (e.g. social capital) and can be sustained via one or more sub-media. Examples could include a group that is solely connected via one sub-media (such as groups that only maintain ties via social networking services, like Bebo) or one that is maintained using a range of different on- and off-line communications tools.
Media ecosystem	Naughton (2006:6) proposes the emerging media landscape be viewed as a ecosystem rather than using other analogies (such as market) allowing its character to be perceived as a "…dynamic system in which living organisms interact with one another and with their environment". This approach can be interpreted at two levels: institutionally, the idea of a media ecosystem can be

	seen to conceptualize different technologies and channels as fulfilling different functionally-differentiated niches, which can be displaced by the emergence of new technologies or social practices of communication; alternatively at the human scale, the interaction between different media users can be described in terms of different relationships (e.g. "produsage" (Bruns 2008), or "parasitic" (Hiler 2002)).
Mini-site	A candidate-specific section of a political party's organizational website. Mini-sites range from simple list entries to extensive content with their own subdomain.

Methodological Appendix

Province	Population	%	Sample	%	Difference %
Newfoundland and Labrador	7	2.27	1	2.56	0.29
Prince Edward Island	4	1.3	1	2.56	1.27
Nova Scotia	11	3.57	2	5.13	1.56
New Brunswick	10	3.25	2	5.13	1.88
Québec	75	24.35	8	20.51	-3.84
Ontario	106	34.42	11	28.21	-6.21
Manitoba	14	4.55	2	5.13	0.58
Saskatchewan	14	4.55	2	5.13	0.58
Alberta	28	9.09	3	7.69	-1.4
British Columbia	36	11.69	4	10.26	-1.43
Yukon	1	0.32	1	2.56	2.24
Northwest Territories	1	0.32	1	2.56	2.24
Nunavut	1	0.32	1	2.56	2.24
TOTAL	308	100	39	100	0

Table A: Content analysis of candidates' use of digital media, population and sample

Party	Population[35]	%	Sample	%	Difference %
Christian Heritage Party	11	15.069	6	15.789	10.720
Conservative Party	44	20.276	1	2.631	-17.644
Green Party of Canada	43	19.815	8	21.052	1.236
Independent	6	2.764	2	5.263	2.498
Liberal Party of Canada	44	20.276	6	15.789	-4.487
Libertarian Party of Canada	2	0.921	1	2.631	1.709
Marijuana Party	1	0.460	1	2.631	2.170
New Democratic Party	44	20.276	13	34.210	13.934
Total	217	100	38	100	10.136

Table B: Survey of candidates, population and sample

Party	Number	Percentage
Bloc Québécois	88	23.655
Conservative Party of Canada	25	6.720
Green Party of Canada	37	9.946
Liberal Party of Canada	126	33.870
New Democratic Party	96	25.806
Total	372	100

Table C: Sample of online videos analyzed, by party

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[35] The population in this instance is all candidates sampled for content analysis (e.g. the subset of the original population of all candidates). The reason for this selective sample is to allow the results of the survey to be compared and correlated with the results of the content analysis.

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List of Interviews

- Mr. Adam Miron, Coordinator Online Social Marketing Liberal Party of Canada, October 24, 2008.
- Mr. Doug Finley, National Campaign Director, Director of Political Operations, Conservative Party of Canada, October 29, 2008.

- Mr. Jim McDonald, Executive Director, Green Party of Canada, October 31, 2008.
- Mr. Nammi Poorooshasb, Online Campaign Director, New Democratic Party. October 30, 2008.